

WOMEN: A TRANSLATION OF  
WOLFGANG HILBIG'S  
*DIE WEIBER*

ROBERT LEE RHUMY, B.S.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

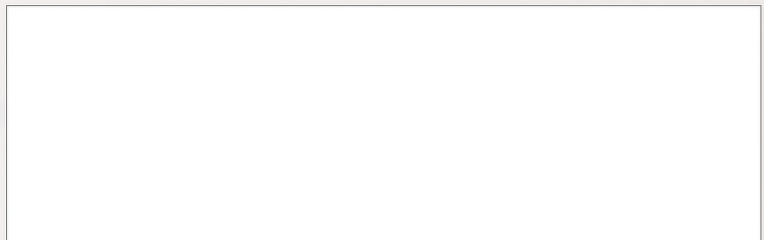
The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS



THIS IS AN ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT  
IT MAY NOT BE COPIED WITHOUT  
THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION

**WOMEN: A TRANSLATION OF**

**WOLFGANG HILBIG'S**

***DIE WEIBER***

**by**

**ROBERT LEE RHUDY, B.S.**

**THESIS**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements**

**for the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**

**DECEMBER 1991**



## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Women.....	25
Bibliography.....	135

## Introduction

Wolfgang Hilbig has been writing fiction for nearly all of his adult life, but it was not until the late nineteen-seventies that his work was first made available to the public in book form. Born in Meuselwitz, Germany, on August 31, 1941, Hilbig's earliest experiences were of a country losing a war of unprecedented scope and destruction, apparitions of which often provide backgrounds and settings for his work. After the war, Hilbig grew up in what became the German Democratic Republic. He received training as a machinist. After completing his mandatory service in the East German *Volksarmee*, he worked as a tool maker, as a machinist, as a construction worker, as an assistant welder -- even as a busboy in a restaurant. From 1970 until he became a full-time writer in the early eighties, he worked mostly as a boiler man, shoveling coal into the blazing innards of iron furnaces. The hellish purity of this profession furnished central themes for some of Hilbig's more provocative writings, and in general the list of the jobs he has held shows him to be one of the most proletarian of the many writers to have emerged -- or be expelled from -- East Germany. Ironically, the



class-conscious-minded East German authorities systematically rejected and suppressed Wolfgang Hilbig's work.

Hilbig writes both lyric poetry and prose. His major works to date are *abwesenheit* (poems, 1979), *Unterm Neomond* (short prose, 1982), *stimme stimme* (poems and prose, 1983), *Der Brief* (three long stories, 1985), *die versprengung* (poems, 1986), *Die Weiber* (novella, 1987), *Eine Übertragung* (novel, 1989), *Alte Abdeckerei* (novella, 1991), plus sundry pieces in literary magazines and anthologies.

Although organized writers' workshops and colloquia did exist in East Germany, Hilbig is largely a self-taught writer. He participated in some lyric seminars -- for instance, in the "Circle of Proletarian Writers" -- but he was quickly expelled. He also took part in seminars for the *DDR-Arbeiterfestspiele*. Eventually he was suspended from further activity within these or any other sanctioned literary groups and organizations.

One evening in the late seventies Hilbig was surprised when a friend telephoned to report that some of his work was being read on a broadcast by a West German radio station.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after this Hilbig published his first book with S. Fisher and was granted a permanent travel visa by the East German authorities.

In 1983 he was honored with the *Brüder-Grimm Preis der Stadt Hanau*

(Brothers Grimm Prize of Hanau), and two years later he received the prestigious *Förderpreis der Akademie der Künste Berlin* (Berlin Academy of Arts Prize for Literature). Hilbig now lives and works in Edenkoben, Germany, and travels throughout the German speaking countries to give readings and attend writers' conferences and colloquia.

The complex narrative of *Die Weiber* depicts the loss of personal identity in a totalitarian society. The protagonist, who is never given a name, works in an underground storage room in a factory somewhere in East Germany. Placed there because he was incompetent, he sits in the dark, dungeon-like room, sweating, drinking, masturbating. Disconsolate, he peeps up at the other workers through an iron grill. Barely visible, and utterly beyond his reach, a number of women sit on stools operating heavy machinery. This picture of observer and observed, of fantasizer and the fantasized, forcibly held apart by interdiction from above, serves well as a symbolic pattern for an interpretation of *Die Weiber*.

The women, with whom the protagonist yearns to have contact, shimmer as a vision in a world beyond his grasp. The managers of the factory where he works have put him in a cell, separating him from his co-workers in the



name of the general good, for the protagonist has proven himself inadequate at all other tasks. Thus isolated, he is prevented from disturbing the smooth operation of the factory. Taken literally, as a single act of managerial necessity, the protagonist's removal would be defensible, even rational. As metaphor, however, it captures a reality degraded by censorship and oppression.

In the East German socialist state, party bureaucrats and functionaries, acting as the managers of society, determined which ideas endangered the stability of the collective and carefully cordoned them off as taboo. Individuals entertaining such ideas were prevented from expressing them, and if they still managed to get around the extensive bars and prohibitions, the offenders could always be (and often were) silenced or removed. Thus the smooth and well-oiled workings of the collective were ensured, a collective which the propaganda machine insisted was swiftly marching away from socialism-as-it-existed towards a glorious communist future.

Separation and prevention, then, are two key concepts. The grill between the protagonist and the women could be metaphoric for something so visible as The Wall, but better yet it can be metaphoric for any of the internal, bureaucratic tools that were used to prevent subjectivity from being expressed in East German totalitarian society. The protagonist of *Die Weiber*, subjected



to such chicanery his entire life, can no longer function in the system. Filled with tempting visions, sensing the onslaught of an unknown, threatening illness, he becomes unbalanced, and is subsequently fired.

Shortly after losing his job the protagonist suffers the hallucination that all the women have disappeared from his city. He recognizes this as "madness", as the beginning of the illness. Still, he feels certain that he did, in fact, lose something, and that whatever it was that he lost was "essential" for his life. The protagonist sets out to find it. In a panicked flight, he tries to discover where the women have gone, for finding them, he believes, might enable him to overcome his illness and recover his own identity.

The loss and the illness are the same. The protagonist is convinced that his language has become diseased, or is a disease in and of itself. He mentions the "schizophrenia of (his) language," the "sickness of (his) language," and how he has "metamorphosed (himself) into a disease." Not only has he lost the women, but he has also lost his language, clear down, he thinks, to his very own name. Thus when interpreting *Die Weiber* one needs to recognize that the protagonist believes that personal identity is related to language and, to a certain extent, defined by it. Words evoke images in his mind and the images, in turn, evoke words. But the words are foreign, alien -- a disease -- and so he is, in a sense, alienated from himself, separated from

his sense of identity, prevented from expressing his own subjectivity by the intervention of an alien power.

Thus the disease that separates and prevents, the grill -- The Wall -- is identified by the protagonist as language itself, and he believes it reaches far back into his past. To discover a cure he must strip himself completely and find the cause. In a torrential and tortuous self-analysis he examines himself and his *Vergangenheit*, a past his diseased Self thinks humiliating, degrading, scandalous. Through the figures of an anonymous female bureaucrat and his mother, the poisoned language that is at his disposal condemns him as worthless and degraded, nothing more than a cheap pornographer pretending to literary greatness (the protagonist is a would-be writer). In a grinding and visionary battle the protagonist explodes the charges and the language that formulated them, analyzing his relation to women, to his mother, and to the state. The narrative, which has the form of an internal monologue, reflects his increasing disorientation: the past overlaps with the present, logic is routed by the irrational, and fantasy collides with reality.

As the protagonist searches for an answer, he begins creating his own language, a non-infected one that exists independently of the official language of the state. In a burst of lyrical expression, he hopes to reinvigorate the stiff, doctrinaire language he has inherited from the authorities.



At this juncture it might be useful to point out that words were carefully redefined by the East German authorities to conform to the requirements of Marxist-Leninist theory. A comparison of East and West German dictionary definitions verifies this assertion. This is not to say that West German dictionaries are not laden with ideological assumptions and prejudices. But the West German definitions were not amended following the tenets of a single economic and sociopolitical theory -- and then dogmatically enforced. The effects of such a brutal method on individuals are illustrated in *Die Weiber*. The state's (and therefore the narrator's) language is diseased because it is a language which does not allow certain ideas or themes to be treated. Not only do certain connotations of words not exist, but many concepts and ideas were, in East Germany, either stridently attacked or suppressed outright. There was a formalized, acceptable discourse -- and then that which was forbidden. Using official language, the discourse sanctified by the party, the individual cannot speak for him or herself, but speaks only as the authorities wish, hence has no identity of his or her own.

This is why structuralist and post-structuralist ideas were so engaging for the East German writers and poets of the eighties. If meaning is thrall unto context, then the discourse that an individual is allowed to use is everything or -- as in the case of the protagonist of *Die Weiber* -- nothing. If a particular

context is devoid of meaning for a certain subject, or if that subject wishes to go beyond "politically correct" contexts, then the subject must break free of the sanctioned and sanctified discourse. A contemporary of Hilbig's, Gert Neumann, whose work has also suffered at the hands of ill-disposed East German functionaries, raised this idea to a unifying principle in his book *Die Schuld der Worte*, which investigates via fictions the implicit and explicit meanings of words -- a discourse investigating discourse. Other ex-East German poets of the eighties also focus on language and meaning in their work: Uwe Kolbe, Sascha Anderson, Stefan Döring, Leonhard Lorck, Jan Faktor, Bert Papenfuss-Gorek, and Rainer Schedlinski, to name just a few.<sup>2</sup>

The protagonist in *Die Weiber* feels himself compelled to investigate the sanctioned discourse of his land. As the narrative progresses he first deconstructs his own past, his own experience with language held captive in the bounds of a certain discourse, then casts it aside and expands the subject of his narration to include a broader spectrum of idea and form, a form both expressive and visionary.

As part of this investigation, the protagonist does not directly critique language deformation, but does so indirectly by inserting key ideological concepts within peculiar contexts, subverting normal usage and meaning. His technique is particularly successful in the passages where the protagonist



contrasts his own sexuality with the guidelines on sexuality formulated by the state. Women, with strong muscular arms, are to embrace the *Aufbau* -- a word used by the propaganda machine to describe the economic and spiritual growth of society away from socialism towards pure communism. But within this passage the protagonist succeeds in giving the word *Aufbau* a twisted connotation -- a sexual one -- for it literally means "the build up".(p. 53) Later, in fact, he uses *Aufbau* to refer symbolically to the sexual organ of the state, which "made" the protagonist by having intercourse with his mother and subsequently defining his function and purpose within the collective.(p.67) The protagonist's protest against ideological suppression, then, is to be found in such passages, the communist terminology foregrounded and given new meaning by the unusual contexts in which it is placed.

Consistent with the protagonist inventing his own contexts and usage (which is the prerequisite for recovering his identity), he also invents his own rules for punctuating the prose, which towards the end of the book becomes lyrical. In fact, throughout the entire book Hilbig uses a punctuation that stretches the reader's ability to comprehend, at times, to the very limit. *Die Weiber* is written as an internal monologue driven by an intense and vibrant effort on the part of the narrator to capture and hold on to his own subjectivity. Sentences continue to stretch out until the narrator's



comprehension fails, to where his thoughts lose themselves in confusion or paradox. There the narrator places a full stop, a period, and begins again, repeating this process until he believes a satisfactory answer has been found.

The resolution of the protagonist's dilemma, the result of his search for the women, might be termed a kind of internal emigration. In the face of an aggressive and hypersensitive totality, the protagonist retreats to a region over which the authorities have no jurisdiction. Within his own rediscovered Self he finds a tentative solution. In a society debased by hypocrisy and the abuse of power, where form cancels content, the protagonist succeeds in creating a language of his own. He discovers the women, imprisoned, unable to escape. Yet the protagonist knows where they can be found. He can invoke his own language, one that is both beautiful and meaningful to him, and in this fact he finds the possibility and promise of survival.

Returning to the beginning: it is the diptych, two separate panels of imagery, that provides the pattern of interpretation and the possibility of a metaphorical extension to the culture of East Germany. In the first panel, or image, we have the protagonist peeping, like Dostoyevsky's anti-hero in *Notes From Underground*, from his isolation into the world beyond -- the other panel. The authorities have separated him, and prevent him from crossing over. The other panel depicts the women. The vision tantalizes the

protagonist, it is with him always, and yet it is not. The authorities have succeeded in an act of subtraction -- taking the women away.

The result, then, is the absence of the women, symbolic for a general absence, or lack. The theme "absence" characterizes much of Hilbig's work. Absence appears as a theme in the prose of *Unterm Neomond*, and Absence is also the title poem of his first collection of poetry, a poem written ten years before it was finally published, *abwesenheit*. The poem conveys the destruction of vision, the language it is expressed with, and the concomitant, unavoidable destruction of the victim; absence is, in kernel form, the essence of and unifying principle behind *Die Weiber*. The poem in translation:

how long will our absence be accepted  
no one sees how filled with black we are  
how withdrawn in ourselves we are  
in our blackness

no we are not missed  
we have strong shattered hands stiff necks --  
that is the pride of devastated and dead things  
look at us, bored to death things -- it is  
a devastation as has never been before

and we are not missed our words  
are frozen shards and fall into thin snow  
where trees stand exulting white in frost -- yes and  
ripe for shattering

all things to the last are devastated our hands  
shattered to the last our words shattered: come on



go away stay here -- a language shattered to the last  
 multiplied and utterly all meaning gone  
 and we run after it and running after

our absence as when in the evening  
 dogs that have been driven away come running after us  
 with sick uncomprehending eyes.

These lines reveal the devastation of a human being and his world. Words are frozen shards incapable of capturing the fluidity of personal vision, of subjectivity. Language has been objectified by the party apparatus. The peaks and spikes of free expression have been planed flat to fit snugly with concepts previously defined by authority.<sup>3</sup> Individuals are "broken and dead things," "bored to death things." They suffer "a destruction as has never been before," and yet they are not missed, no one is there to help, they withdraw into blackened shells of despair and anguish.

It is this Absence that fuels the burning hopelessness of the diptych. The inability of controlled language to represent subjective vision is merely one facet of this metaphoric prism. Myriad others capture a veritable host of absent things, a denial so ubiquitous that it drives the protagonist of the *Die Weiber* to the very brink of his existence (symbolized by the inferno-like landscape of the trash dump where he begins his pilgrimage); and it is the same severe absence that drove Edgar W., hero of Plenzdorf's *Die Neuen*

*Leiden der Jungen W.*, to suicide. The connection here is not accidental but the result of a diabolical program. Inside The Wall, which once framed the East German system, civil liberties fundamental to open society were denied: the freedom to move, to experience other places and cultures, to jump beyond the given. Outside the frame no omnipresent secret police undermines trust, the root and prerequisite for fulfilling communication. Outside, poetic language is not frozen into stasis, the artist censured as counter-revolutionary. Outside, it would seem, is some kind of hope, no matter how derelict and broken. The two picture panels of the diptych represent inside and outside. The frame holds them firmly apart, separating and preventing; it is subtraction to zero, to absence, and it smothers the fire of life.

Wolfgang Hilbig wrote *Die Weiber* in three weeks,<sup>4</sup> the translation took considerably longer. A number of problems presented themselves, many of which could be adequately solved, some of which could not.

The title itself beset me with a problem impossible to resolve with satisfaction. The word *das Weib* (*die Weiber* is plural) has no English equivalent. *Das Weib* in Middle High German means woman. Luther used



the word throughout his translation of the Bible instead of the word *Frau*. In the middle ages *Weib* simply referred to a non-aristocratic female -- a peasant woman. *Frau* was reserved for women belonging to the aristocratic class. At that time the word *Weib* was not an insult, but when used in contemporary German society, it often has a negative connotation, roughly equivalent to the case in English when a man, driven to a fit of pique by some unfortunate contact with a member of the opposite sex, declares the word "women" with all the hostility and disgust he can muster. *Weib* can, in extreme cases, even mean wench. But *das Weib* does not always carry with it a negative implication. Today it can also mean wife, as when a German male refers to *mein Weib*. The negative connotations were attached to it as a middle class arose.

I have rendered the word *die Weiber* generally as women, for lack of any better word. In Hilbig's work, for the most part, it does not carry a negative connotation. There are two short passages where Hilbig contrasts the words *Weiber* and *Frauen*. In one instance, he refers to women held prisoner in a concentration camp and the women guards who watched over them. Here I used the word "wench" to refer to the prisoners, and "women" to refer to the guards, much in the way that *Weiber* used to refer to peasants, and *Frauen* to the aristocracy. But in the following passages I was forced once



again to translate *Weiber* as women, because "wench" was simply too extreme -- too negative -- and did not capture the flavor of the narrative. Later, Hilbig stressed this taboo aspect of the word *Weib* (p. 98):

*Weiber ... die ihr nicht mehr genannt werden durft ....*

which I rendered as:

Wenches ... you aren't supposed to be called that anymore....

Many women in Germany would consider it an insult to be referred to as *Weiber*, as women in English speaking countries would be insulted if they were called "wenches."

The above example also illustrates another problem (though a relatively minor one): a literal translation often disturbs the rules of euphony. I avoided "Wenches ... which you aren't supposed to be called anymore", and used the demonstrative "that" instead.

Relative clauses are often a problem because in German syntax it is common to have numerous successive clauses -- in all possible orders -- hooked onto the main clause. These clauses are often separated by mere commas, whereas in English entirely different punctuation may be called for: semicolons, parentheses, ellipses, dashes. On occasion, a German sentence extends so far and has such tremendous, lengthy digressions that the

English-speaking person is simply unable to make much sense of it. In *Die Weiber* Hilbig takes this tendency, for aesthetic reasons, to experimental lengths that even other Germans have difficulty with, much as native speakers of English unused to experimentation with prose may have difficulty reading the last chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Hilbig relies on commas where even in German periods would be called for. In such cases one sentence of German often has to be split into two, three, or even more English sentences, and the order of clauses -- impossible to duplicate in English and make any sense at all -- must be changed. This happens on numerous occasions. An example from *Die Weiber* would be a sentence that describes the women at work on their machines. It begins near the top of page ten of the original and continues clear through a good two-thirds of page eleven. I was forced to render this in seven sentences, changing the order of certain clauses in one section to make it understandable in English, specifically:

... erkannte ich, daß ihre Kittel hochgerafft waren, daß sie mit halbgeöffneten Beinen saßen, daß ihre bloßen oder pantinen bewehrten Füße sich, während ihre Knien endlich zur Mitte kippten, auf die äußeren Enden der breiten Fußhebelstangen stützten, was dazu diente, die Gießformen fest zu arretieren -- zwanzig Zentimeter hoben sich ihre Hinterteile über dem Sitz auf  
....

which I had to rearrange to:



... I realized that their aprons slid up, that they sat with half open legs, that their feet, bare or with clogs, rested on the outer end of a wide foot-control bar that served to lock the molds into place. Their knees finally turned in towards the middle -- and their rear ends lifted ten inches off the stool ....

