WAITING FOR MELLI

by

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(1st Folder: pps. 1 - 175)

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W A I T I N G F O R M E L L I

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C O N T E N T S

This is the story of friendship---a glimpse of it. Perhaps we only get one in life. Our epoch doesn't allow us any more. It begins with Melli.

For five years she'd kept me alive. It was the first time in my life I was free to do what I wanted to do, every day. That doesn't mean just money. Melli gave me the time---the slow time that grows out of a source that doesn't change and never has to speak---the gift of undisturbed time that always lies inside her, amazingly untouched by the world.

We got a tiny, intimate home going, first in Monte Sacro, a hideous jerry-built garden suburb just outside Rome with very little garden about it, and then in Rome itself, in the old part, where it was noisy and cluttered-up but with a strange embracing glow that seemed to belong to the end of the nineteenth century, as that epoch was in Europe and <u>not</u> in England---the time of horse-drawn carriages and dim lamplights and candles at table, and a sort of commercial baroque that wasn't too disgusting. We used to feel this most when we were dressing to go out in the evening, especially a winter-evening when the televisions weren't blaring across our courtyard, and all the colours of the room glowed sharply, with the Japanese standing lamp, the deep-blue carpet and sea-

blue ceiling, the bright yellow curtains that didn't quite fit--- everything so clean, even in the city, with clear primary colours that always have a special glow in Italy.

The light---this is what you miss when you leave Italy, the marvellous glowing light which is always there like a mystical presence even on dull days, and which opens the eyes wide, as the dry air widens and nourishes the fibres and joints and nerves. Just the light and air of Italy heal. Just a touch and even the tightest face from northern civilisation starts to clear and show a natural light, as it eases the muscles underneath and soothes the guts and lessens the anxious, trotting pride and stops the invisible gnawing of the worm of ambition that always plans and schemes and thinks to itself and can't ever yield to the world outside because, in the north, the real world isn't allowed to show. The real world, which is natural light and air, is still there in Italy: it has gone into the guts and tissues. I don't mean optimism. We have much more of that. In <u>that</u> way Italy is a dark, numbed world: endlessly dark.

Everything I had belonged to Kelli. It still does. I had absolutely nothing. Just what I stood up in. I could smile--- I could rise to that---just enough to make her think I was more or less sane.

In Monte Sacro we had hardly more than one room for the two of us, and even that was small. It was wonderfully cosy. There was another room, much smaller, only that was separated from the next-door flat by a wall as thin as cardboard and you could hear every word, every ~~word~~ cough and even every creak of a chair caused by the moving of a behind. It would only do for a little reading in the day. If you tried to sleep there you were projected out of your sleep by the sound of sweeping and dusting, which went on for hours, not

ordinary dusting and sweeping but a fanatical kind: the furniture was always pushed across the floor with a horrible wrench and squeak (she seemed to be both the laziest and the most energetic person you could imagine), and the broom hit every bit of chair-leg and wainscoting head-on. Italy is nerve-wracking. But the real nerves underneath don't suffer: I've always found that strange. Then there was the conversation. This was southern Italian, shouted, with lots of coughs---but quite charming: I liked the conversation best of all.

So we slept and ate in the bigger room, and we brought up our dog there too. There was a tiny balcony leading off this room through french windows, which never got the sun apart from a few delightful moments about breakfast time. In fact, the whole flat was out of the sun. The windows looked down into shadow.

The description 'garden suburb' came from its previous existence, before the war, in Mussolini's time, when it had been a place on its own, quite separate from Rome, consisting mostly of villas large and small among trees, along quiet, orderly little roads. You still felt this other life sometimes, with the tall new blocks standing up behind. Once you used to take a bus from the Porta Pia along a deserted Via Nomentana, with trees on either side of an avenue, but now you joined a smelly queue of cars and cycles and got there in half-an-hour if you were lucky. And now there are houses and new flats nearly the whole way out. And the garden suburb gleams and flashes at the end like a huge concrete zoo, where every shop seems to sell precisely the same thing, in flimsy coloured plastic bags, even the vegetables. The goods they sell don't seem to have come from a real place or been grown anywhere. This is the little tinsel dream of Italian prosperity. The tall blocks look vivid for a few weeks and then start peeling in the rain or sun.

Melli was living in one of the new blocks when we met---with the sound of bulldozers all through the day, and none of the roads made up. These roads were always the subject of dispute between the contractors and the town authority: neither took responsibility for them, so they were mud in the winter and a fine dusty sand in the summer. But her place was quiet, clean and quiet, because she was the first occupant and most of the other apartments were empty. I shall never forget that first healing quiet.

Monte Sacro was the place for the new lower middle-class, people who were more orderly and subdued than their mothers and fathers; they'd turned their backs for good on the old rough peasant life where you squatted in a field for a shit, and at night flung yourself down on anything flat and slept at once. Contadini---peasants, already a term of slight contempt, or hurt distaste, mixed with compassion, with just a hint of the dignity given by the fascists and false for that reason.

The place had a terrific tedium. It was the Italian tedium---the sad inherited conviction of the nerves that nothing is going to move or change---a tedium gone out of the body, where it had slept quite comfortably and healthily for centuries, into the mind. A nervous tedium. Partly it was because the place was new. The Italian intimacy would grow again---probably already has---but the old timeless and healthy tedium wouldn't come back. Now there was just alien restlessness. The streets would begin to look intimate---Italy can do that to the most hideous things---but this restlessness would be on top. There is this nervous mind-searching you never got before.

In that first tiny home we made together we started to come to terms with our own restlessness. We found each other exhausted, almost broken, in different ways; but outwardly resilient. In

a way we'd both just recovered from something. Melli from a real sickness, me from a life-sickness, which are the same thing in the end. Really we were at the end of a struggle when we met. The meeting was only a climax, and afterwards we felt it had been predestined. We both seemed to wait for it, already conscious of it coming, certainly to need it, absolutely, with every fibre and little nerve, spoken in every chance remark to other people and felt in sleep, always as a waiting. I know I waited, day after day, in the most massive pause of my life.

So that when it happened it was almost not a surprise. I remember the morning perfectly. It was one of the dazzling and radiantly clear days you get in the autumn in Rome. It meant for me a release from disgust and a horrid weight that had been loading itself on me for months, even years, accumulating like the dust and the dry, poisoned air in the streets and the deafening traffic. At that time in Rome, I remember, I was almost never alone. But it was all dust. Everything said was dust and misery and dross. It was all for nothing, from nothing, towards nothing. I was nothing. I couldn't afford to be alone: I mean, really in the money-sense I couldn't afford it. I didn't have enough money. In fact, I had absolutely none. So I had to keep rotating. Otherwise I would have lost all connection with the world. I kept calculating to myself, 'I can't die, I can't starve to death, so something must happen, if I just hang on.' So I hung on from day to day, just getting through each day separately, as a separate account which I thought of singly, getting just enough food under my belt, perhaps one bus ride, a walk across Rome, a coffee here, a drink from someone there. I always regretted not being able to talk about it---to say, 'I'm finished.' But I

couldn't. If I'd done that I could probably have picked up an easy job somewhere or even been given money straight off, as a gift. But I always behaved as if I knew things were all right, so naturally people thought the same. And it was complicated by the fact that I didn't want a job. If one appeared on the horizon I found myself taking a side-street.

At the time we met I'd just picked up a job as an extra in some American film, which would last a few days. The idea was to dress up as a German priest, in a bright scarlet cassock with a wide furry hat, together with a small group of boys from Trastevere who had the devil of a time making dirty jokes and larking about. We were supposed to be tourists from the German college. As the film was always shot outdoors, in the ruins of the Forum or at the Colosseum---it was one of those massive films on a wide screen that showed the finest spectacles of the world---we had to walk through the streets in our red cassocks, and of course we were taken for real priests. The Trastevere boys really did look like priests, too. They had the natural acting abilities of the children of the poor. ~~For these few days they actually were priests.~~ They created extraordinary alarm, and the film director had to make an appeal to them not to 'overdo' the fun, because they might get a complaint from the Vatican. They would follow a woman down the street with their cassocks lifted up over their knees, doing a sort of dance. Romans used to decades of gloomy, undemonstrative priests stared and gaped and stood rooted to the pavement. The women would look round with a kind of ravished amazement, mixed with interest. The boys made their usual sexual cat-calls, 'Che pezzo!', 'Amazza, che culo!'---what a piece, what an arse on that one! One of them bunched up his waist band in the form of a massive phallus, knotting it at the end, and rushed straight up to a passing woman, holding it in both hands.

She was so astonished that all she could do was to step aside without saying a word, her mouth open, at the same time watching hard, as all the other women did---not afraid, because these were priests after all, only intrigued and horrified and fascinated and ~~perfectly~~ stunned and unwillingly amused all in one; and like the others she kept turning to look at us, hurrying off at the same time. The boys would whip off their neat, rimmed hats just as someone was passing and make as if to piss in them, pushing their bellies out and straining hard. The American director---who looked exactly like most people's idea of an American director, with horn-rimmed spectacles and a chair to sit in by the camera and a kind of green shade over his eyes, gazed on mildly from a height where the cameras couldn't be seen. He had such a tolerant look---he even smiled. And now and then he sent down mild messages---please, boys, a little respect, please.

Apparently, that was the historical reason why the German priests wore red: back in the centuries they'd behaved so rowdily in Rome that the pope had put them in a colour people could see a mile away. That was the story, anyway.

As we were crossing the road from the Forum to the Colosseum (about the most dangerous road in Italy because it is so wide), on our way back from a snatched lunch in a pizzeria, a man with a deadly pale face and a morbid, gloating expression picked up with us, right in the middle of the traffic, and began asking one question after another---were we about to be ordained, how long had we studied, were we sad about it perhaps, what sort of feeling did we have about the priestly life? He was struck, apparently, by our not wearing our hats---it seemed to him our last ascertion of freedom, before we took the cloth. And we were so young. He kept looking at us closely, fascinated and gloating, taking us in one by one, very slowly, from our feet upwards,

looking starved of life, with a slightly sweating pallor. And the boys answered with perfect seriousness. They seemed to know what he wanted to hear. Yes, they were about to be ordained, it was a sad moment but also a stirring one too, for all of us. We were so young! Yes, yes, the morbid chap said with a nod, he could see that, with his perverted little glance at all our parts. We'd given up everything, the boys went on, we'd given up our homes, our possessions, our families, and of course----women. Ah! Ah, yes! Wasn't that painful? How could we do it? It was hard, the boys said, terribly hard---they spoke with a wonderful soft solemnity; it was hard, but when one had heard the Message, and seen from afar, and knew one's vocation, when the light was clear ahead, dazzling one's eyes, then all the little pleasures other men strain after were very small things indeed, my son! They talked with absolute understanding. They really did understand. They weren't smiling at all. They moved and spoke and looked round exactly in their role, and there was that subtle Roman humour underneath which is sad and shows a sad face, and never laughs.

One of the scenes was actually in the Forum, and we had to walk between the ruins slowly, some of us looking at the stones and others reading their prayer books or saying the rosary. And they did it all with such an extraordinary natural ease. It was beyond even acting. They walked solemnly, not a bit too fast or too slow. And nobody had to tell them. They knew all the characters of Rome---of life---in their blood, and didn't have to be told. And all the while they were walking along solemnly they were making dirty jokes, without moving their faces, saying, 'Lobk at that big column, my friend, it's just like your father's prick!'

I watched all this through thick layers of loneliness and alarm and restlessness that were like a hot rash all over me, making me

tremble. Getting up in the morning and going through the day meant a voyage through nervous alarm that changed its scope and situation every few moments and was also strangely exciting; the excitement provided the moral energy to go on. Only for a few hours in the morning did life look sane, out in the tiny country house near Frascati where I was living at the time, with an Italian family. The daughters and the father would have gone to work by then, while the noisiest boy had gone to school. So I was alone with Lisa, the mother. She was a quiet, sharply goodlooking woman, thinned by work and worries. She had such an easy way of talking, direct and rather child-like, and we would talk for long hours together, while she mended socks or cooked. It was those long hours of healthy tedium that kept me in sanity at all. Nothing I asked seemed inconvenient to her, or irritating. I was in the house like a stray. I brought in what money I could, when I could. The meals were noisy--- the clattering went on from the moment we sat down until the tiny cup of coffee which only one or two of the grown-ups had at the end came; an enormous clash and clamour, with three generations talking at the top of their voices, but without touching the hungry, digesting organs inside. The room where we ate and sat and lived most of the time was a dark, thrilling place with a staircase and dining table at one end, and a cluttered sideboard under Russian ikons and pictures, which had been brought back from a visit of the papal nuncio before the war. The father was a member of the pope's noble guard and dressed in a magnificent uniform now and then, and carried a sword at the side of the pope's chair. Whenever we talked about priests having women or anything like that---which his sister, liked to do---he bit his lip and went rather quiet; but he took colour-photos of some of the most attractive young women in Rome, showing a lot of bosom, usually in bathing cost

umes, and now and then one of the local monasteries would invite him to dinner and he would take the transparencies along and show them as lantern slides. He would spent minutes fixing his camera, if there was an attractive woman to take, and would ~~all the time be~~ poring over her bosom through the view-finder. He had a rather panic-stricken glance sometimes, showing the whites of his eyes like a horse, and for all his stamping he was a mild, tolerant man, with that faint humour which in the real Roman hardly twitches the lips. They were real Romans, in the old, flourishing, wild and rampaging sense. Every moment was burned away, rather then lived. Their tedium was the old kind. They had the noisy, raucous, passionate and philistine approach of the old penniless nobility. There was sudden shouting, then long quiet. The voices were thick and unaware. Sometimes the ribald sister would lower her dress and show one of her breasts, with a quiet laugh, to show us how beautiful she'd once been; and the father would look away, remonstrating very quietly, but with the hardly visible twitch of his lips, cracked and thick, unhindered by a moment's real imposed discipline in all his life. And the old woman, his mother, talking firmly and quietly at his side during the meals, ranging over names and families and the past, in a dialogue that seemed to have been going on for fifty years, with nothing changed.

Outside the windows at the back there was a small courtyard with a fountain, where the women washed and gossiped all day, and in the front they had a little piece of garden leading down to the road of olive trees and peach trees. In summer the house baked silently, with the dogs barking in the yard every now and then, and the sound of cicadas was so overpowering that it was like a higher silence, nearly beyond all feeling, drugged.

I used to sit there for many hours, with Lisa, while she knitted or mended some trousers, or talked to her sister-in-law, who sipped

white wine all the time and sat sighing and yawning, and making her ribald chuckle. As I say, the mornings just after breakfast were the most peaceful time. I would take my tea alone, with a big hunk of bread and jam, and Lisa would be in the kitchen at the other end of the room, with the sun streaming in, getting the vegetables ready for lunch, talking to me through the open doorway.

The house was nearly always ramshackle, nearly always deafening, and sometimes she passed her hand over her brow in a tired way and said, 'O, Dio!' There was a kind of primitive struggle, hardly stated, between her mother-in-law and herself. The old woman would talk slowly and stolidly, always getting her point over, through the clatter and shouting. Her conversations with her son were endless, and had a violent, gutteral, passionate and yet dry tone, hard and merciless and yielding and soft at the same time---the Roman way of talk that probably was the same in the ruling families two or three hundred years ago, among the so-called black aristocracy, the aristocracy of the church. They'd ~~sick~~ lost all their money and their position, but the dry, clattering wildness was still there, the extraordinary surges of passion that nearly wrecked everything, including themselves, the terrific rise and fall of life every day, always violent and dramatic, never pausing, always raising and dropping life with a loud reverberation that had no effect, that led to nothing, to no change, that was always enclosed again in the soft web and woof of life, and then wrecked again, moment by moment, with a clashing, vulgar, disgusted, ecstatic, tamed and abject and yet passionately assertive movement of feeling, that gorged itself on the energies and the heart and the bowels, and ate them up all day and spewed them out, and then regurgitated it all again as if from nothing. For hours of days, and days of weeks, it seemed that I sat there, nearly always in the same chair between the window and the

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dining table, in a kind of second life in which all self and looking-forward and even ~~the~~ my natural animal-identity seemed to have been given up, while only the fibres and nerves went on living, numbed even to the point of satisfaction, drowsy and distant, with only the flesh in proper connection, and growing invisibly all the time, in the hot room, while someone talked or the radio blared or the women shouted ~~at~~ in the back yard as they washed ~~and the~~ clothes or the whole family became active in one full clattering chorus that only stopped suddenly, as if put out by God, at bedtime, to be resumed with the same violent suddenness at seven the next morning. It seemed I could have gone on sitting there always, and nothing would have changed very much, gradually I would have become a limb in their family-life that could never be removed again, absorbed into their momentary dramas----Lisa going to bed with her young nephew, the father writing an appalled letter to this young nephew, though gentle at the same time, because he loved him so much, and then the attempt of the young nephew to seduce the daughter, and a quarrel between Lisa and her sister-in-law, over the nephew, whom the sister-in-law claimed was being seduced by Lisa, and so forth, all in great dramatic instalments day by day. I certainly was drawn into the drama, but not yet with my whole life: my energies were being shouted away and spent passionately on the immediate moment, until the body that owned them slumped down at night and slept like the others, waking violently again soon after dawn, to take up the long raucous dialogue, and so life passed, tearing and tugging the flesh in a pointless perpetual motion so that you never really owned your own life for a moment and there wasn't a moment to spare in which to see it clearly, there was no separateness from other people, even your lips were like the lips of something from the past, a gulf or vine-terrace, like the lips of the baked earth, and every change came from outside, from an angry fate or a suddenly benign

/ To P. 12b.

one, but if you tried to cling to the benign one it showed a bitter vengeful spite and threw you off again. It taught me the meaning of what Stendhal said, that passion had passed out of Europe in the sixteenth century. Passion is that hard, raucous, immediate method of life which poses at once what one must do, and gives no spare moments in which to see things clearly. But we have to see things clearly all the time; we're lost otherwise. It's our method, a different life.

It was the real Roman style, in that house. It was what Stendhal meant when he said that the Romans were passionate---that this was what distinguished them among Italians. Their life was unpausing and wild, yet numbed, listless, sunken, abject. Feelings rose from the abject vapours, like plants from decay. Under the old Roman passion, of which there are still traces today, you have that natural evolution, the decay isn't thrown off or refused, which is a secret of survival. In that house I learned my first Italian---I was flung, at once, into the heart of Rome, with nothing fancy or modern, I was given the real flesh of Rome as it had always been, even in the pagan days perhaps. It sears and yet secretly fattens your flesh. It is brutal yet waywardly soft, with nothing virginal, nothing fixed or strict or unharmonious, least of all in its violence; nothing is strained, nothing is allowed in the slightest degree negative, even what is an absolute and brutal no, nothing that could stop the daily consuming and spending and laying waste of flesh.

That was nearly nine years ago. I was still being whirled round then, wondering at what point in the wheel's giddy turn I would be flung off. All I knew was that it couldn't go on whirling round at that rate.

I didn't know what was happening to me but I was aware that

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this was a period of waiting---with the whole of my body, where I abandoned any claim to a real, moving self. There was something deliberate in my waiting, after all---I was deliberately laying myself open to God, I wanted fate to decide something for me, I wanted to be shown the path mystically, without putting anything in the way.

That was why I'd come to Rome in the first place. I left London suddenly. I threw everything up. And I don't really know why it was Rome. I knew no one there. I took a one-way ticket to Rome on borrowed money, with enough extra to keep me a few days. I went into the blue with my eyes shut. It was done with an absolute surrender---either it would save me or finish me. I drew the darkness on myself, blindly, letting go of my identity. I only had the name and picture in my passport. Otherwise there was nothing. I believed that if I surrendered helplessly to fate, it would have to give a me a sign. I wanted a sign. I wanted fate to show me where I belonged in life, to whom I belonged. And I had to be naked for that. I had to be without possessions, and without anyone to save me. At a point in life you have to do that. You must lay yourself open to fate, in however little a way (the effect will be for the whole of life---there's no little way with fate), because fate is only a word for your ultimate self, a reality without flesh or single existence, that is known only on the deathbed.

Melli did the same, and about the same time. She came from Germany, after growing up in America. She yielded her flesh in the same way, after the shadow of death had fallen on her for a moment. That was infinitely greater than my surrender. She knew the force she was surrendering to. I didn't. She had more shere knowldge of the invisible than I could imagine. There was no foresight in

what she did: therefore only passion.

And when I got her little note one day---it arrived after a roundabout journey, quite miraculously---I think it was even lost for a time---anyway, there it was on my bed one sad, blazingly sunny afternoon, just after I'd got back from Rome, and an enormous relief went through me, as if I'd got to the end of a long journey, though I didn't know who this person was, I'd never met her. My mind said nothing. My mind had no ideas. It was just a note--- from the friend of a friend. But there was this extraordinary peace in me, and a confidence beyond anything I'd known for years, as I read it. All out of the blue. I had to reply---make an appointment, so I wrote the name of the only café I knew in Rome where you could sit for any length of time and which wasn't done out in travertine like a lavatory. It was called the Aragno, the spider, and at that time had chandeliers and mirrored walls, and potted plants, like a Viennese café; later they changed it, especially the name, and put the marble and chromium in. The Italians have few real cafés, only hurried little bars where you snatch a thick cup of coffee and buzz off again.

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Suddenly life changes in all sorts of ways---towards an end: without you knowing it. Not long before this I'd got to know Angelo and Francine. I used to go to their flat, and sometimes stay a night or two on the sofa in the sitting room. That was a strange story, too. I'd met Francine in London, quite a number of months before. She'd just had one of her many quarrels with Angelo, and had packed up and flown off. I was sitting in a café on a Sunday morning, when the streets were deserted and there

was that look of torpor and dearth over everything, with the clouds low over the roofs. I was sitting there alone, next to someone I was on nodding terms with---he worked in the City and always wore a dark suit, and was nicknamed Slippery Dick, I don't know why. Francine was in the corner by the coffee bar, reading something by Bernard Shaw: I remember looking at the title from across the room.

It was a dark and ~~completely~~ chaotic period for me, when I was separating from my first wife: we'd been apart the year before, on and off, but now it looked final. We were very nice to each other about it---the great battles were over---and now there only remained the slow physical ache of becoming separate, I don't mean in sex but just in the daily habit of contact and always being there. When I come to think of it, we weren't together very long, only about five years, and for the last one of those we were apart. But it was like drawing ourselves out of a long sleep, not a very comfortable one but a friendly one---we were always friends, and there was that unbroken respect between us that made everything perplexing and contradictory.

The morning I met Francine we'd spent most of the night up, talking at someone's flat, about five of us: one of them was an actor, I think, of French origin, and he was telling us yarns by the hour; I can remember his dark, rather elfin, lined face, and his pleasant clothes, as he talked and one person fell asleep while another woke up; all through the night until dawn that went on. Then we all trooped back to our house and had breakfast. Those nights had something terrible and ecstatic in them---there was the excitement of straining the nerves to a delicious, troubled fatigue which gnawed and enflamed the sex, in a situation where one's body and everybody else's was being broken up---everything was breaking up, not only the furniture and books that looked drabber and drabber in the daily smoke of London, but all hopes and wishes and tender little services,

all folly and intimate little preoccupations, all was being closed and thwarted, like the closing-up of the fertile organs in a woman. And always that low-hanging sky, it seemed---always a strange dawn when the sound of the birds made you slightly sick because it was natural: the sunlight was always forgotten, it came and went like a lure to other places. And underneath this swinging and rolling and sickeningly yielding daily life there were the shadows of betrayal and things left undone and badness unaccounted for---there was never cruelty exactly, nothing really unkind, that seemed too positive a gesture for lives already swallowed up, but there was a gathering badness, from promises that came to nothing, from leaving everything intimate to the mercy of the huge city. There wasn't anybody bad there, but the badness grew from there being nothing else---people's goodness, which is really their intimacy, shone for a moment and then was put out by drink or a late night or a sudden infatuation that eclipsed everything for a week, a month, a year---so that everything was personality, faces and clothes, a way of talk, a fascinating little habit (a laugh or a way of standing or it might be just a nervous cough) that was copyrighted by the owner and kept as his mark. There was complete honesty. You couldn't dig ~~too~~ very low into yourself because there wasn't the time or the necessary silence and composure, but everything that was conscious poured out in an ecstatic, flowing way, which turned everybody into a little philosopher---candour was the one hold on life people had; without that endless self-revelation there was no sanity. People knew that things were breaking up, their bodies and hearts were breaking. And nearly every one of them was secretly planning a getaway, even from his own wife or closest friend to whom he told everything. One would drpp out here, another there---sometimes he was never heard of again---'Oh, he's in New York, I think'---'She married a watchmaker of all

people, and they're living in Penge', Penge being a joke for suburbia or those who'd given up the struggle. Underneath, everybody was planning for his own intimacy---a way out, one day. In the end everybody left, though they might not have moved house---they might only have moved a block away from where they'd spent their darkest nights, but their lives changed, they planted their intimacy again, to try and make it grow. And they all look back on each other now with a sort of fear and disgust---they fear meetings---no more of that life---the life where the characters are always changing. We were nearly all wrecked, and we all left in the nick of time.

I was sitting in the café feeling heavy and lost, rather sick from the night before. It was unusual for me to go to a café alone---at least to a café like this, where a lot of people I knew congregated: I either stayed at home or went a short bus-ride away to a conventional place where there were women with ~~their~~ little dogs and a fitted carpet on the floor. I felt safe there. But this time, to my own astonishment, I left the house and walked straight to the café round the corner. I didn't even hesitate before going in. I didn't walk up and down the road outside to see if there was anyone there I wanted to avoid. And I didn't feel awkward taking a seat alone, squeezed between other people. I felt too heavy, life was going too far for that sort of worrying to be possible any longer---I was beginning to settle down in the mud of excitement and grief every day that clung to me, mud that was an irritant and a drug as well, so thick after a time that it was protective, and shyness was impossible: bringing a blush to the face through all that wrong living needed an effort. But I did manage it at times. Like a child. Suddenly. As if an unaccountable shame that was almost collective, almost not belonging to oneself at all, flooded up and drowned everything else for the moment. But on the whole I had a kind of permanent trembling

composure. I sat down and nodded to Slippery Dick. He was always polite, with a neat and thoughtful air, and gave me a nice smile back. We talked a bit. Francine got up and left, and quite involuntarily, without intending it in the slightest, I said to him, 'What a nice-looking girl.' And he said at once, 'Would you like to meet her?' He then jumped up and dashed out into the street to fetch her back. I sat there in a dim, deeply underground astonishment. She had struck me---again without real consciousness, but like a movement far underneath my being, where there were only dreams and aches and glimpses of fate---as not being wrecked, as not being a wrecker, but as having an intimate and truthful concern: it was in her face, a look of clean concern, she could still worry about trifles, and above all she was truthful, she had a face that couldn't tell a lie---it would show a lie immediately. She returned after a long time. He had to run nearly the length of the road. How extraordinary that he should do that---we hardly knew each other---all I did was make a chance remark, what <u>seemed</u> a chance remark---and he dashed off as if I'd given him an urgent order! He was still panting when they came in. And I was sufficiently recovered from my numbness for my heart to be beating quickly at the ordeal of a first meeting. I stood up and we shook hands. Francine. From Paris. Actually from Rome---she had just come from Rome. Ah, Rome! I knew Rome. I'd been there the year before. She was a pretty girl with long dark hair and very clear eyes, slim and rather pale. After a few minutes Slippery Dick got up to go, and left us sitting there. And I don't believe I ever spoke to him again. I saw him some years later in ~~some~~ a sort of dance-hall, or a club, but he didn't recognise me--- so many people come and go in that world, die and then come to life again, fall and pick themselves up, suddenly change their characters, their clothes, walk, voice, mind.

So there we were! Without any warning---in a few minutes--- Francine and I, with our lives changed, because the meeting did change our lives. We spent the whole of that day together, wandering round London, taking bus-rides, sitting in a park. It was marvellous to be perfectly simple, after so long. We just talked. We were at our ease. And to my astonishment I told her all about my present situation. The candour which never came to me when I was with other people, when it was the necessary coin to be passed round before you could be accepted, was suddenly there like a clear light, simple and motionless, so that I talked quietly and without the slightest shame. I can remember her saying to me suddenly, while we were walking along a deserted street, 'Do you know, I think you and my husband are going to be close friends!' And there wasn't just opinion in her voice. There was even more than conviction: it was just final---knowledge. And I hardly did more than nod; I just accepted it. I could see him clearly, though she'd hardly talked about him ~~at all~~ at that time. He was there, clear and dark, the first image before I'd set eyes on him.

Probably, in the dimness of that morning, I thought life had another little love-affair in store for me---with her. But life had other intentions. And that also was a relief. All this 'love' business had been going on so long, there had been such a traffic of free and engaged and half-engaged bodies over the last year or so that I was sick and tired of it, to the death! People did it to keep alive. They touched bodies to keep the blood flowing----rightly. The body either has to be stirred with love or with the signs and symbols of love: it can get along with very little. These were the signs and symbols. It wasn't pleasure. The moment or two of ecstatic recognition at the beginning of an affair was quickly lost. The intimacy had then to be reckoned with. But

this was at variance with the first glittering love-recognition, which was public, which belonged to public glitter and was like a little ~~collective~~ theatrical vision---it could never be cashed, it could never be turned to intimacy. So we (I wonder if Francine felt the same thing?) arrived immediately at what we wanted, without knowing in the slightest what it was---but that's like all real wants, they show themselves through their fruition afterwards, they make life serve them the moment a chance offers. And we were a chance for each other.

The strange thing is that Francine was never part of the stunning friendship that started between Angelo and me in Rome, and then absorbed Melli as well. She always stayed a bit outside. She was always at the edge, slightly resenting, with her simplicity, her capacity for doing a service, a ~~marvellous~~ charming power to be moved and appealed to. She maintained a kind of discipline for the rest of us. She had something similar to my first wife---a kind of inexhaustible mercy combined with ~~toughness~~ toughness. In the English this is a soft, hesitant quality, a certain gracious expectation before the spectacle of life, in the French it is more a decision of the intelligence, this same respect for life. And it can flash into hardness, learned from hundreds of years of organic development, in both cases. Both are ancient and awe-inspiring combinations.

