

WALTER BENJAMIN'S ARK

A departure in biography

John Schad

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND CULTURE



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Walter Benjamin's Ark

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May you ... find a chamber in this ark – which I have built.
(Walter Benjamin)¹

To Stefan

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Figure 0.1 Stefan Rafael Benjamin, c. 1937/8 © Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archiv, WBA 1526 / Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur

List of abbreviations

Walter Benjamin's texts are cited in English translation, with reference provided to the original German. The abbreviations used are as below.

- Arcades* *The Arcades Project*, ed. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- Archive* *Walter Benjamin's Archive*, ed. Ursula Marx et al, tr. Esther Leslie (London: Verso, 2007 / *Walter Benjamins Archive*, ed. Ursula Marx et al (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006).
- Briefe* *Briefe*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).
- Correspondence* *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, tr. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- GA-WB* *Gretel Adorno-Walter Benjamin Correspondence, 1930–1940*, tr. Wieland Hoban (London: Polity, 2008) / *Gretel Adorno-Walter Benjamin Briefwechsel, 1930–1940*, ed. Christophe GÖdde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).
- GB* *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Christoph GÖdde, Henri Lonitz and Theodor W. Adorno, 6 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995–2000).
- GS* *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–99).
- Origin* *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, tr. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).
- Radio* *Radio Benjamin*, ed. Lecia Rosenthal, tr. Jonathan Lutes et al (London: Verso, 2014).
- Storyteller* *The Storyteller*, tr. Sam Dolbear et al (London: Verso, 2016).

- SW *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996–2003).
- TA-WB *Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, tr. Nicholas Walker (London: Polity, 1999).
- WBA Walter Benjamin Archiv, Berlin.
- WB-GS *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, tr. Gary Smith and Andre LeFevere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) / *Walter Benjamin–Gershom Scholem Briefwechsel, 1933–1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980).

Preface

On 10 July 1940, amid fear of Nazi invasion, a ship left Liverpool, in the north-west of England. The ship was HMT *Dunera* ('Hired Military Transport'), a passenger ship, by design, but now a kind of prison ship, or 'hell-ship'. On board were a few British soldiers guarding over 2,000 male enemy aliens – Germans, Austrians and some Italians, many of whom, until arrest, had lived legally and peaceably in England for some time. Now, though, they were all herded together, below deck, hatches sealed, and with many soon succumbing to dysentery.

Some were passionate Nazis, held largely in the rear or aft of the ship; but most were Jewish refugees, many of whom bore famous names. These included, for instance, men called, respectively, Marx, Wilde, Freud, Kafka and Wittgenstein, not to mention Abraham, Isaac and Moses and so on.

Also on board was a young German-Jewish man of 22 years who was the only and estranged child of Dora and Walter Benjamin. Dora (née Dora Kellner) was not only a journalist, translator and author but owned and managed several hotels and boarding-houses; Walter was also a journalist, translator and author, but he owned very little and managed nothing. It is, of course, Walter's name that is, currently, the famous name. Their son, the young man on board the *Dunera*, was called Stefan Rafael Benjamin.

Acknowledgements

Many people and archives have helped in the writing of this book, a book that rereads the writings of Walter Benjamin via the life and death of his only child, Stefan Benjamin. In particular, I should like to thank the following: Mona Benjamin, one of Stefan's daughters, for her wonderfully generous help with myriad details relating to Stefan; Flossie Draper, one of Stefan's granddaughters, for all her support; Ursula Marx at the Walter Benjamin Archive for her expert assistance; Paul Chodziesner for his kind help; both Seumas Spark and Carol Bunyan (two exceptional historians); Sam Dolbear for his encouragement; Roger Ebbatson for his reading; Esther Leslie for her early advice; both anonymous reviewers of the book at manuscript stage; the series editors, Timothy Mathews and Florian Mussnug; and, finally, my wonderful editors at UCL Press, Chris Penfold and Elliot Beck.

I am also grateful to Edinburgh University Press for their permission to include, as my opening chapter, a revised version of "All at Sea": Virginia Woolf, Walter Benjamin, and the Unknown German,' *CounterText*, 7.2 (2021) 206–33.

Note

- 1 Quoted in Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), 202.

Introduction

If, having read the preface, you are ready to move to the main event, please do not let this detain you. If, though, you would appreciate some further preliminary thoughts then please read on.

I

The book that follows is an attempt to reread the famous, even epic, life and work of Walter Benjamin via the obscure and difficult life of his only and estranged child, Stefan.

Why, though, via Stefan? Well, that is, in part, simply because, within Benjamin studies, there has been increasing attention to Benjamin's immediate family.

To begin with, in 2002, there was the publication of a conversation that Martin Jay and Gary Smith had with Mona Benjamin, Kim Benjamin and Michael Benjamin – Benjamin's granddaughters and nephew, respectively.¹ The conversation explored, above all, what it meant, or was like, to be related to Benjamin and how Stefan's experience of his father was as a rather distant or absent figure, even when present. Still more intriguing was that, when young, Stefan had disliked the Paul Klee *Angelus Novus* watercolour that Benjamin so dearly and famously prized. Benjamin had, apparently, nevertheless insisted that, one day, Stefan would understand exactly why Klee's Angel was in fact so very important.

Then, in 2006, there was the publication, by Ursula Marx et al, of a manuscript titled 'Opinions et Pensées', which was Benjamin's extensive and meticulous transcription of Stefan's infant words and expressions.² These words and expressions had been set down over a period of

10 years, beginning in January 1922, when Stefan was just three, and are a mix of both charming or comic curiosities and genuinely strange or suggestive adventures in thought, language and imagination. There is, for instance, talk of princes, dreams, beautiful witches, blackamoors, seafarers, angels having birthdays, Saint Moses, a magical papa, being slaughtered, flying to England, the sun being ill and Stefan, aged 8, deciding that he is going to write a novel called *The Room*.

Next, in 2014, there was the publication of Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings's monumental *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, which included several striking passages on Stefan as a wayward and even disturbed youth. At this point in time, the mid-to-late 1930s, Stefan was living far from his now-divorced parents, first as a student-lodger in the Vienna of the Nazi Anschluss, then as a refugee in wartime England and, finally, as a deportee on HMT *Dunera*, the 'hell-ship' bound for Australia.

Many more details relating to Stefan have since emerged thanks to two further books, both by Eva Weissweiler, on and around Stefan's mother, Dora – *Das Echo deiner Frage* (2020) and *Villa Verde, oder das Hotel in Sanremo* (2022). Both provide fascinating glimpses into Stefan's regular pre-war visits to the Italian coastal resort, San Remo, where he made fitful attempts to assist his mother in running a hotel and engaged in escapades involving several dangerously close encounters with the local Fascist authorities. Weissweiler also explores the strange drama that surrounded Stefan's late-in-life struggle with both Theodor Adorno and Gershom Scholem over Benjamin's posthumous legacy.

Stefan, although a bookish and brilliant linguist, is not thought to have ever written anything longer than a letter; indeed, the world has only ever known one substantive text that can be in any sense ascribed to him – namely, Benjamin's transcription of Stefan's infant utterances. This is, as I say, a fascinating text, but it is also one that has been largely overlooked; and this is despite Eiland and Jennings's intriguing remark that 'it continued to play a role in Walter Benjamin's writing until the end of his life'.³

This remark is not, though, followed up, not even by Eiland and Jennings; and this silence is the final prompt for *Walter Benjamin's Ark*, seeking as it does to show how much of Benjamin's writing makes dramatically new sense if understood as being written about and indeed to, or towards, Stefan. *Walter Benjamin's Ark* seeks, then, not only to recover the intriguing figure that is Stefan but also to identify him as that most important Benjaminian spectre – namely, the secret 'you' or addressee of Benjamin's writing. Frederic Jameson recently drew

attention to how Benjamin prefaces his 1932 essay, 'Berlin Chronicle', with the words, 'For my dear Stefan', and it might be said that *Walter Benjamin's Ark* dreams this dedication to preface all of Benjamin's writings.⁴

II

As you will see, *Walter Benjamin's Ark* is not a regular work of scholarship. Indeed, although a work of research, it looks, on the whole, something like a novel. It is, then, an attempt at scholarship by other means – that is to say, novelistic means. As such, what follows seeks to mirror Benjamin's own avowed interest in what he once called 'magical criticism', a mode of reading, thinking and writing that, in one way or another, departs from conventional academic discourse.⁵

This interest of Benjamin's was, in part, related to the fact that, despite his best efforts, he never held an academic post. Indeed, in 1925 his habilitation thesis was effectively rejected by the University of Frankfurt on the grounds of its 'incomprehensible mode of expression'.⁶ This rejection alone is enough to make sense of Benjamin's 1931 declaration that 'subjects that have long been investigated and appropriated by scholars need to be emancipated from the forms in which such scholarly acquisition took place if they are still to have any value today'.⁷

Walter Benjamin's Ark is by no means the first work on Benjamin to heed his call for an 'emancipation' from conventional scholarly forms. See, in particular: Jay Parini's novel *Benjamin's Crossing* (1996); Carl Djerassi's drama *Foreplay: Hannah Arendt, the Two Adornos, and Walter Benjamin* (2011); my own quotational fiction *The Late Walter Benjamin* (2012) and its subsequent adaptation for the stage; Frances Cannon's graphic biography *Walter Benjamin Reimagined* (2019); Michel Tabachnik and Régis Debray's opera *Benjamin, Dernière Nuit* (2016); and Mathelinda Nabugodi's *Shelley with Benjamin. A Critical Mosaic* (2023).

There is no doubt that *Walter Benjamin's Ark* owes much to Parini et al; one thing, though, that makes it immediately different is that, while these prior departures tend to focus on Benjamin's final weeks in the fateful summer of 1940, what follows is an exploration of these last weeks from the very particular perspective of Stefan who was, at precisely that moment, adrift on a hell-ship to Australia.

Walter Benjamin's Ark might, then, be viewed as an oceanic work of scholarship, a book that is itself all at sea and far from *terra firma*.

Its citations are not, that is, managed or organised by any overseeing scholar, as would usually be the case. Instead, these citations take the form of utterances (cries, accusations, ripostes etc) hurled to and fro by sundry novelistic figures or characters. Here, then, reading is not so much something that is *done* by the scholar but instead something that *happens* in and through the collisions of wave after wave of citation.

Very often these citations are manifestly resituating the words that are cited, taking them out of the context in which they are normally to be found. At such moments the reader is conscious, or half-conscious, of words being dislodged or unmoored, sometimes quite dramatically, or even violently. For Benjamin, though, this is what always happens in citation, even citation of the most conventional kind; 'citation', he writes, 'wrenches it [the word] destructively from its context'.⁸ Importantly, he adds that, citation 'thereby calls it [the word] back to its origin [*Ursprung*]', a startling line that seems to suggest that, by setting words free from context, we somehow return them to whence they came, to the unfathomable time and/or space that is the origin of language. If true, what follows is, in part, an attempt to inch toward some sense of just what that origin might be or be like.

As you will see, the citations in play in *Walter Benjamin's Ark* are not limited to texts authored by Benjamin. The reason or prompt for this is that 'Benjamin' was not the only literary name aboard the *Dunera*, there also being one deportee called Kafka, another called Wittgenstein, still another called Marx and three called Wilde. In addition, as it happens, there was a novelist who had recently met Virginia Woolf, as well as a man who said he had helped to kill Rosa Luxemburg. Finally, unknown to Stefan, also aboard was a cousin of his father, the brother of the Berlin poet Gertrud Kolmar.

The existence or presence of these 'names' aboard the *Dunera* is, of course, enormously suggestive, not least because Benjamin had an almost mystical understanding of human names. They are, he says, 'a privileged caste of words', being 'the point at which human language participates most intimately in the divine infinity of the pure word'.⁹ What all this means in *Walter Benjamin's Ark* is that the many resonant names thrown up by life aboard the *Dunera* effect a form of holy magic by which a host of otherwise unthinkable exchanges and encounters are suddenly made possible.

Central to all this is, as you will see, a spectre known only as 'the king', who seems to speak for Benjamin and is a kind of stowaway somehow imagined or thought-aboard by Stefan. And Stefan is himself represented, it seems, by a figure known throughout my text simply

as 'S.'. That Stefan should here become 'S.' owes much, of course, to Kafka's famous Joseph K. As for Benjamin becoming 'the king', that is simply because the infant Stefan, as Benjamin notes, once declared himself a prince – 'Today, I am the prince'.¹⁰

To encounter Benjamin as 'the king' may seem odd, given his manifest interest in figures of seeming powerlessness – above all, 'the nameless' of history.¹¹ Benjamin, however, was equally interested in kings or sovereigns. Admittedly this was, in part, a fascination with the fragile, creaturely and very mortal kings that he saw so vividly in seventeenth-century German mourning-plays (*Trauerspiele*); but it was also a fascination with the transcendental, even mystical, idea of sovereign power or force (*Gewalt*) that he saw within revolution.¹² There has been much scholarly discussion as to how far these two forms of sovereignty can be held, or thought, together. My rendering Benjamin as 'the king' may serve, in part, to put this question to the test.¹³

This test does not, though, take the form of measured debate; for 'the king' here finds himself thrown into a world of dramatic or 'live' encounters unmediated by the distancing protocols of usual academic citation. These are encounters not only with S., or Stefan, but also figures or voices that variously speak or shout or plead on behalf of Kafka, Luxemburg, Woolf, Wittgenstein and Wilde, respectively. Some of these are figures with whom Benjamin might readily be associated, such as Kafka, Luxemburg and Kolmar; some, though, are figures with whom he would not so readily be associated, such as Woolf, Wittgenstein and Wilde. At times, therefore, *Walter Benjamin's Ark* is speaking to existing debates and conversations within Benjamin scholarship and at times it is speaking to conversations that do not, as yet, exist.

III

Allow me to say a little more about the fact that *Walter Benjamin's Ark* does not itself look like scholarship, or at least not like usual scholarship. As you may know, one name for this less usual species of scholarship is, to cite the rubric for the series to which this book belongs, creative-critical writing. There are other names, such as ficto-criticism or creative criticism, but what all three obviously have in common is a keen intuition that literary-critical writing cannot be limited to conventional scholarly prose, but might instead draw on the myriad devices and strategies of literature – such as voice, irony, allusion, dialogue, plot, character etc.

At the core of this intuition is, as I have argued elsewhere,

a sense that there is something within literary criticism that by internal necessity exceeds itself or breaks its own bounds. [To put that another way ...] to talk about reading is so very strange that criticism is necessarily drawn into thoughts, locutions and situations that have all the strangeness of the literary.¹⁴

What this means, among other things, is that any clear generic distinction between the critical text and the literary text is troubled. And this, in turn, means that the critical text is no longer imagined to operate at a distance from the literary text and to be primarily commenting or reporting upon that text. The critical text thus ceases to be thought of as a mirror held faithfully up to the literary text. Creative criticism is, then, at odds with Matthew Arnold when, in 1865, he made the profoundly influential claim that the function of criticism is 'to see the object as in itself it really is'.¹⁵ In contrast, creative criticism is as one with Oscar Wilde when, in 1900, he perversely declares that 'the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is *not*'.¹⁶

To suggest, with Wilde, that the critic's task is not to faithfully represent the text is, of course, an anti-realist or anti-mimetic move. It is thus a move that is analogous to literary modernism's early twentieth-century refusal to offer a photographic view of the world. Creative criticism might, then, be usefully thought of as *modernist* criticism. And this, in effect, is exactly what Gregory Ulmer brilliantly suggests when he writes 'that the break with mimesis, with the values and assumptions of realism, which once revolutionized the modernist arts, is now underway belatedly in criticism'.¹⁷

If, then, creative criticism is a kind of belated modernism it is hardly surprising that a text like *Walter Benjamin's Ark* should arise out of an attempt to engage with such manifestly modernist figures as not only both Benjamin and Wilde but also Woolf, Kafka, Kolmar and Wittgenstein. Indeed, Benjamin takes us very close to the notion of modernist criticism in his talk of 'magical criticism'.

This phrase has been largely passed over by commentators; partly because its primary appearance is within a fragment, and partly because it is almost passed over by Benjamin himself, who simply (and without any further comment) writes that, 'Magical [*magische*] criticism is ... a manifestation of the highest stage [*Stufe*] of criticism. Opposite [but] on the same plane [*Stufe*] is the scholarly literary historical treatise.'¹⁸ It is tempting to read this as suggesting that magical criticism has nothing

to do with history; however, that would be to overlook Benjamin's insistence that, although such criticism is the 'opposite' of historicism, it is still 'on the same plane'. It would also be to overlook Benjamin's two follow-up claims: first, that 'the fundamental distinction between literary history and criticism must be rejected'; and, second, that 'the theory of the ruins created by time should be completed by the process of deconstruction [*Abmontieren*], which is the task of the critic'.

These are two difficult lines, but it would seem that, for Benjamin, magical criticism is somehow both like *and* unlike historical criticism, as if to say that the magical critic deals with history but not as we know it or could ever know it. This would be supported by the suggestion, later in the same fragment, that magical criticism will never get 'to the bottom of mystery [*Geheimnis*]'. Putting all this together, magical criticism would be criticism that engages with history as mystery or, if you will, as unreadable (or deconstructed) 'ruins'.¹⁹ To put that another way, for Benjamin, magical criticism gestures toward a sense of history as something so strange as to itself be a kind of magic. In short, in Benjamin, magical criticism implies magical *history* – the one, it seems, is connected to the other.

And the two, indeed, come closest together, I suggest, in the figure of the Benjaminian child. I have in mind here two particular moments: one in which the child is glimpsed as the magical critic par excellence and another in which the child is glimpsed as an intimate familiar of the rough magic of history. Witness first, in 1933, Benjamin's remark that 'to children, words are still like caverns, with the strangest corridors connecting them';²⁰ witness second, in 1940, Benjamin's describing the hapless victim of European Fascism as *das politische Weltkind*, a phrase usually lost in its translation as 'political worldling', but literally meaning 'political world-child'.²¹ The 1933 remark invokes the notion of the child as peculiarly sensitive to the labyrinthine magic of words, the 1940 remark invokes the notion of the child as peculiarly susceptible to the rough magic of history.

In sum, both the world-child and the *word*-child come together in the figure of the magical child. Cue, as we shall see, the figure of Stefan, who is quite possibly both the word-child Benjamin has in mind in 1933 and indeed the world-child he has in mind in 1940, the year in which Stefan is, of course, exposed to that roughest and most perilous historical magic – the sea in time of war.

The imperilled world-child of history may not, though, be a wholly ominous figure. For Benjamin, that is, the rough magic of history does not necessarily leave us without hope. Note that Benjamin

accompanies his talk of 'the political world-child' with talk of how 'the past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption [*Erlösung*]' and, indeed, how 'for the Jews, ... every second was the small gateway [*die kleine Pforte*] in time through which the Messiah might enter'.²² Benjaminian history entails, then, the possibility of redemption, a redemption personified, indeed, by a Messiah who might enter through a gate that is small – as if to say or hint that the Messiah is sufficiently small to be a child, a world-*redeeming* child. Cue those most famous messianic words of all: 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ... the Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9.6). We might here recall Benjamin's careful transcription of Stefan's infant declaration that 'Today I am the prince'.²³

IV

That Benjamin was fascinated with the figure of the child has often been observed; indeed, Jameson recently argued that this fascination is at work even when the child is barely visible.²⁴ And this is, I suggest, never more powerfully the case than in the figure of *das politische Weltkind*. However, even when the Benjaminian child is clearly visible it is not usual for commentators to glance toward the figure of Benjamin's own child. This may, though, change as we begin to learn more about Stefan. Consider, for instance, that he was, according to his daughter, Mona, famously disorganised and, nevertheless, became an antiquarian bookseller; with all this in mind, we might well read afresh those lines in *One Way Street* (1925) concerned with the figure of 'The Untidy Child' and how 'every single thing he owns makes up one great collection', thus revealing a passion that 'lingers on in antiquarians, researchers, and bibliomaniacs'.²⁵

The thought that Benjamin might often be, in some sense, writing *about* Stefan soon gives rise to the additional thought that he might often be, in some sense, writing *to* Stefan. This is especially the case when it comes to the many talks for children that Benjamin gave on Frankfurt Radio or Berlin Radio – talks from what he called 'Voice Land' and addressed to those whom he called 'dear invisible ones'.²⁶ These talks, which ran until 1932, began in 1927 when Stefan would have been six years old, and thus about to become the age of the listeners to whom Benjamin was speaking. Indeed, given that Benjamin and Dora were separated by 1928 and that, thereafter, Benjamin only ever saw Stefan intermittently, it is tempting to think of Stefan as *the* dear invisible one.

And this thought is often being put to the test in *Walter Benjamin's Ark*, as time and again Benjamin's written words are reimagined as being addressed to Stefan. This reimagining is, though, often being complicated by Stefan, or rather S., failing to hear or heed the king's words. When Stefan was a student in Vienna, Benjamin remarked in a letter that 'it [is] ... completely impossible to communicate with Stefan'.²⁷

There is, though, much evidence that Stefan found it equally difficult to communicate with Benjamin. This is hinted at in 'Opinions and Pensées', with lines like 'Papa won't let me go in the room', and also suggested by Dora's remark that 'Walter ... cares no more for Stefan's ... future than for that of a total stranger'.²⁸ Dora's words were echoed by Mona Benjamin who, in her answers to my many questions, often stressed the fragility of Stefan's relationship with his father.²⁹

This fragility was, perhaps, never more literal and poignant than when, on the night of his death, Benjamin is believed to have written a letter to Stefan that for, reasons unknown, was immediately destroyed. I seek to explore this moment in some detail towards the end of *Walter Benjamin's Ark*; however, elsewhere the book is often driven by the thought that, for all the non-communication between Stefan and Benjamin, there was still some kind of secret or virtual communication at work, especially during the summer of 1940.

Important in this connection is Benjamin's claim that the infant Stefan was capable of certain 'telepathic phenomena'.³⁰ In *Walter Benjamin's Ark* this claim is often explored, particularly via a fascinating moment in 1924 when Benjamin writes about being in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and there encountering Raphael's depiction of St John the Baptist (Figure 1.2) as what Benjamin calls an 'uncanny youth' (*unheimlicher jungling*).³¹ At the time, this painting was only *thought* to have been the work of the Renaissance artist Raphael, and thus what struck Benjamin was not only the painting but its quizzical one-word legend 'Raphael?' Given that Stefan's middle name was Rafael, it is hard not to imagine that Benjamin in some sense saw Stefan in, or as, the uncanny youth; not least because the name Raphael is, of course, shared with that most uncanny of beings, an archangel.

On the subject of names, as Samuel Weber notes, 'Benjamin was fascinated with the idea of names being kept secret *from* the persons they name'; Stefan, though, was both alerted and alert to his angelic name – Benjamin records having bedtime 'stories with Rafael Good and Rafael Naughty' and how Stefan once declared himself 'a Rafaela'.³²

Such cues prompt, within *Walter Benjamin's Ark*, the thought that Stefan might be identified with Benjamin's famous storm-blown 'Angel of History', the figure he envisions within the raw, and indeed childlike, figure that is Klee's *Angelus Novus* (Figure 3.2). Pertinent here is that Klee's figure was, for Benjamin, in part distinguished by the very simple fact that 'his mouth is open', an observation from 1940 that, in *Walter Benjamin's Ark*, is set alongside Benjamin's 1922 remark that the young Stefan, when tired, would declare, 'my mouth keeps on springing open'.³³

The thought that Stefan might, in some sense, be the Angel of History only gathers force in *Walter Benjamin's Ark* as we see S. blown about the world by huge historical storms. We see, that is, how in 1938 Stefan was blown from Vienna to England by the Anschluss and how in 1940 he was blown from England to Australia by the fear of Nazi invasion. History in both cases thereby blew Stefan to places that Benjamin himself would never go. Both Dora and Stefan had hoped that Benjamin would join them in fleeing to England, but he never made it; likewise, Benjamin talked of heading south, and out of Europe, but never got further than Ibiza. In sum, although Benjamin finally failed to escape the Nazis, being quite literally stopped at the French–Spanish border, Stefan was blown right across all possible borders.

There is, then, a sense in which the world-child Stefan lived out the very experience of history about which Benjamin himself dreamt or nightmared. To put that another way, there is something profoundly Benjaminian about Stefan's dramatic migrations. This is most obviously the case in his voyage, via the west coast of Africa, to Australia, a journey that realises, or makes manifest, at least three otherwise latent themes within Benjamin: namely, the sea, the south and Africa. Benjamin scholars have only occasionally attended to these themes, but there is no avoiding them once we reread Benjamin via Stefan.³⁴ In other words, Stefan's migrations suddenly bring into sharp focus such otherwise overlooked Benjamin lines as: 'when do we set sail for happiness?'; 'it is absurd to believe the southern sun is the foe of concentration'; and, indeed, 'Africa mesmerizes'.³⁵

To be mesmerised is to be in some sense mentally disordered, perhaps even comically so; and there is indeed much that was almost comically manic in Stefan's enforced Australian voyage, a voyage suggestive of Benjamin's talk of a 'globe-encircling Mickey Mouse'.³⁶ In so far, then, as Stefan is to be thought of as the Angel of History, he proves to be in, some ways, a comedic angel. In this respect, he is evocative of not so much Klee's somewhat mournful angel, or Benjamin's still more

mournful interpretation of that angel, but rather Benjamin's much earlier talk of how 'the *comic* figure ... is the only angel suited to this world'.³⁷

For the itinerant Benjamin, 'this world' was often the world of hotels. That is to say, a significant part of his adult life was spent in shabby hotels – first as he sought employment, and then as he sought refuge from the Nazis. Indeed, as many have suggested, for Benjamin, the hotel, being the site of temporary and rented dwelling, both fascinates and horrifies as the epitome of modernity. In *The Arcades Project* he talks of 'an earth on which every place has [now] become an inn'.³⁸

There is, then, much that is fitting in the fact that, at the very end, Benjamin's earth literally became an inn – to be precise, the tawdry hotel-inn at the Franco-Spanish border where he committed suicide. In Benjamin's case, the world of hotels would seem, then, to have been unsuited to have even a comedian as its guardian angel.

The scene of the hotel may, though, complicate in character if we turn to Stefan, for whom hotels often had something faintly comedic about them. The hotel in San Remo, for instance, had been built by the Victorian nonsense poet, Edward Lear, and seems, indeed, to have lived up to this history, with Stefan remarking that 'as for guests [we have] the usual percentage of madmen'.³⁹ These lunatic guests included, for example, the 'Austrian professor with a wavy beard from whom no snake is safe'.⁴⁰ This comedic theme continues when Stefan later moves to London and remarks, both improbably and with consummate vagueness, that he may yet 'secure a secretarial position in a hotel in Wales'.⁴¹ Finally, there is the hotel or inn at the Italian–German border that Stefan visits in July 1938 when undertaking a walking tour begun in San Remo; writing to his father about this excursion, he remarks:

I went into an inn located right on the border, and learnt a lot of interesting things by ordering the innkeeper some of his own drinks. ... [Indeed,] I myself was not often sober during the two days. One curiosity was that the innkeeper had the nerve to fetch an SS man for me.⁴²

Stefan does not say why the SS man was summoned; it is, therefore, something he never gets to share with his father who, within just two years, would also find himself at a border-inn run by an hotelier known to have been dangerously close to the SS.⁴³ In Benjamin's case, the experience would be tragic; in Stefan's case the experience was comical, almost, in fact, a kind of triumph. Nevertheless, the two experiences, or hotels, remain remarkably similar – something that, in his final hours,

Benjamin himself might just have contemplated. Indeed, so very similar are the two hotels that we might yet be caused to rethink our tendency to see Benjamin's final hours as absolutely singular. To put that another way, even at the last, the very last, Benjamin might just be found in the company of 'the uncanny young man'. Cue *Walter Benjamin's Ark*. I hope you enjoy it.

Notes

- 1 Martin Jay and Gary Smith, 'A Talk with Mona Jean Benjamin, Kim Yvon[ne] Benjamin and Michael Benjamin', *Benjamin Studien / Studies* 1 (2002) 111–25.
- 2 See *Archive*, 109–49 / *Archive*, 76–119.
- 3 Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: a critical life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 244. There are passing comments on 'Opinions et Pensées' in Ilit Ferber, 'Walter Benjamin and the Acoustics of Childhood', *Angelaki* 27.5 (2022) 37–55 (45 n 32) and Sam Dolbear and Hannah Proctor, "'Cracking open the natural teleology": Walter Benjamin, Charles Fourier and the figure of the child', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 24 (2016) 495–503 (499).
- 4 See Fredric Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* (London: Verso, 2020), 98.
- 5 'Criticism as the Fundamental Discipline of Literary History', *SW* 2.2.415 / *GS* 6.173.
- 6 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 231.
- 7 'We Ought to Re-examine the Link between Teaching and Research', *SW* 2.2.419 / *GS* 6.172.
- 8 'Karl Kraus', *SW* 2.454 / *GS* 2.363.
- 9 *Arcades*, 840 / *GS* 5.1007; 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', *SW* 1.69 / *GS* 2.149.
- 10 'Pensées', *Archive*, 128 / *Archive*, 96.
- 11 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"', *SW* 4.06 / *GS* 1.1241.
- 12 See *Origin* and 'Critique of Violence', *SW* 1.236–252 / *GS* 2.179–203.
- 13 The argument that the two forms *can* be thought together is most famously advanced by Giorgio Agamben in *State of Exception*, tr. Kevin Attel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). One counter-argument is deftly advanced by Paula Schwebel in her essay 'Sovereign / Creature: Neostoicism in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*' in *German Stoicisms*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
- 14 John Schad, 'The CounterText Interview', *CounterText* 10 (2024) 79–94 (80).
- 15 Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865) in *Matthew Arnold. Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 130.
- 16 Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', *The Complete Works*, ed. Russell Jackson and Ian Small, 8 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–), 4.159.
- 17 Gregory Ulmer, 'The Object of Post-Criticism' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 83.
- 18 'Criticism', *SW*, 2.2.415 / *GS*, 6.173. One commentator who does explore the phrase is Christopher Bracken – see his excellent book *Magical Criticism: the recourse of savage philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007). Bracken, however, understands Benjamin's magical criticism in purely formalist-cum-idealist terms, arguing that 'magical criticism actualizes the work's own self-conscious self-reflective life force' (16–17).
- 19 See Schad, *CounterText Interview*, 94.
- 20 'Thought Figures', *SW* 2.2.726 / *GS* 4.432.
- 21 'On the Concept of History', *SW*, 4.393 / *GS*, 1.698.
- 22 'On the Concept', *SW*, 4.390, 397 / *GS*, 1.694, 704.
- 23 Benjamin commentators rarely stress the link between his messianism and his interest in infancy. However, a notable exception to this rule is Sharon Jessop who talks of Benjamin's 'infant messianism' in her excellent essay 'Children, Redemption and Remembrance in Walter Benjamin', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47 (2013) 642–57.

Jewish thinkers, despite the language of Isaian messianism ('For unto us a child is born'), likewise rarely stress messianism's link to infancy. However, the link to infancy, and indeed to that most radical moment of infancy that is birth or nascency, is laid bare in Jacques Derrida's writing on futurity. Note, firstly, how in some later texts, such as *Spectres de Marx* (1993), Derrida insists on thinking futurity not as *le futur* but as *l'avenir* which, meaning literally 'the to-come', has, he suggests, a quasi-messianic structure. Note secondly how, in his early essay 'Structure, Sign, and Play' (1966), Derrida thinks futurity via a glance 'toward the operations of childrearing' with his talk of 'the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself whenever a birth is in the offing' (Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 293).

This last link, between futurity and nascency, is much more explicit in Jean-Luc Nancy, whose quasi-existential insistence on contingency leads him to insist that Being itself is always already, and again and again, 'a birth to presence'. For Nancy, 'presence is what is born and does not cease being born' (Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, tr. Brian Holmes et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 3).

- 24 Important discussions of children in Benjamin include: Jeffrey Mehlman, *Walter Benjamin for Children: An Essay on his Radio Years* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) and Nicola Gess, 'Gaining Sovereignty: on the figure of the child in Walter Benjamin's Writing', *MLN* 125 (2010) 682–708. For Jameson on the child as Benjamin's secret or 'deeper subject', see *Benjamin Files*, 27.
- 25 Mona Benjamin, email to author, 17 June 2023. I am immensely grateful to Mona for permission to cite both this email and others from her throughout the book; *One Way Street*, SW, 1.465 / GS, 4.115.
- 26 'Much Ado about Kasper', *Radio*, 247 / GS 7.1.345; 'Children's Literature', SW, 2.1.250 (translation amended) / GS, 7.250.
- 27 Letter to Gretel Adorno, c. 2 December 1936, GA-WB, 188 / GA-WB, 275.
- 28 Dora Benjamin to Gershom Scholem, 27 June 1929, cited in Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 316.
- 29 'Pensées', *Archive*, 124 / *Archive*, 91.
- 30 'Pensées', *Archive*, 117 / *Archive*, 83.
- 31 Letter to Scholem, 12 October – 5 November 1924, *Correspondence*, 254 / *Briefe*, 363.
- 32 Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 217; 'Pensées', *Archive*, 127, 117 / *Archive*, 93, 83.
- 33 'Pensées', *Archive*, 129 / *Archive*, 96.
- 34 See the following: Michael Munro, *Theory is like a Surging Sea* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum, 2015); Eiland and Jennings, who comment interestingly on Benjamin's southward-ness (*Walter Benjamin*, 198); and Mathelinda Nabugodi, *Shelley with Benjamin. A Critical Mosaic* (London: UCL Press, 2023), which explores Benjamin via, inter alia, the history of black bodies under slavery.
- 35 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', SW, 4.59 / GS, 1.599; 'Paris Diary', SW, 2.1.350 / GS, 4.584; 'Self-Portraits of a Dreamer' in *Storyteller*, 40–1 / GS, 4.423.
- 36 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility', SW, 3.118 / GS, 7.350–84.
- 37 'Ibizan Sequence', SW, 2.2.590 / GS, 405.
- 38 *Arcades*, 361 / GS, 5.456.
- 39 Stefan to Walter, 10 May 1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archiv WBA_21_50. I am very grateful to both the Akademie der Künste and Mona Benjamin for their kind permission to cite this letter and others throughout the book.
- 40 Stefan to Walter, 18 April 1937, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, WBA_21_49.
- 41 Stefan to Walter, July 1939, in Geret Lurh (ed.), *Was noch begraben lag* (Berlin: Bostelmann & Siebenhaar, 2000), 53.
- 42 Stefan to Walter, 11–12 July 1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, WBA_1_53.
- 43 See Ingrid and Konrad Scheurmann, *For Walter Benjamin*, tr. Timothy Nevill (Bonn: AsKI, 1993), 269.

1 (Unknown)

Introductory notes to Chapter 1

This first chapter begins in July 1940, with Stefan, or S., in Liverpool, being forced aboard the HMT *Dunera* and descending to a darkened lower deck. Once fully entombed he will begin to find himself somehow in dialogue with his faraway father, whom S. thus talks, or thinks, into some kind of presence.

Soon, though, the focus on S. at sea is inter-cut with scenes focusing on Virginia Woolf, aka Mrs Woolf, at her home near the coast in Sussex, also in the summer of 1940. Many of these scenes explore her fascination with the sea.

As the chapter progresses, the two worlds of the *Dunera* and Sussex begin to criss-cross, particularly via Woolf's acquaintance with a number of German-Jewish refugees. One of these refugees, the novelist René Podbielski, known to Woolf as 'a German (unknown)', would end up on the *Dunera*. Two others were known to not only Woolf but also Benjamin – namely, Charlotte Wolff and Gisèle Freund, the latter being a portrait photographer whose subjects included both the famous Woolf and the relatively obscure Benjamin.

The chapter concludes by exploring the very real possibility that Freund shows to Woolf her photograph of Benjamin, another 'German (unknown)', as it were.

* * *

Benjamin and Woolf are not often thought of together and there is no evidence that either spent any time thinking of the other.¹ Benjamin must have known of Woolf, but she may well not have known of him.

Woolf, though, was famously aware of unlikely affiliations. Witness this line from *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): ‘odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to’.²

Woolf, of course, never spoke to Benjamin, nor he to her. However, like Benjamin, Woolf gave radio talks, albeit in her case just three, in 1927, 1929 and 1937, all for the BBC. Given, then, the common interwar custom of tuning into overseas radio stations, if only momentarily while searching the airwaves, there is a just a possibility, albeit remote, that Woolf and Benjamin had actually heard the other’s voice.

In what follows, this possibility develops into a disembodied exchange between the two that focuses on Woolf’s suicide, committed less than six months after Benjamin’s. Woolf suicided while ‘not of sound mind’; however, she had for some time made plans for suicide in the event of Nazi invasion – not unreasonably, given that both she and her Jewish husband, Leonard, were, it turns out, among those whom the Nazis intended to arrest following an invasion. Her suicide has, then, more than a merely temporal affinity with Benjamin’s.