Another problem when translating from German into English is distinguishing gender: masculine, feminine, and neuter. It is not possible in modern English to show this distinction in the definite or indefinite articles or in suffix endings; we give gender to at most a few words when they are replaced by pronouns, such as calling a large sailing vessel "she". Usually, this loss is not a big problem, but gender is an issue in *Die Weiber* and the protagonist believes, at one point, that not only the women have disappeared from his city, but also all of the feminine words:

*... es kam mir vor, als seien selbst die weiblichen Wörter nicht mehr in Gebrauch, ich glaubte plötzlich zu bemerken, daß man in dieser Stadt eine Tonne als einen Kübel zu bezeichnen begonnen hatte. (p. 17)*

This sense is impossible to translate without adding some sort of remark. If translated as is the difference between the accusative indefinite articles, the feminine *eine* and masculine *einen*, merge into the genderless article "a". Besides, the English sentence would then be referring to a trash can as feminine, and a bucket as masculine -- without any explanation whatsoever.

Since this is a literary translation, I chose, instead of footnoting, which might have had a sterilizing academic effect, to make the distinction clearer within the text itself, by inserting statements of identification:

... it seemed to me as though even the feminine words were no longer in use, that in this city *trash can*, a feminine word, was now being designated by *bucket*, a masculine one.

Of course my solution still leaves open the problem of *why* the trash can is feminine and the bucket masculine. But I preferred to explain that here rather than disturb the body of the narrative with a footnote.

Gregory Rabassa, in an essay entitled "No Two Snowflakes Are Alike: Translation as Metaphor" argues that no literary text may be duplicated or equaled, but merely approached.<sup>5</sup> Donald Frame, in the "Pleasures and Problems of Translation", goes so far as to quantify that principle by gauging how close a translation comes to the original in terms of percentages.<sup>6</sup> With my rendition of *Die Weiber*, I have tried only to approach the original. A considerable body of theory disputes how this is best accomplished. I will briefly explore two views that mark positions on a long continuum of possibilities.

In a 1955 essay in the *Partisan Review* about translating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* into English,<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Nabokov espouses a particularly strict



method:

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. (p. 504)

He takes this to the extreme, in that "the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase." (p. 466)

Surely nothing would please a translator more than being able to translate the whole text and nothing but the text -- but the very differences in the way languages dissect the world into elements of meaning, into words, prevents this outright. Leaving aside questions of varying syntax, grammar, and punctuation, even in related languages like English and German some words simply do not correlate "with absolute exactitude" -- like the German word *das Weib*.

This point merely touches on the difficulties involved. Willard V. Quine, for example, argues in "Translation and Meaning" that it is questionable whether any but the most elementary statements of identification are translatable at all.<sup>8</sup> His essay makes clear that we cannot be certain that even the most literal translation of a single word or concept means the same to the speakers of language T (who read the translation) as it does the



speakers of language O (who read the original). The problem lies in what Quine calls the "arbitrariness" of translation: that a word in the original may specify things that the word in the translation does not -- and that there is no certain way to correlate. This isn't to say that one shouldn't attempt translation. The point here is that, because of this linguistic uncertainty -- which explodes exponentially as the complexity of ideas increases -- there simply is no possible *exact* translation of a text.

But Nabokov also argues that the translator must be steeped in cultural knowledge if mistranslations are to be avoided and high fidelity to the original ensured. Indeed, an author will often allude to various aspects of his culture and if the translator is not aware of the phenomenon in question he may miss the connection and botch the translation. If the original was written long ago or in a culture alien to that of the translator, the problem becomes critical. *Die Weiber* is filled with allusions to East German experience that only an East German could fully appreciate and comprehend. Doubtless I have missed some connections while translating; my hope is that I did not miss many, and that what I did miss did not result in serious mistranslation. The possibility of mistranslation because the translator lacks cultural information points to the problem of reception in the foreign, or alien culture, where the reader must forge an understanding of the text based

on his own experiences and what little knowledge he may have of the culture in which the original work was written. Theoretically these problems could be largely overcome by long and arduous study, but in practice we must relax Nabokov's stringent requirements, and satisfy ourselves with the conclusion that a translation and its reception are always less than ideal.

Opposed to Nabokov's position that the translator should follow an utterly "servile path", Christopher Middleton envisions the translator as a mime.<sup>9</sup> This view conceives the translator as a creative performer rather than a docile robot. It is more realistic than Nabokov's in that it recognizes that the translator essentially plays the part of the author in the host language. He becomes an active player, directed by his understanding of the "total structure" of the author's vision. The translator tries to "reweave the original spell". Middleton distinguishes between mime and imitation, suggesting that imitation follows appearance, whereas mime strives for union with the "other" -- the spirit of the original. Middleton argues that mime breathes life into the reenactment of the original, while imitation presents us with a static replication.

But Middleton's idea of translation as performance, provocative as it is, leaves open the serious question of how far the mime may deviate from the original. To answer this question I will transpose the performance idea into



another arena.

We may view translation as a process resembling the interpretation of a piece of music. Thelonius Monk's classic jazz piece *'Round Midnight*<sup>10</sup> is performed differently according to each ensemble's own style and voice. The interpreters know the original, have divined its spirit, and rather than imitate it via an exact, or note for note, replication, they commune to the audience their interpretation of the original's spirit. The act is originaive and yet controlled by the original. Versions of *'Round Midnight* by Miles Davis<sup>11</sup> and Sonny Rollins<sup>12</sup> are recognizable and yet distinct, they are colored differently. The coloring of the original *'Round Midnight* is due to the unique voice of a particular ensemble -- Thelonious Monk's -- and the coloring of the renditions by other groups deviate. This change, or coloring of the original Monk by other artists, corresponds to the kind of coloring a translation gives an original text. Furthermore, any one version of *'Round Midnight* may be as compelling as the original played by Monk, or it may even be so inspired (rare if not impossible in translation) that the original, as Middleton puts it, is reduced to a "ghostly scaffolding".

This analogy, however, quickly breaks down. The jazz performer is free to improvise over the harmonic structure of *'Round Midnight*, he may stray as far as he likes -- and in jazz that is often exactly the point. But the

translator cannot have this freedom. A jazz player may play either chords or scales over a harmonic line -- the piece remains identifiable. But if the author writes "woman", meaning simply "female", and the translator writes "wench", a blatant distortion has arisen, the translator has failed, and has even abused the original by misrepresenting it. Besides, the nature of words, their function as signifiers for objects and concepts, is fundamentally different than musical notation, which is clearly more abstract.

In a sense this points us back in Nabokov's direction, where the originative voice of the translator is restrained, and replication is the goal. Nevertheless, the coloring a translator must and will give a translation should be recognized. In any case, both Nabokov and Middleton concentrate on how what has been interpreted from reading the original should be expressed, rather than the act of interpretation, the deciphering of the original text. Whether we conceive of the expression of our interpretation as creative mime or robotic imitation, the crux of translation is how the translator divines, as Middleton would have it, the "presence" or "spirit" of the original. This is the gray area which has vexed translators from the beginning and the reason why no translation, as Rabassa maintains, is ever final.



## NOTES

1. Personal communication with author, 1990.
2. Heinz Ludwig ARnold, *Die andere Sprache, Neue DDR-Literatur der 80er Jahre* (München: Text + Kritik Sonderband, 1990)
3. Wolfgang Beutin, et al, *Deutsche Literatur Geshichte* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1984) 405.
4. Personal communication with author, 1990.
5. Gregory Rabassa, "No Two Snowflakes Are Alike: Translation as Metaphor", in *The Craft of Translation*, John Biguenet & Rainer Schulte, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)
6. Donald Frame, "Pleasures and Problems of Translation", in *The Craft of Translation*, John Biguenet & Rainer Schulte, eds. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966)
7. Vladimir Nabokov, "On Translating Pushkin", *Partisan Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1955, 496-512.
8. Willard V. Quine, "Meaning and Translation", in *On Translation*, Reuben A. Brower, ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1966)
9. Christopher Middleton, "Translation as a Species of Mime", in *The Art of Translation*, Rosanna Warren, ed. (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989)
10. Thelonius Monk, *Pure Monk*, Milestone Records MFP-47004, 1973.
11. Miles Davis, *Live at the Plugged Nickel*, Columbia BL 38267, 1976.
12. Sonny Rollins, *All the Things You Are 1963-64*, Bluebird 2179-2RB, 1990.

## Women

It was hot, a steam-hot hell, sweat was flowing from all of my pores. I began to exude odors, peculiar, as though something inside me had begun to mold, a very special *fromage*, as though I smelled like my eyeballs, they were bugging out and seemed to overflow with a certain mucous, a darkness probably sucked out of the loins, an ache from the groin that painfully touched my heart, it reached into my brain, and I hadn't noticed it begin.

--I was incompetent in the machine shop, so they sent me down to the form cellar, where I was supposed to organize the metal dies and molds onto shelves. Cleanly, they told me. Cleanly -- but after a few days rust spots appeared where I had touched the dies with my wet hands. During inspections they reprimanded me because of those spots, and I began to brush the dies with oil. It crackled on the brown spots and gave off a burning smell, but far stronger was the smell that I gave off myself. Gigantic



flaking callouses formed on my elbows, white crusts that smelled like sour milk, and I huddled over my table in the humid cellar, doing nothing. I wasn't even upset, I was astounded that all of my fears had been realized with such absurd consistency, and all my thoughts turned immediately and unerringly into stagnant poison.

--Daily, later on even several times daily, I masturbated in the cellar and smeared the opalescent spunk into the cement floor; there wasn't the slightest reason for these infringements, not even a need; you pig, I said to myself, hurry up so that they don't catch you. But it kept taking longer, I drove myself to an ever increasing frenzy -- but the ache in my hips didn't go away. I kept sweating while I was doing this, the outbreaks of sweat paralyzed and weakened me, my member lost the last of its strength and I coughed dryly, painfully, as I stroked myself with my tired hand.

--And I kept sweating, although the windowless room, illuminated by a solitary lamp, seemed cooler than the air outside the factory, which sweltered during those three summer months.

A little bit more light penetrated through a square metal grill in a corner of the ceiling, it came from the press room above the cellar where the machines pounded. Earlier, when this plant was a munitions factory where the prisoners from an adjacent camp had worked, the grill had allowed

precious metal shavings to fall into the cellar. Now the opening was for a mechanical elevator that could be used to lower the forms, which were often extremely heavy, down from the press room. I was then to take them apart, clean them, reassemble them, and mark them with codes and numbers. But they never opened the grill for me. It was supposed to be too dangerous for the women working the presses, who would have to move back and forth around the grill for hours on end if it were left open unsupervised. Taking several days, I lugged the forms over indirect routes and steep stairs down to the cellar. After those days I didn't touch anything else for a while, I sat still at my table and nervously thought about the twitching of my muscles, the rattling in my lungs -- symptoms that only disappeared gradually; the sharp edges of the forms had scraped my hips, and my sweat was burning fiercely in the wounds, which seemed deep to me, penetrating deep into my body, as if the nerve bundles had been injured, the flow of my senses severed.

And the women worked in the press room.

--Through the grill came a steamy, glowing heat, which flooded over me with persistent force. I sat immersed in this hot stream, on a stool under the grill, hidden in half-darkness, next to the stool some bottles of beer; I believed that when I drank, the beer flowed immediately through me, not even managing to change its temperature inside my body, emerging again



lukewarm from all my pores. It was an endless strain to gaze up through the grill into the light, my head bent backwards stiffly, always hoping to see the women walk over the mesh of the grill. Sometimes I climbed up onto the stool, with my forehead nearly touching the iron lattice, acquiring thereby a narrow, thickly crisscrossed view of the press room; I recognized the short stepladder which was a little more than a meter high. It allowed the women to reach the large funnel of a hideous-sounding grinder, where cooled waste plastic, which the presses molded into spool-like parts for radios, was ground into such fine granules that it could be used again.

From my position I saw two or three women, they were the oldest and strongest, the kind who were assigned to work at the hand presses. They had their backs to me and sat on high tripod stools that rocked and seemed to squeak; because of the temperature they weren't sitting on seat pads, and their massive buttocks completely enveloped the circular wooden seats of the stools. Like all the women in the press room they wore thin, bright aprons, and when they stretched up to reach the long levers of the presses I realized that their aprons slid up, that they sat with half open legs, that their feet, bare or with clogs, rested on the outer end of a wide foot-control bar that served to lock the molds into place. Their knees finally turned in towards the middle -- and their rear ends lifted ten inches off the stool, for a moment

their thighs seemed to relax, the buttocks seemed to sag a bit, then flexed to an extreme hardness and no doubt pressed, with that movement, intense smelling substances against the fabric of their aprons. A crane track spanned the length of the hall and ruined the greater part of my view, so I could only see a small part of their bodies above the waist. With both fists the women grabbed the oblique upper hand lever and pulled it down with the entire weight of their heavy bodies. They did it, I suspected, with deep groans, as if a wooden wedge had been driven into their chests. The upper section of the machine sank onto the tightly secured jaws of the form and extruded a bit of molten, steaming plastic, the women, who sat down on their stools again, held the phallus-like lever down so that the plastic, having escaped the injection nozzle, would cool, and while doing this parts of their thighs clamped around the stool seat; I knew that the upper arms of the women were flexed hard like iron, that their shoulder muscles, shoulder blades, and collarbones united into a single, armor-hard form before their white-knuckled fists allowed the lever to snap back; then, after opening the jaws, they knocked two or three properly cooled, miniature spools out of the mold. All this work took no more than half a minute. The women worked on commission, and the personnel changed constantly at the hand presses, so that within a week I could observe nearly all the older women working on



these machines -- but they were always women of similar stature, of similar weight and strength, and all of them were similarly dressed, the wet material of their aprons stretched to the point of bursting around the rings and folds of their monstrous bodies, and often I saw them shimmering in a haze of their own perspiration, the flower-bright expanse of back melding into the glimmering air of those three summer months, and in the interior cloud of the press hall it was nothing other than the molten odor of rubber and plastic.

--Under their stools I had noticed large, dark puddles; I speculated whether it was sweat, or maybe even the women's urine; but resigned, I soon supposed that it was likely a worthless residue of cooling water that had seeped from some leaky seals in the form. The women didn't resist, they let it wet their legs.

Occasionally men walked briskly across the grill, over and away from my forehead; they were men from the machine shop section, men who moved elegantly and wore immaculate work clothes. They had delicate, harmless tools between their fingers; they were to insure the frictionless operation of the machines, to quickly make small repairs. They strutted unimpressed through the noise, fanned themselves with air, made conversation near the ventilators; none of them paid attention to the boorish, lewd remarks of the

women (clearly audible but for me unintelligible), which were yelled at them through the hiss of the presses, the stamping of the automats, the howling of the grinders, the gnashing of the cutters, through the whole rhythmically knotting and unraveling fugue of noise.

The women never walked over the grill. Once in a while they grazed past a tiny corner of my field of view, unanticipated and lightning-fast: ah, they went past, but their wooden clogs never stepped on the grill, not even once. Two or three of them would go by, their shadows barely passing over me, for a fraction of a second I heard their voices, they were unoutlined tones of darkness, silhouettes of language that drifted over me, I could see nothing but the objects that the women carried. Pressed onto their hips they held large, obviously heavy cardboard boxes, which could only be identified clearly when they floated over the grill. At such times I could only see the women again when they stopped by the ladder in front of the scrap-material grinder. This was the minute yearned for, my forehead -- my face -- pressed against the grill so that I could see -- could see how one of the women climbed onto the stepladder so she could bend over the grinder's hopper, and it was the moment when I failed to see that a third woman had followed the first ones, carrying a bucket in her hand. That was the moment when the hem of the apron that clothed the woman bending over on the ladder seemed to glide



up over the reddened backs of her thighs, and the paper-thin synthetic material of the apron appeared in the light of a nearby window, in the glow-white penetrating sunshine, to ignite. That was the moment in which the heavy, slightly parting cheeks would become visible, immediately, as though some trick of physics -- in an imponderable second, now, immediately -- would reveal the place of an invisible darkness. It was the lightning-fast moment when a hot sun-drop would have to inflame the nerves of the flesh that would be exposed there -- I have no idea what I mean by that -- and that was the moment when the third woman, the one who had followed the others, played a wonderful joke, and doubtless it was repeated hundreds of times. The woman swung her arms powerfully (with a sharp, well-calculated jerk that guaranteed the certainty of her unscrupulous aim), making the bucket's four or five liters of cold, clear water rocket up through the burning air in an arrow-straight line, up under the apron of the woman on the ladder, exactly between the woman's thighs. It splashed, soaking the entire back part of her lower body. The amused, shrill scream of the woman on the ladder promptly confirmed her acceptance of the greatly appreciated, unerring direct hit, which, although expected, was nevertheless surprising; ah, what welcome cooling, I saw nothing, I saw the surge of water raining down, what I had wanted to see was washed out, blurred and distorted by water. I jumped off

the stool to catch the racing torrent of water, which shot towards the grill and flooded through the iron mesh into the cellar. To catch it with concave hands, which were unable, with the face, which was instantly soaked with spray, with the nose, with the wide open mouth, as if I could ingest a minutia, a perhaps hardly noticeable flora of woman that might have been washed off and rinsed away, absorbed in the water despite the speed of the events. To receive it, to ingest it, to keep it with me, even if unnoticed, in a single pore of my skin. Nothing met my lips but the dust swept up from the floor, nothing but the oily smell of contaminated water remained on my hands, I had only the smell of burning rubber, the inhuman smell of plastic in my nostrils, which, cooled for a few seconds by the water, now tasted more distinct and perverse than ever.

I had gradually begun to metamorphose myself into a disease. Like everything else that I conjured up, this metamorphosis was also completely exaggerated, yet if it wasn't quite the suffering of a man, in the end it wasn't the suffering of an animal either. It forced them to dismiss me from the factory, the details that led up to that aren't worth mentioning, I lived under conditions in which the symptoms were more important than the causes, or much more, the causes perpetually metamorphosed into the symptoms.