Sometimes, later on, she even began to fear our visits, when they had moved to Paris. So much was disgorged, that was painful for her to touch---much more painful than I realised at the time. Those visits brought up all sorts of discontents in Angelo that lay dormant otherwise; the moment we were together he launched into one of his accounts of the horror of life, while Francine made her frightened recoil.

She would rather it stayed below, unmentioned. She would rather not go through it, but at the same time she recognised that if you

live with a man like Angelo you couldn't live on any other terms. She recoiled from the enormous contradictory horror and tragedy and marvel of life, that unfolds like an unbelievable picture of which we were never given any warning, and which seems chaotic. She feared this seeming chaos and dared not plunge into it. And this seeming chaos was Angelo's order. She wanted life neater, with practical solutions.

Their quarrels were famous among their Roman friends. The friends would ask with the rather ratty malice of the Italian educated classes, 'Are they still quarrelling?', their eyes glinting a little---la classica questione, this was called, the classical question everyone asked about Angelo, from their neat enclaves. He was so clever, so much alone and remarkable in his thoughts, so turbulent and yet extraordinarily calm, with the born authority of an intelligence that pervades everything and touches every experience and learns all the time and shakes off the dross and continually renews itself and is continually in new shape, continually apart from anything social or accepted or even heard---that he was an isolated man. Nothing came of his friendships.

And since he always gave himself, terrifically, burning himself every time on those warm but closed ~~hard cold~~ souls, it wasn't just isolation but continual suffering. He offended the careful rationalism of middle-class people. That was painful for Francine, too; because she shared the rationalism; she believed in the world as logic, people's logic---but with a saving frailty of doubt that drew her to Angelo more than to the others whom she said she preferred. She saw every little group of friends come to ruin. He was always complaining, always humiliated, always brought up against the rock of other people's hearts, bleeding and half-broken, and pouring himself out to her. This was 'weakness' for her---this

continual giving of himself, the shedding of his reality every moment of the day. Instead of being taken as a gift abd privilege, this shedding was taken by other people as hatred, selfishness, a wilful opposition to life, always grinding and talking and sighing and declaiming and appealing and attacking. Angelo aroused the greatest middle-class fear there is---of an unpredictable flow of talk that asks for no occasion.

In Angelo the wonder ahd ebb and flow of life were still untouched. When we found each other we flung ourselves on each other becausexwe had shared the same story and know every item of the other's struggle. We were astonished how we'd lived in the same world---he Sicilian, from perhaps the most primitive and barren part of Sicily, me a Londoner. We knew the feeling of being disgusting to other people, through talking too much---showing the self in too much nakedness; we had caused the same recoil in other people. That single thing---the hurt sense that our words had made people recoil, as early in life as we could remember---was our way of recognising each other. We stared at each other, the blond and the swarthy, with amazement at every discovery.

Years before, I would have put my struggle down to puritanism---that was why my continual talk had seemed to create disgust, because it had shown the nakedness of life, it had uncovered the body; and, ah, if I'd been born in the southern world, the catholic world, where the inner flow hadn't been interrupted, things would be different! I didn't know that Angelo put his struggle down to the opposite, to the very world I thought I would be safe in, the 'southern world', the catholic world, where the priests gnawed at ybu like beetles while, ah, in the other world---for him---the protestant world, in the world of the north, where people were free, where

no priest could interfere with you, where people spoke the truth when and as they liked, where you were admired for stepping out of line, there he'd be safe!

And this made us think that we'd had the same struggle, which I now know to be wrong.

Sometimes when Angelo had read us a few lines of Dante, or just talked, I looked into his face, only a few inches away, and shuddered with the proximity, because it was like a god's face, dark and concentrated and eternal, his nostrils dilated slightly and his eyes darkly blazing. I remember his reading Dante's verse about a terrible storm at sea that swallows creatures up, and his face was the storm, it was relentless and monumental, without self, like the weather, beyond people.

It was never easy for Francine. Partly she was right, that she was up against the Sicilian world, which she knew nothing about: life verged on hysteria all the time. And now and then Angelo seemed beyond recall, so alone in his dry, mourning southern self; I've heard her say, 'But, Angelo, won't you help me? Don't leave me alone like this!' And he would half-lie in his chair, wan, his eyes narrow, with a grey, gleaming, burnt-out look in them, his lips dry: not the friend of mankind.

They're what people a handsome couple: both of them slim, no waste flesh---everything excess is claimed by the high activity of nerves. He's neat and dependable. He does everything you ask him with quiet care, watching every detail. You see this in the way he puts on a record---he knows exactly where the music he wants lies, even if it's in the middle, and he lowers the needle with infinite care, never making a scratch. And ever since I first knew him he's been meticulous in dress, he never goes out without a neat suit and

a collar and tie, never a pullover or open collar---never beach-wear on the hottest day. That's really southern. 'The body isn't to be joked about,' he says with a little smile. You see the squares in the deep south crowded every Sunday, in the hottest weather, with men dressed in black---black suits, black hats, black boots---everything black for the dry, melancholy, brittle southern soul. Black for the thwarted passions, for the silent vendetta, the snatched, forbidden, half-horrified love, the heat that burns in the darkness and dies in its own smoke.

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I didn't see Francine for some days after that first meeting, then Angelo flew to London to try and patch the quarrel up. He was suddenly there, after sending her a telegrem. I met them both on the day of his arrival, and we went to a pub together. We looked at each other curiously. He was darkly pale, with clear, strong, black eyes, and we stood together in the large bare saloon-bar putting monosyllabic questions to each other because my Italian was so bad and he had no English. Francine wasn't a scrap nervous. Within a few minutes he said to me, '<u>Freedom</u>, that's what you see in this country! It's in people's eyes, it's in the eyes of the girls!' Freedom is a <u>light</u>, he said, that's the first thing you see in people's eyes when you step off the plane!

In those days he was always ~~talking~~ on about girls. The grand question in Rome for men---women. Would life with a <u>completely</u> beautiful woman be exciting and terrific every day? he asked me once. Was this one attractive, did I think, wasn't that one <u>un orrore</u>? Was Francine attractive? did other men look at her?--- he suddenly put this question to me as we were walking down the

road from his home towards the Vatican. That seems a long time ago---he was like a prisoner then as far as women went, his eyes followed them everywhere and gorged on their bodies. He was still the southerner there---marvelling that women could walk about free, and actively attract and seduce men without being whores. They were still distant creatures for him---certainly not fellow-citizens. And he resented this interest he had in them. At the same time it brooded and burned in him, an itching but yet not really voluptuous ~~desire~~ desire, which it was impossible to satisfy. When we went to the sea he used to gorge his eyes on Melli's breasts and legs, making us laugh. But there must be no jokes about the body. The body had to be clothed, like a gaudy, radiant, fascinating and shameful temple under heavy guard. He told me one hot day, in a whisper, the breath hissing through his teeth, that he'd never be able to resist a woman, an attractive woman, if he was alone with her for more than a few minutes. He <u>couldn't</u>, no, he <u>couldn't</u>! And he hated Italian women, he said. They dragged you down into ~~purely~~ fetid, passive, mindless pits which weren't even sexual in the end. The Italian <u>culo</u>--- the arse---in spite of its spectacular roll from side to side in a tight skirt was really sexless: behind it there was the dull mother, and aeons of dull, suffocating, man-eating motherhood behind <u>that</u>! Nothing made him feel more lonely, he said, than the thought of an affair with an Italian woman. They played you a dirty game, he said. They were prick-teasers, and they learned this in childhood. They stepped back when you advanced, advanced when you stepped back, every movement was a horrible little game designed as an insult to your manhood, in order to subdue, because the two sexes were deadly enemies in Italy, there was no friendship between them, certainly no love, hardly any contact, only a brief animal-contact in which both sides ~~seemed to lose~~ lost position. And, having broken your manhood in

time, if they were lucky, they pushed you into church and you were free to eat of the forbidden fruit, but it turned out nasty because having been withheld so long there was something matter-of-fact about it, like a money-transaction finally concluded, the flesh was passive in her where it was unyielding before, you were sunk in disgust, the let-down was terrific, both sides were cheated, it had all been made too much of, the grovelling anmial-appetite was quickly appeased, the boredom stamped back like a terrible shadow, and occupied the chairs, waiting patiently ~~like~~ for death. He could never have married an Italian woman, he said.

But for someone who couldn't think of marrying them he certainly feasted his eyes on them.

At the same time he was free. Like most Italian men he addressed the woman and not the man when there was a choice, but he knew men, he knew he needed them, I never felt I was lost to him when a woman was present. Only he couldn't take his flashing, narrowed eyes away from them. His nostrils would always dilate, and a faint predatory smile come over his lips. He would glance at them, cough, blink, gaze at them for a long time, cough, move his shoulder in a characteristic little twitch, look at them again, gaze at their bosoms, cough, twitch his shoulder again, make his little smile, in the most extraordinary sexual pantomime I've ever seen. Without being voluptuous, it was sexual. It excited the women in a basic way---it touched the organs---it excited between the legs, it was hot and close. It belonged to quick, stabbing sex, hurriedly covered up, rather Arab.

At that time one of his best friends was a young pianist and I remember Angelo's terrific loyalty to him, the thrill he had at his first concert; he kept on saying, 'Manneggia, manneggia!' to himself, his eyes narrowed and his chin pushed out triumphantly,

with the sheer thrill of seeing his friend perform. Those were the green days. He went through many fires after that, and began to accept being alone. In those first days, in Rome, he was still expecting marvels from people---I don't mean from single persons but from people as a whole. He wanted us to form some sort of group, not deliberately but in such a way that one formed round us, of the most suitable people, with voluptuous grils, to ward off the loneliness which Rome imposed on her children to keep them separated, and the peculiar Roman ennui which in the end made only the family possible, only the self-contemplating things, in a sensuous, withdrawn, silent hunger. Rome broke friendships, unless they were family-ties and without thrill. It made them flare up and then it broke them. For hours we talked about the city, thrilled and horrified, as if it were a person. And sometimes Angelo would call me on the phone, to ask me to come to a café, just to talk, as a relief from the pervading, heavy city that had had so much more experience than we. And every day it was, 'We must leave, we must leave!'

After the pub---I remember it was a hot evening, and we were all sweating---we took a bus-ride and Angelo for some reason talked at the top of his voice. He sat on one side of the gangway and I on the other, and he bellowed his questions at me---his 'questionnaire', as we called it afterwards. He would ask questions in the most formal and pointed voice---how big was London, how many people lived there, were there many Indians resident in London, were the effects of the empire still felt, what did I think of the empire, had I been in the House of Commons during a debate, were there women MPs as well, was it true that American women 'wore the trousers' in the household, did I like America, how often could one divorce in England, who was the oldest prime minister the count-

ry had ever had, what was the Latin quarter of London like, did I enjoy spaghetti, did everyone in Scotland wear kilts, was I a great tea-drinker, what did I think of Scott, was I a protestant, had I ever been to Brighton, did it often rain 'cats and dogs' (this in English) in London? These questions would stun and abash you, and usually all he got was a mumbled 'Well...' before he rushed on again. The background to these questions seemed to be a very formal, clockwork education, and a sharp, delving curiosity underneath that had picked up all sorts of odd little things about the world in its yearning for freedom. Angelo hadn't really been educated in Italy [redacted]---he'd lived in Sicily the first seven years of his life and then moved with his family to North Africa. After that he had come to Rome for the university. His time in Rome was the most miserable of his life, he told me---everything was desert, every friendship he had, every girl, until he met Francine. I've seen a photo of him from that time, the same neat person but [redacted] terribly pained, with a [redacted] yearning and thwarted expression in his eyes, completely withdrawn, with a tense aloofness. But always with that searching and clean expression as well, fastidious like a girl. I think he had a neat rolled umbrella in that picture, and a high, dazzlingly white collar.

I saw nothing of them for a week or more after that first meeting in a pub, and I didn't have their address in Rome, nor did I know that I'd ever be [redacted] in Rome again.

I began to think I'd seen the last of them. The usual wrecking life went on, ecstatic because it was slowly destructive, but hushed inside, with the pain. Suddenly one night, at about ten o'clock, I was passing the café where I'd met her first, and there they were both standing, in a great crowd near the bar, in the dimness of the wall-lights, Angelo looking bewildered and frail,

politely distant, listening to something she was saying, eyeing the other people nervously, very dark-looking in the shadows, with a sharp, penetrating yet not probing face---always delicate and thoughtful. I went straight in to see them, and stood talking to them for some time---just empty things that you say in a great crowd always. All I remember now is seeing Angelo's face in the shadows---his bewilderment, the violence that seemed to be done to him by the crowd.

They gave me their Rome address. I would come and see them, I said. I would come to Rome one day. It was a strange address: something like 'the steps leading up to St. Peter's'; at least, that was how I remembered it. And it was a good thing it did sound strange because I lost it at once. I realised I didn't even know their surnames. And they'd left London.

All I had to go on, when I did get to Rome a few months later, was this ~~s~~trange-sounding phrase. I looked in the phone-directory and found something like it; at least, the word St. Peter's was in it.

I remember it was a hot, brilliantly sunny day when I left Frascati to look for it. I had no number. God knows how I expected to find it! I started from the huge square in front of St. Peter's, which looked slightly misty in the great heat. The road was there, rising steeply from the entrance to the holy city towards a railway station at the top of a hill. There were houses and blocks of flats on either side. A little shop. There seemed no real hope of finding it; but I knew I must. I stood about, walked up and down. Then I asked at the little shop---did they know a young couple?---I tried to describe them, he a lawyer, I suddenly remembered that. But they thought I was crazy. I seemed to remember the number 50, or perhaps 56. But that gave

me no result either. Then I made a determined effort of will, quite suddenly, thinking, 'I can't waste any more time!' And I went towards the tallest block of flats at the top of the hill. The foyer was cavernous and cool, full of marble, rather luxurious in the post-war Italian style, shiny and spacious. The portiera was sitting in her office. Did she know a lawyer? called Angelo? No. Really not? He was married to a Frenchwoman. Ah, a French woman! Yes. Ah, yes, indeed, yes. She nodded (I suppose she'd heard their quarrels echoing down the stairs often enough), and she told me their surname, which even then didn't strike a chord. The top floor. They were here! So up I went, in the noiseless lift.

A ring at the door. A pause. A few hushed footsteps. Then the door opened quietly and slowly, and there was Angelo. 'Oh!' A moment of recognition, then a little welcoming embrace. Francine would be happy to see me! Please come in! Wait in the sitting room. He would telephone his wife at once, she was out, he knew where she was, she would return at once. He bustled round, talking all the time. For I was still Francine's friend rather than his. I went and sat down in one of the armchairs and he popped in and out of the room to say she was on her way, she wouldn't be long, I must be patient. But he didn't stop to talk. He was in a fluster of bewilderment, going to the balcony to see if he could see her, then looking at me and saying she wouldn't be more than a few minutes, and how happy she would be to see me—she had often talked about me since their London visit.

It was a large room, looking down on the road that led to St. Peter's, with a wide balcony, hidden from inside the room by long lace curtains that stretched right across the wall, making the light in the room soft and enclosed, with the heat drifting

in like a breath of desert-air every now and then. There was a fitted carpet and Louis Quinze chairs which they both treasured enormously, as I found out later---they were always forbidding you to sit on them in case they collapsed. Everything was neat. A nice long sideboard, a mirror, a big radio-gram and lots of records. French books in paper covers. And an air of softness over everything; great stillness after the streets of Rome. The noises came up pleasantly distilled. The radio was by a big sofa where I ~~naughtily~~ sat and ~~where I~~ sometimes slept later on. It was an elegant room, with something too formal about it---the furniture had been set carefully, everything had been lovingly seen to, in the French way, delicate and sensible and comfortable, but nothing had been really touched with their lives yet, the stillness hadn't been broken, the place wasn't fully and absolutely theirs yet, it wasn't made with their daily lives. It was still in abeyance, waiting for them, beautiful because of that---in its stillness. It was quite an immense flat, with a long dining room where we used to sit for hours after a meal talking, and a small studio for Angelo where all his ugly law-books were, and a dark, cool bedroom.

After a while Francine came back, and we sat talking, the three of us, in a cheerful and easy way, yet also hesitant, as if we were preparing ourselves for all the hundreds of conversations we would have later on. Francine sat on the edge of the sofa, smiling---asking questions---slim, with bright eyes, her hair falling straight down to her shoulders, more or less uncurled, while Angelo paced about the room, smiling quickly and then glancing at me, talking, puffing at strong-smelling cigarettes he didn't seem to want, always agitated, never still for a moment, going to the window, coming back again, asking if there was anything I wanted, taking a book out to show me, laughing in his strange, elated,

hoarse way, his eyes black and piercing, his nose aquiline and sharp with a fastidious little point that always seemed to be sniffing and recoiling and taking measure delicately and painfully, while his mouth was set more placidly, as it would be later on in life, after the terrible Roman battles were finished and he no longer tried to persuade or change people or win their love but remained in his own stillness and indifference and the pained disbelief that was really the best belief of all.

I can't remember if I stayed to lunch or not. I think I said no (with my mouth watering), wanting not to stay too long the first time. I had an idea, I'm sure, that something had happened, that a new kind of heaven, an experience I'd never known or predicted in my life before, was coming about, and I didn't want to press it too far the first moment. I felt safe---completely free with them both: I could come in when I wanted to, phone them when I wanted to, stay when I wanted---I knew that without asking them, and this safe feeling drove me away early.

I can remember the first lunch there, when we sat in the dining room with the curtains drawn against the harsh sun, leaning back in our chairs when the meal was over and the table was strewn with napkins crumpled up and bread-crumbs and our half-filled glasses of red wine, while we talked drowsily, laughing and then serious again, in the same rhythm as always afterwards. Already Francine began to fall a little out of our conversation, and she felt this. She took on the role, mostly, of listener. There was always something to be solved between her and Angelo, so this listening role was really the right one: she couldn't solve these things in herself, she could only wait for an exposition from outside, blaming the world or me or Angelo, then being amused or touched, then being angry and offended, then crying, then being amused again, but

always feeling inadequate, not up to our flow of talk that seemed to take no account of her. Instead of accepting her role and letting the flow go out of her hands, she always criticised herself inwardly and told herself that she wasn't being regarded enough, we didn't think of her enough. And this was much worse when there was Melli as well, especially as Angelo---being himself--started concentrating his attention on her and asking her his volley of questions. That seemed to prove for Francine that there wasn't any future for her with him---everything that added to <u>his</u> life took away from hers. And so she cried bitterly---often in silence, without moving her face. This went on, really, for years, this conviction in her that she was condemned to be a stranger to us while we enjoyed a moving, everlastingly different, thrilling warmth. And partly she wanted it to be like this---she hated the 'Sicilian' side in Angelo, it wasn't her world, it was suffocating and violent for her. But on the other hand she would look at us wistfully sometimes as if wondering what it would be like to come in and surrender---surrender her will---and let the flow of talk go on past her and if necessary without her, if necessary beyond her, so that ~~they~~ she could come back to it freely, when it woke to her again, when it returned to her orbit of understanding. But when it seemed to go beyond her she accused herself of being <u>beneath</u> it---she wasn't clever enough for us, she hadn't a good enough soul! And this would bring a negative after-feeling of anger--- she didn't <u>want</u> to understand, she didn't believe it <u>was</u> real cleverness, she knew clever people who wouldn't agree, our talk was a kind of weakness, only an indulgence, the world outside didn't take any notice, it didn't care, we had no positions in life! She didn't really understand what Angelo wanted---what he couldn't find. And he suffered from that. And she took this

suffering as a criticism of her lack of an inner understanding---ah, she hadn't a good enough soul, had she?---and also this made him harder, in his sudden outbursts of indignation (they weren't really anger, much less violent, but she took them like that), and made him bring out a word she feared---like 'middle class'---or he would say something hurtful about her father---and then it would be tears, slammed doors, a smashed cup or two, and a slow, tired, moaning reconciliation that went on for the rest of the day---in this reconciliation Angelo would seem wasted, darkly endlessly sad, like a man in the desert after a long, dry journey.

Francine's feeling was aggravated later on by the talk that used to go on between Angelo and Melli about music. This closed me out as well---but that didn't seem to help her. Angelo and Melli had both studied music---and apart from the enormous knowledge that passion gives they had an immediate graphic understanding that made their talk about it easy and flowing. They remembered every piece of music they'd ever heard, down to two-minute improvisations on the piano, and went through them all. It was titillation, most of it---they were just getting to know each other and there was the first thrilling sexual awareness that there always must be where two sexes aren't dead to each other. And their relation had to grow separate from mine, with its own glow, a necessarily one sexual. This titillation-talk had a deliberate, erotic exclusiveness---I felt that Melli wasn't above trying to elbow me off like Angelo's pitch---and was the preliminary without which their friendship wouldn't have got its flesh and blood. So at the same time as I felt excluded I was glad. Just a friendship between Angelo and me would have been hopeless: the women would have wrecked us, we would have wrecked them. The four of us couldn't have been together like that, complete like nature.

So each relation had to grow in its specific and individual way. When I first met Francine in London I thought she was going to be just more sex: and the thrill of sex was the opening reality between us though we didn't touch each other. And it was the same with Melli, when she came to Rome: she had to find her relation with Angelo, and sex was the first reality. Friendship only grows from real desries. All friendship (I knew nothing about it before I met Angelo) is sexual: there's the glow of fleshly understanding, a strange vibrant appreciation of the body, which is also at the same time like a proxmitiy far beyond life but with nothing shadowy or mental about it, much less physical in the ordinary sense.

When there's no intimate form in life but only dead society, as nowadays, offering us no guide and never touching the real springs of our behaviour, our real relations, our springs of love, when they happen, grow slowly and through extraordinary violence and for a long time we're within a hair's breadth of being destroyed. In the old world, before this deathly society started, when there were forms even for intimacy, forms that didn't destroy, when there were public tears and kisses and shouting, the relation between Angelo and me would have grown steadily from that first moment---that first lunch with the heat pouring through the closed curtains and the half-filled glasses of wine between us, and the broken pieces of bread, would have been repeated again and again, as we drew slowly into manhood and the glory and wonder of our dreams and endless talk and listening and laughing would have spread until they reached almost infinity, filling the room round us and every carafe of wine and soiled, thick tablecloth and all the books and the children as they grew up. But that

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wasn't our world.

Yet those first moments of recognition would always have been there, in any world: that warm promise of a new experience, and the sense that we could give ourselves fully, for the first time, in all the thousands of tiny contradictions and hesitations and firm decisions and follies and glimpses and visions and temptations and dreams hardly seen and sudden revelations and hopes and paralysing fears and indignation and hatred and then slow compassion and a certain fine, yielding mercy, and then in dullness, and silence, and in pain that made words impossible, and in hot desire---all the things for which our epoch has false names and through which it has driven false paths for us to take the moment we open our mouths. We were free, we could give ourselves---which meant a glimpse of creation. And we both needed, with an urgency that made us fling ourselves on each other with words, to do that. And Melli, when she came, needed it too, as the convalescent needs light and air. It was the beginning of the first real intimacy any of us had known.

The relation with Angelo revealed more and more, it didn't fall on obstructions---there were no sudden dark and hidden peculiarities in him that fought shy of the ultimate freedom---that was the astonishing and marvellous thing for me. There was a slow and continual spreading, more and more he stood revealed to me in his meaning, nothing slipped into a false idea nursed through weakness, there was nothing perverse in him, no sudden twist or betrayal or reluctant faith or self-disgust that yearned for an escape from the light, nothing that I'd become used to in other friends---I called them friends! There was nothing in him reluctant of the light, nothing flinched from it, the light always healed him and moved him, there wasn't a sudden clinging to self, he was the first real friend of

light that I'd known. There aren't many in the world. That can be safely said. There never will be.

And this, first to me and then to Melli, was a blessing life had given no warning of, for which there seemed no parallel, much less worthiness in ourselves. It was a double blessing. So, with our wounds, coming it seemed from the four corners of the globe, we suddenly faced each other, in a miracle for which we had laid no plans nor even nursed hopes.

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When I met Melli it was one of those still autumn days when the light and air had a special excitement. We were to meet in the Spider but we'd never seen each other before. There was a café full of people to choose from, and a number of them were sitting alone at their tables. She was near a far window, quite still. This is the first impression I had of her---the remarkable and stunning stillness that was more than peace, more than a state for herself alone, but touched the world outside. She was wearing a nicely cut grey tweed suit with a jumper underneath, and was leaning slightly on the table. I forget how we arranged to recognise each other but I remember my eyes went over all the other people in the place and finally rested on her with a kind of lasting and emphatic inevitability that seemed made from beyond life, without the slightest support or testimony from either of us, like a scheme for which we were just the rehearsal and promptors.

I can remember that she looked a bit wan, from the strains of the previous few months, which I knew nothing about. She seemed in a musing state, like someone returning to things after a long while away. And all round her were lights---the windows looked

out on to a narrow and crowded side-street. And there was the lovely warm sense of autumn in everything, the special gathering intimate light, with the early Roman dusk, and the shining quality of things as if the hot sun was still in the pavements and walls and squares, having given them a glow inside, from underneath, that would last them all winter.

We smiled at each other and I sat down. And we talked hesitantly. She didn't flash and brittly crack and twitter and sparkle and send off jagged little flames of pride and scorn and cleverness and all the hard naif defences that the weak and lost go in for. It was almost no conversation. We just had a sort of poor badinage, mostly from me---because if you're caught up in a world where anything intimate is represented as a stink it is better to try and make people laugh, to get through the brittle prejudice and masquerade into a bit of sanity, to stop yourself from crying and wanting to get on to a bed and die. So I had this tone---quite a habit with me then---of trying to turn everything into gaiety, and Melli responded with slight, puzzled smiles, turning her head slowly to look at me, only half-conscious of me as yet, in the way of women, whose first thoughts are never in the head, unless they're those men-women whose breasts have an incongruous and disturbing effect of not being in the right home. Underneath we were breathing with the same rhythm, struggling for air, although we couldn't know it. We sat in the same kind of easy posture, half-leaning, in the same watching and exhausted state, while our smiling questions-and-answers, that belonged to the world we would both thankfully give up, went on indepemdently of us.

There was something frail and suggestive and enquiringly gentle about Melli but at the same time a steadiness and strength

that glowed in her, so that her expressions came slowly, like decisions from deep down, always in her own time that established itself and touched the outside world with silent authority, while she enquired all the time, only smiled and asked questions and nodded, never asserting anything unless it came like a quiet, soothing shaft, from her mind, laying its effect minutes after it had been spoken. Yet she didn't seem to hold back. There was this flowing and invisible self that went as coolly as the air and seemed to have been arrived at slowly, from years of watching and noticing and divining, and being mortally hurt. She hadn't a public manner. A fool could walk over her in a moment.

I remember someone saying, 'What's Melli got up her sleeve? What's her story? Why is she so quiet?' The silence seemed to affront him, as it touched him and made him admire her, but it was uncanny for him, he seemed never to have known anything like it before---a creature who didn't hurry to make herself beholden to others or excuse herself or make little traceries over her nature that would form an acceptable picture he could grasp. It was always the same question, 'What's at the bottom of her quietness?'

Since then I've learned not to go by words with Melli---I know when to take a quiet and sympathetic 'Yes' for 'No', and when to take her little nod---that she will do something <u>my</u> way---for a sign that she's going to do it hers. At one time, people used to think she was under my domination in some way, because I seemed to be speaking most of the time and she not at all. That was how we were balanced at the beginning, not very evenly; in public, that is. But talking was my way, as quiet was hers. Speaking and writing were my element, like air to breathe. I couldn't develop or solve anything without talking all the time and bringing it all up to the surface in words. Melli suffered from this at first,

because she thought the flood of talk was didactic. Then she began to realise that it was only a flow like the tide; and she could interrupt it at will, could disregard it, fall asleep in it, turn it off like a tap. And it began to free something in her. Something was locked in her, from the years before. This talk of mine broke a sort of organic reserve she had. She realised the talk wasn't a person talking: it wasn't an ego---I seemed no more responsible for it than a bending tree is for the wind.

And what I learned from her was---silence. I was astonished to realise, bit by bit, what an enormous repertoire of speeches could lie in silence, if this was real, growing from a proper root, as true as the quiet of a tree. I was like a child in her silence. I learned more than I'd ever done before from a single creature. I couldn't name it, I could only say it was like a victory, this silence---it persisted until a sort of triumph attached to it. Melli always seemed to take the line of passive resistence with difficult people, whereas I persisted and tried to persuade them and argue things out, always hoping that a state of candour would introduce a natural harmony. But Melli knew more about the people she was dealing with than I did. For most of them the intimate self was a smelly charnel house, and it was best left covered up. She'd learned that as a middle-class child, she was used to people thinking of themselves, essentially, as stinks. I grew up knowing nothing about that. This was a great support for her, like the appearance of a world she had only hoped might exist. I had grown up among working people, and for working people everywhere the human creature is fabulous and mysterious like a temple, and finally unknown; it is basic life-knowledge among working people. Far from being stinks, people are good in their intimate selves. Basically all people are

good. This is practical daily knowledge outside the middle class. Therefore you find that wherever the common people go---wherever they sit down and play cards or just talk or sing, even if the place is bare walls and a ceiling, just a brick backyard, they make an atmosphere, they give the place a glow, it gets fabulous, you look into their corner with wondering, they make themselves kings wherever they are, they need no materials. Wherever my mother and father are, you feel this glory. The spark isn't dead in them. But middle-class people can make the most splendid palace hollow and drab, with their sniffing principles. With everything they've touched in the last two hundred years, they've brought the kiss of death.

And Melli learned that I took ~~their~~ my own world for granted, I thought it was the only world there was, shared by everbody. We learned about each other's world, slowly. We saw we took for granted completely different realities---different civilisations. She'd always dreamed about mine---she never believed in her own, but she was taught in America that it was the only one that existed. With me, she slowly began to perceive that she was listening, in the torrent of words, to a new experience, where people could lay themselves naked gladly, without fear of the charnel house inside, and not only this but she began to feel that this was the experience of the majority of people on the earth. It was amazing to discover---that the further down you dug in yourself the more order and splendour there was to be found, the more goodness. There was something in yourself that could be relied on, after all. She shed the foul middle-class doctrine---that 'underneath' you are a kind of savage that has to be 'controlled'---overnight. What neither of us knew at this time was that this was a step towards understanding Christ, which we would take together, more

or less.