Woolf once claimed, while on holiday in Bonn, to ‘have almost met Hitler face to face’.³ And much of this chapter explores the equally unlikely thought that she almost met Benjamin voice to voice – not only via the medium of the radio but also the telephone. The chapter concludes, though, with how Woolf might, via the medium of photography, have almost met Benjamin face to face.

PS It has been suggested to me that there is one additional figure whose shadow might just be seen to fall across the action of this chapter. This figure is Benjamin’s closest friend, the radio programmer, Ernst Schoen, who not only worked for both Frankfurt Radio and then (in exile) the BBC but also had been, in 1921, the father of a child that Dora aborted.⁴ In both cases, then, Schoen might be said to have constituted, for Stefan (born in 1918), a double or shadow of his actual father.

* * *



Figure 1.1 HMT *Dunera*, 1940 © National Archives of Australia

Chapter One

(Unknown)

The malcontent ... tend[s] to pass through existence ... tight-lipped ... reluctant to make free with his own name. A laconic S. in front of his surname warns us not to take too many liberties.⁵

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

I/III

10 July 1940

No. No. This was not what S. had hoped. Not of Merry England, not the dark. Not at all. Not the pandemonium, not the bayonets, not the barbed wire.⁶ Not even the oil-painted face of the waters. The deep.

But what, thought S., could be said of it all? What indeed? Words, like the day, were failing him. If he had still possessed the gift of tongues, as granted his child-self, his dwarf-self, he surely would have had the words, words adequate to the situation, words equal to this new dark house of his. With such a gift, he might, for instance, have looked about and remarked, *It is totally unwindowed.*^{*7}

S. stumbled.

Or inquired, *How does the house see?*

S. tripped.

Or perhaps he might have said, *The sun is ill today.*⁸

S. staggered.

* All italicised words attributed to S. are from Benjamin's transcription of Stefan's infant utterances.

Or even, *My whole ear is laughed full of headache.*⁹
The blind house swayed.

* * *

[Since] expatriation, my son has not been able to find his balance.
(Walter Benjamin)¹⁰

* * *

Ah yes, how well the dear dwarf had spoken, back then, before, in those glorious Weimar days. *Today*, he had then used to say, *I am the prince.*¹¹ S. slipped. In truth, alas, the prince had stood in need, in need of an orange, as did all Weimar princes. *Do you think*, he had asked, *I can buy oranges for all the strange princes?* S. again fell arse-ward.

S. was, even now, still of the old-time view that *'Prince' is a word with a star tied around it.*¹² Like a noose, perhaps, or albatross. S. fell once more. No harm done. A charmed life, his. Yes, he was, no doubt, enjoying a charmed life. And soon, perhaps, a charmed death. Yes, charmed. But then, as the prince had said, *someone who has a magical papa is a Sunday child.*

Ah yes, papa, the king, though currently lost, was indeed of a magical sort. Or so the prince had thought. *Papa knows all of the stories in the whole world.* Yes, *all*, alas. All the stories.

* * *

Stefan ... won't undertake anything real.
(Dora Benjamin)¹³

* * *

S. looked around. Behold, Lower Mess Deck No. 2, and everywhere pale faded men who, like himself, wrestled with fabulous names, their own, or so they said: Messrs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Adolf, Jonas, Moses, Solomon, Adolf, Moses, Eli, Moses, Marx (Karl), Freud, Kafka, Adolf, Wittgenstein, Moses, Adolf, Moses, Wilde, Wilde and Wilde, not to mention a certain Wolfgang Amadeus (aka Fackenheim).¹⁴ Others, though, struggled with tin-pot, crack-pot, do-it-yourselfer names, such as Herr Zeppie, Simon-the-Child, Frank-the-Mathematician, the mysterious Herr Semaphore and one known as Maestro S.¹⁵ Perhaps the latter was he himself, it was possible. However, he was quite certain that his own especial burden-of-a-name was Rafael. Yes, Rafael the god-dammed angel. For the king had loved an angel.

To date, though, S. had always remained stubbornly mortal. Much like the wan wrestlers all about him. All sorts and conditions there were. Strangers, pilgrims, lawyers, professors, comedians, hairdressers, cooks, crooks, quacks, queers, errand boys, U-Boaters, madmen and spies (or so they said), not to mention (though he did) the Man from the National Circus of Argentina and, indeed, what is more, a Film Actor (minor) who had been intending, but that very morning, to step jauntily aboard the ferry to the Isle of Man, not bloody Canada, or to wherever it was they were bent, hell-bent.¹⁶ Some Godless place, no doubt – please God.

And so they cursed and cried, preached, plotted and prayed, ceaselessly murmuring to some bugger or other, some bugger like Jesus – Jehovah, for instance, or Himmler, or Charlie Cairoli. To each man his very own Clown. Some among them even essayed to read in the dark, which was folly (thought S.) for, although we may now be a People who walked in darkness and who went down to the sea in darkness and who even pissed and shat in darkness, we surely should not read in darkness. As the prince had said, *One doesn't read a book at night – otherwise the darkness will read it and the book will remain dark for ever.*¹⁷

* * *

In July 1940, Virginia and Leonard Woolf (aka 'L'.) were, for the most part, at their house in coastal Sussex, though they also spent time at their apartment in central London.

* * *

Mrs Woolf went into the house. Yes, *a dark kind of summer* it was proving.^{†18} And, indeed, somewhat out of the ordinary. She removed her hat. *Ever since the war*, she thought, *we've been infested with refugees.*¹⁹ No, let us say, we've been *entertaining refugees.*²⁰ Like angels unawares, as it were. She glanced at a pair of *strangled wool gloves.*²¹ How, she thought, *they fill the place with odds and ends*, these refugees.²² The gloves were women's gloves and had been abandoned, as if orphaned, by an Austrian woman. Jewish. *Mme Spira.*²³ The dear woman had *sobbed* and would, no doubt, be back. Ah, *the refugees ... People like ourselves, beginning life again.*²⁴ With and without their gloves.

Mrs Woolf again considered the abandoned gloves. Long accustomed they were to gentle Jewish hands. As, in a manner, was she.

Odd, though, seeing it was July. Why wear woollen gloves in July? Even this July. She half-shivered and thought of that day, March,

† All italicised words attributed to Mrs Woolf are from the writings of Virginia Woolf.

yes March it was, when a boatful of *refugees* were *turned back from Newhaven*.²⁵ Unfortunate name. Mind, her own *house has been a veritable refugee haunt*.²⁶ And how they come and go, *frittering one's days to shreds*. No wonder, she thought, *I'm ... all at sea*.²⁷

Mrs Woolf entered the sitting-room, then paused. *Dear me – what a bore*, she thought, *I've a wretch of a German (unknown) coming here on Thursday*.²⁸ She now wondered if, on Thursday, the wretch would also leave behind strangled Jewish gloves or indeed *anything* strangled. The wretch would, no doubt, need saving like all the others, saving from England, the Home Office (unfortunate name), Aliens Department. Yes, he would need to be rescued, this *German (unknown)*, *our German von-Something*, although not really von-Anything, his actual name being altogether different.²⁹ *I shall call you Renny, L. had said. Yes, Renny.*

* * *

René Podbielski, one of several refugees whom the Woolfs encountered, was known to Virginia as 'a German (unknown)' or 'German von-Something' and to Leonard as 'Renny'.³⁰ They were, though, unable to prevent him being rounded up and put on the same ship as Stefan. Podbielski had been writing a novel at the time; however, the soldiers on board, some of whom were pardoned convicts, immediately threw the manuscript into the Mersey.³¹

* * *

A man, thought S., is weeping. Again. It was, though, only a book, and he, the man weeping, only its author. Indeed, the man's book was not really a book, being just a manuscript, or what the prince would have called a *mandosquik*.³² And, alas, it would now never grow up to become a book, seeing it had just gone south. Ah, the English knew what to do with a book. And there had been no shilly-shallying, not from the Soldiers of the King's Pardon, the Forgiven as it were (such is grace).³³

Welcome to hell, they (the Forgiven) had said upon greeting S. et al, as they had boarded.³⁴ Yes, welcome to hell, they had said. And S. had believed them for, as they examined one's baggage, it was evident that they knew exactly what to put into their own pockets, such as a ring or coins, and what to hurl over the edge of hell, such as the scribble of von-Something or other. At least, thought S., the darkness would not be able to read the drowning book.

Even so, its author continued to weep. Wept like Jesus, he did. Yes, it was quite *raining here in the room*.³⁵ Or at least, that's what the prince

would have said. For, back then, it had often rained indoors, when the king and queen had fought and the queen had grown royally sad. Often, however, S. could stop the rain from falling. He would simply lisp in the queen's ear, avowing, *I am going to marry the princess*. Yes, marry her, he would lisp.

The king I see that *Oedipus has learned to speak*.³⁶

S. Pardon?

The king Nothing.

The great blind house now murmured – unmoored, loosened, she felt her way. His Majesty's Sightless Ship was off. England had left England, and S. was away. Away.

The king *Oedipus is the oldest runaway*.

S. Pardon?

The king Nothing.

And now S. fell to cursing, to cursing the ship, the day, the War, Herr Adolf, Herr Churchill, Herr George VI, not to mention Herr Knock the Policeman-in-Cunning-Disguise who had knockity-knocked at his door.³⁷

The king In *London the police already have tanks*.³⁸

S. Pardon?

The king Nothing.

Where, though, might they be going? *We are travelling to the Baltic*, the prince had once said.³⁹ But no, the prince had blundered, for the ship seemed bound for the Atlantic and, thereafter, Godknows Where – and, indeed, Godknows *When*, for S. could only imagine what hour it was, seeing that the Forgiven now possessed his watch.

The king *The seafarers are lost and do not know any longer where morning and evening are*.⁴⁰

S. Pardon?

The king Nothing.

S. stared at his timeless wrist. All around him, the Patriarchs of Israel, not least the Moses Five, were considering the watery wilderness. A strange land it was, the sea. And they were the strangers in the strange land. Exodus came to mind. But what of their Promised Land? Their destination. Where was it? Canada, said one. America, said another. Full fathom five, said Herr Jonas.

* * *

‡ All italicised words attributed to 'the king' are from the writings of Walter Benjamin.

Mrs Woolf sat down and removed her boots. The walk had been a long one, but the sea had done its best to seduce the sun, as had the passing ships. And *the cliffs*, she thought, had almost *looked as if they were conscious of the ships*, and *the ships as if they were conscious of the cliffs*. Indeed, it was *as if* (she thought) *the ships and cliffs both signalled to each other some secret message*.⁴¹

Ah, the secretive sea. She was by no means unfamiliar with its secrets, or at least the secrets of the Admiralty, the King's own, HMS-*This*, HMS-*That*, all those lovely battleships. Yes, she thought, how *I want to see again the shore where I played my joke on the Dreadnought*.⁴² What alarums had sounded that day. How the Naval Lords had howled at her youthful *tricks on the King's ships*.⁴³

* * *

In February 1910, at Weymouth, while dressed as a man, Virginia Woolf had joined five male friends in disguising themselves as the Emperor of Abyssinia and attendants; they thus somehow succeeded in being shown around HMS *Dreadnought*, the Royal Navy's flagship.⁴⁴

* * *

Yes, how grand she had looked with both beard and turban as she had man-walked the *brig*, or *frigate*, or *whatever they call it*.⁴⁵ Ah, she had *no head for sea-terms* – or for the sea itself, or water of any kind, come to think of it. Indeed, she *never crossed a ditch without saying the Lord's Prayer backwards*.

No, not backwards, as that might upset the Almighty. And that would not do, since to whom else could she address her *Damn Hitler prayer*?⁴⁶ Damn Hitler, she thought, praying forwards, Damn Hitler. Yes, damn him for causing her, these days, so often to talk to God – not to mention the wireless and all those foreign stations, even when jammed.

* * *

The BBC, in a measured trained voice, ... [was] interrupted by the ArchB's prayers: then ... a ... message from the Admiralty to ships. ... Then ... all foreign stations were jammed.⁴⁷

(Virginia Woolf)

* * *

Ah, they were so often jammed, those stations, over there, across the darling Channel. Yes, jammed, like windows that won't open. And if

the news were to become yet worse then her windows *would* indeed be jammed – by herself. Yes, jam them shut she would. Although, to be honest (she thought), I do, in fact, *open my window when I hear the Germans*.⁴⁸ As she did so often now. For instance, just *last night* there had been several *raging voices* in German, and she herself had raged back.⁴⁹

Ah yes, these days, *the wireless*, she thought, is *more pain ... than pleasure. What with the Germans cutting in*.⁵⁰ Most often it was *That Man Again – Hitler speaks tomorrow, Hitler's speech tonight*, etc.⁵¹ She preferred, though, to call him *what's-his-name*, as if he were half-unknown, a kind of secret, the secret king of—

The king *Secret Germany*.⁵²

Mrs Woolf Pardon?

The king Nothing.

Mrs Woolf reached for the newspaper. *I begin to hear voices*, she thought.⁵³ She looked down at the newspaper. *Nun in bus who pays fare with a man's hand*.⁵⁴ A spy no doubt (she thought), a man, a German, hidden beneath the habit of an English nun. How's that for a secret? And looked up.

Perhaps, she thought, the Germans have an especial taste for secrets, or at least that which is half-hidden, or withdrawn, a little hard to get at. Just look at all the difficult books the Germans read – even difficult books one has written oneself, Mrs Woolf. Right now, for instance, a certain *Fraulein Gulde is studying my works in the Brit. Mus*.⁵⁵ The Fraulein's name is not quite Gulde, may even be Gruber, but why be precise? At this hour. Besides, I am not the scholar – *she* is. Which is doubtless why *Fraulein G. ... cannot be sure what life is, so writes to ask me*. Ah, how very inquisitive are the unmarried.

Mrs Woolf closed the newspaper and picked up a large envelope. It had come, good heavens, from Fraulein G. No doubt she *sends me a pamphlet on me*, that is to say *a German glass ... into which I can't resist looking* and so much so that I shall soon *begin twisting among long words*.⁵⁶

* * *

One of the very first studies of Woolf's work, completed in 1932, was written by Ruth Gruber as a doctoral thesis at the University of Cologne.⁵⁷

* * *

Mrs Woolf allowed the pamphlet and all its long words to fall from her hands. Hopeless they were, these long words, so hopeless she could

scarcely recognise herself. One's *books*, she thought, might just as well *have sailed into the blue & been lost*.⁵⁸ 'One of our books did not return', as the BBC puts it.

Mrs Woolf eyed first the fallen pamphlet and then the radiogram. *We think England's talking of us* – but no, *not a bit*; no, it is Germany talking, talking, talking.⁵⁹ But such now is scholarship. And the radio.

The king *Berlin Radio*.⁶⁰

Mrs Woolf For example, yes.

The king Though not any more.

Mrs Woolf Pardon?

The king *Events at Berlin Radio have completely robbed me of my income.*

Mrs Woolf Ah.

The king I have been asked to leave. To leave *Voice Land*.⁶¹

Mrs Woolf Voice Land?

The king *Radio*.

Mrs Woolf Ah.

[PAUSE.]

The king In Voice Land, one cannot see. Cannot see anyone.

Mrs Woolf Not even me?

The king Not even you, *dear invisible listeners*.⁶²

Mrs Woolf Ah.

The king *Maybe, though, someday I'll meet one of you*.⁶³

Mrs Woolf Perhaps.

The king *But we will not, alas, recognise each other.*

* * *

Beginning in 1927, Walter Benjamin gave around 80 radio talks in Berlin, many for children. From 1933, however, as a Jew, he was no longer allowed to broadcast.

* * *

S. rose to his feet and swayed, like a lord (drunk), like the sea (drunk). I wonder, he thought, if I am about to vomit? Why not? I already stink. He now thought of the long-lost king. *I am sad ... sad because I don't see you anymore*, the prince had said.⁶⁴ But perhaps, perhaps, S. might yet see his highness again, even out here, on this dear dead ship of theirs. Yes, what if the king (unknown) had finally made it (unknown) to England, as many had begged him, and then (unknown) set sail with the rest of them?

S. removed his spectacles (uncleaned). And stared at them. *Papa glad*, the prince had said.⁶⁵ And, perhaps, Papa is glad again, this time glad to be at sea with his only begotten son.

But is that really possible? *That I don't know*, the prince had said. He then had added, in his own defence, *Does one know everything*[?] ⁶⁶ Yes, but (had said Someone) did the prince know *anything*? *That I don't know*, had replied the prince; however, *one day I'll know*. Know what? *That I don't know*, had said the prince.

S. now slumped to the floor (if ships have floors) head-hard-against-wall (if ships have walls) and put on his spectacles (uncleaned). He peered about him. Moses, Moses, Moses, Moses, Moses – and Jonas. No king to be seen, and no-one aboard seemed even to have heard of the unseen king. But perhaps, S. thought, the king had adopted a pseudonym, an absurd gentile name. He had often done so before. Fellner, Mabinn, Holz, Stempflinger – there had been so many.⁶⁷

Though never 'Benjamini'. No, the king himself had never used 'Benjamini'. It was, of course, uncomfortably close to just 'Benjamin,' but 'Benjamini' had its advantages. Above all, it might yet help one to pass for Italian and thus for Aryan. And did he (S.) not look Italian? (*Non sono ebreo, signore*). And did he not have the capacity to speak Italian? (*Non sono ebreo, signore*). And he would doubtless beg like one, scream like one (*Non sono ebreo, signore*), should he ever find himself with a Nazi gun to his temple and a freshly-dug grave before him.

* * *

In Stefan's deportation papers his surname is recorded as 'Benjamini'. This was probably a misreading, as Stefan's handwriting was extremely bad and often his signature appeared to have an *i* at the end. It may, though, have been an error with which Stefan was not altogether unhappy since, given his excellent Italian, he could seek, if necessary, to hide his Jewishness by passing as Italian. In 1936, when in Vienna, he had, for a while, called himself Stefano Benjamino.⁶⁸

* * *

But, thought S., enough of words, names and other masks. The more pressing question was this: might his highness be a royal stowaway?

The king Perhaps.

S. Pardon?

The king *The gangplank had already been removed and the ship had already begun to move.*⁶⁹

S. And then?
The king *I scaled the hull and manged to clamber over the railing successfully.*

S. So, *now* where the hell are you? To be precise?
The king *Imagine me.*

S. Where?
The king *At the bow. Imagine me at the bow.*⁷⁰

S. At the bow of what?
The king *A 2000-ton steamer ... cutting through the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean surf.*⁷¹

S. Are you sure?
The king No.
 [PAUSE.]
Imagine me. Imagine me again.

S. Where now?
The king *On the ship's terrace.*

S. Doing what?
The king *Sunbathing ... sunbathing like a droll, moustachioed old lady.*

S. Really? Really, your highness? Are you sure?
 [NO ANSWER].
 I said, are you sure?
 [NO ANSWER].
 No, stay your highness. Don't go. Stop. Stop.

* * *

Today ... in Florence, [at the Uffizi] I was moved to stop in front of a painting labelled 'Raphael?' In a way, the question mark was the reason I stopped. The panel portrays an uncanny young man.

(Walter Benjamin, 1924)⁷²

* * *

S. shifted his back, his arse. Ah, there we go. Rear-to-wall. Head-set-to-drop. Hands-at-the-ready. Perhaps, then, *this* was the moment to vomit, seeing his highness had gone, gone somewhere. Perhaps, though, he would soon be back. S. looked about the lower deck, but no returning king as yet approached or even waved from afar with, say, a soiled kerchief, while calling out, across the o'er-crowded bark, the prince's secret angel-name.

The king *Raphael?*

No. No-one. No king.

The king *Raphael?*
Still no-one.
The king *Raphael?*
No-one.

* * *

It [is] ... completely impossible to communicate with Stefan.⁷³
(Walter Benjamin)

* * *



Figure 1.2 Raphael, *Saint John the Baptist as a Boy* © Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi

* * *

After a couple of weeks at sea, the men on the *Dunera* began to organise talks or lectures on everything from Jewish scripture to Philosophy, History (both global and local) and How to Drive a Car. They called it the ‘Ship’s University’.⁷⁴

* * *

Fursity, the prince used to say.⁷⁵ *Unifursity*, he would later say, whenever the king had vanished.⁷⁶ He would also say, *Do you like it*, your highness, *faraway in Heidelberg?*⁷⁷ *Do you like it even more than being at home?* Even though home is nice and the queen is lonely. And weeps. So, please come back. Yes, Papa, come back. And, *Papa*, please *bring me something*. *Bring me something back. From Heidelberg.*

S. looked around. Into the shadows. All about him were unwashed prophets. Some stood upon tables, others hung from hammocks. Each one had a lecture to give.

The king *Many lecterns stood all around.*⁷⁸

And the king, S. thought, might just be among them, a king in the dark, preaching to the dark.

The king *Night, yes night, is the hour ... of the lecture hall.*⁷⁹

But what might be the king’s recurring theme? The burden of his sermon? Whatever it was, thought S., it would not be easy to tell, or discern, there being, tonight, so many sermons – and all, it seemed, being preached at once.

The-History-of-Shipbuilding-shit-is-nevertheless-shit-unlike-Colour-Photography-while-shit-On-the-other-hand-consider-Deutero-Isaiah-fuck-If-you-take-a-spanner-fuck-notwithstanding-A-Walk-Through-Paris-or-fuck-The-Philosophy-of-History-bloody-Nazis-or-How-to-Drive-a-Car-vis-à-vis-Hegel-bastards-and-Colour-Photography-vis-à-vis-Hegel-not-to-mention-A-Walk-Through-Paris-or-Moses-or-Sex-in-Vienna-or-a-hammer-while-The-Viennese-Fire-Brigade-notwithstanding-Isaiah-not-to-mention-A-Walk-Through-Paris-or-Sex-or-A-Walk-Through-a-Car-or-Sex-or-Moses-or-How-to-Drive-a-Ship-a-fucking-big-ship-in-Vienna-Vienna-Vienna-Vienna-Vienna.⁸⁰

* * *

From 1934 to 1938, Stefan, as a teenager, was sent, by his parents, now divorced, to live and study in Vienna. There he had stayed in lodgings, right until the Anschluss and the entry of Hitler.⁸¹

* * *

Yes, thought S., I remember Vienna – and the Fire Brigade, the ringing of the bell, no doubt ringing forever now, what with all those synagogues aflame. Enough it was to make anyone learn How to Set Sail from Vienna. His highness, however, being all fingers and thumbs, did not even know How to Make a Cup of Coffee.⁸² One must, therefore, dismiss all thought of the king – he is simply not here, not among them. More likely, he is still hiding in Paris, or perhaps, even now, taking A Walk Through Whatever Has Become of Paris. Albeit alone. So many having left. Escaped.

* * *

One of the German-Jewish émigrés who made it from Paris to London was Walter Benjamin's close friend and fellow Berliner, Charlotte Wolff. When in London, she took up palm-reading and read the palms of many, including Virginia Woolf. Charlotte, aka Lotte, had once been arrested by the Nazis as a spy, being suspected of posing as a man in woman's clothing. This story, among others, she told Woolf.⁸³

* * *

Mrs Woolf looked down at the palm of her hand. Like a man's? No. She rose to her feet. Enough, she had had enough. Of hands and the War. She would head for the garden. The writing lodge (she presumed) was awaiting her. She paused. Looked again at the palm of her hand. Like a man's? No, certainly not. Although, according to that palmist, the Berliner, it was, apparently, a 'hand full of contradictions.'⁸⁴

Mrs Woolf had, at first, refused to have her hand read, thinking what on earth might a hand have to reveal, or say? But then, *having the idea that after all some kind of communication is possible between beings that can't be accounted for*, she had surrendered.⁸⁵

Yes, she had sat for the palmist. Or was that *to* the palmist? Whatever, she had been a peculiar woman, if woman she was – hard to tell, the way she had dressed and had felt her hand, Mrs Woolf's hand, the skin, its marks. *But why such a fuss about marks on the hand? Why should deaths, say, indent the palm of the hand?* Mind, if true, then might death, in the case of her own hand, be contradicted? After all, if her hand really was so full of contradictions might it not contradict even death?

The king *We who have died ... are resurrected.*⁸⁶

Mrs Woolf Quite.

Mrs Woolf strode through the garden. The palmist's reading had been, perhaps, a little too sure of itself. Yes, it had been not unlike *the kind*

of lecture on the Novels of Virginia Woolf that earnest young men sometimes deliver at Huddersfield.⁸⁷ Not that she had ever been to Huddersfield, nor thought it was quite the place for such a lecture. She feared, in fact, for literary criticism in Huddersfield. And elsewhere. Though there was always Germany, or at least the *monolithic Baroness von Nostitz*, which amounted to much the same thing.⁸⁸

She walked on, past the pond, remembering how *the Baroness* had said *Germany is the better for Hitler* – not least, it seemed, in terms of literary criticism, for the Baroness had been seeking, she said, some *young man to lecture on English poetry*. The Baroness had not, alas, been seeking a young woman to give the lecture, an oversight all too characteristic of the Nazis. Yes, she had thought, *why don't they make me Prof. of English? – I'd teach 'em*.⁸⁹ But, what would she teach them? What could she possibly teach the Germans?

Mrs Woolf entered the lodge, but did not sit down. Still standing, she asked herself what, exactly, might be the point of literary criticism in Mr Hitler's Germany? Indeed, she wondered, what was the point of criticism, period? After all, literary critics were a curious tribe. In fact, she was herself somewhat nervous of literary critics. They were, she felt, out to get her, to tear her to pieces. Indeed, in relation to critics, she thought, *I'm the hare* – a higher kind of vermin, as it were.⁹⁰ Thankfully, she thought, *I'm a long way ahead of the hounds, my critics*.

She sat down.

What, though, if the hounds were closer than imagined? After all, they were now being bred within the universities. Take, for instance, Fraulein Gruber, or Gulde – what if, say, this particular critical hound had *discovered the meaning of The Waves*?⁹¹ Mrs Woolf had always thought *The Waves*, like the sea itself, might never be decrypted; however, the decoders, were finally onto her.

She examined the window.

Like that woman at Chicago, the University, Miss Elizabeth Eddy, authoress of 'The Study of the Style of Mrs Virginia Woolf with Special Emphasis on Her Thought Patterns', which meant, it seemed, Special Emphasis on the Length of Mrs Woolf's Sentences.⁹² These, apparently, ranged from 1 to 274 syllables, with 75 to 85 per cent being no more than 50 syllables and those over 85 amounting to 6.86 per cent of the more recent novels, as against 1.3 per cent of the earlier. Roughly.

This account of Mrs Woolf's Thought was, thought Mrs Woolf, a curious thing. A twisting among long sums. A twisting that, Miss Eddy said, was a trick learnt from her Chicago tutor, one Miss Edith Rickert,

who had herself, or so she says, first learnt the trick as a military cryptographer. In the War, the last one.⁹³

Mrs Woolf stared at the desk before her.

Miss Rickert had, apparently, gone on to work for The Black Chamber (hush-hush).⁹⁴ Anyway, it was Miss Rickert, they say, who had decoded the Zimmerman Telegram (hush-hush) when all hell (hush-hush) and indeed America (hush-hush) had broken loose. 1917, that had been. Ah, what memories. Of hell.

Mrs Woolf at last began to type. She had had enough (she thought) of the hell that came down the wires, from Across the Pond. Why, only *yesterday* she had endured a *positive[ly] dangerous woman lunatic from Chicago*.⁹⁵ *Never again* (she thought) *do I answer the telephone in person*.

* * *

The woman on the telephone was not, in truth, Elizabeth Eddy or Edith Rickert but rather one Elinor Nef. She did, though, almost certainly know both Eddy and Rickert since she, Elinor, was herself a woman of letters and wife of a Chicago professor.⁹⁶

* * *

Ah yes, they were on to her, the mad ladies of Chicago, clearly convinced that, when typing, Mrs Woolf was in fact labouring at some kind of clanking encryption machine.

Mrs Woolf paused, her hands mid-air.

But perhaps she *was*, perhaps she *was* busy encrypting, without quite knowing it. She stared at her typewriter with suspicion. She had often found that it would randomly change one letter for another. *This typewriter cannot spell*, she would say, with something like a smile, or one half of a laugh.⁹⁷ Perhaps, though, she should not laugh, or even half-laugh.

She stared down at the page just typed.

The typewriter, she thought, *has already converted one name into another*.⁹⁸ Mind of its own. Ah well, on, on, tap, tap. Damn, there it goes again, just look at those *dots and dashes*. It was like Morse Code, dear God, Morse Code though thinly veiled. *Observe how the dots and dashes run themselves into continuous lines*.⁹⁹ Mrs Woolf looked around. Ah, she *could work as a spy without even leaving this place, without indeed stirring from this chair*.¹⁰⁰

Mrs Woolf tapped again at the typewriter, her *Portable Underwood*.¹⁰¹ Yes, portable, albeit not exactly reliable nor wholly faithful. But what could one expect? Underwoods came from America,

a merely Neutral nation; so, not exactly Enemy, yet neither Friend nor Ally. Some things were, then, best *not to be whispered on a typewriter*, certainly not on this one.¹⁰² Yes, she must be careful. She looked at *the books* on her desk, her own books, the ones she had written or, rather, typed.¹⁰³ *Were they allies? Or were they enemies?*

* * *

The two thousand-and-more deportees crammed into the *Dunera* shared just ten toilets between them. These were positioned at the top of a flight of metal stairs, and the inevitable queues were overseen by self-appointed toilet police.¹⁰⁴

Friendly enemies, mused S., looking for the stairs, in need of a piss.¹⁰⁵ Yes, that's what they had said. You lot, they had said, you lot are what we call *Friendly-Enemy-Aliens*. In short, *Friendly-Bloody-Enemies*. Paradoxical, yes, oxymoronic even. Or should that be ambiguous? Yes, yes it should. He *really* needed a piss. And, in fact, the ambiguity had been something of a blessing. Where, he wondered, had the stairs gone? Trouble was, Someone Important had had a belly-full of ambiguity and had sought Clarity in Time of National Emergency. S. had held on as long as he could. And now they were just *Enemy Enemies*. Which was at least simpler. He could hold out no longer. Or was it not? Not what? Simpler. Perhaps, but he was not sure. Not at all. Now for that piss.

Yes, not sure, he was. Though bliss it was, not only the piss but also this being-not-sure, this having-not-a-clue as to where in the world they would end up if, by some misfortune, they were to survive. And no less clueless, no less in-the-dark, the blissful dark, was his Deck-Leader, or whatever he was called. Mess-Father, was it?¹⁰⁶ Or Desert Father? Either way, the delirious bugger knew no more than one's Actual-Father. Wherever he is – Baltimore, Buenos Aries, Bermondsey. Heaven.

But not so fast. What if (after all) his highness *were* on board, yet ensconced in his very own room? What if, in fact, this here shit-of-a-ship were, in truth, some shocking hotel? After all, the king had always liked shocking hotels – not to mention a room of his own. Trouble was (the prince had said), *Papa won't let me go in the room*, not the king's room, not just at any-old-time. It had been only by appointment.¹⁰⁷

The king *I see Stefan twice a week.*¹⁰⁸

But, then, perhaps the king had been low and at the end of his royal wits. Or perhaps it was more that his majesty's room had been rather uncomfortable. *Can he sleep badly?* the prince had once asked the king.¹⁰⁹ His highness had not replied, so the prince had simply answered

the question himself – Yes, the prince had said, even as he had marched straight in.

The king *Stefan is here.*¹¹⁰

And the king had responded with aplomb, inquiring, Pray, *what are you doing coming into my room with your unwashed 'yes'?*¹¹¹ To which the oncoming prince had replied, *I have washed my neck, and so also washed my 'yes'.*

S. now paused and felt for his neck. There it still was, though no longer washed, and neither was his 'yes'. No, his 'yes' was now no longer washed. No. Had not been for days. No, his 'yes' was filthy now, as also were these London rags he wore. And rags they certainly were, cheap shit. His suit, second-hand (five shillings) was sharp but torn and fast coming-apart at the seat. Crap to walk in.

The king *At once, a lad in rags and tatters came towards me.*¹¹²

Ah, is that him? The king? The one over there, the one with his head in his pants.

The king *I searched feverishly in my pockets.*

Ah, no. No. Alas, the bugger just *looks* like his highness.

The king *The lad crossed my path, but did not stop on his way.*

* * *

On 24 June 1939, at 3 p.m., Virginia Woolf encountered another German-Jewish exile and friend of Walter Benjamin's – namely, Gisèle Freund. Freund had already photographed many famous authors such as Sartre, Joyce and Malraux, and was now to photograph Woolf. Before doing so, Freund projected for Woolf, upon a sheet hung up in her London drawing room, some of the colour portraits recently shown at a private exhibition in Paris, at *La Maison des Amis des Livres*, a bookshop owned by Adrienne Monnier. This exhibition included a photograph of Freund's friend, the little-known Benjamin.¹¹³

* * *

Mrs Woolf drew up a chair and sat down. The sitting, or *séance*, as the French might say, had begun. The *devil woman* was ready to show *those d—d photographs*, and then it would be herself, Mrs Woolf, the next to succumb to this *treacherous vermin*.¹¹⁴ The room, she thought, needs cleaning. Ah, and here they were, *all the lit. gents & ladies shown on a sheet*, a bed-sheet.¹¹⁵ Single or double? One could not say. Either way, how leisured they seemed, *the lit gents & ladies*, all of them, or rather all save one, the unknown one, or at least unknown to Mrs Woolf. She peered at his face.

The king *Now began the game.*¹¹⁶

Mrs Woolf What game?

The king *The game of recognising ... every face.*

[MRS WOOLF PEERED AGAIN, HER EYES NARROWED.]

Talking of faces, beautiful faces, *I have*, you know, *had dreams consisting primarily of women.*¹¹⁷

Mrs Woolf Pardon?

The king *I have had dreams of women taking an interest in me.*

Mrs Woolf Where?

The king *In Adrienne Monnier's rooms.*

Mrs Woolf paused. So, who was he? This particular Unknown German, this Odd-Man-Out looking down and away, his hand to his face as if half-in-hiding. Most likely he was, like *devil woman*, some Berlin prodigal. A Jew, no doubt – again like *devil woman*, albeit with a moustache (him not her). But to whom else could he be compared? She hesitated. Perhaps, she thought, *he looked like a king in exile.*¹¹⁸ A runaway.

Yes, like that Munich king, clown-king, What's-His-Name. He's a runaway, of a kind. Isn't German, not really. From Austria, the clown.

Again a moustache. Anyway, she had seen him too, or nearly. Yes, *almost met Hitler face to face*.¹¹⁹ Fancy that. Just a few years back. She and Leonard and the marmoset, all three of them on holiday in Bonn – *received everywhere like film stars* they were (even Leonard), and there He was, What's-His-Name, driving through all the people.¹²⁰ Just by the bridge. Chaos it was. *We ... had to pass through ranks of children with red flags* who cheered and waved.¹²¹ *Seig Heil* etc. And *I raised my hand*. Don't know why. Might have looked like a salute.¹²² Anyway, on we went, *chased across the river by Hitler (or Goering)*.

Yes, may have been Goering. Anyway, one of the two. They all look the same, Nazis. Nearly seen one, nearly seen them all. She peered again at the face on her bed-sheet. This face or half-of-a-face what, exactly, did it mean?

The king *The task of the critic will include ... physiognomic criticism.*¹²³

Mrs Woolf Quite.

But how, she wondered, was one to go about physiognomic criticism? She really had no idea. Least not with respect to this particular face, this technicolour face. As large as life it was – though perhaps she would not go that far, as far as life. Nevertheless, the face was certainly big, projected as it was like a sorry film-star. And to think that Fraulein Freund desired that she, Mrs Woolf, be also thus enlarged – how terrible.

She stared again at the half-face, this *German glass* (dark glass) *into which she couldn't resist looking*.¹²⁴

The king *'The more closely you look ...'*

Mrs Woolf Yes?

The king *'The more distantly it looks back.'*¹²⁵

She stared at the man once again who appeared to stare back, albeit distantly. *At this very moment*, she thought, *half-past three on a June day in 1939* (or thereabouts), *they greeted each other*.¹²⁶ How odd it was.

Pause.

The king *I recently saw – for the first time – Katharine Hepburn.*¹²⁷

Mrs Woolf And which film was *that*?

The king *There is a lot of you in her.*

Rubbish, she thought, *I'm not even Greta Garbo*, thank God.¹²⁸ She, Mrs Woolf, was by no means a film-star; indeed, relatively, she was almost unknown and intended to be *truly* unknown, *absolutely* unknown, unknown to all – to critics, photographers and, indeed, all exiled kings, whether in Bonn or her drawing room. She intended, in fact, to be unknown even to herself and, what-is-more, unknown *to the Unknown*.