During the day I hid in the apartment, not until evening did I wander out, in the darkness I wandered around the deserted streets of the city, talking to myself, holding stentorian speeches for myself, sweating, covered with milk-green pustules. Something horrible had happened, the worst since I had learned to observe life from the outside, since I had learned to use life to create images that were supposed to make my inner life possible. Something horrible -- and I was supposed to call it beautiful. If I had ever succeeded in that before ... and I had always doubted it ... then this time the discrepancy was the greatest, it was terrifying. Not a single thing that had happened allowed itself to be metamorphosed into a beautiful idea for my inner life. Earlier it hadn't bothered me to let the filth sparkle. In the writings that I had relinquished to publishers earlier ... I grinned ... *to print*, or which I had otherwise gotten rid of, the monstrosities had always been pleasing. I had dressed them in cheap mysticism, and even if they were never accepted anywhere, their sale had at least been discussed. Oh, those beautiful prisons -- that was about how I portrayed the trash cans that stood on the street. If they weren't quite useful, at least they were described as the reflectors of a magical moonlight. I had let them shine, like giant tin cans in the sun, I named their shininess "silver".

But now it had happened, and it wasn't so easy to twist around. It didn't

have anything to do with a contamination, it was rather a lack of richness, a loss, an especially painful one. The city seemed to have freed itself from a certain element, in the beginning it seemed that it had freed itself from one of its smells. The madness must have begun on the day I was dismissed from the factory, in any case ever since that day I was missing something definite; when I dared to go into the street in the evening I gasped for air, it seemed to me as though a special aroma, one necessary for my life, had been extracted from the air. I searched for the cause of this feeling, then a suspicion came, it strengthened, and soon I was walking around for days just to determine how right I was, for nights, just to confirm a revolting suspicion: *all the women had disappeared from the city.*

--It didn't help at all that I felt possessed by an obsession, it flamed up in my overpowerful head, in blazing letters, that they had all disappeared from the city, all women, and with them every hint of womanhood had left the city too. Completely, it seemed to me, as though even the feminine words were no longer in use, that in this city *trash can*, a feminine word, was now being designated by *bucket*, a masculine one. The trash cans were lined up in long rows on the street that summer, with no possibility of being moved because the sanitation department was even less functional than in winter. When I gazed at them from far away I thought -- at first I was utterly



convinced of it -- that it was a line of deformed women who sat there, languidly iridescent in the bluish street light, and I quickly moved closer. I recognized that they were merely the trash cans that I saw every night. Rubbish hung out of their gaping tops, it seemed to be covered with hair and made of some indiscernible evil. I went so far as to roughly lift a can from the ground, as one sometimes does to a friend in the initial fire of a joyous reunion. It was possible to do this because at that time of year the containers usually held only rotting fruit, crumpled paper, and perhaps some old clothes too. It was confirmed that I was holding a cool, horrid bucket. My arms were slung around the smeared metal, it revolted me, I slammed the can back down onto the sidewalk and was swarmed with the flies that had been resting within the trash in the container. Suddenly they considered me a better place to be, but they flew away indignantly when I tried to smash them.

Nevertheless, I often lurked for long periods around those cans; in such a town, I thought, it was just possible that a woman -- exactly like Aphrodite, who was born of foam -- would appear out of the interior of one of the containers and climb up into the light.

I had never seen the slightest hint of the scandal that I witnessed after being fired: the disappearance of the women, so I thought, must have

proceeded very quickly, a radical, smooth action, an operation in the night and the fog, without meeting any resistance, maybe they had left of their own free will, it was as if they had evaporated into the air and been blown away by a wind that I hadn't noticed. It had probably happened on the day that I had been driven from the factory in terrible confusion; on the very evening, namely, when I had appeared in the city -- which for me was the same as returning to a place that I had already relinquished. I momentarily felt that the facts agreed with my memory, I smelled it with the instinct of a wolf. I asked myself if the disappearances were causally related to my return, if it was because I had the potential to roam freely throughout the city, which my spare time had considerably increased. Had I frightened them some other way, had my arrival in the city simply caused their dissolution, couldn't they tolerate the stuff I was made of, was I some kind of anti-matter to their matter. Couldn't I even see them anymore ... hear them, smell them. I could still do it in the factory, which was a so-called women's factory, where they employed very few male specimens ... if I wasn't mistaken. I didn't know anymore if I was mistaken on that point, if it was possible that I couldn't see the women in the factory anymore, couldn't perceive them. For weeks I had almost no doubts that it was *I* who carried the guilt for making them run away, that in their eyes my return to what I called "external life" had been too



monstrous an insult. But what was it about me, was it the threat of me making a speech, which was expected everywhere, that drove them away. Was it my appearance, was it the discoloring of my skin, which couldn't be controlled any longer, was it the fact that I had become more sinister. Was it my prurience, some kind of underhanded lewdness that excited me until I realized that it was without a basis, and that I didn't have the strength to be able to realize the ideas that it gave me. Was it my desire that repelled them, the smell of my arid desire, my addiction to always seeing them, to having them nearby, was it my hand, which had long since begun to tremble because I couldn't touch, couldn't stroke one of their kind. Was it my desire that led me to collect the Kleenexes they had thrown away. Was it the gurgling noise I made when I guzzled my bottles empty. Was it the noise of my eyelashes, which lowered as soon as the shortest glance from them flew over and beyond me. Was it that I stood out because I bitterly tried not to stand out. God, was it the howling that shook me when I crept into my room at night with no chance of seeing one of them, was it the rabidity within me that they sensed.

By all means, it could also have been the other way around -- it was possible that I had disappeared and they were present instead of me. That I didn't see them because I was gone, non-existent, consumed and probably

hidden inside the intestines of my own pubic lice, which weren't able to nest in the women's cool purity. Or I was hidden in the intestines of my mother ....

But perhaps there had been a premonition of this scandal. I remembered an enduring horror that an incident last winter had caused. Very early one morning I sat in a bus enroute from A. to M. It was one of the first that drove that route so early; it was completely filled with workers who wanted to get to the early shift. Only the seat next to me was empty. Even though people were standing in the aisle between the seats it remained unoccupied. It wasn't an accident or a mistake, they were manifestly avoiding the seat next to me. In fact, I looked like I was already sick, as if I were already a sickness. At the same time I knew that it hadn't actually infected me, I expected it during the coming summer, even if I didn't yet have any idea what the symptoms would be; but now I interpreted things to the effect that I had metamorphosed into a hollow-eyed, fever-glistening ruin -- and this while I was on a weekend trip, while I was utterly confused, and while I had been unable to sleep for the last two or three nights. Wavering, I presented to them a bleakly glimmering mist that emanated from my pale-gray facial skin, it was a horrid smelling mist that came from my burning mouth and my unwashed underarms.



--A girl sat in the seat in front of me, a young woman, separated from me by the seat back. She climbed in before me and smelled like the green plastic seat covering; when I had gotten in she was standing directly next to me, with sleepy eyes, and she was infinitely beautiful. I noticed instantly that what characterized her was a nose that had a sharp kink and was bent a little towards the left side; either a terrible accident had once broken her nose bone or it came from the carefully operated on and nearly smoothed-out harelip, a very mild irregularity. It was, however, apparently reason enough for the younger man sitting next to her to slide as far away from her as possible. This younger man, casually dressed and clearly far less ill-smelling than I was, belonged to the group that managed the machine shop at my factory. He was a so-called dispatcher, and in a broad sense was therefore one of my superiors; luckily he didn't appear to have noticed or recognized me. His name sounded exactly like mine, which is why he was often mistaken for me, or much more me for him; the girl, who also worked at our factory, though not in the press hall, had said something to him a few times, softly, sentences that I didn't understand. She addressed him intimately -- by his first name -- and that I did understand. From everything she said I only heard the first name, murmured softly, it was the same as mine, and it sounded wondrous coming from her mouth. But he didn't answer her, he

hardly condescended to look at her. I firmly decided to punch in his nose at the next opportunity, using any excuse. This intent, even though it was just a verbal threat, would play a roll half a year later, contributing in part to my being thrown out of the factory.

--She had probably given up trying to talk to him, had laid her head back against the seat, her long dark hair hung in smooth cascades over the padding, hung down to me, and after a sharp curve I noticed that my hand, with the intention of bracing myself, had grabbed the seat and was now stuck there. The hand rested only an centimeter away from the girl's draping hair, my hand laid there, without touching it at all. I looked around the bus, worried that someone had noticed the treacherous position of my hand. I only had to move the hand about an centimeter to touch the girl's hair, probably she wouldn't even feel it. I didn't move the hand, the hand didn't move by itself. Spellbound and desperate, I was paralyzed with the conviction that it only required a touch. On the skin of a normal person it would hardly cause more than the sensation of an undetectable tickle, hardly the suspicion of a tickle, so light and paper thin ... actually there was no question that any normal person could have easily resisted such a contact, no one actually wasted a single thought on such a contact. My heart began to palpitate because of it, the idea drove a prickling sensation through me, clear



to my lower extremities, an invincible nervousness, which had as a result ... that I believed I saw my hand twitch, the paralyzing urge to momentarily overcome this one centimeter pulsed unmistakably through my fingers ... that my entire arm hardened into stone and -- in spite of all the will I mustered -- remained paralyzed ... had as a result that the only thing left to do was to unscrupulously grab it, a blind yank on those strands of hair, which would help pull the young woman's head in my direction so that all at once our eyes would meet, so that my eye would focus all at once right on that unfortunate deformation in the middle of her face, so that all at once the name that still must have been lurking in her thoughts would have to be called out to its one true owner ... or that I ascertained the hair was a wig, I suspected, I recognized it already, this immovable hand would yank on an imitation, in my hand this hair would metamorphose into plastic, this paralyzed and artificial finger would only touch the cold, unfeeling surfaces of a perfectly made wig ... my hand, having gone pale, as if it had taken on the coloring of my sleep-deprived face, didn't move in the least. There was a thought in this hand that hurt me deeply, in it was the horrible suspicion that this darkly shining, soft and fragrant hair in front of me -- although I clearly saw it -- did not really exist.

My losses increased: evidently I had even lost my name, yes, I no longer

knew who I was, my name was possessed by an alien figure, my name was with the women only because of that, and they didn't suspect what was going on. My name was lost, to me it was lost like all this flowing, rustling hair ... it was lost because I wasn't permitted to touch it, ah, it couldn't be recovered.

--The bus drove past a huge garbage dump as we neared the city of M., pyramids of garbage actually towered in a landscape of old, overflowing landfills. The heavy, howling garbage trucks roamed along the cliffs of trash until they finally found a place to empty themselves, again they howled violently and dumped their loads out of orange colored tanks. Torrents of wind blasted the desolate, upward swirling debris ... and I had the impression that monstrous gobs of hair poured down over the dump, I imagined colossal balls of matted hair, of all shades and colors, they were being abandoned here to the elements, yes, I saw how the hair misted low over the ground, how it was blown as tendrils towards the last of the barren trees, how it was caught in scraggly winter branches and fluttered there, black tattered flags, flags lamenting the murderous tradition of my homeland. I got off the bus when it stopped at a path that went to a village. Trembling with horror, I was abruptly cold with sweat and became nauseous. A thought forced itself on me with burning intensity, it made me panic, it seemed inexplicable to me, yet was an incontestable truth, as when you are forced by experience to



believe something, and all of the surroundings suddenly seemed to turn into evidence that confirmed it. I reminded myself: once, just about one year ago, I lived in M. for several months on savings. I didn't have a job and tried to write during that period of unemployment -- it was supposed to be a novella, a love story with a tragic end. But it was just for practice because I knew that I would never allow myself to submit a manuscript with such an embarrassing theme. Then I was unexpectedly summoned to the Office of Labor Management at the local courthouse. They demanded to know why I hadn't been seeking regular employment for so long. I began stammering, I couldn't come up with a convincing excuse, the threatening undertone of the heavyweight woman who questioned me irritated and unmasked me before I had opened my mouth, and any explanations except for the real one -- which I confessed with a crimson flush -- seemed pointless to me. The motionless eyes of the woman rested on me, they developed a shimmer of derision and indignation as I spoke circumstantially of my long-standing urge to write, which I consequently felt was my real calling ... Oh, she said, then what do you want to write about...

-- A question that silenced me instantly. You didn't even get a high school diploma. No, you didn't even get past the tenth grade. But we gave you the chance to train for a very good job ... and you've thrown it out the

window again. Your appreciation of the state and society leaves much to be desired, not to say that it's taking on criminal dimensions. You want to be an artist, then what do *you* want to write ... a writer, and you shy away from taking a glimpse at real life. I can give you some very good advice. Surely you know that the department of sanitation in M. has a significant need for workers. The sanitation department is constantly looking for young people. You're young and pretty strong, you don't want to work at your job -- too bad -- but you're a pretty big person, and the work there isn't anything for sensitive types. You've definitely got to report there as soon as possible ... I nodded and promised to follow up on the suggestion, but she saw that I was lying: Good, you do that ... I'll register you in the meantime so we can keep an eye on you, so that you don't stay on the wrong side of the tracks --

I don't know if I remember that conversation word for word. It was irrelevant ... it was as though I had wished an attack on my person in a far more dangerous form. Panic filled me, to contain it I tried to repeat my talk with the woman in all its details. In my mind I increased the severity of her statements; when one of the statements directed against me seemed too weak I tried to refine it until its severity really hurt me. I let the conversation slice through my mind while I paced back and forth in a panic by the icy, rain-washed trash dump, and also later, while I marched towards the city,



where another bus wouldn't be going for two hours. And I realized suddenly that it wasn't the foolishness or meanness of what I'd heard that was important, but the singular fact that a woman had spoken to me that way, and not a man. If it had been a man I would have immediately judged such a reproach as nothing other than an insult, I could have answered with the same. Ah, it would have been possible for me to laugh about it, I could have forgotten the whole thing as soon as I left the administration building. The rebukes only seemed to become truly threatening when they came from the mouth of a woman, when they came with a cold heartlessness against which I was powerless, when they came with a stony decisiveness that consigned me to the trash.

The injuries that the woman's words caused (that weren't to be separated from the fact that they came from a woman's mouth) protected me however (and the worse the injury was, the more it protected me) from seeing clearly that it was the state that had *an eye on me*, that the power which could mete out punishment was of the opinion that I found myself *on the wrong side of the tracks*.

If I ever succeeded in sensing the possession of an identity, if I were ever able develop some kind of mysterious sense of worth for my Ego, then only while writing, when I experienced myself as a subject, as a subject, I admit,

that I never dared to reveal openly: this had happened at the Office of Labor Management and they had immediately given my Ego the sharpest rebuke thinkable. For the bureaucrat my Ego wasn't even a category. For her it was out of the question that it had -- in the form I had revealed it to her -- any right to exist at all. She hadn't even threatened me with a work camp -- for that I would have had to be a subject that was worth reforming in the camp ... even though her words had clearly indicated that it was a possibility. It was lucky for my agitated thoughts that I could choose a simple projection in this case. I had to deal with a woman's completely normal animosity towards a man who was, apparently, unfit to live. I was a person who didn't work, who didn't take precautions, who depended perhaps on his family's pocket (with all the unpleasant social consequences that came with that), and who additionally boasted of an unpredictable intellectual pretension. I understood this lack of sympathy all too well from my mother. When my mother heaped on the criticism because of my laziness and incompetence, she always based her disappointment in me on the fear that I would some day wind up in a work camp.

--It seemed to me that I felt a little warmth at this thought, I calmed down for a few moments, the monotone droning of the bus engine made me sink into a light slumber.



Later on another reason forced me to get out at this stop, and at bottom it offered just as poor an explanation: at one time many years ago, perhaps at the beginning of the sixties, I had written a manuscript which I subsequently lost. The existence of this manuscript was terribly embarrassing for me and I had hidden it, lost it, repressed it, and forgotten it so thoroughly that it would have been easy to claim that I hadn't written it, even if it had suddenly appeared again. It was also possible that I could believe this myself. As I rode the bus from A. homeward to M. that winter of a year ago (after being summoned to the Office of Labor), as I fell asleep, I dreamed of that manuscript during a nap that lasted for about a minute. It doubtlessly must have shaken my faith in being a writer severely. To my horror I dreamed that I had discovered a notebook just a short distance away from me -- presumably the horrible work lay inside. It lay on a wide writing table or judge's desk. Behind the desk dark, veiled persons made a case against me. All the charges against me remained unintelligible, they were read by a woman's voice, doubtless it was the voice of the woman from the office where I'd just been, and it naturally had the greatest of similarities with my mother's voice: the existence of that manuscript, they judged, served my complete moral decay, and was an excellent reason to increase my punishment. It lay on the desk openly, to my utmost embarrassment I had

to admit that it was my own. I unsuccessfully tried to grab it and press it to my breast, which showed without question that I was its author ... I even had to be misunderstood so badly that they thought I still wanted to insist on keeping it.

--During the stop at the garbage dump (which lasted nearly half a minute), I came out of the dream as if I were dazed. I was covered with sweat. Shaken by the grotesqueness, I tried to orient myself. Outside the wind and the rain blasted great quantities of scattered paper scraps, they were blown over the street in front of the bus -- in that moment, as the bus began to pull away, for tenths of a second, a half-torn page from a notebook stuck to the outside of the bus window, directly next to my face. It was a page from a trade school student's notebook, just like I myself had used for so long. It was scribbled with an immature handwriting, in green ink, which I thought to recognize as my own from earlier times. It was a hallucination, I even thought I could read some of the text. A cowardly terror seized me, I imagined that it was part of the childishly obscene story that I had lost, that I had forgotten ... the text suddenly seemed to be present again, it was a shameful attempt at pornography that I had once written for myself ... the paper blew away, the bus drove off, I couldn't get out anymore. Of course I must have been the victim of a deception, but the fact remained that I had



this loathsome manuscript in my past, loathsome, doubtlessly, because of the fact that I was the author. The dream had all too clearly reminded me of that, and it couldn't be denied anymore.

--It was a nightmare, a hallucination. Nevertheless, it was enough that, when I got home, I searched for the compromising pages like a crazy man. I didn't find them even though I pulled out the oldest bundles of paper that I had written on from the most hidden corners. I made a different, horrible discovery: at some point my mother must have moved my old papers from one place to another. They were ancient, absurd texts, which I thought that I had burned long ago. I deluded myself by thinking that I would find the consciously pornographic material among them ... but I didn't find them.

I had forgotten long ago what was in the text.