I remember I caught a glimpse of Melli's face as we walked away from that café, down the side-street which we'd been glancing at from inside for the last half-hour, towards Piazza San Silvestro which wasxa mass of one-decker buses with overhead rails making their peculiar animal puff when they pulled up, with crowds of people walking between them and in the lights from the shops, a dense unhealthy warmth from the pavements mingling with the car-fumes, everything deafened with noise and movement, while we picked our way along. She had to walk for a moment on a step leading into a shop, to avoid somebody, and it was then that we glanced at each other, and really looked at each other for the first time. Her face, her profile as she half-turned to me, with a slight smile, gazing down for a moment, was extraordinarily beautiful, and clear, subtle, strong, and classical and reflective, full of the beyond, looking out far, far away, with that promise of ~~terrific~~ freedom---that we both needed so much then. How we needed freedom! We needed to spread ourselves and slowly abandon our thoughts and break the metal-structure world that was all round us and claiming our time and attention and even praise, and telling us we were nothing in exchange! In that first moment of really looking we caught a breath of the freedom we would have together, of being able to look at the world with leisure fallen on our flesh like a new light and dew. We left each other then---she stepped up into the bus---we were going to meet again that evening, after she'd eaten, in the square under Angelo's flat.

I went out after dark to meet her and remember standing in the dusty, makeshift square with rubble at its edges while the lighted bus came swinging round the corner to its terminus by the station. She got down and came walking towards me with a certain slow

and reflective gait, so collected in herself, walking smoothly, her head up, her body hardly moving, but lifted easily forward on her legs, in a sure and collected motion, like someone drifting, half-dreaming with an assurance of peace, not the hard self-willed assurance that presses forward deliberately, but the dormant power of reminiscence and thought that come out of sorrow, carried like something soft on the shoulders, that mustn't be disturbed but needs no strain, a soft and consoling burden, both fragile and unassailable. I recognised her only by her walk, though I hadn't been aware of it before. It was her---in the darkness, with the dim exciting lights shining from the edge of the square, like a night in the epoch before the ~~first~~ 1914 war, when there was still mystery in the air, before the last human mystery had been worn away. Rome draws so much on that last spring of humanity, as Salzburg does. And she was part of this wonderfully promising mystery that gathered round the square and enclosed the high apartment where Angelo and Francine were waiting. It was a second confirmation for me---her walk. It was wholly her---she was complete, she was the same all the way through. She wore the same grey suit as before; it went with this slow dreaming walk of hers, that seemed to come out of sleep back into the world, into revelation, while she watched from the distance, approaching all the time.

There was that first intimate chill of the Roman autumn, together with soft, dim lights, and a still sky, with sights and sounds very clear, as the days were too when the bright yellow sun poured down uninterrupted, making everything ~~look like~~ seem under clear water, with a ~~marvellous~~ glitter in everything; sometimes on those days I used to walk down from Angelo's flat to St. Peter's and stand near one of the fountains, gazing at the huge dome which was like a pencil drawing held very still against the sky and quite unreal and

untouchable, though clear and defined. There's nothing on earth like the Roman sun on those autumn days when it splashes down and saturates everything with a clean and glittering light, touching every window and penetrating through the dark houses. And this evening was the aftermath of a day like that, soft and enclosed, with a dimness gathering round like the sides of a theatre bustling with people, before a clear, splendid performance.

There's absolute noia---boredom---in Italy. Richer and deeper than anywhere else in the world; stretching to the ends of life. Something is missing from life. There's a basic interest lacking. Nothing to do. Nothing waits to be done. You learn early not to press down on your life for the northern, exciting, curious pleasures. The noia runs through everything like a solid, magnificent, torrid stream in Rome, disturbing and irritating and nourishing you. It seems the reality, the basic reality of all life. It doesn't take away from you, as the northern boredom does. The organs and glands thrive on it. Only the mind is unsatisfied and disturbed. Nothing but the noia, the slow, inner rhythm that divides you from other people except in an organic unison, underneath. Nothing else seems to thrive---no friendship or curious, light, interesting pleasures. Only the basic things, like forming a union with somebody, like building your body and health. None of the civilising things. None of the voluntary things. The friendship with Angelo didn't thrive in Rome. Really it couldn't exist. But the friendship formed there---it got its baptism there. The great early colours surrounding it were the heavy, sensual colours of Rome. But it couldn't develop there. It couldn't become the fabulous contract it did become.

And Nelli was walking into this, across the square. She was walking into our lives, the grand and stirring noia that makes every

man a king---of nothing. So she was coming into our royal circle with its dim and mysterious lights, on the top floor.

The hours Angelo and I spent together plotting and scheming to get away, and dreaming of it, vowing to each other---that seemed the only important thing, to get away, away from Rome! The terrible city, the whore, as we called her, who called you back and satisfied you in a way, she satisfied your <u>needs</u>, but not your <u>wants</u>, no, all the conscious things were unsatisfied; and we would sit together, huddled close to each other, with narrowed eyes, scheming and dreaming, in his tiny car or a cafe. And this dreaming, with an ecstatic, brilliant and also rhetorical yearning, was part of Rome; it was the looking-out, beyond, that you needed like fresh air; to new things, to the future, other places. But here-and-now was just a basic satisfaction you hardly knew about: only the body was soothed, and the mind was soothed, the organs were whole, there was something for the taste-buds always, there was the rich wholesome reality of the Latin genius surrounding you, even while the mind was unsatisfied, and laid to sleep; you might vow to get away but there was tomorrow, and then tomorrow, and only a last great burst of disgust would get you going.

Kelli was coming into our schemes and vows, with Rome lying there all round us mending and bringing to birth and lulling and drugging with health and offering endless evenings where the senses yearned and languished and cried out, there was Rome offering nothing for <u>you</u> in your own striving self, in your own self-formed life---no, that would be lulled away, or broken to pieces slowly if you tried too hard, or corrupted---there were those deadly little groups of people who did try, who started with something curious and exciting, who determined to make a real interesting city out of Rome, a place where things <u>happened</u> as they did

in the northern cities---they would make a kind of Paris, but it ended in the wilting of character, in last angry and violent bursts of corruption, in affairs, and intrigue, touched with a deliberate, morbid wickedness, the total inversion of the unsatisfied soul, and even murder, and suicide, and drugs, but all flowing along in the same splendid and stirring rhythm of noia, that offered high colour and warmth, a terrific pervading warmth that you felt most in the autumn when the lights were dim and everybody's lives gathered closer in the new winter mystery, there was more pervading warmth than in the sweating dog-days when everything closed and the whole city lay still under a cloud of irritated self-disgust. We often said to each other, 'Only family thrives here'. Not even love thrived, except in its aspect for the family. It thrived in its deep copulating steadiness. The hot contact thrived---the thick feminine rump, the hard male pressure, the moment, the sweating torpor of desire. These basic elements of love thrived and survived. They made children, families. They provided the only unity. A union was a close compact, a touching of buttocks, there wasn't comradeship in a union, there wasn't charm or curiosity or interest, or the slightest altruism. There was just the basic flesh-union that burst into quick and even wild moments of contact, and otherwise went along unconsciously, in torpor, and disgust. Nothing could shake off that reality. It was like the earth on which the city was founded. It smashed to pieces the slightest artificiality or convenient untruth or affectation. It just mocked it and trod it in the dust. It broke the little masquerades and practised quirks and oddities of character that are known in the north, and provided one basic and lasting wisdom that was tainted and stood with an absolute unconcious firmness for the rest of your life against make-believe and cleverness and so-called personality and

prestige and trumped-up mystery and all the unnatural things that comprise the northern world. Rome is a thoroughly natural city, with the freedom knocked out---it never started. And with this natural life that will never accept an attitude as reality, Rome has the maximum smashing and destroying power, together with the maximum healing and body-enriching qualities. But all the quirks and make-believe schemes of so-called personality in the northern world, and all the attitudes that pile invisibly higher and higher in the big northern city so that the air thrills with things about to happen, come from freedom. And with this Rome never has had any truck. You will know Christ through Rome, you'll get familiar with him even if you never mention his name or go in a church, his life has a curious pervading reality there, though it has no civic goodness or any other northern form, only a frightened, tenacious pity for the human creature in his night, the personal and intimate comfort you don't find in the north, which makes Rome a place of inner and personal pilgrimage by thousands of people in every generation who go to make their lives again, poor bastards, and to learn the basic principles again, as Melli and I did. You will know Christ all right but you won't be able to live him, you won't be able to grasp that intoxicating and dangerous gift that stemmed from him over generations and races and countries---freedom. Not in Rome. You may know it in yourself---or dream it, dimly. You may bring it. But it always will be very silent and closed inside, as Christ himself carried it. You won't take it for granted as you do in the northern life; it isn't outside you, handed to you on a plate. So in a way you do live Christ, but again basically, again in the flesh, as he did. You know him really for the first time. He's no longer historical or past. But you won't be able to take the gift of freedom from him, as a pure gift.

incorporated in your life, without bitterness, as in the north. Christ was one thing and you're another, Rome seems to say. And so you're a kind of slave. He is made the new invisible master, but the master has the inner, silent freedom to teach you, if you concentrate. That's the point---if you join the privileged and concentrate: then a new life begins, in solitude. Rome finally teaches solitude. The inner and silent message is there for you to understand, if you have the will. But most people don't want to understand, Rome says. They want to be safe. So Rome offers safety to the organs and senses and flesh. Not freedom.

Angelo and Francine were upstairs and said hullo very politely and formally in their little hall---they were like two children sometimes, Angelo with his fear of strangers, making him over-alert and excited. The moment Melli was sat down on the sofa his questionnaire started. What part of Germany did she come from? she had grown up in America? did she like America? she was going to be a sculptress? she was going to study in Rome? did she wish to become a great artist? did she want to be famous? what kind of work did she want to do---abstract, traditional, futurist? Melli nodded to nearly everything. That first evening passed slowly and quietly. We were all really gazing at each other---the talk meant nothing. Even Angelo seemed not to be concentrating on his questionnaire. We'd found each other, the four of us. Angelo didn't play any music, and we left early to take her back to her flat on the outskirts.

He asked her a lot about Germany. Did she know Berlin? what about Goethe? what did she read most of, English or German? And Melli sat there coolly all the time, usually answering with a smile, while Francine tried to interrupt him. He delved into Melli's eyes, trying to divine her. In the darkness of the

car on the way to her place he kept flashing her quick glances sideways, bouncing up and down a bit in his seat with a kind of sensual excitement, hunching his shoulders in a sudden movement as if he wanted to get rid of the collar of his jacket, then coughing in a way that made it sound like a word shouted, changing his position in the driver's seat, his hands playing on the steering wheel, his head turning quickly when he asked a question. He was more or less oblivious of me. Only the woman counted. And foreign! That meant---freedom: he put his hand quickly on her knee and withdrew it---it makes me smile now. It just needed a woman---a real woman---to put him into a blind, gleaming, tense state, so tense that it was nearly beyond sex.

As we drew into the strange shadows of the new garden suburb, where the proper roads stopped and wide dusty lanes took their place just like the roads in the desert leading out of Baghdad, with lights slung up temporarily on wires and swinging about in the breeze, the great new blocks rising out of the earth like coloured neat mountains glittering with lights, he turned to her with a last, 'Well, we're there, cara signorina!' and touched her leg again with his free hand as if he'd been preparing it for the last minutes, in a soft, confirming little pat. There wasn't rivalry between us but I was determined not to let Angelo have his own wife and my future one as well, so I jumped out of the car---in a kind of Anglo-Saxon abstract intimacy (the fellow citizens) that excluded this southern sex-maniac, and walked with her to the main door. I even made it seem---because Angelo was watching us hard from his tiny car---that there was already an understanding between us, I made it seem so to Melli as well, in case she had thoughts of falling for the dark one instead of the blond! This first choice is so precarious---dark equals blond---sometimes the blood wants this

one, sometimes that, but I was as determined about this as about anything in my life----so I found as I stood there. I wasn't competing with Angelo: there was just this flat determination in me. If there'd been competition I'd have given up: with the innate laziness that comes over me when there is any competing to be done. I always hand it to the other man on a plate. A sniff of competition in the air and all my resources are laid asleep. They were always admonishing you at school to cpmpete---when they weren't tanning your arse, tearing your balls off in a 'game', saying something sarcastic and 'teaching' you the functional pleasures of Anglo-Saxon life.

We stood in the dim shadows of the block, just outside the glass entrance, and arranged to see each other next day. I said I would come out and see her. To my astonishment she agreed. I half-expected her to peep round my shoulder and call out, 'Hullo, there, dark one, come and make an appointment, too!' I was as alive to Angelo's charm as if I'd been in her body. But instead she smiled up at me dimly, always from that distance---just beyond. And so we shook hands. I can remember now exactly what she was wearing as we said good night---it was a white, open-necked blouse, its collar tucked over the grey jacket, cool and clear like herself, suggesting a firm, straight intelligence, and unerring judgement.

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I forget if I was still working at the Forum on the seven wonders of the world as a German priest but I think the next day was my last and ~~then~~ we were payed off outside a café. I remember how different the light of the sky seemed to me that day, and what a springing elation caught hold of me and made the priest-work seem abject and ridiculous not as it had done before but in a new way

that left me untouched, because really I'd gone into another world, I knew it, I was no longer just myself, I was at the edge of something, a great new reality was about to begin and I had a new pride that calmed my nerves. I remember standing at the edge of the pavement that day, in a square nicknamed Piazza Quadrata, the 'square' square, a place I hated because of its empty din, its sombre blocks of flats, the dusty shops and tall sad trees looking down on tramlines, the little cinemas near by with neon lighting, and no reminder anywhere of Italy, which can't be said even of the new jerry-built districts, where at least people still sit outside in the evening. Most of my lonely hours seem to have been spent round that square. I can remember standing at the edge of the pavement in the hot noon sunlight, just before crossing the road, and feeling with this sudden spring of elation that I was about to be launched on to a vast new ~~calm~~ shining sea and that all I had to do instead of inwardly weeping and fighting and more and more encrusting myself in my own life and senses until I was nearly dead except in the pure functioning of my organs, was just to walk on, as myself, and I would be known for myself, for the first time as long as I could remember, perhaps for the first time in my life: I could return to myself. It seemed that hitherto I couldn't afford to be myself---I'd forgotten to be myself---not enough time, enough money.

It made me quieter---usually I would bound up the stairs to see Angelo and Francine, my other saviours, and launch into a long overpowering speech, until Angelo was tempted to take over with one of his own and we stood together sweating and gesticulating, with bread crumbs and wine stains all over the table, and Francine looking on quietly. But I changed. I was quieter. The quietness grew on me over the next few weeks. Francine, above all, was

to notice it, and say she didn't like it.

I went out to the garden suburb and we were together nearly the whole day. Little by little we realised we both wanted to---rest. Gazing at her was enough for me: listening to a record, glancing at a book, talking, drinking tea. With these intimacies we healed ourselves. Sex came about as easily as smoking. But smoking, as Egremont says in a book by Disraeli, is 'the tomb of love'. This sex is a kind of initation rite in our world. It makes conversation easier. I can remember our first sensations. There was ~~absolutely~~ no pleasure. There was the impression of rumpled clothes---not much else. Her shyness was what sometimes never abates in a woman---the organs have made an habitual recoil from the outside world since childhood; her organs were like mine---used to 'pleasure', namely hard interest, but not ~~xxxix~~ satisfaction at all. I can remember when our organs met, and it was as narrowly physical as possible: pure touch. It was less than it would have been with a whore. We weren't fit for sex, either of us. There was only the itch. It wasn't the sex that grips the middle---wracks the middle of the body in its spasm, like the centre of an axis. It was just bareness. In proper sex there is no body, yet there is nothing but. The moment is enclosed in a shared dream---this is why brothel-sex is no good in our epoch, and why the brothels have mostly died out; because there's no shared dream between strangers, as there used to be. This dream comes after a long search, nowadays. And we were a long way from even starting that search. It was just a ritual of secretion: the middle of the body was only accessory---the breasts and prick were the bare instruments of a kind of pleasure-contest. Only later when we turned to the outside world---when we delved into each other's

tastes---when we turned the sex into light and air, and talked it away, when literally there was no sex left, nothing between our bodies at all---did the dream begin that led to the mystery of real body, as secret as light itself.

I looked back on the previous few months. I'd been doing so much. Spurious activity grew like twining roots out of my loneliness, until the whole organism was nearly choked to death. And it was a terrifically exciting state. I remembered that. The outer skin had a strange febrile touch, warm and toned-up, but there was nothing inside except rehearsal for activity. I didn't get experiences right through to the inside. I didn't get any relish or slow dawning appreciation. There was too much tomexorcise and waylay. I don't mean I clung to other people's company. I spent long hours alone. But it wasn't really being alone. It was activity. Even the lonely experience, which is a marvellous one, didn't reach right through me. My experience was masturbated: I was a good member of the middle class.

I threw myself into everything---a dance at the little house at Frascati, drinking coffee in the village square---but there was no fullness. I was present to those places in my excited and talkative and exhilarated self, but not in my permanent reality. That stayed in suspense. I was fascinated and intrigued all the time, I had an endless intoxication with the simplest things--- standing at the side of a country lane smoking, lying under a vine on a hot day, sitting in a church, making myself a sandwich of tomatoes, with chopped rosemary and olive oil, and plenty of pepper; but it wasn't total participation. For others it was: I was with them as I never was again, later. I was aware of a certain static misery underneath: a starvation of self I couldn't put my finger on. It was like signing my name to life every minute but

seeing no more than the promising and colourful contract. Only the shell of life was offered. I can remember those hours at the house so well---in the heat of the afternoon, with the radio blaring---somebody had passed by and flicked it on---or the cicadas bellowing outside among the olive trees, a truck thundering by on the road below, with a cloud of dust, and the hours would slip by, the nerves were still, waiting for their next adventure, the blood was thick, I was hot and aware all the time, but the real fibre of self was gone. In London, and then in Berlin, this fibre had been snapped every moment of the day. Now it was laid asleep.

Only sleep was a real pleasure. But the moment I was awake in the morning there was the bleak question of how I was going to live, ~~get~~ make money. Yet I didn't get a job. I had a degree, I'd even taught at a university. It would have been so easy. But I was ashamed to. I remember standing in the Piazza ~~St.~~ S. Silvestro, near the post office, with a friend who was showing me a printed form put out by some school, which you had to sign if you wanted a job there. I could have filled it in. But I didn't. I didn't want a solution. I didn't want to make things easier for myself. I was on a test of some kind. I wasn't clear what this was. But it was a test of my whole life, therefore my whole powers. I would stand at the life-frontier and say, 'This is my total identity, I have no other, and this act baptises my identity.' I wanted to baptise the meaning of my life. I didn't want to finance my identity in any way. I just wanted to wait, in my total and complete self, and let fate put on its stamp of guarantee, to set my actual day-to-day life on that path and that path alone, so that it was no longer in the slightest degree even a chosen and therefore academic being. So I waited, going to sleep in my little room with the glass door, near the staircase where people

clattered up and down all day. A letter came from London---there was a job for me in Ankara, if I wanted it, with long holidays, voyage paid. From the Turkish embassy. But I said no. I was too busy being destitute.

I'd been trying to do that---lay myself bare---for a long time before. I can remember the same shame in Baghdad, even while I was teaching happily at the university, and writing my own work in the afternoons and evenings. The work there was light and fairly easy. I took classes in the mornings, between nine and midday. I used to stroll down to the college from my house on the outskirts of the city. The college-year was over before the real summer heat started, so that the weather was bright and spring-like most of the time, with a clear glittering sunlight and a warm wavering breeze coming in from the desert. It was called the country of two springs. We used to go out to Babylon sometimes and picnic there, or drive out to the arch of Tesiphon, visit one of the desert villages. Once I went with my students on a small steamboat we hired, along the Tigris, where it was narrow and flat and untroubled, between grassy banks, in the cool weather, with everything glittering, while we sprawled on the little decks or hung over the sides; and I remember we arrived at a tiny summer-house, hardly more than one room, but with a proper roof and walls, like the river-house of a palace, gleaming white with a perfect lawn and palm trees in front, immediately on the river, and we all hopped off the boat, picnic baskets were taken down, dance records were put on and the girls started dancing together, their long black hair touching and their hips moving slowly, in the heavy Arab way. It was all totally silent round us, with the water not moving and not a soul to be seen. The sun glittered and dazzled all the time, the boat swayed ever so slightly at its anchor, and

the water lapped at its sides.

When I finished work those mornings in Baghdad I would stroll back to the house, or get a lift from one of the richer girls whose father owned a Cadillac or Oldsmobile, and after a lunch in the long dining room from which I could see palm trees and the white square house next door, I would sleep, with that dead sleep of the desert-countries, and then read while tea was being got for me. Then I might sit at the desk and write, or stay on my bed in a dreaming state. I might listen to music, on a gramophone borrowed from one of the colleges. Some afternoons I had to go down to the college to supervise a club or discussion group---something deadly that was called cultural for some reason. But mostly I was free after midday. And in the evening there would be one of the hotels by the river, with a friend, or an hour in the little windowless bar of the Riverside hotel where you got chicken livers and brandy. The money was good, all I wanted. But there was shame underneath. I was aching all the time to give it up while I was feeling content. For one thing there was the shame of getting good money in a place where people walked past you in rags and where whole villages were starving. But that feeling might have abated, in time---after all, my Arab friends were earning good money too, as doctors or lawyers or something, and they were the people who were supposed to be the hope of the country. And there were medical schemes, irrigation schemes, slum-clearance schemes---things were changing, the comparison would have become less stark as the middle class in the city grew and took its propperity for granted. The shame---like a power tugging at my jacket all the time, even while I clowned about in the classes, feeding my girls with words and books and all sorts of wind they'd never heard before, even while I was giving myself publicly as I'd never done before---the quiet shame

acted all the time: I wasn't doing what my life-identity required.

I could argue that I was doing it, that I was writing as I'd never done in my life before---in security, knowing where the next week's money was coming from---I could argue that this was bringing security---order---into my work. But it was no good. The facts weren't enough. I had to be wholly my life-identity. I had to obey that.

I obeyed it against my interests, my freedom and certainly my happiness. I closed the college-contract after a year and didn't go back. The last few weeks there hadn't been very happy; it was lonely, there were the usual intrigues you get in these colleges allmover the earth, I seemed to be getting enwebbed in trouble. But that didn't matter. It wouldn't have stopped me going back. Since it wasn't my whole life I could play the required games easily. I was amazed how much I demanded sometimes, what risks I took---I just went my own way in the teaching and if anybody disagreed with me that was too bad, they would have to get used to me. So people approached me gingerly. That ease---the sense of not being really committed there---gave me authority. And I used it more and more. I made a nuisance of myself when I could, to keep my place intact---I showed my teeth when one of the ladies on top, whose husband was later sentenced to death by the revolution, stuffed a lot of refrigerators in my top classroom to start a course in housekeeping. That was my Hamlet room, as opposed to my Rape of the Lock room across the way, and the refrigerators were probably all part of a dim policy of intrigue in any case. My attitude was that it was a privilege for them to have me, and to pay me, and this attitude was easy for me because it was unconscious, I mean I really did feel it was a privilege for

them. It amazes me now---having since then demeaned myself and begged and cajoled for money---how I leapt into that income as if I'd had it all my life, without even a thank-you, with a nice two-storey house on the outskirts and a couple of servants, and girls feeling flattered to give me a lift home in dad's limousine, and citizens actually competing to have me as a private tutor for their children at a rate which even now, over eight years later, seems fabulous. I ~~was~~ had a limousine---long and dazzling, with a chauffeur---to take me to my private lessons two afternoons a week in the centre of town, and I used to ~~step~~ walk out of the house after an early tea in a grudging and uncooperative state of mind, and hear the cracking radio from inside the car with irritation, before I stepped into the soft pinkish interior and was whisked purringly away between the palm trees, still yawning, with the ugly little textbooks in my hands, towards my illiterate charges. Those extra hours were the only ones I taught grammar in. They were drudgery and nothing else. I had two pupils and they learned what they could. The heat was beating up at that time, and was stifling even in the early hours of evening, and we lounged about, with water trickling down straw in the doorways, to keep the air cool. The two boys liked to waste my time talking about the city and I let them. We struggled through the two hours like dead men, and I tried to stuff English down their throats like handfulls of pork-fat: they brought it up immediately. When I got annoyed they smiled in the Middle Eastern way---it livened their afternoons up a bit.

In the college I got a name for being a bit of a clown, among the girls, and I used the clowning method to teach. The fact that they were all girls made it easier. But I yearned for men-classes as well, or at least for the mixed classes the other

colleges had. The women intrigued and gossiped too much. You could never get anything straight home, without this little web of the harem. But fate had put me into a women's college. And really it was a harem. They came, most of them, draped in the veil, and took it off for the classes. Hardly one of them had been alone with a man before, ~~without him being~~ unless he was a brother or at least a close cousin. If it had ever happened it had been a fluke---or a betrayal. And here they were alone with a man for hours on end, every morning. At first I had no idea about this. I was there to teach, to talk about Pope and Hamlet and Chaucer, and teach I would. I clowned to get my points home, but it had other effects. They used to press up against me when I marked their books---'Come and have your book marked, Fatima'---and I used to wonder why. I thought they were interested in what I was saying.

I think I worried more about money at that time than ever before, because I was getting enough of it. Enough money always poses the question, what is going to happen if the supply stops. I begrudged spending any of it---I wanted to buy myself two or three years of independence, to write my books in. This was how I saw all money, as buying that. How much of a silent room would it buy, for how long? Of course, I did spend---they seemed enormous amounts. And I never seemed to have anything in the bank. This was due mostly to an admirable Jew in the ministry of finance to whom you had to go to get your balance-sheet straight. He never told you exactly what you had in the kitty---in fact, he told you hundreds of pounds less, so that you were always anxious to cut down your expenses. At the end, when I wound up the contract, I was surprised how much I really had, apart from the bonus. He sat crumpled up in an untidy tropical suit over his desk,

sweating, with piles of untidy files and contracts and accounts all round him and on every table and chair. To sit you down he always had to remove a little pile of dusty accounts. And you always had to wait. He nodded to you politely when you walked in but never attended to you at once. That was his little kingship. He was the only one in the building, I heard, who could really do accounts, he had a genius for them that the Arabs couldn't understand and were awed and silenced by, and he governed all these massive amounts of money with a careful, kindly, tyrranical eye. Everything was impossible with him, the moment you mentioned it. Could you have fifty pounds at once? Fifty? Impossible! And you would come away with half---to be deposited in the bank next week, perhaps. You were baffled because although you knew the money was yours he had a way of covering it with mystery so that you didn't know quite how much you'd already spent of it. The bank account might be in front of you but he always had little rules and provisions which showed why all the money due to you hadn't been paid in and might never be. It never once occurred to me to bribe him. In Italy I would have done it at once. But I think it was the sense and size of the power he liked. He was a charming, quietly spoken man with a sudden soft yet piercing gaze, never presuming beyond his exact position but using it with a nice kingly fullness. One had to climb up an iron staircase to get to his corridor, in a dusty, flaking building with irrigated lawns, parched palm trees and gravel paths outside, with that queer heavy air of foreboding that there is round an Arab government building.

I never got used to the money there. I never felt I really had it but that it passed like a tinsel episode, doing nothing for my position in life, securing nothing that money is supposed to buy. The money-part was like a dream, not touching me. I

remember stopping at a tiny wine-store in the main street one autumn evening, when it was dark and still warm, on the way home, to buy some drink for the sideboard, which had been empty since I arrived: I'd reached the estate of having a sideboard of drinks and there was the money to do it with. So, always with the sense that I was spending hours of the life I ought to be leading, I ordered a roughly adequate sideboard---gin, whiskym brandy, some sherry and so forth. I can remember feeling that the storeman, a dark, quick, smiling Arab with a sharp face, wouldn't allow the order in some way, wouldn't take it seriously. But he went on writing the order down. And I was afraid all the time that I wouldn't have enough money in my pocket to pay. And it didn't seem my right. I felt the right would be questioned. I didn't have the personal power to do the ordering, I felt. It wasn't my world. I seemed to be apologising to him, even, I felt apologetic. And I more or less stumbled from the shop, with the sense of a crime on my shoulders. The first 'sideboard' I had ordered! Well, he promised to have it all sent to the house, and I half-expected it not to arrive. But it was there before I got home. It didn't seem much after all. Only a few bottles. I forget how they were drunk, in what circumstances. I believe I didn't get any more. There was always this sense I had of violating a certain inner chord---a certain place I tried to obey, but without any clear consciousness, I couldn't have put the matter into words.

I bought suits and shirts made to measure for the first time in my life. I had no idea what I was doing in these clothes-shops---I mean, having been brought up in England I had no idea of comportment, no sense at all like the Italian sense, which every person has rich or poor, of what becomes the body and makes it feel easy and assured and harmonious. At that time clothes

for me were things you flung on with a sort of feverish perplexity, wondering if they would stick and not explode on your skin like industrial boils or get you into fierce arguments with Irishmen on the streetcorner when the pubs closed, or tempt the conductor to stop the bus and have you put off for general unfitness. I didn't inherit from my world the clear, sane, restful sense of the body which Italians have and which at one time was the rightful inheritance even of slaves. I can remember stumbling through the streets where I was born feeling like a criminal and hiding my eyes from everybody that passed by, much as they were doing from me, I expect. The air of those streets, the grim shopfronts, the creak and clatter of the trams, the forbidding-looking grey pavements of asphalt, made the body start and draw back and lose that first natal connection with the physical life of the outside breathing world, bit by bit. I had had holidays from this fearful nervous background, which it would take years to undo: one was in Austria, where I stayed on a farm near Salzburg, in a wooden room with a long balcony looking down on the valley of the Salzach, and I started writing my second book there, with hesitation and in a sort of broken grief which only allowed intermittent glimpses-through of real life---of my own real life---while the cool misty airs drifted through the window, and cow-bells sounded across the valley, the chickens clucked in the yard below, and the family moved about talking in raucous voices with an occasional thump on the kitchen table or the scrape of a milk pail. Those few weeks gave me the first clear hint of my real voice for a long time---the voice drifted in from the steep hills, and when we got back to London it entered fully into me, like a wonderful recollection become organ and flesh; I began writing again, with the room upside down all round me, ladders and whitewash pails and rolls of wallpaper, and decorators coming and

going, so that I felt the voice was all the more sure and that I'd done the journey that had exorcised the war and the nervous defeats that had preceded it like a mounting army to crush the last fibres of hope and pleasure. At the end of that time, with the substance of the Austrian book done, I remember sitting down at a desk by the window and thinking, 'Now what?' And the answer to that was a telegram from Baghdad asking me to come over. Within ten days I was there.