*She would, therefore, place one chair there, another here and somebody new, somebody **unknown**, somebody passed on a staircase ... will come.*¹²⁹

She stood up. That projected Jew, with the moustache, had she passed *him* on a staircase? Unlikely, she thought. But there was something about him. Something known. Yes, known.

The king *Photography –*

Mrs Woolf Pardon?

The king *Photography is the most decisive of all conquests of a person's incognito.*¹³⁰

Yes, she thought, she knew what he meant. Even in *L.'s snap-shot* (she thought) *my privacy is invaded.*¹³¹ Still worse, *my legs show ... oh my legs.* At least Fraulein Freund was not after her legs. It was merely her head she wanted. Mind, how *I loathe being hoisted about on top of a stick for anyone to stare at.*¹³² She turned to go.

The king *Photography studios –*

Mrs Woolf Enough!

The king *Photography studios have occupied an ambiguous ... place –*

Mrs Woolf Silence!

[PAUSE.]

The king [DEFIANTLY] *Photography studios have occupied an ambiguous ... place between ... throne room and execution.*¹³³

Mrs Woolf straightened her collar, high collar, the highest in her wardrobe. It protected the neck. She moved toward the door. It was over, thank God. The sitting was done. *I was photographed, she thought, about 40 times.*¹³⁴ But why 40? Why indeed?

Once Mrs Woolf had reached the door she paused and recalled the moustachioed Jew, the one like a king who had lost his kingdom, a king no longer. Not unlike herself, for she was now (thanks to devil-woman) a *queen* no longer. She was, instead, just another face, just another face in the crowd; which is, these days, where faces belong, in crowds and queues and lines, all waiting for something. She thought once more of the Jew – *strange that, the face of a person whom I scarcely know save that I think we met on a gangway of a ship bound for Africa.*¹³⁵

* * *

A few days after leaving Liverpool, the *Dunera* would turn south and make for Africa.¹³⁶

* * *

Above them, just above (don't look), the sky had gone. All the clouds, thought S., all the operatic clouds of old Europe, had gone, quite gone, and now there was fuck-all above as well as fuck-all to the East, the West, the North, the South. There was, however, above, high above (don't look), a huge great flaming Eye. Not that It can *see*, but then there is nothing to see, not out here, in the inferno, on deck, at noon, every noon, where as if on *A Walk Through Paris* (one thinks of the king) we, the Apprehended, do gaily, albeit briefly, promenade at bayonet point. Ah yes (we daily say) let us now step out and once more laugh, greet the gulls and pass elegant comment upon the chances of yet being drowned.

* * *

On 11 July 1940, the *Dunera* had been very nearly hit by two U-boat torpedoes. There had been great alarm on board, not least among those who, just two weeks before, had survived the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, another British ship carrying deportees. On the *Dunera*, the alarm was heightened by the fact that no life-belts had been given out and no emergency drill had taken place.¹³⁷

* * *

S. paused, mid-promenade, mid-boulevard, Paris as it were. Ah, he thought, how exquisite the light and how fine the barbed-wire, all glinting upon the sun-washed asphalt. Yes, see, said the prince, how *the sun has painted the ground*.¹³⁸ S. now turned east and stared, toward the Sahara. *Affika*, said the prince.¹³⁹ The desert, thought S.

The king *The Nazis are threatening an expedition into the desert.*¹⁴⁰

S. continued to stare.

The king *Africa mesmerises.*

Africa. Yes, how often he (S.) had thought of Africa, and the Desert, and indeed (like a Moses) of making for the Desert, the Wilderness, where, although one might grow famished (*someone's meant to starve here*, had said the prince) at least one would not be worked unto death.¹⁴¹ As in Egypt. Or Dachau. Or Buchenwald. He peered east again and blinked. The sweat from his brow clouded his eyes. It was too hot for running.

* * *

As the *Dunera's* voyage went on, even as the heat grew greater, twice a day the men were taken on the upper-deck and compelled, at bayonet point, to run.¹⁴²

* * *

Not that he, these days, was much of a runner. Although, once-upon-a-time, he had been when, say, a boy on holiday, along the shores of Lake Brienz.¹⁴³ Alas, he did not, these days, feel at ease in shorts, not that he now had any shorts, nor would now wear them if he had. But they, or rather ‘They’, the Men of The King’s Pardon, did seem to want him to run – so run he would, for the Forgiven, for a minute or two. Until he would stop, now out of all sight (theirs) and breath (his).

Once, early on, a week ago or so, having ceased to run, S. (quite breathless) had looked up to see (he had thought) a man, a pale man. The man had said that the Forgiven had torn up his papers, his migration papers, which was rather unfortunate as he had been intending to go to Argentina. No, not with the Circus. His name, he had said, was Weiss, *Jacob Weiss*. Yes, *Jacob*, he had said, like the one that wrestled the angel, or perhaps it was *Yahweh*, too dark to tell, it having been around midnight, an usual hour for a grapple, though depends what you mean by a grapple.¹⁴⁴

Herr Weiss had reminded S. of someone. But why? What was it about Herr Weiss that had so reminded S. of someone? He had considered. It was, he had concluded, the air of the man (Herr Weiss’s air). Yes, therein lay the likeness. And what precisely was this air? What was it, this air? It was, S. had concluded, the air of one who has a rather breezy way with the question of suicide. A royal way. Yes, that was it.

The king *Suicide is not worth the trouble.*¹⁴⁵
[SILENCE.]

It was true, had thought S., that many on board talked lightly of self-slaughter, or at least possessed the winsome air of such as do. They too had reminded S. of the king and were, in fact, everywhere.

The king *Doppelgangers ... he saw them all around him.*¹⁴⁶
S. Quite.

Herr Weiss, however, was different in that he seemed to have a genuine enthusiasm for suicide, particularly for drowning – for, quite literally, jumping ship, splash, man overboard, etc. In this respect, Herr Weiss was, apparently, not unlike his late father (Weiss Senior) and, indeed, *his* late father.¹⁴⁷ Yes, the passion for drowning had, it seemed, long run in the family.

* * *

On 21 August 1940, *Jacob Weiss* threw himself over the side of the *Dunera*, having previously told others on board that both his father and grandfather had jumped to their deaths from ships.¹⁴⁸

* * *

S. had said nothing to Herr Weiss. He had, in fact, nothing to say, at least not with regard to the man's late forefathers. In contrast, the infant prince, being one so young, always had words for the dead, or at least laughter. He had, for instance, once been shown (though he was not sure why) an engraving of skeletons and had laughed, even belly-laughed, thinking (or so his belly had thought) What could be funnier? However, no sooner had the prince-prodigy finally fathomed the full import of the engraving than up he had piped with a princely defence for his laughter: *I didn't know*, he had said, *that they were already dead*.¹⁴⁹

S. once again turned east. Africa, he thought, dear *Affika*. Is *that* where the ship would dock? Were they, then, missionaries? If so, would there be anyone left to convert? What if *they*, the Africans, *were already dead*? Skeletons, again. After all, it had often seemed that *someone's meant to starve* there. In Africa.

And what, he thought, of the king? Might he too be already dead? Yes, yes, perhaps he was, S. thought. But why? Why did he (S.) think like that? Well, as the prince had said, *Sometimes the dear Lord gives you something in your head*.¹⁵⁰

* * *

For a period, when we were lifting him [Stefan] at night ... and he did not fully wake up, telepathic phenomena came quite clearly to the fore in the [following] daytime.

(Walter Benjamin)¹⁵¹

* * *

Not that they (the somethings) were always pleasant. No, the somethings in his head, the voices, were not always pleasant. Far from it. *We want to leave the ol' voices*, the prince had said.¹⁵² Yet, still they would persist. Indeed, *someone made hello all the time* as if (say) on the telephone, attempting to make a long-distance call.¹⁵³ Hello? Hello? Hello?

* * *

On the night of 26 September 1940, Walter Benjamin would die in a hotel in Port Bou, in the Pyrenees. In the morning, he would be found dead in bed, half-naked. For some time he had been suffering from heart disease, but it is believed he committed suicide, taking a huge dose of morphine pills that he kept in a pocket. First, though, Benjamin seems to have made four telephone calls. Whom he rang, or tried to ring, is not known.¹⁵⁴

* * *

S. now bowed his head, cursing both the sea and the bastard sun. Yes (he thought), what if his father *were* already dead. Fathers had a way of dying.

The king *He was awoken ... and led before his father's corpse.*¹⁵⁵

S. Quite.

* * *

Mrs Woolf turned off the radiogram. She wished to hear no more nocturnal talk, no more queer forecasts of both rain and death – killings (to be precise), mass killings, of *the Jews* (said Leonard), all of the Jews. But, she thought, *holocaust on such a scale was not probable*. Possible, perhaps, but not probable.¹⁵⁶ After all, how on earth could so many ever be killed? By what means? *They could not all be drowned*. No, not all of them, the Jews, all the Jews of Europe. She thought of Leonard, in the kitchen. No, she thought, there would not be room enough in the sea. No, *they could not all be drowned*. She looked about the sitting-room. Although some (she thought) might be simply shot or hanged. Or would, perhaps, effect their own end.

Mind, it might also come to that here. In England. Again, not probable, but certainly possible. One should, at least, be ready, prepared, like a boy-scout. Exhaust fumes, she thought. Yes, that should do the trick. *In the garage*, that is, where, *Leonard says, he has enough petrol, should Hitler win.*¹⁵⁷ But, she wondered, how much would be sufficient? How much, exactly? Just half a gallon, she thought. Best not be wasteful. Think of others, they would.

* * *

In the summer of 1940, the Nazis compiled a secret list of prominent British residents to be arrested, following invasion. The list included both Virginia and Leonard Woolf.¹⁵⁸

* * *

There were, however, many other ways of going about it. Pills, for example. She felt inside the pocket of her dress. Yes, she thought, *I have my morphia.*¹⁵⁹ It is *in my pocket*.

Mrs Woolf now turned to the wall and began to speak aloud, as if addressing someone – someone like, perhaps, that glum moustachioed fellow. The technicolour one, him. Yes, him.

*The last letter I had from you, she began, said that you were sitting half-naked in an Inn.*¹⁶⁰ *You were, I gather, about to plunge into the Pyrenees. Yes, now (you had said) I shall climb this Spanish hill,*

and there will I lie dying. But from the top (you had said) I shall see Africa.¹⁶¹

Ah, she thought, how splendid, at the last, not only to climb a Spanish hill and see Africa but also to sit half-naked in some crumbling Pyrenean Inn and to reach both gracefully and finally for the morphia in one's pocket.

Mrs Woolf now headed for the dining room. Again, she thought, *I begin to hear voices.*¹⁶² This time, my own. Yes, the voices now are mine, though not perhaps the stories they tell, which might just be stories from another's life, even one whom she did not know and had never met, or at least not in the flesh. *Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to.*¹⁶³

Although she may, perhaps, have seen a photograph of them.

Yes, or perhaps she had sat for someone who had *taken* a photograph of them (this person she had never met). Or, maybe, this person had had *their* hand examined by – Enough! Enough! *There are moments, she thought, when the walls of the mind grow thin.*¹⁶⁴ Too thin.

Mrs Woolf stared at the telephone. Damn the thing. Today, so far, it had been silent, had had nothing to say; however, upon a mad day (damn it) *Buzz buzz buzz goes the telephone.*¹⁶⁵ Indeed, on such a day *what else is there to do – except answer the incessant telephones?*¹⁶⁶ Ah yes, one day she might yet die of the telephone.

She now, though, paused to make a most terrible confession. *The truth is, she said, I can't resist the telephone.*¹⁶⁷

Mrs Woolf promptly sat down (at table) and prepared to write. It would be a letter, of a sort; to whom, though, she was not quite sure. She took up a pen, dipped and wrote. *Could you angelically ring the telephone?* she scribbled.¹⁶⁸ She stared at the telephone and waited. (Silence). Yes, ring, ring like an angel, please. (Silence). Indeed, *Speak* like an angel, please, please – for, these days, merely *human voices wake us & we drown* and she had had quite enough of voices that woke her and caused her to drown.¹⁶⁹ (Silence). Or at least to *wish* to drown. *She felt again her own headlong desire to throw herself off the cliff and be drowned.*¹⁷⁰

Mrs Woolf stood up. She must think. Think of something. So she thought of the sea. But, ah, she thought, *it's all I can do not to throw myself in.*¹⁷¹

The king Naturally.

Mrs Woolf Pardon?

The king *What is meant by 'thinking' is ...*

Mrs Woolf Yes?

The king *Knowing how to fall.*¹⁷²
Mrs Woolf Falling where?
The king *The sea. Into the sea.*¹⁷³
Mrs Woolf The sea? But how close was the sea?
The king *One step ... one step ahead of me lay the sea.*
Mrs Woolf And were you alone?
The king No. *I saw an unknown woman.*¹⁷⁴
Mrs Woolf Unknown?
The king *Unknown.*
Mrs Woolf And what happened to her? This unknown woman.
The king *She ... had disappeared.*
Mrs Woolf How?
The king *She had fallen overboard.*

Mrs Woolf straightened. It seemed that others too were inclined to drown. She was not the only one. Perhaps, then, one could never say, *I am drowning*, but only ever, *We are drowning*. Or at least, *I am drowning*, **my dear**.¹⁷⁵ Drowning, yes, but in your presence, *my dear* – or at least in your hearing, *my dear*. Whoever and wherever you are.

Yes, perhaps it was never quite possible to drown absolutely alone, but only ever with another, if not others (plural). Though not *all* others. No, *they could not all be drowned*. Not all of them. Not all the others in the world. All the other people. There were too many.

She now recalled Fraulein Freund's damned photographs. Ah, she thought, **all the lit. gents & ladies**, yes, *all*, all of them, had been snapped, captured – and she too now. And perhaps it was *them*, or such as them, all the *photographed* of the world, who were (in truth) the *all* that were drowned.

* * *

Gisèle Freund made much of the fact that her first-ever professional photograph was of someone who had drowned.¹⁷⁶

* * *

But what, thought Mrs Woolf, what if there were a still-greater *all* yet to be drowned? An All, as it were. A whole people, say. She moved to the window.

Mrs Woolf Look! *There are figures coming toward us.*¹⁷⁷
The king What figures?
Mrs Woolf *Figures who wear ... draperies.*
The king What kind?

Mrs Woolf *Ambiguous. They wear the ambiguous draperies of the flowing tide.*

The king What tide?

Mrs Woolf *The tide in which they have been immersed.*

The king Drowned or baptised?

[NO ANSWER.]

She looked again. For one last time. Could she still see them? *The figures?* Yes, yes she could. Indeed, she thought, *the figures are coming toward us. The immersed.*

* * *

On 28 March 1941, just days after beginning to hear voices, Virginia Woolf would walk into the River Ouse and drown.

Notes

- 1 There is, however, Angeliki Spiropoulou's excellent study, *Virginia Woolf, Modernity and History: constellations with Walter Benjamin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 2 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* [1925], ed. Stella McNichol (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 167.
- 3 Woolf to Stephen Spender, 12 May 1935, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols., ed. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975–79), 5.392.
- 4 See Sam Dolbear and Esther Leslie's wonderful book *Dissonant Waves. Ernst Schoen and Experimental Sound in the 20th Century* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2023), 145, 28.
- 5 Benjamin is here commenting on how Siegfried Kracauer chooses, as an author, to initialise his first name – 'An Outsider Makes His Mark', *SW*, 2.1.305 / *GS*, 3.219.
- 6 The men were kept below by barbed-wire around the top deck and were often beaten by soldiers brandishing bayoneted rifles – see Cyril Pearl, *The Dunera Scandal* (London: Harper Collins, 1983), 24–7.
- 7 'Pensées', *Archive*, 138 / *Archive*, 107.
- 8 'Pensées', *Archive*, 131 / *Archive*, 98.
- 9 'Pensées', *Archive*, 126 / *Archive*, 92.
- 10 Cited in Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 544.
- 11 'Pensées', *Archive*, 128 / *Archive*, 96.
- 12 'Pensées', *Archive*, 142 / *Archive*, 111.
- 13 Cited in Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 544.
- 14 All these names appear in the official records (five men had the surname 'Moses' and three 'Wilde') – see Paul R. Bartrop and Gabrielle Eisen, *The Dunera Affair: a documentary resource book* (Melbourne, Vic.: Jewish Museum of Australia, 1990), 397–416.
- 15 These names were soubriquets – see: Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 193, 197, 161; and Benzion Patkin, *The Dunera Internees* (Stanmore, N.S.W.: Cassell Australia, 1979), 60.
- 16 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 194, 385–8, 197; the term 'queers' was used by the men themselves (see Pearl, *Dunera Scandal*, 206) and the story of the film actor, though related as fact and as relating to Sigurd Lohde (Pearl, *Dunera Scandal*, 22), would seem not to be true, since he was captured in London on 1 July 1940 (information by courtesy of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: MP1103/2, E35184).
- 17 'Pensées', *Archive*, 144 / *Archive*, 114.
- 18 Woolf, 23 June 1931, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols., ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1977–84), 4.30. When citing Woolf's diaries or letters I regularise unconventional spelling.

- 19 Woolf to Philippa Woolf, 29 September 1939, *Letters*, 6.360. By 'refugees' Woolf here means clerks from Hogarth Press, which had been moved from London for fear of bombing; however, in London, the Woolfs received several continental refugees, as will be seen.
- 20 Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 12 or 13 September 1939, *Letters*, 6.358.
- 21 Woolf, 25 July 1940, *Diaries*, 5.305.
- 22 Woolf to Philippa Woolf, 29 September 1939, *Letters*, 6.360.
- 23 Woolf, 25 July 1940, *Diaries*, 5.305.
- 24 Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* [1941], ed. Frank Kermode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109.
- 25 Woolf, 22 March 1938, *Diaries*, 5.131.
- 26 Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 26 September 1939, *Letters*, 5.359.
- 27 Woolf to Edward Sackville-West, 1 December [1940], *Letters*, 6.449.
- 28 Woolf to Elizabeth Bowen, Thursday [2 March 1939], *Letters*, 6.320.
- 29 Woolf, 11 March 1939, *Diaries*, 5.208.
- 30 The German (unknown) is identified as Podbielksi by Bell and McNeillie, *Diaries*, 5.208n, and his name appears on the *Dunera* list of internees, see Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 415.
- 31 Roy Wilcock, *The Dunera Boys* (2018), 7 www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Dunera-Boys-by-Roy-Wilcock-final4.pdf.
- 32 'Pensées', *Archive*, 120 / *Archive*, 86.
- 33 These were men who had been allowed out of prison on the basis that they would enlist, and by whom 'every valuable was taken', see Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 21, 162.
- 34 The *Dunera* was often called 'a hell-ship', see Patkin, *Dunera Internees*, 32.
- 35 'Pensées', *Archive*, 127–8 / *Archive*, 95.
- 36 'Oedipus or Rational Myth' (1932), *SW*, 2.2.579–80 (translation amended) / *GS*, 2.393, 395.
- 37 Stefan's date of arrest was 28 June 1940 – information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2, E39130.
- 38 'Brecht's *Threepenny Novel*' (1935), *SW*, 3.3 / *GS*, 3.440.
- 39 'Pensées', *Archive*, 134 / *Archive*, 102.
- 40 'Pensées', *Archive*, 141 / *Archive*, 110.
- 41 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* [1927], ed. Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 246.
- 42 Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 2 March 1936, *Letters*, 6.17.
- 43 Woolf to Smyth, [6 October 1932], *Letters*, 5.109.
- 44 See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), 282–6.
- 45 Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 117.
- 46 Woolf, 15 September 1940, *Diaries*, 5.321.
- 47 Woolf, 2 October 1938, *Diaries*, 5.178.
- 48 Woolf, 12 July 1940, *Diaries*, 5.302.
- 49 Woolf, 30 August 1939, *Diaries*, 5.232.
- 50 Woolf to Smyth, 6 January 1933, *Letters*, 5.146.
- 51 Woolf, 29 and 30 January 1939, *Diaries*, 5.202–3.
- 52 Woolf to Julian Bell, 11 March 1936, *Letters*, 6.19; 'German Letters', *SW*, 2.2.466 / *GS*, 4.945.
- 53 Woolf to Leonard Woolf, [18 March? 1941], *Letters*, 6.481.
- 54 Woolf, 25 May 1940, *Diaries*, 5.288.
- 55 Woolf, 7 July 1931, *Diaries*, 4.34. The woman's name was, in fact, Ruth Gruber who was American, though born to Russian emigrants.
- 56 Woolf, 31 May 1935, *Diaries*, 4.317.
- 57 See Ruth Gruber, *Virginia Woolf, The Will to Create as a Woman* [1935] (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005).
- 58 Woolf, 2 August 1940, *Diaries*, 5.308.
- 59 Woolf, 2 May 1934, *Diaries*, 4.212.
- 60 Letter to Scholem, [24 August 1932], *WB-GS*, 17 / *WB-GS*, 26.
- 61 'Much Ado about Kasper', *Radio*, 247 / *GS*, 7.1.345.
- 62 'Children's Literature' (1929), *SW*, 2.1.250 (translation amended) / *GS*, 7.250.
- 63 'Street Trade and Markets in Old and New Berlin', *Radio Benjamin*, 14 / *GS*, 7.77.
- 64 'Pensées', *Archive*, 134 / *Archive*, 102.

- 65 *Archive*, 121 / *Archive*, 87.
- 66 *Archive*, 138 / *Archive*, 106.
- 67 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 622, 386, 407.
- 68 See Eva Weissweiler, *Villa Verde, oder das Hotel in Sanremo: Das italienische Exil der Familie Benjamin* (Berlin: btb Verlag, 2022), 96. Once in London Stefan seems again to toy with passing as Italian – see letter to his father, written in July 1939, in *Lurh, Was noch*, 53.
- 69 Letter to Scholem, 26 July 1932, *Correspondence*, 395 / *Briefe*, 555.
- 70 Letter to Scholem, 4 April 1937, *Correspondence*, 538 / *Briefe*, 729.
- 71 Letter to Gretel Adorno, 27 July 1930, *GA-WB*, 1 / *GA-WB*, 200.
- 72 Letter to Scholem, 12 October – 5 November 1924, *Correspondence*, 254–5 / *Briefe*, 363.
- 73 Letter to Theodor Adorno, c. 2 December 1936, *Correspondence*, 188 / *Briefe*, 275.
- 74 Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 191.
- 75 ‘Pensées’, *Archive*, 119 / *Archive*, 85.
- 76 ‘Pensées’, *Archive*, 135 / *Archive*, 104 – the German here is *Uniwurstität*.
- 77 ‘Pensées’, *Archive*, 134 / *Archive*, 102.
- 78 ‘Schiller and Goethe’, *Storyteller*, 8 (translation amended) / *GS*, 7.638.
- 79 ‘Karl Kraus’, *SW*, 2.2.447 / *GS*, 2.354.
- 80 This passage is all based on lectures given or topics discussed, see Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 191, 195, 264, and Patkin, *Dunera Internees*, 59–60.
- 81 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 543–4.
- 82 See ‘Berlin Chronicle’, *SW*, 2.2.596 / *GS*, 6.466.
- 83 Charlotte Wolff, *On the Way to Myself* (London: Methuen, 1969) 88–9, and *Hindsight* (London: Quartet Books, 1980), 66–7, 146. For some fascinating details regarding Wolff’s connections to Benjamin and Woolf, see Sam Dolbear’s wonderful book *Hand that Touches this Fortune Will* (London: MA Bibliothèque, 2024), 33–5, 78, 106, 189–95.
- 84 Charlotte Wolff, *Studies in Hand-Reading* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), 90.
- 85 Woolf to Julian Bell, 17 December 1935, *Letters*, 5.452.
- 86 ‘The Metaphysics of Youth’, *SW*, 1.12 / *GS*, 2.298.
- 87 Woolf to Smyth, 16 January 1936, *Letters*, 6.5.
- 88 Woolf, 5 November 1935, *Diaries*, 4. 351; Baroness Nostitz was the niece of Paul von Hindenberg, the late president of Germany.
- 89 Woolf to Smyth, 10 August 1935, *Letters*, 5.423.
- 90 Woolf, 22 September 1931, *Diaries*, 4.45.
- 91 Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 1 November 1933, *Letters*, 5.241.
- 92 See Elizabeth Eddy, ‘A Study of the Style of Mrs Virginia Woolf with Special Emphasis on the Her Thought Patterns’, MA Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1930), 16.
- 93 Rickert writes that ‘the root’ of her approach, ‘lies ... in the methods of code analysis used in the Code and Cipher Section of the Military Intelligence in Washington during the war’, *New Methods for the Study of Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), 5.
- 94 This was the United States’s first peacetime decryption organisation, which ran from 1919 to 1929.
- 95 Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 9 August 1933, *Letters*, 5.212.
- 96 This was John Ulric Nef, who once remarked of Virginia and Elinor that ‘there was a strange communion between ... the two women’ – John Ulric Nef, *Search for Meaning* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1973), 147.
- 97 Woolf to Elaine Robson, 26 September 1937, *Letters*, 6.174.
- 98 Woolf to Dorothy Brett, 8 July 1933, *Letters*, 5.201.
- 99 Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* [1931] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 161.
- 100 Woolf, *The Waves*, 207.
- 101 Woolf remarks on the capacity of a Portable Underwood to misspell in a letter to Julian Bell, 25 October 1928, *Letters*, 3.550.
- 102 Woolf to Julian Bell, 9 September 1934, *Letters*, 5.329.
- 103 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 172.
- 104 See <https://www.duneraassociation.com/dunera-boys/> (accessed 14 June 2022).
- 105 See J. Beatson, ‘Aliens, Enemy Aliens, and Friendly Enemy Aliens’, in J. Beatson and Reinhard Zimmermann (eds.), *Jurists Uprooted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 106 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 162.
- 107 ‘Pensées’, *Archive*, 124 / *Archive*, 91.

- 108 Letter to Scholem, 5 December 1923, *Correspondence*, 222 / *Briefe*, 319.
- 109 'Pensées', *Archive*, 134 / *Archive*, 102.
- 110 Letter to Scholem, 31 December 1937, *WB-GS*, 210 / *WB-GS*, 255.
- 111 'Pensées', *Archive*, 149 / *Archive*, 118.
- 112 'Dream I', *Storyteller*, 48 / *GS*, 4.431.
- 113 See Woolf, 24 June 1939, *Diaries*, 5.220 and Adrienne Monnier, *The Very Rich Hours of Adrienne Monnier* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1976), 490–1.
- 114 Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 19 August 1939, *Letters*, 6.351.
- 115 Woolf, 24 June 1939, *Diaries*, 5.220.
- 116 'Hashish in Marseilles', *SW*, 2.2.675 / *GS*, 4.412.
- 117 'Diary Entries, 1938', *SW*, 3.335 / *GS*, 6.532.
- 118 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 201.
- 119 Woolf to Spender, 12 May 1935, *Letters*, 5.392.
- 120 Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 7 May 1935, *Diaries*, 5.389.
- 121 Woolf, 9 May 1935, *Diaries*, 4.311.
- 122 Jacqueline Rose suggests that Woolf 'raised her arm in salute' – see 'Smashing the Teapots', *London Review of Books* (23 January 1997), 3.
- 123 'The Task of the Critic', *SW*, 2.2.549 / *GS*, 6.172.
- 124 Woolf, 31 May 1935, *Diaries*, 4.317.
- 125 'Karl Kraus', *SW*, 2.2.453 / *GS*, 2.362.
- 126 Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 69.
- 127 Letter to Adorno, 20 July 1938, *Correspondence*, 572 / *Briefe*, 772.
- 128 Woolf, 30 October 1936, *Diaries*, 5.27.
- 129 Woolf, *The Waves*, 167.
- 130 'Paris of the Second Empire', *SW*, 4.27 / *GS*, 1.550.
- 131 Woolf, 16 September 1932, *Diaries*, 4.124.
- 132 Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 19 August 1938, *Letters*, 6.351.
- 133 'A Little History of Photography', *SW*, 2.2.515 / *GS*, 2.375.
- 134 Woolf to Victoria Ocampo, 26 June 1939, *Letters*, 6.342.
- 135 Woolf, *The Waves*, 252.
- 136 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 174.
- 137 Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 150.
- 138 'Pensées', *Archive*, 124 / *Archive*, 90.
- 139 'Pensées', *Archive*, 119 / *Archive*, 85.
- 140 'Self-Portraits', *The Storyteller*, 40–1 / *GS*, 4.423.
- 141 'Pensées', *Archive*, 129 / *Archive*, 96.
- 142 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 166.
- 143 Mona Benjamin, email to author, 17 August 2023.
- 144 See Genesis 32.22–32.
- 145 'The Destructive Character', *SW*, 2.2.542 / *GS*, 4.398.
- 146 'Demonic Berlin', *Radio*, 25 / *GS*, 7.87.
- 147 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 199.
- 148 See Pearl, *Dunera Scandal*, 41.
- 149 'Pensées', *Archive*, 135 / *Archive*, 103.
- 150 'Pensées', *Archive*, 139 / *Archive*, 108.
- 151 'Pensées', *Archive*, 117 / *Archive*, 83.
- 152 'Pensées', *Archive*, 133 / *Archive*, 101.
- 153 'Pensées', *Archive*, 128 / *Archive*, 95.
- 154 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 674–5, and Scheurmann, 290–1.
- 155 'The Death of the Father', *Storyteller*, 83 / *GS*, 4.724.
- 156 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 107.
- 157 Woolf, 13 May 1940, *Diaries*, 5.284.
- 158 See Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 289, 351.
- 159 Woolf, 20 June 1940, *Diaries*, 5.297.
- 160 Woolf to Judith Stephen, 22 August 1939, *Letters*, 6.352–3.
- 161 Woolf, *The Waves*, 176–7.
- 162 Woolf to Leonard Woolf, 18 March 1941, *Letters*, 6.481.

- 163 Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 167.
164 Woolf, *The Waves*, 192.
165 Woolf to Smyth, 1 July 1936, *Letters*, 6.51.
166 Woolf, 13 March 1936, *Diaries*, 5.17.
167 Woolf to Smyth, 27 March 1936, *Letters*, 6.23.
168 Woolf to Sackville-West, 8 June 1933, *Letters*, 5.194.
169 Woolf, 31 July 1939, *Diaries*, 5.228; Woolf is here quoting T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.
170 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 237.
171 Woolf to Smyth, 26 October 1937, *Letters*, 6.185.
172 'Theological Criticism', *SW*, 2.2.430 (translation amended) / *GS*, 3.278.
173 'Dreams', *Storyteller*, 32 / *GS*, 4.356.
174 'The Handkerchief', *SW*, 2.2.660 / *GS*, 4.744.
175 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 124.
176 See Gisèle Freund, *The World in my Camera* (London: Dial Press, 1974), 23–4.
177 Woolf, *The Waves*, 198.

2

(Unseen)

Introductory notes to Chapter Two

This chapter finds Stefan, or S., still on the *Dunera*. He is now, it seems, in the very particular company of two other German-Jewish deportees said or known to have been aboard – a circus acrobat called Zeppie and an actor from Berlin.

The action begins, though, with just S. and Zeppie, who together encounter a spectral female figure who seems to be, or represent, Rosa Luxemburg. This is despite the fact that Luxemburg has been dead since January 1919 when, after leading the unsuccessful Spartacist Revolt in Berlin, she was infamously murdered. Luxemburg, however, appears aboard the *Dunera* by virtue of the fact that among the deportees was a man called Wolfgang Kittel who claimed to have assisted in Luxemburg's murder. Kittel, a Nazi enthusiast, was held, along with others like him, largely in the rear or aft of the ship.

The action goes on to explore Benjamin's affinities with not only Luxemburg but also the cultural energies that had characterised Weimar Germany, energies represented by many of the Jewish intellectuals on board.

In due course another spectre emerges, namely Shakespeare's Hamlet, who appears by virtue of the fact that also aboard the *Dunera* was the Austrian Shakespearean Richard Flatter who, in 1936, had published a book titled *Hamlet's Flight to Death*.

The figure of Hamlet, a particular fascination of Benjamin's, plays an increasingly important part in the chapter. It is not long before Hamlet's talk of a 'fine revolution and we had the trick to see't' draws him into dramatic encounter with Luxemburg.

At this point, especial attention is paid to the importance of the figure of Hamlet to modern Germany, not only Weimar Germany but also Nazi Germany. Hamlet thus becomes a hugely contested figure on board, being owned not only by the old-world Weimar intellectuals but also the new-world Nazi enthusiasts – not least, Kittel.

The chapter concludes with Hamlet subjected to an elaborate trial, which hinges on his enigmatic remark that ‘The Murder of Gonzago’, the famous play-within-the-play, ‘is the image of a murder in Vienna’. It is a line that proves to be of particular significance for S. as one who was in Vienna at the moment of the 1938 Anschluss – ‘a murder in Vienna’, as it were.

* * *

Although Benjamin, in his writing, never formally discusses Luxemburg, he was well aware of her work; indeed, in 1920, he remarks that he had been greatly ‘touched by ... [the] incredible beauty and significance’ of Luxemburg’s letters from prison.¹ Quite a few lines from these letters play an important part in what follows – in part, no doubt, because the ship is a kind of prison. No less important, though, is the infamous image of Luxemburg’s murdered body, which, as Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsio have argued, might just be viewed as the encrypted subject of Benjamin’s 1921 essay ‘Critique of Violence’.²

This essay famously explores what Benjamin calls ‘divine violence’ (*göttliche Gewalt*), a spectacularly enigmatic formulation that gestures toward a violence to end all violence – in particular, the violence that is, for Benjamin, necessarily constitutive of law. And it is with the impossible thought of just such divine violence that the chapter ends via its vision of the many lawyers aboard the *Dunera* all engaged in a bizarre trial of Hamlet.

Benjamin’s notion of divine violence clearly relates to what might just be called the *secret* of revolution – or, to adapt Hamlet, the ‘trick’ of it. And it this secret, or trick, that preoccupies much of this chapter. This is in part because of a puzzling mutiny said to have taken place on board the *Dunera*; and, in part, because Luxemburg here comes into view as a figure whose political passions are complicated by seemingly apolitical passions for such things as the sea, the clouds, and even ‘moments of grace’.

So close, indeed, are these two kinds of passion that it becomes increasingly hard to determine when Luxemburg is, or is not, about the work of revolution. In sum, when she declares that ‘from history I am on

leave' it may just be that she is at her most revolutionary, closer than ever to that break from, or within, history which is revolution.³ Cue not only her belief in spontaneous revolution but also Benjamin's late and famous call to disrupt the continuum of time or, to be precise, 'to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history'.⁴

Chapter Two (Unseen)

I/IV An English Christ Experiment

Of Zeppie-the-Acrobat who was, reportedly, aboard the Dunera, nothing is known, not even to which circus he belonged. However, also aboard was a theatre agent who had worked with the Dresden-based Circus Sarassani, sometimes also called, for complex reasons, the National Circus of Argentina.⁵ It is just possible, then, that this was the circus to which Zeppie belonged, or said he belonged, or thought he belonged.

* * *

One Day

Upper deck was wild with winds and the weeping of waves. And S. sought a roof neath the flap of a torn tarpaulin. Beside him, hard-by, breathed Herr Zeppie (or so he said), Herr Zeppie *der Akrobat* (and Occasional Clown), he of the National Circus of Argentina (or so he said) and soiled-yet-silken trousers. He was a fragile and buckled crank, sometimes hard of hearing and largely bespectacled (awkward for an acrobat).

Even as the waves (like Jesus) wept on (and on), someone, someone old-but-new, appeared, simply standing there, just to portside of the helm. Half-afeard, S. looked up, with weather-eye. This someone, S. thought, cuts a strange figure. S. turned to Herr Zeppie. Question: this someone, this enigma, this quiz, that stood before them – was it a woman?

Perhaps, but what exactly did a woman look like?

* * *

During this long time we have not really seen a woman.

(Konrad Eisig, HMT Dunera)⁶

* * *

The quiz was short of stature and being, it seemed, a perfect cripple, was inclined to limp. This, though, hardly settled the question, the Woman question. S. thus asked silken Zeppie if he might be able to assist with the Perfect Cripple's name. S. was promptly advised that it was Junius, a man's name in ordinary time, but a name which, in this sea-blown hour, might just denote a woman. It was a thought. Whatever, the Perfect Cripple was on-the-whole clothed (as is the usual way) and this too did little to resolve things. Moreover, the clothes (or draperies) in question (blue perhaps, velveteen perhaps) had grown altogether ambiguous. Being so sodden.