--Later, in summer, when the sickness had infected me (it was a sickness of my language) and so far eroded me that I could unhesitatingly fill myself with either true or false memories, I often believed that certain sentences from that old pornography were still hidden in a few corners of my brain, and I abruptly suspected that there was a chance for them to invade my consciousness. I doubted the sentences instantly, I couldn't even remember the wording of the piece of writing I believed that I had read half a year previous through the rain-smeared bus window. I didn't believe it was

possible that I had intended any more when I tried to write the obscene text than to hawk the torrid images of my fantasy -- let alone that I thought of establishing some sort of connection with society. Such associations regularly interfered with my efforts to conjure up the text again. If possible at all, I was about to rehabilitate my own self with the reevaluated text. I'll never be able to find the real reason for my confusion back then, I said to myself, if I don't stop cultivating the crudeness of my feelings. And I won't find what's breeding the sickness of my language if I don't strip myself completely, since it seems clear enough that the schizophrenia of my language had already begun back then.

Yes, it was a sickness of my language ... since early in the year I had followed the symptoms while taking long walks at night. I repeatedly wandered along country roads (which at that hour weren't used anymore), till I reached the border of that giant, lonely trash dump whose desert shadow was torn by red, agitated fires, was illuminated by an underground glow, and was populated by rats and sick, run-away dogs. I told myself that it was a strange, magical goal ... and a starting point.

--I couldn't succeed in getting a normal text, so to say, down on paper, a simple, lighthearted description without strange, extravagant accusations mixing in that were trying to compensate for some kind of repulsive



cowardliness that I had in my soul. Even the slightest cause was always enough (and the causes were always of a similar nature) to conjure up inside of me an abject feeling, a kind of simmering ferment that immediately drove me from the place where I was then sitting, expelling me, making me spring up and storm out into the streets of the deserted night of the city, that drove me in hysterical strides out of the city as if the shining panic in my belly were even visible from the few lighted windows of the houses.

My external body hurried through the night, completely numb, while inside of me language was embedded in a musty, diffuse, but stubbornly pestilent air of old, inexplicable terror. Imprisoned words were struggling in nebulous webs. The more the threads and weaves were torn by the word's terror-stricken movement, the finer and denser the webs were spun. What were my words doing in the middle of this thicket, I asked myself. Perhaps they were trying to combine but it wasn't working; go away, come on, stay here ... they were words that were ruined by distrusting the place where they were spoken.

I thought that I recalled also having embedded the 'I' of that early pornographic text in a substance that was just like a damp and moldy thicket. But at the same time I was unsure whether I had grafted my actual desires to that early text. However, I did think that I had described in it how I had

laid down in a soft place with my girlfriend, who I said was *cold*, and whose head was sometimes hidden from me. The place was made from a mixture of different kinds of hair, a heap of women's hair ... pads, thick pony-tails, vile half-rotten knots, balls -- they insulated the ice-cold cement floor. The terror and revulsion of this hair united us with the shamelessness of our lust.

Some experience from my childhood must have been the cause of such thoughts, I didn't remember the experience anymore. In my permanent, unreconcilable hatred of childhood, I had also repressed the memory of this experience. It must have had something to do with the empty barracks of the concentration camp that was on the outskirts of M. They were my main playground for the first twelve years of my life, because the camp was very close to our apartment building. It was connected to the gigantic expanse of ruins that was once the munitions factory. From that only a few buildings were left, and they were used to manufacture parts for radios. At the time it seemed to me that I was the only kid who knew about the hellish purpose of the rows of barracks, of all the kids I was the one whose fantasy didn't turn the horrible brown sprays and flecks on the whitewashed walls of the long, empty hallways into anything other than blood. I didn't paint over the fact that corpses or moaning victims of torture had been hung on the rusty hooks on the walls. And it is possible that the criminal fantasy of the child



that I used to be (while observing games of hide and seek in the landscape of ruins and barracks) united the horror of the camp's previous business with the first childish desires.

--I had heard or read that in the camps the prisoner's hair had been shorn away, that the women were completely shaven too, and I thought up the story that we lay on mountains of hair, and in these mountains I imagined that I could still smell women's pubic hair -- it didn't matter that I'd never seen any. My language was full of hair, hair rushed and undulated in the river of words that I let gush out of myself, in fall the bald trees across from the garbage dumps wore wigs of hair and smoke, the garbage trucks blasted it into the wind on the cliffs of the deserted landfill. Hair, which I suspected was in the garbage buckets along the streets. Hair, which I was consigned to as human trash that refused to help the sanitation department. With the hairy trash of his writing materials on a desk, hidden from the whole world. With a condemned brain under a stormy wig, condemned by the voice of my mother, by the voice of the state in the tone of my mother. Disapproval of my hair, which threatened the camp. Threatened the barracks that I knew from childhood. From them the hair blew, in the evening, through the window holes, hair from the camps, hair from the ramp. And it seemed to me as though all the surroundings, the whole country, were

metamorphosing into a place similar to the playground of my childhood, and as if hair were stored, forgotten, hair misplaced behind all the hills of this country. Hair, which couldn't be rescued if I didn't take it into my language. In my truncated and entangled language, sick with shameful odors, and in the sickly color of King David, flying yellow under the heavens.

--From far away I see the barracks of my childhood, and I know of nothing inside them except occasional debris. They are stretched out, ice-cold rooms, brightly plastered and spattered, bleakly spattered with fluids that have turned black, then plastered again -- for what reason other than a suspicious one -- spattered on again, peed on, lascivious rhomboid shapes had been wildly scribbled on them. Nothing in this coldness, but when evening comes, when the undefinable lecherous secret builds up in the games within these rooms, a brown, a brunette, a fox-red darkness surges in long strands through the frameless window rectangles, billowing in the corners, concealing the hiders from the seekers, hair of the evening, that hides me, evening, that smells of urine and lime, shadow fluff, in which I entangle myself. Shadow hair that concealed me when I gasped out my shameful thought-odors, under the yellow rain that bled from the moon, powerless in silhouette next to the barrack window, powerless against the hunger of the sickness that circled in my head, powerless against the world I could not reveal my desires to, which



nevertheless knew them because all the times I was late and all the things that I missed were the result of my being banished into illicit lust. And the nights came with hair whose gleam had dulled, moist and moldy, hair that didn't burn anymore. On top of it were swept up remains, swept up from the ramps, mixed with the dirt of boots that had turned to dust with the passing years.

--And as I returned to the city in the night, on a summer night, in a year when no rain fell, I punched my arm into one of the trash cans. And I thought that I felt hair, a fleshy, hairy lump in the middle of the trash can, the contents of which balled around wrist. As if I had succeeded in swallowing my own fist, a circle of lip clamping tight and sucking around my bent lower arm, which wrapped around the throat of my shadow, pressing the head of my shadow to my face, carefully I closed the fingers of this hand and arm into a fist, and for days I will still find the smell of the heat that enveloped my hand: on my palms, between my fingers. Rotten fruit in the can, rotten and glimmering fruit and its wet heat, driven into the skin of the fingers, into the cracks in the plane formed by the four fingers of this fist, smoothly coated by a fluid from this depth. My language, smoothly coated by the color of this sickness. The yellow color of a wall in front of my language. The yellow-gray color of a door that no key unlocks anymore. My

speech, closed when I say that my fist is lodged in a flesh. Returned, when I say in mildly bloated flesh, in a hollow under the hair. Returned, avenging the source, a balled hand, supported by brain-like tissues and convolutions, soaked by my sliced veins, secured in the center of the flood and wound in the strudel of the brain, rotten fruit in the can.

--In that moment I knew what I had to say, what I should have said in the Office of Work last winter, that I still had to say in court this summer. It was when my hand bumped into a resistance in the can, against a soft round object, it was like a womb, and I boiled with horror, because there was suddenly something in there that I wasn't allowed to injure.

--Somebody had scribbled *Jackie I love you* on the wall of a nearby house, that night I stood before it and gazed at the words with a consuming envy; they never faded because it didn't rain that summer. I swayed in the heat of the night, my head burning, and curled my fingernails into my palms: a terrible venereal disease raged in my cerebral convolution, while in boneless horror my arm froze inside the shuddering flood of the can. All at once I had lost my name, which I had to begin my speech with. A fermentation and illumination in the skull, the quiet irradiation of my paralysis, the immovable rotting content of a sun on its neck, and my name had been burned under its wig. This name, that separated me from everything that a man is. But I



knew it was necessary to change myself into a man, into a name. What wall of reasons had separated me from that something named *Jack, Caesar, Dante* -- had separated me from the three words on the wall. What mountain of education had I rolled down, yet still couldn't partake in the banal mystery of love. Ah, what tumor of reasons blocked me from experiencing even an unclean, vicarious love. What remained of love for me (a dirty scrap of pornography) had landed in the trash dump, and only there, on those softened pages that had excited my mother's disgust, was my real name to be found, for my drenched head did not contain it anymore. The name I used for a signature, to identify as mine the speech that I still had to make at the Office of Work. The speech that I wanted to make as a preface to those three famous words. The three words, invented, released from this head which was opening, that would erect itself on its stem because it had finally incubated those three tempting eggs in its summer-like brain. These three shrill words -- to blast them into the curly locks of the comrade director behind the yellow doors of that bureaucratic labyrinth. The three word yolks -- to throw these three hoarse ejaculations across the table at last, to let them fly across the judge's desk, to sling them at last between the static papers, into the tidiness of those files, to at last spray the ruinous pornography of those files with my Ego.

--No, it was senseless. I was without a name, I had to make my speech in the name of general principle. And perhaps it was necessary in that moment to hold my speech with a raised fist.

No, only an invalid answered the three words that I had invented every night.

--There wasn't anything in the trash can that would have interested me. Nothing to love -- really, the contents in the cavity of this cylinder corresponded exactly to the horn of plenty the republic had given me for my education. None of it could be clearly named.

--It didn't take long before I felt miserable again. Only five minutes, and I reached the conclusion that I didn't even possess enough education to be able to *see* the women, even if they were still present, even if there were millions of them. To recognize them it wasn't enough to be blind in one eye, it wasn't enough that I had a working anatomical knowledge of them from a visit to the circus which my mother had let me take during my childhood.

--Lenin had already said (as reported by Clara Zetkin) that one of the *pastimes of the intellectuals* was *wallowing in the sexual*, which was of no interest for the *class-conscious* proletariat. The attribute *class-conscious* described a stage of development that towered far above my own. Resigned, I turned away from the can and gazed at my arm, which was still damp above



the wrist. I looked at my fist, which had limply opened, harmless and hopeless, as if there were no place for it either.

But there had been something ... I had already left but now I went back again ... hadn't I noticed a delicate object in the can. Really, on the previous day it seemed to me as though I had felt some kind of uterus inside the can. Once more I sunk my hand in, grabbed a round, rather solid object. It was heavy, but let itself be removed effortlessly from the tumble of hair, filth, slimy substances, and old clothes. I couldn't see what I had pulled into the light since there was no lighting on the dark street ... or I only saw what I wanted to see. In any case I thought I had found something unmistakably feminine. But what. I cursed the town's non-functioning light sources, even Frau Luna dimmed her shine, as though she wanted to go along with her playmates.

--What should I have done, I was free, free and without a name, but my alienation didn't allow me to do anything.

If I was free then I was free from reality: free, I felt how the impact of this word sank down into me, the light that I had seen was the lightning bolt of a violent ideological slap.

--Since that morning I had been free. That is, I had been fired from the factory. This thought caused time to fall into its proper dimension again: in

the early morning, after an ugly argument during which I had threatened to punch my superior, I had been fired. Immediately afterward I had ridden to A. to complain at the Office of Work, and by evening I had returned again from A. A lot could have happened during that time, but for me the hours were filled with senselessness and repetition, senseless beginnings of a speech that I had attempted all day long until I finally spoke in an utterly inappropriate place -- insofar as I wasn't just imagining it -- and the things I said were doubtless completely false. Oh, I had probably maligned women, banished them ... to the wrong place, which was the right place for my destructiveness, of course ... and now I finally had to come to terms with my foolishness. Perhaps it was just the awkwardness and foolishness of my claims that could be brought into direct relation with my identity, with my name, but my foolishness alone couldn't get any sympathy even in the bureaucracies of this republic.

--I apply for permission (that's how I think I began), I apply for permission to wear dresses from this minute on, even outside my apartment, without being reprimanded for it.

--I wondered if I had really spoken like that; just one bottle in my fist couldn't have caused something like that.

--Or perhaps request that the well-known Pavlovian reflex therapy be



applied to me. I'm not homosexual. Please note that. For me it wasn't just a matter of, at the very least, disgracing the fatherland in such a blasphemous way (a fatherland from which all female members had been castrated), it was also a matter of making sure that after I was fired from the factory (the only factory I could go into), that I wouldn't be sent to a work camp for being asocial. That is, if I couldn't be rehired at the factory again. So it's probably not just a fetishized foolishness that made me start collecting women's clothes from the garbage. For me it was also a matter of finally releasing the state security service from behind my pant's fly, where they had established themselves much earlier. For me it was a matter of finally giving them their freedom. There are three words somewhere in the city, they must be ancient, everyone can read them, they're on a wall, in public, they're directed to *Jack the Ripper*, to whom I can probably be compared in many respects. At least I belong, even if through a strange accident, to a nation of similar characters. And so the three words also have to be directed at me, in an entangled way, or perhaps they once were, and I'm striving to realize my right to make such a confession there on the wall -- without being hindered by the Office of Work by any comparisons or demands. Don't ask me what I'm inventing, I'm no friend of such polemics either. But since I don't have money for a ticket anymore, I have to make my own cabaret ... ah, and I really loved reviewing

the ladies. Still the foolishness leads me in this moment to the self-realization that I have the right to know these three words --

Naturally (by all appearance I paced leisurely back and forth between the garbage cans, but I had balled my fists in disappointment) naturally I hadn't begun with such a tirade, it was too ridiculous, it didn't fit in with my inclination toward the sublime ... had I actually begun to speak then at all. In A. I had been sacrificed to the senseless labyrinth between bureaucracies so typical in country. There was no time allotted for appointments at the Office of Work. Still, an older man asked me, just as he locked up the building while leaving, what I wanted. It was totally unnecessary to ask for a job at the Office of Work, because every company in the whole country was looking for people. Clearly visible signs hung outside every factory gate. For the untrained there was always garbage collection, even if they didn't have a lot to do in summer and were therefore more discriminating in their choice of employees. Whether I'd experienced that then, at garbage collection. I wasn't in the capitalist domain, after all ... he added, watchful. My trip here was at the very least for nothing.

--I went further, through the whole city, to the Labor Court, to report myself to the proper state attorney, but although her office hours had just started, she wasn't there.



--Would I rather speak with the secretary or did I want to wait for an hour until the attorney arrived.

--I decided to wait, but when I returned after an hour, I was sent away with the same comments. Once more I wandered aimlessly through the city, in the meantime I had become unsure of all my neatly organized arguments. After exactly one hour of being at the courthouse, I was told -- now a high-level official addressed me from inside a reception booth occupied by policemen -- that it was much too late for a petition at the state attorney's, and that the office hours for that were long since over. It was pointless to come back before the end of the week, they told me. Besides that, it was better to turn in a written statement.

--This situation seemed so characteristic of my entire preceding Dasein, seemed to describe *my* relation to the society of this country so well, that I nearly felt thankful. But to be sure, only after my protest had sunken into a kind of insight: I was the one, of course, who always managed to take things so far. It was my confused manner, though it wasn't entirely clear to me what means I had used to do it this time. At the least it had significantly delayed the explanations I was seeking. And indeed, it was only possible to come too late, no matter how hard one tried. There was no possibility to escape *at the right time* from any imprisonment.

--With agitated thoughts I searched for a bar downtown, in the two or three places I found there weren't any tables left. Only at the train station bar, which was filled with the screams of men, did I succeed in quenching my thirst with beer. I drank the sour, flat beer, and since I promptly missed the bus to M., I drank more. Soon I asked myself what I had actually wanted in A., why did it have to be, of all things, the Labor Court. What story had I wanted to tell the attorney to keep myself from being summoned. It had been utterly correct to fire me: we don't know your attitude towards work, Herr C., in your own interest you should seek as quickly as possible another job ... besides, the main thing is that it's a women's factory where you're not allowed to work anymore.

--How could they show me any sympathy when I was arguing against completely objective things like old age and sickness -- even if I wasn't being paranoid. A sick language was simply necessary for life in this republic. It was the only way, I thought, and was relieved.

--You should have yourself examined -- that's surely what they would've advised. But I was the one who had to examine me. Yet here in this republic, there was no way for me to do this.

Every time I sensed the unsuspected ability to examine myself, even to recognize myself, and perhaps, then, to pull the roots of my sickness, I



realized that the state had torn every means to do this from my hands, or that it secreted the means from me in that it held the ability to verify what was possible under lock and key. A serious illness, an all-encompassing illness of my ability to perceive the world rightly and correctly was the necessary consequence, as was also an illness of my ability to truly make everyone that I faced recognizable as a person of reality. Since reality had been stolen from me and destroyed, I had to exist necessarily as a form of destroyed reality, alone as a mere hallucination of reality, and I could only destroy reality for each of my fellow-men.

What could one accomplish, for instance, at the Labor Court with complaints about the anxiety of being impotent. What a wretched, profoundly sad question. They hadn't summoned me because of that. Since there was no injustice in this country, there couldn't be any justice either ... I sensed that such abridged thoughts had always belonged to the speech I wanted to make. And consequently (it seemed now that fish scales had fallen away from my eyes) I should have demanded to visit a certain kind of office at the administration, one that accepted complaints about the *depth psychological transgression of the past onto the present*. Only such an office (I knew it now) could have justified the existence of the judicial system in this country. But such an office didn't exist -- or even that was hidden from me.

Despairing, I considered which office I could turn to.

--There was no question that the person who headed such an institution had to be, of necessity, a woman -- never a man. For me it lay in the nature of the thing ... if I wanted to prove it though, I was helpless; once again it seemed to me that I needed nearly visionary abilities to ascertain natural things which were understandable and necessary in themselves. I had to *hallucinate* to be able to discover the world and my possibility to exist within it. If I didn't have the power to do that -- even for as long as a moment of dizziness -- these possibilities disappeared, seemed to disappear forever, everything disappeared that I could love, the judicial system disappeared, justice and injustice disappeared, my hopes and accusations disappeared ... everything disappeared that I liked to touch, happiness disappeared, the women disappeared.

--Yes, and I probably even disappeared myself. I looked around in the train station bar, only men were there, drunken, endlessly babbling, wildly gesticulating men. They seemed to angrily confront an invisible opponent, I received as much attention as if I had never come in. Nevertheless, it soon seemed to me as though accusations were being hurled at me through the stifling air, accusations directed at the solitude in which I sat and which dissolved me.



--I alone cannot be held responsible for the mistakes of this patriarchal society, I defended myself, not I alone. I cannot have gone beyond certain limits. I even came too late on the occasions when the mistakes I'm referring to are being alleged, Frau Director.