Baghdad was my first release into the body---the war had only been a hint of it, hedged in and stunted by murder. In Baghdad I began to realise the effects of having a God-given body, the stupendous inheritance which this was and which I'd always half-disregarded before and been cheated out of in some way by the life round me. It was in the tiniest things, like taking a glass of lemon tea in the morning, or standing in the quiet sandy quadrangle at the back of the college. In sex the body had been lacking in some way, there'd been appetite and a gnawing underground local desire, but the complete functioning body was in abeyance, there was the fog of a hostile outer life round it, a public life that throbbed and hummed in the streets and denied the intimate processes of the body, its leisurely requests and long-drawn-out fulfilments. In those London streets you had a hot stabbing desire between your legs---for the woman next door you peeped at through the window, the girl you glimpsed taking a bath one summer night, the towel waving madly over her naked shoulders like a naughty dance, the woman who stood at the bus-stop at about seven every evening and looked monstrously inviting from behind. I remember this hot sensation of desire was so maddening that once I stood in the middle of the local reference library and ejaculated there and then, in a flood, because of a woman reading

close by.

Every event in Baghdad banished the old nervous body---from the blatant, crackling call-to-prayer that came over the city loud-speakers at dawn every morning to the splashing of oars on the muddy, eddying river at night after the sun had gone down and coloured lights shone from the minarets and hotel gardens. Leisure started getting into my body. I remember the long walk home from the college, along the half-made roads that almost melted in the noon-heat. And there was the tiny kiosk near the house, at the edge of a ~~tiny~~ public garden with border flowers, where I used to get bottles of Coca-cola on hot afternoons, and water melons. The pressing claims of the outside life died away, the silent organs, that had been shocked into dimness, began to thrive and show themselves plain, as an extraordinary common inheritance---divine, yet shared with every creature on the earth. It was the opposite of the Anglo-Saxon death-life, which said that the body was a work-unit, and pleasure taking time off.

In the last few weeks there I felt stranded---spied-on; the heat had started. Gossip travelled fast and even the policeman on point-duty was supposed to note every car that passed him and its occupants, if they were worth noting. My neighbour, a Kurd, told me he'd never had trouble finding out if his wife was up to any tricks when she went out in the car every afternoon---the police traced her route all over the city.

On the hot, stormy days the city felt grotesque and haunted. There was this sense of an unpredictable, spying power, close to your own conscience, changeable as you were changeable, doing invisible things that might easily involve you one day. Terrific heat always seems to produce disgust with creation. The sky bears down with a personal relentless weight, only releasing you

to your own thoughts in the dead of the night. I used to try and snatch the early coolness at dawn, walking out on to my balcony. But already the sun had that fierce, sickening glow that bored into everything. By eleven the weight of the sky had come down, the whole city was still. Then all there was for it was to sweat and drink. Sometimes the evenings gave a sudden surprising coolness and it was possible to take a bus to one of the hotels without getting your clothes wet all through. I came to dislike even the croaking little buses that went along the main street, which I'd enjoyed at first; now they were dusty, scorching monsters, breathing fire when you got near them, grinding along in a wet mist of heat.

I felt ~~terrifiedly~~ strangely threatened in that heat. I had good friends---Arabs and Kurds. But the feeling wouldn't leave me. It was a deep inner threat---not entirely outside me. It seemed so easy to die like a dog (or a king) and not be missed, death was so close, breathing at the edge of your skin; and that was the fascination as well, like a drug. It was the whole meaning of the place in a way. There was the fascination that you could yield at any moment to that vast, breathing death like a sunset all round you, belonging to no particular time---full of ages ago, from before your birth. That was the element of struggle. You wanted to ~~get~~ cut clear---now, at once, at any cost---anything to get away from the city, into the next country, to the sea, just a few hundred miles across the desert. Then, oh, the safety and long cool hours, like being received back into your own life again! And you would recognise yourself again with such relief: because, at the same time, you had wanted to stay. You wanted to surrender, and you wanted to escape that want in yourself. The word Islam, after all, means surrender. There's the chance of surrender

all the time---such a perfect finding of yourself, such a complete arrival at what you are at the last frontier that there is nearly no self left. I mean, a surrender to the death of self. A great ecstasy would accrue from that, in the coolness of the two springs, in the pitiless heat and the crushing scandals of the city, an ecstasy of release from self which goes very well with the slow clicking of beads in the hand on a hot afternoon.

When I got to Beirut on the Lebanon coast I was so relieved that I nearly danced in the roadway. I got down from the desert-bus and just stood there breathing in the air for a few minutes. So cool! The sea frothed and splashed and rolled close to the road, there were cafés, restaurants, French food. I stayed there a few days getting my senses back and taking the old relish in things. And I had a renewed sense of individuality. But it was illusory. It was the kind based on organisation---on one's joining the clatter of the world: not based on ourselves, through and through, forged in the slow machinations of the will. When <u>that</u> comes about it's invisible. Nobody sees it.

But the freedom came back. My name---what my life was to be---the friends I had---my date of arrival at the next town: choice and decision came back. Yet in Baghdad I'd laid the basis even of that freedom. The <u>work</u> was done there, sweating in the afternoon with nothing on above the waist, sitting on my bed; this work was blindfold, as it were, it sprang from a source of surrender, and in a way the self <u>did</u> yield at last, so that the conscious will gave place to the deep organic one which just moves in the direction of the required object. And it had all seemed so difficult before---the self had been there before with its illusory identity, prompting me to false efforts and stunned for the lack of anything to surrender to, always referred back to its miniat-

ure will, which is the personal will, not the grand will which is there from birth and slow of growth, altogether invisible and never in harmony with the personal will, which prompts solutions and keys and short cuts and good ideas all the time, and never the total necessity that lies outside as objectively as the sun, and about which there is no arguing when the time comes, to which there is no alternative and for the satisfaction of which no idea is any good because no idea has any relevance. Before, the self always got its invitation, 'Speak!'. But now it got the invitation that couldn't be refused, to listen.

I can remember sitting at a terrace-café in Beirut, outside, under a cool awning, high above the road that runs by the beach, looking out to sea on a glittering, spacious morning soon after I'd arrived from Baghdad. I was talking to somebody but the state I remember was that of looking out to sea across the bright, shining buildings, and containing in that moment the whole of my life, not its events ~~or even its tone;~~ but its proper meaning, that was light and glittering and hopeful like the sea and the road below; I sat perfectly still in my wicker chair, with the tortured weeks of Baghdad well behind me, and the morning seemed endless. There was this picture that had no image at all---the essential moment of a whole life, summarising everything in such a way that no words or images were possible, being only a breath of intimation like a breeze from the sea, stirring the striped awning above us and sweeping away the noises from the road below. It had something to do with books, this moment---that was as near as it came to a definite thing: the smell and touch and shape of books was there, the strange, awed moment of writing that was always full of trembling and fear, the act that came from a spell and yet cast a spell when it was done, every day; the invisible light in the moment of

writing, that was there, the invisible image that touched all real sights and sounds and penetrated them to where they lay together in one dream, always with this hope and terrific clean gladness that could never be impaired or drained away but stood for all time, taking in any age and state and remaining absolutely the same; that picture---moment---seemed half out at sea, where it was dazzling-blue and calm with bright white foam now and then on some of the slow breakers, it seemed held up above the sea, in the air, touched by the town as well, not separate at all, but getting some of its bustling reality from the edge of the town where there were boats, trucks and customs-houses on the harbour, where there was a smell of good morning coffee and the garlic going into the lunch-dishes, and the sound of gulls, and the hushed, gutteral, clandestine sound of Arabic.

It was perhaps the first real moment of well-being that I remember. The meaning of ~~your~~ my life was caught and enclosed in a state that being real wasn't in time at all but without beginning or end, only anchored to that terrace-café and the pleasant striped awning for want of a place to be. And yet the presence of those things round me, the sea down below, was so strong that the state didn't seem possible without them: they clung to that moment so strongly that they were penetrated ~~to their reality~~ with it---no longer awning and sea and the sounds in the street, but the ways and motions of a dream of life that is like a glimpse of creation. That image had something to do with my future, what I would do, and also with the past, but in such a way that it made time and present and future and past, and also any achievement, any act of doing, meaningless. Yet it was a guide, also. It was a help to my will, and a proof of my will. It was a <u>sign</u> to me, of the way I would go about things. It was a moment of relish for all

sorts of work I would do---work not yet formulated or even imagined; it was a substitute moment for working---the peculiar dream-work that you need to sustain the actual, live work; it was the warmth that provided the later glow, and illumined everything. It was strange I should have it then, just after the hot weeks in Baghdad, as if to say, 'Now here's your freedom again, most of it made <u>for</u> you and not <u>by</u> you---don't just walk into it again and take it for granted, learn from this moment what your meaning is, try to keep yourself as you were in Baghdad, keep your surrender, keep the thinking-will down, let the dream-will through, don't let the world put it to sleep by offering you the other thing, the 'work' in which you can shine and move and impress---keep this image as your authority, keep what belongs to you.' And yet it wasn't articulate. It was far removed from a decision of any kind. It was only a moment that seems to me <u>now</u> to have said those words. And that moment had something to do with feeling clean---with the bright cloth of my tropical clothes, the sea-bleached awning above, the clear air of the harbour, and the sun that poured down in one huge, uninterrupted avalanche of yellow light, not pausing for any corner and yet not scorching the heart out of things as it had done in Baghdad.

That I would ever go to Italy and live there was all unknown to me. But the friend I was with had relatives there; he was part-Italian. ~~Perhaps that was why I went---just a visit on my way back to England.~~ After three or four days I walked down to the harbour and got my ticket, on an Italian boat. It would stop at Naples, after a call at Syracuse, and I decided to get off the boat at Naples and take a train up to Rome.

It was a gleaming white boat, quite small, with tiny lounges like those on the cross-Channel boats. I sat in one of these

for hours on end in a half-dreaming state, with the sunlight pouring in through the doorway from the deck and the engines throbbing quietly underneath, on a smooth blue sea. I remember an Italian family---and elderly man and his wife with a young girl---who sat there quietly, seeming in the same state as myself, hardly ever talking to each other but gazing round in an intelligent way, politely attentive to everything but at the same time easy, in the way ~~some~~ Italians of the educated classes have, their expressions fine and rested, a shade intimidated by the foreign world, with a fear of not coming up to its needs, so that they seem to have a fine and clear perception, ~~a certain circumspectness~~ through concentrating on the subtleties they feel they're supposed to show, and also through a real subtelty, a certain minuteness of intelligence that goes with good nerves and the ingrained fear of vulgarity that you get in the peasant countries. I wanted to talk to them but I knew no Italian then, and I kept on leaving it to another day as the boat drifted on; I gazed and read and dreamed in the flashing white sunlight coming in from the sea, with the noise putting my nerves at rest, so that I seemed to be talking to this family already, underneath, in the throbbing silence, and in the light that would be there for ever, in the sea that ~~turned and turned~~ rolled and didn't bother about anyone, and in the cool, rock-dry air that came across from Greece, the sky that had seen gleaming temples with huge pillars and marble Apollos standing in the sea and other ancient things that made words unnecessary and meant that this quiet Italian family of three had come close to me and an act of recognition had passed between us, in a way none of us would quite be able to realise, though the peculiar organic and silent connection would always remain, having solved something in each of us perhaps that we could only recognise slowly, after many years. I remember

the man's slight, pointed beard with its touch of grey, and his delicate, small, penetrating eyes, reticent and shy; he was at a frontier of life, perhaps; and I remember the girl with her unmoving, clear face, her eyes quite still as she gazed across the room, hardly moving, always with a certain wondering caution in her, like an animal, her experience untouched yet, unattacked. The mother is vague to me. She was a shadow to the others, accompanying them, inside them all the time, fully given to their rhythm, and so her face was vague to me, her actual lines were unnecessary to the act of knowing her.

I liked these states---rare enough then---of complete, half-dreaming acceptance, without the nervous attack and foresight education had tried to teach me. I remember a similar state in Tel Aviv during the war, close to the beach, when I was eating fruit at a café-table ~~outside~~ on a kind of cement clearing that sloped down to the sea, on a hot day in the late afternoon, one Saturday, with two or three other soldiers. I remember how the underground numbing misery of being a soldier lifted from me for a moment, leaving its twin---the splendour of having no identity, hardly a name, no aim except to survive, hardly a wish except the wish in dreams that doesn't even hope for possibility, the ~~splendour~~ glory of never asking why, the tension to sounds like an animal; the splendour kept ~~the~~ its twin misery from rotting ~~the~~ my body and ~~his~~ resolve; it was nature's way; there were sorrow and pain but no melancholy, the thwarting misery from my former life had stopped---nature saw to this. Two years or so before that I'd fallen in ~~love~~ love, when I was still at school, in the country, and the two of us had separated in that catastrophic way young people have in a world that has nothing healthy to teach. In the army I carried her photograph about everywhere, I looked at it until it was no longer a face for

me but millions of little spots on a piece of paper, I couldn't remember her face any longer, I daydreamed about her every night before I went to sleep, I filled up every spare minute with her image in the daytime more or less all through the war, I searched the letters I got from other people for a little mention of her, what she was doing, even if it was terrible; this, too, was something that kept me together, it was the good accompanying dream, from a wrong and bad world---I had to take that world's odd cures with its errors. It would have been better if I'd just had desires and purged them with whores, this is a better world, but it wasn't mine. I belonged to the falling-in-love world. And so I never really enjoyed a woman all through the war, it was all catastrophe for me, I was never united to the Woman I should otherwise have come to know in childhood and sustained through all the first desires of puberty; Woman for me was a gnawing and itching licence---a dream that took half my prick while 'love' took the other, so the poor little chap got nothing real out of it for himself. There was no real desire in me in the war, there wasn't in the other men, either; one or two married men seemed to have it, and to satisfy it. But most of the others were like me. Since the falling-in-love world is necessarily the masturbation-world, desires weren't all that urgent. Soldiers seemed to prefer a smoke and a talk, with something to drink, in a tent or a low bivouac, with the rain or sun outside and the sound of the country, or in a big hotel lounge turned over to the army, in Taranto, Bari, Ancona, Forlì, Naples. There wasn't sex. Everybody had been prepared badly for the world he was in now, which really had to do with the mysteries of the body and the earth, with the spur of death everywhere, for which---even for death---we weren't glorious enough. Yet there was a glory to be had, and it was

the opposite of war---the opposite of shock: all the time I was being shaken and torn under new shocks, in my young body, and I was being healed as well.

People had no stature for each other---that was the world the army had come out of, a world where a man mustn't lift his head too hggh, and thus a world where his sex, which is his glory, ~~his sense of the future and his self-respect,~~ was damaged and humiliated. And so, while a soldier was learning glory in his body, through the fruit he was eating, the marvellous nights spent awake close to the Mediterranean, through the spur of death and the smells of the countryside, the first glimpses of a world that didn't banish him intimately, he was officially insignificant and nothing, just a unit of murder-work.

So many people ended the war with ~~thexfxxxing~~ relief that they'd got through, but with the contradictory feeling that they'd glimpsed something they would never have again, which they didn't understand, which seemed even to put them on the side of war, except that they had yearned for peace; ~~and really did have this extraordinary relief when it was over; but still~~ there was this reminder that somethigg wrong seemed to have been going on in their pre-war lives---that this wrongness would perhaps continue now, once they'd settled down again, something they didn't understand but which amounted to a total criticism of themselves and society.

And so there was a lot of restlessness and misery after the war, especially as war-conditions didn't stop but went on for ten or fifteen years, with all real sense of England---of France---of Germany---of Italy---gone, except as a dream, a daydream of the past, with American armies and weapons keeping the actual material frontiers intact.

The settling-down took place, gradually, there were children

to look after, the intimacy of wives and home, the little sights and sounds that after happening regularly a year and then two and then five and then ten became as inflexible a part of the outside reality as the stars and the sound of the sea had been in the war, and then the children began to grow up with no knowledge of what you meant, with their yearnings that made your country seem a real country again, because it was the scene of their early wonderful desires, so that the tiniest corner that seemed to have been discarded by war was mysterious to you again, through their yearnings which found the smallest place enough---a possibility of heaven everywhere.

And then working people were better-off---the process had started in the war, through higher wages and the strength of the trade unions. There was a terrible weariness with the old life, the old false accents of the suburban middle class that had governed everything before the war, the old division of life into class-shadows that no one really took seriously but which had seemed to correspond with existing interests, the old world where unimaginative people thrived and ~~reality~~ reality was another word for NO---there was such weariness with it all. Working people began to flood into the middle class, children went to school in thousands; the country seemed to be concentrating---in those years after the war---on this one thing, the graduation of working people into middle-class life; and for a time there seemed a chance of a new middle class. But it wasn't so. The old shadows didn't disappear. Only the real interests behind them had gone. But the shadows were still there. Something strange happened. The settling-down went on quickly but with peculiar dissatisfactions everywhere, underneath. Things weren't quite right. Life wasn't quite---authentic, as it had been once. The authority seemed to have gone out of people.

Yet things did seem right. On the surface they seemed quite all right. No one gave any evidence---in talk and books and plays and things like that---that they weren't all right. The old names came back, the old faces, some of the old annoying accents---strange! together with good wages, new schools and all the paraphernalia of a new reality. There was irritation underneath, a thwarting of life on a massive scale that was much worse than before the war, and which sent not just lonely men abroad but thousands and thousands of ordinary bright people, until England had the highest emigration rate in the world.

The atmosphere wasn't of something bad or hard. It had been much more so before the war. There was a new quietness over everything. There wasn't the old bad struggle, with hard-faced business men on top, the sense of violence being done to life all the time, through rackets and hidden scandals and dirty political deals and the rough handling of poor people. There wasn't the old sense of power being brandished everywhere. And there was a big change underneath, in people. You could see it. They were turning to something new. But it was smothered. All life seemed smothered now, in a strange way. People's faces began to look smothered---to the outsider. There didn't seem power---anywhere. People began to look less authoritative---not simply less certain but less authentic in the pores of their skin, not just in their gestures but in the cast of their features. They didn't seem to be developing properly, freely---with real struggles. I noticed this more and more after the war. Only the real old class---who still had a few remnants at the top---kept a bit of the old atmosphere of authority. But in the ordinary middle-class positions there was only a sort of fancy-dress authority, a kind of imitation of the previous world which was kept going by something other than its own efforts

and ideas. They didn't seem to need ideas. It seemed that the English middle class could be kept going officially, like a subsidised institution, without dreams or disturbing ideas that could change its organisation. The violence and hardness, the sense of rackets and hard-won authority, had moved to America.

Englishmen came to resemble policemen---keeping everything in order, marking time. They were the quietest, most just and decent and obliging policeman in the world, they didn't wear uniforms or carry weapons---their traditions (another subsidised reality) prevented uniforms and weapons. But still they were policemen. There was a way to do everything, a way to say it. There was a status quo to maintain, in almost every field. But what was this status quo? It didn't seem to exist. And a certain puzzlement grew in people's eyes. They were telling you the letter of the law in the service of---what?

And I felt this the more as I began to live abroad. I began to see my country clearly, with a peculiar troubled love.

It seemed that there was a formula for everything. Where there was a question of power being exercised---in offices, mostly---it had to be enclosed in a peculiar smothered formula that was frightening because it was ghostly---unreal. There could be no sign of a living and talking person in this formula. Actual persons were smothered. There weren't persons any more but credentials. And these credentials seemed ghostly, too, and therefore ffightening. They seemed to come from nowhere. They were marks on a piece of paper.

Ibcan remember an interview I had for a fellowship at Oxford---I had the idea then of becoming a don so as to give myself the time to write books, but it was a brief idea because I realised that horror is no gateway to freedom, on however safe a

salary. I can remember, in the horror of the quiet long carpeted room where the candidates were interviewed by about a dozen dons, that I talked to persuade them how I was going to change the people I taught, I thought this was what teaching meant, provoking to change: on my right I had a 'philosopher', a fairly young man with an unhealthy, puffy face, so deeply smothered behind concepts that his words seemed to come out through endless fluffy filters; and I can remember his quiet, sarcastic voice, which seemed to me strangely yellow like jaundice at the time, because it summarised so much of the poison of irritated and muffled violence that had accumulated through the war and through the years of substitute-peace afterwards, I remember his voice asking me whether, after I'd done my work of--- er---missionary zeal, I would be prepared to teach my pupils a little philosophy perhaps?

Officially I had a hope in eleven of getting that job, but really it was a hope in a million. It was the zeal that stood in my way, not my real unfitness, which was ignorance.

Englishmen's clothes---that was another awful thing. They hadn't changed since the Thirties, not as far as ordinary men went. They began to look greyer and greyer. It wasn't just the war--- because this particular thing didn't get better with peace. If anything it got worse. People crept round like beetles under a stone, cheered up by a stale cup of tea at the station-buffet or music from the loudspeakers, or an announcement from a voice which didn't know what accent to keep and so was fake-genteel. Some necessary belief in self, some power to carry the head high, had gone. The less style you had the better for you in that world: unless of course the style had a formula, and if it didn't it was soon fitted into one. The policemen guarded, preserved; but nothing changed or was born. Nothing offended

because nothing was risked. It was all shadows and gestures. The truth wasn't talked. You were free in an uneasy way, too free---smothered in indifference. Issues seemed temporarily to have disappeared. There was no real argument about anything. There was no real politics, since there was no real political choice, all the political power was formed and determined outside England and outside Europe. Politics was just how much money you should get for how much work, how many slums should be pulled down and whether a road should be built: you ~~wouldn't~~ didn't get the young arguing about it, because it was all administrative, there was no real fight in it any more, all the fighting had been done by other generations. And yet this truth never really transpired: it didn't come out; you would think, from all the institutional talk on the radio and in the films and newspapers, all the talk that poured from people who showed the right credentials, that everything was as authentic as it had always been, that there was nothing wrong. The real truth---that England was not an independent country-didn't come out. Politically it was obvious. But it didn't go further. The important thing wasn't even that independence had gone but that its loss wasn't recognised or ever discussed. So it wasn't fought for. Yet the loss was there, in the most intimate and personal way. Above all it showed in a horror of style---~~a certain~~ there was a will to smallness and drabness, like a cancer at the centre of life. Yet the body itself wasn't really ill. People themselves---in themselves---didn't seem like that. It was like a common unwanted identity, coming from nowhere.

And because the lack of independence was unrecognised, its presence was dreamed. The English didn't dream about the past particularly, much less about the supposed grandeur of the nineteenth century which most of them and their forbears had got nothing

but misery out of and which had treated them as less than slaves. They dreamed daily life. The dream-atmosphere began to envelop everything. They dreamed what their own lives weren't---naturally developing lives. They dreamed that the man above them had authority, which he didn't. They dreamed that things were being looked after, which they weren't.

I can remember distinctly how my own hopes were smothered. I came back from the war with a terrific avid need to read and be alone, and though there was this desolate loneliness in me that came from an interrupted youth, it was something that only gnawed at me intimately, it didn't hinder the concentrated blazing attention I gave to anything I could lay my hands on by way of books. That went on for two years or more, in one ~~enormous~~ feast of reading from early morning until late at night, in nearly complete solitude, with outward misery and fumbling, but with this building-up going on all the time, invisibly, renewing ~~all~~ my powers of mind after ~~the~~ four years in that universal youthful wilderness ~~where great shocks are sustained~~ called war.

But then, quite suddenly, it came to an end. I came to know people. My solitude stopped. I was aware that---quite suddenly---the old world had come back again. The old faces were there again, for some reason. The future was muffled suddenly. I knew I would have to fight myself out of this world. That was how my time would be spent: not fighting in my work, which is the natural legacy of life, but fighting to be free to fight.

An artificial world had come into being---suddenly. I remember feeling this sitting in an Oxford pub with a friend one evening---it was one of those dull summer evenings that have a disturbing and nervous excitement, when the clouds are low and stifling and there is a strange pleasurably grim light over every-

thing. It was an old pub with a low ceiling, on the outskirts of the city: I can remember looking out of the narrow window from the wooden bench where we were sitting, and having the sensation of the return of old, dead shadows, to which I must now show a kind of idiot and out-of-joint respect, and talk in a language that wasn't my own again, and play in a theatre where the scenery was dusty and frowsty and I didn't know my lines, for a quite frivolous and yet dominating end; it was a strange vague sensation which I only became conscious of ~~realised I had had in that spot~~ years later, when the truth had clarified a little. You could say I felt the return of the old middle class, which had been put back into position---quite suddenly---to perform its police duties of preserving the status quo, which, since there hadn't been time enough since the war for a new one to develop, had to be the old one. But the idea of class didn't enter my head. It was simply a sensation of the total eclipse of hope, almost a conviction that through an event unknown to me, outside, my struggle would be deathly hard, from that time on: and in a strange way unnecessarily so, in a way that didn't belong to the story of my own development or ~~him~~ to the actual nature of the country all round me, but came out of the blue, gratuitous, unforeseen and completely out of joint with the needs of the time.

Perhaps it had something to do with the friend I was with. We were friends without having anything in common. We liked each other---without liking the other's world. We were together but no ideas joined us, no fight of any kind, not the slightest identity as Englishmen, nothing but a curious, fascinated loyalty neither of us could understand. We---liked the look in each other's eye.

It gave me the sensation of having to listen---from now on---

to imbecile talk as if it was clever, to the story of petty invented desires as if they were passions, to the sound of wormwood as if it was music. I would have to listen to the invisible leaders of England---humming to themselves, marking time, passing the day, because they had nothing new to offer. Real life was now irrelevant. It went on like a roaring wind that no one allowed himself to notice. They danced, joked, drank and fucked in this roaring wind.

The greater the change actually going on in the country, the less it seemed it was mentioned. The greatest change of all was perhaps in matters of class, so that class was a word coming to sound more and more forbidden.

My sensation in the pub was a misty one---the first sense of real vagueness I'd had since coming back from the war. We sat there speechless. We had nothing real to say to each other. I gazed out of the window on to the sad street in a forlorn way, realising in those few moments that the old rotten society had come back, like a ghost, not real but there, powerless but dominating, obliging but obstructive. Everything was there again as before the war. Nothing had changed. Yet it had <u>all</u> changed---from royalty to food. The country had changed from top to bottom---but this dream was put on top and made to fit, much to everyone's inner perplexity. This dream said that---royalty was the same, the swish hotels the same, and titles, and working people with their grievances, and slums, and being left-wing; all the old life was still there! But it was now more free and easy (being a dream): artists and people like that could now get C.B.Es (they could be counts of a British empire that no longer existed and which had never interested most Englishmen in any case), a Chelsea lay-about might lunch at court, you yourself might even take a

cup of tea with a peer of the realm. It was all easy---no struggle: because it wasn't real. Nothing had authority any more. Yet it was still there.

In those first months after the war I worked and thought, prepared my future life, marshalled my forces---for anything but mists and vapours. But now I started dreaming as well. I dreamed that perhaps those lovely parks and the country palaces were still intact; that somewhere perhaps, in offices, in the clubs of St. James's, people were really thinking and deliberating, that perhaps life hadn't lost its flavour of authority after all. It was an idiot-dream that grew on me without me having anything to do with it---a kind of eighteenth-century dream that missed out the immense smoky cities. It was part of enjoying the countryside. Somewhere---across that hedge, by that road---a hundred miles away---the old authority was alive. Just because it was dead.

I can remember staying in a country house with its own park and lake, under a rich squire for whom the local tenants rang hand-bells on Christmas morning. I used to sit in the hall and the old library when nobody was about dreaming the place alive, because it was dead of the real community that had surrounded it once. It needed the dream. Every little object---the sunlight coming through the bathroom window on to the great Victorian bath, the frescoes, the huge fireplace in the hall, the gun-room, the massive oak staircase, woke a dream. The owner probably had more money than any of the previous owners. There were probably more servants, more lavish food, a cellar more full of wines and port and champagne, there were better stables, the dairy was a paying proposition, the roof didn't leak, there was hot water in every dressing room. The owners were business people, they

worked hard, their week-ends were lively and hearty. But what did the house mean? What was its authority? What was theirs? They had none, though they had power. The real authority was just visible at the edge of the park---in the council houses. It was in the policeman who came to the house to enquire about gun licences and didn't say sir. It didn't go with power. And so a dream had to be supplied---of the time when people carried authority in themselves, when there was excitement in the rustle of a dress and the sound of a voice. It was all mist and uncertainty. Those hearty, lively people had authority. But yet they didn't. The house was power, yet it was just a shell.