* * *

'Junius' was a *nom de plume* used by the Polish radical, Rosa Luxemburg, who walked with a limp and, in January 1919, had led the failed Spartacist Revolt in Berlin that ended with her being killed and, infamously, thrown into the Landwehr Canal. On board the *Dunera* was a man called Wolfgang Kittel who reportedly claimed to have assisted in Luxemburg's murder.⁷

* * *

So, this Perfect Cripple: an Adam or Eve? S. would inquire, would ask the Perfect Cripple directly, and would bellow so that he might be heard above the bedlam sea.

Adam or Eve? bellowed S.

Zeppie held breath, bad breath.

Adam or Eve? bellowed S. again.

At last, in a lull (an almighty lull), Junius replied, saying that *The Christian Church knows no distinction*.^{*8}

Ah, a woman! Betrayed by fluting voice. S. should have known, if only by virtue of the drowned-yet-delicate hat she held in frozen hands – a hat to crown an Eve. Yes, an Eve not an Adam. Let us then (said S.),

* Any italicised words attributed to Junius are from the writings of Rosa Luxemburg.

even at sea, insist upon the Old Distinction, the Old Distinction of the Sexes. To hell with the indifference of the Christian Church.

To hell, indeed, with the Church, full-stop, added S. He then paused. Unsure. What say the waves? he asked. And listened, ear bent to ocean. The waves said nothing, nothing much.

Junius, however, her hair blown mad, said this: *The cross, it weighs on me.*⁹

Ah, like Christ, said Zeppie. The cross, it also weighs on Christ. Or was it the other way round? Whatever, now gripping his spectacles, Zeppie stood (just about) upon his head, his *Christian* head for, although an Hebrew and in silken trousers, he was (he said) All for Jesus. Yes, being from Argentina (he said), not to mention baptised (he said), he was all for Herr Jesus and, indeed, every other saint, not least The Holy Pope, Blessèd Martin Luther and Dame Ave Maria. These days, however, he was most particularly devoted to the Tortured and Contorted One, *El Crucificado*.

* * *

In the late 1930s, while still in Nazi Europe, a number of the Jews on board the *Dunera* had, like many others, been baptised into the Christian church (some Catholic, some Protestant). Often it was in the hope that a certificate of baptism might just protect them.¹⁰

* * *

Junius dragged her hair from her eyes and cursed. Then, a-sliding o'er the watery deck, she drew nigh unto the largely upturned Herr Zeppie and, indeed, a crowd of men (not upturned). Upon arrival, she spoke. Could Herr Akrobat, she said, whether right-way-up or no, please not be confusing her with Christ. Yes, the cross may weigh on her, but she wished *not to encourage the erroneous opinion that she belonged in any sense to the Holy Trinity.*¹¹

Seeing that Herr Akrobat, notwithstanding his inversion, was about to demur, Junius spoke again. This time unto the men. Yes, let no one mistake her for Christ. It was true that she had been, like Him, *able to rub elbows with the prostitutes.*¹² And yes, such were often her comrades, just as they once had been His. But there all similarity surely ended. And off she slid (westward) leaving some among the men to ask themselves, Where *were* said prostitutes? Yes, where were said ladies of the night, if ladies they were and not perchance *men*, men of the night, as it were. As in, say, old Berlin, whispered Zeppie.

Now, to the surprise of S. (albeit mild), the king, yes, the king, the king himself (albeit struggling) half-emerged from a neighbouring life-boat (damp). The newly visible king held an umbrella in one hand and brief-case in the other. His tie it was loosened, his face it was reddened and his breathing it was short. It will be his heart, thought S. And the king cleared his throat. He was ready to speak, to speak apropos ladies of the night etc. *At sea*, he said, *even without women, it is possible to conjure up all the depravity of harbour life.*¹³

Zeppie mouthed an Hallelujah.

The king (however) was not finished, not done, not quite. He wished to qualify his remark by adding that *one afternoon, off Dover ... a well-built girl, one with a poor reputation, had been found on board, strolling up and down the stern.*

Where? asked S., looking about.

* * *

It is said that Stefan, when living in Vienna, 'seems to have descended into the Viennese demimonde'.¹⁴

* * *

Zeppie's silken legs, still raised heaven-ward, now swayed in the hatless wind, a wind such as he had never known in his circus days, his tented days, Argentinian days. He held tightly his spectacles, but his legs they bent and he prepared to buckle and fall.

Not, alas, that any soul would care to catch him, or even break his fall, least of all cool Junius who, by now, was well on her way to starboard, her sodden brain still afflicted with Christs. Like an antique horse she was, with flies all about its eyes. Ah, these Christs, these *bloody shadows*, *Golgotha* shadows, she cursed.¹⁵ And shivered. How they followed her, followed her all along *the road, the road to ... liberation* which was also (it appeared) *the road to ... Golgotha*. She cursed again.

* * *

Rosa Luxemburg's relationship to Christianity is complex. On the one hand, she saw the Christians of the first and second centuries as 'fervent supports of communism'; on the other hand, she believed that in the end, albeit for largely extrinsic reasons, 'the[se] Christians changed nothing'.¹⁶

* * *

Zeppie's two legs (disappointed) now wavered and Limping Junius came to sudden halt. She immediately looked down, then turned around that body of hers (awkward thing). She had confession to make – yes, she said, bastard Truth compelled her to now acknowledge, full-of-throat and before all-four-winds, that even she, Junius, First and Last of Spartacists, had (on occasion) endured certain *moments of grace*.¹⁷

Praise God and Jesus, said Zeppie, then collapsed.

This, though, was not before Comrade Junius further confessed that, Dammit, she had, of late, grown *fascinated by even Easter Island* – its very *name*.¹⁸

Island? said Zeppie (wrong-footed).

Silence.

And what is more, resumed Junius (still on Easter Island), there are *all those stone figures just looking out to sea*.

Quite, said S. (looking out to sea). He now recalled how the prince, the long-ago Weimar prince, would always, for some reason, insist that Easter was his birthday.¹⁹ It was true that the day of his birth, the 11th of April, was a plausible date for Easter, but it had never actually been so, not in his life-time – not as yet, that is. One day, however, Easter *would* finally fall, as from a great height, upon the prince's birthday – it would have to happen. Yes, one day the prince would (at last) be right, absolutely right. Ah, there's a trick.

And here, right here, was another: his having conjured up This Stumbling Mermaid. It was surely a miracle – his very first. His being at sea had (it seemed) caused S. to grow miraculous, to become another Moses. *Saint Moses*, as the prince had said.²⁰ And why *not*? Why *not* be another Moses? There were already six on board, six called Moses. Yes, said S., call me *Moses, Saint Moses*.

Or, said the king, *Mickey Mouse*.²¹

Who? said Zeppie.

Mickey Mouse, said the king, *his life is full of miracles*.

Aye, sir, said Zeppie, but Meister S. here is, alas, no Mickey Mouse, let alone a –

Globe-encircling Mickey Mouse? said the king.²²

Pardon? said Zeppie.

All Mickey Mouse films, said the king, *are founded on the motif of leaving home*.²³

And why, sir, is Herr Maus always leaving home?

In order, said the king, *to learn what fear is*.

The ocean swelled and the ship pitched.

Fear, thought S. Yes, he knew how to fear. Not, though, that he had needed to leave home in order to learn how to fear. How to shit himself. No, he said, that trick he had first perfected in –

Nurseries and other haunted rooms? suggested the king.²⁴

Quite, said S. And inclined, with the ship.

He then turned to Mermaid. What, he asked, did she make of his *present* haunted room? The eternal sea, that is.

The eternal sea, she said, *always bears within it every ... possibility.*²⁵

For example?

Me, she said, as if to say that she was possible at sea but altogether impossible on land.

Junius now looked down at her sorry hat, her drownèd crown. Then, as if to explain, she said, *From history, I happen to be on leave.*²⁶ She shivered. And departed.

* * *

Another Day

Ah, thought S., there she is, Grave Mermaid herself, for there she was, stood at the foot of the cold-metal stairs and (now) wearing her crown. Solemn she was, though still disastrous and still a-limping (damply) among all the madding men.

The sudden crash of their alien boots now shook the fallen air and Mermaid, at once, turned towards Herr Zeppie. Crash. How were things? Crash. How went the world for her *Fool in Christ*?²⁷ Crash. How fared he?

Fool reddened, made the sign of the cross and cursed.

Junius now turned instead to S., took him gently by the hand and bid him sit down at mess table. S. did as bid, his fingers soon drumming at the table, cold-metal table.

Tin, said Zeppie (the Fool). Tin-tin-tin, the whole bloody ship was one huge tin-tin-can.

S. continued to drum at the table. And the table finally spoke.

How fares Miss Junius? it enquired.

*I feel, she said, as if on uncharted seas in a derelict boat.*²⁸

Correct! said Fool. This was indeed their sorry predicament. Fool now turned straightway to S. to inform him that there were no flies upon Mermaid. None of any kind. In sum, she was a palpable genius. In a dress.

In a society exclusively of males ..., began the king (who had newly arrived).²⁹

Fool crossed his eyes.

In a society exclusively of males, resumed the king, *there would be no genius.*

If only, said S. Alas, hereabouts, on board, in this particular society of males, one could hardly fart for Towering Genius. Or at least, for men whose names threatened genius, men such as Herr Marx, Herr Freud, Herr Kafka etc., not to mention the tuneless Herr Wolfgang Amadeus. In the absence of soap, however, they stank almost as bad as himself, or indeed the mysterious Herr Semaphore.

The Atlantic now rattled the table and the lights (such as they were) corpsed.

Does Mermaid, asked S., find it dark?

*It seems, she said, as though we're in a tomb.*³⁰

Don't get your hopes up, said S.

No, no, she wouldn't. She would never do that. Not as long as there was Light in the world, Light enough to stupefy the proletariat. Yes, so many, she said, had *overrated the sun.*³¹

Junius now sat down, joining S. at table, and removed her gloves, although her hands (both) were still frozen. She looked about, in the half-dark. *Life and nature*, she said, *here please me very much.*³²

Really?

The main thing is the sea.

Quite.

I can see it from my room.

Your room? You have a room of your own? With a view?

She nodded. *I observe the clouds*, she said.³³

The clouds? The beautiful clouds?

She nodded again. However, she said, *I shouldn't be enjoying so much beauty all by myself.*³⁴ No, not *all* by myself.

A noble sentiment, said a tall man (of sorts), blessed with fine deportment but whose hair had (perhaps) seen better days. He might be thought-of (he said) as simply The Actor, seeing that he was a thespian, both agitprop dramaturge and matinée idol. Yes, a star of sorts, albeit minor or fallen, though never had he fallen so far as to be an extra or what one might call a crowd-artiste. No, unlike the Moses Five, he could not do a crowd. No, not a crowd. Not even out here. The man paused, as if striking an attitude. Perhaps, he said, they knew who he was? He himself was not certain. And for this he thanked Jehovah (or Luther).

* * *

The actor Sigurd Lohde, also on board, had a host of film and stage credits, many at the Volksbuhne, Berlin, a radical theatre well known to Walter Benjamin.³⁵ Lohde's papers, however, described him as both a chiropodist and masseur. They also record that he had fought in the First World War and that his religion was 'Jewish (Protestant)'.³⁶

* * *

The Actor felt for his hair (retreating) and turned to Junius. Alas, he said, she must resign herself to enjoying all alone the beauty of the view afforded by her room; for none, said the Actor, could be expected to join her therein, there being, apart from herself, only Men aboard. Although, he said, there was one among them called Sally Spar.³⁷ Yes, Sally. Apparently.

Junius now straightened her gloves, again looked about (still half-dark it was) and, as if the Actor had not spoken at all, declared, Ah, *how many beautiful women there are here.*³⁸

S. also surveyed the murky scene – that is to say, the usual shades, shadows, pirates, wide-boys, thin-boys, spivs and comedians (both light and dark). He, though, could see no women, beautiful or otherwise. Not even Herr Sally Spar. Whom then (he asked) could Mermaid possibly have in mind?

The Sirens, said the king (from somewhere or other).³⁹

Pardon? said the Actor.

The Sirens, said the king. Such as (he said) once *appeared on crests of waves before Odysseus*. *The Sirens*.

The Actor, though, had seen no Sirens, none had appeared to him, least not of late. None. Perhaps, he said, it was the weather, or what they (the British) put in the tea. Regardless, Mermaid, he felt, was surely not so much thinking of the Sirens as, say –

The *Niobes*[?] said the king.⁴⁰

Pardon?

The *Niobes of the Sea*?

No, said S. (intervening). Perish any thought of antique Niobe, poor sorrowing Niobe. The world (he said) already housed far-too-many Niobes, far-too-many rainy-faced women. For instance, the queen – yes, the queen, for instance.

The king said nothing.

However, continued S., it was unlikely that Mermaid had in mind the queen, since she was now queen of London. Moreover, at 62 Leinster Square, she was well-hidden from view. Yes, the queen, said S., had lately been altogether cured of visibility. Exile had done the trick. As had her boarding house. Not to mention marriage, of a kind.

The ship tipped, or tilted.

* * *

In 1939, some months after Stefan had made it to England, Dora followed suit, having entered into a marriage of convenience with a London-based businessman called Harry Morser. They, or perhaps just Dora, took up residence at 62 Leinster Square W2, which she ran as a guest-house. According to Ernst Schoen, however, Dora sought, for various reasons, to conceal her new address.⁴¹

* * *

Ah yes, resumed S., the queen had, of late, scarce been seen. In short, she had, as it were, taken the veil.

Like Mermaid, said the Actor.

Pardon? said S.

Junius raised an eyebrow. *I, she said, I remain modestly behind the curtain.*⁴²

The Actor nodded (to himself). Mermaid was, indeed, he said, somehow veiled or curtained – sheltered, as it were. Though not, alas, forever. For, in the end, every curtain, he felt (as but a bare-forked Player), would either rise or part. One's modesty was only ever temporary.

* * *

Rosa Luxemburg's body remained in the Landwehr Canal for four months; however, once finally recovered, in May 1919, it was photographed by the police and then identified by Luxemburg's friend Mathilde Jacob who, in a letter to a friend, was moved to wonder 'what misdeeds have been committed upon' Luxemburg.⁴³

* * *

Junius rose from table and began to effect an exit of sorts. *Revolution*, she said, turning and sailing stage-left, then stopping.⁴⁴ No way out, it seemed. *Revolution*, she said again, now steaming stage-right. But once again she dropped anchor. Once again there was, it seemed, Nowhere-to-Go, no leaving of the stage. *Revolution*, she said yet again, and once more turned, this time to face the auditorium (as it were). *The Red Spectre*, she observed, has not *vanished from the public stage.*⁴⁵ She now bowed, as if to announce herself. Or even to greet herself. *Welcome*, she said, *to the ghost.*⁴⁶

Ghost? said S.

Spectre. Red Spectre, she said (and bowed again).

Red? said S.

Red, she said.

As in Marx, said the Actor. As in dear Herr Marx, Herr Karl Marx. The Actor now waved a loose, directorial, hand toward a man who, though a martyr to dysentery and, with his head in a bucket, was waving back as if to say he was indeed Karl Marx but *not* the real Karl Marx. No, he was, thank God, the *un-real* one.

Junius was saddened that Karl Marx was not quite real. She was, however, all-the-more-glad that the Actor and Herr Zeppie were remarkably real. *How good that both of you exist*, she said.⁴⁷

It was, said the Actor, the least they could do, and Zeppie began to cartwheel (badly), all the while enquiring (of Junius) what it was like to be a spectre (red or otherwise).

Junius thought, for an eternity. Then spoke. It was, she said, *Fine! But hell!*⁴⁸

* * *

Yet Another Day

Another deportee on board the *Dunera* was the Viennese Shakespeare scholar, Richard Flatter. In 1936, he had published *Hamlet's Flight to Death*.⁴⁹

* * *

Fine, but hell! Fine, but bloody hell! The voice, this time, was that of a man, a young man, and S. turned to see that the intemperate young man was none other than Hamlet, yes, Prince Hamlet, the Dane. He had tripped o'er Herr Marx's bucket. Fine, but hell, he said again – those being, he added, the very words, near-as-fuck, of his very late father, his ghost of a father. He held aloft a well-worn skull. Fine, but hell.

Hamlet now stopped and turned to S. What think'st thou? he bellowed.

S. was not sure what he thought. Or, indeed, what he thought of.

Think of Shakespeare, suggested the king.⁵⁰

Pardon?

The work of Shakespeare. Think of it.

And?

Question it.⁵¹

In what manner?

Like Hamlet.

But *he's* Hamlet.

Then question *him*, said the Actor.

S., still seated, turned slow toward Hamlet.

Who's there? said S.

Hamlet, said Hamlet

How come? said S. Why *here*? Indeed, why *now*?

The time, said Hamlet, *is out of joint*.^{†52}

Pardon? said S.

Hamlet, said Junius (intervening), *finds that the world is out of joint*.⁵³

Correction, said the Actor, Hamlet said "Time" not "World."

† Any italicised material words attributed to Hamlet are as given to him by Shakespeare.

Ah, said Junius, I see you are *troubling yourself with mistakes ... mistakes made by the typist*.⁵⁴

Typist? said S., intervening. Was there a typist among them? A proper one? A real one? S. thought it unlikely, though he had certainly heard that, somewhere on board, there crouched, toad-like, a brooding typewriter, a sullen Astoria.

* * *

Stefan had, in 1938, taken a Pitman's course in touch-typing, but was not a professional typist. According, though, to the *Dunera's* records, there *was* a professional typist on board. Moreover, a stray typewriter *was* seen in the Orderly Room, most likely an Astoria.⁵⁵ It is thought to have been taken, by the guards, from one Ernst Winter.

* * *

Winter, said S. Yes, Winter. Winter. Yes, it was *Winter's* typewriter. For a moment, S. imagined a frozen typewriter, its keys edged with freshly-fallen snow.

S. now turned to the king and recalled that the prince had often heard the king labouring at the keys of his own royal machine. Ah yes, who could forget the forever Tap-Tap, the cold-metal horse-hooved clatter of –

My winter kingship[?] said the king.⁵⁶

As it were, said S.

The king tapped at his umbrella. *The typewriter ...*, he began.⁵⁷

Yes? said S.

One day it *will alienate the hand*.

S. looked down at his hands, his own. Or were they *no longer* his own? Alien, as it were? Perhaps. His writing, *par manus*, was certainly diabolic – characters all over the shop. However, his hand had always been odd, mad even, long before ever he had begun to type. So, was it the *king's* typing that had somehow been to blame? As if one could *inherit* frozen hands. Unlikely. But what (said S.), thought Argentina? Argentina, the clown. Could frozen hands be inherited?

No idea, said Argentina, who had himself (he said) only ever inherited belief, belief in Yahweh. Which had proved unfortunate.

Argentina was, as before, largely inverted. This time, though, he was attempting also to remain bespectacled.

S. turned to Mermaid. Could frozen hands (he asked) be passed from parent to child?

Well, (she began), by reason of her inhuman limp, she did tend herself toward the frozen side of things. However, she had not been from birth a cripple.⁵⁸ She had not, that is, been frozen in the womb. No, her limp was an accomplishment, an acquired art. Indeed, it was only of late that she had learnt to be so very slow as (on occasion) not to move at all but rather to simply stand and turn to salt. As now, for instance, at the foot of the stairs. Metal stairs. Crash. She looked around, eyed unable-seaman Hamlet (skull-in-hand) and whispered, '*Here I stand, I can do no other.*'⁵⁹

Ah, she quotes, said the Actor. She plays a part.

Whose part? said Zeppie. Herr Hamlet's?

No, bloody Luther's! bellowed Hamlet. She quotes Luther not myself.

Hamlet paused, thought of nothing, then spoke again, now accepting that he and Herr Professor Luther (the very Fart of farting Wittenberg) could easily be confused – one for another, that is. The reason for this was, of course, that –

*The words of Hamlet, said the king, are very Wittenbergian.*⁶⁰

(Pause. Darkness. The sea sighed and Hamlet wailed).

Ask Mermaid to try again, said the Actor, at last.

Try *what* again? said Zeppie.

To play a part, said the Actor.

Whose part?

Herr Hamlet's.

Junius, overhearing, at once cleared her frozen throat. *The to be*, she began, *or not to* –⁶¹

Gadzooks, bellowed Hamlet, tapping at his skull. How *had* she learnt the trick of him?

*I went once, said Junius, to see Sarah Bernhardt.*⁶²

Who? said Hamlet.

A goddess, said the Actor, a goddess of the stage, the divine Sarah. She once played *you*, my Lord.⁶³ In Paris. In trousers.

A woman? said Hamlet.

On the whole, said the Actor, who added that it had, for some while, been a rumour universally acknowledged that he, Herr Hamlet, might in fact *be* a woman.

* * *

In 1921, in Berlin, a silent film had been made that starred the actress Asta Nielsen as a Hamlet who is born female and merely disguised as male.⁶⁴

* * *

Hamlet, in alarum, flew unto an hammock, then fell, forthwith, from out the other side. He clambered back, a-cursing. Had Mistress Bernhardt, he enquired, been apprised of this rumour, this calumny? When playing him?

Not as far as I am aware, said the Actor.

Did she, then, simply never believe me a man?

Perhaps, said the Actor. Perhaps she knew not to trust anyone from Denmark – it being so cold there.

But *is* he? said S.

Is he *what*? said the Actor.

From Denmark. Is he really from Denmark?

Who?

Herr Hamlet. Is he really from Denmark?

Indeed, or so it is said, albeit by Shakespeare, a man inclined to fabricate.

All now turned to Junius for illumination – or, perhaps, an epigram? In the manner, say, of Herr Wilde (one of the three).

I can easily believe (she duly began) *that Denmark does a big herring business ... (it was a promising start), but I find it difficult to imagine that Prince Hamlet was born there.*⁶⁵

Zeppie's spectacles now finally fell, from grace (his nose). As for Hamlet, he wished to speak unto Junius.

Forgive my curiosity, said Hamlet, but if I was not born in Denmark then where *was* I born?

In a handbag, chorused the Wildes, trooping past.

A handbag? said Hamlet.

No, Germany, said the Actor.

Pardon? said Hamlet.

You were born, said the Actor, not in a handbag, nor even in Denmark, but Germany. Had Hamlet not heard? Germany *is* Hamlet.⁶⁶ It was often said.

Where? asked Hamlet.

Germany.

* * *

Ever since the Romantic poets, German high culture had been almost fixated upon the figure of Hamlet – so much so that in 1844 Ferdinand Freiligrath declared that 'Germany *is* Hamlet'. It is, therefore, no surprise that, in the twentieth century, the figure of Hamlet was owned by both Weimar Germany and Nazi Germany.⁶⁷

* * *

Zeppie now drew alarming close, his body (bent, curved) a question mark. He knew full well, he said, that Germany was Hamlet (a commonplace among clowns) but his wringer was this: *Which* Germany?

Sorry? said the Actor.

Exactly *which* Germany is Hamlet? said Zeppie. *Our* Germany or *Theirs*? He lowered his voice and pointed, astern, to the Very Devils. It was where They lived, the aft – where They were stored. It was the cupboard for Them.

The Actor said nothing.

I said (persisted Zeppie), Is Hamlet *our* Germany or *Theirs*?

The Actor would not say.

Speake voice! bellowed Hamlet. (He began to struggle from his hammock). Answer, the bloody question. Which Germany is me? (He fell from his hammock). Or, if you will (he had landed on his buttocks, both), which Germany am I? (He rose, yet slipped, as if upon ice, or twist of rationed butter, or the skin of a rare banana, and fell again). Answer me, I say (he spoke recumbent), which Germany *am* I? Old or New? The shit One, or the shit One?

* * *

If the Nazi vision of Hamlet was epitomised by a 1936 production starring Willy Birgel as a 'steel-hard figure', the Weimar vision of Hamlet was epitomised by Leopold Jessner's 1926 modern-dress production, nicknamed 'Hamlet in Tails', with a blond-wigged protagonist. This 1926 production was, as it happens, described by Walter Benjamin as 'an English stage experiment'.⁶⁸

* * *

II/IV An English Stage Experiment or *Hamlet* in Trousers

* * *

Dramatis Personae

HAMLET, Prince of Denmark

GHOST, late father to Hamlet

GERTRUDE, mother to Hamlet

CLAUDIUS, second husband to Gertrude

LAERTES, friend of Hamlet

POLONIUS, father to Laertes

HORATIO, friend and confidant to Hamlet

MARCELLUS, member of King's guard

BARNARDO, member of King's guard

&

STEFAN, Prince of Weimar

WALTER, father to Stefan

JUNIUS, seditious

ZEPPIE, zany

THE ACTOR, master-player

* * *

Somewhere in the Atlantic

(August 1940)

* * *

Scene One

Hamlet stands, solitary, stage-centre. He is thinking. Meantime, the Actor, Zeppie and Stefan (all hugger-mugger) confer stage-left, which is to say stage-starboard. Enter Gertrude, stage-left; she is, however, visible only to God, audience and Stefan.

GERTRUDE *Mad ... mad as the sea.*⁶⁹
THE ACTOR [LOOKING ABOUT] Who is?
GERTRUDE Hamlet.
HAMLET [UNTO THE WINDS] Hear this: *I am but mad, mad north-north-west.*⁷⁰

GERTRUDE [STILL HIDDEN] Indeed. *Mad ... mad as the sea.*
THE ACTOR Who sayeth that?
[EXIT GERTRUDE, LEFT.]
ZEPIE [TO THE ACTOR] Who sayeth *what*?
THE ACTOR That my Lord Hamlet is sea-brained.
STEFAN Ah, dear Player, it was, I fear, Lord Hamlet's own mother, Queen Gertrude.
THE ACTOR And pray, sir, where is she?
STEFAN Who?
THE ACTOR The Queen.
JUNIUS [ENTERING LEFT] She is *gone*, my Lord. *Gertrude has gone.*⁷¹ *Gone and all powdered and painted.*
[HAMLET PONDS UPON POWDERED-AND-PAINTED GERTRUDE, THEN SPEAKS, AGAIN UNTO THE WINDS.]
HAMLET *Frailty, thy name is woman.*⁷²
[URNS TO STEFAN].
*My mother, she has married again.*⁷³
[STEFAN MAKES NO REPLY.]
I say that *my mother* has married again.
STEFAN Aye, my Lord.
[FLOURISH. ENTER WALTER, TO MAKE PROCLAMATION.]
WALTER My son, pale *Stefan* ...
[WALTER STOPS TO STRAIGHTEN CROWN, THEN BEGINS AGAIN.]
My son, pale *Stefan*, is *not upon the best of terms* with *his mother.*⁷⁴
[STEFAN REGARDS HIS FEET.]
Stefan has, in sooth, a *disturbance of the will.*⁷⁵
[STEFAN AGAIN REGARDS HIS FEET.]
In fine, *Stefan's development* has taken a most *disturbing turn.*⁷⁶

‡ Any italicised words attributed to characters from *Hamlet* are as given them by Shakespeare.

[WALTER CLOSSES WITH STEFAN AND SPEAKS UNTO HIM: SOTTO VOCE]

*I fear that I may have embarrassed you somewhat.*⁷⁷

STEFAN I fear so.

WALTER Might the hour, then, be not propitious for me to make public discourse upon *the extasy of procreation*?⁷⁸

STEFAN No, my Lord. It might not.

[EXIT WALTER AND RE-ENTER GERTRUDE. SHE ALSO NOW CLOSSES WITH STEFAN.]

GERTRUDE *To whom do you speak?*⁷⁹

STEFAN When alone?

GERTRUDE Aye, when alone, *to whom do you speak?*

STEFAN The air.

Scene Two

[RE-ENTER WALTER, TO MAKE FURTHER PROCLAMATION.]

WALTER [CLEARS THROAT] *Stefan is ... in England.*⁸⁰

STEFAN Was.

ZEPPIE Was *what?*

STEFAN Was in England. But he has since put to sea. This here is midst Atlantic.

HAMLET [INTERVENING] Atlantic? Why, I had thought this was yet the Narrow Sea.

ZEPPIE The Channel, my Lord?

HAMLET Aye.

ZEPPIE I fear not, my Lord. This is not the Channel.

HAMLET [MAKING PROTESTATION] But *I must to England.*⁸¹

ZEPPIE The Isle of Man, my Lord?

HAMLET No, sirrah, *England.*

ZEPPIE Ah yes. And why not? England is a most pleasing place, my Lord. Most pleasing.

[STEFAN LEADS ZEPPIE STAGE-RIGHT.]

STEFAN [TO ZEPPIE] Why, sirrah, speak so fondly of England? Is not Lord Hamlet sent unto England because the fellow is mad and, moreover, because there, amongst the English, all themselves being mad, it should not be discovered?⁸²

ZEPPIE By no means, my Lord. The English are a most reasoning people. Ask thy father.

STEFAN [TURNING TO WALTER] Sir, what say you of England?

WALTER [CLEARS THROAT AND COMMENCES] *Nowhere ...*

STEFAN Aye, sir?

WALTER *Nowhere is humanity more respected than in England.*⁸³

[SILENCE. PUZZLEMENT. IRONY. ZEPPIE THEN, AT LAST, SPEAKS TO ALL.]

ZEPPIE Ah, England [HE SIGHS]. How, gentle friends, dost dear England fare now? Is it, in sooth, still there? Where we didst leave it. Is it?

[SILENCE, SAVE SOUND OF SIRENS. ZEPPIE NOW TURNS TO HAMLET]

My Lord Hamlet, what news of England?

[SILENCE, SAVE SOUND OF SIRENS.]

I said, my Lord Hamlet, what news of England?

HAMLET [QUAKING MIGHTILY] *I ... I cannot live to hear the news from England.*⁸⁴

* * *

News of three air attacks on London: 'some damage'
(25 August 1940, HMT *Dunera*)⁸⁵

* * *

Scene Three

[HAMLET, STEFAN AND ZEPPIE ARE ABOUT TABLE. ENTER HORATIO WITH MARCELLUS AND BARNARDO, SENTINELS BOTH. THE TWO SENTINELS KEEP SENTINEL; THEN, STRAIGHTWAY, GHOST ENTERS STAGE-RIGHT, WHICH IS TO SAY STAGE-PORT.]

MARCELLUS [POINTING AT GHOST] *Look, where it comes again.*⁸⁶

BARNARDO *How like the King that's dead.*
[GHOST MAKES AS IF TO EXIT.]

HORATIO *Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak.*⁸⁷

HAMLET *Ay, speake, Ghost, I am bound to hear.*⁸⁸

[GHOST TURNS AND SPEAKS AT LAST.]

GHOST *I am thy father's spirit.*⁸⁹

STEFAN [PAUSE. STEFAN RISES AND TURNS UNTO HAMLET.]
 But *whose* father? Yes, whose father's *spirit*?
 Thine or mine own?
 [SILENCE. THEN ENTER CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE,
 FOLLOWED BY LAERTES, ALSO A SON LATELY
 UNFATHERED.]
 LAERTES [SORROWFULLY] *Where is my father?*⁹⁰
 ZEPPIE Who?
 LAERTES *My father Where is my father?*
 ZEPPIE In the clouds.
 HAMLET And where be mine?
 ZEPPIE In the grave.
 STEFAN And mine?
 ZEPPIE Somewhere, sir. Somewhere or other.
 [STEFAN NOW SEARCHES DECK, PURSUANT OF HIS
 FATHER.]
 GERTRUDE [TO STEFAN] Ho, sir! *Do not go seek for thy noble
 father in the dust.*⁹¹
 ZEPPIE Or, yet in ash.
 STEFAN Ash?
 ZEPPIE Aye my lord, ash.

* * *

One of the men on board, a Jew who had lost both his wife and his son to the Nazis, had hidden in the inside leg of his trousers a small, charred stone. He had rescued it, he said, from the burning ruins of his synagogue.⁹²

* * *

[STEFAN CONTINUES TO SEARCH DECK.]
 GERTRUDE [TO STEFAN] Again, sir, I say *do not go seek for thy
 noble father*. Not in ash, nor in any part.
 STEFAN Why say you so?
 ZEPPIE Well, if thy father be now dead –
 STEFAN Dead? Dead!
 ZEPPIE Ah, hast thou received no letter? No word?
 STEFAN No, sirrah, none. No envoy can reach a man upon
 the bounding main. And should news yet come
 hither of my father, and be the worst, I shall ever
 refuse to believe the same.
 CLAUDIUS But, sir, a *common theme is death of fathers.*⁹³

STEFAN I am not common, my Lord.
[PAUSE. ZEPPIE MOVES STAGE-RIGHT, SPIES WALTER WITHIN THE WING AND WHISPERS HIM.]

ZEPPIE Your noble son is mad.

WALTER [FROM OFFSTAGE.] *As far as my son is concerned, the situation is, I accept, rather gloomy.*⁹⁴

ZEPPIE No, he's fucking mad.

Scene 4

[LAERTES TAKES CENTRE-STAGE, WHICH IS TO SAY HE ASCENDS MESS-TABLE AND STANDS THEREON.]

LAERTES *My father –*

ZEPPIE Where, sir?

LAERTES *How came he dead?*⁹⁵

ZEPPIE Not a bloody clue.
[ZEPPIE TURNS AGAIN UNTO WALTER WITHIN THE WING, THEN ADDRESSES WING.]
What say *you*, my Lord?

WALTER [FROM WING.] *Murder is suspected.*⁹⁶

ZEPPIE [TO WING.] Ay, but *whose* murder?

STEFAN [INTERVENING.] A father's.

ZEPPIE [TO STEFAN.] Ay, but *whose?* Whose father?
[SILENCE.]
I say, *whose* father's murder is suspected?

LAERTES Mine, I fear.

HAMLET Mine also.
[STEFAN HOLDS HIS PEACE.]

* * *

It is suspected by some that, in the hotel at Port Bou, Walter Benjamin did not commit suicide but was murdered.⁹⁷

* * *

[ZEPPIE DRAWS STEFAN ASIDE AND BEGINS TO QUESTION HIM].

ZEPPIE [TO STEFAN] Your father –

STEFAN Aye, sirrah?

ZEPPIE If he be, in sooth, dead ...
[STEFAN HOLDS HIS PEACE].
And if he be, in sooth, murdered ...
[STEFAN HOLDS HIS PEACE.]

GHOST [Entering] And *if thou*, in sooth, *didst ever thy dear father love ...*⁹⁸

[STEFAN HOLDS HIS PEACE.]

GHOST *Revenge*, then, *his foul and most unnatural murder*.

STEFAN Speake that again, dire spirit.

GHOST *Revenge*, I say, *revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. Revenge!*

[STEFAN CONSIDERS AND THEN, AT LAST, DOES SPEAK.]

STEFAN Upon whom, dire spirit, would thou say I should seek revenge?

ZEPPIE [INTERVENING] My lords, allow me to speak. [ZEPPIE HEREWITH ATTEMPTS TO SPRING UPON MESS-TABLE. MISSES TABLE. ABANDONS ATTEMPT. BEGINS, INSTEAD, TO REASON, ALBEIT MOST TARDILY.] My Lords, it is of late remarked, rumoured, bruited abroad, etc. that our Lord Hamlet is, in truth, the un-intending slayer of a beloved father –

STEFAN Whose father?

ZEPPIE Why, unhappy Laertes, sir. I speak, that is, of his father, gentle Polonius, as mistakingly skewered by our dear Lord Hamlet.⁹⁹

STEFAN Where? Where mistakingly skewered? Where in particular?

ZEPPIE Behind the arras, sir.

STEFAN Behind the *what*?

ZEPPIE The arras.

[SILENCE. A POOR MERRIMENT IS STILL-BORN. ZEPPIE THEN RESUMES THREAD.]

Now, sirs, if tis indeed the case that Lord Hamlet has killed *one man's* father, might cunning reason not contend, therefore and thereafter, that Lord Hamlet might yet prove the killer of *another man's* father?

STEFAN Mine own?

ZEPPIE Perchance. Perchance not. I would, though, dare to venture that Lord Hamlet might something *know*.

STEFAN Something?

ZEPPIE Aye, sir, something of how or why your dear father, *if* he be dead, might have come to be so.

[ZEPPIE HERE TUMBLES TOWARD WING, AS IF TO MAKE EXIT.]

STEFAN

Stay, clown. Speake more. Much more.

ZEPPIE

[STOPS AND TURNS] Ah, well, sirs, it is, me thinks, the case that our Lord Hamlet might know more concerning the murder of fathers than mortals such as us canst ever imagine.

[ALL GATHER ABOUT HAMLET.]

STEFAN

But what? What might he know?

ZEPPIE

Ah, alas, *that* I cannot yet discern. My brain is a poor addled thing. [ZEPPIE STRIKES HIMSELF UPON THE BROW.] It is, though, me thinks, somewhat to do with the darkling city of Vienna.

HAMLET

Vienna[?]¹⁰⁰

ZEPPIE

Aye, sir. Vienna.

STEFAN

Explain thyself, clown.

ZEPPIE

I cannot, sir. Not at present. Not yet awhile.