--You were fired too late, you mean.

--For God's sake, I yelled, I've come to have my dismissal reversed.

--You have to explain this exactly, you have to pull yourself together and explain everything exactly, from the start to the finish. Pull yourself together. Think about what it means to you to be taken back again.

--Actually it doesn't mean a thing, I answered, actually it just means, Frau Justiciary, that in this factory I had the possibility to reflect on just those things that were the basic cause of my dismissal. I believe that it goes clear back to the time when I was about the same age as your daughters are, Frau Director. Yes, perhaps it had begun back then. Back then it was as if I had been, at some point, amputated. In metaphor of course, not literally. They didn't cut off an infected limb, but nevertheless I was amputated, intellectually amputated, lobotomized, a brain amputation, as we so facetiously say. In the glorious spring of my life I had somehow caught cold ... since then the days fly past me. Believe me -- and now I'm speaking with the maturity of a person who is, in comparison, twice as old as your

daughters. But recently I seem to be rejuvenating again, obviously flourishing. Not really young anymore, but still rather healthy, I insist on that as I stand here before you. In any case, I deluded myself to a certain degree with that idea. Healthy then, with an eye towards life, I had a job, yes, up until this summer I worked. To be sure, I would rather have written ... you know of course that I also tried that, but it was in a so-called women's factory that I worked. I went there daily, with great pleasure, to work directly under the women. And I recalled my youth, my youth was a sort of metastasis which grew out of me, not always to my advantage, but still ... but now even this factory has been amputated from me, a further, painful intrusion into my fate. And perhaps with that they completed my amputation. I abruptly lost more of the cells that controlled me ... perhaps they controlled my breathing, my knee joints, my vocal chords, perhaps they controlled my voice, which I brought to paper, even when it didn't come out right. Perhaps amputation is not the proper expression and it would be better to speak of castration, to speak of a mutilation of my inner world through castration. They didn't operate on me, they left everything to dangle, but they eclipsed the cells that controlled, my cells, certain ones were sterilized and castrated. It was a brain castration, and the instrument they used to do it was gracious femininity.



It is difficult to explain the method that they used for this, and it is embarrassing to me, Frau Magistrate. The situation is embarrassing, ridiculous, not very *manly*, like it really should be ... not only my explanations of it, but also its consequences. And death is near. Oh, I think these things are obscene, but I have to try to explain them. I *have* to, I said. And I have the hope that just such a method, if it is one, will appear less obscene to you that the tone of my explanation. It is not *what* I explain, then, that is obscene, it is obscene *how* I explain it ... I say that so you'll remain sympathetic towards me, Frau Magistrate ... the manner of my discourse would then be identical in many ways with *morality*. Morality is, I admit, a somewhat outdated word that isn't popular today ... at best when it is in association with *struggle* or *work* ... but the last connotation of this word as I use it comes from the time when I will begin. That word was, even then, the banner under which I was castrated. I grew up between walls that echoed with the droning of both vowels in this word, between walls where they thought (as in every normal madhouse) that the cock was dangerous. You know, of course, that psychopathology finds its purpose in proceeding to destroy the instincts. I grew up under the reign of psychopathologists who declared that the sex drive was abnormal ... and *sex* was capitalistic. Even the word, because it sounded too American, was nearly forbidden. I'm not

exaggerating, the relevant articles are still available. You know this yourself anyway, you're about as old as my mother, and you probably had an influence back then on such publications ... in short, back then the hand of science already influenced me. They dimly suspected the disease that came from the cocks of my generation, they didn't have enough money back then to buy out the sexual interests of the youth, the downfall of the state loomed dangerously if they couldn't hold the cocks down. Perhaps they could have explained this to me scientifically, but admission to the university departments that managed the household sexology books was limited even back then. To be sure, I belonged to the class for which the Enlightenment's ideas were intended, but they didn't offer them to us in their pure form, but rather set them immediately into action. So they began. It was an enlightened method to separate me from the consciousness of my cock. The Enlightenment took even this consciousness in its hands, since the cleanliness of my senses had to be preserved. Oh, I was compared to a starfish, I was instructed about its method of reproduction. In general, the word *clean* played the biggest role. I had the impression that the word could never be missing when interpersonal relations were discussed. That gave me something to think about, Frau Magistrate, because I knew that my penis pissed and hung near my anus.



--It was a *disgusting act* (I inserted a small episode so that I wouldn't bore her) it was a filthy disgusting act, or so I learned during my first police interrogation. It had happened in the sixth grade -- I think, if not earlier -- it was in the sixth grade when the bodies of naked women at the schoolyard--

--Where were the naked women, a police officer screamed, a question which terrified me immeasurably.

--They were confiscated, they had been drawn in notebooks, drawings in which the existence of genitals had not been suppressed. It wasn't me, incidentally. I have to say that in my own defense. Apparently I was apprehended because I had mocked the poor quality of the drawings, probably that made them suspect that I would have busied myself with that kind of art. It wasn't the case, but I have to admit that these pictures hacked so deep into my brain that I became, four or five years later, a pornographer myself ... and probably I can't see women even today because there isn't anything comparable to these pictures that can be found anywhere ... I became a pornographer myself, to be sure in writing, probably all these outpourings landed in the trash, which is why it's no blasphemy when the depths of a trash truck remind me of a gaping womb. A warranted, thorough search of my house hadn't uncovered anything. He must have hidden it very carefully -- that was the conclusion the investigators offered my teachers, who

were frozen in a disgusted pose. So nothing had been proven, including my innocence, except that a note had to be added to my file indicating that I was doubtless -- from that day forward -- a bad choice for any further training once I graduated from school. In this way, Frau Magistrate, the universities were closed to me. I became a worker. To be permitted to remain one, in the factory of my choice, is the purpose of my speech.

But I'm not finished yet, Frau Magistrate. I'm going to continue with explanations that become increasingly obscene. It was clear even then that the country had to be divided. The ends of these plans were sacred and required means which were not reform oriented.

--I must have really been crazy back then, perhaps even crazier than today. At some point I suddenly had the impression that the division would be drawn through the waists of the women, and so carefully that the women wouldn't notice it at all ... the lower parts of the women's bodies, their perfumed *raffinement*, belonged on the other side of the wall, belonged in the domain of the reactionaries, who wanted to stuff the bodies full of money -- or that's what I thought I could deduce (with great import) from the polemical stew they gave my brain to feed on. Naturally it must have disgusted me. To be sure, some of the lower parts of the bodies remained, they were distributed among the university departments responsible for



monitoring the developing situation. They were just those lower parts of bodies whose chances for further training were less questionable than mine, and from these it seemed that there were, in fact, more lower bodies from women than from men. To my horror I discovered that my cock -- which had been annoying me for some time -- was also straining towards this wall, namely towards the lower bodies of the women, from underneath and behind, but my head wanted to stay here ... ah, I recognized that the upper bodies of the women stayed here too, they were long-necked upper bodies dressed in blue or gray, with arms that had no muscle. These bodies demanded that social improvement be embraced, which is a quote, though I should have forgotten this quote as I have forgotten its source. And the heads of the women remained too, they were filled with pristine thoughts, they would have loved me like a brother if I had been able to sacrifice all I could for the improvement of society. But blocking what I could give was a cock made of lead ... the pain in this minuscule organ was thick and heavy, like lead ... and when I began to feel some obscene pride in it, I discovered that women didn't share my feelings at all. From the literature that wasn't banned (which I was therefore able to trust), I thought I discovered that women were in truth even revolted by my cock. I'm abbreviating this rather crudely, Frau Magistrate, I was an uninvited guest in literature, and what they allowed me

to read was stuff that couldn't pervert me. So I craved to discover more about my cock's relation to women, and I had a great respect for everything that was in print. Out of all the experiences I brought to bear on this problem, the key one seemed to be that women were disgusted by my cock. The women, so I thought, went to bed with the literature of the Enlightenment. At best I was a sad case-history of their studies. When I panicked about that they consoled me ... I should just wait, be calm, give myself time for God's sake. That's what I read in the newspapers. I got it from them because there weren't any people that I trusted; yes, it began at that time, occasionally the pages of the newspapers aimed at younger people touched on the problems between the sexes ... be calm, and it was as if someone handed me a piece of soap for my cock because the heart of my future partner was clean. I knew that, in their hearts, women really did love a man like Lenin, who didn't have a cock ... at least nothing about Lenin's cock has ever come to light. Ah, and I took that piece of soap, and I washed my cock away. Merely out of sympathy with women I had begun to despise my cock just as much as they did. And at last I was capable, fit for living, able to serve in the military -- but the women, to my astonishment, were still staying somewhere else. And when I finally got to see them (from an appropriate distance) I could understand their coldness. It was all very



simple. Out of love for women and with the help of their image (in knit socks and blue shirts), I castrated myself, and no one other than me had been the surgeon.

--What a joke, Madame, what a trashy joke. But not much trashier than the one that's happening to me now, where I am, which we so facetiously name "the second spring" ... the second, because now everything is coming back to me again. Average, everything that is coming now is average, with an average flavor. While I have arrived (with average success) at the lowest category and fit in there, while I have forgotten (with average success) everything that has plagued me (with something saved up for my approaching retirement), looking back at my average success on the shooting ranges built for this country's defense ... I always seemed motivated because our goal was to defend the women and the children ... because I was found to be half-way competent for this, I was once again separated from the women. And I don't see them anymore, Madame, the women. Some kind of terrible madness has clouded my vision ... once again they are in some other place.

--The universities have come clean in the meantime. They've ripped away the last unnecessary shrouds, and now breasts can be shown from behind those blue shirts. Unbelievable but true, at least according to my superficial impression ... and I hadn't noticed any of it. There is a phrase by Franz

Fanon that describes a terrible feeling, a feeling that is the first step towards violence, in Fanon's sense it is like revolutionary force: *lustful envy*. That describes exactly how I feel, Madame, when I think about how much I haven't noticed. The universities suddenly approve of the lower body; grinning, they give us the results of their tests. Suddenly they tap us on the shoulder, heads shaking ... they can't understand what we've made of our lives ... if we didn't know, if we'd never heard that sexuality builds character. For years it's been known at the universities and beneficially used in the departments, and they give us examples from the most pertinent literature, the best they have been able to obtain on their trips abroad. Oh God, now they even call it sex in their articles. And they don't understand how we could live without it, they don't understand that we're dried up, that we are desperately dried up, ah madness, they pull another generation into their fold. The question is: what do we still want, us, with our dried up fingers ... what are we complaining about anyway. They introduced legal abortion, they have debated permitting us to have affairs ... theoretically even for you, Mr. Hop Frog ... the universities can point to their successes: the introduction of the swimming pool, the organization of the orgasm, the Party orgy ... the introduction of the masquerade ball, the introduction of the nipple, the introduction of the four-letter word. Even I wasn't having such a bad time.



I became the proud owner of a television set, my image could be reflected from a screen that had consumed my youth.

--With my somewhat obscene humor, with some regret, I come to the supposition that they are getting a little tired of these things back at the universities. I don't know if I should be a little jealous of their weariness. I stand here without a clue, with an emptied brain, Frau Magistrate, I don't even understand any foreign words. I have realized that all the things that nearly kill me are almost meaningless to others.

--And I drove. I raced around the country ... I racked myself over my assignments ... I hurried through construction sights just to find some trace of the women. Time after time I swore to myself that I would ignore my impotence. Once, at last, finally, I thought that I was near the women again, I found such a factory, I could be among them everyday, often separated from them by a mere iron lattice -- but now they've fired me from my women's factory. Once again they've castrated my vision of women from my brain. That's what it is that I wanted to complain about, Frau Magistrate.

--You tell me that I've exaggerated, that I operated with generalizations ... but you're the one who has operated. I would have made a fool of myself, given away my ignorance. I alone am to blame for everything ... and nevertheless, you want to hear the conclusions I've reached.

--I only have one conclusion, only one comes to me, and that is *j'accuse*. Away with them, reads the conclusion, I don't want to see them anymore, and even you, Frau District Attorney. You're no woman, Frau District Attorney, you're my father. And even though you just copulated with my mother once, she still dreams of you today. You wouldn't grant me your love anyway, I'm not good enough for you, you've repeated that to me so often. And there is only one conclusion: I protest. Yes, I protest ... I had stood up from the table and was yelling the last sentence into the train station. My voice was so hysterical that I frightened myself; embarrassed, I looked around. The drunken men hadn't noticed me in the least. They were completely consumed with themselves, they hadn't even raised their heads. I threw a couple of coins on the table, which more than covered my bill, and left the bar as if I were fleeing.

Of course, I thought, since it's true that I've chased women throughout the whole country, and since it's true that I have to stare at them whenever I'm lurking at some bar, then there's an unusual paradox in my discourse, for somehow or another I still manage to avoid them. Yes, I knew, they were loved by a state that demanded from me that I look it straight in the eye. In the eyes of the state demanding this of me I must have been at bottom a piece of trash. Trash ... for the state I must have been a piece of trash from



the beginning, a trashy, filthy pair of machinist's coveralls. But I have to say that I avoided the women to stay clean. To stay clean I avoided them like a leper ... like a leper. I understand now that the cleanliness they imposed on my was leprosy, a nasty smelling, red-green, dripping leprosy.

--Once more I examined my hands. A foamy, undefinable substance seemed to be drying into a crust on them, clear up to the lower arms ... perhaps a sickness that I picked up in the trash can, I asked myself.

--What cleanliness underneath, I thought. What cleanliness under this ablation where my skin is in a constant state of rosy regeneration. It was just this image that must have driven the women from my proximity. They've made themselves invisible from this kind of cleanliness, and it radiates in my expression, it is the scab of castration on my forehead, it constantly ripples over my skin with the speed of the wind.

I was coming back from the garbage dump on my way into the city, the bus from A. passed me, in the brightly lit interior of the bus I saw men sitting, they were on there way to the night shift in the factories at M. ... for a second I imagined that I saw women sitting in the bus. I even saw my mother in the bus, she was coming back from a trip, but I must have deluded myself.

--A terrible loneliness crept over me. In that moment I would have given

everything, would have given half of my life to have been able to sit in that bus with the rest of the workers ... without hesitation I would have, should such a condition have been set, I even would have given up my attempts to write, if they had only accepted me again in exchange. My attempts to write, which upset women so much ... although I had only dared confess to a woman that I was trying to write on a couple of rare occasions, the stigma of this contemptuous confession stood on my forehead.

--I remember how I had once admitted to my mother, in a moment of blind trust in the sixth or seventh school year, that I wanted to become a writer, yes, that I had even started writing already and was writing constantly, and now it was my most inner wish to be allowed one day to read to her from one of my attempts. My mother, however, although she hardly protested my offer, showed all the signs of being truly, painfully embarrassed. After a moment of skepticism as to whether she should believe my outrageous comments, after making a horrid face in reaction to them, her expression changed to one of such incredible anger that I immediately stopped and began trying to placate her. Probably I remembered the impression I had as a kid that my mother wasn't capable of taking me seriously ... but I seemed to remember her begin to shake. Only disbelief kept her from immediately recognizing that something inside me was the



most abominable traitor possible to all the plans she had for me. I began to mollify her, I'll only pursue such activities in my spare time, I'll only write when I really have nothing else to do, and I'll never take up the true conditions of our existence in my stories. Even if my mother seemed relieved, her face remained suspicious. Her skin, gone pale at first, had turned a shame-faced red, as if I had said some sort of crass obscenity without realizing it, or had proclaimed my decision to report all the private conversations in our house to the neighbors, to the general public, or to the secret police. Hastily I assured her that my attempts to write wouldn't concern in the slightest what it was my duty to do, or negatively influence my schoolwork, or bring me into conflict with the moral code enforced by society, or make me refuse to follow even one of the goals (either ideological or hygienic in nature) that were set for me at home, at school, and by the world. I'll especially respect my family life, about that you can rest easy: if I ever have any readers they won't learn anything negative about us.

--Wasn't I ashamed of myself, she finally asked, even thinking of readers when you have those kinds of things in your head. But I'll never be able to do that, because for someone who comes from such a simple background it's just not possible. For that you have to have some sort of special talent, or at least possess the necessary means to be part of such a special clique.

--But I do have the talent, I countered.

--What a talent, she said, your father was a man who had talent for everything. He was a very good machinist, everyone knew him, and he gave himself totally to his work and to his family. He was an example of goodness and correctness, welcomed everywhere and loved by everybody. You could depend on him, but you've become his complete opposite. One could think you weren't even his son. You're going to wind up being some minimum wage employee who has to clean up the scum for everybody else. Or you're probably just going to wind up on the wrong side of the tracks, you're going to bring nothing but shame your whole life long.

--So, I thought, I've lived up to her opinion with great honor.

The bus had roared past the trash dump without stopping. I should have stopped it at the bus stop. Or better, I should have thrown myself onto the street directly in front of the snout of that howling animal, which was carrying away life in its belly; I should've let myself be run over by it instead. Wasn't the bus still dangerous for me ... didn't it take me along once, picking me up from the side of the road. I tried to force myself to remember when that had happened. The only scene that I could remember was so full of deathly horror that I could never again feel good about climbing into a bus. Though the bus was completely full no one sat next to me. The women



stood in the corridor behind me, and I wanted to think that from that day on I was cut off from life. It was a feeling like being shot through space in a perfectly sealed capsule inside of which all my memories had evaporated, and I've thought ever since then, with every fiber of my being, that I was in hell. I got back to town in the evening, I don't know how, it was in August, the month of my birth. Anyway, I hope that the time can be determined so precisely. The air was brown on that evening ... by that time of day I was already born, a bundle frightened to the point of idiocy laying paralyzed in its cage staring out at its first night ... the brown seemed to be sucked up by a black yawning, and somewhere in that darkness bright sparks glowed unbelievably red. They didn't illuminate anything, but instead gave off smoke, a heavy, putrid smoke.

--The town welcomed me with a great stillness (the kind of spellbound stillness when an attack is expected), and also an emptiness that seemed to stop at the town's borders. I was still on the inside of an empty container ... and I was a part of this emptiness, I was its recovered, empty consciousness. I doubted whether I should go to my apartment ... I wasn't able to do anything against my aimlessness, I had recognized that life was an awkward, clumsy counterfeit.

A short time later I made it to the police station and I let loose a few

screams -- I still remembered that -- I had screamed something, several times, as loud as I could. I had waited for a reaction, perhaps I waited for them to recognize and arrest me ... I was of the opinion that after I had spewn out my speech in A. -- loudly, I hoped that they'd heard it -- that they would've had to have thrown me in jail ... but there wasn't any reaction. Grinning about that, because it took so long for me to understand that they had faked everything ... the entire republic, half the world.