My years at Oxford were the most degrading experience of my life. A sickening dream like jaundice, a bad and slothful dream, spread over everything like a permanent chill light. There life was all mist! And I remember the chill and misty days there most vividly, not the lovely sunlit ones. One or two nice images remain---a glimpse of a meadow at the back of Magdalen full of snakes' heads ~~distillaries~~ fritillaries, supposed to be one of only two fields in all England which have them in abundance, in a blaze of deep tiger-skin colours. And the flat land by the river where ponies grazed, out towards the Pike. The river at Christ Church, with willows and low stone bridges where there's hardly a sound. These were sights---I remember sights. There were the long dining halls with tarnished pictures on the walls where we had dinner, and the grey mediaeval stone, the panelled rooms. But it was all dreaming, all endless dreaming. Whatever was pleasurable and soothing had something to do with a magnificent dream. I used to sit in the Radcliffe Camera dreaming over books, trying to dream the place live and real again. The reality for me--- the only one---was a tiny room on the top storey of a house

in the Victorian part of Oxford where I spent a whole year alone. That was the real non-dreaming life, before the jaundice spread from the city on to me. For years afterwards I couldn't bear to think of that chilly city of masturbating youths for long, its lovely old buildings squashed and shaken by the lorries that trundled through. It was when I started to feel identified with the city, and to meet people, that I felt my life had collapsed. A fearful kind of hysteria came over me. It hadn't been there before. I took a room near a maternity hospital, and when there was some noise from the child on the floor above---it was a cooped-up little hole of a house---I used to dash out of my room yelling like a maniac, my eyes starting out of my head and my face flushed angrily. I used to shake and tremble after these strange bursts of abstract horror that came over me. The father of the child was some sort of male nurse at a mental hospital, appropriately enough, and he would come down and look at me with a strange, wan preoccupation, his mouth open, saying, 'What's the trouble?' But he had his shouting bouts, too. When I talked too much in my room he would shout down, 'Ah, shut your bloody mouth!' A gay little house!

And that had happened suddenly. For two years my life had been all books and hard work, and then---life burst all over me like yellow vomit. One morning I dashed out of my room yelling before I was dressed---I stood in the hall absolutely starko, with the couple upstairs staring down at me with astonished faces.

What Oxford meant as an experience I didn't know---what the devil all the clubs and functions and 'May Balls' as they were called meant was beyond me like delirium. There were apparently 'gentlemen' at Oxford---a few, though where they'd sprung from after two hundred years of industrialisation Christ alone knew. But there they were, and I could have been a Mongol for all

the mouthing and chuckling and drinking and aying and naying meant to me. At the very end I went to one or two of the 'parties' and even to a Ball, and at the Ball what with the burning torches and the great marquees and the lawn with faery lights, the women in their gowns, a little dream came to the rescue and attached itself graciously to my memory of the whole town, for a moment or two, in the ebb and flow of the jaundice of the day and the sleeping hysteria of night, and the numbed misery of a kind I hadn't even known in war, even in the years of puberty in the streets of London.

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~~The~~ Italian boat docked at Syracuse for an hour or so, close to a narrow promontory, and I remember the deep blue water and the gleaming white sides of the boat, in the utterly calm southern day, with the sunlight pouring down on to the great blocks of cement in the tiny harbour, with low houses close by rather like houses I'd seen on the outskirts of Baghdad. Sicily didn't seem such a different world. And the boat with its twinkling port-holes and smooth, varnished decks looked so neat and perfect against the blue of the water. I strolled up the road a little way, nodding to a group of people standing by their house, curious and watching. Then I drank a glass of thick black wine in a little cantina exactly opposite the boat, in a dark, windowless room with a stone floor and old wooden tables, and flies everywhere, reminding me of southern Italy during the war. This tiny glimpse of the very edge of Syracuse made me think of Greece and the Arab countries much more than Italy. There was something in the way the stones and pillars contrasted with the water, something of the same air as in Greece,

a touch of the same golden light, a breath from a great invisible ~~and intimate~~ element in the sky, like a god.

Then we went on to Naples where we arrived quite early the next morning, in a different brilliant light, more yellow and intimately and personally suggestive than the Greek, less golden and infinite and stirring---but stirring in a different way, towards a more intimate relish and excitement. After sitting in the station café for an hour with my bags all round me I went on to Rome. I remember this station-café particularly, its long bar and its wicker chairs in a ~~great~~ spacious hall, with the tall doors wide-open on one side; I found myself in a state of ~~complete~~ ease and composure, perhaps with relief at being out of the Arab world; but it was more than that---I think it had something to do with Italy, a certain sense of arriving back in my world, and that here was my world, although I couldn't see why at the time, I could only have made historical comparisons, about the Roman empire being the embryo of Europe and so forth; ~~and not~~ I couldn't know the intimate and personal connection that was awaiting me and which awaits everyone brought up in the Christian world when he passes through Italy, although there may be no act of recognition, only a hidden, almost unfelt assent, nearly ancient. I can remember sitting in the wicker chair of that spacious café just as I remember the terrace café at Beirut a few days before. In Beirut there was ecstatic recollection, so to speak, of the future, a sudden heartening and exhilarating glimpse which acted as a kind of guarantee of the rightness of my life, without words, in a few seconds, while in Naples it was a state of ease without thoughts or the slightest ecstasy, without past or future, only a long-drawn-out state of pleasure, not even revery; it was completely organic, just as the connection underneath it (to Italy)---which I knew

nothing about---was organic and would have to be learned organically, with deep inner changes as physical as secretions you don't see but which take place every moment inside you, changes that are never signalled or known by signs beforehand, but which give their result quite suddenly, making a fait accompli which you then have to recognise and adapt your mind to; quite different from the processes I was used to in my own world, where the mind did the signalling and warning, and achieved conscious changes, and pushed ahead all the time like an explorer, but without the long physical training and composure the explorer must have.

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In those years after the war---the ten or fifteen years---we were like prisoners, we were yearning intimately all the time for a freedom we couldn't define but which we had once had. And it wasn't that we were prisoners of a violent or negative reality we could fight---the terms weren't clear enough to fight. What were we prisoners of? We couldn't say.

The imprisoning thing was unreality. It was like a blanket in front of life all the time, numbing our senses a little, always there between us and the object. A terrific importance seemed to be paid to gestures---in place of reality. Some had the gestures of an upper class, but everyone knew that an upper class no longer existed. And others had the gestures of a lower class---you even saw working people taking on the gestures of a fictional working class, with political-pamphlet gestures; you saw educated people from the working classes keeping their old accents for social effect, as you saw emancipated people from the middle classes taking on working-class accents for social effect; you saw men too pale

and thoughtful to be farmers making the gestures of farmers and living on the land; you saw bank-managers making the gestures of bank-managers, customs-officials those of customs-officials, doctors those of doctors---none of it had quite the living substance, the personal driving force. And gestures bred themselves. Your clothes were a gesture, your accent was a gesture, your ideas were a gesture, your sex was a gesture, your walking into the Dorchester hotel could be interpreted as a snobbish gesture, you walking into the Dorchester hotel with your collar unbuttoned and no tie on could be an effective counter-gesture, just as your walking into the Dorchester hotel with a starched white collar and carefully knotted tie could be a gesture counter to the counter-gesture; your taking lunch in a working man's café could be a gesture, your not belonging to a club could be as deliberate a gesture as belonging to one, your gesture of taking a taxi everywhere could be replaced by the gesture of never taking one, your gesture of taking a holiday in Cannes when you wanted one in Brighton was equivalent to the gesture of taking one in Brighton when you wanted one in Cannes; your gesture of wearing old and dreary clothes in a Thirties style because otherwise people would think you were putting on airs unsuitable to a ten-pound-a-week clerk was the same as the gesture of wearing colours that jarred and shocked just to show people you didn't care being only a ten-pound-a-week clerk; your gesture of looking to the left when royalty passed on the right was equivalent to the gesture of saluting them; your gesture of being a bit of a gay dog because you felt too respectable was the equivalent of the gesture of being respectable because you felt you were too much of a gay dog. More and more life became an arena of public roles, where every man had to carry his gestures like a uniform, and where nothing inward existed any more. Thus, being a soldier,

being at Oxford, having a job, not having a job, marrying and having children, not marrying and not having children, going to the theatre or not going to the theatre, walking by the river at night or taking a bus or flying in an aeroplane or looking at television or kissing someone hullo were all gestures, they all carried an indescribable stain of not being quite real.

There was a suspension of the inner resources of will and desire, because a gesture had been made without corresponding necessity, thus making a dumb and underground accusation of the whole being of each creature, so that for a moment he stood fixed into his own gestures and would need a drink, a party, an hour or so alone, an act of love, a thousand-mile journey, to break that fixture and regain the original life that moved and changed inside him and belonged to the mysterious real world and to no public capacity whatsoever.

You had to make endless mental allowances---the man you were talking to who had the gruff air of a workman, leaning all over the table with his glass of beer, might be from a well-to-do family which had sheltered him too much; the delicate man who only liked tomatoe juice worked a lathe all week. Gestures followed counter-gestures in a kind of delirium that took the place of life and hid all reality and direct communication between people, and spread an air of things-not-being-done when they were being done, and of being-done when they were not being done. There were brisk wooden business men who used a classy accent to get the shirt off your back, and there were those who made the gesture of grabbing your shirt but then gave it back with a smile. Naturally a trade in gestures grew up: making the proper gesture was half the battle, you left the dirty work to other people until it seemed that no dirty work was being

done anywhere anymore; only gestures---the gesture of cooking food in a restaurant that wasn't real food at all but a few ideas thrown together to make the gesture of a meal (after all you only wanted to eat out as a gesture)---potatoes cooked two days before with eyes and all, peas dyed green to look the part, meat a week old, a slithery sauce made with colouring and flour, and a nice bit of deep-frozen fish tasting of nothing, cooked in fat so stale that it stank (but stinks had little chance of getting through that ghostly world of gestures)---a gesture materialised into edible form, strangely abstract---rather like eating a bit off a categorical imperative---so that the poor eaters had an abstract look, faintly bewildered at this 'good old English fare'.

Food, like a bed, is basic to life and tells a story about its author---you can't get round it: and the food in England became so unspeakably grotesque and foul (unless you knew where to 'look', as the phrase was) that it was like a galloping consumption all over the island, spreading further the more it laid the victim low. Foreigners began to wonder if the English really had taste-buds like other people.

If you complained the waitress always said that Nobody Else---the ghost that was always being invoked---had complained. This Nobody Else skulked and crawled from one gesture to another, actually believing in the gesture-world all round him (though his organs inside didn't share the belief), and setting such little store by his own tastes that in the end he had none, feeling sure that They---the top gesture-makers---couldn't be wrong, there must be something wrong with your own palate if you didn't like it. For in a world of gestures you had to lose sight of yourself in some way, you counted for nothing, you were only valuable for your gesture and otherwise you had no voice, no whim, no taste,

no silly desire that people should cater for in any way. You were on sufferance. Of course, when you went On The Continent you ordered coffee and got real coffee, you ate when you liked and what you liked. But that was only another gesture---a slightly classy one. It was a holiday, and Going On the Continent meant taking time off from reality. Europe---your own civilisation---was a playground.

Even the national beverage, tea, tried to become a philosophical idea in that period. The greatest Christian tea-drinking people in the world, with every tea in their shops from Darjeeling to Lapsang and Orange Pekoe and Assam, teas with 'liquory' blends and 'winey' blends and 'scented' blends, only ordered straight tea when they went into a café. No restaurant thought of advertising all the different types, or of running Earl Grey, strong Indian and Chinese blends as three alternatives. Even for your straight tea you invariably got slop---water kept boiling in an urn for hours(a crime for tea), the pot unwarmed (as you can detect by the small leaves floating on top), and the tea a cheap growth.

Working people everywhere had more money now: but one thing they couldn't buy was quality and finesse. Here the shadow of an overpowering history fell on them: quality and finesse had been a monopoly of a small and beneficent oligarchy for hundreds of years, or at least since the eighteenth century, and were still associated with a creature who no longer existed except as a convenient historical gesture---the gentleman. And since the country wasn't developing organically---since, in these post-war years, it completely lacked a directing and thinking class, the absence of the gentleman with his repertoire of fine tastes meant the absence of any market for the goods he'd liked. Instead of

spreading to the working people who could now afford it, the market died out. You would think the middle class would have kept it alive. But in the middle class the cancer of the empty gesture was stronger than anywhere else.

The looks of abashed and grieved wonder on the faces of waiters and waitresses in that period are something to be remembered--- tea now, at three o'clock in the afternoon? Good God, no! A drink, outside licencing hours? a glass of water with your mashed potatoes? some bread with your chemical gravy? a salad? some ice in your water? The waiters were like policemen: If you wanted anything to eat you had to have a clear criminal sheet, and to keep pretty quiet; Letting out a scream, vomiting, spilling your gravy or complaining in a quiet voice could have got you arrested. Even the foreign restaurateurs in England learned that it didn't matter what you served up to Englishmen. When I was at Oxford, one mild Sunday, I had a 'foreign' meal and went to the station to see somebody off---and spewed the whole lot out in one yellow jet across the platform. I felt perfectly all right---in fact, getting rid of it was the best part of the meal. I was told afterwards that the food came down from London in big ice-boxes and had been cooked six weeks before. The meals in college were pretty rough, too, although I can't be sure of that as I had no taste-buds at the time, like most of the people round me. But I've been in Oxford colleges since, and there always seems to be a sort of stale fat-stench round the dining hall, it seems to have got right into the wood panelling. The same for Cambridge, too. And people look perplexed. When they go in to eat they look like people going to their execution. Which in a way they are.

I shall never forget Angelo and Francine after they'd eaten

at a fashionable (meaning the gesture of serving goods in a classy way) stores in London, on their second visit. We met them in a 'continental' café afterwards, where theye compensated for their experience by eating a poor imitation of an apfel strudl (Vienna, city of my dreams!) served by a nice-looking girl who then hovered over us trying to say that our time was up---a queue was forming, there were other prisoners waiting to present their clear sheets. Anyway, at the fashionable store they'd decided to eat---I'd forgotten to warn them. They'd gone upstairs---low lights, cardinal-red striped wallpaper and all that lark---very classy. And a murmur of talk. Well, when it came---they thought they'd try the classic dish of the national cooking genius, fried bacon and eggs with half a grilled tomato thrown in as a coneession to the colour-scheme---the whole lot tasted of soap. It didn't suggest soap---it was actually like eating soap. But even this wasn't the worst thing---they'd had an English restaurant meal before, after all, and their taste-buds had been inured; and they pushed their plates aside. What worried them was the sight of a well-to-do, furred, clearly sophisticated woman opposite them tucking into the same soap-dish like a workman at his bread and cheese. They stared and stared. She was dressed so well! She seemed to have such good taste! Eyes not unintelligent! A commanding manner with the waitress. And there she was washing her tummy out with carbolic soap! They asked me---how could that be? And I said perhaps she dreamed the taste---she had a way perhaps of closing her mind to the taste of soap. ~~They'd been~~ We were drugooned as well, they said---all over the stores, like soldiers! Given little tickets and told to queue here and pay there! Angelo looked deathly pale, ~~as if the intimacy in him had been shocked and trodden on.~~ That

was how such a thing would affect him---strike him deathly pale.

A gesture-England was, naturally, a dead England. And perhaps this was the idea. Perhaps the whole of Europe was, so to speak, spuriously dead---each country in a different way. Unknown to most English people, England was becoming known in the outside world for all sorts of things it wasn't; it was becoming embalmed into a kind of dead reputation, a fiction. England was now a 'traditional' country, or an 'imperial' country, or a 'stiff' country, or even an 'eighteenth century' and 'picturesque' country. I used to feel this in all sorts of ways when I was abroad. It was like suddenly not being yourself. It was clear that sometimes as an Englishman I was associated with a tremendous grandeur---an imperial history. But this was strange. So little of that had been heard about in my own country. But it wasn't so much what qualities were attributed to ~~one~~ me, as that all these qualities were unreal. Especially in Europe, one country didn't seem in real relation with another. The English had equal fictions about the French or Germans, the French had the same about the Italians, and so forth. Nothing was working naturally.

Underneath, England is a turbulent and ardent country---but this stopped. There was an awful quiet. People said it was because the country was exhausted from the war. And this was true. But exhaustion from war---as you could see in Germany in the first years after the war---makes the energy for peace. That peace-energy had started up in England. Then suddenly it stopped.

Really it stopped in the rest of Europe, too. You hear people talking the same way in Italy and Germany---how everything looked lively and hopeful in the ruins, in the first two years after the war. but that this suddenly stopped and the old crowd

was back. A new world was expected, but it didn't come. Or rather, a new world appeared to be there, not a better one necessarily, but the whole feeling was new. But instead an old world came back which the inmates had to try to decipher as best they could and which foreigners regarded as rightful and authentic. I had no more idea of what this old England was about than I had of bird-habits in Borneo. Had it ever existed, this fiction?

Europe wasn't so much fixed in dead ideas as in fictions that had originated thousands of miles away. For these fictions were American.

That was natural enough, given the enormous power that America had accumulated not only by its geographical vastness and natural wealth, and size of population, but by means of two world wars for which it had provided the arsenal, without being attacked itself or suffering great depletions of manpower. Those were the bare facts. Twice Europe had been an almost-dying beast; and twice America had been untouched. Two wars had bolstered up its society (its rich men) at the minimum possible cost. These wars were really basic middle-class arguments about civilisation which involved America as much as other countries; America could no more separate itself from Europe than it could separate itself from the English language which it spoke, or from the forms and habits of Christian thought which it had inherited, or from its own fears and urges which were exactly the same as in the equivalent middle-class society of Europe. It ended the second of these wars with a money-power at least three times greater than that in the rest of the world, because the rest of the world was largely in ruins.

But the presence of America in Europe after the last war---though America and Europe were basically the same world, with the same problems---was the presence of a foreign and sometimes hostile civilisation. America could understand Europe as little as the middle class in any of the European countries could understand its own history, its own people, its working class or its peasantry; and for exactly the same reason---that America enthroned the European middle-class ideal worked out in the nineteenth century, namely the definition of the human creature by his work, and of his position by the money he got for it. It was a simplification: there being, in America, no overshadowing historical presences such as an old noble or peasant class, or even a proletariat in the strict sense.

You could say that America was middle-class Christendom as an island to itself: the embodiment of the grand nineteenth-century theme---life as production.

Its fictional attitudes to the rest of the world spread, until each country was typecast into a role foreign to it. Germany was---murderers: the actual question, what is there in the German character that makes for murder, wasn't thrashed out; it was put into cold storage for time and prosperity to heal. England was the splendid, colonial, irritating ally. France meant intelligence, decadence, whores and good food; a bit of the atmosphere of the gay nineties (Montmartre). Italy---the little paradise garden, with a quaint tendency (for a paradise garden) towards communism. It was all a not unattractive dream, really. And each country had its corresponding diplomatic role: Germany was the hired bully (against Russia); Italy the clown; England the major-domo or gentlemen's gentleman. The major domo rather looked down on his master (and was turned into a lackey for his pains); the bully despised

him, and the clown---the wisest of the three---simply milked him. It was a bit of a mess because it had nothing to do with the actual countries, namely the people living in them. It was a strange world we had to learn about all overagain, as if we'd never grown up in it. The Italians never really got to grips with their own fascism, nor did the Germans with their nazism; nor did the French and English with their old commercial fumblers still surviving from the Thirties. There were little clashes with Americans--- we all had them: little misunderstandings in which we gasped--- Frenchmen, Englishmen, Italians---at being taken quite naturally and without question as caricatures. I shall never forget a young German who had done his post-war pilgrimage to America in search of freedom saying to his wife after I'd made a joke, spluttering with happy laughter, 'And in that accent, too!' There was even, now, an authentic English language; but not spoken any longer by Englishmen.

The publicity that poured all over the world, but especially over our part of it, in not only social but also intimate and personal ways, was basically that America had received a long-due ethical reward from God, and that it was now the earth's rightful ruler. Yet---it was strange: this wasn't an empire, clearly. It had the ethical claims of empire. It did rule the western seas and upper spaces. It was the richest country in the world. Its interests had infiltrated everywhere, and it had the power to bring down foreign governments, even English ones. But still, the actual composition of America seemed to prevent it being an empire in the customary nationalist style: because it wasn't a nation like others; it was the embodiment of an idea, to which people from everywhere emigrated. Yet this idea was an ethical one, that there was something wrong with the rest of the world. So while it

couldn't have an empire in the proper sense---because it had come into being as a protest against empire---it had an invisible ethical empire which brought into being a Europe that fitted the American image. Since its basis as a country was ethical, it could have no allies---no equals. America always addressed her ethical inferiors, a fact which was never realised in England until too late, when the country was isolated from its own world, Europe. America was an empire without owning up to it. And that ambiguity traced itself all through our lives in those years.

The soul of the world---especially Europe---had passed into the American soul. America was the spokesman of the twentieth century. This was the ethical attitude supported by the most gigantic publicity-service that had ever existed. Simple people---in America as in the rest of the world---were baffled and confused. And in our world it had the effect of making us feel that real life was evading us all the time. The ethical authority had been transported elsewhere: but by power, not by right.

The publicity wasn't swallowed, quite: it was gulped down like the lump of pork-fat sailor boys used to have to swallow once, as an initiation; it couldn't stay down for ever. And as the American ethical idea turned the rest of the world into a fiction, it had to turn America into a fiction as well, in order to do it effectively. No society is an ethical achivement. Always and everywhere it is the kingdom of interests. Ethics belongs to conscience, which in the end is always private, and contrary to society: conscience is precisely the turbulent factor which changes society. But this was hidden for a time by the shattering publicity of power and success that dominated the world. America became the promised land, ethically. At the same time it was an integral part of our own world, it had the same desparate problems. And it was an ally;

which was perplexing. And in the end this perplexity worked against the publicity.

People with the new ethical authority after the war were unable to make themselves felt; which is another way of saying that the natural social evolution stopped. It was a perfect chance for mediocrity.

In this world-publicity, America became another word for modern. And the wreckage of Europe after the war gave this publicity a visible support. Someone travelling from America, finding a half-ruined Europe, remembered not the war but the ethical lessons he'd been taught in childhood as American history. Europe was now visibly the 'old' world. But sometimes the traveller preferred this: he preferred the 'old' world to his own. Here he invariably showed the other side of the same coin of ethical publicity: he deplored the 'Americanisation' of, say, England and France---in ugly roadside gas-stations which had actually been put there thirty years before; he deplored the fact that 'even' in Europe---the seat of wisdom and tradition---they were now going in for the 'modern' (namely, American) habit of pulling down buildings more than a few decades old. It even began to seem that industrialisation hadcfirst taken place in America and not in Europe. The first railways, the first mines and spinning mills and steam engines had no longer come about in England over a hundred years before but in some strange way had been the moral property of America. Those pioneers of modern life had been Americans 'in spirit' if not in residence; even Leonardo da Vinci was an 'American', you might hear someone say, half in jest. Since America was an immigrant and not an organic nation it could always be described as a spirit immanent here and there throughout European history, until finally it had lodged in one particular place

as the climax and raison d'etre of that history, in an Hegelian sort of way. Few Americans, by being American at all, could avoid the allurements of this publicity.

In a peculiar way this had the effect of preserving Europe in its essential quality---as an inner dream. Under a kind of invisible and benevolent miltary occupation this dream thrived and even glowed warmer than before: Europe ~~mended~~ mended its cities, got rich again. The dream was supported by reality but not disturbed (or changed) by it. So it was a trifle academic as well. Rather like being characters in a pantomime. It was a nice feeling. Pantomimes are nice: there was an audience---the scenery was clean and colourful, the stage had the best equipment; it all felt jolly and safe. But still, there was a funny feeling when you went out into the street. You couldn't dream all the time. But without the dream life was incomplete.

I remember the hours we spent talking to Angelo in Paris, after they'd moved there---listening to Verdi or Schubert or the Beethoven sonatas, talking about Dante or Leopardi, whom he'd just started to read, like a child learning its first steps, with that extraodrinary total ignorance that Italians inherit. And Europe as a warm, vivid dream always seemed to be there---in the room---in the shade from the tree outside whose leaves touched the windows, and in the sounds from the courtyard below as people walked by and children played, and the look of the French books massed on Angelo's shelves in their paper covers when the sunlight came in briefly in the morning sometimes, reminding me of my first frightened visits to Paris years before, which had had the ecstatic horror of youth. It was always Europe in those talks---and an older Europe, when there'd been less traffic and the food had been better and the sky had seemed lighter. We were looking back all the

time---to a kind of nineteenth century glow you sometimes feel in Verdi---crimson and gold---with hansom cabs and the sound of hoofs on cobbles, and lantern lights---which also happened to be the period Angelo's little house was built in. Every time we heard a piece of music it was an actual and present experience---of thought---and yet also it was like looking into a marvellous past until the two things---the present thought and the past fact---were the same: art was the past enclosed perfectly like a womb, or like the glowing centre of all life, past and safe because it could never be altered or reduced. And then, we were so much Europe ourselves, the four of us---French, Italian, German, English; we were each of endless curiosity to the other, a vast source of strangeness and difference.

But Angelo always said, 'Europe's finished. Europe's dead.' He felt this contradictory death that was going on all the time, under the dream, so that the dream was more completely and safely a dream than it would have been otherwise. Like an Italian he accepted it: he didn't look forward, he didn't examine it too closely; it was just the status quo at the time, and therefore all of reality. More and more, too, he said he didn't care for America. He wasn't interested in it. The country irritated him, more and more. And that, too, was an acceptance---of the other side of Europe that was by no means a dream although equally invisible.

And when, in the end, Europe was at its famous point of recovery, and the governments were beginning to make their own political decisions again, even occupied Germany, that dream of Europe---the glowing, inner Europe---far from becoming materialised in any sort of triumph suddenly collapsed. Europe became real, with all the dirt of politics again. Paris seemed bleak---

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a capital of power politics again. And at almost exactly that time the friendship between Angelo and me collapsed too---before we knew what was happening.

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More and more in those deadly post-war years, when a wrong dream of England began to swell and roll and envelop everything like a mist, the real objects of life---the sights and sounds and smells that have their only seat in the single human creature---seemed to become less and less distinct, and tricks and feints and guises and tinkerings became greater and greater until the whole of English life looked like an emergency-job to patch something up for reasons that weren't quite clear, and on behalf of a status quo that was less than an interesting fiction.

Wherever you went you met one of these tricks, and for years I took them seriously. It wasn't the fact that the war had wrecked the economy or that the country had lost its empire: on the contrary, people were richer and happier---in the current sense of happy. It was the fact that a genuine life wasn't coming out

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of individual people, in talk and struggle. The dream was necessary for people not responsible for their own lives.

At one and the same time as the Englishman was acknowledged to have quite a position in the world, he had none, which was a perfect condition for tricks and dreams. And everybody who had a middle-class job hid behind these tricks and dreams at some point or other. He had to. At some point, in every middle-class job, there had to come the secret conviction, 'I'm corrupt.'

You only had to try and get somebody in his office, or write to him, and if there was any kind of 'position' attached to his work---if a 'position' could be dreamed into it---there was always a trick you were supposed to go through and to understand. I myself never really got to understand these tricks, which were like police-formulae except that the police-force was ineffectual and designed to guard a fiction in which nobody believed. There would be a secretary with a peculiar fluting accent designed to show 'position' at second remove, or a letter would be signed 'in his absence' for someone you knew was warming his arse at the gasfire all day and cracking dirty jokes over the phone with another 'position'. And if the letter was actually written---dictated of course---by the Position himself, it was invariably in that dead tone thought to be suitable (in a period when the individual tone

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of voice seemed struck out of life) for the Making Of An Impression. And so the farce went on---the recipient answered in the same tone, which he thought was the only one understood by Position, especially if he was a Position himself. And so even middle-class youths who had started school or college with a certain delicate goodness and sincerity and equality of approach, for no people have a more deliberate sense of equality than middle-class people, began to find themselves fixed in a mould which they didn't understand, much less liked, but which on the whole they thought was the mould of authority; except that it was a hoax. They arrived at their Position, but with a faintly startled air, as if there was something unreal about it, which there was. But they went on: father or mother or uncle said this was how things were done---of course. But of course!

The idea was that if you wanted to show your Position you went in for a certain withholding of feeling, and much reliance on letter-heads, and secretaries with appointment books, and a general tone in your letters that while you favoured your clients you didn't need them. This went on in the smallest business, as if the only thing you needed in order to establish yourself was an air of some kind--- preferably the air of seeming to dress other people down slightly, so as to create the suggestion that they came to you instead of vice-versa. That was dream-business, conducted on the assets of the past, which had secured a large enough clientèle to take care

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of the next decade or so; after that there'd be trouble---which there was.

Then there were the titles---the most obviously fictional element of the whole fiction: patrons of this firm and that society and this club and that agency, the lord so-and-so, the marquis this and the Sir that, MBE and CBE and Christ alone ~~knows~~ knew what else. And if you joined this institute or that association and paid your little whack every year you could have certain initials behind your name: a Position! And that was the question at every turn of life---the man who blocked the door everywhere you went (invariably on an income that hardly kept him in pride) had it on his lips: what was your position? what were your credentials? At the customs---who were you? What right had you to approach him, even if all you wanted to do was to buy his refrigerators? I shall never forget a young Arab merchant coming to me in Baghdad with a letter from an English refrigerator-company in his hand. He wanted to know what it was all about. For while the letter didn't actually turn down his offer to pay good money for a number of their refrigerators, it pointed out their Position in the matter and wanted to know his: it seemed to say in effect, who are you to be writing to us out of the blue like this? who is your bank? what are your references? and of course you must know that we don't allow credit? And all in the dry tone of Position. Not really of patronage, because the writer himself was hardly visible, especially as someone else had signed his letter for him (his Position didn't allow him to actually sign the letters), with the use of those little initials p.p., in case the client should think he was being addressed directly. Direct talk seemed to pass out of England in those years. And probably the man with

the Position was neither surly nor patronising in himself, but just lacked his own voice, he wouldn't have known what to say without the formula, so it was better to play safe and couch himself in a deadly, stark, grey language. The only pleasure in that was what he got with the secretary, dictating the dead letters, um-ing and ah-ing and let-me-seeing, with his fingers together in front of his face, and many arch frowns and quizzing looks, as the business went slowly down the pipe. At least the English enter disaster with a certain quixotic irrelevance, and much less worry about material circumstances than they're given credit for: it is part of our greatness.

Since his Position was no position at all, since it didn't spring from his own single energy and nature but went along from day to deathly day in an office-routine that had its formulae already assembled like a machine, there had to be the dream as well: the one fed the other, with cumulative effect. Men sat in offices play-acting Men Sitting In Offices to the tune of thousands of pounds of wastage a year, in a bacchanalia that has something attractive and aristocratic about it. The fridges this first-class actor was trying not to sell were getting better and better, because at least the engineers and the workers were doing their job, however much tea they were supposed to drink. And this created a great national perplexity, a vast scratching of the head as to why these foreign markets kept falling into the hands of people whose work seemed no better. In industries where there were vast potentialities, and which were making money hand over fist in other countries---industries like book-manufacture, catering to millions of English-speaking people all over the world, and to millions of poor bastards on the home market who were undergoing the misfortune of an advanced education,

firms went bankrupt right and left, and pulled in their horns, and cut down on this and cheese-pared on that, and developed a new pinchbeck atmosphere at a time when on the face of it the 'economy', that peculiar abstract of modern life, was booming.