[HAMLET NOW TURNS TO FLEE, ONLY THEREUPON TO SEE DREAD GHOST.]

HORATIO

[To HAMLET] My lord, the Ghost, it *beckons you to go away with it!*¹⁰¹

HAMLET

*Then I will follow.*¹⁰²

[HAMLET MOVES STAGE-STARBOARD. HORATIO IS AGHAST.]

HORATIO

[To ALL] Ah, my lords, *what if* the Ghost, should *tempt* poor Hamlet *into the sea?*¹⁰³

[NONE SPEAK.]

What, I say, *if* the Ghost should *tempt* poor Hamlet *into the sea?*

[EXIT HAMLET, FOLLOWED BY NOISE STAGE-LEFT – SOUND OF ONE LEAPING OVERBOARD.]

* * *

III/IV An English Piano Experiment

Enough! Junius cleaved the thickening air, thereby ending the Play. *Enough*, she said, of *puppet-shows performed by gilded youth*.¹⁰⁴ It was, she said, *a bad comedy deserving of a ... boo*.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, it was, she continued, a *constitutional comedy* and thus one *the workers must at all costs prevent*.¹⁰⁶ And this, she said, they would surely do, for the workers were altogether done with theatre OF all kinds and IN all places. Why, even now (she said) in far-away *Tallinn*, although *the theatre there was in flames*, the *masses are* by no means grieving, but rather hell-bent upon obstructing the *fire brigade*.¹⁰⁷ Yes, busy they were **preventing** the *fire brigade from extinguishing the fire*.

The sea heaved and Junius removed her defeated crown. She was herself a consuming fire – a fire that raged against each and every theatre. Ah, yes, how she despised the ambiguous stage. She swiftly looked about their shrouded lower-deck.

On just the other side of the wall ...

She waved her crown toward history, World History.

Is a *show of a most un-ambiguous sort*.¹⁰⁸

Junius now limped toward a favoured mess-table, seated herself and raised her hands in the air, her frozen hands, January hands. Tis time, she said, *to be striking the keys of World History's piano*.¹⁰⁹ She promptly bowed her hatless head and fell to it, striking the table with the force of a thousand wars.

It was, S. thought, music to die for. Music, perhaps, even, to kill to. But where, where, where on earth did this lunatic Dame think she was?

Steglitz, she said.

Pardon? said S.

Steglitz.

Are you sure?

Indeed, on Sunday *I went to the Steglitz Motion Picture Theatre*.¹¹⁰

They showed so many different things.

Who did?

The Picture Theatre.

Mickey Mouse?

And *all in pouring rain*.

Donald Duck?

Or that's how it always looks.

What does?

The screen, she said, the flickering screen at Steglitz. It always looks like it's raining.

So, why did she go there?

Where?

Steglitz, said S. The Steglitz Picture House.

The ship lurched and Junius paused, as one who had quite forgotten. Then, as one who had quite remembered, she said, *They had musical accompaniment.*

She looked down at her hands and once more fell upon her grand tin piano. Even now she was in an antique Picture House. Even now the screen was flickering. Even now the rain was pouring. And yet it was, she said, *a very touching story.*

But upon what did it touch? asked S.

A palace, she said. *A palace that looked like a prison.*

A prison?

Indeed, said the woman in Steglitz. What the audience thinks, at first, to be a palace is revealed, in truth, to be a prison.

S. straightened his tie.

And what greater evidence, she continued, could there be?

Of what?

Of the revolutionary primacy of the silent film, said the king, appearing (with umbrella).¹¹¹ One could, he said, always trust a Silent to show a palace to be a prison. Yes, there was nothing so revolutionary as a Silent.

The Actor here swayed. For he too loved the old Silent Days – the mouthing, the attitudes, the eyes. He himself, however, had come too late (he said). Ah, alas, he was, professionally speaking, a child of the Talkies. Yes, with regard to cinema, he had been, one might say, born talking, made to talk (as it were) – about murder, in fact.

* * *

Sigurd Lohde's screen debut, albeit a minor role, was in Fritz Lang's 1931 Berlin thriller, *M – A City in Search of a Murderer*, Lang's very first sound film.

* * *

Junius began once more to play tin-piano and, as even she played, Hamlet, still mad as the sea from whence he had (by seeming miracle) returned, stepped forward. Looking about, he straightway announced, by way of diversion, a Dumb-Show, a Silent, if you will. A tragedy it would be, albeit a Ruin of a tragedy, a fragment – in sum, a tragic tragedy.

Ein Trauerspiel [?] said the king.¹¹²

Pardon? said Hamlet.

A mourning play [?] said the king.

Indeed, said Hamlet, one for all who mourn, such as I. So, prepare to weep, along with myself. He looked about for those who might yet prove mourners, then tapped his skull and announced that the Show would be performed even now, this very eve, upon Lower Mess Deck, No. 2. Its players would be (he declared) several dissembling loons. Let the Ruin commence.

Trumpets sound. A dumb-show follows.

Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly, the Queen embracing him, and he her. He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck, then lays himself down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him.

Anon, comes in another Man ... the Poisoner. He takes off the King's crown, kisses it and yet pours poison in the King's ears. The Poisoner exits.

The Queen returns, finds the King dead and makes passionate action, weeping greatly.

The Poisoner, with some Three or Four, comes in again. They seem to condole with the Queen.

The dead body is carried away.

The Poisoner now woos the Queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile, but in the end accepts his love.

*Exeunt omnes.*¹¹³

S. made to go (to the pisser, or Anywhere), remarking, as he did, that he had never before seen such a thing, such a thing as the Show. How very bizarre, he said, were that husband and his wife, and all that hullabaloo.

But, said Hamlet, had the late prince never witnessed a *marital dumb-show*? Or, say, a *domestic pantomime*? A *drawing-room farce*? Not even once?

The king tugged at his umbrella, then intervened (in a manner). *For Stefan*, he said, the *old puppet theatre* was often dragged out.¹¹⁴

Into the street? asked the Actor.

No, *for Stefan*. It was dragged out for *Stefan*.

S. sat down at table and lowered his head until slap face-down upon Mermaid's cold piano. Crash. Ah yes, the puppets, the gestures, the dramas, he remembered them well. He had never, though, seen a silent king silently poisoned. Never. He could, therefore, make little sense of Herr Hamlet's morbid pantomime. In sum, what the fuck did it mean?

Zeppie raised a silken arm. To this question, he knew the answer. The King is dead, he said.

Wrong, clown! said Hamlet. The King is *murdered*.

Murdered, my Lord? said S., face still (as it were) pianoed.

Yes, murdered, quite murdered, said Hamlet. The King is murdered. And, indeed, in Viennese manner.

Pardon? said S., lifting his head.

This play, said Hamlet, the dumb show, is in truth *the image of a murder done in Vienna*.¹¹⁵

Gadzooks, that's it! said Zeppie. (He struck his brow, as before). The knocking-off of fathers, or kings, or both ...

Yes? said S.

Has something to do with ... (Zeppie now struggled, as if he had already forgotten).

Yes?

Murder! said Zeppie (once more sure of himself). Yes, the killing of both kings and fathers definitely has something to do with murder.

But *that*, you Arse, I think we already know.

Ah yes, said Zeppie (greatly apologetic). He would try again. Herr Hamlet (he began again) seeks to indicate that the killing of both kings and fathers, or indeed, let us say, Killing in General (he now stood upon his head), has something to do with ... murder *in Vienna*. Something.

Yes, but what? said S.

No idea, said Zeppie.

S. raised his head, considered and then declared that Vienna was an unlikely key to the mystery of Killing in General. What with all that waltzing (in Vienna, that is). It was true that, alas, *Berlin* might be –

A City in Search of a Murderer? said the Actor.

Quite, said S. But Vienna? Murder? What exactly was Herr Hamlet thinking of? With respect to Vienna.

Ten o'clock, said the king, interrupting.¹¹⁶

Pardon? said S.

Ten o'clock – time for the news from Vienna.

What news? said S.

Silence. Silence himself had clambered (dripping) aboard, and the ship and all her company waited for ten-of-the-clock and news of Vienna.

And yet, when ten o'clock finally came there was nothing. Just silence. More silence. Radio silence.

At last, however, Junius prepared to speak, seating herself (as before) at table, portside of S. She then cleared her throat and spoke.

*Austria is heading for destruction.*¹¹⁷

Silence. Radio silence. Then, *again* Junius spoke.

It is *with regret* that *His Majesty's government has heard the news of the massacre of Jews.*¹¹⁸

Silence. Radio silence. Then, yet again Junius spoke.

*According to telegrams received in London ... three-and-a-half thousand persons are said to have been killed.*¹¹⁹

No, said S. He would not believe such things. Not of Vienna. One place was being confused with another. Words had been muddled, muddled no doubt by some invisible bugger, some unreliable typist. Someone, some bastard was –

Wrench[ing] each word, said the king, *from its context*[?].¹²⁰

Exactly, said S.

But, said the Actor, perhaps it is true, this heading for ... (he paused, smoothed his hair, and resumed) ... this heading for Destruction. After all, with regard to Vienna (smooth) he had heard Things (smooth) even Before ... before leaving England.

Such as?

The Vienna gas-board, said the king, *not supplying gas to the Jews.* He now straightened his tie, before adding that *the Jews preferred to use the gas to commit suicide.*¹²¹

Ah, said the Actor (knowingly), the writing had long been upon the wall.

In the pissar? said Zeppie.

The king nodded. In *the urinals*, he said, *one certainly reads the notices.*¹²²

Quite, said the Actor. One is always in need of a script, not least when wrestling with one's poker. However, he had in mind, he said, a merely general Wall, a general-and-everywhere Wall and, perhaps –

A proletarian, said the king, *at the mercy of the rain.*¹²³

What? said Zeppie.

A proletarian at the mercy of both the rain and the Gestapo.

But the wall? What about the wall? The wall.

The *proletarian scribbles* some words on the wall.

And what does he scribble?

I shall perish here, said Junius, rising.¹²⁴ *I shall perish here.*

Perish *where*? said the Actor.

Vienna? said S. For perhaps, after all, Herr Hamlet was right. Perhaps there *was* a murder done in Vienna. Or, indeed, many a murder.

Junius said nothing. As if to say, No, no, the perishing of which she herself was thinking was not in Vienna but somewhere else.

Argentina? said Zeppie.

She shook her head.

Azusa? said Zeppie.

She shook her head.

Africa? said Zeppie. It was his last guess, last A-name, *place-name*. Very last. For he knew no more, no more places that began with A and that might yet be the very name for where one might perish.

Africa? he said again, in desperation.

And *this* time Junius nodded.

Yes, she said. *I am concerned by not only the suffering of the Jews but also the Blacks.*¹²⁵

Which blacks? said Someone (passing).

The Blacks, she said, *with whose corpses the Europeans play catch*.

And where would that be? said Someone (still passing).

Africa, she said.

* * *

Rosa Luxemburg protested vigorously against the systematic genocidal campaigns that, early in the century, were being carried out by Europeans in south-west Africa. These same campaigns, it has been argued, were later mirrored in the Nazis' Final Solution.¹²⁶

* * *

S. lifted his head and glanced to port, toward what (one had heard) was Africa. Of a sudden the deck rose with a meaningless heave of the sea, then fell to its knees – *if* a deck has knees, thought S., who cursed. In German.

The king, now standing behind the seated Junius, tapped her upon the shoulder. My son *Stefan*, he said, *is still in Germany.*¹²⁷

Really? she said.

No, said S. (intervening). My noble father is mad.

Stefan (said the king again) *is still in Germany.*

No, I got out, said S.

Stefan (said the king yet again) *is still in Germany.*

I said, I got-the-hell out. Years ago. Do you not recall?

The king paused, then spoke again. *Stefan*, he said, is now in Vienna.

No, I got out, said S. I got out of there too. Have you not heard? Not heard the news?

10 o'clock is the news, said the king.

What news? said the Actor.

From Vienna, said the king.
And what *is*, said the Actor, the news from Vienna?
We, said the king, *are expecting* ...
Yes? said the Actor.
We are expecting Stefan from Vienna.¹²⁸
Expect, then, damaged goods, said the Actor.

* * *

Stefan did not leave Vienna until September 1938, six months after the Anschluss. This began with Hitler being driven triumphantly through cheering crowds and a programme of systematic anti-Semitism, including Jews being made to scrub the streets of Vienna. In a letter to his father, written at the time, Stefan remarks upon 'how terrible it is in Vienna'.¹²⁹

* * *

S. looked about. Herr Hamlet's infernal Dumb Show was (somehow) somewhere in the middle of an-encore-of-an-encore-of-what-was-itself-an-encore. Herr Hamlet himself, now deep within an hammock, appeared to care but little for This Ceaseless Show; yet, even as the Poisoner once more tip-toed toward the supine Player King, Hamlet coolly crooned, *Begin murderer ... begin*.¹³⁰

No, murmured S., in half-arsed protestation.

The Play-Poisoner continued, however, to play at his poisoning. And Hamlet, without a glance, crooned once more, *Begin murderer ... begin*. And with this smooth, smoky refrain, cool Hamlet marked each and every encore. This murder, this murder-made-in-the-image-of-a-murder-in-Vienna, was to be repeated, it seemed, for ever. Vienna, it seemed, was murder's very cradle.

* * *

As a young man, Adolf Hitler had studied in Vienna.¹³¹

* * *

The sea yawned, as did the ship, and S. watched as the Dumb Show grew slow and ever-more slow as, with each performance, the Poisoner himself grew slower. This tip-toeing killer was growing (it seemed) ever-more weary of killing – yet, still he killed. And, again and again, the Player King would softly lay himself down, stretch out his theatrical limbs and prepare to be poisoned, his slowing breath hereafter beginning to fail, his heavy head to tilt port-ward as if asleep, and his finger-nerves

to twitch a tiny electric Adieu. The Player King, thought S., plays well at royal dying.

* * *

On the morning of 27 September 1940, Walter Benjamin was found lying dead on the bed in his hotel room. Those who believe that Benjamin's death was suspicious point to the hotelier Juan Suárez, who is known to have been close to the Gestapo.¹³²

* * *

S., in want of exercise, now stretched his cribbed-and-cabined frame and began to strut, stiff-legged, as if a turbulent child in callipers. He circumnavigated the Dumb Show's horizontal Player King, then glanced toward the other king, the real one, the vertical one, the one with the umbrella.

The Devil, said the vertical king, *looks after his own*.¹³³

Pardon? said S.

The Devil looks after his own.

Says who?

The hotelier.

What?

The Devil looks after his own – so said the hotelier.

And, pray, how does the hotelier know?

No answer.

I said, your highness, how comes it that Herr Hotelier knows so much about the devil?

Still no answer.

Is Herr Hotelier *himself* a devil?

The king raised an index finger to his lips, as if to say that walls had ears, even where there were no walls, as at sea.

S., though, continued. Is it the case, he said, that *all* hoteliers are devils? Quiet and orderly, no doubt, but (in truth) demonic? An unhappy thought, your highness, since I am myself an hotelier of sorts, having served in more than one guest-house. Or, at least assisted. In a manner.¹³⁴

* * *

In 1937, when Dora was managing a pension in San Remo she wrote to Walter, saying 'I can't trust [Stefan] ... with the guest-house books; ... [and] he doesn't understand a thing about administering the place.'¹³⁵

* * *

The king stared at S. It was as if he barely recognised the young man, or could scarce recall the old hotel-days.

In San Remo, for instance, said S. Remember?

The king still stared.

Ah, it is hopeless, thought S. These days the king seemed to forget so much, even San Remo and the hotel. Hard by the sea, it had been. Villa Verde, *numero sei*, Via Hope.¹³⁶ Yes, Hope. Strange name for a road, even by the sea. In Villa Verde, however, the queen and S. had lived largely *without* hope – hope, that is, of ever seeing the bloody sea, the view being long-ago obstructed. Now, though, S. himself was, no doubt, making up for that.

S. cursed and turned once more to the king. Ah yes (he said), I might well be considered an hotelier. Why, even in London I assisted the queen at her royal flop-house. A many-floored folly it was – and indeed *IS*, if it yet be standing. I allude to the bombing, your highness; fear of which caused me, in fact, to pursue another and *safer* Hotel Position, and thus to consider riding westward to some far country called Wales.¹³⁷ Yes, Wales, bloody Wales. But better, perchance, an hotel in Bargoed than Berlin. Ask Mermaid.

* * *

The murder of Rosa Luxemburg began with her being beaten about the head in the lobby of an hotel in Berlin – Hotel Eden it was called.¹³⁸

* * *

Junius, still at mess-table, stared down, head bowed, hatless. The table was now a desk (or so it seemed) and she was some kind of scribe. And *here*, she said, *I am in my hotel*.¹³⁹

Your hotel? said S. Did she too live in her own hotel? Was she too that strangest thing – one's own guest?

Junius tugged at an unravelling sleeve and, as if a magician, drew forth Lilliputian pencil and paper (a scrap from the crapper it was). Now, with her body bent ever so slightly forward, she pincer'd the pencil between frozen thumb and forefinger and hovered, like the spirit of God, over the face of the paper. *I am trying*, she said, *to work upon the proclamation*.

Surrender? said S.

She did not reply.

Capitulation?

She did not reply.

Is it all over? The War, I mean? Have we lost? Should we give up?
Jump overboard?

She looked up. *Think of me*, she said, *as being in ... Paradise*.¹⁴⁰

Where?

Paradise. Like Adam, she said.

As, say, in Eden? *Hotel Eden*, as it were?

Junius started, which is to say she stopped, as one who had been arrested. Indeed, it was as if her mind had suddenly changed, mid-stream, mid-ocean.

The thought of a hotel, she said, *terrifies me*.¹⁴¹

She did not say why; she offered up no explanation. S., though, enquired if the problem were all the voices that one heard within an hotel, all the voices that struggled through the walls, from one room to the next or that echoed in the lobby.

Voices, said the king (interrupting), *are not accustomed to waiting in the lobby*.¹⁴²

Quite, said S. Yet wait they must. Yes, voices must wait, wait in a queue, if wishing, that is, to speak into the Hotel Telephone, the one in the lobby. The call (S. said) may be urgent and the hour desperate, but there was, invariably, just the one Hotel Telephone.

S. now looked about the crowded deck.

Indeed, he continued, whoever seeks to use the Hotel Telephone must wait, wait patiently, like a patient saint. Is not that so, Herr Hamlet?

Hamlet grinned, like a screwball. He seemed (by some sad miracle) to know just such a saint, one who *walks*, said Hamlet, *four hours together in the lobby*.¹⁴³

Who does? said S. Who walks four hours in the lobby?

Hamlet would not say.

* * *

The hotel in which Walter Benjamin spent his last night was a very modest establishment; it might, therefore, be reasonable to suppose that the telephone from which he is known to have made four calls was located in the lobby.

* * *

The sea half-raised an eyebrow, the ship too and S. fell, fell unto thinking of unlikely hotel-guests, strange guests – men who might well, in fact,

walk for hours in the lobby. He thought also of *unwanted* guests. Ah yes, he had seen them all, not just the unlikely and the strange but also the unwanted. This, though, was hardly surprising, since every hotel will surely have some guests who are simply not wanted. Indeed, some so-called guests might perhaps, on occasion, be considered aliens, even enemies. If so, though, what happens to such? Or, rather what may already have happened to such? The Unwanted, that is.

Junius came close. As did the king.

We were both thrown out, she said. *Thrown out of the only hotel.*¹⁴⁴

Which hotel? said S.

Eden, said the Actor, intervening.

(The king blinked)

Thrown out of Eden? said S.

Naturally, said Junius.

(Pause. The king put up his umbrella.)

When?

When what?

When were you thrown out of Eden?

When dead. Or half.

Half what?

Half dead.

Ah.

Did you not, said Junius, *hear me scream?*¹⁴⁵

* * *

It was on the day after his death that Walter Benjamin's corpse was carried out of Hotel de Francia. Rosa Luxemburg, however, was no sooner beaten than she was swiftly bundled out of Hotel Eden.¹⁴⁶

IV/IV An English Typing Experiment

Mutiny

In the Autumn of 1918, Germany's dramatic post-war abandonment of constitutional monarchy was initially triggered by mutinies on board a number of German naval ships. These mutinies were then followed by the Spartacist Revolt, as led by Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919.

* * *

The king (wind-blown) looked about the upper deck, straightened his tie, cleared his throat, grew historical and spat into a Northerly, an action regretted forthwith. He had, though, something or other to say. Something historical.

1919 ... , he began.¹⁴⁷

1918, said S.

Pardon? said the Actor, intervening.

1918, said S. His Highness means 1918. I was born in 1918 not – 1919, resumed the king, *1919 is the date to be* –

No, said S. You mean 1918. April 1918. April 11th 1918. Does it not ring a bell?

The king said nothing. No bell, it seemed, had rung. S. tried again.

Here's a clue (he said): *Me*, head-over-arse, stark bollock-naked, and not much bigger than –

Such a small ... small human being, murmured the king.¹⁴⁸

A bell, it seemed, *had* now been rung.

So very *small*, murmured the king.

A huge, great, walloping bell.

I lie now in bed, said the king, and *am disturbed by a little child crying*.¹⁴⁹

No, the child is *screaming*, said S., screaming the bloody-palace down. Not surprising, mind; seeing he (the child) had not been asked if he wished to be born. No, he was just summoned, dragged out by a muscular midwife. Come on (she said), out you come, you little bugger. Admittedly (she said) there is a bit-of-a-War on, bit of a Show, but worry not, it's just Repertory shit, Matinee stuff.

The Actor appeared to stiffen.

* * *

Sigurd Lohde had fought in the First World War, enlisting in 1917 and serving right through to the Armistice in November 1918.¹⁵⁰

* * *

For a moment, the king, touched now by a passing Westerly, swayed to-and-fro. He then stifled a morbid laugh. He had, it seemed, once more grown historical.

1919 ..., he began, as before.

S. eyed the sea.

1919, continued the king, *1919 is the date to be borne in mind.*

But why? said S. Why 1919?

Because ..., began the Actor, all-at-once magnificent, all-at-once a Soldier, an unlikely veteran of the Old War, the Good Old War. His eyes now flashed, and he recommenced. Because ..., he said again.

Yes?

Because, said the Actor, because But he did not continue. He had stopped, as if quite defeated, quite defeated by 1919. Or rather, 1918. November 1918.

Silence, silence, until at last the king resumed.

In 1919, he said, in 1919, the revolutionary mood –

Mood? said S., surprised.

Indeed, said the Actor (now recovered). A good revolution is a trick of the affections, a work of grace.

Junius said nothing.

Imagine, continued the Actor, the delight of an audience or, say –

The extasy of procreation, murmured the king, as once before.

Pause.

S. turned to the king. If procreation (said S.) *is* extasy, why had the king procreated just the once?

The king looked down, as if searching for his kingdom. Or pavement. The sea grew curious. Time passed. No answer came. None.

Where were we? said the Actor, at last. He had quite forgotten his lines.

1919, said the king.

Excellent, said the Actor, an excellent year for a revolutionary mood, it being, one might say, the year in which –

The revolutionary mood continued, declared the king.¹⁵¹

What? said Zeppie – how he loved to say ‘what’.

In 1919, said the king, *in 1919 the revolutionary mood* continued.

After *what?* said Zeppie. He had said it again.

The end, said the Actor.

End? End of *what*? said Zeppie. He twitched with delight.
 End of *her*, said the Actor, indicating Junius.
 Who? said S.
Rosa Luxemburg, murmured the king. *Rosa Luxemburg*.¹⁵²
 Silence.
 Junius stared down at her hands, still frozen, it seemed.
 Where? said S., at last.
 Where what? said the Actor.
 Where did the mood continue?
 What mood?
 The mood revolutionary.
 Upon a ship, a regular ship, passenger ship. German.
 Name?
The Prival, said the king.¹⁵³
 Year?
 1919, said the king.
 Location?
North Sea, said the king.
 And what happened? said S.
 What? said Zeppie. Twitch.
 What happened on the ship? said S. Upon *The Prival*?
Politicisation, said the king.
 To be precise? said S.
 To be precise, said the king, in 1919, upon the good ship *Prival*
 all-at-once there came into being a *ship's secretariat*, a *political tribunal*,
 and a *catering committee*.
 In short?
An entire revolutionary apparatus, said the king.
 In shorter?
The boat had been transformed into a ... city, said the king. A
magic city.
 Magic? said the Actor.
Magic, said the king.
 But in what respects magic? That is to say (said the Actor) in what
 respects was the magic made manifest? By what forms of on-board enter-
 tainment and end-of-pier merriment?
Three gambling clubs ... two boxing-rings and a gramophone, said
 the king.
 Gramophone?
 Indeed, *in the Officers' Mess*, wherein *the gentleman* all *tap-danced*.
 Zeppie here essayed a mutinous tap-dance (failed) – Tap. Junius,

meanwhile, began to limp with a quite perfect limp – Limp-limp. Then, of a sudden, Zeppie stalled; for S., it seemed, had a question, a poser, for the king.

In 1919, said S., when the revolutionary gentlemen were not jiggling to the gramophone (Zeppie momentarily jiggled), what on earth did they do?

Exchange, said the king.

Exchange *what?* said Zeppie. He twitched, jerked even.

They exchanged *cigars, dollar notes, binoculars* and ... *photos*, said the king. *Nude photos*, he added. *Nude*.

Zeppie jerked again, then froze. So too did Mermaid.

* * *

In the last war, the frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic. And the revolts that followed it were the first attempt of mankind to bring the new body under its control.

(Walter Benjamin)¹⁵⁴

* * *

Ice

On 8 August 1940, when the *Dunera* briefly docked at Cape Town it is believed there was some kind of mutiny, or at least disturbance – possibly among some renegade guards, possibly among some of the Nazi enthusiasts on board. It was certainly the case that one such enthusiast, a man called Wolfgang Kittel (a man who had claimed to have assisted in Luxemburg's assassination) left the ship at this point. However, mysteriously, he was then returned to England on a civilian boat, unescorted, and in a first-class cabin.¹⁵⁵

* * *

The day (dark, still dark) was sudden torn, its airless air torn to shreds by voices off; that is to say, by curses-and-cries-from-bloody-Elsewhere – midship, stern, aft, Munich, Nuremberg, Dunkirk etc.

What is this? said Mermaid. *A mutiny?*¹⁵⁶

S. was divided, sawn in two. Mutiny or no? Revolution or no? Hard to say. Ask Herr Hamlet, he finally said, gesturing to an hammock.

Here's fine revolution, said the hammock, before adding, *had we the trick to see't.*¹⁵⁷

S. feared (within) that he himself had *not* the trick to see a fine revolution. Not here, not now.

Hamlet yawned. More voices off. Uproar.

Alas, thought S., here (now) is *bad* revolution, a revolution of the bad, bad men – bad men like, say, those English buggers-with-bayonets who now, at last, have a chance to jump ship. Or, say, those Nazi buggers astern, The Adolfs, The Entirely Bad.¹⁵⁸

Not, though, that all The Entirely Bad *were* entirely bad or, come to think of it, bad at all. Or maybe, just a little. Herr Kittel, for instance. It was true that some among them (thin shadows) would darkly say that Herr Kittel had once helped out (boot here, fist there) with the perfect killing of the Perfect Cripple; but S. would not listen to shadows. Least, not if he could help it. Besides, Herr Kittel was once, *mirabile dictu*, a hurtling Weimar hero, a once-famous Giant of the Ice, the glistening blades of his skating-boots forever gleaming in the light, the light of winter. Yes, winter, dear winter.

* * *

In 1928, at St Moritz, in Switzerland, Wolfgang Kittel's career as a top-class ice-hockey player culminated in his playing for the German national team at the first ever Winter Olympics.

* * *

This morning, we came into Cape Town. It is winter here.

(Konrad Eisig, 8 August 1940, HMT *Dunera*)¹⁵⁹

* * *

S., a rattle-bag of Northern limbs, almost shivered. *Is cold after all*, murmured the prince.¹⁶⁰ Again S. almost shivered, almost shivered at the thought of shivering, shivering now, today, in August. But how? Or why? Why was there winter in August?

Junius (port-side), at porthole, peered out. *There has been*, she said, *a sliding back into winter*.¹⁶¹

Is cold after all, murmured the prince.

I am, though, *ready*, said Mermaid, *for the cold-water treatment*.¹⁶²

Ah, then Mermaid is mad, said S. Winter is no time to take the waters. Least not in Berlin. Is that not so, your highness?

The Landwehr Canal, said the king, *exerts its charm*.¹⁶³

But not in January, your highness. At such an hour, the Landwehr is as frozen as an –

Ice Palace, said the king.

Pardon?

The Ice Palace, said the king. *In Berlin*. It was *the first skating-rink in Berlin*.¹⁶⁴

S. nodded. He knew the Palace well. Had always loved to skate.¹⁶⁵

It was *also*, said the king, *a thriving nightclub*.

So?

So, it happened that there my attention was held far less by the convolutions in the arena than by the apparitions at the bar.

Ah.

Among which was a prostitute in a very tight-fitting white sailor's suit.

I see.

Who, though I was unable to exchange a word, determined my erotic fantasies for years.

S. shook his head, to empty the thing, He then slouched West, like the Magi, to the pissier. Bethlehem, as it were, crowded. Upon arrival, he ascended a crapper, stood upon a single leg and peered out. Cape Town, he saw, and the sky. So (he wondered), which way goes the World and its War? Was it won? Or was it lost and all over – all over bar

the shouting and screaming? But the harbour would not say, Cape Town was stum.

S. decided, therefore, that he would not think of the War at all. No, he would think, instead, of that Apparition, in the Ice Palace and the tight-fitting suit; for if he closed his eyes he could see her, even now, from the crapper. And Herr Kittel too, he could see him as well, even now. Yes, there he was, the once-Olympian, upon the very ice. Around-and-around-and-around went Herr Kittel, and yet, with every convolution, the cold Apparition (poor thing) grew still colder, until frozen, frozen stiff, as stiff as a January stiff. The seat of the crapper slid, and S. nigh fell from grace.

S. steadied himself and looked about. God (he thought), the pissier stinks. So too these pissing bodies and all this pissing flesh, Jew and Gentile, members both cut and uncut. And then there were the voices. Yes, all the voices, strange and mad, not least the one that put him in mind of –

A very important lawyer.

What? said S.

*A very important lawyer is calling me.*¹⁶⁶

What? said S.

A very important lawyer is calling me to summon Europe to its feet.

Why? said S.

To stand – to stand against the horror.

S. slipped, for the crapper could not hold, and he (Europe) fell. Arse-first. But, even as Africa vanished from view, he (Europe) heard once more the summons to his feet. Yes, to feet. And to arms. Yes, a man-at-arms he must become. A *warrior-prince*. And (quick) prepare he must in order to face the horror, the Enemy. Yes, there was (it seemed) an Enemy to face. Somewhere. Somewhere or other.

* * *

A very important lawyer [is] calling me to summon Europe to its feet to stand against the horror.

(Rosa Luxemburg)

Law

The ship has already cast off, but [now] suddenly [it] makes fast, and the leader of the German seamen ..., Wolfgang Kittel, is called before the [ship's] Commander. After a while he [Kittel] returns, assembles his men and makes a short speech in which he states he has to leave. He is then immediately escorted off the ship.

(G. F. Chodziesner, HMT *Dunera*)¹⁶⁷

* * *

Gone. He's gone, said Someone. Herr Kittel. Gone. Just buggered off. Ah, thought S., looking down at his flies. Ah, he thought again. For only just now had he stumbled from out of the pisser and was still a-fiddling with his flies. Cheap-suit, crap flies. Only to be expected.

S. had stumbled, it appeared, into the Orderly Room, wherein was crammed the whole ship's company – all, that is, save Herr Hamlet.

In the midst, the very midst, sat cold Mermaid, the sorry Wildes and the ship's lone Professor of Typewriting (hard at the Astoria). In the corner, north-north-east, leant Hamlet's familiar, Scholler Horatio.

He's gone, said Zeppie.

Who's gone? said the Actor.

Forgotten, said Zeppie. Gone from ship was gone from mind. But wait, perhaps he *could* recall. Yes, yes, the one who's gone was, he thought, the one who –

Smote Polacks on the ice? said Horatio.

Yes, him – Herr Kittel, said Zeppie.

Ah, but in that you are misprized, said the Actor.

What? said Zeppie (and twitched).

Well, you see, said the Actor, Herr Kittel did in-no-wise smite Polacks *plural*. He merely did smite, or partly-smite, just *one*, albeit a troublesome one. Or so he said.

(Mermaid raised a frozen Polish hand.)

Who, then, said S., *did* smite Polacks? Polacks *plural*. (S. still a-fiddled. Bloody flies.)

The Ghost, said the Actor.

Ghost? said S.

Hamlet's father, said the Actor.

He it was who smote the sleddèd Polacks, said Horatio. *On the ice.*

On the ice? said S.

Indeed, said the Actor.

S., now at peace with his flies, looked around. There, before him, was houseless Herr Hamlet with skull (warmed) in hand. It seemed he too had stumbled from out the stinking khazi and been thrown, unfastened, unto the Orderly Room, what with *his doublet all unbraced, his stockings fouled, ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ankle; and with a look* (said Someone) *so piteous in purport as if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors.*¹⁶⁸ Yes, horrors.

Ah, said the Actor, brain-sick Herr Hamlet has never looked so brain-sick. Nay, full clownish he now is, what with his trousers, as it were, about his bloody ankles. But can a man so attired, or dis-attired, really speak of horrors? Can he?

Hamlet said nothing.

Indeed, continued the Actor, if a man's trousers lie crumpled so far beneath him do the horrors not perhaps vanish? Do they not simply grow insupportable, being laughed quite out of existence? Hell thereby emptied by the comedy of one's knees.

Again, Hamlet said nothing.

Speak, clown! said the typist, thumping the Astoria.

Still nothing.

Well, at least pull up your trousers, said the typist, still thumping.

He can't, said the Actor.

Why not? said the typist. Tap-tap.

He lacks, said the Actor.

Lacks what? said the typist. Tap-tap

A single trouser-button, said Junius.¹⁶⁹

That's as may be, said the typist, but Herr Hamlet cannot just stand there, like some –

Elegiac beauty, said the king.¹⁷⁰

What? said Zeppie.

Some elegiac beauty with a hole in his trousers, said the king.

The bell upon the typist's Astoria now went Ding and, at once, the Wildes were moved to speak. *A hole in one's trousers*, they chorused, *may make one as melancholy as Hamlet.*¹⁷¹

But he *is* Hamlet, said the Actor. Besides, he has not so much a hole in his trousers as almost no trousers at all. And thus one can not only see his legs but see that they are –

A little odd? said the typist. (Tap-tap).

Quite, said the Actor

Or (perhaps) somewhat ambiguous? said the typist. (Tap-tap)

Quite so, said Zeppie (grandly).

Indeed, said the typist, do you think that they might, in fact, be the legs of a woman? (Tap). Or are they, more precisely, ironic legs? Or even, Weimar legs?

Pardon? said the Actor.

Hamlet's legs, said the typist – do you not think they suggest something of Weimar's ultimately farcical spirit? Or would it, in fact, be more correct to align said legs with the horrors of the Third Reich?

The Actor, being not altogether sure, examined Hamlet's lower-half. Having done so, the Actor remarked that Hamlet's legs, *sans culottes*, suggested farce rather than horror. On the other hand (or leg), added the Actor, Herr Hamlet (as a *whole*, not just the legs) was well-acquainted with the horror usually associated with killing. Recall his father, that Smoter of Polacks.

Ah, yes, the murderous Ghost (said the typist). Should we not impeach that evil greybeard?

As in a court of law? said the Actor.

Indeed, said the typist.

Civil? said the Actor.

Uncivil, said the typist. Ding.

Then let the trial begin, said the Actor.

At once up-went an Hoorah from among the Ship's lawyers (twenty-seven, no less).¹⁷² Hamlet however (legs still unhoused) was silent and, within seconds, so too were the Twenty-Seven. For they had a problem. Yes, a problem, an impediment. Or so it seemed, given the silence. Pause. At last, Someone (a queer fellow) broke rank and began to speak, to speak freely.

Gentlemen, he said, a trial of Herr Hamlet's late father might well be a bit of a laugh, or even a Hoot. However, he said, the trial would prove nigh-unto-fucking pointless since no hanging, no strangling, no asphyxiation could possibly ensue.

Why ever not? said the typist.

Because, said Someone, one cannot (alas) dispatch a ghost. Not even at sea. A man cannot die twice.

Damn, said the typist, and at once twenty-six lawyers began to hurtle from the Orderly Room until (of a sudden) Someone called the twenty-six to a dis-Orderly Halt. And spoke again. He had good news.

Whilst it is true (he began) that Herr Hamlet's incorporeal Sire may be beyond the reach of mortal law, this would not be the case with respect to Herr Hamlet himself. He (Hamlet) was all too corporeal, all too-too-solid flesh etc.