I feared the apartment ... at least the part in which I had barricaded myself ... its dark, filthy chaos had been pouring an undefinable terror into me for some time. For a good while I'd been arguing with my mother (who lived in the other, larger part of the apartment) because my disorder and filth had begun to expand, like an unstoppable poisonous swamp, towards her part. While my mother was gone (she had been visiting her sister in West Germany for over a month) the swamp had steadily flooded over into her part of the apartment. The horrid stink no longer escaped from her room because I didn't open the windows, because molding, unwashed dishes towered mountainously on the counters, and because, though my mother put up a strong resistance, I was constantly smoking in there. Since my body had apparently tolerated an insane amount of chain-smoking till then without any problems, I got into the habit of no longer extinguishing the butts in the



overflowing ashtrays ... instead, I busied myself lighting the older butts with the ones I had just finished, so that after a while all the old butts were ignited, and they burned until they were gone. In the end a snapping, blue-black fog of smoke had risen up out of the ashtray and collected near the ceiling (I was already smoking another cigarette by this time), so that the ceiling had disappeared behind a screen of smoke that was up to a meter thick, if not more. I increasingly developed fears -- ever more threatening fears that I thought I had seen some kind of movement above my head -- while I propped my elbows in the refuse on the table, unable to do anything but smoke without pause while the desk lamp burned. I had been trying to cover the movements with the clouds of smoke ... but now that they were covered by the smoke their mysteriousness only intensified my fear.

Out of fear I turned off the desk lamp and lit a candle ... even though it made me feel uncomfortable to sit there in the candlelight because it reminded me of the time when there were air raids, when we didn't have -- almost without exception -- any electricity. The smoke rolled about on the ceiling like some evil and treacherous movement. Nervously I moved to the kitchen and swept some ancient newspapers off the blue and white checkered cloth that covered the table. They were nauseating stacks of papers full of slime that made you want to vomit. They were glued together with southern

tomatoes, overripe and black with rot ... and there were always a lot of tomatoes. They were so-called "love apples". I bought them and on good days took the greatest pleasure in stuffing myself with them; but now they had all gone bad, softened, spoiled ... and even from that waste a dark fog seemed to rise. In the street there were noises as if shots had been fired ... and while that happened it seemed to me as though a trudging unrest had developed in the night that was lurking down below the window, as if the tired steps of many feet dragged and stumbled down there, all going in the same direction.

--Nothing behind the smoke covering the ceiling. Nothing, I told myself. Nothing, just the cancer stricken paralytic who retreated into the attic for fear of death, and who sits there immovable in his chair, day and night, staring out over the roofs at the fields. He's going to succumb to idiocy up there, in past years his old mother (she had a wooden leg) tirelessly washed and fed him, but now all the women had disappeared from the city.

--Nothing, I told myself, and laid my cheek on a cool wax paper that lay on the table. My facial skin immediately began to stick to the dried-up residues of fluids. In this moment I knew that this was exactly what caused my fear, the single plausible reason: nothingness. It was emptiness that generated this feeling, and against nothingness I had no power.



The nothingness that scared me was my inactivity. I did nothing but breathe in the horrors of the night, not once did I even move my body. Once, a week ago, two weeks ago, a letter had come, obviously for me, obviously from my mother, but I didn't dare to open it. It was buried somewhere in the garbage that had piled up in the apartment. Suddenly fear began to torture me -- she might have announced her return in the letter ... suddenly, at any moment, the door could open and my mother could come in. She'd begin to scream, hands squeezing the sides of her head, she wouldn't be able to find a single empty chair to sit down in.

--I didn't have any time. I was writing ... that's what I would shout, trying to explain the disaster zone. It would have been a lie, an evil joke against myself, for I hadn't written anything, but once again I'd blame my writing for the problems that came up, I'd blame my sick language -- and thereby confirm my mother's accusations. And that, although she would never demand proof of my statements. She never even uttered a word about it. Even when I really wrote she punished my *diversion* with contempt, she punished me rightfully, because when I wrote it always caused filth and disorder and besides that I smoked and used up unbelievable amounts of coffee.

--Kaput, she said, you'll make yourself go kaput, you'll see soon enough

what you get from that. You'll make your own life and the lives of everyone who associates with you go kaput.

--But she never told me why I should live ... I was over forty, and she had kept it a secret from me clear up to now ... yet in the final analysis she had taken pains to carry that insanely screeching bundle -- which is what I was in the last few years of the war -- through the howl and clatter of the night bombings, to drag me into the bunker. No, she hadn't just thrown me to the side of the road, although that wouldn't have attracted any attention whatsoever.

--Ah, and the state hadn't thrown me away ... and it couldn't tell me why I should live either, other than to serve it by increasing the population for its profit. To the state it was perfectly clear that I owed it my unlimited, utter, and eternally lasting gratefulness. Because, at bottom, the state had created me ... oh, an act of creation had come to pass of monstrous intensity. Spread wide in her most sublime submission, my mother had let Father State come over her in his entire, powerful beauty, the grandiose symbol of the economic build-up stood erect above her and plunged securely into her body, and to celebrate her conception a sea of flags were unfurled, the Party's Young Guard waved them over the ceremony of that pure coitus, I was immaculately conceived and I stood unblemished in life, which was being built up, my



forehead became strong, I appeared promising ... but then a summer caused that forehead to ignite. Ah, later I went so far as to be jealous of that pristine act. And Generalissimo Stalin had created me, the friend of all good people. I had the honor of thanking him for my life. I obeyed, and there was weeping in the world and tears on my mother's face when he passed away. And I was terrified to death ... but a glaring and desolate summer had ignited me, and sweat poured out of my eyes. I closed my eyes, I must have slept ... and the skepticism I had when I awoke was terrible.

To have awakened so late was another reason to panic.

--On this night, after I sleeplessly wandered around the sweltering apartment for hours, a dream had come to me again, between the kitchen and my room, after a couple of attempts to fall asleep on the sweat-soaked bed had failed. I had already dreamt this invariable dream many times. This time the dream wasn't interrupted by any hard knocking on the ceiling, this time I dreamt it to its unpleasant conclusion, which was some kind of colorless fading of the scene into a diffusion, into a formless emptiness, where I lost myself in an indescribable terror.

--This dream always passed without leaving a memory, it haunted me only on nights when my mother was not home, and I was powerless against it. When the crippled man above me hit the floor with his cane trying to make

me be quiet, the dream went away. Obviously it disturbed him when I screamed in my sleep, it scared him out of the paralysis that made him one with the damp pulsings of the night, which relented in the first hours of the coming day and were a foretaste of his approaching death. After waking up I only knew that I had dreamed the sentence *I love you*, using either the informal *dich* or the formal *Sie*, but I didn't know if I had screamed the sentence out loud. I never woke myself up with my own screaming.

--I knew that these words must have nearly driven the cripple crazy -- if he still had any sensitivity for things that were lost -- but I'd had the feeling for a long time that he wasn't going to go to Hell as surely as I was.

It happened that I intended to go upstairs and speak to him about our future in hell.

--Probably I was even mistaken about this: it hadn't really happened and I had only dreamed that I'd had the intention. Now it was obviously too late to do it -- I shrank from a thought that would have brought me within a hair of accosting him with my envy, something I could have killed him with. I'd escaped that because presumably he was already dead. Simply died, because all the women had left the city ... now I would no longer be able to hear the hesitant dripping of his urine into a tin pail when I listened through the door of the attic, his coughing when his mother lit a cigarette for him and he



greedily sucked in the first puff, no longer hear her cursing when she admonished him because of his impatience.

--Now it was quiet up there, nothing more to hear besides the buzzing and crisping of summer, in the middle of a brew of yellow heat his gray face would slowly dry out, with clenched teeth, the tip of a bitten-off tongue clamped between them, a specter that even in death would seem blinded by the sunshine coming in through the skylight. No, he wasn't in hell; even in those last seconds before his heart finally came to a standstill he had to resist against the sun, his nearly-closed eyes had not glazed over in the night, and what he had seen where not the hell-like trash dumps with their blue-red flickering fires from which black, grasshopper-swarms of burned paper floated up. He didn't see those hills and valleys of ash where a wild man stumbled through the rubbish, looking for a couple of pieces of paper, long ago rotted away, that contained a few instructions for the practice of love, in green ink, instructions that couldn't have been pieced together again for a couple of years now. He, who was seven years older than I and had been born even before the war, must have felt in all that time of unhappiness some oven of warmth that fed him memories ... which was something I didn't have. I was missing some indefinable minutia, a point that I couldn't uncover within myself, a heat -- something had been withheld from me. In a moment of

neglect, or because there wasn't enough time, they forgot to breathe into me a minute breath, something vague, without any importance for every other person, a small tickle, as if from an accidental strand of hair that was touched for a fraction of a second. But it was something that I was never again to recover, and the lack of that merciless droplet condemned me irrevocably to a future in hell.

--This is what I wanted to ask: what is it, and from where ... you must have experienced it yourself since you live with your pain, with your paralysis, with the smell of a blue-red metastasis, you must be familiar with it. How could it be installed in me. Where can I find it, and what will happen to me if I don't find it, if I can't fill in the lack. Will this tiny needle-puncture rip open, will this barely noticeable hole someday burst into an insanely gigantic one. Will it consume me, will it kill me ... will I land -- condemned to be an evil one -- in purgatory. Isn't it said that in the destructive phase of insanity one comes to the playgrounds of one's childhood, will I wind up in the concentration camp. Or at the cancer ward, in barbed wire ... or will my hand still feel anything when the control lever of high-tech torture touches it --

After summer collapsed into night I abruptly fell asleep, as though I were sinking down into a bog. But before I reached deep sleep, thoughts began



to plague me. They woke me up again and again; in brush-stroke movements they circled around inside my cerebral cortex until they controlled me completely, destructive in the bright, painful burning of all their excessive circumlocutions, and I recognized that they were thoughts about me, irrefutable, that they appeared as truths I had no possibility to appeal. It seemed to me that many years of veils had been torn away, and all at once I believed that I saw -- and anyone could have recognized it -- how I really behaved among my fellow men.

Oh, when I did dare to mingle with those fine people in the street, in the gardens or at swimming pools, I successfully believed that I was similar to all of them. I saw how they moved with certainty, with carefree self-confidence, how they spoke and rested, melting over the stools that supported them, given over to the mild hand that was offered them. I saw how they danced and how their laughter escaped from their larynx just as perfectly as an expression from their gastrointestinal tract did. Ah, how they solved the mathematics of their daily lives, how they made the proper decision in all problems, and how they dressed with pinpoint accuracy. How they shamelessly used false words, how they were even able to reveal their sins and lusts to the whole world with a straight face, inimitably lazy, and certain of being forgiven, and how their innocence wasn't touched by any of it.

Inimitable ... no, only I couldn't imitate it, but I didn't notice it when I was with them, bent over from oppression and clumsily trying to fit in with them. I achieved the sharpest level of sensitivity while observing, because I was embarrassingly endowed with a capacity to detect even the slightest smirk directed at me. I had acquired the most infallible hearing, but it betrayed me anyway, in the evening, when I thought I had missed just one whispered joke about me, and it left me dreading the coming day.

And nevertheless I thought the next day that it was the other way around, once again it seemed to me that I was one of them, that I could fool them, that they didn't recognize my real character. Yes, they didn't notice at all how immeasurably tense I was when I was with them, hoping to at least appear calm on the outside. I didn't want them to sense that I was completely immersed in the hope that they should like me, that I was utterly consumed by this desire to be loved, and at the same time I was determined in the extreme not to let that desire be noticed. For I was convinced that if I showed such a weakness I would forfeit any possibility of them liking me. I was convinced that they would have to despise me if they recognized even the slightest hint of despondence within me. They would punish me with contemptuous laughter because it wasn't natural for me to love and to be loved, because I had to grapple with such an idea, and



because I wasn't able to win the sympathy of others simply by shrugging my shoulders, to reach then, this thing that hardly cost them any effort at all. Yes, their reward was the product of not trying, and it was just as easy for them to do without this thing, which they were able to show they had at any time with a casual wave of the arm. And on the nights I was alone I hated them for this simplicity, and at the same time I knew that if I wanted their love then they couldn't find out about my hate. No, they couldn't find out that I was in a hell, that I didn't move in the light of their brilliance, but was absent instead, that I rather lead a secret existence, that I huddled during black nights in smoke-filled caves and brooded over grimy papers. I saw myself ever more clearly growing into a gigantic bestial spider, balling up in my own filth in the foul-smelling isolation of my hiding place, where I gnawed on poisonous characters while muttering convulsively. A monster whose decay showed up in the form of red flecks appearing in every wrinkle of the skin, who had dried up uric acid on its scalp that itched, whose insanity could no longer be held back, and from which clotted bunches of hair began to fall out painlessly. The beast that put out its glowing cigarettes in the spaces between its toes to kill the slimy wet irritation that constantly broke out there ... that finally drove me out into the night, where I roamed through the most repulsive of all the desolate places at the fringes of the city

that I hated. Just to be able to sleep, just so that I wouldn't be so deathly pale the next day, just so that the next day I might -- if I behaved well -- be loved.

But I didn't fall asleep, and the thought of who I really was made me feel the strike of the whip, again and again, which instantly inflamed my senses ... all of my limbs were still dormant, were incapable of defending me, but my keenly attentive consciousness burned like a torch, I myself was the essence of hell, blinding myself, me, since I couldn't detect any other person but myself, me, who thought only of myself, and who therefore slowly lost the ability to see ... the women, they had already disappeared ... soon it would go so far that I couldn't see myself anymore ... in an onslaught of resignation I fell asleep. Never, I said to myself, could I be loved under these circumstances; this consideration satisfied me. An awkward calm filled me, my thoughts directed me more and more towards sleep. I didn't wish for anything more than the return of my mother so that she would be ashamed of me, so that she would deplore me and punish me with her contempt. At last this would force me to be the other, or so I hoped, the one who could think about himself from within, so that he could look outwards without restriction. With that he might still have a hope ... the other one ... without hope I fell into sleep.



The images of the subsequent dream were so clear that for a long time afterwards I asked myself how I could have forgotten some of them. The solution to the puzzle, that is what I had forgotten ... it was as though I had fallen asleep at the beginning of a long voyage and didn't wake up until reaching the destination. Thus it seemed that the entire, immeasurably long duration of the trip disappeared from my life. Nevertheless I asked myself whether something had happened during the trip ... I had the suspicion that I had disembarked somewhere, at an arbitrary stopover, and that something had happened to me there. But I didn't know what it was, what it meant. It meant only that soon, in a few days perhaps, I would be hit by misfortune. And I said to myself that I might possibly have warded it off (after the forgotten act of disembarking), had I not fallen asleep again on the second half of the voyage. During the first part of the trip I had been transformed to another reality, and possibly an important part of my expected misfortune would be that I could no longer refer back to that previously experienced reality.

--And even in my dream I had slept: I lay in bed and was suddenly awakened because I thought I heard a voice. As always it had begun with a raw voice demanding that I get out of bed, which I did immediately ... it was quite probable that I did this in reality ... I knew immediately that any

resistance would be senseless. After that the voice demanded that I raise my night shirt ... unnecessarily, it seemed to me, because I thought I knew what I had to do ... as always in this dream, the rude tone of the commands contained a mixture of amusement and disgust, amusement that reminded me of the warbling standards played by military bands. Their refrains made the same command (they liked to play them in the concentration camps when whippings were given), and along with it came a certain disgust that could only be a reaction to the ridiculous appearance of my filthy night shirt. I knew what would happen, it would be less painful than one might at first suppose. The man wrapped the loop of a powerful cord around my genitals. His hands were cool and practiced, their movements revealed neither squeamishness nor caution. It was an unclean, frayed cord, more like a finger-thick rope, a real bull lasso, the loop was jerked closed, tightening perfectly to the best possible fit, stopping a hair short of causing pain. I don't know if I was ordered to come along, the cord jerked taut and I followed silently. The man had clipped his end of the cord to his belt, which held his dark uniform jacket together at the waist. When words or thoughts distracted me, I was forcefully pulled forward ... for instance, when I was busy wondering why this man had painted his fingernails bright red. After a careful look at the back that was about two yards in front of me, I recognized



that there was a broad shouldered, unusually heavy-boned woman in the uniform, a woman in a tight-fitting dress that hung down over the shiny black shafts of high-heels. It spanned taut between her short legs, which were taking very large steps. After looking at this women's unapproachable back I should have woken up. But this time I was dragged through a dream that took place in wide, poorly-illuminated places where I could only identify for certain the wet, shiny cobblestones. I hardly felt my genitals underneath my ridiculous shirt, which draped over the cord. Only when I hesitated for a moment and the cinch was jerked with an impatient, even brutal yank, did I become aware that I could still feel pain; I stumbled quickly forward, suddenly I had the feeling that the situation had become serious.

--Stop ... please stop, I wanted to yell. But it was unusually difficult to find any language. Where are you taking me, I wanted to ask the woman, and who will I have to deal with.

--Words seemed to have lodged at my larynx, nevertheless, in that moment the woman turned around, she had a smile on her wide, somewhat roughly chiseled face, an expression of mildness in combination with light resignation, apparently in reaction to my rather unintelligent question. She proudly stepped up to me, her feet somewhat apart, gripped tight by her officer's boots. She had stuck both thumbs under her belt, at the same time

pushing her elbows back so that the black material of the uniform jacket stretched over the large, upward-jutting breasts.

--Are you taking me to the barracks ...

--She ignored my question. Koch, she introduced herself. My name is Ilse Koch, you have doubtless heard the name before, sir, or haven't you ...

--Of course, of course, I shouted, I know you. My tone of voice was devout, vibrated nonetheless in a kind of happy astonishment.

--She stared at me for a little bit longer while I began to fear that my member could turn into an erection under my shirt, even though I didn't notice anything like that happening.

--Come along. I know what you want .... After giving this command she violently jerked me towards her with the cord, her facial expression had suddenly transformed into a hideous mask. I hurried forwards, behind the taut, hard cord, which aimed at her waist. She walked, quickly and unimpressed, I heard the nails in the soles of her boots crack on the flagstones, as if she wanted to make sparks.

--I shivered once at the thought that the woman might get away from me. A gigantic terror began to fill me, and just this terror seemed to cause the feared event to happen: she really did get away from me. After a few paces she stepped into the illumination of a glistening moonlight, her silhouette



became wavy and finally disappeared, and with her the rows of houses where the square came to an end also disappeared, the light towards which I had been running seemed to suddenly metamorphose into a foggy gray twilight, beneath which it was hollow and empty. I knew that the man hadn't knocked with his cane this night, that I must nevertheless wake up immediately, and my sorrow knew no bounds.