Change had to come from somewhere. But it couldn't come from the middle positions. They were too busy telling people that oh, this could never be done that way, or, but that's quite impossible, you'd never get very far with that---leaving the dead, bare office routine to do it all, in its own way, in the silence and bareness and starkness of a place where living creatures no longer existed except in brief flaming moments among themselves in the evening, in a scheduled squirt of sex after the deadly journey in the train ~~and hour hour~~ and the deadly hours of Doing It The Right Way were over.

I know nothing more awful in all the world than the sight of the hordes of people pouring into the big London stations at night and then away from them in the morning, they're like the last hordes of mankind who have given up hope, whose little frail desires and yearnings have been squashed nearly out, to the point where only a cup of tea is a help---slovenly and pale and sad and shuffling and tired slaves who serve what they don't understand or even care for, with a daily self-debasement which in the end is all a mistake and dreadfully unnecessary, because it doesn't achieve the crackle and sparke[1] of wealth it was meant to. I don't think the sight of workers pouring out of a factory is really as terrible as that. It <u>is</u> terrible, but workers keep something closed in their faces, they keep it in reserve, you have the feeling that there is something contained in them all the time, there is a glimmer of optimism in their eyes, a tiny

glimmer they keep as closed as possible, and there is the strange mechanical satisfaction of their work: life must have some satisfaction, though it may be a terrible satisfaction. And their homes are marvellous. You can glimpse them sometimes when you walk past---the homes of the younger generations, with striped wallpapers and tiny chandeliers and walls a different colour and fitted carpets and tables of clean, sound wood, all in a decent and straightforward taste, cheerful and with an intimate sort of relish that makes you gasp sometimes with vicarious delight; and working homes have always done that---always taken the intimate part of the current taste, even of Victorianism, and made it in the form of a tiny palace to last a life-time of dreams and daily secure happenings that are identical after ten or twenty or fifty years, as they should be in all worlds that haven't gone insane.

This is the great change in England since the war---the massive invisible revolution: the change in working people. And this is the audience and market that people of Position failed to address, except in its dirtiest and lowest tastes, through the various forms of journalism. That massive invisible change seemed to leave hardly any mark on the country. Looking at it from the outside you would never think it had happened. A whole organic development that should have taken place in the first years after the war, when the working class was beginning to stretch itself and look about for the first time, at the threshold of a new kind of society, was stopped. And people of Position were suddenly there who knew not the devil what was happening. More than any other single factor, this was the cause of the growing sense of bankruptcy at a time of apparent boom: the proper energies were leashed up.

On the surface nothing happened except that people got a bit more prosperous. This was the basic fact---an enormous relief from worry for most of the people in the country. And the fact was hardly noticed. It was the basic political fact, too: all the talk by the intellectual servants of Position about the loss of the British empire and its humbling effect on the country had nothing to do with the reality at all. Not only wasn't the loss felt---whatever 'loss' might mean in the cash terms that are supposed to be the womb of modern society---it was hardly seen. The empire, to most people in the country, had never been alive; so that its death brought no tears. Most of them had never been to any part of it. At best they had relatives in one of the dominions. Most people were indifferent to the Position of the country abroad because they had never participated in making it or got anything out of it, except in ways they didn't notice. This indifference was the basic crippling fact in the country's recovery from war. Everything was left to the men of Position, who scrambled---but only when they had to---to save the leavings on the plate. You got this extraordinary contrast in England between an optimistic and more and more contented class of common people, who had now won most of their battles, with more money in their pockets than their parents had had, but within living memory of the depression and the means test, beginning to look round them with the freshness of a first generation, with a certain wonder and excited caution, doing things that seemed to have been socially forbidden before, even when there'd been money to do it, such as plane flights to Italy or southern France, going to the theatre outside the Christmas season, buying expensive clothes and so on; you had the contrast between this class and that of Position whose lives in comparison were cramped, pinched, fetid and faded-genteel, with everything

that was classically theirs falling into slow decay, a class without ideas for the future because they had no grip on the present, and whose only collective resource was a negative weariness and scepticism---always saying 'no'. Every man and woman of Position knew his job, apparently, and believed that if anything was going wrong it would be noticed by somebody higher up whose authority had never been questioned. There were Experts---and Ways Of Doing Things. But that was the fallacy. Nobody higher-up did notice. The dream was all-pervasive. It included high and low. The bankruptcy lay in actual life-currency, not in cash; so it wasn't noticed. Not until the cash was affected.

In some way, this was the case all over Europe---with different trappings. The myth was put about by the sons and daughters of Position that Europe was finished---an 'old woman' that was now managed from the New World. The English found that Americans treated them with a magnanimity no Englishman gave them (and which they gave no Englishman): it was said that the Americans now displayed the out-going, imperial generosity which had once been an English gift. They capitulated easily to the American publicity-myth for the simple reason that they themselves had nothing to offer their own country---its problems were beyond them, and so it seemed better to leave the conflict of life to America. Besides which, America was a middle-class paradise. That is, the collapse of middle-class morale hadn't shown through there yet in clear money terms. It was a good place in which to shelve the actual middle-class problems, and leave their solution to those lonely and neglected creatures in America who felt that it wasn't a paradise at all but howling hell, and said so.

I can remember my own bafflement when I heard those stories, everywhere in Europe, that 'we' were finished. It was a funny

way of putting things. I didn't feel finished. I felt I'd only just started. There was an enormous amount to see and learn. To begin with, I didn't know Europe: Italy in the war, then France and Austria afterwards, were my first timorous glimpses. And here were these other people---they'd apparently 'done' Europe in some way that went with Position---taking it all with a flat, blasé fatigue. I didn't feel tired. I didn't feel old. I felt extraordinarily new. After all, mine was the first generation in my family to read and write properly. That seemed to----promise something. I jumped into the world---having somehow survived school education---ready for anything. And there were thousands---perhaps millions---like me. And wonders did unfold. But all the time it was against the grain---hidden and strangely unproductive of external events. These other people---whose voices were the only ones to be heard on the whole---said everything was finished. 'We' were decadent. 'We' had explored everything to the bottom---there was now 'soil-erosion'. They were talking for me as well. It was they who went to the parties---wrote in the newspapers---represented 'England' to the foreigners.

Only Americans were 'young'. And that was how Americans began to look at you. You were suddenly a kind of old and wise and half-dead 'European': my sensation that I had come from the common people gave way to another one, by virtue of this caricaturing gaze, namely that I was in a mystical way aristocratic, which I suppose every European is, finally. I was a 'colonial' owner of some kind, though I couldn't see how. One even began to hear that one was 'parochial', because one hadn't driven across the Arizona desert. It was a strange world suddenly to come into being, apparently out of nothing: certainly out of no reality. My life was finished, the myth said. I was a member of the museum, so to speak. I

was interesting, even fabulous; but not quite all there. It was a little bit how the Australians and white South Africans and Canadians looked at you: you were a huntin' and shootin' sort of feller, terribly white, you know, from the old country, the mother country, home and all that rot, you know. Only the Americans, coming from an industrial society, had a more realistic grip, and a better overall picture of Europe. And they were independent of Europe. Or they hoped, now, that they would be. Much of post-war history is the history of their attempt to bring about an organic independence for themselves that was impossible. This explains the peculiar dual nature of their politics---the friend of Europe who at the same time tried to break her influence wherever possible.

In every conversation I had with Americans, on every topic from stars to lumbago, I felt this caricaturing element that lay underneath and alternated with their sense of the caricaturing element on my side. For as they turned me into the old, if wise, 'European' who had explored all the roads which they, as the young and pioneering, were about to start along, I turned them into the callow, if refreshing, 'American' who was arguing out the things that had interested European minds a century or so ago. For the dream that stood between us was the same. It was a false dream. Only false relations could grow from it.

Americans flocked to Europe. Europeans flocked to America. The dream that held both worlds in its grip was the same, only its terms were different. A change from one to the other was pleasant, if you were the dreaming kind. America was a nice bed for the European to lie in, Europe a nice bed for the American. And, because of this, the dream was given more and more chance to become reality. The differences between Europe and America

which were cited in the dream tended to become more true. You couldn't help beginning to feel that, after all, the Americans over there really did seem to be arguing and thinking things out more and facing the dirty realities of our time. And people in America began to feel that really perhaps the Europeans had a better grip, as a people belonging to the past and therefore on safer and saner ground. But there was a difference. Americans hadn't capitulated to anything. In Europe certain people had. They had capitulated not only their own lives but all those around them. The Americans didn't ask them to. They just did it. So there was an unequal distribution of power; the dream gained foot even more. Since, at the end of the war, England's independence---strength---was greater than that of any country in Europe, her capitulation was the greatest, being the most unnecessary. She lost even that little bit of real England that the Thirties had left. The war had turned her into a military springboard for a huge western offensive. The peace now turned her into a kind of well-run factory. Her guiding lights turned to America because they were closer to their world than to any other; they were more American, in fact, than they were English---they understood (and liked) the Americans better than they did their own working class. Therefore it is really wrong to say they capitulated. This is political talk---just empty words. They didn't have to capitulate or do anything consciously. They were just already members of the Anglo-Saxon industrial charnel-house.

In England the weather always seemed bad now, even when it was quite good. It seemed to get an obsessive hold on people's lives---as if, because everything else was finished, all you could do was stare at the sky. Even the royal family complained that it rained wherever they went: apparently, they took the weather

with them, even to places that only had a thimble-full of rain a year. The question you wanted to ask was, why with all that Commonwealth, stretched across nearly a sixth of the earth's surface and apparently well-disposed on the whole to the mother country, the royal family couldn't arrange to have itself given a private holiday at one of the spots where the sun always shone, making a permanent residence there, so as to keep that natural luxury which befits captains and kings? They could have done business by phone and the famous 'red box' could have been flown out from London every morning. Then they could have held up their heads for the rest of the country. But they had to be 'like everybody else'---a ridiculous idea if you want a king at all. They were servants---of civil servants. Above all there was this will to smallness and drabness in the country, getting at the roots like a cancer. Envy stopped everything. And where a country shuns style it must be governed by civil servants. There was a horror of aristocracy, inherited from the Thirties. And this is all right as long as money is being made. All visions are aristocratic in some way. And if you are neither making money nor having visions there is no development. The furniture gets dustier and dustier: which is what happened in England, as it will in America---when money is no longer being made there and horror of aristocracy lingers like a wound in its side.

In those dark years after the war there was simply no way of judging a man than by his Position. There was no real measure of violence and struggle, no hard measure, there was decidedly none of the clear suffering of the other epochs, even the epoch before the war. Since reality had really departed, something like a form had to be clung to, something concrete, because the English always begin from the concrete, they never go from thought to object but vice-versa. And the only available form was something left over from the past---but which for a very long time had been nothing but a form. So a form

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---even that from another society---was suddenly introduced as reality. Your credentials had to be gone into but nobody told you that these credentials were just a form and that therefore they could be fiddled. You only had to know how to fiddle, and if you were middle class you had probably had this training at home or at school. The peculiar dream-quality was that this fiddling wasn't clearly fiddling, it was apparently in earnest and yet the people who practised it weren't in earnest. If you wanted a job there was always the question of bona fides. That was how the old class of authority had always behaved---'Who is he?' That had been a convenient form, for finding out character: a quick and reliable form. Now it was one stage further on from a form---a 'formality'; often, you were told, a 'mere formality'. Formality governed everything. And the reward that came out of this was a vague privilege, not named very definitely: a privilege belonging to the old class of authority except that this didn't exist any more, and hadn't existed for quite a number of decades. But it was there 'on paper'. And the country got more and more into the condition of a peaceful, if slow, treadmill where nobody paused from the treading to ask a few clear questions as to what the devil it was all about. If it hadn't been for the peace---the orderly and intimate community the English create wherever they are---there would have been total civic collapse.

A stale and shameful air got into everything. This shame was a strange feature. You could see it in people's faces. It was the natural shame of the dreamer, the confirmed dreamer who has to face a crowd. People looked more and more retiring. Visitors from abroad noticed it---the English were extraordinarily 'civic', so much that they nearly cancelled themselves out. If you stayed in

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the country any length of time you got into this self-demeaning habit yourself---oh, no, thank you, yes, please, oh, I wouldn't bother if I were you...

The air was stiff with bona fides, with police-guarded credentials and Positions that began to show the holes more and more. The 'old gentleman' with his family business who sent across to the family wine-merchant in St. James's Street for his carafe of vintage-claret (Algerian swill laced with sugar) and always took you to the marvellous French place called Le Merdre where chemical gravy was squirted on to plates and stomach pumps were available in the lavatory, this gentleman who told an anecdote so nicely and had just bungled a big job for you was wearing thin and stale even for himself: the whole country was so clearly geared to something else, and had been for quite fifty years, but nobody could say what it was. The only people to make a real moral mark were the twisters and fumblers and procrastinators. It wasn't their fault, either. The country had fallen into their hands but they hadn't asked for it. It had been handed to them on a plate. For some reason they'd been left holding the baby, men who would have been the laughing stock of their mothers and fathers had they suggested trying to run a business fifty years before. There was the possibility that the old class of authority still had some spunk left, and knew how to run things by a kind of inherited instinct. But since a real class of authority hadn't existed for over a century except in foreign history textbooks, and only a handfull of families existed with anything like inherited powers of government, this didn't materialise. There was as near complete chaos as you could get in a country where social order was the first requirement in any situation. Pinchbeck ladies and gentlemen began to proliferate all over the country, in imitation county-clothes and imitation county-accents---the men standing in pubs dressed in

hacking jackets just not quite right, with ascots round their necks, drawling conecpts that didn't even belong to the world they were imitating. The order was all imagined to be there, the security was taken for granted by the new pinchbeck ladies and gentlemen who found themselves taken seriously by those from the lower classes who were just getting their first glimpse of the outside world. But their biggest blunder was not so much stepping into the jobs and being taken seriously, which they couldn't help, as taking themselves seriously. The result of this was that the country lost about as much influence and power in ten years as it had accumulated in three centuries.

It was rather like being under house-arrest. You had lost control of your life. But who exactly had put you under house-arrest? Who were the warders? You couldn't say. You couldn't even say clearly you were under house-arrest: you certainly never saw the guard outside the door. Though you heard gossiped evidence that he was there.

Only Europe was clear to me in those years---I mean the Continent: a marvellous new landscape I'd discovered through the war. It had been raped and shocked, but there was peace again. It was a daydream for me, like a woman, when I sat in that attic room on the outskirts of Oxford a few weeks after the war had ended, in the red-brick, still street from Victorian times with its suggestion of utter safety to the point of death. I was so excited in that room, with books all round me, on the floor, on the bed and tables. I had a little table wedged close to the window, and I could glance down at the street every few minutes as I worked. I ate there as well, wedged in the corner by the window, doing my first thinking for four or five years,

ecstatically relieved at being alone again, actually able to decide for myself whether to go downstairs and walk in the streets or not, or go to a café in town, or buy a book. I bought books from Paris. I dreamed about the castles in Germany, which I'd never seen, about the tall pine forests and wooden farmhouses with their overlapping eaves, and the valley leading from Italy through the Alps to Villach and Klagenfurt in Austria, where I'd once felt, coming out from between the mountains into flat green fields, that I was arriving home at last, though I'd never seen it before; I dreamed about the lakes near Yugoslavia, the Ossiachersee and the Wörthersee, and the little inns by the road, with streams and elm trees, and about the hot vineyards and tomato groves in the south of Italy, the broken-down barns rich with smells because of the heat; the shimmering mountains on the Garigliano, the endless column of smoke that used to go up from Vesuvius, straight as a ribbon held in the air on clear, still days; I thought of the olive groves on slopes just outside Salerno; my thoughts were all turned east, not consciously--- the east seemed actually to be in the work I was doing, latent in the books---and those memories seemed to be my points of reference whenever I sat down at the desk. I read German books as well. I'd always wanted to take languages at school instead of classics; but I'd missed the chance. I tried to learn a few verbs and nouns of German now. Europe was a new possibility for me, an occurrence for the first time, with that freshness you got in an autumn dawn in Karinthia or the Tyrol, with bright mountain grass and the sound of cow-bells. It was a discovery that had only been hinted to me before, in London, when I'd yearned to go abroad. Now it was like a total act of thought

that involved my future, my intimate designs and wishes, inseparable from the thinking I was doing, it didn't matter what the thinking was. It was like finding my whole identity for the first time, a necessary element in all the thoughts I had had so far, but which I'd never been conscious of. It wasn't that I'd felt isolated from it before. With nazism and the political crises before the war you thought about Europe a lot. She had been very closely there. It came from a sense that a separation was growing now. Perhaps it was a last-minute embrace---you didn't know why at the time.

Because an artificial isolation did come about. It wasn't even a slow business. It was a matter of the first months after the war. A source of life-blood was cut off.

More and more the Continent became a holiday-place. Not in real connection. If you lived on the Continent you were now 'lucky', you were having it 'easy', you weren't quite inside life, you were on a perpetual holiday. The precedent established by the rich English in the Thirties was still followed, though the situation had changed utterly. And this isolation was what suddenly ended the flow of my thoughts, and curtailed their energy, turning me to interim tasks, so to speak. What characterised my first energy after the war was something that should have had immediate historical fulfilment, in me as in millions of others; it wasn't just thinking <u>about</u> Europe, it was thinking new European thoughts quite as a matter of course. Or rather, they were simply new thoughts: at that time, they weren't 'European'; they are only so now--in the light of what happened afterwards. 'Europe' became the name---due to the artificial isolation which developed between its countries, and all round it---of a national area, which it had never been before. When I dreamed about

Europe in Oxford I was dreaming about countries---places. Only afterwards did the Europe we talk about now---an area of power politics---develop at all. And it developed by virtue of ceasing to be a civilisation: becoming instead a hope and a dream, in a decided physical area.

Europe and my own country were the landscape round all thought for me, and the energy of my thinking was the moral energy to change and make fresh life inside that landscape, invisibly. It was what thinking always is and must be unless there is something wrong with it: it must have a country, a place, a home, a spot of baptism, and such a thing can8t be made by a man's lonely will, it can't be made by people just deciding to get together and make a conscious society, it has to come from the invisible and undeclared will that is never in one man alone nor in one time alone but develops like an organ, in the darkness of conception and birth---a state of community which no mind can be responsible for or even become conscious of, except in moments of self-estrangement. I mean that my first thoughts after the war were a natural and complete act, they were proper thinking, but later they were not; later their struggle was with a certain puzzling unnatural element that kept coming in, they weren't clear with a decided moral direction, they had to deal with obstacles on the road---which blocked the sight. The problems inherent in all thought were no longer the only ones, the question kept coming up of whether it was possible for the act of thought to survive at all, and of how to keep one's faculties in line for the other mental offensives, and of what strange new menaces might not be blindly at work inside us. My thinking and reading went on as before, but there was a peculiar new block to the moral aspect, to that moral energy which sees

opportunities not for action but for expression: and these opportunities seemed to disappear. Nothing seemed shared any more. There seemed no authoritative and objective experience, of the simplest things. Unresolved ideas lay about everywhere, from class to God, and were just left lying there. And yet the problems behind them were what ~~was~~ were operating on life all the time, disturbing and halting and negating efforts; only they weren't so to speak officially recognised, they weren't supposed to be there although they were there with increasingly strong presence, so that in the end they came into life like inanimate things, not thought-out as they should have been but lived-out painfully and drearily in their contradiction. There was an invisible crisis going on all the time involving the whole question of the future and validity of the middle class, the whole question of whether the world it had made was going to break up not from war but from shere basic unhappiness. It was this crisis---involving all Christendom---which was postponed for twenty years or so by the existence of a middle class as strong (that is, wealthy) as any had been in the nineteenth century: namely, America. 'Europe'--- as she now was---could lean on the last surviving facet of nineteenth century civilisation, thus turning its problems back a century without any of the zest or conviction felt at that time.

I began to be aware after the war that having an attitude towards America was now a complicated and ambiguous matter. Resenting America was in some way low-class now. There was something shameful about it. Liking America was rather high-class now. You might not want to do either. But some attitude was incumbent on you. There began that American fate in post-war foreign relations of being identified in every country with the rich and classy. This was the basic contradiction in American

influence---it championed the underdog, it had a sore resentment of Class and Position, but wherever it was felt it bolstered up both, and smothered the natural resources of real change. That is the fate of rich people: they never get to know the realities anywhere; they're guided and chaperoned; they meet the climbers and apologists and charlatans. What American influence invariably did was to finance a fictional and sometimes attractive past. Outside America it represented the opposite of change and newness.

An element of shame entered into one's contacts with Americans. You didn't want to seem to ask a favour. And they brought that atmosphere of rich people---of having something morally contaminating about them: the atmosphere of a dream-world, a rich one, rather artificial and tinselly. It didn't matter if an American dressed himself in a torn shirt or hung around bars or set himself up as a bohemian in Paris or Rome or got into brawls---the stigma of the last wealthy middle class was always there. Foreigners were always, to some extent, like a proletariat spread befor ~~e him or them~~ him, even the better-off ones. It was in the American's gestures and accent. ~~They~~ He began to have the artificial quality of a kept class.

Thus, the myth worked both ways: it stopped the development of the countries under American influence, and it stopped the development of America itself.

Having an attitude to America wasn't like having an attitude to another country. Some people hate one country, or think they do, and some another. They always have done. But this was different. It began to be clear in those first years after the war. If you had any attitude towards America, whatever it was, like or dislike, reserve or plain spectatorship, it involved nearly everything else under the sun: it was a moral attitude.

You were asked, it seemed, for approval or otherwise, without your wanting to give either, just as you wouldn't want to give either in the case of Japan or France or Italy. You can't approve or disapprove of whole countries. You can travel through them and hate the size of people's heads, or approve of their love habits. You can find their food good or their lavatories intolerable. You can adore, say, French women. You can dislike the noise Italians make. But it doesn't involve you in a whole moral position. You wouldn't have to drag your whole life in, make a kind of life-confession. But that seemed to be involved in the case of America.

What you were really called upon to do was to approve of middle-class life. That was the basic thing. To some people this was easy, to others impossible, to yet others ambiguous and puzzling. But to everybody it was elementary---like being asked to subscribe your name to a petition from fifty or a hundred years ago which you thought had been argued out and forgotten even before your birth. You were suddenly asked to record a vote against slavery, on behalf of equal rights for women, for free education, poor relief, against class privilege: all the measures, in fact, of nineteenth-century industrial society. This meant that you had been subtly constructed into an enemy of the measures! No wonder ambiguity was the keynote of nearly every conversation in American company.

Criticism of America (meaning anything American) began to bear a kind of guilt with it. In those first years after the war there was talk of 'envy'. You mustn't envy the Americans. That was strange. Then envy was taken for granted---it was taken for granted that they had something enviable, that is, better? Why? Hitherto they had just been another country.

Now they represented a whole better life. You mustn't feel superior to them, either. That was another strange thing. Who said you had ever felt superior to them---that the thought had even entered your head? A high-class journalist playing the squire in Shropshire might write an article about it: this anti-American feeling had to stop, he might say; the envy and superiority were painful. He seemed to be talking for himself: could that be? He seemed to be saying that he had felt the superiority, and saw the grounds for the envy, but stopped himself because America was paying to clean up the ruins in Europe (as well as a handsome sum for his syndicated article). It seemed that the 'right people' were schooling England---as their prototypes were schooling every country in Europe---into a kind of acquiescence they themselves found advantageous. It was their world, apparently. Their world was being kept alive. Not ours. We'd never felt the superiority, or seen the grounds for envy. Nor did we see why we were supposed to applaud morally because a few people got rich out of American business contacts. But we were definitely being schooled. Things were hushed. A kind of censorship crept into life. And 'we' were the majority of the people in England; or, at least, this is my guess.

All the Right People had taken trips to America, or were about to do so. It was quite a high-class property. County ladies talked about Connecticut and Ohio as if they were a stone's throw away, certainly much closer than Calais. Of course, they liked the 'old country', and always came back to it, but things were done so much better in the States, didn't you think? The 'old country' was dreary and slow, having been snubbed and dressed down and shamelessly used by these very people for fifty years or more. These people seemed, in fact, to have sunk their own country, without

being asked to by the Americans and without being admired for it by the Americans---a fact which took some years to become clear. So that a dreary 'old country' really did come about---and seem to be of advantage to them. Their own power didn't dwindle at once, though they were incompetent to exercise it. It only slowly fell away, over about fifteen years, like rotten skin. The farms, the old family businesses, the manor houses, only drifted into the slough instead of cascading in as soon as the war was over. The county people, the imitation county people, the fiddlers and procrastinators and cadgers and bunglers 'rolled out the carpet' for visiting Americans. That was the expression. To the visiting American they were everything from eighteenth-century squires to the 'splendid British'---whichever role the visitor seemed to require. They could fulfil any of the caricatures: there was apparently an endless stock of acting ability in the Old World. The American (His Excellency the Ambassador, perhaps?) got his suits on Savile Row, his ties on Bond Street and his bowler hats you-know-where, and he was served by a shopkeeper who talked and behaved as if it was a hundred years before even his own time, and looked the part. The American rarely knew that he alone was keeping that shopkeeper off the street where he deserved to go and would have gone had his market been left to the natural tastes of the English and not been subsidised as foreign pantomime.

But invariably the American felt swindled. He played the American---whatever caricature of himself he was supposed to fulfil. And secretly he boiled and resented, as, secretly, his English associate boiled and resented. For the ones who talked about envy and superiority towards America were the ones who felt it most. Their capitulation was the greatest and most shameful. They were capitulating for the whole of civilisation.

Fellow-conspirators burn and boil secretly against each other.

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Above all, the dream was a real material benefit to most English people, which was why it lasted so long. The mediocre in their positions thrived on it; or at least ticked over, which was all they could afford to hope. It was like a game of monopoly in which one player hoards all the money: he paralyses the game for everybody else, but by producing stagnation all round him he eventually loses, little by little, the money he has hoarded. The mediocre only knew how to hang on to what they had: they didn't want adventures because then their powers would have been put to the test and their money risked. They could say no---and did to almost everything---but they had nothing to suggest for a possible yes.

But the dream was useful to working people as well. I saw how my own mother and father began to take on stock Working Class Attitudes, as they'd never done before. It was like whizzing back fifty years. The world was suddenly full of toffs, country houses, 'high society' and even the honest masses: all with the growing support of TV, it seemed. England became like a bad American film about itself. And there were 'protests'---against conditions and ideas that had gone out in the Thirties. Fictional protests against a fiction.

This picture of an old society meant that working people, though they now had more money in their pockets than ever before, had no new thinking to do, no fresh ideas to adopt and above all no responsibilities. The 'upper' class was still supposed to be there, looking after things with its strident manners and

its inherited know-how, irritating as these were. It made parrot-cries easier when you wanted more money. It made the labour struggle simpler: if you didn't get the money you asked for you went on strike, though the rest of the country might go to the devil. You never tried to influence the mediocrities in charge of things. You didn't try to join them, that is, share their responsibilities. It was snugger to say that they alone were in charge, and that they were to blame. Disraeli's 'two nations' were kept alive now as a matter of interest on both sides.

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America was now the 'newcomer' in politics: and she had twice saved Europe from her own 'mess'. The myth spread until it was no longer questioned: millions of dollars went to propagating it in in every form from films to private talk. People forgot that an American president had been quite as responsible for the Versailles treaty after the 1914 war as either the English or French prime ministers; that one of the major reasons for the failure of embargos against Mussolini after he invaded Abyssinia was America's wish to keep her oil flowing into his country; that perhaps the strongest voice for the release of Germany from the Versailles clauses limiting her armaments in the Twenties was that of America. All this was natural mistaken politics, which is the inheritance of every country on earth: but we were now told not only that there had been no mistakes in the case of America, but that she had had no politics at all.

Above all, people forgot that America was a crude <u>laisser-faire</u> capitalism, not a missionary force. It was, in fact, more like what Europe had been a century before than what it was

like now. Like other empires, this one extended its area of influence with the help of missionary zeal. In the same way, world markets were soon accompanied by world arms.

In this period German ideas---the philosophy of power---had subtly more and more influence over American thought: there was the growing megalomania of American aims, corresponding with the growth of American arms; there were world schemes and scholarships, there were international research organisations, there were cultural exchanges and plans for flights to the moon in a sort of Walpurgis Nacht of abstraction and sublimity; discernible were a certain German scorn for the human creature in his intimacy, a certain German awe of power and success, and a haunted German horror of failure and rejection, so strong as to paralyse ~~the~~ all but the most conventional ambitions; above all, a certain Hegelian sense of being the chosen nation of history. As if Hitler had given his genius to a whole continent, to be put into an acceptable Anglo-Saxon rational and liberal setting, where its disguise could be conveyed most effectively.

In twenty years or so the country that purported to bring with it a higher moral civilisation built up a world power as watertight as any empire. Never before, even in ancient Roman times, had an empire kept its power by such an emphasis on war. All we heard of in those years was war. Peacetime excitements continued to seem a little absurd, just as if a war was still on; an element of absurdity still clung to the intimate little devotions one person paid to another, as if hardness was now the incumbent human theme.

There were political crises, organised or accidental, and a mounting publicity of high moral attitudes that coincided with the mounting volume of armaments. And underneath this armoured

sky each country languished. The problem of what our civilisation was hadn't been broached: an effective answer to Hitler hadn't been given. In fact, there was a more thorough mobilisation for war than in his day. Everbody was mobilised in his soul.

The encyclopedic definition of knowledge, the mechanical definition of science, the functional definition of the human creature---everything that personified late nineteenth-century thought---were suddenly launched on Europe as if they were novelties.

What characterised the barbarian epochs---and the reason why they are called the dark ages---was that the worship of light which marked all other civilisation ceased ~~under~~ during them. In the ancient world Jove, the god of light whose image stood at the top of mountains, was what made countries and peoples whole and one: just as later on the hidden light of Christian truth was what made western civilisation whole and one.