Hamlet, with shaking hand, fumbled at his un-bracèd doublet.

Moreover, said Someone, is it not the case (according to the law of Moses Moses Moses Moses and Moses) that the crimes of a father might yet be visited upon his son?¹⁷³

S. eyed the tin ceiling.

Therefore, continued Someone, might Herr Hamlet-the-Younger have been loosèd out of hell not merely to *speak* of horrors but to *confess* thereto? It was, he said, a thought.

The king opened his umbrella and began to examine it, as if looking for crimes.

Someone now spoke yet again. This time to suggest that when, in dear Elsinore, Herr Hamlet had first crooned 'Begin murderer, begin' he had (in fact) been singing unto *himself*, addressing himself, exhorting himself.

Hamlet, silent, tugged at his foulèd stockings even as Someone resumed, now observing that Hamlet had soon thereafter proceeded unto most casual slaughter – first slaying the prattling Polonius (forgivable) and then half the Court of Elsinore (less so).

Storm, said the king, now raising his umbrella.

Where? said Someone.

Storm of forgiveness, said the king.¹⁷⁴

By no means, said Someone. Let there be no forgiveness, no storm thereof, nor even a passing shower; for Herr Hamlet, having killed so many, must simply *not* be forgiven. Indeed, the bastard might yet kill many more. After all, had anyone ever heard him say, 'End murderer, end'?

Silence. Silence, save for the idiot-sea without. No, no man, it seemed, had ever heard Herr Hamlet say, 'End murderer, end'.

Then might he not, said Someone, be found guilty? Before the law.

The law of the sea? said the king.¹⁷⁵

Perhaps, said Someone. It is as *mad* as the sea.

The law? said the king.

Precisely, said Someone. The law, I confess, is both as mad and (indeed) as cruel as the sea.

Hamlet tugged again at his stockings.

And thus, said Someone, Herr Hamlet must, I am afraid, be hanged by the neck. Until dead.

But, said the king, *Hamlet wants to die*.

Really? said Someone.

Hamlet here nodded and remarked that Yes, he would indeed like to die. Please.

Shit! said Someone. How on earth could one punish a man who *wants* to die.

But, said the king, *Hamlet wants to die by chance*.¹⁷⁶

Hamlet nodded again, this time saying that Yes, if they did not mind, he would prefer not an Hanging but an Accident: wrong sword, wrong chalice, wrong play – that kind of thing.

Why so? said Someone.

More endearing, said the Actor.

What? said Zeppie. Twitch.

Death-by-accident, added the Actor, is possessed of a certain charm – more, at least, than organised strangulation. Yes, inadvertent death is a more-nearly-perfect bloom. No hint of an eye for an eye, or –

Tit for tit, said Zeppie.

Quite, said the Actor. No hint, therefore, of mere exchange or calculation – no red-tape, if you will. No paper-work. None.

The typist cursed.

In short, said the Actor, an accidental death would be altogether – *Outside the law?* said the king.¹⁷⁷

Quite, said the Actor.

Lethal but without spilling blood? said the king.¹⁷⁸

Exactly, said the Actor.

It would, though, still hurt, said Someone, hopefully.

Oh, indeed, said the Actor. In fact, I suspect that death-by-accident is a thing most terrible – quite unspeakable.

Hamlet looked concerned.

But at least, said the Actor, it would *not* be a case of merely – *Administered violence*, said the king, as if a ventriloquist's doll.¹⁷⁹

In fact, continued the Actor, it would be something closer to that – *Highest manifestation of violence* –, said the doll.

To which, concluded the Actor, we might just give the name of – *Divine violence*, said the doll, Triumphant.

At this (an apotheosis of sorts), all applauded, everyone save Someone; and both the Actor and the king took a bow, before the Actor spoke once more.

Herr Hamlet, he said, should now be granted his heart's desire and be released forthwith to die promptly of some accident or other.

Someone, though, raised a logical arm. Alas, he said, *there* is the rub. For if Herr Hamlet should *intend* to die by accident then it would *not*, technically, be an accident. Indeed, if one is really to die by accident –

One simply has to have a lucky hand, said the king.¹⁸⁰

What? Twitch.

To die by accident, *one simply has to have a lucky hand*, said the king.

Or perhaps, said the Actor, one simply has to be mistaken (whoops) for a rat, a rat behind an arras.

Whoops, said Zeppie. His spectacles had fallen. Off.

Or again, said the Actor (continuing), perhaps one simply has to be beaten a bit-too-senseless (whoops) in a Berlin hotel.

Whoops, said Zeppie. His spectacles had again fallen. Off, off.

Or, yet again, said the Actor (concluding), perhaps one simply has to be reduced to self-slaughter upon thinking one is buggered when in truth (whoops) one is not. Not buggered. Not at all.

* * *

It is understood that Walter Benjamin committed suicide at the French–Spanish border because he assumed that he, and the group with whom he travelled, would be handed over to the Gestapo. However, as it turned out, on the very next day, the group were allowed to proceed to neutral Spain and, ultimately, to freedom. Benjamin’s death, therefore, is often thought of as a terrible accident.

* * *

Greetings from Mr Clumsy, said the king.¹⁸¹

Exactly, said the Actor.

Someone now stepped forward. He had, alas, identified a problem, a fly in the Accidental ointment. It was this: that a fatal mistake might just tarry, may take longer even than the Viennese Fire Brigade; and yet the Law, much like a jitterbug-boy in a bawdy house, simply could not wait for satisfaction.

Someone eyed the youth in the room.

Therefore, Someone continued, since we cannot wait around forever for an accident that might yet do away with Herr Hamlet, let us proceed post-haste to simply string the bastard up. And where better than in an Orderly Room? Not to mention one with a typist.

It was fine logic – Someone could not be gainsaid; he had, as ever, reasoned like a scholar. Yes, Herr Hamlet must, sadly, swing until dead.

The ship reared, Hamlet began to shake and those nearest, even as they prepared him for execution, at once became most tender, speaking with very great kindness. One, indeed, took gentle hold of

Hamlet's hand. A woman's hand? Perhaps. Whatever, could Herr Hamlet kindly stand upon the chair? The chair beneath the noose. Yes, the noose suspended from the ceiling. And yes, he could certainly keep his skull. Hamlet shuffled forward, then half-raised an un-gartered leg. Toward the chair. And Someone thanked him for his kind assistance.

Hamlet, still shaking, now stood, at last, upon the chair (which creaked). Progress it was. However, none among them knew what next to do. It was clear to all that a hangman was needed, but there was no hangman aboard (something of an oversight). And so, as one, they turned to the Actor, seeing he was (he said) not only an Actor but also, apparently, a Chiropodist and, as such, they reasoned, might be as handy with a neck as a foot. This possibility the Actor did not deny and so, with some élan, he placed both noose and cowl over the head of the condemned Hamlet, who still clutched his skull.

S. now stepped forward and eyed poor hooded Hamlet. Ah, said S., did Herr Hamlet now weep? Was Herr Hamlet now sad? Sorrowful, even? Ah, perhaps he was. But what did such sorrow signify, come-to, attain?

In Hamlet ..., began the king.

Yes?

*In Hamlet melancholy attains to Christianity.*¹⁸²

S. peered again at hooded Hamlet. His tears, his sobs, his deepest sighs were indeed fast turning to Christian prayer. Dear Christ, dear Christ, etc. Amen, amen. Then silence. All praying done.

Hooded Hamlet now raised his cowed head. He seemed ready to speak for one very last time. *A villain kills*, he said.¹⁸³

So he does, said S. (to the villain).

And for that, said hooded Hamlet, *you send him to Heaven?*

S. did not move. He had been about to kick away the creaking chair.

* * *

The time *must* come when no one is any more willing to be a hangman.

(Rosa Luxemburg)¹⁸⁴

* * *

S. remained move-less. So too did hooded Hamlet. Silence again. Then, at last, S. turned and walked away, alarmed that he had so nearly killed Herr Hamlet. He was alarmed because execution would have been not too great a *cruelty* but too great a *kindness*. S., that is, would have mistakenly sent a villain to *heaven*, a villain redeemed by a villain's own

prayers, like an holy Houdini. Execution was, clearly, no way to punish a Christian. Against one who talks to Jesus there was, alas, no law.

S. now looked about the Orderly Room. It tilted, with the incline of the sea, tilted until empty, quite empty. Now, indeed, there was no-one save himself. No Zeppie, no Hamlet, no Wildes, no king, no Actor. Not even the typist remained. But then, these days, typists disappeared as easily as anyone else.

* * *

In July 1942, Rosa Luxemburg's typist, Mathilde Jacob, a Jew, was deported to Theresienstadt. In this ghetto-town many somehow managed to make music, to paint, to write and even to type. In April 1943, however, Mathilde Jacob was killed.

* * *

S. ran his fingers across the abandoned typewriter. His fingers thought of the king, wherever he was. Indeed, they thought of him typing, even now, somewhere hammering at awkward kEys. After all, a typewriter might be found in the most unlikely places – a ship, a ghetto, even an hotel.

The king *A rare constellation of events has put a typewriter at my disposal.*¹⁸⁵

S. What constellation? Where?

[NO ANSWER.]

I said, where? Where is this typewriter at your disposal? Where?

* * *

The Hotel de Francia, the border hotel where Walter Benjamin spent his final night, is known to have possessed a typewriter because one was clearly used to make out the bill for Benjamin's overnight stay. This typewritten bill does, however, date Benjamin's death as October 1st – which is a mistake.¹⁸⁶

Notes

- 1 Letter to Scholem, 29 December 1920, *Correspondence*, 171 / *Briefe*, 250. As Michel Löwy points out, Benjamin would have certainly learned of Luxemburg's ideas from Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) – see *Fire Alarm* [2001], tr. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2005), 79.
- 2 See Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsio, *Politically Red* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023).

- 3 As Löwy observes, Jurgen Habermas would later claim Luxembourg for the Frankfurt School, not least because of her rejection of classical Marxism's linear view of history – see *Fire Alarm*, 74, 119.
- 4 'On the Concept of History', *SW*, 4.396 / *GS*, 1.703.
- 5 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 197.
- 6 Konrad Eisig, 31 July 1941, 'Diary', © Claudia Cotton British Library (MS 89025, MS 89025, 40). I am grateful to both Claudia Cotton and the British Library for permission to cite the diary here and elsewhere.
- 7 For Junius, see J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* [1966] (London: Verso, 2019), 620. 'Junius' was first, and famously, used as a nom-de-plume by the author of the 'The Junius Letter's' (1772), a collection of private and open letters critical of the government of King George III. For Kittel's claim, see Patkin, *Dunera*, 46; there is no evidence to support this claim.
- 8 *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* (3 vols.), ed. and tr. David Fernbach, Joseph Fracchia and George Shriver (London: Verso, 2011–), 1.171.
- 9 Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 17 May 1898, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* [1990], ed. George Adler, Peter Hudis and Annelies Laschitzka (London: Verso, 2011), 44.
- 10 See Patkin, *Dunera*, 53.
- 11 Luxemburg to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 17 May 1901, *Letters*, 146; as the editors note, she refers to the three leaders of the Marxist party SDKPiL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania), of which she was, at one point, a member.
- 12 Luxemburg to Luise and Karl Kautsky, [13 March 1906], 230.
- 13 'Spain, 1932', *SW*, 2.2.649 / *GS*, 4.460–2.
- 14 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 544.
- 15 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis in German Social Democracy* [1919], tr. Socialist Publication Society (New York: H. Fertig, 1969), 9.
- 16 Luxemburg, 'Socialism and the Churches' (1905), tr. Polish Social Democratic Party, in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 137, 139.
- 17 Luxemburg, 'Victorious Days for the Constitutional Manifesto' (1905), *Luxemburg Speaks*, 3.378.
- 18 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, 10 April 1915, *Letters*, 350.
- 19 See 'Pensées', *Archive*, 139 / *Archive*, 107.
- 20 'Pensées', *Archive*, 141 / *Archive*, 110.
- 21 'Experience and Poverty', *SW*, 2.2.734–5 / *GS*, 2. 213–9.
- 22 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility', *SW*, 3.118 / *GS*, 7.350–84.
- 23 'Mickey Mouse', *SW* 2.2.545 / *GS*, 6.45.
- 24 *Origin*, 201 / *GS*, 1. 364.
- 25 Luxemburg to Mathilde Wurm, 16 February 1917, *Letters*, 374.
- 26 Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 15 April 1917, *Letters*, 392.
- 27 Luxemburg to Hans Dieffenbach, 27 August 1917, *Letters*, 438.
- 28 Luxemburg to Jogiches, 21 February 1902, *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg's letters to Leo Jogiches*, ed. and tr. Elizabeth Ettinger (London: Pluto Press, 1979), 129.
- 29 'Socrates', *SW*, 1.53 / *GS*, 2.130.
- 30 Luxemburg to Sophie Liebknecht, [before 24 December 1917], *Letters*, 455.
- 31 Luxemburg to Hans Dieffenbach, 12 May 1917, *Letters*, 411.
- 32 Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 14 May 1909, *Letters*, 278.
- 33 Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 15 April 1917, *Letters*, 393.
- 34 Luxemburg to Dieffenbach, 6 July 1917, *Letters*, 429.
- 35 In his radio drama, 'Prescriptions for Comedy Writers', Benjamin refers to a performance at the Volksbühne from January of that year (see *Radio*, 275); this is just a year before Lohde's first known involvement with the theatre.
- 36 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/1, E35184.
- 37 Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 409.
- 38 Luxemburg to Jogiches, [11 March 1894], *Letters*, 8.
- 39 'The Moon', *Storyteller*, 55 / *Traume* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 29.
- 40 'Nordic Sea', *Storyteller*, 121 / *GS*, 4.383–7.
- 41 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 655 and Eva Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 305. The Leinster Square address is that given in Stefan's deportation documents – information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2, E39130.
- 42 Luxemburg to Dieffenbach, 20 June 1917, *Letters*, 415.

- 43 Mathilde Jacob, *Rosa Luxemburg, An Intimate Portrait*, tr. Hans Hernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), 111.
- 44 Luxemburg, 'The Street Battle in Lodz' (1905), *Complete Works*, 3.179.
- 45 Luxemburg, 'Introduction to Political Economy' (1925), *Complete Works*, 1.163.
- 46 Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, [16 July 1897], *Letters*, 37.
- 47 Luxemburg to Henriette Roland Holst, 17 December 1904, *Letters*, 181.
- 48 Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, [26–27 October 1905], *Letters*, 212.
- 49 Richard Flatter, *Hamlets Flucht in den Tod* (Wien: Herbert Reichner Verlag, 1936).
- 50 *Origin*, 127 / *GS*, 1.307.
- 51 'Berlin Chronicle', *SW*, 2.2.628 / *GS*, 6.465.
- 52 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1982), I.v.196.
- 53 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Life of Korolenko' [1919], *International Socialist Review* 30 (1969) 11–31 (15).
- 54 Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob, 3 May 1917, *Letters*, 408.
- 55 See Bartrop and Eisen, 215 and Wilcock, 'Dunera Boys', 22.
- 56 Letter to Gretel Adorno, 10 September 1935, *GA-WB*, 163 / *GA-WB*, 239.
- 57 'One Way Street', *SW*, 1.457 / *GS*, 4.105.
- 58 At the age of five, Luxemburg had a disease of the hip which left her with a permanent limp – see Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 55.
- 59 Luxemburg to Wurm, 28 December 1916, *Letters*, 363.
- 60 *Origin*, 140–1 / *GS*, 1.317.
- 61 Luxemburg to Paul Levi, 31 [August 1914], *Letters*, 331.
- 62 Luxemburg to Jogiches, [29 March, 1894], *Letters*, 8.
- 63 She played Hamlet in 1899 – see Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: performance and interpretation in theatre, film and fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107.
- 64 Howard, *Women as Hamlet*, 140.
- 65 Luxemburg to Holst, 27 October 1904, *Letters*, 180.
- 66 See Andreas Höfele, *No Hamlets: German Shakespeare from Nietzsche to Carl Schmitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 160.
- 67 Höfele, *No Hamlets*, 228.
- 68 Höfele, *No Hamlets*, 132; 'Oedipus', *SW*, 2.2.577 / *GS*, 2.391.
- 69 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, IV.i.7.
- 70 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.ii.374.
- 71 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, [28 May 1908], *Letters*, 260 – Luxemburg refers to Getrude Zlottko, her domestic helper.
- 72 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.ii.146.
- 73 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.ii.140, 156.
- 74 Letter to Gretel Adorno, 17 January 1940, *GA-WB*, 281 / *GA-WB*, 402.
- 75 Cited in Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 543.
- 76 Letter to Scholem, [11 February 1937], *WB-GS*, 191 / *WB-GS*, 232.
- 77 Letter to Scholem, 2 June 1934, *WB-GS*, 114 / *WB-GS*, 145.
- 78 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.487 / *GS*, 4.148.
- 79 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.iv.131.
- 80 Letter to Theodor Adorno, 4 October 1938, *TA-WB*, 277 / *Briefe*, 777.
- 81 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.4.202.
- 82 The grave-digger says that Hamlet was sent to England 'because a was mad [and] [a] shall recover his wits there. Or, if a do not, 'tis no great matter there' (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V.i.146–7).
- 83 'Lichtenberg', *Radio Benjamin*, 345 / *GS*, 4.2.696–720.
- 84 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V.ii.359.
- 85 Pearl, *Dunera Scandal*, 179.
- 86 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.i.43–4.
- 87 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.i.54.
- 88 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.6.
- 89 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.9.
- 90 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, IV.v.127.
- 91 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.ii.69–70.
- 92 See Patkin, *Dunera*, 49–50.
- 93 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.ii.103–4.

- 94 Letter to Theodor Adorno, 29 January 1937, *TA-WB*, 165 / *TA-WB*, 217 – the word here translated as ‘situation’ is *Dinge*.
- 95 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, IV.v.130.
- 96 ‘Brecht’s Threepenny Opera’, *SW*, 3.5 / *GS*, 3.442.
- 97 See *Who Killed Walter Benjamin?* (Medianimación, 2005), dir. David Mauas.
- 98 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.v.24–5.
- 99 Polonius, hiding behind an arras, or wall-tapestry, is mistaken for a ‘rat’, the rat that is Claudius.
- 100 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii.232–3. It is not clear why Vienna is cited here – see Manfred Draudt, ‘Between Topographical Fact and Cliché: Vienna and Austria in Shakespeare and other English Renaissance writing’, in *Shakespeare et l’Europe de la Renaissance*, ed. Pierre Kapitaniak and Yves Peyré (Paris: Société Française Shakespeare, 2004), 95–115.
- 101 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.iv.58.
- 102 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.iv.63.
- 103 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.iv.69–71.
- 104 Luxemburg, ‘The “Peaceful” Action of the PPS’ (1905), *Complete Works*, 3.160.
- 105 Luxemburg, ‘A New Tsarist Circular’ (1899), *Complete Works*, 3.12.
- 106 Luxemburg, ‘The “Constitution” of the Knout’ (1905), *Complete Works*, 3.193,196.
- 107 Luxemburg, ‘The Russian Volcano’ (1905), *Complete Works*, 3.242.
- 108 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, [13 May 1907], *Letters*, 240.
- 109 Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 15 April 1917, *Letters*, p. 392.
- 110 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, [14 November 1911], *Letters*, pp. 314–15.
- 111 Letter to Theodor Adorno, 9 December 1938, *Correspondence*, 591 / *Briefe*, 798.
- 112 Benjamin argued that seventeenth-century German mourning plays (*Trauerspiele*), commonly disparaged for their improbable action (dreams, ghosts, terrors) and excessive focus on grief, were not failed tragedies but rather a separate genre of theatre more attuned to the darkness of history. See *Origin*.
- 113 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii.104–33.
- 114 Letter to Scholem, 14 January 1926, *Correspondence*, 288 / *Briefe*, 409.
- 115 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii.232–3.
- 116 ‘Notes from Svendborg’, *SW*, 2.2.787 / *GS*, 6.528.
- 117 Luxemburg, ‘The Problem of the “Hundred Peoples”’ (1904–5), *Complete Works*, 3.68.
- 118 Luxemburg, ‘The Revolution’, *Complete Works*, 3.327.
- 119 Luxemburg, ‘The Tsar Breaks His Word Again’ (1905), *Complete Works*, 3.290.
- 120 ‘Karl Kraus’, *SW*, 2.2.454 / *GS*, 2.363.
- 121 Letter to Margarete Steffin [June 1939?], *Correspondence*, 609 / *Briefe*, 820.
- 122 ‘Hashish in Marseilles’, *SW*, 2.2.674 / *GS*, 4.410 – the word here translated as ‘urinals’ is the French *pissoirs*.
- 123 ‘A Commentary on Poems by Brecht’, *SW*, 4.240 / *GS*, 2.564.
- 124 Cited in Harmer, *Luxemburg*, 113.
- 125 Luxemburg to Wurm, 16 February 1917, *Letters*, 375.
- 126 See Elizabeth R. Baer, *The Genocidal Gaze: from German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017).
- 127 Letter to Gershom Scholem, 17 October 1934, *Correspondence*, 460 / *Briefe*, 624.
- 128 Letter to Scholem, 2 July 1937, *Correspondence*, 540 / *WB-GS*, 241.
- 129 Christine Fischer-Defoy (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: das Adressbuch des Exils 1933–1940* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 2006), 95.
- 130 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii.246.
- 131 Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler’s Vienna: a portrait of the tyrant as a young man* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
- 132 See Scheurmann, *Benjamin*, 269.
- 133 ‘The Lucky Hand’, *Storyteller*, 189 / *GS*, 4.771.
- 134 Stefan was working at Dora’s pension in San Remo toward the end of 1937 – see Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 575.
- 135 Dora to Walter, 26 January 1937, cited in Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 714.
- 136 See Weissweiler, *Villa Verde*.
- 137 See Stefan to Walter, July 1939, in Luhr, *Was noch*, 53.
- 138 Netti, *Luxemburg*, 775.
- 139 Luxemburg to Jogiches, [5 April 1894], *Comrade and Lover*, 14.

- 140 Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, [? July 1904], *Letters*, 167.
- 141 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, [14 July 1908], *Letters*, 262.
- 142 'What the Germans were Reading while their Classical Authors were Writing', 305 / *GS*, 4.2.1054.
- 143 Hamlet here quotes Polonius – *Hamlet*, II.ii.160.
- 144 Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 29 November 1918, *Letters*, 484.
- 145 Luxemburg to Jogiches, 4 October 1904, *Comrade and Lover*, 140.
- 146 See Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin. A Biography*, tr. Malcom Green and Ingrida Ligers (London: Verso, 1996), 261 and Nettle, *Luxemburg*, 775.
- 147 'Spain, 1932', *SW*, 2.2.649–50 / *GS*, 6.461–2.
- 148 Letter to Scholem, [7 April 1918], *Correspondence*, 123 / *Briefe*, 186.
- 149 Benjamin, 'Hashish in Marseilles', *SW*, 2.2.674 / *GS*, 4.410.
- 150 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2, E35184.
- 151 'Spain, 1932', *SW*, 2.2.649–50 / *GS*, 6.461–2.
- 152 Letter to Gershon Scholem, 29 December 1920, *Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, 171 / *Briefe*, 250. Benjamin is here referring to an edition of Luxemburg's prison letters that had been given to him as a birthday present.
- 153 'Spain, 1932', *SW*, 2.2.649–50 / *GS*, 6.461–2.
- 154 'One Way Street', *SW*, 1.487 / *GS*, 4.148.
- 155 According to one internee, 'at Cape Town ... a number of military guards absconded with their loot' (Patkin, *Dunera*, 46). For details (such as they are) of Kittel's return to England, see www.olympedia.org/athletes/102588 (accessed 27 March 2025).
- 156 Luxemburg, 'Victorious Days', *Complete Works* 3.377.
- 157 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V.i.89.
- 158 One anonymous diarist wrote: 'several of the Nazis at the aft of the ship have been boasting that they will see to it that the ship will arrive at no other destination than Germany and they will take it there. This is a real threat. Most of them are Nazis of the fanatical type and quite capable of running the ship. Some were members of the crew of the Altmark, others from U-boats' (see Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 194).
- 159 Eisig, 8 August 1940, 'Diary', © Claudia Cotton, British Library (MS 89025, 21).
- 160 'Pensées', *Archive*, 123 / *Archive*, 89.
- 161 Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 11 March 1918, *Letters*, 460.
- 162 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, [14 July 1908], *Letters*, 263.
- 163 'Review of Hessel's *Heimliches Berlin*', *SW*, 2.1.69 / *GS*, 3.82.
- 164 'Berlin Chronicle', *SW*, 2.2.620 / *GS*, 6.499.
- 165 Email to author from Mona Benjamin, 21 July 2023.
- 166 Luxemburg to Kostya Zetkin, [5 June 1908], *Letters*, 260.
- 167 G. F. Chodziesner, 'How I Came to Australia' [1940], 11 – cited here and later by kind permission of Paul Chodziesner.
- 168 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.1.78–84.
- 169 Luxemburg, 'Introduction', *Complete Works*, 1.97.
- 170 'Paris Diary', *SW* 2.1.345 / *GS*, 4.578.
- 171 Oscar Wilde to Frank Harris, August 1899, cited in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 4.534.
- 172 There were, indeed, 27 lawyers on board: see Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 386.
- 173 See Exodus 34.6–7 and Deuteronomy 5.9.
- 174 'The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe', *SW*, 1.287 / *GS*, 6.98.
- 175 'Spain (1932)', 2.2.649 / *GS*, 6.461–2.
- 176 *Origin*, 138 / *GS*, 1.315 – the German here is *Zufall*.
- 177 *Critique of Violence*, *SW*, 1.252 / *GS*, 2.200.
- 178 *SW*, 1.249–50 / *GS*, 2.199.
- 179 *SW*, 1.252 / *GS*, 2.201–2 – translation amended, the German here being *verwaltete Gewalt*.
- 180 'The Lucky Hand', in *Storyteller*, 187 / *GS*, 4.771.
- 181 *Berlin Childhood*, 3.385 / *GS*, 7.430 – the word here translated as 'Clumsy' is *Ungeschickte*.
- 182 *Origin*, 164 / *GS*, 1.335.
- 183 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.iii.76–7.
- 184 Luxemburg, 'Street Battle', *Complete Works*, 3.179.
- 185 Benjamin to Scholem, 28 April 1934, *WB-GS*, 108 / *Briefe*, 137.
- 186 See Scheurmann, *Benjamin*, 290. Benjamin did in fact die on 26 or 27 September.

3

(Unless)

Introductory notes to Chapter 3

As the voyage continues, S. and the king encounter a man who answers to the name of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He is not quite the famous philosopher nor, indeed, the obscure Berlin furrier of the same name who happened to be a deportee aboard the *Dunera*. Confusion thus ensues as this phantom Herr Wittgenstein speaks largely in the words of Wittgenstein the philosopher.

There follows a series of strange encounters between S., the king and Herr Wittgenstein, mostly working around the question of when exactly a man is dead. This question proves to be, for S., of not only philosophical significance but also existential importance, since he has no idea if his father is dead or alive.

The second half of the chapter begins with the entrance of a woman who wears a black dress. Her entrance is prompted by a lecture of Wittgenstein's that opens with 'Suppose a story began with "She wore a black dress"'.¹ Here, on the *Dunera*, this woman is imagined to be the poet Gertrud Kolmar, for she was not only a cousin of Benjamin's but also sister to yet another deportee on board, Georg Chodziesner.

The woman, being in black as if for mourning, prompts further questions around death. And these questions soon shade into dialogue concerning angels – both the angels that are so conspicuous in Benjamin and those that can be found half-hidden in Wittgenstein.

The chapter culminates in the woman's gradual disappearance and thus in a move toward the question of loss, in particular the loss of a beloved. This question finally begs the further question of resurrection

via Wittgenstein's startling declaration that 'only *love* can believe the Resurrection'.²

* * *

Benjamin and Wittgenstein are rarely considered alongside each other; indeed, although Benjamin was aware of Wittgenstein and may have read him, Wittgenstein would seem never to have heard of Benjamin. Moreover, they are usually identified with two supposedly antagonistic philosophical traditions: Benjamin to a 'continental' tradition drawing on the resources of subjectivity, quasi-literary modes of writing and historical speculation; Wittgenstein to an 'analytical' tradition aspiring to objectivity, formal argumentation and problem-solving.

When, however, Benjamin and Wittgenstein *are* considered together, it is their common interest in language that is usually foregrounded, as in Alexander Stern's excellent study *The Fall of Language* (2019). This common linguistic interest plays an important part in what follows, as does a less obviously common interest in logic, or at least what Benjamin calls 'thinking of thinking of thinking'.³ While, though, Wittgenstein tends to deal systematically with the question of thinking, for Benjamin the question is often subverted as soon as it is raised, as in a fragment from 1920 entitled 'Language and Logic', which opens with 'Sheet of paper has gone missing. ... Must look for it at home'.⁴

In this 1920 instance Benjamin characteristically descends, in a blink of an eye, from formal reasoning to the bathos of all-too-human situation or scene. And this shift toward scene or drama can, on occasion, also be glimpsed in Wittgenstein. This is made conspicuous in what follows as, time and again, the action turns on those moments in Wittgenstein where his philosophical examples or scenarios – 'Suppose a story began with ...' etc – are sufficiently vivid as to exceed any merely argumentative function.

Indeed, in so doing these scenarios shade almost into parables. Here, then, they play a part in revealing how Wittgenstein's otherwise secular, even scientific, thought opens onto Hebraic patterns and figures.⁵

One such figure is that of the angel, which will finally take female form in the person of Gertrud Kolmar – she who is here seen as the solution to Benjamin's famously riddling talk of a 'female counterpart to the Angelus Novus'.⁶

Chapter Three

(Unless)

On board the *Dunera* was a man called Ludwig Wittgenstein, a furrier by profession, one who both made and sold fur-coats etc; it is not, therefore, the case that he was Ludwig Wittgenstein the famous philosopher.⁷ Nevertheless, both Wittgensteins, the sea-borne furrier and the Cambridge logician, measured in height exactly five feet six inches. Moreover, the latter, as an Austrian living in England, came close, once Austria was annexed by Germany in 1938, to becoming an enemy alien and thus subjected to both internment and deportation.⁸ Finally, he often taught while sitting in a deck-chair and once wrote that ‘nothing is easier than to think what is not the case’.⁹

* * *

I/VI Scene

The scene is of ... [a] detective, alone on the deck of a ship in the middle of the night, and with no sound except the ticking of the ship's clock.¹⁰

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)

* * *

Night. The clock on the deck tick-tocked. Night. And the man, a detective of sorts, sat alone on the upper deck. Night. The clock continued to tick-tock, but the detective of sorts, all alone upon the unenlightened deck, did not stir. Night. At last, there came a voice. Night. It was Mermaid's failing voice. *The real murderer*, she said, *is you*.¹¹

Still the detective of sorts did not move.

The real murderer, she repeated, *is you*.

Silence. The voice was now no more; it was gone, quite gone, and the dark deck grew yet darker until (thank God) some bugger struck a match, a Bryant-and-May Strike-Anywhere (thank God). And, in an instant, light gleamed and half of the man could, at last, be clearly seen.

The man, the detective of sorts, wore flannel trousers and stood amidst a circle of deck-chairs. This scene, though, was lost-to-view as soon as the light (of Bryant-and-May) gave up the phosphorescent ghost. The man now eyed the returning dark, his own dark, very own. *As if*, he murmured, *I could read the darkness*.¹² Night. The clock ticked wearily on even as the man *looked* wearily on. Night. It was time to teach, he murmured, time to teach the art of detection. Night. He cleared his throat and, turning to address the deck-chairs, began. *It seems*, he declared, *a fact of experience that, at the source of the visual field, there is mostly a small man with grey flannels*.¹³

The king and S., who had both been looking on, together approached the flannelled man. He was, indeed, mostly a small man not amounting to anything like six full imperial feet. The king and S. were, though, close enough to see that the fellow's flannels were, in truth, more black than grey. The diminutive man-in-the-said-flannels now looked up.

Wittgenstein? inquired the king.¹⁴

It could not be denied, said the man.

The philosopher? said the king.

No reply.

* Any italicised words attributed to Wittgenstein are from the philosophical writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The philosopher called Wittgenstein? said the king.

The man raised a single finger. It was a defiant gesture, perhaps obscene.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein more than once gave up philosophy to seek better employment as, variously, a kindergarten teacher, monastery gardener and hospital porter.¹⁵

* * *

The king, unperturbed, scrutinised the night sky, as if a celestial ragpicker. He was drawn by the stars, clearly drawn. And so too, it seemed, were both Herr Actor and Zeppie; for now the former elegantly entered stage-east, eyes cast toward the firmament, whilst the latter simply appeared and (straightway) keeled over backwards and landed hard upon the deck, face uppermost. From there he had (S. presumed) a perfected view of the heavens.

S. himself peered not into the empyrean but at the face of Herr Wittgenstein. Then peered again. At the face.

*The faces of famous men, said Wittgenstein, and the sound of their names are ...*¹⁶

Yes? said S.

Invariably *fused together*, said Wittgenstein.

What? said S.

*Sometimes, said Wittgenstein, we project the character into the name.*¹⁷

What? said S.

Here the Actor intervened. Herr Wittgenstein suggests (said the Actor) that, given his name, many (notwithstanding himself) are tempted to think him a philosopher. In short, although by trade a furrier, he is often deemed to be a logician.

Magician? said Zeppie.

Indeed, said the Actor. Or murderer.

What? said Zeppie.

Herr Wittgenstein might just be a murderer, said the Actor.

What? said Zeppie.

Well, *someone* must be, reasoned the Actor – Mermaid had said as much. Just now. He had overheard her, from the wings.

Wittgenstein said nothing, stayed stum.

The Actor thus resumed, observing that even if this here diminutive man were not on the *murdering* side of Murder he was at least on the

other side, the far side, being (it seemed) a detective of sorts, or sleuth, perhaps even hardboiled.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein the philosopher loved to read popular murder mysteries in magazines especially sent to him from the United States – his favourite was *Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine*.¹⁸

* * *

But was the man really a sleuth? A detective not just *of sorts* but also *in fact*? That is to say, did he *really* detect or investigate?

Wittgenstein again said nothing. He was, it seemed, more interested in eyeing a near-by Goon, right bastard, still damp with Dunkirk, damp in the head, a drooping doll-of-a-man propped up with a rusting rifle. Wittgenstein now beckoned to Zeppie. The acrobat drew close, uncomfortably so.

Suppose, whispered Wittgenstein. And stopped, as if that was it and there could never be more, except that there was. *Suppose*, he whispered, *that I see someone pointing a gun at someone*.¹⁹

Someone, said Zeppie, who sometimes thought himself to be Echo, of old.

Wittgenstein again eyed Corporal Damp and then resumed. *Suppose* too that *I expect* to hear a report –.

Report, said Zeppie.

And then, a moment later, but only a moment later –

Later, said Zeppie.

The shot is fired [!], fired Wittgenstein.

Zeppie (deafened) clapped his hands to his knees.

So, concluded Wittgenstein, now whispering once more, *did something of the shot already occur in my expectation?*

What? said Zeppie.

The Actor (as before) intervened, to clarify. **First** (he said): Gun is aimed. **Second**: One *expects* gun to go off. **Third (and last)**: Gun is fired. So, **Question**: Had the shot *already* (as it were) gone off? In one's head, as it were.

Zeppie considered, considered this poser and then (at last) announced that he had not the Faintest. Wittgenstein appeared delighted.

Not so, however, the Actor, seeing (he said) that the poser reminded him of a bad night upon the provincial stage; viz.: villain fires gun and then (too late, *just* too late) a sound-effect shot is heard. Indeed (he said),

Herr Wittgenstein's poser could almost be rendered thus: Does a gun go off before it goes off?

Silence.

I *said*, said the Actor, does a gun go off before it goes off?

But why should it? said S.

Because, said the Actor, one is *expecting* it – that is to say, one so *expects* the gun to go off that it *has* all-but gone off.

Off, said Zeppie.

In sum, continued the Actor, it is as if a man could find himself – *Dead*, but *not* quite *by the ordinary criteria*[?] said Wittgenstein.²⁰

Exactly, said the Actor.

Exactly, said Zeppie.

The king examined his umbrella (furled). Deep in apparent thought he was, doubtless considering a death that was not an ordinary death. At last, the king spoke. *Murder*, he said, *is suspected*.²¹

The Actor demurred: killing, perhaps; murder, no. There was a difference and one that he himself had once clung to back-in-the-day when busy a-killing in the famous mud at the famous Front. However, exactly *why* there was a difference he had clean forgotten. Could Herr Wittgenstein assist? Please.