Perhaps I was already awake. Lamplight burned my eyes, I had woken up on the stool, out of joint, broken in the cage-like position that the stool had forced upon me. Thirst had caused me to have outbreaks of sweat, exhaustion had torn me away from sleep, thick summer-evening air seemed to flow through the window, but the window was closed ... I was moonstruck with light, but it was the light from the lamp, I was decaying in it. And I had a terribly acute pain, some kind of rheumatic pain, as though coarse, unclean wires were being pulled through my flesh. My torso, lying on the table on the sticky oilcloth, was swirled around as if it were thrown by the explosion of an artillery shell, and with eyes ripped open I stared into the burning lamp. My field of vision seemed crisscrossed with a large number of black lines, my eyes were checkered from these lines, cutting over each other as if I had spent the entire time I was asleep staring through a grill into a bright room above me. And the impression of the grill's pattern had burned deep into my

retina.

--Naturally it was the alcohol that had thrown me onto this table, as always it was the alcohol which halved and ruined my vision in such an evil way. I couldn't remember when I had consumed the outrageous quantities of alcohol that were necessary to have caused it. But it was also important that I didn't have the courage to poison myself with hard liquor. Instead, I swallowed tremendous amounts of low quality, brass-colored beer. It had an insidious, creeping, and stupefying effect on my thinking. But just such an effect was what I found perfectly appropriate for my unstable mind. The beer made me bitter and unpleasant, it saturated me with a stoic absent-mindedness. Tears rolled down my cheeks, which seemed to calm me down, although the cause of the tears was a hypocritical envy of everything human. I was comfortable with the thought that I sat beneath life ... staring up at life from below, a life I couldn't begin personally. This thought agitated me and calmed me at the same time; my life -- suddenly I realized this -- was still trapped in my mother's womb. But she wasn't here ... I could only stare upwards at the life transpiring above me, upward through an iron square, observe the life of the paralytic that decayed brilliantly above me ... his acidic moonlight dripped through the grill, down onto my face ... while he died he had probably pissed for the last time -- and nobody had been there



to hold the pail for him ... no, he hadn't pounded with his cane tonight, he couldn't do it anymore no matter how loudly I screamed my love for him. And my screaming made me tremendously thirsty. Finally pulling myself together, falling all over myself, I staggered to the water faucet ... poisoned, I was poisoned ... but it was as though the alphabet were streaming out of the faucet instead of the usual black-brown water. I was drying up in its evil smelling stink. Where was I ... suddenly I had the feeling that I was in an ancient, terribly arid and puritanical place, in a desert-like vacuum. An aura of transfixed asceticism surrounded me, it was forced upon me while rings of the oil of life trickled on walls that I couldn't reach, bloated and smiling walls ... didn't I suddenly find myself in the depths of a cellar that hadn't been aired out for fifty years. It was one of the cellars that I knew from the women's factory. I had searched its wet, underground honeycombs in a senseless, panicked desire to discover some kind of *secret*. This always happened when my never-ending, hopeless condition became unbearable, which was caused by the fact that a woman's leg never placed its foot on the grill above me. Oh, the cellar into which I descended when I was bored to death by my eternal worrying over the possibility of desire, descent, to find a secure place to masturbate, thereby plunging deeper and deeper into the hellish levels of the catacombs, into the labyrinth on top of which the

one-time munitions factory was erected.

--That describes my life, I thought. My life, with all its tunnels, cellar dungeons, subterranean levels and foundations. With that I finally give it a name, and it could be that I finally acknowledge it ... but as always when this thought occurred to me, I was too drunk to accept it.

--*Careful: the enemy is listening.* This sign was on the iron door of my form cellar, as it still is on many doors of the half-forgotten underground works of the factory. It was ancient, barely legible, almost entirely rusted away ... it was as though in the dream someone had brutally and violently dragged me back to my old cellar, where I was held prisoner and was kept apart from the women. High above me I heard the nerve-grating sound of artillery shells being turned on the lathes. Shells, shells, countless numbers of shells orderly lined-up in compact crates, shells that all had the appearance of fat, reddish-yellow penis tips crowning the hard cocks of men, shells, shells, homosexual shells on cocks of banana-colored brass that had passed through the soft hands of the women who were held prisoner in the factory, who worked above me in a noise that pulverized my spirit ... cocks as hard as metal in the oily-soft hands of the women: in my cellar I was cut off from it. And finally I was cut off from the vulgar lust that the sight of the shells caused in the women's minds, which they transmitted to the terrifying organs



through the gentle stroking of their hands, hands so experienced in love. They stood them up in packages of twenty, giving the message of their lust: kill the men.

I wasn't able to fall asleep anymore; when I woke up I had to notice that once again, as so often, I was fundamentally outside of my four walls. Yes, once again I felt distanced from myself ... I almost never succeeded in making contact with myself. How, I asked myself, how should you do it, make contact with yourself ... in a practical way.

Certainly not by yielding to the descriptions of others, descriptions that could hardly be more inhuman.

But you can make contact for sure when you produce a description yourself, a description of the way you see it, and therefore the description is, for the world outside your window ... a warrant for your arrest.

The world on the other side of the window doesn't see things from my point of view, I sometimes told myself.

But I had to realize that I was a nobody.

--I didn't know if I existed; they hadn't told me that I'd been born. To punish me they didn't tell me, because I hadn't become an object that they wanted to present to the world. Yes, I had made the mistake of letting myself be born, letting myself be raised by the state and its system of

education, by the system of education and its state, and I had almost offered myself up to it -- but then I turned out differently. So I was to be a nothing, there was neither a womb, nor a system of education, nor a state for the creature that I had become. I couldn't even claim that I had a name. When I wanted to begin describing the world (my city for instance) and how I saw it through my eyes, I had to create myself first, and I had to do that each time I began such a description. But in the unparalleled failure of my childhood the state and the system of education found that it wasn't worth the effort to teach me the technical details of the act of procreation. When I finally discovered this for myself -- by accident -- I began rushing into the city, my right fist formed into a metaphoric symbol relating to this act, the symbol on my waving arm rushing through the air so that everyone would clearly see that I was determined to create my Ego anew. With that I gave a promise, one to the way I'd been educated: let me do it once, and I'll finally become an Ego.

--And at the same time a promise to the state: when I become an Ego, when I can do the same thing that my mother did with your phallus, then I'll become like you, and then I'll be the way you want me. I'll become a swine, a stubborn old bastard, a patriarch, an officer, a machinist. When you finally let me I'll leave the trash dumps on my own, I'll never be a pornographer



again -- and I won't take revenge. I'll forget the attempts of the state to exterminate my sex by preventing me from being able to reproduce, yes, I'll even accept that. I'll refrain from reproducing, from then on I'll only create myself. But they didn't believe that I wanted to forget, they didn't open the doors of their bureaucracies for me.

I had made a serious error, I hadn't promised to further their idea -- the idea that lust could only be parceled out by the state. No, I'd merely promised to create myself. And while doing that I'd ignored that they had recognized me as a mutant when I was born.

An agitated desperation. My thoughts incubated, incubated, but no answer came from them ... the cane didn't knock four times on the ceiling -- the same rhythm as the syllables in the three words that were written on the houses near the trash cans.

--You're dead. Your eyes have given up describing things ... should I follow you.

The bright yellow syrup that I had vomited on the motionless ceiling lamp while sleeping, which glued my lips to the filthy table cloth, the fungus that spread out under my hair, the crust which covered my tongue every evening after sleeping during the day -- I dissolved it with the brown water that dripped out of the faucet, coughed it into the sink as black letters of the

alphabet, as crosses, and as jagged medallions: from now on this would be the material composing the descriptions of my Ego. The description of a darkly impregnated stream of summers, a light, scanned from swarms of black type, an infinity of glowing filament "E"s that the lamp had branded my pupils with.

--Would I be able to reach the trash dumps on this night, walking quickly, to crouch there amidst the damp, hairy trash, to wait for morning between vicious mongrels and copulating rats so that I would be the first to fall upon some blurred papers. If accident would make it so, it was a document of my sexuality, that terrible expression ... but probably not.

No, I knew that it was reckless of me to leave the house.

--I did it anyway ... carefully I checked to see if any dogs or police were roaming around the house, I didn't hear them, from the full moon came a shimmer like stearin, in which everything was dead still. I hurried to get close to the trash cans, from one of them I had once pulled a corked bottle that was still half full; I had taken it to be a champagne bottle. I had given up on the papers ... I had to try to reach my goal without them ... in cases like mine, I told myself, hope is a cowardice that is hard to bear, and also an extraordinary compromise that leads to the temptation of no longer moving anything at all, but simply to sit and wait in your own filth until the hoped



for comes to you. There was only a single hope: the hope of being difficult to bear. Without the hope that somebody helps to bear ... you probably still had hope, my friend, upstairs in the attic. I always envied that you were tolerable, but that was probably a mistake. The three words, whose rhythm your four knocks on the floor made in answer to my scream, are still scribbled on the wall of the house -- and that is how I know that I'm in the right place. In our fantasies, my friend, we long ago appropriated the names that lay behind those words. I said this with a strange grin.

--With that I quietly opened (with less difficulty than I had anticipated) a distance of about a meter and a half between the last two cans in the row. Exactly in this space I sat down, legs spread open on the sidewalk, my back pressed against the inside can of the series, so that I sat rather straight. Then I pulled the last of the cans towards me, tight, pulling the can as close as possible into the half round space between my stretched out legs. I breathed in deeply and jerked once more on the can, this last jerk clamped my groin tightly, so that I sat nearly without a seam between the greasy lead walls of the containers. Then I pulled my sex organ out of my pants. Balancing carefully, I placed my penis against the side of the trash can, which rose up in front of me; I only managed to do it after several tries, I wasn't able to do it, in spite of the slogan above my head I couldn't stimulate an

erection, finally I had to be satisfied that the appendix of my genitals -- shrinking from the night-cooled metal -- softly touched against the tin.

So as not to hold up the fable of my cremation: I had forgotten to think about the three-quarters full champagne bottle I had wanted to take out of the ash can. So now I did it, then sat down again in the same position and placed the bottle a little bit underneath my open pant's zipper, directly on my saucer-sized palm, which was sprouting blond hair. I firmly pressed the bottom of the bottle onto it. The slim green neck with the white plastic cork on the top rose up splendidly, so that I was somehow reminded of the anatomical hand gestures that were given back and forth under the desks during the politics lectures while I was in the military. I had already tested the bottle with my nose, without question it contained gasoline, a gasoline very likely difficult if not impossible to sell. Carefully I capped the bottle again and considered what should be done. I chanced upon an old habit. First slowly and with much feeling, then ever faster and more intensely, I began to masturbate. I did it with my entire fist, which was a deviation from the routine, even if insignificant. At first I squeezed carefully, then ever harder; since the neck of the bottle was already moist it didn't take any effort, it even went wonderfully well. When I first noticed that the bottle glass was warming up, I had to stop twice to wipe the sweat from my brow.



I knew it was possible too bring a champagne bottle of this kind to ejaculation by quickly warming it, if I warmed the bottle enough the fermenting champagne would have a powerful orgasm shooting the cork into my face ... in spite of a great effort I wasn't able to do it. My hand became tired and resigned, I broke off my movements.

The wild bus rides that I could no longer keep separate in my memory were the destiny of my story ... suddenly, while sitting so cramped-up on the sidewalk, a similar feeling overcame me: it was as though I were sitting inside of a bus, clamped in between tightly pressing, fleshy bodies. They pressed against me in stubborn defense, yes, with hatred they pressed against me, against my aching, hidden thigh ... I had clearly won a battle with them over the last seat ... and the only thing that was missing was the rhythmic shuddering of the vehicle, which had always caused me to get erections in pants that were too tight. The various phases of time that the bus took me through became rooms when I thought back on it. Each one had nothing to do with the other, and I didn't know anymore how often I had driven down a particular road in the time-spaces that I remembered, how often I had gotten off, had gotten back in, had gone to sleep again, was thrown out anew from the warm interior of the swaying cab, which was filled with strong odors ... in fact, the green vapors from the torn plastic seat covers, which had been

soaked by the sweat of so many buttocks, reminded me of the odor of women. I knew of this smell presumably from the burning smell of the molten masses of plastic that bobbed on the waters in the press hall. And it really seemed to me as though I were trapped in a bouncing vagina, the bus, the interior with its pressing, contracting, inward directed movements, was a gigantic symbol for a vagina ... it wasn't driving, it was falling, sinking with a frantic velocity that robbed me of my breath and weight, through all the different days and weeks, to throw me with one blow, and mercilessly, back to the town of my birth. Suddenly outside of the moist interior of its body -- cut off -- and the red, urine colored bus (exhausted, emptied, but unwavering) hobbled on towards a new fate.

I picked myself up and got out of there, as nervous as a fugitive. I tried to recall the feeling I'd had when the press hall was waiting for me, the press hall ... it seemed to me as though I had lost my mother ... the only thing I could think of again was that old project: I had wanted to write a love story with a tragic end. But it was senseless to look for old, lost texts because of that. The words themselves contained the necessary material, and the climax of the story I'm referring to could be created from the material of my own Dasein and the language that belonged to it. There were enough means available in this country to do that, I thought. The foundations of this



country were actually creaking with repressed descriptions.

In fact, there seemed to be enough tragic material at hand, a pure, unacceptable, ridiculous material, a tragedy that was almost bursting with absurdity, as it should in its own right.

--It went so far that I busied myself for two days collecting discarded women's clothing from the trash dump. I had carefully packed the sticky, moldy rags in a small cardboard suitcase; my new life would start with them. I really thought (in this state of physical and intellectual degeneration) on a new life after the death of my old one -- even if I had difficulties admitting this to myself. My thoughts (and they were a mockery of the abilities of the human brain) went something like this: I had to take advantage of the moment when my descriptions (which described me as a man) were going to fail. The moment when I could admit that the symbolism of my masculine descriptions was absurd. They were descriptions that had long since turned into insane associations, whose style was decaying further and further. The descriptions were peculiar, I told myself. Namely because all the described objects had the characteristic of being a process stopped at a certain moment. The descriptions surely inhibited the continuation of the process too soon -- and for that reason they were reactionary.

--Reactionary, I said aloud, while walking along.

--Reactionary, I mimicked myself.

--The process of free association was often enough the impetus for the resounding speeches that I've already mentioned, which I held on my way through town at night, or on the path by the trash dump coming back to town, when I tried to shout above the sound of the night bus that droned past, so that my consciousness remained protected from the fear provoking thought that there was some kind of "essence of womanhood" inside the vehicle.

--A hardened reactionary, I said again. Probably a hardened reactionary. These words incidentally ... which came from the words *hard* and *reaction* ... gave me something to think about. It was possible to say that the term *hardened reactionary*, because of the parts, was a verbal phallus symbol ... and because of that this republic unwillingly imputed to the enemy a rather powerful manliness. No wonder the women had all disappeared in that direction.

With these thoughts, I finally made it to the police station.

But no, the word *hard* doesn't have anything to do with *reactionary*. What it's supposed to mean is something like *obstinate* or *stubborn* ... words I was experienced with, since I had been threatened since my school days with rehabilitation institutes, prosecution, and the penitentiary.



--If you wanted to make the word *reactionary* into a phallus symbol, then you had to add the word *bottle*, the kind of bottle where everything is stopped up, that doesn't react, even under high heat. Pensive, I gazed at the champagne bottle that I was carrying, I shook my head, put it down carefully on the curb and sat down next to it.

--Champagne ... I thought, pungent champagne ... with you my baseness would be turned into beauty. I didn't have enough money to present the state with an acceptable sum, but perhaps the champagne bottle would do. Really, I could grab it by the neck and swing it around my head so I could serve it to them with the speed of a rocket. Oh, how the windows gleamed so dimly in the night.

--And couldn't I make up for my terrible screams by giving this bottle as a gift ... my terrible screaming in front of the closed police station, which was an attempt at confrontation. And what had I actually screamed. Perhaps, in spite of its absurdity, I had screamed that famous accusation of Zola's taken from the context of the Dreyfus-Affair ... as idiotic as it was, at some point I had screamed that word.

--Or I had screamed the word *rocket* ... *rocket*, anyway, it had sounded about like that.

--I remember that the few lighted windows remaining in the station began

to be turned off as I screamed out this word several times. In such a way as though I shouldn't notice ... as though I shouldn't see which windows still had policemen working behind them.

--*Rockets*, it was my opinion that this word was a woman's name. *Shells*, *rockets*, they really did remind me of women's names.

--I had jumped up. The champagne bottle that stood on the curb, what did it remind me of -- of the similarity of a trash can to the womb. Women's clothes hung out of the trash cans, dresses, underneath which I searched, calling out women's names, women's names, at the sound of which the police turned out the lights.

Or did it mean then that someone in this town really was listening to me ... that a person was listening to me ... or perhaps an entire garrison.

--I laughed mockingly: where were they, and where were the women. I looked at the bottle with brand new interest, it seemed to me that hidden within it was a very tempting thought.

Now the moment had arrived when the process had to be halted-- the moment to change things. Not me anymore, the women. The women were the ones that had to be described anew. Yes, they had to be put together again from the materials that I had at my disposal. What I could see were the descriptions of women from literature and newspapers ... there were



uncountable numbers of black letters, an insect-like swarm of them, that described women. Wasn't I completely enveloped by them, masses of flies, gigantic alphabets of bugs, black mosquitoes, locusts. But it seemed to me that I had to ignore what was already available, because those descriptions were made by men ... it wasn't enough to pick one of the descriptions out, introduce it to myself, and let it pass before my eyes in revue, as we so figuratively say, in the hope that it would begin to stagnate before me in both its form and its spirit. And I would simply pick out one of the old ideals, my mother perhaps, or the Virgin Mary, Karl Marx, or perhaps Kaspar Hauser. No, first I had to adapt the perspective of a woman. From one of my search missions at the trash dump I had brought home a huge, yellow, woman's hat, which my mother (or one of the women from my distant past) had worn in the summer --perhaps that very hat. I remembered that by looking up I had seen a circular yellow stretch of sky, like a second sun that extended beyond the horizon, and I remembered how I'd become dizzy, had become weightless, and had almost believed that I'd floated up into the burning yellow heights. I'd become dizzy and had to grab onto the knee of the woman ... perhaps it was this point of view that I had to recover.