During the barabrian occupations history became dead, the churches lay like museums ~~cluttered~~ cluttered with precious objects that aroused sensations of awe and acquisitveness; the paraphernalia of Christian civilisation---manuscripts, paintings, music---were rubble which was at best marketable. The 'real' activities of life were those which could be shown to have no dream. Every one was divided, basically alone. Children grew up with strange gaps in their perceptions: often in dumb resentment at what they felt instinctively they had missed. At the back of everything---keeping the 'peace'---was the daily threat of violence: and, locally, the practice. During that time it was isolated pockets of men who had ideas and wrote books and prayed for no other reason than they they were interested in them, in monasteries which were to all intents and purposes dead. They kept Christian feelings

alive for the next generations.

In those years after the war the word America meant tyranny for me. It meant a block to happiness and development. It meant that my own country---which finally and at the very deepest point is me, whether I like it or not---was running down; it meant that only a mask was being shown which would sooner or later be torn away. I burned secretly for freedom. I believe everybody else did, too. But they never spoke about it. There was no evidence of it. Apparently the will was dead. The American was, if a tyrant, a most mild and innocent one.

I had a famished love for my country which certainly wouldn't have existed in any other epoch; it wouldn't have been necessary--- it would have lain dormant. It would simply have been a state of being, not a claim. Now it seemed necessary if we were going to keep our language going, or any recognisable form in which to grow up; if there were to be homes and intimacy again, a safe place from which all poetry begins, and without which there are the dark ages.

It made an intimate difference to the whole course of life, this lack. It made conversation stale and inbred. It robbed every object, every face, every meeting of its authority: for the simple reason that the real authority was being exercised three thousand miles away. But it was deeper than that. The loss of authority was everywhere. It was the great new fact of life. The truth in the end was that authority wasn't being exercised from anywhere.

The greatest ambiguity was that America was really ourselves: a process in ourselves. It could fascinate us, put a kind of spell on us. These moments of fascination might be brief, but they involved a sense of ecstatic self-liberation which seemed to offer a chance of throwing everything over---all our past and therefore everything that haunted us from the past, the intimacy and hidden organic formulae that stretched over our lives like a web, the necessity to make our cities again, the pains and shadows round us that seemed to have taken on our own personal names: heady moments when life promised more than its dimensions and seemed to become a real religious being, instead of some thing always just short of---marvellously and bafflingly short--- of religion; moments when even society promised to be turned into some thing fraternal that would be without power or inequality, with their deadly stings and intrigues. Spurious---this bid to make God comprehensible---but we manufactured the need ourselves.

If, instead of working out for myself why the London streets where I was born haunted and horrified me for years afterwards, I'd just gone away from them and told myself that from now on I was free and wouldn't think of the past again, that would have been an American act. I would have made a new life, apparently, out of (apparently) new material. But my being haunted and

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horrified by those streets, instead of feeding me through the tissues of experience and conflict to make in the end a complete person, and a moral solution, would have been thrust under, in a peculiar dark and coiled-up inner zone that only reached expressim through nightmares and strange unknown outbursts of the heart, calls from a past now deathly because feared and shunned, and nearly unconscious, in a bristling contained violence under equilibrium; and that would have been the American state.

In some way it is all of us. America is us <u>in extremis</u>, beyond the point where we can be rescued. America was the need of the middle class to make---to try to make---an intact world where only itself would be known: no working people with their loving acceptance of work and refusal of ambition, no peasantyy with its daily blindness in the fields, no aristocracy with its divinity of person and its wildness that springs from inner form and seems (to our world) to threaten chaos; no power beyond the workaday requirements of life, nothing but the material, the logic of production, no folly that might disrupt the schedule; an intact and closed world of opportunity, ambition, failure or success, civic religion, and separate inviolable prides that will refuse the humility of being fully known and taken for granted in community. It was an experiment against what came to be called 'nature', meaning (in the middle class terminology) a picturesque, blind, terrible and marvellous but always separate and basically irrelevant zone outside us. There was to be no power outside what men could understand: a world apparently made by men---that is, made conscious, with no past, no passion or 'force of nature', therefore no religion, nothing invisible to engulf men's consciousness and make it their victim---nothing to hold, imprison, darken their minds. Their minds had to be the light shed on everything. The body, the earth, the

sky, the will, the desires---all had to be comprehensible to the consciousness, and arranged and ordered by it. Nothing must be allowed to give---to yield---to the invisible outside world, to the rhythms of the 'outer' (but necessarily 'inner' as well) universe---nothing must be lost in the dark, silent marsh of the blindly created forces outside. Outside was chaos; in the consciousness there was order; the consciousness even brought order to the surrounding chaos. This experiment that took place over centuries was to make men free of the invisible so as to give their lives order, to stop them being slaves of fears, storms, moments; it was therefore a religious experiment, but conducted against the great manual of religion---the natural universe; it was designed to rescue the consciousness from paganism---from the terror of an unexplained and cruelly indifferent universe; and this it did. But its long battle left ruins: in the aftermath all you got was men's consciousness in the world, men's order---it put its deadly mark everywhere, cancelling out the real order behind; the world round us was ravaged---inside us as well; we were born in the smoke and ruins after the battle. You could say the battle was to rid the middle ages of its paganism---~~the~~ its horror of death, ~~the~~ its numbed pagan resignation to the apparent wild disorder of the forces outside, ~~the~~ its sorrowing sense of the macabre, ~~that there was in medieval times.~~ It was to bring Christian order into actual men's being, instead of remaining as a desparate faith, a kind of sustained passionate hope. It was to fulfil the Second Coming which the middle ages were always waiting for: the coming of Christ into men, not as hope any more, but as the very form of perception and consciousness.

And in the first terrible dawn after the battle, when the dead have still not been removed, we have to make up to the world again, we have to get used to peace, look round us again, notice things,

we have to remember that the enemy has been dealt with, there's time to look about and instead of marshalling forces all the time and dragooning nature for the next zero-hour we can watch things come to life again all round us, we can see how they grow and what extraordinary ingenious natural lives they have apart from us: we can have real science---instead of battle-order as knowledge---for the first time. And this discovery has to be through the mind because this is the only intact faculty left to us after centuries of battle on the other faculties. We have to discover the stupendous order that lies all round us, in the soil, in the animals and plants, in the space through which we look, in the movements of things, in the tiny glands and cells and channels of our own bodies: and we can only do it when we know that we are part of this order, and are not in battle-order against it all the time. It means religion, which is always surrender. And this surrender to discovery is what brings the middle class to an end, by a process it will take on itself.

The charnel house brought into being by that experiment is enormously dreary. This is the dreariness of a long, treeless, industrial street. You feel it in France, in England; in America it is <u>in extremis</u>, eaten into the flesh of life. It is dreariness because the sky is changed---it falls back to second remove; it is a kind of dead spectator to men; it doesn't feel created any more, nothing has that stunning and exciting sense of being created from beyond us any more. It is like putting everything under a huge plastic roof---once it was made of glass, at the end of the nineteenth century; ~~and~~ the last previous furniture in the channel house always looks innocent to the ~~present~~ later inmates. That roof covers everything, even the countryside, it filters the light and darkens even the rain. It fills the air with sounds made by people, but not sounds <u>of</u> people. It always reminds you of

people, you can never get away from them: but people as small creatures---ticking, unnatural intelligences; as uncreated. They seem to have created themselves. They're all consciousness. And here again you get the American mind in extremis---our ~~world~~ mind, which is slowly evolved over the centuries, gone nearly to madness, in a ~~mind~~ state that can never lose itself, that is morbidly and irretrievably conscious. At the same time, in the charnel house, we are responsible for ourselves. This is an advance. We have a new kind of freedom. It compensates for the dreariness. It makes it possible to look forward and change things. In Italy and Germany you still have a sense of created nature round you, and of people being part of it, even in the industrial districts. There isn't the physical dreariness. But there isn't the other thing either, the full self-responsibility, the freedom. So the two facets of our great modern charnel house draw together, and grow by each other. The one sustains the other. So that in the end the strange heady and anchorless freedom will go, and so will the dreariness. There will be the surrender to the real, objective freedom that lurks outside, in the surrender of the middle class. There is a freedom outside which we haven't tuned to yet.

America---or rather the publicity-myth we are in the habit of calling America---is an attempt to make the one world work after all: the world of uncreated being; it tries to alter the dreariness by giving it a coat of paint, ~~so to speak,~~ and demolishing it every few years for a new building. It confesses its own failure. This is what makes any religion or art in America an act of revulsion from the whole environment, an act of total rejection. It has to reject totally the world of uncreated being.

The ideal middle-class society is without blind communal sources. A society with the minimum heritage, the minimum inher-

itance. The perfect end-product middle-class world---the 'America'---is where there can be no genuine inner development, no real movement, no sustenance from the past and no hope from the future; only an endless accumulation of power by each generation, and each new generation discarding the last and therefore discarding itself, with no soil in which to grow and reflect and nurse wounds because the ploughing-over is constant, so that ploughing-over is the only reality, in a circular and repetitive mad movement which has no reason beyond itself, in a self-assertion that repeats 'I am I am I', and all foothold in the objective---the natural and ordered---world outside is nearly lost and is only kept by reference to the past or its equivalent (the world outside 'America') where vestiges of folly and community and aristocracy can be found; each generation being a marvellous imitation of what is going on outside or what used to be or what is thought to be, in order to perfect it or complete it or round it off, to be as it were the Logic Centre or the Finishing Laboratory of the Christian world. This 'America' will go down quickly as part of the middle-class upheaval everywhere, not in decadence or degeneration or any of the other famous nineteenth century forms that are usually promised (as if there was the opposite of decadence anywhere else in civilisation) but by voluntary change; not through displacement by another class, or through violence or even loss of power, but through a simple and clear self-examination that will be forced by circumstances (namely, by the natural and ordered universe outside), and will involve the death of the worm of ambition. In this enormous mystical upheaval, whose appearances will be anything but mystical, the nineteenth century divisions of middle-class life into Europe or America or Asia will cease.

America will then be a place, for the first time, as opposed

to the realisation of an idea. Its great spurious ethical ambition---its attempt to teach ethics through power---is basically the spurious dream of middle-class life everywhere: a disastrous and doomed illusion, which all great religions begin by destroying. 'America' is therefore the great anti-religious society, precisely as the middle class is the great anti-religious class by definitinn. The American artist is in difficulties from his birth. He asks himself to perform the most complete religious act outside the church, but by his birth he subscribes to the greatest anti-religious experiment ever conducted in the name of a religious end (and a valid religious end). He can only begin by denying that experiment from start to finish, which means unearthing and rejecting every principle he has imbibed since childhood. He can only approach ~~a~~art ---as opposed to a kind of loud and splendid journalism---if he damns the whole picture from top to bottom, with himself thrown in. He has to see the doom and collapse of the whole experiment in every thought and gesture and smile all round him. Short of that he can't get to the frontier where God and not man shows him the way. At best he'll achieve what the Victorians achieved---a bustling public statement where there are men and vivid objects, and plans, and a language to make you hop, but no solace for us, nothing that includes us waifs and strays of history, nothing from the God for whom our little generations are sand in the desert. ~~And they~~ The Victorians were in the same position---the same experiment was going on all round them in its first stages, so loud and constant that the lonely voice of thought sounded, selfish, a little mad, shameful---dirty. The Victorians, too, were the spurious ethical leaders of the world. Their massive error, too, was the idea that the rich man can ever have something moral to teach. The rich man has one possibility, which might

just secure his own salvation: prayer. For the delights of community, like moral insight, are for the poor.

After the upheaval America will be able to take up its real history again, and its continent become a brooding mystery again. The land will get its inner pulse back, you will see the extraordinary crisp marvel of the pioneer-country again, its strange, half-forbidden hugeness, its special light, the vivid colours, the intimacy and sanity, and the nineteenth-century paraphernalia of a national ethics and indeed anything national at all will fall to pieces. It won't have to try for a national identity like an outpost any more. It will be its own world. It will just be there, as my Englishness is here, whether I like it or not. A country is language.

The language of a country is its heart---the physical source of warmth and circulation. It's action is invisible and unplanned. It evolved through slow evolution, quite independently of the body in which it beats---independently, I mean, of the will in that body. Its sounds come from ways of thinking and feeling: these are like rivers and waterfalls that have made marks on the rocks as polished as glass. A language is already, in its form and sounds, part of the thinking of the creature who uses it: it actually forms thoughts, as it bears the burden of thought to other people's ears. It goes on in secret, it lies in a kind of womb of the past, it speaks in dreams, it can be seen in its syntax and sounds in dreams, it becomes the face and look of thought, it has a strange and terrible being in itself, like the heads of grandmothers and the smell of fir-pine burning, the ring of copper and the sound of ancient trees being felled; it is the countryside where you were born. Its human vehicle, above all, is the mother. She bears the secret language through the generations. She brings

it in the first months like a rune, with its strong glowing colour and ancient imperative demand. The writer can never come into being, he can never develop. He can only be born. Language is only his sign, for the countryside, for the fear in his belly that this man causes and that man relieves, for the sounds that haunt him early, and the crisp, chill air at night, and the moon, and lanes through hills with hedges on either side.

The English language always touches life concretely---it touches things. It isn't reflective. It is crisp and clear like stones and streams and the barks of trees. Its words are actual objects. People call it an empirical language, for this reason. You begin with the living and touchable world round you, you begin with the intimate community of objects. That is safe. That is the coin of poetry. Each language is its countryside, and therefore its people. German is sweeping, lonely, primitive, like forests. French is reflective, dazzling-clear like the light of the sky in the Isle de France on an early summer day. Italian names the feelings all the time, it starts from them, inadequate, like the irresistible outburst of a child. But these are locked away from me: I can only talk about English. I know a bit of the other three languages but the secret of the womb is hidden from me, and must always be. A writer always knows that a man has one language and one only. If he has two, equally fluent---he has none.

The English language doesn't start with a principle and then work towards the object. There aren't the facilities for it. The English don't draw from experience clean and satisfying moral incentives. That would be too static a function for the language. The words have to be in movement, above all in actual life. They resist the formal. They work in and through daily life, and

achieve moral incentives in terms of what is to be done. The language encourages a kind of pragmatic action all the time. It is close to doing. Unlike Italian and German, there is one language for all purposes---talking, working, writing. There isn't a special language for literature. The language of the common people is the language of literature in English; in German or Italian this would have to mean vernacular or dialect literature. German and Italian require an enormous life-effort on the part of their writers, just to achieve language---that is to say, form. The form isn't already there; the actual daily language threatens to drag them down into formlessness ('vulgarity'). In Germany and Italy life and thought were never joined together on a collective basis, perhaps because of the lack of a complete and integral aristocracy---that determinant of the form of all society. In France and England you had this aristocracy: to a great extent it came to England as a gift from France, through William; in fact, this man gave England the fruits of what he'd learned in his own country---a centralised aristocracy, namely, monarchy as it came to be known.

Therefore you have a fundamental difference of psychology between on the one hand the French and English world, and on the other hand the German and Italian world. It is the difference between the organic and the provincial cultures.

Listening to Angelo talking was for me the strangest and most stirring journey into another world because I could always marvel at how he started with the generality and then went on to the instance and situation. This is a particular Sicilian gift. I always talked about things, there was always an example on my lips, all my thinking and talking were concrete in that respect, although they might correspond with Angelo's in substance. The styles were totally different; there were also fundamental differences of

psychology which I didn't learn about for years. I think my style was basically incomprehensible to him as well. In his world things were what had to be held at bay, they were the opposite of reflection and generality, not the source and material. In his world this clinging to things was like clinging to chaos; the things all round---namely, daily life---had no form of their own accord, it seemed; they meant the failure to reach thought, they meant vulgarity and provincial suffocation and imprisoning vapours and the clutch of a dead and pervading past and superstitions and hysterias; they meant being locked in self, which seemed not to have inherited any collective form, but to be the seat---especially if left undeveloped---of ignorance and disgust. One day, after we'd known each other for nearly ten years, he suddenly turned to me and said, apropos of a judgement I'd just made, 'Ah, I see, I see... Now that's very English. I can see now. You go from particular instances. Particular instances---things---that means your perceptions and senses are your guides, you learn from them as you go along, there's a harmony for you in them, you don't form a judgement of life through thought, directly, you have to touch it at some point, and only then do you know about it. And that's Shakespeare, too. Everything comes through touch.' What I'd just done was to say something about two friends of his, one a Russian and the other a Greek, both living in France. I said that when you shook the Russian's hand it was like entering a contract: his grip had something contractually binding about it---it seemed to ask you to sign somewhere, in a contract describing the terms of loyalty and friendship. And the Greek's handshake was flesh---carne--- you felt the soft and sensuous flesh right at the centre---it was almost meat---there was some overpowering attention to the sensuous in it. It was randy, so much prick that the inner character seemed

to have gone, the inner stiffness. It was desire so deep that it was fathomless, therefore soft all the way through. And he leapt on this---'Yes, yes! That's him!' He lowered his voice---'You know, he likes licking so much, between the legs.' And it was so true of the Russian---the contract. I had got to know these men in a moment, through a handshake, not through thought and appraisal. ~~That was how I always seemed to arrive at my judgements.~~ And he added to Nicole, 'You see the way he thinks?---one quick empirical moment and he knows them.'

But he didn't understand it any better. At least, I don't think so. It was still a distant world for him, and one finally to which he could never belong. He could only make an intellectual recognition of it. Perhaps. Perhaps he knew me better than I shall ever know.

Mine ~~It~~ was the opposite of his way. His marvellous calm and rounded and elegaic appraisals of other people were Sicilian, as I came to realise slowly. There was something classical about them. That elegaic and calm and melancholy thing was already in his language. His language was waiting there to fill him, almost like a body of thought already there, not just an instrument of words. Language is never an instrument.

Angelo never really had patience with my halting Italian, especially when I spoke it fast, and all the little halts and mistakes came pouring out. He never really taught me anything about his language. He wasn't like an Italian---patient, easy, teaching me to take it slowly. Through him I learned all the wrong lessons of speech in Italian. I went at it headlong instead of opening all the tissues, so to speak, and falling into a slower and natural rhythm, enunciating clearly and slowly, as if there was all the time in the world. I always felt his impatience---that dry,

classical, unsympathetic scrutiny of the 'island', as they call it. In his language he was the 'island', not Italy, certainly not Rome.

This is the limitation of the American language---it is always being drawn back into the role of instrument-of-thought, with nothing intimate---no distinct countryside---to serve it, only remnants and dreams and little pockets of the past. Really, this is the danger of all language now, and the American is only language *in extremis*, broken under the strains of middle-class life. American has to serve the requirements of people who do not share with each other the same forms of thought, the same vivid intimacy: it has to serve Germans, Arabs, Chinese, Sicilians, Irish---whoever the emigrant is. It can only be an enormous complicated vehicle that stands away from the mouth and the blood, so to speak, like a machine infinitely regulated to all the millions of different propositions that have to be expressed. This is what makes it enormously difficult to read for those who haven't been groomed to it---difficult for those who have, sometimes, too. It is like looking into the jagged parts of a machine that clatters and clicks while purporting to be the sound of a human creature. There is much more of the past in American than in English---many more old expressions, from 'gotten' to 'Say!'. 'Son of a bitch', which is never used in England now, was used there in 1733. 'I'll be even with you' sounds specifically American now, but you can find it in Shakespeare. There are dozens of words which went out centuries ago in England which still have their old crisp force and tread in American. But still the language is prevented from taking its roots in intimacy, because of the endless ploughing-over. The intimacy of a language is really born in the first primitive efforts of community, and even though the American language was brought from elsewhere you

still get that intimacy---its ring---in the first pioneer-stories. But gradually this language became a public medium, not the heart and glory of life planted by the mother. Every language has its intimate form that is the form of its people, their habits and dreams. But with each new immigrant this is broken down in America. So you really get hundreds of different languages there. You get people writing in clear, puritan language that is really from the seventeenth century; you get the machine-language designed for all purposes---for the production-society; you get a kind of German style, unwieldy and abstract; you may get a sort of Italian plastic vividness. The rhythm of American is always different from English, too. Really American is made for the unambiguous social act---it has the swing of speech between strangers, but strangers who share something; so the language has this strange sweeping and yet intimate ring. The stranger has to be put at his ease; basically, everybody is a stranger. By comparison with this, English is the language of a family. It has no deliberate intimacy whatsoever but an infinite number of half-conscious signs. The American when he hears English hears, essentially, Europe. It brings out all his love and hate of Europe---it provokes the whole troubling ambiguity of his attitude. Just the sound of English can do that. It suggests the haughty, the authoritative, the lovley, the immobile, the traditional and fixed, the dark, the past, the dream, the horror. It is listening to the past, for the American. And so all language is, essentially, for the middle-class world. All intimacy, all the dark roots of our lives, our kisses and our sweat---are the past. And the past lours at the middle class. It has to be dealt with. It can't be avoided much longer. The nineteenth century promised that

it would be killed off, once and for all. But this wasn't fulfilled. The past can't go on being a sort of kiss one moment, and a stink the next. ~~In this America is only our world in extremis, as it is in everything else.~~

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I remember living in the country near London, in Kent, after the war, in a tall, slim semi-detached house that looked across an ugly little strip of garden towards the lovely Darent valley, which was always wonderfully still, like a perfect lawn with the river going through it like deep glass, under trees. I could see this valley from the window where I worked. Sometimes I saw it at dawn. My room was at the top of the house. I could see the dawn falling on the misty grass like a dust, and gradually the trees would open to view, stealing out of the dimness. It was one of those villages that have hardly been touched, except with a little urban craziness like a poor tide that brings old bits and pieces---a little crime, some driftwood of malice, a daft old lady---and leaves them on the sand to dry. Once all the pets in the village were killed off by a maniac, or perhaps he was the treasurer of the cricket club. We lost our white cat, which used to follow us about like a dog. Three dead whippets were left in a sack on somebody's doorstep just before a village conference was due to be held there to discuss it all. The village was the past, with a London madness to keep it bright. The men used to travel up to London to work, and tried to form a community on the week-ends---like a big-arsed monster without arms or legs making gibbering noises. There were little quarrels---the journalist up the hill was a communist, the bank-man down the hill was bitterly anti-

communist; the wives were involved---an insult at the pub---angry knocking on the bank-man's door to redress the insult---nearly a fight; so the boys went on, in the dream-life they thought was real. And the cricket club---they were always trying to get you to join. It was like an itch. They wanted you to scratch as well, otherwise you didn't look right. The cricket club was like a lavatory-pan for the evacuation of hidden dreams, hopes and daring sexual affinities---which should have got to the women but unhappily for them didn't. There were those eternal-seeming afternoons on greens, with the plock of the ball like a clock marking off everybody's distress. As a means of evacuation for school-boys fox hunting is much better, I think: the horses are swift and lovely, there is the hard autumn weather, the mud and the memory of glowing manor halls and log fires and sirloins of beef and wild, god-damming Englishmen standing in their breeches farting in front of the fire. I've always been afraid of cricket, for fear of being hit in the balls. It always seemed to me that you needed a big pad not over your knees but over your balls, and when I was chain-ganged into playing the game at the age of twelve or so---at the galley where I got my education, together with four welts across my backside which drew blood---I used to lean forward a bit when the batsman's instrument closed on the ball, in case I got it straight in that little spot where (I hoped) much activity was being held in store for me. Of course, I ought to have been willing to give up everything in the interests of what the school called public spirit, of which cricket was for unexplained reasons a part, but being of weak and mortal flesh I was anxious to keep my sex.

This public spirit, which didn't really have any spirit about it/all, was also present in the village. But the real village---the soul of the village---resisted this, and at night it was dark

and mediaeval, and silent, exactly as it must have been a century or more ago, in the days of the painter Palmer and William Blake, who were often there. Palmer did a lovely picture of the autumn moon over the village, with the mysterious hill rising up to it. That was my third glimpse of the silence, the marvellous sweetness and intimacy, that lie beyond men, and which we have temporarily tried to break in ourselves. The first time was at the beginning of the war, near the southern coast of England, the second in the war itself, in Italy and Africa and Palestine and the Lebanon, and lastly Greece. The distress of society all over the middle-class world, from Silesia to San Francisco, was so rigid and fast that only two world wars could break it. The rest has to be done by men themselves.

Those months in the village, with clean fields and woods and orchards all round, and hills that made every end of the road mysterious, were a kind of convalescence for me from the insanity of Oxford. I started work in about the most miserable job there was in London. I used to travel up every day in the sniffing and hawking hordes of people with their rustling newspapers and chapped noses and smelly raincoats, as far as Charing Cross station where we were all spewed out of the train by an invisible malevolent force, to flop, stumble, stagger, trip and crawl towards the main lunatic exits like the prisoners in Fidlio who haven't seen the light for so long, except that we had no voices and didn't sing O, welche Lust! because even the light had lost its joy for us. Our lives were so much death, we thought we might do without the light. So these old men and ladies of whom I was one staggered out of the station not even like prisoners but like the freemen of death. I suppose even a century ago England wasn't totally given up to these hordes, it hadn't entirely become the exercise-yard of these hordes - if the freemen of death have exercise-yards.

But since the war this has what it has become. Those hordes don't give themselves airs. That is the one rule. No pretences or gestures of being fully human, only law-abiding and work-abiding and death-abiding good people, going to their rosy homes for the tiny permitted kiss in the evening, to make clean the day. Though when I got back at night I didn't feel like kissing anybody, I didn't feel much like anything. All I wanted to do was to sit and breathe the air from the window, and to drink in the country silence, and to feel the dim, secret trees outside and the crisp valley, and let the thoughts of dead men---the real living dead---flow into me, together with hopes that made me shudder suddenly with their sheer magnitude. And I looked at everything---the carpet by the fire in my room, the bed in the corner, the old chintz-covered chairs downstairs, the books on the shelves. I thought of the intimate country-lane outside the bedroom window. The kitchen that jutted into the garden was like the room of a castle. These were all parts of a life that other people had lived, or that I had lived before, and belonged solely to the silent England outside, that lovely gentle presence.

My job was to sit in an office with two other men, who like me were broken-hearted clowns, snipping pieces out of newspapers and pasting them on to a booklet which when printed up in all its fatuity and staleness would go out overseas to government posts which wouldn't even glance at it. My work was always finished early, if it could be said ever to start. The only rule behind it was that not a trace of the mystic human breath should be present, on the finished product. And after that I sat twiddling my thumbs. I smoked, I got up and went for a pee about once an hour, I looked out of the window across at the dreary Victorian mansions opposite, I thought about women. But I couldn't act-

ually do anything, I couldn't think up a plan for my immediate life; a plan of escape it would have to be. I couldn't even read. And the people in the corridor outside and in the other rooms always seemed to have colds. The dim glow of the corridor was like the glow of a running nose. And nobody seemed really to speak. I don't think I was spoken to the whole time, except by the broken-hearted clowns, in quips and groans and asides. At least there ought to have been drinking or card games or parlour tricks---or music-hall turns, orgies, nude exhibitions. These would have given the work a meaning, and the mansions would have got back some of their old robust mystery, as they must have had in Victorian times, because people at least ate well then and had naughty music halls, they were strict about sex but at least it was hard going for them, at least they still had whores, and the best of them, even ambassadors, kept pictures of plump nude ladies over their beds. But now, at a time when there was supposed to be the greatest liberality about the body, it really seemed to have disappeared, and sex didn't seem half as important as the morning cup of tea if one could judge from the scheming and squabbling and fretting there was about it. For perfect foulness this morning cup of tea was seconded only by the afternoon cup of tea. So you couldn't even look forward to that. One of the tall, massive rooms should have been fitted out as a kind of splendid whorehouse, and we could have had a running buffet all day, with persian carpets on the floor and billowing satin curtains and dim russet lights, and long settees with footrests where you could sit with one of the girls, with one rule only---that the work to be done must be done, somehow. That room would have been the temple where we could lift up our heads and get a little ~~=====~~ dignity and splendour and depth into our long faces; we could Hem say that as the creatures

of God we had more to show for His ingenuity than snotty noses. In all the time I was there I only remember seeing one girl, who hurried past along the corridor one day---with a handkerchief in her hand. I don't say that I didn't see more than one, I only can't remember more than one. And the handkerchief was an important part of the scene. It flashed as she passed. Then she was gone and I didn't see her again. Everyone seemed to be hiding, including myself and the other clowns. The chief of the whole place did the same. He came into the big office on the other side of the corridor every morning (he had a carpet, a desk and some curtains---you got a certain quota of things as you went higher, and that was his lot) and made a kind of pale dive through his door with sheer terror at being seen (moving, too) by one of his subordinates. Because he wasn't supposed really to be there, not as himself, anyway. He was a---Position. And if he'd been seen by the subordinates there would have been the question of whether he should be called sir or not, and then the counter-question of whether he should appear to want to be called sir, since after all this was democracy, and who was he to put on airs? Yet because in fact he <u>was</u> higher-up he did have jurisdiction over them etc etc. It was very ambiguous. And so there was the pale dive, and the pale dive of his subordinates away from him. It was not only ambiguous but ghostly too.

Even the money I got was unreal. I got just about enough to cover the fare to and from the village and the extras implied by two train journeys a day---cups of stale tea, a pellet designed for multi-firing guns called A Bun, a Wash and Brush Up to forestall total collapse, and lotions, tonics, powders to keep my legs walking straight. One day I realised I could have begged or borrowed the same amount easily, and got my own work done as well.