Yes, yes, he could. Wittgenstein crossed himself and began. *Suppose*, he said, *in a room below, there is a man ... a man who has a mechanism ... with a crank*.²²

Crank, said Zeppie.

And you can see (with a mirror), continued Wittgenstein, that he can *make me kill*.

Kill, said Zeppie.

Ah yes! said the Actor. One could (he now recalled) be made to *kill* but not to murder. If one is *made* to kill it is not murder.

The Actor now smiled a smile of relief and smoothed his hair.

Wittgenstein, however, peered down, toward his shoes, or the deck, or even some infernal room below. He then (somewhat haltingly) proceeded toward the king, raised his right hand and, with index-finger outstretched, took aim, as if with a pistol, at the very head (temple) of the king. The now-doomed king began to stiffen, even as he prepared to speak, as well as to die.

There was once, began the king, *an automaton*.²³

Wittgenstein nodded, as if an automaton.

And, said the king, *a system of mirrors*.

The automaton nodded again.

And to *this apparatus*, concluded the king, *one can imagine a philosophical counterpart.*

One *can*? said S.

Not really, said the Actor.

Wittgenstein, with finger-pistol still held to the head of the king, now began to discourse once more upon how the mysterious man below, the mechanic with the crank, might somehow cause himself, Herr Wittgenstein, to kill. He then paused, reached for his head (his own), wherever it was, and asked: *Could a machine think?*²⁴

What? said Zeppie.

Could a machine *kill*? said S.

If ordered to, said the Actor.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein the philosopher (though not the furrier) had fought extensively in the First World War.²⁵

* * *

Wittgenstein now cocked his pistol and the king stared, for an instant, into the eyes of that uncanny young man, the late prince. The king then bowed his head and the late prince looked away. It was the end, thought the king. Death. The day, he thought, was not going well. Death. Not well at all. Death. But then, at that very moment, Wittgenstein declared that there would be no killing. Not of the king.

But why ever not? said Someone (newly arrived).

Because, said Wittgenstein, *we can't shoot him if he isn't there.*²⁶

At once, the king folded in two, a royal heap: umbrella, brief-case, spectacles, kingdom. Wittgenstein stepped over the heap and again reached for his head (his own), wherever it was now. Herr Wittgenstein (it was clear) was possessed of a riddling thought, a veritable brainteaser. He cleared his throat and began. Question: *If I see someone being killed, is what makes an impression simply what I see? Namely, a man being killed. Or, is what makes an impression on me ... only the hypothesis that here a man is being killed?*²⁷

Zeppie surveyed the nocturnal deck for a man being killed. He was, at last, rescued by the kindness of Herr Wittgenstein who observed (as before) that *We can't shoot him if he isn't there.*

Would hardly be sporting, said the Actor.

Wittgenstein (still whistling) now turned and again stepped over the royal heap, this time saying, *I am (however) able to think of a man that isn't present.*²⁸

But, said S., can one *converse* with such a man? Talk with him? Send him warmest greetings? Is it possible?

S., it seemed, had not quite followed. Wittgenstein would, therefore, try again.

I can, he began, **look** for a man when he is not there.²⁹

The ship pitched.

However, he continued, *I cannot hang him if he is not there.*

Wittgenstein yet again turned and o'er-stepped the king.

But where, said S., *is there?*

Or indeed *here?* said the Actor.

Here is here, said Wittgenstein, dragging from his jacket a stick of tailor's chalk (broken) and pointing it east, then west, then south, then north.³⁰

S. stared at the waves and began to think – in particular, to think that, in truth, to think was unlikely to save them. Nevertheless, S. too now o'er stepped the folded king and ventured a question.

What exactly happens to the man who cannot be hung because he is not here?

Hanging a man, said the Actor, is but an example.

Of what? asked S.

Murder, said Zeppie.

The Actor cuffed the idiot acrobat, declaring that hanging a man was but a *philosophical* example, a kind of figure. Or picture.

In that case, said S., he himself very much hoped for more such pictures. For although he did not give a toss for philosophy itself, he did enjoy Herr Wittgenstein's pictures, each one being like a bloody finger to the wind. So, how about another? Another finger, another picture, another example; only, this time, of what it might mean not simply to *see* something but rather (and instead) to see something *as* – as something *else*. Yes, he would very much like an example of such.

Wittgenstein descended to a deck-chair. Consider *F*, he said, the letter.³¹

F, thought Zeppie. F for furrer?

Wittgenstein now raised his chalk (broken) to the salty air and there he drew a huge, though ill-formed, F. He then looked upon it, admiringly. It is possible, he said, narrowing his eyes, that I might not so much see the F itself but rather see the *F as* ...

Yes? said S.

As a gallows, said Wittgenstein. A kind of gallows.

A gallows for whom? said S.

Himself, said Someone.

* * *

By 1918, three of Ludwig Wittgenstein's four brothers had committed suicide and he himself often considered doing likewise.³²

* * *

Wittgenstein, still deck-chaired, was by now (as often) surrounded as if by lost sea-gulls. To a gull (or man) the gulls (or men) were half-baked Varsity types. There were many aboard and all now eager to pursue (with Herr Wittgenstein) the Gallows Question. They had, it seemed, little interest in the fur-trade. Gallows were the thing.

The Actor here intervened, observing that gallows were usually reserved for the Condemned (comedians, say, at the Hackney Empire). Moreover, he said, Herr Wittgenstein was, in truth, no more condemned than the rest of them and thus would have no especial knowledge of the good-old gallows. The Actor did admit, however, that Herr Wittgenstein was (again, like all of them) clearly enduring a kind of trial. Trial by sea.

Trial? said a man, squeezing by. Did someone say trial?

And who might *he* be? said the Actor.

Kaffka, said Wittgenstein, sounding two fs (twin gallows, as it were).³³ *Kaffka*, he said again. *And*, by the way, *may not I prove* (he added) *too much of a skunk when I myself am tried*.³⁴

But who, sir, said the Actor, could possibly bring charges against a logician? A furrier, yes, but not a logician. Surely?

Wittgenstein seemed not so sanguine. Alas, *no new symbol in logic may be introduced*, he said, *with, so to speak, an entirely innocent face*.³⁵

The Actor remarked that he thought Herr Wittgenstein's face to be entirely innocent. Upon the whole.

Wittgenstein demurred. *God*, he said, *could, at any time, force me to confess my crimes*.³⁶

Really? said the Actor. God, on occasion, surprised him. As for instance when He (God) had started the War; although He (God) may, by now, have finished it, grown bored. But how would one know? Out here.

Wittgenstein now rose to his feet (estimated shoe size: 7). He was eager, it seemed, to set about confessing some crimes. Bellowing *I destroy*, he then began, as if now a seaside-attendant at eventide, to fold away the deck-chairs. In *my work*, he said, *I destroy, I destroy, I destroy*.³⁷

He suddenly stopped (mid-deck-chair) dumb-as-if-dumb-struck by some unheard and unbidden music in his head. He then began to whistle.

Ah, Wagner? said Someone.

No, said Wittgenstein, *the end of a theme which I cannot place*.³⁸

Or, said the Actor, what we in the Chorus Line might call –

Dark music, said the king. *The dark music of the surf*.³⁹ The king, now enthroned upon a Rare Surviving Deck-Chair, gawped at the swelling deeps.

The theme, said Wittgenstein, this musical *theme*, only occurred to me today.

Thank God, said the Actor.

S. (or rather the prince) was now moved to speak. *Sometimes*, he said, *the dear Lord gives you something in your head*.⁴⁰

Not mine, said Zeppie. And began to smile.

Wittgenstein (meantime) resumed his deck-chair labours, folding away, away, away. *Destroy, destroy, destroy*, he intoned.

Bastard, murmured S. Screw the –

Destructive character? suggested the deck-chaired king, now beginning to fear for his throne.⁴¹

Yes, screw him, said S. Screw the logician.

* * *

Stefan is complaining about *gens academica*.

(Walter Benjamin)⁴²

* * *

Wittgenstein halted, defeated, by deck-chairs. He looked about and groaned. He had, it seemed, a second confession to make, for he promptly flopped to his knees in the direction of an astonished king, now priest as well as sovereign, in sum, a Mr Melchizedek, to whom Wittgenstein swiftly explained that there had been, alas, a recent occasion on which he had told an Untruth. Melchizedek, eager to take minutes, produced an antique pencil and a Paris metro-ticket. Wittgenstein now further explained that the Untruth had been told in Michaelmas Term, a year or so ago, at Miss Pate's, bowels of. Melchizedek looked blank. The *Typing Office*, added Wittgenstein, the *University Typing Office* – Miss Pate's, very bowels. Still blank. 34 Trumpington Road. Blank. Cambridge. Blank.

* * *

October 1938

Dear Mrs Stewart,

I must apologise for an untruth I told you today in Miss Pate's Office. ... Please forgive my stupidity.
Yours sincerely,
L. Wittgenstein.⁴³

* * *

Forgive, said Wittgenstein. *Please forgive*.

Forgive what, exactly? inquired the Actor.

Stupidity, said Wittgenstein.

What? said Zeppie, rising to his feet.

Stupidity, said the Actor, cuffing (as before) the fool. Stupidity, he said, was always to be regretted. Even in Cambridge.

The Actor now turned to Herr Wittgenstein. The logician or furrier (or, indeed, detective-of-sorts) was still supplicant, still upon his knees. Surprised, the Actor wished to know why, stupidity aside, Herr Wittgenstein was so troubled? So troubled, indeed, by mere falsehood, mere lying. Had he not heard of Acting? Or, indeed, of his (the Actor's) booking-agent? If still alive.

The Actor paused, as if to recall the smell of the grease-paint and roar of the crowd. (Nuremberg).

He then resumed, asking if what so troubled Herr Wittgenstein was the *where* of his Falsehood? That is to say, the Typing Office. Cambridge. Trumpington Road.

Trump, thought Zeppie, trumpety-trump, and an ancient circus-elephant wandered (lost) in his head.

After all, continued the Actor, an office, indeed a Typing Office, was not, perhaps, the place to tell an untruth. He knew all too well, he said, what typists were like. He then asked if S. also knew all too well what typists were like.

Yes, said S., he did.

* * *

Upon arrival in London in 1938, Stefan undertook a Pitman's course in touch-typing.⁴⁴

* * *

In that case, said the Actor, S. would understand that if a page of type included just one errant litter all typing hell was loosed.

The king nodded. *Of the absence of a single letter*, he said, *imagination itself dies*.⁴⁵

At once, the king (pencil in hand) set down these words of his in a tiny, monkish script; each minuscule letter was both present and correct, not one missing in action.

S. (finally stirred) now fell to wondering what might happen should there be not one letter *less* than was needed but rather one *more*, such as the bastard *i* that somehow appeared every time he signed his name. *Benjamini. Benjamini.* How odd was that impish *i*. Like a child it was, a child who arrives uninvited, unwanted. And might imagination *die* of such a surplus letter? A letter that should not be there at all?

The ship listed.

No, thought S., just one letter out of place could surely not mean the death of anything, let alone (alas) the death of one's cursed imagination, which was (alas) no doubt the last bloody thing to die, the last (alas) of one's faculties to go, at one's End – one's drowning, say. Yes, as one floundered in the waves one's reasoning might go, one's volition might go, one's perception might go, but one might still (alas) be able to imagine – imagine, say, that one is breathing.

The sea rose, S. breathed, then breathed again and returned to the thought of a single errant letter and how, though unable to rid him of his cursed imagination, it might just effect an hilarious postal cock-up.

S. turned to the king. Did his highness (S. wondered) have any especial anxieties relating to the Mail? The *Royal Mail*, as it were. Think bloody hard, your highness, there's a war on.

The king did not reply.

S. tried again. He would re-phrase the question. Was there, he said, anything especial that he, S., should bear in mind if he, by any chance, were ever moved to write to his highness?

The king looked about, then spoke. *Please*, he said, *please abbreviate my first name.*⁴⁶

Walter? said the Actor. Walter as in Walter-Walter everywhere but not a drop to –

Yes, said the king. Walter, *my first name*, be sure to *abbreviate* it. *Abbreviate it so that any letter you send does not end up in the W box.* He lived in terror, he explained, of having his first name mistaken for his surname. The consequences did not bear thinking of. So, please, not Walter but W.

* * *

In September 1940, when Walter Benjamin would be found dead in the Spanish fishing-village called Port Bou, the local authorities, upon looking through his papers, would somehow conclude that

the unknown German was one 'Benjamin Walter'. He would, therefore, be mistakenly buried as a Christian.⁴⁷

* * *

S. considered, considered the king's request, and concluded that his highness was, for once, in luck. You see, he said, I myself, as a professor of typewriting, love a good old-fashioned Initialisation, viewing it as an exquisite saving of labour and, indeed, of scarce or rationed ink, not to mention of taps, strikes, or wallops at recalcitrant keys. It is, admittedly, unlikely that I shall be writing to his majesty from the middle of the Atlantic; however, I shall certainly bear the Initialisation Stratagem in mind and hope others might do likewise. It would be most unfortunate to have a letter to the king end up with someone whose surname just happened to begin with W. Every morning in every mail-room in the world there are, no doubt, many grinning undesirables (Mr Walkers, say, or M. Wattiers, or Herr Wagners etc) all busy fingering the contents of the W box.

S. looked across to Herr Wittgenstein. Is that not so? enquired S.

Wittgenstein did not answer, or at last not directly. Instead, he asked if a man could *intend to write to one person* and *in fact write to another*?⁴⁸

Certainly, said S. For instance, he himself might intend to write to the king and yet just one careless postman could mean that he was in fact writing to Herr Wittgenstein.

The latter, now seated beside the king (albeit uneasily, since this particular deck-chair was sadly cracked), here expressed disquiet. He did not like, he said, the thought of ever receiving a letter from such as S., whether intended or not. He was, he said, somewhat wary of typists.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein spent much time with typists when dictating his work. These typists were usually without any philosophical training and thus, on occasion, made mistakes; for example, the word 'tautology' was once rendered as 'tontology'.⁴⁹

* * *

The trouble with typists, continued Wittgenstein, is that on occasion they unearth words of which one has never previously heard – like, let us say, tontology. Yes, tontology. What the fuck does it mean? Yes, what exactly does it mean?

How about (said the Actor): Farewell *Tautology*, Hello *Ontology*?
In sum, Bugger-off stiff-legged Logic and let us all now Fall-and-Die
once more to the plangent strains of Metaphysics.

Zeppie began to Fall and Die.

Wittgenstein, however, just stared, astonished if not appalled,
being (he thought) a logician and *not*, thank God, a metaphysician – a
furrer perhaps, but not a bloody metaphysician.

Wittgenstein paused and then, of a sudden, announced that,
notwithstanding his general wariness of typists, he wished for a typist
now, right now, out here, at sea. Yes, *I have hope*, he said, *to get a typist
soon*.⁵⁰ He wished to dictate.

He now looked in vain for S. who had, it seemed, vanished into
a forest or wood of motley oceanic familiars: waiters, lawyers, butlers,
exegetes, dentists, butchers etc.

I have hope to get a typist, said Wittgenstein.

The motley wood was unmoved.

I have hope to get a typist, he said again.

The motley wood swayed a little in the face of a westerly. Even so,
a muffled, half-guilty voice could now be heard from within the wood.

I ... have a secretary, said the muffled voice.⁵¹

What? said Zeppie, still declining.

I ... have a secretary. It was the king (muffled).

Where? said Zeppie, who could decline no more.

At my disposal, said the king.

And of a sudden (quite hurled from the wood) S. once more
appeared. Disposable.

The Actor promptly lit a cigarette (imagined) and proposed that
Herr Wittgenstein now get on with his dictating.

Like Hitler, said Zeppie.

Seig Heil, said Someone (bastard).

S., the king's disposable secretary, now made bold to intervene.
He said he would like nothing better than to set down the thoughts of
Herr Wittgenstein, but alas and alack he had no bloody typewriter. Yes,
there was one on board but, like a woman with child, it was (sadly) in
confinement. Within the Orderly Room. In short, he was stuffed.

In that case, said the Actor, S. could perhaps transcribe *per manus*.

(Latin, thought Zeppie. Like the Holy Father.)

But, said S., cannot Herr Wittgenstein write for himself?

One cannot, said Wittgenstein, *view ... one's own handwriting*.⁵²

S. asked, therefore, what it was that Herr Wittgenstein wished him
to write.

The Actor again intervened, declaring that what Herr Wittgenstein would most like S. to write was that –

One's hand writes, said Wittgenstein.⁵³

Pardon? said S.

One's hand writes, said Wittgenstein.

S. was a little confused and thus sought clarification. You mean, he said, that one's hand *thinks*?

When writing, *yes*, said the Actor. *That*, I believe, is precisely Herr Wittgenstein's meaning – viz. that when one is writing it is one's hand that thinks. Is that not so, Herr Wittgenstein?

Certainly, said Wittgenstein. *Thinking is indeed performed by the hand*.⁵⁴

S. stared at his own hand, his writing-hand, the left, hand-sinister.

* * *

The name 'Benjamin' comes from the Hebrew *Binyamin*, meaning 'son of the right hand'; however, while Walter appears to have been right-handed, Stefan wrote with his left-hand.⁵⁵

* * *

Idiot thing, S. thought – this hand, *left hand*, damned idiot thing; it could barely write, so how on earth could the damned thing be expected to think? And, if it *could* think, *what* did it think? What *madness* did it think? What mad *left-handed* things did it think? What *sinister* things? S. looked down and prepared, at once, to write. It would be a letter, a letter for Mr W. Benjamini, W. Benjamini the great –

Juggler? said the king.⁵⁶

No, said S.

Clown? said the king.

No, said S.

Charlatan? said the king.

S. said nothing and, after saying nothing, composed the letter. He then showed the letter to Zeppie who examined it, or rather attempted to do so, face contorted, eyes crossed.

Handwriting, said the king, as if to explain.

Where? said Zeppie.

Handwriting, said the king (pointing to the letter), is sometimes *construe[d] ... as a set of hieroglyphs*.⁵⁷

What? said Zeppie.

Hieroglyphs.

* * *

As an adolescent, Stefan's handwriting had been so illegible as to be considered pathological. Indeed, in 1937, Walter and Dora had it examined in Paris by a graphologist also trained in psychoanalysis.⁵⁸

* * *

II/VI Story

Suppose a story began with 'She wore a black dress'.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)⁵⁹

* * *

She wore a black dress, the woman, the wide-eyed woman, now seen (suddenly seen) at dawn, at sea. She was hatless and stood in purple shoes, half-kissed by the half-risen sun. Glancing toward S., she cocked her head ever so slightly, as if she almost recognised him.

S. turned to the king (adjacent) and spoke, *sotte voce*, concerning the woman.

Why, said S., does she wear such a dress? And why those purple shoes? Why out here? There was, on board, no dancing to be done; indeed, there was no ballroom, unless, that is, the Demons in the aft had a secret place in which to jig their Nazi jigs. *Or*, said S., did the black of the woman's dress suggest that, notwithstanding the purple of her shoes, she was attired as for the grave? In sum, was she coffin-ready, a soon-to-be –

Murdered woman? said the king.⁶⁰

Yes, said S.

* * *

On board the *Dunera*, unknown to Stefan, was one Georg Chodziesner, a cousin of Walter Benjamin and brother to the poet Gertrud Kolmar. Georg had escaped Germany just before the War, but Gertrud had not.⁶¹

* * *



Figure 3.1 Gertrud Kolmar. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute

* * *

S., and the king, approached the woman, now seated. Although Wittgenstein himself was gone, his deck-chairs had fallen into perfect line, with the woman occupying the sixth in the line. She looked up, turning her head to stare at the king, also now seated. With the sun still low behind him, he was the most perfect silhouette.

Walter, she said, in casual greeting.*⁶²

Cousin *Trudi*, he said, no less indifferently.⁶³

No more was said, not another word passed or hobbled between them, king and coz, coz and king. His highness simply straightened his tie, attended to his briefcase and fell silent. The woman, however, continued to speak.

My eyes ..., she said.⁶⁴

Quite, said the Actor, newly arrived with sideman Zeppie. Both sat down.

My eyes stare, continued the woman. *My eyes stare*.

At what? said the Actor.

Yes, what? said Zeppie. What? What?

She did not reply. Instead, she brushed at the skirt of her dress. *I sit*, she said, *I sit in a boat*.⁶⁵

Ship, thought Zeppie.

But, she continued, *if my love wants it so, I will capsize and sink*.

And who, coz, is your love? enquired the Actor.

The woman did not reply.

I said, who, coz, is your beloved?

Still she would not answer.

Is he, perhaps, one of *us*? said the Actor. One of The Great Adrift?

The woman leant across, and whispered. She was sorry to disappoint, but *these here* (she gestured toward The Adrift) *are mere names ... mere names in the books of the scribes*.⁶⁶

But could she not fall in love with a *name*? A magnificent name, such as –

Zeppie, said Zeppie.

The Actor cuffed the clown. How about, he said, a proper name, a proper theatrical name such as –

Wittgenstein, said the king.

For instance, said the Actor. Or, say, –

Wittgenstein, said the king. Again.

* Any italicised words attributed to the figure of 'the woman' are from the writings of Gertrud Kolmar.

The Actor now felt breath (un-theatrical breath) upon his nape and turned about. There stood Herr Wittgenstein himself.

Animals, said Wittgenstein, *come when their names are called*.⁶⁷ As if he were himself a summoned beast, he scanned the deck, then lowered his head and declared, *As in the films, I'll find a beautiful girl ... a beautiful girl whom I meet on board*.⁶⁸

But she's gone, said the Actor.

What? said Zeppie.

The sixth deck-chair, said the king, *it's empty*.⁶⁹ And all now turned about to regard a girl that was no longer there. The *woman*, said the king, *had fallen overboard*.

Or leapt, said the Actor. One would understand.

However, said the king, *someone else had leaped over the rail, and – Yes?*

Surfaced with the woman ... port-side.

Hallelujah, said Zeppie.

But, said the Actor, is port-side to the Left or the Right?

One of the two, said Zeppie, who then suggested that to resolve the question they (The Adrift) might toss a coin, if they had one, which they did not, which being the case they had no option but to guess, to leap unto the dark, as it were.

This they did (all except king and prince), quickly departing to the Left which would (by happy chance) turn out to be the desired port-side.

As for king and prince, they followed, albeit with wandering steps and slow, as if Weimar father and child, hand in hand, their uneven shadows falling headlong across the forenoon deck.

Meanwhile, port-side, the woman (now resurfaced) stood drenched. Her dress was a watery ruin and she appeared to shiver. Nevertheless, she was eager, it seemed, to explain herself to The Adrift, all lately-arrived.

Jonah (she said) *went overboard*, so why not she?⁷⁰

The woman now looked down, at herself, her very self. *As if alive*, she observed.⁷¹ And looked again. Or *maybe*, she said, *I died*.⁷²

What? said Zeppie.

Death, said the Actor, although to be honest he did not (he said) quite know what to do with the word. What, for instance, to connect it with.

Wittgenstein raised a spare arm toward the zenith. He wished to help. *I connect with the word 'death'*, he said, *a certain picture – a woman lying in her bed*.⁷³

Pardon? said the Actor.

A woman lying ... in her bed.

Her bed?

Yes, *her bed*.

Wittgenstein's arm now fell (like night) and the woman spoke. *You men*, she said, *you undress me in your mind.*⁷⁴

The men (to a man) looked to the big morning sky, as if for help.

But, she continued, *I do not hinder you*. She turned toward the Actor. *When you picture naked women, do you think of me?*⁷⁵

Why, yes – he thought of her as a naked woman who was fully-clothed.

In what? said Zeppie.

Rubber underwear filled with alcohol, said the king.⁷⁶

Pardon? said the Actor.

The dirty joke triumphs, said the king.⁷⁷

Over what? asked the Actor.

Me, said Someone (and cursed).

All now fell silent. Silent. Until no longer silent.

Why?

Why what?

Why were we silent?

Because ...

Yes?

Because –

A picture, said Wittgenstein (interrupting), *held us captive.*⁷⁸

Just the one? said Zeppie.

No – several, said the Actor. Several pictures, several –

Photos, said the king. *Nude photos.*⁷⁹

The woman now drew out, from within a fold of her dress, the photograph of a beauty who, as if Eve in the Garden, wore no dress, not even of a ruined kind. This photograph she gave to Someone, a dull half-hidden fellow, who lurked and watched, as if at a door ajar. She then turned to S. and, glancing first at the half-hidden man and next at the photographed Eve, she whispered, *He will ... behold her breasts. And kill her.*⁸⁰

* * *

In March 1943, at Auschwitz, Gertrud Kolmar would be ordered to undress and then to enter a gas chamber. There she would perish.⁸¹

* * *

III/VI Picture

It is as if I carried a picture with me.⁸²

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)

* * *

Someone eyed the revelling ocean (wave cavorting with wave) and grinned. The sea he imagined to be pure slap-and-tickle, a sea-Blue Movie, a nautical Smutty, a Smoker. He could not take his eyes off the thing, not for a moment.

And now he (Someone) spoke. In this age of moving images, he said, what is the point of a photograph? Or a picture? A mere still, no lovely cavorting.

Ah, said the king, but *everyone has a picture for which he would give the world.*⁸³

Or, said S., that is one's world.

What? said Zeppie.

Ask Herr Wittgenstein, said S.

*A picture, said Wittgenstein, lay in our language ... and we could not get outside it.*⁸⁴

What picture? said the Actor.

A picture we could not get outside of.

What? said Zeppie.

The king now reached into his briefcase and drew forth a picture. Small it was, almost a miniature (twelve-and-a-half by nine-and-a-half). He then kissed the picture, strange though it was.

* * *

Right until the end of his life, Walter Benjamin cherished one picture above all others, Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920), a water-colour that he had bought, in 1921. It depicts, in almost child-like manner, an angel with gaping mouth and vacant stare.⁸⁵



Figure 3.2 Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920 © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, photo by Elie Posner

* * *

The king now handed the picture to S., indicating that he was to admire the thing and then to pass it on, like the plague. In due course the picture arrived at Wittgenstein, who promptly stared down at it.

*How hard it is, he said, to see what is right in front of my eyes.*⁸⁶ He now held the picture at arm's length and squinted. He then cursed, adding that *when one does have the picture in view (he said) it is ... dead.*⁸⁷

And silent? said the Actor.

Pardon?

Is the picture not only dead but silent?

The picture was by now with Zeppie who held it to his ear – deaf ear, perhaps. (Damaged? In a good beating? Perhaps). Zeppie made as if the picture were a shell and as if he were listening for the sea.

No, he said at last, the picture was not silent.

What, then, does it say? said the Actor. The picture or figure therein – what does it say?

Zeppie said nothing.

Speak, clown, what does it say?

Imagine, said Wittgenstein, *that I have something halfway human in me.*⁸⁸

The picture, having completed its circumnavigation, was once more with the king, who now raised a grave hand. He desired, it seemed, once more to speak and, indeed, to repeat himself. *Everyone*, he began, *has a picture for which –*

But why? said S. Why the picture of *an angel*? An angel that gapes? If the king required an angel to stand around gaping then why not the prince, the infant prince?

The king said nothing.

Was not the prince, continued S., secretly called Rafael? Rafael-the-angel? And was not the prince also inclined to gape? Behold (had said the prince), *my mouth keeps springing open.*⁸⁹

The king said nothing.

Ah yes, added S., the prince had often been a drooling clot-pole. It had been a talent, a gift of his.

And *his*, said the Actor, pointing downwind to Herr Wittgenstein.

* * *

Once, Wittgenstein showed me a passport photograph he had taken; in this photograph Wittgenstein looked derelict, imbecile, and criminal [with] ... his gaping mouth, ... vacant facial expression, [and] his blank staring eyes.⁹⁰

(Yorick Smithies)



Figure 3.3 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Cambridge, 1929. Public Domain

* * *

The heavens (all grey today) now tilted. And S., prey (as usual) to gravity, fell toward Herr Wittgenstein (the face of). S. promptly examined both eyes and the mouth. Was Herr Wittgenstein, perchance, a fellow clot-pole? Another staring prince? Another gaping Rafael? Perhaps. S. would certainly ask him, ask him if he (Herr Wittgenstein) was also inclined to gape? Or gawp. Like some backward village-angel.

Herr Wittgenstein considered, thought, recalled. Then, at last, he spoke. Once, he said, once *I stared fixedly ... my eyes ... wide open ... vacant, like ... someone admiring the illumination of the sky.*⁹¹

And *now*? Now too? said S. If the firmament were, right-now, to be suddenly illumined might Herr Wittgenstein again behold the world with angelic vacancy?

Unlikely, said the Actor (intervening). Herr Wittgenstein was, he felt, not quite an angel.

But, said S., does Herr Wittgenstein not perhaps have the air, gait even, of an angel? Or, at least, of an androgyne, one without sex, neither male nor female. It was a thought.

Wittgenstein himself considered this proposition, even as the king seized the hour to walk the deck. Not easy, dammit, what with all his queer regalia – briefcase, books, orb, umbrella, orb, spectacles, orb, papers, etc.

Wittgenstein was now ready to speak. *That I am a man and not a woman*, he said, *can be verified.*⁹²

Excellent, said the Actor. A quick dropping-of-trousers should, then, do the trick.

But, said S., that Herr Wittgenstein is a man and not an *angel*, could *that* be verified? Attested to? Does he have the documentation?

Wittgenstein checked the pockets of his jacket. Nothing, he said. He had nothing to prove he was not an angel. Nothing.

Quite, said S. Do you not, therefore, sometimes doubt that you have a body?

Wittgenstein looked down at his flannel trousers. Nice hang, he thought.

I said, said S. (again), do you sometimes doubt that you have a body?

Wittgenstein again looked down at his flannel trousers. Nice cut, he thought.

I said, said S. (yet again), do you sometimes doubt that you have a body?

It may, began Wittgenstein (at last), *it may be a nuisance that in this world we have bodies.*⁹³ The king tripped.

But *if someone*, Wittgenstein continued, *doubted whether he had a body, I should take him to be* –⁹⁴

An angel? said S.

Half-wit, said Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein now glanced at the half-witted sea, then fell to wondering whether, insofar as he (Herr Wittgenstein) was a logician

(as opposed to, say, a furrier), he might therefore also be an angel. In short, was he, like Aquinas, some *doctor angelicus*? Unlikely, but it must be considered, discussed. Wittgenstein cleared his throat and began. It was true, he said, that real *thought ... flies above the world*; that could not be denied.⁹⁵ It was also true, he said, that real *thought is surrounded by a halo*; that too could not be denied.⁹⁶ Here he paused. In sum, he declared, perhaps (after all) he *was*, in fact, an angel.

* * *

In 1929, Wittgenstein was elected a full member of the elite conversation group, the Cambridge Apostles – he thereby became what the Apostles called ‘an angel’.⁹⁷

* * *

Wittgenstein now added (however) that he had not himself ever seen an angel – or at least not one that had stared and gaped and been badly drawn, such as the king’s angel. No, he had certainly never seen the king’s gawping angel. Unless he had simply forgotten, dismissed the memory, sent the angel to Coventry as it were – if, that is, Coventry was still standing, had not yet been bombed to bits, to rubble, to ash. He tapped at his forehead and cursed himself. *I destroy*, he said.

Pardon? said the king, looking up.

I destroy, said Wittgenstein. *I destroy*.

The king considered and then, at last, he spoke. *To understand ... destruction*, he said, *one must have ... seen Klee’s New Angel*.⁹⁸

Must? said Wittgenstein.

Must, said the king.

* * *

It is not known if Ludwig Wittgenstein had ever seen Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, but he may have come across one who certainly knew it well – namely, the polymath Stephan Lackner. In 1938, Lackner discussed with Walter Benjamin the possibility of selling the *Angelus Novus*; and in 1934, Lackner had published a book on Wittgenstein.⁹⁹

* * *

The king, now abandoning his regalia (queer), addressed the ship’s company, his very own queer kingdom. *I have here met*, he said, *a female counterpart of the Angelus Novus*.¹⁰⁰ He blinked.

S. turned to the woman. You? he enquired.

The woman paused, then spoke. *My eyes do stare*, she began, *and I don't have any hands ... they are wings*; nevertheless, she was not, in fact, an angel.¹⁰¹ For she knew, she said, an angel whenever she saw one.

The woman looked down, first at her absent hands and then at S. and his very present hands, fine hands, unmarried hands. Yes, she knew an angel whenever she saw one. Or kissed one.

And did she see one now? said S.

Yes. Yes, she did, albeit an angel whose *countenance is sorrow*.¹⁰²

The woman now gently closed with S. and, with lightest touch, took his arm, his wing. She should like to Walk Out with him, to stroll, promenade, *hand in hand*, through (say) the Tiergarten, where Berlin's pale winter sun, despite the day's coming curfew, might yet smile upon them, if only for the while.¹⁰³ Yes, she and he, her very own angel, should surely together enjoy the park, its bridges, its lawns, its paths, its statuary, and do so all Sabbath afternoon. And, although such as they, Jew and Jewess, must look no-one in the eye, nor take rest upon a public bench, they could at least walk and walk and walk.

S. stood erect, being (for a moment) enchanted, quite possessed by the thought of being seen with such a woman, such a fine Berliner.

She, though, then whispered, *I won't let you go, lest you bless me*.¹⁰⁴
Pardon?

I won't let you go, lest you bless me, she said. It was, she said, what Jacob had said.

Jacob? said S.

To the angel, she said.¹⁰⁵

S. looked down, and away.

I won't let you go, lest you bless me, she said yet again. The weight of her touch had increased, though barely. *Bless me*, she said.

S. made to gently lift her arm from his.

Bless me, bless me, she said again, her face now a little lost.

No, no, he could *not* bless her, whoever she –

Bless me.

No. He could bless neither her nor anyone since, in common with her, he was, in all truth, no angel. Far from it.

But are you not, she asked, a *youth with gleaming and quivering wide-spread wings*?¹⁰⁶ *Wings that beat high over me?*

No, no he was not. The woman was mistaken. Quite mistaken. S. lifted her all-but-weightless arm and began to slip away. He was sorry, so sorry.

* * *

In 1941, Gertrud Kolmar would fall in love with a man, a fellow Jew around 20 years younger than herself. He, though, would end the brief romance.¹⁰⁷

* * *

S. headed north north-west or thereabouts and thereby ploughed (headlong) into the king, who was careering (headlong) south south-east or thereabouts.

Ah, *Mr Clumsy*, said the king, still clutching his picture of the cretinous angel with the hopeless wings.

Or, thought S., were they hands? Yes, *hands*, they were surely hands, raised hands. But, why raised? Yes (he asked), why? Why might anyone (angel or not) raise both hands?

Silence. No answer.

Flight? said S.

Too late, said Someone.

Prayer? said S.

Too late, said Someone.

Surrender? said S.

Never, said Someone and Wittgenstein stiffened.

* * *

On 27 October 1918, Ludwig Wittgenstein's brother Kurt, who was fighting on the Italian front, shot himself in the head – he did so, it was believed, because he refused to surrender.¹⁰⁸

* * *

The king (and his badly-drawn angel) shuffled-off eastward until such time as the king found himself all but bent over the very side of the ship. He peered down at the abyss, its chaos (its ruins), and waved.

Meantime, hands in pockets, S. travelled port-ward. There the Actor stood erect and magnificent, his immaculate posture a kind of miracle. As for Zeppie, he lingered nearby, half-buckled at the knees. Wittgenstein, though, was seated-and-alone amidst unpeopled deck-chairs which had (somehow) once more formed a circle as if about to confer chair-to-chair and thus in confidence, as it were, the-confidence-of-chairs, such as it was now.

S., still plagued with the question of the raising of hands, here sought assistance. Why, he said, should one raise one's hands? S. promptly sat down.

The chairs had, alas, little to say. The Actor, though, took this as his cue to discourse upon how, in recent years, at the Volksbühne, at curtain-call, a sullen brown-shirted Few, half-hidden among the audience, would *not* raise their hands, least not both their hands, not to applaud.

But *suppose*, said Wittgenstein, *suppose a man could not remember whether he had always had two hands* –¹⁰⁹

And thus thinks he may now have just one? said the Actor. Just one?

Or, said Zeppi, perhaps he thinks he has *none*.

But who among us, said the Actor, doesn't have any hands?

I don't, interjected the woman, who had returned, alone. *I don't have any hands.*¹¹⁰

Pardon?

I don't have any hands.

Ah, said the Actor, but at least, dear coz, you have legs (both). And, speaking for myself, I find that one is frequently in need of legs (both). For instance –

If one had to expound the teachings of antiquity ... while standing on one leg ..., began the king, approaching upon two.¹¹¹

It would be rather awkward, would it not? said the Actor.

Zeppie now stood upon a single well-practised leg.

Wittgenstein looked up. When *philosophising*, he said, *it is important for me not to stand too long on one leg.*¹¹²

Indeed, said Zeppie, beginning to topple.