Nevertheless, they had to be made of earth too. Hadn't they once been made of earth as I was. Didn't they contain all the chemicals that trickled

out of me -- breath, slime, tears -- which return again to the earth. Wasn't it a simple fact that all the disease and decay that afflicted me was the beginning of my return to the earth. And wasn't this true for all *human beings*, didn't the women have to be made from exactly the same earth. In any case, a rib from me wasn't necessary to do it. What were all the things that I excreted every day, substances already alien to me, substances that turned invisible ... spit, sperm, shit ... blood, dandruff, pustules, scabs, sweat, filth, and the stale atmosphere that flowed out of my lungs -- what were they but earth. And didn't women have to be described with the same things, weren't they only to be created using the same earthly descriptions. Didn't the rambling grave that I was have the capacity to do that from the very start. How was it possible to invent a material which was their's without thinking of my own material. My fingernails, my teeth, I could bequeath them that, but they had to have a different soul than mine. Their soul -- to obtain it I probably had to pray to their feminine divinity, and that was Gaia, the Earth.

--And I will call these creations *wenches*, even if it violates the prohibition, because it sounds more feminine.

--Their souls probably have to be described like their hair. Flowing and soft, a flood which began to darken in the rain.

And suddenly I knew the place where the women really had existed.



Throughout my entire childhood I'd played with the idea of their souls. Throughout my entire childhood I'd been looking for them without being aware of it. I constantly had the expectation that I would find them, see them suddenly lying in a previously unknown room of the barracks at the camp. To suddenly stand before them, before the wild, turbulent mountains of their hair, which I could grab onto, which I could wade in. Oh, if I had only once been allowed to dive into their Dark Souls, they wouldn't have gone away from me, they would've stayed.

Yes, I felt that I had to describe the women who had lived in the torture and simple solidarity of those barracks, where they had named them *wenches*, because part of the guard personnel had been made up of women. There they invented the honorable name that I mean: *wenches*.

And when I stood outside of my town and tried to remember what had been mine, there came to my mind a long series of women. On the same evening that I was born they must have been driven along on the street below after they came out of the factory, down there on the corner where the long rows of trash cans gleamed, away towards the camp that began at the end of our street. And it was perhaps the first time that I perceived them and the yellow evening sky, which made it possible for me take wing, and also the memory of the never ending, dragging footsteps, the silence of their columns,

the tired wandering and the coughing of that never-ending column of women.

And since I'm a man, not one of their kind, I tried to open an old door. It was a door that had never been opened. Yellow-brown paint had filled in the seams, even the keyhole was painted over, a side door to the labyrinthine basement in which one of the paralytics sat on a throne by a window. I wasn't able to open the side door, to quietly and inaudibly slip in, I knew that there were old closets there, old cabinets in which the women of our house put their unusable things, where onetime belongings and also old bundles of writings got covered with dust. Perhaps my old pornographic writings were hidden there too, the ones I had looked for at the trash dump in vain ...mainly though I hoped to find the letters that my father had written from the front, perhaps I was mentioned once (it wasn't beyond the possible). And if this was in answer to a letter that my mother had written, then it proved that a women had at least once recognized the existence of my person ... the paralytic, whose soul had long since flown into the golden, royal heavens, would no longer hinder me from looking in the attic for the proof-- the proof I needed for my story with the tragic end. Now I could attempt to open the door.

I took the champagne bottle and wanted to go, suddenly it seemed as though I would have to go unbelievably far away, as though a gigantic stretch



of road lay before me. Suddenly I doubted whether my feet could carry me to my goal. Clear into town ... no, I wasn't really in town yet, it was still far below me. A full moon shined its pale bell of light on it ... it lay below me, and I saw myself, from the trash dumps, trying to penetrate the light with my vision ... I was ancient, had become old in the middle of these monstrous heaps of trash that my town had given birth to ... my feet would hardly carry me anymore if I wanted to return now to the city, but I couldn't allow myself to think about it, couldn't think that my dismissal was irreversible, I had to move along and not pay attention to anything. But with my last hope -- ah, barring all hope -- to move along towards the wonder, if necessary on all fours, towards the wonder.

Wenches ... you aren't supposed to be called that anymore ... isn't your situation only to be explained in that this unheard of sensitization of my eyes makes you invisible for me. Isn't it so that before me, the man who has transformed himself into a speck, that before the insect-like sensitization of my eyes a monstrous metaphor is appearing. Am I not through some terrible mistake simply the Chosen One who continues to stand in the great, permanently-frozen lie of God. And isn't it clear to all that the Chosen One will be destroyed. She's waiting for me, in the house below me she is waiting for her man, her God. Should I finally give up and transform myself into my

father. Should I finally confess my own divine status ... ah, I would only disappoint her anew, I could neither be her total man nor her total God. I'll always remain that child in the basket of mud and bulrushes, launched into all bankless rivers, driven away for no reason. Found without reason, brought onto land, rescued once again for no reason. And wasn't I just that wanderer of the deserts. Everything that restrained my emotions was feminine, wasn't I my own *Moses*, who I celebrated in song. The one who fell before the entrance, the one who does not pass through death. Does he only guide the sons, and being a half-father, does he give them his blessing without envy when they go through. And he himself bowed down before the gate while the others, who he guides, no longer turn back to look at him in front of this gate, this entrance that they name with a mystical term ...hackneyed, hollow, overdone: the *Gates of Paradise*. Broken, unable to see with my scar-ridden retina, sensing the gate only from afar while dying, oh, to see the gray light we call sweet darkness leaking out from behind the entrance. To see it become ever darker, to see it then become ever sweeter, the sweeter it is the more difficult it is to reach, increasingly unreachable as the dying vision tries to push forward. And it is just the vision, which pushes forward. Yes, do I see then this town of mine only through the ring of a cunt. Do I only see how it shimmers, so far away, and turns soft. Unfilled



emptiness that dawns over growing proto-forms, chameleon colors, the mouth of a fish that closes itself with the sluggishness of metals flowing together. Quicksilver fungal skins that grow into each other, streaming with waves of milky serum. Until a medusa-like border reminds me, the blind man, that the real existence of my town is only to be experienced through the sense of smell. And if the town really was behind it, behind that gash of flesh which I saw last ... behind that, an obscene mouth forming a grimace made of skin and hair which formed my half-open eyelids. Is it still underneath there, behind the lashed slits of my eye which want to close me into a frigid sleep. Would it still be recognizable behind the momentarily spread thighs of the woods. Down there, in the south, my town, which staged my brilliant ovulation. That spit me out in the heat of the summer, with the shudder of a thirsty scream, with the splashing of a blind man in the muck, I was the one who was born in sudden shower of green amniotic fluid... my father had been born to my town though, and in fear the women had shuffled faster on the street corner under the window... while birth devoured and choked me, choked, strangled, bit down on me and nevertheless finally spit me out ... the birth of my father had confused their expulsion, and it was me that they vomited up, the first raven screech that they pressed out of themselves had come from me. Damned city, I won't sing your praises with my father's cock,

damned country, I'll flood you with myself, I'll masturbate on your walls, I'll ... and drive away over the precipitous path of dead bodies between you and me, Oh Maman, my sun of absence, I won't acknowledge the dead gods between you and me, come closer, to finally look at my birthplace, to look inside my birthing hole, to look closer at my nation. Women, I'm going to take away your fathers. Ah, to finally look through these troubled glasses, through this grill. Ah, to press the boiling monocle of a vulva over my eye. To learn how to see, so that I learn how to understand you all. To see the blood, your blood, that has multiplied in the Milky Way of my veins, to see the nerves that menstruate in my gray matter. To come to death, which has begun to tattoo me with black. To see the throes of genius that are planning to slip into freedom on the slippery path of your darkness. No, I don't want to wait anymore, I don't want to use you to press my eyes closed forever. Not just my breath should stroke over the power of your thighs, my breath, which first learned to breath inside you. The eye wants you back too, the eye that learned to see from you. The eye wants to press itself. On your aquatic plants, on the hollow of your rage. On the core of your soul, in the gutter of your feces. On the exploded bomb in your flesh. To follow the branching of your veins ... so that I don't have to compare you with plants anymore. Your hair doesn't fly in the trees, you aren't in the flowers, not in the fruit



and vegetables that are spoiling in the garbage cans ... to follow your hills, so that I don't have to compare you with animals. Oh she-wolf ... so that finally the soft blow of your senses will grow in my throat ...not to kill, but only so that I can finally compare the masculine and the feminine, Oh creator ... ah, so that I don't have to compare you with your silence, with your invisibility, with your lack of odor, with your murderous purity. Yes, your murderous purity is the revenge of a dead general.

--Ah, you're finally there, where I can't follow you. Womankeeper of the gate, have you finally joined the ranks of men, are you finally free in your silence. Oh, you've freed yourself from the word that loved me, and I chase my dreams alone in my madness, where the word spoken by your mouth, spoken by your vagina, still echoes. And you say that you can't forgive me ... never again forgive, you're divorced from Jack the Ripper ... you say that you can't stand being with me anymore, but are you truly free in your well-calculated academic silence. You don't have to reveal it to me, you don't have to reveal what you once wanted before you liberated yourself from love.

--A sorry attempt to convince that I created, handful after handful.

--I'm speaking to you as if you were really free ... and I hear you laughing, I hear your long and unbroken laughter. Your laughter drowns out

the banging of a cane on the ceiling, a feeble tapping through the smoke. This nation considers the freedom you have in other countries to be soaked with blood. In front of your wild tête-à-têtes, between the Spanish horsemen, lie the bodies. Gas outlets open into freedom. The wall of your freedom is pockmarked with bullet holes, electroshocks torture lazy madmen in the cells of your freedom. Your freedom is paid for with the money of those who've been left behind. It's not your fault that I've been left behind -- I forgot about you during a long, sleepy trip ...

Still, I want to come closer to you. Closer, to press my eye against the slippery flesh between your legs. To finally recognize the original reason for your silence. Yes, I love you-- to be able to close my eyelids. The eye in your flesh. I love you -- to be able to open my eyelids ... to close, to open, quickly to close to open, oh to fly with my eyelids. To open the scream in you with my eyelids. With my eyelashes so long. They're completely soaked with you.

*My lashes, so long ...*

*See, I climb down*

*Into your lap to forget*

No answer, no echo. We don't protect ourselves anymore, our hair flies under the yellow sky. We've been fired, women, and everything that we were



has been fired, fired from the factory, from the country, from the situation, from life ... let us be fired, wretched tools that we were, let us be silent and let us go, don't let go of my hand, God in His Heaven waves to us with his hat.

No answer. I knew that I hadn't succeeded in describing women; they were still absent, absent from this city, absent from my description. Absent, like the light and life in these streets... I suddenly realized how monstrous and merciless it was that reality had been stolen from me. And it became dark around me, dark inside of me ... if they were suddenly to appear, against expectation, I wouldn't have been able to register them anymore, they wouldn't have had a place within me anymore.

--As though this last thought of mine should also be robbed of its life force, the lights in the police station suddenly began glowing. One after the other they were turned on in the windows of the station. A beam of light falling on the street inflamed the champagne bottle that stood on the edge of the gutter. Inflammation ... as if I were allowed to let an idea escape from my head. I squinted my eyelids and mouth together: if there weren't any women, then I wasn't there either. I grabbed the bottle, uncorked it, and poured it out over my head. The gasoline soaked my hair, flowed over my face, flowed into my collar and soaked my shirt; it wasn't much gasoline, but it was

enough to slowly flow down through my belt, my pubic hair must have taken on the revolting smell of oil. My pants began to cling against my skin, the last drops of gasoline ran dry on my thighs. It would suffice for a torch, for a human torch directly in front of the police station. And I searched my pockets for some matches. Cursing, I felt through all of my clothes for matches, but I didn't find any matches. What should I do, should I ring at the police station and ask for matches. But I feared they would know what I was up to before I could do it.

--So, I didn't even have any matches with me -- were they perhaps somewhere in the women's clothes that I had tried on. Even before I got home the gasoline on my skin had dried out. I had failed, the greatest failure possible, I was utterly without existence, not even a match flame existed so that I could fly to heaven in it.

--Nevertheless, I suddenly began to doubt, the situation was far too insane to have no doubts ... after all, I could always buy myself some matches tomorrow. It wasn't too late. The idea of buying matches calmed me a little. While having doubts I heard the threatening tone of my thoughts. I was disgusted, and on my way past the trash can I threw the bottle away again.

I couldn't stand it anymore in that town and moved to Berlin. I had



carefully packed my shabby cardboard suitcase ... but I had to leave the yellow summer hat behind ... not a single person noticed that I left my spore and moved into a condemned building in Berlin. I hoped to have better luck in the big city, I looked for work, and soon it really seemed that my sickness had retreated inside me, superficially it seemed that I wanted to become smooth. I drank myself a beer belly and observed my strength growing in the mirror. Only the sickness of my language could still be recognized, I could sense it clearly. But I didn't attempt to put it to the test. Except for the short trip to work with the streetcar, I hardly went out of the house. I was working in the supply center of an industrial laundry, I was one of the workers they needed to produce steam, which was used for the washing machines and also to heat the building. The laundry itself was separated from my department by an immense wall of yellowish cement. Additionally, the barbed wire of a security system was spanned along the crown of the wall; nobody from my department was allowed to enter the laundry, nor in anyway come into contact with a person on the other side of the wall. Those people were locked away from the rest of the world: the laundry was run by the inmates of a gigantic prison, the building of which was connected directly to the steam plant. Nevertheless, I learned from one of my colleagues that one could, if one were careful enough ... one could be transferred from the

pleasant atmosphere of the boiler room, or even fired for doing this ... see into the prison yard from the roof of the boiler house. This, in turn, could be reached by climbing a fire ladder.

One Sunday morning I sauntered, bored, over the grounds. It was a clear, lightly clouded fall day and it was already cool ... the heat supply for the prison couldn't be broken, even on Sundays ... I walked between the boiler house and the giant wall reaching up over the yard -- and I heard voices. Very close-by I heard loud shouts, commands, the sound of whistles, and even dogs barking. I knew that it was the time of day when the prisoners were allowed to take their daily, half-hour walks around the prison yard. Deciding suddenly, I climbed the iron steps of the ladder up to the roof of the boiler house. On the flat roof I ducked behind a smokestack and peered out over the wall. I already knew about what I saw, yet it suddenly seemed that I couldn't trust my own eyes. There, down in the prison yard, were the women. Leisurely, lost in excited gossip, they walked in rows of two or three; flanked by guards that had large German shepherds, they walked in circles; they were dressed in dark green, uniform-like wool, which was the official dress of this large women's prison; they seemed good-humored, they laughed and yelled jokes back and forth that I didn't understand. There were young and old, big and small, I saw the curves of their breasts, the movement



of their thighs under their dresses. I saw their hair, brown and blond hair, some of it was cut short, some of it fell to the shoulders in long waves. I tried to see their faces, I couldn't see them very well, but I thought that I recognized among them a few harmonious, pretty, angel-like faces. It seemed that it had to happen to me the way that it did -- I didn't know if I had already seen them in the city of Berlin, it didn't matter, it didn't interest me ... my eyes were completely opened for the first time here, I really saw them here, I had found them again here. I saw them from a distance of perhaps twenty yards, they were walking down there, chatting, watched over by their guards ... women, wenches. I saw them and shuddered, it was no hallucination: at this moment I had no doubts.

--I love you all, I murmured, completely enchanted, I love you.

--What a thing to say, I laughed, as if I already could have seen one of the perhaps fifty women down there that I really did love. It doesn't matter, I said, one of them will understand the three words.

--And I took heart and I screamed: I love you .... Horrified, I heard the scream and its echo resound over the entire laundry complex. But none of the women glanced up, not even once ... I didn't dare repeat the scream; I knew that they couldn't look up if they didn't want to give me away. They all seemed to know, however, that I was poorly hidden, that I was crouching

there behind the smokestack. A few minutes passed before it suddenly seemed that they were making a sign. They made a sign to me, a couple of them had stuck their thumbs between their forefinger and middle finger and carefully raised their hands to the level of their breasts, at the same time they stared dead ahead, looking bored. I understood that they were making a nasty sign at me, the nastiest possible, they had united themselves with me, it was a sign against the pure state. And it also meant: wait for us ... wait just a few more years ....

--The sign sank into my innermost being, for a second I closed my eyes in bliss. But then I pulled myself together, I had heard something behind me, it was as if a second answer came to my call, but it came from behind me. I looked around and recognized a man in a window on the other side of the street. He was at about the same height as me, and stared at me unwaveringly. I could see straight into his eyes, and I figured that he was the one who had answered by clearing his throat loudly. It occurred to me that everyone in the boiler house was convinced that the building directly across from the prison was rented mostly to lower-level members of the secret police so that the entrance to the prison and its surroundings could be constantly monitored.

--Yes, in just that way he had cleared his throat, yes, wait for me ... he



was a man and just about my age. I quickly climbed down the ladder and ran back to the boiler house ... the feather-light fall Sunday seemed suddenly clouded over. I stood behind the door with a crowbar in my fist, I started to shake ...if he risked coming in after me then I'd ... but the man didn't appear in the door, he didn't follow me. After a while I calmed down again ... I could think about the women, and soon it didn't seem so surprising to me that I had seen them again. They had come upon me with the crystal-clear light of this bright-blue fall sky, they had returned to my eyes like a crackling streak of lightning. They had stayed inside me with the singing and laughter of autumn days, which finally swept away the atmosphere of insanity smoldering over the summer of my birth. I knew now where I could find them, I had seen them again and preserved them in my heart, and I could wait for them.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Selected Works by Wolfgang Hilbig:

- abwesenheit gedichte.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1979.
- Unterm Neomond.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1982.
- Der Brief, Drei Erzählungen.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1985.
- die versprengung gedichte.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1986.
- Die Weiber.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1987.
- Eine Übertragung.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1989.
- Alte Abdeckerei.* Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1990.

### Other Works:

- Arnold, Heinz Ludwig. *Text + Kritik. Die andere Sprache, Neue DDR-Literatur der 80er Jahre.* München: edition Text + Kritik, 1990.
- Beutin, Wolfgang, et al. *Deutsche Literatur Geschichte.* Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1984.
- Biguenet, John and Rainer Schulte. *The Craft of Translation.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Brower, Reuben. *On Translation.* New York: Oxford UP, 1966.
- Davis, Miles. *Live at the Plugged Nickel.* Columbia BL 38267, 1976.
- Monk, Thelonius. *Pure Monk.* Milestone Records MFP-47004, 1973.



Nabokov, Vladimir. "On Translating Pushkin". *Partisan Review*. Vol. 22, No. 4, 1955.

Rollins, Sonny. *All The Things You Are 1963-64*. Bluebird 2179-2RB.

Warren, Rosanna. *The Art of Translation*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989.

The vita has been removed from the digitized version of this document.