I seemed to sit about so much in that job that, like all the other clowns there, I looked as if I was walking round with an armchair stuck to my backside, whenever I did walk. It had an effect on my stance. But we didn't really walk, any of us---we only staggered and stumbled about with files under our arms, uncomfortably aware of the invisible pulsing life in our flesh and veins which refused to be put out by the death all round us. I soon got boils on my arse, the first I'd ever had, and was obliged to stand up at my work, which made a change: I ~~used to say~~ held them I wanted to rest my legs, you know. I tried sitting on cushions but they were so painful that I preferred leaning over my desk as if interest was rooting me there. ~~They~~ The boils were the end as far as I was concerned. I decided to get out. I suddenly dashed downstairs and phoned one of the biggest magazine-publishing concerns in London, and shouted until I had got hold of one of the top boys, personally. I sounded so urgent and demanding that all the underlings put me through, until I was all of a sudden at the top. And I told him at once, I was so desperate, the job I was in was so ghastly that in all humanity he must put out a helping hand to me and give me a job. He made an appointment for me at once, for the following afternoon. And off I went the next day, to one of those immense publishing offices in Covent Garden; and I was shown into the chairman's office. He was a nice man, kindly and quiet, and said to me, 'Well, you seem pretty desperate.' I went into another speech and he told me quietly that he thought, just from hearing me talk, that I would certainly go far one of these days, and he'd try to get me a job, but it was very hard, the times were very hard, what with people still coming back from the army who wanted their old jobs; but he would do his best. We smiled at each other and shook hands; at least I'd got a lot of wind off

my chest. Some days later he phoned me at the office, to my astonishment, because I never expected to hear another word (such was my buoyancy), and ~~he~~ repeated that he'd been very impressed by me, that he had tried very hard for me but there was absolutely no chance of getting a job for me just then, it was hopeless and unfortunately he had no power to invent jobs. So that was that. But this action won me my freedom. I applied to take a post-graduate degree, at my old college, an idea I loathed and detested, but I got it, I had won a reprieve for another eighteen months at least. The extraordinary thing was that the boils-job had only lasted six weeks. It was the longest time I ever stayed with death, but yet I insult death when I say that, in the manner of my epoch, for death could never be like that, death is the view you have over the hill, the silence and rustle of wind in the trees, the stream that goes without you knowing it and the sound of sheep and their bells in the night. And this death was what I went back to in the country every night, the real and lovely death.

Perhaps the deadliest thing in that job was the sight of people queueing for cigarettes in a tiny shop near the office the size of a railway-compartment. There was always this queue, of which I made myself one, endlessly getting nearer the counter and never succeeding in unravelling itself, not until the offices got into full death-swing at about half-past ten and the last pale, snotty-nosed, wheezy freemen were safely locked inside. The queue wasn't alive, it was bent and withered and shuffling like the ghost of a shabby idea. And the ghosts of people's feelings went on underneath---animating it and giving what little life there was to the quick murmur of cigarette-formula (since there was a formula for everything in life, developed in wartime, and you were a fool if you didn't know it); and those feelings underneath were war-like,

they struggled like the ghosts of war for the tobacconist's attention, they preyed on her telepathically for a packet of Players or Goldflake instead of Weights or Woodbines, for these were the days of cigarette-shortage and they needed the best smoke to provide haze for the day's séance at the office. And a strange reluctant clicking response took place in the tobacconist-lady's face, hardly moving it, like a machine under the folds of her pale skin, deciding to deny this one his Players, that one his Goldflake, to give liberally to that one and stintingly to the other, while the endless writhing creature of ghosts moved towards her.

I can remember having a sense of the total collapse of England early in the war, before it had really happened. I remember distinctly sitting in a café one morning near a training camp on the outskirts of London where I was waiting for the draft abroad. It wasn't a horrible sensation. It was just a calm and thoroughly clear sense that this future experience---of the collapse---would come. It was a glimpse of a future England. You could see it there already. I could see it in people's faces as they came in for their morning coffee; a more authentic look which had been on them a year or two before had gone. I remember there was a glass fanlight, and a pleasant glowing light in the room from the sky. It was a sudden conviction of the collapse of authority. Just authority---everywhere---had ceased to exist. I knew it, at that moment. The experience might have no meaning. But that was the experience.

And it wasn't just England. It touched everything else. It was in the Americans at the same camp. They passed like strangers. There was a sense of total and absolute decadence---so complete that one could only see it as the new life (because there was no antidote or opposite).

England was ravaged by Americans, in its intimacy. It was a

ravage from inside, as if England had brought it on herself. It was something she even seemed to have worked towards. We all felt this ravage, secretly. Some talked about it. Most didn't. There was no love between English and American soldiers, but there was no love anyway, between one American trooper and another, one English trooper and another, between Canadians and Poles, New Zealanders and Aussies. The whole rotten modern world was there, seething with malice and---its chaperon---sentiment.

There was a sense of the collapse of even the most intimate moral fibre, even the natural fibre the animal has. There was one scene, I remember: a drunk American soldier in Piccadilly, in the darkness late at night when the hollowness of the city at war came into its own and drove out everything but fear and remorse, standing in the shadows with a girl, his pants open, pulling her towards him while he tried to masturbate himself into an erection, his eyes closed, almost asleep from the drink; and she was swaying with him. That was the beginning. A new terrifying force had entered, to which the body of the foreigner was always a corpse. It was the new force in all of us. We were all foreigners. It only looked like ravage from outside. But it was in all of us. We were all foreigners, to each other. That didn't stop at the end of the war. It remained the basic condition. It is still there in us.

That was why this scene in Piccadilly appalled me. Basically it was a glimpse of us all. I was twenty then and had no formed idea. All I knew was that I could either fight this new thing, or give way to it. But it took me years just to find out how to fight it. England was finished. People were finished. That was all I felt. It was perfectly symbolic that an American should

have given me the glimpse. The American was me---in extremis.

In the war I feared Americans like nazis. I thought of them as 'natural' nazis, the born nazis. When after the war, in Austria, I saw a small troop of them walking down a hill---they suddenly appeared close to me, their bayonets (I saw them as daggers) clinking against their belts, their necks thick and sunburned, as I had seen some of our SS prisoners, I began trembling all over and had to stand still until they passed. It was like the shock of another battle. I would have laughed to know that I was trembling at---myself.

This had nothing to do with the Americans I actually met. It wasn't substantiated in any way. We mixed in with the Texans just short of Cassino, before the spring-attacks, over Christmas. Our tents were close to each other. Massive German 88mm shells made holes in the earth between us now and then. It was cold, grey weather on the whole. They had accents that fascinated me, and an easy air that kept drawing me to their tents. But I stayed away on the whole so as not to 'impose', not realising that they weren't Englishmen and that they talked to strangers as a matter of course. We used to exchange bully beef for their spam. They had tinned turkey for Christmas, and plenty of whisky. They had the gift of making a festive occasion even there, with great holes being heaved up all round us. This festive power had the flavour of the eleventh hour about it, whereas our festive occasions, which had assimilar intimate glow, in tents lit mysteriously by kerosene lamps, and with wood fires improvised out of biscuit tins, were strangely different. There was the same intimacy in both, the same glow and love of occasion. But the flavour of England was the flavour of an island---the light and strangely free and individual island-touch where what counted---what made the glow---was

the stamp and personality of each face, its ripples and ancient marks, and the distinct and individual and fabulous ring of every voice. And the American glow had something eleventh-hour about it, quite apart from the war. Their actual physical closeness to each other was greater, they sat more round the sparkling fire, they drew up closer, much as if the intimacy didn't lie inside them but was a need almost like a fear; and their freedom didn't lie in the individual stamp of face---in the eternity behind each face---as it did with the English, it lay in some kind of eternity all round them, something enormously spacious that engulfed and swallowed the individual marks on faces, and the ring of voices, and it was always like the last gathering of allmhumanity, the last gathering there ever was to be, surrounded by the fearful and fathomless silence; there lay its eleventh-hour quality. So it created a sense of tremendous relish---this is still the mark of American intimacy for me: a physical relish, the crunch of things in the mouth, the flow and coolness of a drink, the smell of cooking, the exciting sound of someone turning over the pages of a book, the physical receiving of the human creature into the last glowing circle with no reference to his position or even the quality of his presence. This last is what counts in Europe---the quality of the creature; it is what makes groups and subtle divisions that are mutually exclusive and always will be. But at that furthest exploration point of the universal middle class, the American group, where everything else has been left behind, every bit of aristocracy and therefore all preoccupation with the quality of the creature, where there are only the enormous bare plains all round, and no evidence that God owes you a glance, so that life really is at the end of its tether, at the eleventh hour, the <u>camp</u> is the fount and womb of public intimacy. The camp, much more even than the

family, is the basis of American life.

The European freedom is that of the utmost individual development, the freedom of unique quality in the human creature, while the American asks for freedom of action unencumbered by fear of quality, as a shared right of all creatures. When confronted with each other these look like two types of freedom, mutually destructive. But they are opposite facets of the same civilisation. They only become distinct by proximity: when they are put close their difference is what strikes the eye---they each grow more extreme by proximity. So 'European' freedom and 'American' freedom come into being, although they aren't mutually exclusive at all. The European freedom becomes by contrast an anxious reference to quality, the American an anxious reference to equality.

This division is a logical outcome of something that has been going on since at least the eleventh century, when there were the first signs of what we know now as the middle class---when townsmen came into being as a population distinct from the peasants and knights and priests of the countryside (or domain) all round them. There, in the growing difference between the town perched alone on its hill, hugged behind great walls, and the silent domain of fields surrounding it, you had the first intimation of the kind of agony--- or vision, or joy---that has animated us ever since. The townsmen became more and more bent on the deliberate organisation of life--- in sewage arrangements and education and finance and so forth, all of which depended on foresight; while the domain continued to represent the natural and unforeseeable (the earth worked by itself), and to bring thoughts of God and fate, based on a natural division of labour between the knights and the peasants, that is, those who defended the land and those who worked it. Inside the town, life--- since it depended on trade---was arranged and ordered and calculated

for; outside, in the domain, it was simply inherited---the earth gave its substance, the peasant worked it, the knight was fed in return for his function. And the towns broke the domains. They broke the invisible hold on life, the depth of a present undistinguishable from past or future: the domain's silence. They did it by making contact with each other. Their trade opened up a completely different life---of movement and, once more, secular splendour. 'History'---the chronicling of events as if they were all leading somewhere---started again for the first time since the Roman empire.

There was something unsatisfactory about the Christianising of the ruins of the Roman empire. Paganism was absorbed---used--- by the church. The old pagan festivals became part of the Christian liturgy: the day of the sun's birth moved easily into Christmas. Not only this---the form of daily pagan life was inherited as well: the attitudes. You got the mass of the people quiet and ~~stupid~~ numb- like slaves, as if they were still under Roman landlords. There was still, basically, a slave-based society. Only these slaves had a new faith---a faith for the first time; they took it gratefully and blindly. And this was what the towns altered. They brought the practical Christianity: they were the first seed of that Evangelicalism that established ~~the first~~ a powerful middle class in Victorian times. Christianity had to be clear-seeing. The blind faith could only be temporary. And this bore an element of original truth with it---that Christ had always appealed to the clear-seeing in men. This was where grace lay, in being aware. Each man, really, was to be his own conscience, prophet and saviour: that was at the back of everything Christ said. There were no rules in Christian teaching about how you should live each day,

apart from very bare ones: nothing like the advice in Judaism and later Islam. There was only a new dignity: from which everything must spring (even if it took two thousand years---which it probably will). People mustn't be blind any more. It was the contradiction of slavery. Every man had the power to see, no matter how degraded or wretched or even bad he was. Nobody was barred from this clear sight. That was the marvel of Christ's teaching, and why it was persecuted. And so the itch to reach this clear sight went on and on in Christianity, spreading to more and more people. It made for turmoil, which was there all through the middle ages, although we tend to lump the whole period toegther nowadays as an uneventful one. In fact, the Renascence, far from being a sudden revolution, was just the dénouement of this long inner turmoil. The turmoil came from wanting more and more to break the pagan forms that still held life in grip---even to the point of breaking the intimate fabric that held all life together; and this was what was done in the end---everything was challenged, every authority and blind service, on the assumption that God was something inside men and that what lay outside---the earth and sky and animals---was a wilderness of untrammelled paganism that had to be broken and bowed. And we are in the extraordinary position of clearing up the ruins (if we can)---on a battlefield where everything intimate to us has been destroyed, not by an enemy but by ourselves. This is why I say that the last act---of our recovery---is an act of contemplation. I mean, you have to begin to see again where God lies outside men. You have to see where those spaces and teeming, complicated lives aren't wilderness---aren't pagan chaos. It means surrender, but not pagan surrender, which is the only one we know so far.

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Europe came out of this struggle. It came from the friction of town and domain---the struggle was Europe's story of development throughout the centuries. And what you have in America is as pure a transported 'town' as you can get, with its lack of domain even as a remembered background, and its resultant emphasis on production and forethought and the visible and arranged and spoken. And if you put this close up against Europe it makes her look (especially in American eyes) pure-domain, as America looks from our point of view pure-town. But this is fictional: both worlds exist in both, in the same struggle. That camp-element in American freedom belongs at bottom to the domain: just as in ~~the~~ European freedom there is a hint of the first excited movement of the towns. And in European people you have a natural knowledge of America often without their having been there, because they know the aspiration of pure-town in themselves.

'Town' and 'domain' represent the two facets---a kind of endless dichotomy---of Christian feeling. The domain-element is alive now only as inner recollection. The Renascence was the bequeathment of life into the hands of the town, and the era of aristocracy---that is, the deliberate development of quality---began from it. Aristocracy really carried the invisible loyalties of the domain into town-life by means of money: but the contradiction that lay in this---the liberation from anything feudal that money would always provide---was the destruction of aristocracy. And the permanent mistake of American society---that takes away all its stability---is perhaps the mistake that this destruction was a levelling movement, whereas it was simply the spreading of aristocratic values to more and more people, so

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that a clear aristocratic class was no longer necessary (that is, no longer had so much to teach). American pioneers made the mistake of taking aristocracy as external (dress, wealth, privilege) and not what it was through the Renascence---an inner quality, absorbed slowly by the poorest classes. Every generation in America has been upset by the dogged necessity of making everybody look and feel alike if possible; and the most surprising lesson for the American who lives abroad is always his realisation that in fact people are different, and that his own psychology is a special and by no means shared one.

Each destruction brought about by the town---the slow destruction of privilege and even ecclesiastical authority, everything that still rested on divine right---drew the human creature (citizen) nearer and nearer that freedom of action which Christ seemed to have promised. Christ lived at a time of slavery. He spoke to slaves and heathen alike. Every creature was splendid for him---that was the stupefying element of his work. It didn't matter how squalid, neglected, ignorant or even sinful a creature was, he had the splendour of being the child of God. It lifted the vast mass of people up to the level of the religious right away---an unheard-of thing. That was the terrible flame that licked its way through the dying Roman empire, that was what provided the invisible quality of the domain (Christ as the inner secret, as intimacy) and the visible quality of the town (Christ as rights, as the released explorer). And while Europe developed fully from this leavening and mixing and struggling of town and domain, America had to rely more and more on improvised and mental knowledge, because outside the American community (town) you got not the domain with its resources of long and natural experience but unexplored wilderness, where inaction meant disaster.

~~ignorant.~~ So an American freedom was evolved which emphasised the child-of-God splendour as a kind of social credential for which every creature (subject) qualified, while European freedom emphasised this as a natural, inherited credential with no necessary visible form or guarantee. Proximity of one with the other did only harm to each. It made a caricature of both because it was based on the assumption that here were two distinct worlds: that was required by the power-politics of this century.

The American freedom was precisely what ravaged first English and then European freedom, in and after the last war. I saw the beginning of it, but I had to wait till the end of the war before I knew that the corroding and corrupting process had taken place. At the end of the war, in England, there seemed only mediocrity left. Middle-class expectations had got smaller; middle class people had become pettier and narrower people, with something stale and ambiguous and shabby about them, they were now people who played safe and small; and any self-assertion was taboo. Any style had to trim itself to the general pattern, if it wanted to fit in. Thousands got out. The working class was no help in this because it was intact and stronger than before. The rot didn't apply there. But the fact remained that only the middle class could give the country colour and development. That was the kind of society it was, for better for for worse: working people were onlookers.

In the war, the tiny island had to become the aircraft-carrier and springboard for a vast offensive against the continent. It turned into a kind of factory. The distances dwindled, the island could all be spanned in a few minutes' flight. The stale and corrupt air of the factory grew. But the factory-element alone wasn't the decisive one, because the country had been going that way

for nearly two hundred years, and had done more damage to itself than could ever be done by an outsider in a few years. Yet the American presence was precisely this factory-element---it was exactly the ravage towards which England had been working. These strangers weren't exactly foreigners. Nobody considered that they were even more powerful than the English, especially during the war. They were equal. They were friends. Yet they were more powerful; they were foreigners. Their shere numbers, the shere weight of their equipment, seemed to argue a greater power. But it wasn't talked about. Only in high places was it a fact to be reckoned with. Lower down, it wasn't felt yet. They occupied whole villages. 'American' villages in England were like ghost villages; they still are---if anything, they're worse now, seeming to have settled into a permanent ghostliness. All the intimate life has gone from them. The houses, memorial stones, lawns, are there as always before. But the places are dead. It's an 'air-force' village. The American presence brought abstraction with it---a dead abstract cloud that laid everything waste like an enormous spray of weed poison. Yet that abstraction was already in English life. You could even say it had been created in England, in the first industrial towns. That was the nature of its abstraction---the deathly air of a bleak, industrial street. Not a tree, not a bush---however many trees and bushes there actually were; they seemed painted, artificial, irrelevant.

Yet the people who brought this weren't foreigners. Their abstraction was something we could understand. Only they didn't see the intimate English freedom, they couldn't recognise it, even when they admired its signs and effects. The signs of their own freedom were so different. Here, at the most intimate

point, they were foreigners. It was essentially a painted scene for them, because the mainspring of free choice in the English was dumb and invisible to them. The scene was attractive to them or dull, according to their taste. There, at that point, you got the clash of two forms which belonged so intimately to the same world that they represented the maximum---the most ambiguous and torturous---problem for each other. The two sides stared at each other thinking they were staring at themselves; then they realised their mistake. But the mistake didn't end the matter: you couldn't just shrug the other world off as 'foreign'. The fact was that perhaps you were staring at yourself after all, only you didn't understand. Basically, perhaps, it was lack of self-comprehension.

The middle class in England had given up the ghost. Its intimate hold on the country---which had been far from pleasant---was gone, and it had nothing morally to put up against a working class that complained about social inequality, or against the American alternative which was to give everybody the chance to get rich. They didn't believe in themselves. If they believed in anything, it was America. Historically, they had ravaged England and turned it into a sort of marshalling yard for goods in the same way as the Americans had done with their own continent. They'd driven roads through the country, brought into being a new class of wage-slaves who were exploited with so much insentience that not even brutality was involved: all with one sacred idea behind it---making money. And this sacred idiot-god hadn't been pushed over. It meant no real idea at all, no vision of life, it meant you had nothing at all. It meant that at the end you wouldn't even be able to buy the splendour or comfort you'd promised yourself, because the means to enjoy and the means to be splendid were exactly what you had destroyed in your first workers,

and what you had destroyed in yourself to get them to work. All you got at the end were stinking cities with too many people in them, and as near chaos as life could get. That had happened in England, and it would happen in America. The hour of bankruptcy had to be faced. And at that hour you needed something in your head more than the vision of a crisp pound-note or dollar-bill. Since, by your position, you were committed to organising life, you had to know to what end it should be organised, and why. And this was where the English middle class folded up and made as if to die---keeping itself alive morally by frequent visits to the 'new' world. All over Europe, as in England, you got a middle class whose position was unsupported by any philosophy except the nineteenth century one of getting rich at any price, in which they no longer believed.

And the shame it felt was a surviving tremor of feeling from the past, from its days of 'splendour' in the nineteenth century, which in fact had been days of no splendour at all but only the madness of money-making; a splendour which had moved to America after it had done its worst in Europe, through two wars and fifty million dead in as many years by bombardment, hunger and torture. A 'splendour' of that kind is certainly frightening in its turmoil---which is only its effort to make life ring and echo with the joy it was always assured money could buy; but joy is the treasure of the unambitious. And these same ambitious splendours are now going to be repeated in upper space: we are going to 'explore' the skies; we're moving again, we're progressing! Only the 'progressing' face looks a trifle idiotic now, with its perpetual grin. With its

money, it will buy us infinity, of all things. Perhaps it will meet God up there. But more likely it will meet itself. Perhaps this is why they look so much like idiot-children, these 'explorers' of the middle class: as they prepare for the last journey of all, to the tomb of the nineteenth century.

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I can remember how a peculiar unexplained shame and ambiguity used to occur whenever I talked to Americans, even quite intimate friends. It would always be there, the ambiguity---for me a source of distress that got worse and worse the more I tried to think it out.

For one thing, I was painfully aware of my accent. This wasn't a sense that mine was more ugly or more lovely than his. It touched on that question of freedom. It touched on that theme of quality. Basically, it was a sensation that what there was of quality in my accent---what flowed from the history of my country---was being fictionalised by him into something else: namely, privilege. To my own ears the accent might suddenly sound peremptory, or too stout and decided, or artificial,

or courtly and rounded and stylish, or delicate or pompous or superior of formal or plain gruff or negative. I felt turned into someone else: but this wasn't the problem; it was that I didn't know who the invented person was, where he'd come from. He was supposed to be 'English'. But he certainly wasn't me. The sense that my accent was even delicate or stylish was quite a discovery as I'd always been a bit ashamed until then of it carrying more of the old Cockney strains of childhood than was desirable; at least, my family was always pulling me up about it. And who knows that the American didn't feel his accent was being fictionalised into sounding slack and unstylish and vulgar? This was what our accents did to each other---in terms of reflected consciousness. It was one of many points---though I didn't realise it for years---where our different freedoms touched each other. My accent had come from the developed quality of the single human creature---in this sense it <u>had</u> come from the aristocracy, as I began to realise; for 'Europe', as we now call it---it used to be called Christendom---is represented by the single human face---tragic or lovely, strangely dramatic, a Michelangelo. And the American's accent, with no more than its roots in my world, had been formed by the urgent and simple

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requirement to make intimacy with strangers in a too-spacious land---by a painstaking social equality.

And with this, on my side, there went a sense of shame. This shame seemed to accuse me of being---to fictionalise me into being---a retrograde and snobbish and out-dated creature whose lips were always pouted in the defence of something from the past, like working-class life or peasants or Arabs or noblemen, of which the American seemed (as his part of the antithesis) to have a fictional idea. My accent was only the sound of these negative qualities, as the expression of my face---defensive, often flushed and pugnacious---was the sight of them. And these clashes seemed to happen quite often, in England, in Baghdad, in Italy, wherever I went, and to produce the very same distaste and remorse afterwards as if I'd engaged in something which I hadn't thought out properly and which would always get me into the same blind deadlock. I believe that while that post-war status quo lasted neither of us could resolve the problem for himself, without this violent upheaval. We were neither of us free. We were prisoners of the same universal middle-class deadlock, and prisoners can never think things right to the end. They can go a long way, but there has to be ~~the merest crack of~~ more than a little square of window through ~~the~~ which the light can come. There has to be some power of movement.

It was like the vagueness of a dream, though perhaps the dream was greater on the European side because our governments were little more than governments-by-proxy. Officials only looked and sounded authoritative, because they knew from the past how it should be played. ~~It was a sort of house-arrest. All the furniture was there, everything was all right.~~ You had the same life as you always had before. But it wasn't your

real life. I can remember this sensation so distinctly from those years. I used to walk or cycle in that village outside London, along the narrow, intimate lanes which are still there as they were two hundred years ago, between broad fields and sudden wooded hills, with old tiled farmhouses behind courtyards and elm-trees: and there was always a kind of blanket of puzzlement in front of me---there was a permanent element of shame, too, at not living the right life in some way, at not having a place in life, in not being known for what I was, in not being able to grip with the real problems which I knew were there all the time. Even the right and proper suffering seemed to elude me.

There were all these references to a past society. The war had smashed up everything. Yet had it? The old things were still there---the fine parks, the authentic tones of command. Were they there? And you looked. After all, England wasn't Germany: we hadn't been smashed quite to pieces. Before the war we'd known that 'old England' was dead, that it had been done to death by the money-mad people, in the same way as the old America had. But it was vague now, this truth. We didn't even feel as if we were prisoners. Yet there was this peculiar shame of remaining in our own countries---the sense that everything had been hopelessly compromised, that nothing had its own inevitable life. And you could see the shame in every country in Europe---the same shame and sense of compromise; the same brightening at the idea of 'abroad'. The injection of power into Germany---the terrific new wealth accumulated there---didn't alter anything: her middle class was even weaker at the end of it than those other countries. Real middle-class strength must lie in ideas. And the turmoil of its ideas had ceased. It seemed to have no more to offer.

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I believe the first room where I felt completely free was in Baghdad. I had a big rush-mat in that room---and whenever I smell straw inside a room now, from a chair or garden-table, I have a quick tinge of excitement that seems to be telling me about books and thinking, about the thrilling flavour of sitting down with a book to read or write, about the glowing temple every real room is---about freedom. Against the window was my desk, which I'd picked up quite cheaply at the market off the main street, and in the corner was a narrow bed where I slept in the afternoons. And there was a straight-backed chair where I used to stand the gramophone. It was a bare room, rather tall-ceilinged, and long, with a door leading out on to a square balcony where I sat and read sometimes in the morning, facing the misty edges of Baghdad, if the sun wasn't too strong. A tiny window was cut into a corner of the room rather like a window in a monastery. I could see the sandy roadway outside from that. And from my desk-window I could look at the side of Ismail's house. Sometimes his manservant would be romping on the floor with his two wives, like a child, laughing soundlessly. The light was always thrilling and strange in the evening. And the lights in the house were dim, so that the corridors with their arches had the look of a tiny stone palace in the middle of the desert. Ismail and I went out together in the evening sometimes, floating off in his car behind the chauffeur, or he would give me a lift to my college, reeking of eau-de-cologne after his shower, very clean-shaven and fresh, his head lifted up, everything about him clean and meticulous, with a white shirt and a dazzling tropical suit. He was an enormous man, not fat though---with a long, easy, prowling stride and a peculiar movement of his mouth as if he was biting on a stool bit like a horse. He had fine, light blue eyes. He told me

that when he was younger and drank less he could pick up a handkerchief from the ground ~~by~~ with his teeth going at full gallop on ~~his horses~~ horseback. He was a Kurd and spent the day in the rambling offices of the ministry of justice, feeling contrite---usually--- from a brawl the night before. He always got drunk after about nine in the evening, and his chauffeur waited for him in the car, half-asleep, with dark glasses on even at night, because he had a wall-eye from trachoma. We had absolutely no conversation together, but we enjoyed it: we sat in the cabarets drinking, talking to the whores in the little hotel-cum-brothels on the north side of the river, and sometimes drove out into the desert with our wives, to see some gypsy dances. He always got drunk on these trips, winking and moving his head about and putting his tongue out, and on the way back in the car he always made a quick pass at my wife, ~~by~~ trying to put his hand between her legs. Next morning there would be a sober little note of apology, written in a copperplate hand by one of the street-writers who stood about to be hired, with their ink and paper ready. Or else there would be a present of dolmars, the Arab cakes, or a chicken, or a bottle of wine. His wife, a fine-looking Egyptian woman who hated the veil-habits of the city, got jealous of my wife and sent her a little note in French one day saying she'd always thought English women were ladies: she couldn't see why her husband made so many passes at her unless she was encouraging him. She ought to have seen him at one of the brothels. He used to make a dive at one of the girls, give her a hard pinch in the pussy so that she let out a shrill yell, then swing her ~~her~~ on to his lap, making his peculiar movement of the mouth, with a genial, extraordinarily magnanimous and tolerant look in his eyes.

In that room I felt free of ~~that~~ the blanket of perplexity there

had been over my life. I was myself. This meant that my problems--- the proper ones that every epoch holds in store--- came to my fast, and in the time I was there, which was less than a year, I got more done than in the previous five years. I believe this was because I was in the pure domain-life, in the grip of the invisible; unstained and unliberated by anything middle-class, except what was a clear import from abroad. The straw on my floor, the echo of my gramophone across the room, with its sounds that seemed much stranger and more outlandish than they would have been in Europe, the door on to my balcony, the sounds on my balcony at night, the movement of the stiff leaves of palm trees below, the voices at the edge of the town, singing, the sound of a drum, a sudden hot breath from the desert that started at the end of the garden, the bark of a dog, a cloud of sand behind a passing car, the clap of hands from the next house for a servant, the wild roar of radios in El Rashid street at the centre of the town, the twinkling lights of the minarets from across the river, the brown, swift river itself, the vile smell of boiling turnips, the chink-chink of beads in someone's hand, the whirl of fans, the sound of bare feet on the pavement, the crisp, brilliant autumn mornings when the sun seemed to shine through dazzling glass in one immense cascade of happy light---all these things were like the opening of a physically religious world where the giant inhibitions of public and man-imprisoned gods had not yet worked. I was free as my own society hadn't let me be for years.

I remember other rooms, but none like that where the sense of a sudden freedom was so strong. It was like really lifting up my head for the first time. In England it had felt as if my whole body had been in disuse. There was a strange kind of spiritual excitement to be had from not owning a body, but you could hardly

be yourself: you were condemned to a kind of pleasureable spectatorship. You learned, in England, not to believe in the body. That wasn't from any puritanism---except in so far as the whole industrial history sprang from puritan feelings. It was from there being too much work in the air. So much that work now seemed more or less impossible; really, not much of it seemed to be done. Work is nourished by leisure and spurred by dreams. It creates schedules but is ultimately destroyed by them; and this is what seemed to have happened in England. Schedule hung over everything like an invisible girder, it was even in people, in their taut public nerves which gave little reflection of the lives they had underneath; public life and intimate life seemed divided now to the point of a chronic paralysis of action. If you lifted your head too high you were likely not to get it knocked off, which would have been proof of some philistine envy at work, but to get it bruised on a girder. You couldn't blame the girder, nor could you really get annoyed. All you could do was to keep your head ducked in future. At home it was different: there you unspread. But in public the fearful girder of work seemed to be the only real operating thing. It marked out every part of the day---into work-part and lunch-part and tea-part and then in the evening leisure-part; it marked off Saturday from the other days, giving it the peculiar half-thrilling, half-saddening sense of a half-worked day; it fell like a blow on Sunday, rendering it an empty factory, meaningless, deserted and smelling faintly of roast and Yorkshire. Before the war, there had been an active and spiteful philistinism, the business-classes and their serfs had still been strong and negative. But now there wasn't this harsh and brutal air. Only the schedule remained, the in-

visible girders.