As he did so he waved at the woman, but she had clearly grown impatient. Of legs, she had had enough. Her concern (she said) was hands – she had none.

Or so you say, said Zeppie, falling to earth (or deck) and hoping, even as he fell, that Herr Wittgenstein had a view upon the question of hands.

He *did*, thank God, and at once began to express that view, declaring, *If I don't know whether someone has two hands, say perhaps they have been amputated* –¹¹³

Pardon?

Amputated.

What, *both*? Both *hands*?

Indeed.

Like who?

Lavinia.

Who?

Poor butchered Lavinia.

Who?

Lavinia. Shakespeare's Lavinia. Remember? In a play of his. She had no hands.¹¹⁴

What?

She was ravished.

Without hands?

On the contrary – her ravisher (sadly) *did* have hands, both kinds, left and right; although which of the two was the more cruel we do not know. Lavinia, in contrast, did *not* have hands. Or at least not after she had been ravished; by which point, her ravisher had removed her hands and so too her tongue, lest she might tell.

She had no pen? No pencil even?

No *hands*.

Typewriter?

No *hands*, I said. No *hands* and, therefore, no *fingers*, no fingers to tap at the cold, iron keys.

Someone, the Dull Fellow, here glanced at the woman. She may say, he said, that she has no hands, not now, but at least she has wings, or so she says; and wings surely make up for want of hands.

Someone now grinned (as once before), then added that the woman should be thankful for wings, since not everyone who is lacking in hands is so recompensed, least not hereabouts – Cook's cursèd boy, for instance.

* * *

There is a boy with only one arm who helps in the cook's galley who never says anything. I asked him, Where do you come from? Vienna, he said. I was in prison there, he said. What did you do? [I said]. Well, you see, [he said] I am a Jew and ... he did not finish.¹¹⁵

(Anon, HMT *Dunera*)

* * *

The cursèd boy himself now approached, stumbling over a host of peculiar bodies (fully-grown, two-armed). Silent was the boy and (no doubt) in flight from Cook who was (no doubt) a desperate Englishman – the only kind (no doubt) since Fall of France and the Great Marching Backwards, backwards unto the White Cliffs of Dover etc.

Wittgenstein observed the boy. *If someone's arm is cut off*, he said, *it will not grow again.*¹¹⁶

Are you sure? said the Actor. Was not *everything* possible at sea? Was not an ocean the very shop for miracles?

The Actor now examined the boy, searching him for a miracle – first the hand which (along with relevant arm) was *not* there and then the hand (along with relevant arm) which *was*. There seemed no hope for Hand One (absent) and even Hand Two (present) bore scars, stigmata of a kind – for harsh (no doubt) was life in a Viennese clink, not to mention the ship’s galley. The Actor prodded the scarred, five-fingered thing.

That, remarked Wittgenstein, *is a human hand*.¹¹⁷

So it seemed.

But *can it*, said Wittgenstein, *be something else after half-an-hour?*

Why not? said the Actor. At sea an half-of-an-hour (he had found) was not unlike an eternity, much like –

Heaven, said Zeppie, pointing to the floor. Yes, once, in Heaven, there had been (he had heard) half-an-hour of nothing but Nothing – no singing, no clowning, no hullabalooing, Nothing, Nothing forever, or so it seemed, on and on.

* * *

And when He [the Lamb] had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half-an-hour.

(Revelation 8.1)

* * *

Silence, there now followed silence, on ship as it was in heaven, not quite half-of-an hour, but long enough for the Actor to get around to remarking that he thought it unlikely that they had clocks in heaven or, indeed, any interest in the art of measuring or counting, although there were (come to think of it) the seals, the seven seals.

Zeppie now clapped his hands as if a circus seal.

But why seven? said the Actor. Why seven seals and only *then*, right then, the silence?

Wittgenstein made as if about to answer.

The Actor, however, continued. Yes, why silence at the *Seventh*?

Wittgenstein again made as if about to answer.

But once again the Actor continued. Why, I ask, the silence at the *Seventh*?

Magic number, said the seal.

Who says?

Magic Jews, said the king.¹¹⁸

Wittgenstein said nothing.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was of Jewish descent, divided his famous *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) into seven propositions, the seventh and last of which is, famously, ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be *silent*’.¹¹⁹ Here, then, as in Revelation, the greatness of silence is equated with the greatness of the Jewish number seven.

* * *

Cook’s wordless boy now raised a single hand. It was as if to say, To hell with heaven etc, what about my fucking hand? Yes, what about this lonely hand, so lonely as to be given (at times) to lonely acts, though not in the galley – not there, not in the galley. He lowered his lonely hand.

S. rose and, like the Actor before, examined said hand. Could it really, he asked, become something else?

Why, yes, said the Actor, since in order that one’s hand might become something else –

*One simply has to have a lucky hand, said the king.*¹²⁰

Yes, but *is* it a lucky hand? said S. (concerned). I mean, compared to the boy’s other hand, *this* hand is indeed lucky – lucky to be at the end of an arm that is still attached to the rest of the boy. Is it, however, sufficiently lucky as to become, in but half an hour, something else? Something else altogether. Such as a–

Wing? said Zeppie.

Unlikely, said S., who could not help but feel that a lucky hand was, these days, any hand (lost *or* found) that was *not* considered an Alien hand, that is to say (in effect) not considered an Enemy hand.

*But, said Wittgenstein, how would one think of a **friendly** hand?*¹²¹ That is to say, what exactly *is* a friendly hand?

A hand, said the boy (interrupting), that does not mostly beat me. Yes, a friendly hand is a hand that, for the most part, does not beat me. The boy’s vow of silence had been cast upon the waters.

And have you often been beaten? asked S.

The boy said nothing, his vow re-made.

I said, have you often been beaten? At home as well as upon the street?

The boy said nothing.

S. would not, though, let the question lie. For S. wished to know, with regard to thrashings, how the boy found the home compared with the street. Were the thrashings at home more often but less brutal? Or (alternatively) more brutal but less often?

The boy again said nothing. S., nevertheless, still persisted, now enquiring (of the boy) if, when beaten, it was mostly with the right hand? Or the left?

The boy still said nothing. The king, however, *did* make reply.

All the decisive blows, said the king, *are struck left-handed*.¹²² He glanced at his own left hand.

S. sat down, deck-chaired. Finished.

S. thus prompted the Actor to now take up the conversational baton. And this he did by suggesting that perhaps Cook's boy had *not* in fact been subjected to decisive blows. Perhaps, said the Actor, they had been *indecisive*, hesitant, diffident blows? After all, it was surely possible to be beaten indecisively, as if by (say) an hesitant man of letters.

S. did not reply, nor did the king. Silence.

Then, at last, the boy again broke cover and spoke, saying (apropos nothing), *Well, you see, I am a Jew*. Here he stopped, not finishing his sentence, as if unsure as to how he might do so.

I fear, said Someone, that the boy is himself rather indecisive. Perhaps, then, he needs to be beaten all the more. Or at least beaten more with the left hand. Unless, of course, a man's hands are, after all, much of a muchness, in fact reversible, if you will, as might be the case, for instance, if –

A right-hand glove, said Wittgenstein, *could be put upon a left hand*.¹²³

Yes, but could it? said S. And to what end? Yes, a glove upon the left hand might just help if, say, I am being trained not to write with my left hand. (S. paused, stiffened). But what if I am being trained to play the piano? Answer: Disaster. The glove would surely hinder, especially if the left hand is the only hand I really have.

* * *

Another of Ludwig Wittgenstein's brothers, Paul, a concert pianist, lost his right arm in the First World War, and thereafter famously played pieces especially written for the left hand alone.¹²⁴

* * *

IV/VI Room

Stefan is writing a novel called 'The Room'.

(Walter Benjamin)¹²⁵

C.f. an empty room with Wittgenstein in it, Wittgenstein walking.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)¹²⁶

Room One

The empty room was *not* an empty room. Wittgenstein was in it; he was walking in it, though *not* when he was not walking, as now, for he had stopped, looked about the room and asked *Where does thinking take place?*¹²⁷

No answer came. The sea, however, blasphemed and both Zeppie and the Actor entered.

Where, said Wittgenstein again, *does thinking take place?*

Shit-house, said Zeppie, rushing back toward the door. Dysentery.

Stop! said the Actor, seizing Zeppie by silken elbow. Herr Wittgenstein means, Where does thinking take place with respect to one's *body*?

The skull, said Zeppie. The skull, the skull, the –

But *what*, said Wittgenstein, if *consciousness spreads?*¹²⁸

What? said Zeppie.

What, said Wittgenstein, if *consciousness spreads over all human bodies?*

To one's cock, for instance, said Someone, climbing through a window. One's cock (he said) has a mind of its own. He stared down at his crutch. See, he said.

But, said the prince, the late prince (he also, it seemed, was in the empty room), *why do people have a head?*¹²⁹ Yes, *why do people have a head* if it is not to think with? What's it there for?

To put your hat on, said Zeppie, adding that Meister S. had (at least in this respect) the perfect head.

At this point, the woman interposed; for both she and her suitcase were now stood at the door. *My head ... mine*, she said, *was chopped off.*¹³⁰ (Silence, no response, none). I said (she said), *mine was smashed and chopped off.*

The Actor enquired if there had been something wrong with the woman's head?

*My hair, she said, scatters ashes.*¹³¹

Zeppie looked, but could see no ashes, none.

The woman now entered the room which, being an empty room, had no furniture. She sat, therefore, upon the floor, far corner, south south-west.

*I carry it, she said, tapping her suitcase.*¹³²

Carry what? said Zeppie.

My head, she said, I carry ... my head.

Zeppie said he was sorry to hear this.

The Actor was, though, delighted, delighted that the woman had found a use for her head. Not unlike Zeppie (he added) who mostly used *his* head for standing upon.

Zeppie demonstrated.

And you? said the Actor, turning to Herr Wittgenstein. Do *you* do anything with your head? Apart, that is, from thinking? Indeed, in actual, material, or empirically verifiable terms, what have you ever done with your head?

*I modelled for Drobil.*¹³³

Pardon?

I modelled the head, he said, for Drobil.

* * *

In 1921, the Viennese sculptor Michael Drobil made a marble bust of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Drobil would later become a member of the Nazi Party and also sculpt a bust of Hitler.

* * *

There was now a knock at the door (albeit wide open) and in blew a king, *the* king, backwards, followed by umbrella. His highness appeared to be much rained-upon, so too his briefcase. *Storm*, he said, *a storm from Paradise.*¹³⁴ He fought (as for his life) with the damned umbrella, then swiftly surrendered and straightway tipped open his briefcase, emptying it of several books. I am, he said, *unpacking my library.*¹³⁵ The king now squatted, as if also to unpack his royal bowels. He then began, with much pomp, to build a great-and-mighty tower out of but-a-few books.

The Actor, however, had eyes only for Herr Wittgenstein's head. How fine a thing it is, he remarked.

Yes, said Zeppie (intervening). It is a beautiful head.

Quite (said the Actor). Any logician would be proud of such a head, let alone a furrier. Indeed, perhaps the very point of Herr Wittgenstein's

head was not so much to *think* as to be a *picture* of thinking? Or even a picture of –

The thinking of thinking? suggested the king. He paused, cursed, then muttered something about *the thinking of thinking of thinking*.¹³⁶

What? said Zeppie.

Logic, said the king, his spectacles askew. His tower of books now swayed, for such were the fits of the fitting sea.

Regardless, the king headed toward an absent lectern (gold-leafed, broken, caput). Time it was to read an exordium, an exordium to a thesis, albeit a fragment of a thesis, a mere abortive thing. He surveyed the room, his gaze forever ascending as if, in truth, the room were a theatre of an infinite kind. He then cleared his throat. *Language and Logic*, he announced.¹³⁷

Wittgenstein examined the ceiling.

The king paused, again cleared his throat, nudged his spectacles, and the lecture itself commenced. *Sheet of paper*, he began, *has gone missing*. He now straightened his tie. *Must look for it at home*, he continued.

The king again straightened his tie, bowed low and then, much like his favourite angel, he raised both wings as if to acknowledge the howling scorn of an unseen scholarly audience. The lecture, such as it was, appeared to be over.

Is that it? said the Actor. Your thesis, is that it?

Pretty much, said S.

The Actor shook his head sadly. Philosophy (he said) seems not quite the king's thing. In fact, I fear that he simply does not have a mind for thinking. It is true that he may, like myself, have a fine mind for pantomime –

Aladdin, said the king.¹³⁸

But not for thinking, concluded the Actor. Is that not so, your majesty? You don't quite have the mind for it, do you?

Snow White, said the king.¹³⁹

Pardon?

Sleeping Beauty, said the king.

S. glanced at the woman, then closed with the Actor and, indicating the king, whispered, What's wrong with his mind?

You don't want to know, said the Actor.

Ah, but I do, said S.

In that case, said the Actor, his mind is a –

Mind that treats every question, began the king, *as if it were the first and indeed* –¹⁴⁰

Yes?

The only question, added the king.

Quite, said the Actor. Which is to say –

We must *think*, said Wittgenstein, *as if nothing at all had happened yet*.¹⁴¹

Nothing? said S.

Nothing, said Wittgenstein.

Not even thinking? said S.

Nothing, said Wittgenstein.

But, what, said the Actor, of all the fine thinking of former days and of former furriers? Such as Plato and Zeno, Hegel and Schlegel, not to mention Scheler, Schelling, Schiller and (indeed) Schlegel *again*, there being two (of course), not only Schlegel the Elder but –

Pussel the Wonder Dog, said the king.¹⁴²

Ah! said Zeppie, he knew *The Wonder* well. In fact, he knew many a miraculous beast, not least at the National Circus – Oedipus the Hippopotamus, for one.¹⁴³

Who? said S.

Oedipus, said the king.

The hippopotamus, said Zeppie.

The Actor cursed. Enough. Enough intellectual foolery. He had had quite enough. If it were to continue, he feared, they should soon be doomed to –

Compare the phenomenon of thinking, said Wittgenstein, *with ... burning*.¹⁴⁴

What? said Zeppie.

We *must*, said Wittgenstein, *think as if nothing at all had happened yet*.

You said that before, said S.

Wittgenstein looked blank.

I said, you said that before, said S.

We must keep on thinking, said Wittgenstein (again), *as if nothing at all had happened yet*.

But what, said the Actor, of *history*? Of all that has *already* happened? You know, the lights, the attitudes, the dying falls?

But, said Wittgenstein, *what has history to do with me?*¹⁴⁵

Can't remember, said Zeppie.

Quite, said Wittgenstein. *Mine is the first and only world*.

But what, said the Actor, of the world itself? The world as such, everything that is the case. You know, the lights, the attitudes, the dying –

Wittgenstein raised a hand. The Actor must stop. *Nothing*, said Wittgenstein, *is easier than to think what is not the case*.
And what *is not* the case? said the Actor.
The War, said S., slamming shut a rusted porthole.

* * *

I do not believe in the War.¹⁴⁶

(Stefan Benjamin)

* * *

Wittgenstein, not wanting for sea-legs, began as before to walk the room. Then (also as before) he stopped and made ready to speak. *That we can say how things are not*, he said, *is the mystery of the negative*.¹⁴⁷ He looked down, as if taking a bow.

Encore! said the Actor.

That *we can say*, encored Wittgenstein, *how things are not is a deep mystery*.

Pardon? said the Actor, who had not actually been listening.

Wittgenstein began again, began everything again. *If*, he said, *there was an object called 'not'* –¹⁴⁸

Pardon?

If, said Wittgenstein, *there was an object called 'not'* –

An object *in the world*? said the Actor.

Wittgenstein nodded.

An object called 'not'? said the Actor. A thing? A thing at which we could point?

Wittgenstein nodded and the Actor (smoothing his hair) attempted a precis: Do you mean to say (smooth) that if there really were (smooth) an *object* called 'not', an object in this dear world of ours (smooth), there would be no mystery?

Wittgenstein nodded.

No mystery (continued the Actor) in our capacity to say how things are *not*?

Wittgenstein nodded.

And yet there *is*? said the Actor.

What? said Zeppie.

Mystery, bellowed the Actor.

Wittgenstein nodded.

For example? inquired the Actor.

I knew, said Wittgenstein, *he was in the room, but he wasn't*.¹⁴⁹

Pardon? said S.

I knew, said Wittgenstein, *he was in the room, but he wasn't.*
 Who wasn't? said S.
 The one, said the Actor, that Herr Wittgenstein *knew* (or *thought*)
 was there.
 Where? said S.
 In the room.
 Which room? said S.
A room, said the king, *that might interfere with thinking.*¹⁵⁰
 No, said the Actor. Other way about, a room with which *thinking*
 might interfere.
 Pardon? said S.
 A room in which someone is *thought* to be present.
 But who? said S.
 Who *what*?
 Who is *thought* to be present? said S. Who in particular?
 Does it matter? said S.
 Ask Herr Wittgenstein, said the Actor.
In some spiritualistic procedures ..., began Wittgenstein.¹⁵¹
 S. eyed the king.
In some spiritualistic procedures ..., resumed Wittgenstein.
 The king eyed S.
It is essential, concluded Wittgenstein, *to think of a particular*
person.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is dedicated to his lover, David Pinsent, who, on 8 May 1918, was killed in an aeroplane accident.¹⁵²

* * *

Zeppie now grand-toured the room, his circus-ring, waving to the
 indifferent walls. Wittgenstein, meantime, made-do with circling an
 unseen table and remarking that if, *on the table there are some playing-*
cards –¹⁵³

Gambling? said the king, curious.¹⁵⁴
 What? said Zeppie.
Gambling at the sea-side? said the curious king.
 By no means, said Zeppie. We are gambling at *sea*.
 But what for?
 What?
 For what are we gambling?
 The Christ, said Zeppie.

Or at least his pants, said the Actor.

* * *

After the soldiers had seized our possessions they threw dice for their spoils. It made one recall Christ's crucifixion.

(Anon, HMT *Dunera*)¹⁵⁵

* * *

Wittgenstein began again. If, *on the table*, he said, *there are some playing-cards and I want the other man to touch one ...*. Wittgenstein here paused.

Then, *tell* him, said the Actor. Be frank with the fellow.

But what, said S., if he's *not* in the room? Not really. Not in fact.

Well, then, *desire* him to come in, said the Actor. And *then* be frank.

But *can* one? said S.

Can one what?

Can one simply *desire* someone into a room? said S. Does it work?

Wittgenstein raised a conditional hand. If, he said, *I had a **strong** wish that he (another) should enter, then* –¹⁵⁶

Yes?

He would enter.

* * *

Suppose I hear someone coming up the stairs. [Admittedly] no one ever comes in during the lecture Suppose [though] a man [*does*] comes in.¹⁵⁷

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)

* * *

There was a sound at the door. It seemed that someone or other was there. However, they did *not* come in.

That's what it is like with stupid people, said the prince – *they don't open the door.*¹⁵⁸

Whoever was at the door could almost be heard, perhaps half-wheezing, as if breathless by reason of the stairs, or the deeps.

Who knows, said the king, *whom we will meet at this hour.*¹⁵⁹

Knock-knock, said the door.

Knock-knock, replied Zeppie.

Knock-knock, said the door.

Knock-knock, replied Zeppie.

Who's there? said the Actor.

Some idiot, said S. One of those *stupid people who don't open the door.*

But, said Wittgenstein, **no one** ever comes in. He now looked about, as if half-lost, as if mid-lecture. He then resumed, saying, Nevertheless, let us **suppose** a man comes in. Yes, let us **suppose** a man comes in.

Or a child, said the Actor.

But not if the door is locked, said S. No child can get in if the door is locked.

The woman now stirred and edged toward S. She had news. *Through the locked door*, she said, *enters quietly a child.*¹⁶⁰

The king (alarmed) looked up. There was, however, no child to be seen, none. Had dear coz, therefore, merely dreamt of the child?

She did not reply.

Or, said S., is it simply that although the child *has* entered it has not been especially welcome, or wanted, or cherished – no-one being quite ready for the child? And thus the child has no sooner come than it must go.

* * *

In 1915, Gertrud Kolmar, following an affair with a young army officer, had fallen pregnant. Her family had then insisted she have an abortion.¹⁶¹

* * *

The king arose, approached the door and bolted it. Doors, he said, can no longer be trusted. Not now. Not since –

Friday, she said.

Friday? said S.

On Friday evening, she said, *there was a thundering at the door, and they*–¹⁶²

Who? said S.

They, she said.

S. returned to a house in Vienna.

They invaded the room, she said.

S. hid in a house in Vienna.

Yes, she said, *they invaded the room and took me away. On Friday.*

* * *

On 2 March 1943, in Berlin, Gertrud Kolmar would be arrested and deported. It would not be a Friday but a Tuesday.¹⁶³

* * *

Room Two

The woman picked up her suitcase. It was heavy, or so it seemed, heavy with all that she carried – her head, for example. She was, it seemed, ready to leave. To depart.

But she would die, said Someone.

Yes, she knew.

To jump ship now, mid-sea, would be quite the end of her.

Yes.

Did she then *want* to die today?

*Why should I **not** want to die today?* she said.¹⁶⁴

Because, said Zeppie, today may not be the day for dying. *Friday* was God's day for dying, and today may or may not be Friday (he had no idea). Yes, *Friday* was the day to die, ask Jesus.

Who? said Abraham, squeezing by.

Jesus.

Never heard of him, said Abraham.

Wittgenstein now drew forth his piece of chalk (tailor's, cracked) and began to scratch upon the starboard wall. A blind wall, it was. He then stepped back and slowly read aloud: *How should we feel if we too had never heard of Christ?*¹⁶⁵

Better, said Someone, we'd feel better.

But, said Zeppie, how should we feel if we had not heard of the *Cross of Christ?* His holy Rood, sorry Tree.

Tree? said the Actor. He could see no tree, leafless or otherwise, not in the room. Indeed, he felt that there could not be many –

Trees in the middle of the ocean? said the prince.¹⁶⁶

Quite, said the Actor.

Wittgenstein once again closed with the wall which (being blind) did not see him coming. This time he wrote: The words '*That is a tree*' ... *might be a joke.*¹⁶⁷

As opposed to what? said the Actor.

As opposed to a *proposition*, said Someone. The words '*That is a tree*' might just be propositional.

Albeit not here, said the Actor. It would make no more sense than talking of –

Trees in the middle of the ocean? said the prince, again.

Quite, said the Actor (again). Such talk would be absurd.

Laugh therefore, said Wittgenstein.¹⁶⁸ *Laugh*, therefore, *if you can*. After all, '*That is a tree*' might, I say, *be a joke*.

Zeppie tried to laugh, tried hard. However, ‘That is a tree’ was (he found) no side-splitter; not like, say, a pie in the face, rubber chicken, or exploding car. Such things, such circus things, had always (he said) split his sides. Indeed (thank God), the pie, the chicken, the car etc had always made *the crowds* split their sides, every time, every show, every night. Although not perhaps –

Crystal Night? said the Actor.

What?

Kristallnacht, said Someone.

The woman stiffened. Silence.

Silence.

S. tugged at his shirt-sleeve and began to wipe the wall clean of Herr Wittgenstein. The chalked words slowly vanished like tears (he thought) upon a dead queen’s face. *Dry tears all by self*, said the prince.¹⁶⁹

S. now stared at the remaining words: ‘never to have heard of Christ’.

S. thought, thought this: that he himself, although a J., *had* heard of Christ. Yes, the prince had often spoken of *the Christian religion*.¹⁷⁰ For S., therefore, Friday was indeed the day for dying. Not, though, that he intended to die at all, not on *any* day of the week. Or so he said, or bellowed, to all that might not hear.

S. now looked about the empty room – cornice, alcove, porthole and door, where stood the wide-eyed woman. She was still with her suitcase, though now desiring to speak. To S. And so she approached, her stale scent fore-reaching him by but a fraction of a second.

*You, she said, you too will die.*¹⁷¹ She paused. And *tomorrow*, she said, *I will take a spade ... and bury you.*

Tomorrow? said S.

Tomorrow, she said.

But what day is today? asked S.

I seem to believe ... that it’s Saturday, said Wittgenstein.¹⁷²

Ah, then he (S.) was spared, thank God, at least for today which, being not Friday, was *not* the day for dying. The woman was wrong, therefore – quite wrong. Her spade, the one she would use for burying, could stay in the hold.

Wittgenstein, however, began again. *I seem to believe*, he said, *that it’s Saturday, when it is*, in fact, *Friday*.

Friday? said S. (alarmed).

Friday, said Wittgenstein (and nodded).

Today? said S. (still alarmed). Today is *Friday*? Are you sure? Convinced? Absolutely persuaded?

Wittgenstein nodded.

Fuck! said Zeppie. Let us be praying. Quick. All of us.

* * *

On the very first Friday at sea the *Dunera* was very nearly hit by a torpedo. It came so close that there was a heavy knock against the ship. Everyone thought it was the end and, it was said, 'a Jew from Frankfurt, Mr Sulzberger, began to pray'.¹⁷³

* * *

The king (with briefcase) now rose to his feet. He wished to protest. *If Kafka*, he said, *did not pray* ...¹⁷⁴

Pardon? said the Actor.

If Kafka did not pray..., repeated the king, as though to say: if Kafka did not pray then why should a king?

But perhaps he *did*, said the Actor. Perhaps your Mr Kafka was a secret Mr Sulzberger, busy with his prayer-books, but out of view. Yes, perhaps he prayed hidden within, say, a –

Shit-house? said Zeppie.

Exactly, said the Actor.

Both now turned to eye their own, sea-going Mr Kafka who had, just that minute, edged side-on through the door and doffed an invisible bowler. Someone (however) brusquely advised the fellow to exit forthwith seeing that he was clearly not *the king's* Kafka (the famous one) but just any-old-Kafka, a kind of ship's-Kafka, or stage-Kafka, if you will, albeit (doubtless) equally disinclined to pray.

Now moving down-stage, the Actor closed with Herr Wittgenstein and remarked that *this* Kafka, *their* Kafka, even if (sadly) unlikely to pray, might just manage to weep-and-scream. Or was that weep-and-shout?

Wittgenstein was not sure. *The philosopher*, he said, certainly *shouts, as it were, in his helplessness*.¹⁷⁵

Pardon? said the Actor, who had not been listening.

A philosopher shouts, as it were, in his helplessness, said Wittgenstein again.

Pardon? said the Actor, still not listening.

A philosopher SHOUTS, bellowed Wittgenstein.

What was that? said Someone.

The 'shouting miracle', whispered the king.¹⁷⁶

Someone thought of Dunkirk. There had been shouting there.

S. now turned to the king. Is it possible, he said, that a philosopher might ever *pray* in his helplessness?

Silence.

I said, is it possible that a –

I pray, interrupted Wittgenstein, *I pray a good deal.*¹⁷⁷

On your knees, then, said Someone.

Alas, said Wittgenstein, *I cannot kneel* – not in order to *pray.*¹⁷⁸

The Actor turned to Zeppie. It would appear, he said, that Herr Wittgenstein is sufficiently on the Hebraic side of the street as to pray only when upright. Vertical. Unbent. Like a furrier's manikin.

Wittgenstein looked down at his legs. *It is*, he said, *as though my knees are stiff.*

Worry not, said the Actor, Mr Zeppie here would happily kneel on Herr Wittgenstein's behalf thereby lending him his knees, his supple baptised knees.

Mr Zeppie promptly flopped unto the floor. Once there, he knelt, closed his eyes and began praying, to the best of his lights, his wandering lights.

Dear God, Son, clown, Father, circus, National, Hail Mary, Argentina, Baptism, dear God, Certificate, forgive us, Son, Father, yes a Christian, high-wire, sawdust, not a Jew, Amen, trapeze, no not a Jew, Jesus, elephants, tigers, Oedipus-the-hippo, no not a Jew, not now, big top, yes a Christian, several midgets, and could prove it, and a clown, Amen, closed down, Holy Ghost, pie in the face, closed down and moved on, in the name of Jesus, they said, Hail Mary, bloody Jews, they said, circus-Jews, bugger off, once a Jew, fuck, always a Jew, Amen, on earth as in heaven, bugger off, Our Father, bugger off, bugger off, bloody Jews, fuck off, the lot of you, for ever and –.

Halt! said Someone. Such a prayer, he said, is no use to anyone, let alone their dear, stiff-as-a-stick, Herr Wittgenstein.

Why not? said Zeppie, eyes still closed.

Because, said Someone, although one may *talk* to God on another's behalf –

One can only hear him, said Wittgenstein, *if one is oneself being addressed.*¹⁷⁹

Addressed by whom? said Zeppie, one eye now open.

God, said Wittgenstein.

Silence.

Zeppie now opened eye-the-second. He feared, he said, that God had never been inclined to speak unto an acrobat, particularly one that was (perhaps) not really (perhaps) from Argentina (perhaps) – Dresden (back end of) being nearer the mark.¹⁸⁰ However, if God *had* ever said a word, was it (wondered Zeppie) *God-the-Father* or

God-*the-Son*? Hard to say, but perhaps (at a pinch) Zeppie *had* heard from the Son.

S. asked to know what the Son had said. Yes (he asked) what exactly had the Son said?

Forgotten, said Zeppie, still upon his knees.

The wide-eyed woman now bent down to speak to him. *When*, she whispered, *will my body be bread again?*¹⁸¹

That was it! said Zeppie.

But that was *her* speaking, not Christ, said the Actor.

Well, He said something like it.

Like what?

This is my body, said Zeppie, attempting to rise from his knees.

Broken?

Naturally, said Zippi (and winced). This is my body, he said again. My body.

Ah, said the Actor, but how do you *know* you have a –

If someone, said Wittgenstein, *doubted he had a body* –

Not me, said Zeppie. There was, he said, no doubting the fucking-thing, dying-thing. Still wanted feeding, would you believe it. Zeppie stared down at his belly, then slipped an unwashed hand into a silken trouser-pocket and pulled out a knot of bread, kept against hunger (since yesterday). Sea-bread it was, war-bread, well-fingered, flesh-warm. He gripped it and tore it in two.

* * *

We have no knives and [so] have to break our bread.

(Alfred Lewinsky, HMT *Dunera*)¹⁸²

* * *

Zeppie, now upright (on the whole), offered the fingered feast to the Actor, then crossed himself (in a manner). Sustenance, sir? he said. For the Journey, sir? The Way, sir? Or would sir prefer the more usual wafer?

But why would I? said the Actor who, being a Jew (Protestant), was now quite bewildered.

Wittgenstein here intervened. *Catholics believe*, he said, *that in certain circumstances a wafer completely changes its nature.*¹⁸³

To what? said the Actor.

Flesh, said Zeppie, slapping a silken thigh.

Flesh? said the late prince. *Flesh?* Once upon a time, *I ate flesh.*¹⁸⁴

Good heavens, said the Actor. Did they not feed you?

The late prince appeared not to hear. *I ate flesh*, he said again.

* * *

Mid-voyage, one particular *Dunera* deportee called Peter Meyer, an accomplished composer, wrote and had performed a new choral setting of the Eucharist. It was called the 'Dunera Mass'.¹⁸⁵

* * *

The woman considered the room, even as dawn reluctantly struggled (knees, elbows) through such windows as there were. The woman then bent down, slipped off her purple shoes and made (instead) as if to pull on huge invisible idiot-boots, her Berlin boots, her given boots, factory boots, boots made for dead-work, death-work, Jew-work. Munitions. Israel's latest curse.

Ah, such boots, she thought. And such work, such noise, today and tomorrow and tomorrow and, God, hour after hour, shell after – God, her back it soon will crack and her hands they will crumble and the machines they moan on and on and – God, dear God, it was like *a thousand hammers*.¹⁸⁶

* * *

From July 1941 onwards, Gertrud Kolmar would be compelled, as a Jew, to work in a Berlin munitions factory.

* * *

The woman paused, reached for the receiver of an absent telephone, and stared at the king. A familiar face. Half.

I would have called you right back, she said.¹⁸⁷

The king said nothing.

I would have called you right back, had I known your number.

The king said nothing.

The woman now examined her crumbling hands and began to tug at her fingers, again and again, as if these blackened digits might somehow know the unknown number. Ah, telephones be damned.

Eyeing the woman, Zeppie approached the king, stood upon one leg and remarked, of the woman's telephonic torment, that it might yet go on and on, might yet exceed all let or limit.

Ah, said the king, *everything*, though, *must have a limit*.¹⁸⁸

But what, said Zeppie (now toppling), what, say, of –

An endless row of soldiers? said Wittgenstein.¹⁸⁹

Quite, said Someone. As at Dunkirk. He paused, then added, Upon Dunkirk beach –

One can always count higher, said the prince.¹⁹⁰

1, 2, 3, counted the woman, once more tugging at her fingers, 1, 2, 3 –

3.1, 3.12, 3.13, murmured Wittgenstein.¹⁹¹

4, 5, 6, said the woman, continuing to tug. 4, 5, 6 –

6.001, 6.01, 6.1, murmured Wittgenstein. 6.11, 6.111, 6.112, he continued, as if ad infinitum.

See! said the prince. *One can always say something more. Like ‘Out Out Out Out Out’*.¹⁹² Indeed, continued the prince, one can say ‘*Out Out Out Out Out*’ for as long as –

7, said Wittgenstein. And stopped.

Higher! said the prince.

7, said Wittgenstein.

Higher! said the prince.

7, said Wittgenstein. And there would (he said) be no advance upon seven, not a jot, not a tittle. Seven. Seven. Seven. One could count no higher. There were (dear God) no more soldiers to count, no more thoughts to entertain, no more ideas, no more propositions. None.

* * *

At the time of its publication in 1921, Wittgenstein had famously concluded that the *Tractatus* had resolved all philosophical problems.¹⁹³

* * *

But, thought S., there is always more, always more at sea – always more fear, more fear with which to think. Yes, death may approach, as (say) a torpedo through the main, and you may hear the bastard coming, whistling, whistling to itself, coming straight for you, and you may think that this is the end, but it is not the end, for there is no end, not to the thought that this is the end, nor to the mad orisons of mad Mr Sulzberger, his lunatic hands clasped lunatic-tight as he prays-and-prays against the torpedo and, if It should strike, will attempt to pray-*Out* the sea, *Out* the waves, *Out* the billows, *Out* the cold. *Out, out*, damned death. Yes, *Out, Out, Out, Out, Out, Out* and be gone, for mad Mr Sulzburger is still, like Christopher Robin, saying his prayers, yes still-fucking-praying, praying-out death.

S. looked up. Death, he said. Death. The old word crawled, like a spider, unbidden, from his lips. Death.

Silence.

At last, Zeppie prepared to bend (double) and Wittgenstein to light a lucifer (stolen). Wittgenstein then nodded.

Yes, he said. He had heard of death, knew the name; as every furrier did (naturally). Nevertheless, he said, *death is not an event of life. It is not a fact of the world.*¹⁹⁴

What? said Zeppie, beginning to bend.

Death, repeated Wittgenstein, *is not an event of life.*

Quite, said the Actor. None among them, the Living that is, had *themselves* experienced death, not as such, not at first-hand. Indeed, with respect to dying, their experience was wholly second-hand, a case of the-hand-me-downs. Dear Herr Weiss had muttered something even as he had leapt overboard and plummeted toward the great Orchestra Pit below. But the poor fellow had said nothing of particular note as he finally disappeared from view among (as it were) the First and Second Violins. Indeed, of death itself, death per se, Herr Weiss had not said a word, nothing, nothing intelligible at least. Perhaps then (come to think of it) they themselves, Herr Weiss included, were in fact immortal – like, say, those upon the Silvery Screen.

Zeppie was now lain upon the floor, his limbs (all four) entangled, as mad as Buenos Aries.

Rubber-jointed? enquired the king.¹⁹⁵

Let us hope so, said the Actor.

And immortal? enquired the king.

Indeed, said Zeppie.

The king cursed. Of immortality he took (he said) a very dim view. Why so?

Because, said the king, *in tragedy the hero dies ... of immortality.*¹⁹⁶

Pardon? said S., intervening.

Immortality – the hero dies of it, said the king. *Dies*. He *dies*.

No, said S., protesting. The king, *his* own hero, his very own hero, was (please) not to die. Please.

No need to fear (said the Actor) the king himself was, manifestly, *not* an heroic type. He had not the posture.

Does the king *not*, then, die? said S.

The King never dies, said Someone.

Rex numquam moritur, said Zeppie, by way of translation, his head now between his legs. In such moments of contortion (he said) Latin was somehow gifted him. It was as if he were –

Speaking with tongues[?] said Wittgenstein.¹⁹⁷

Rex numquam moritur, said Zeppie (again).

The King never dies, said Someone (again).

Yes, but *this* king? said S. *This* one, with the briefcase, does *he* not die?

Not of immortality, said Someone.

The king began to tap at the wall, casing their tomb, sounding it out, seeking hollows.

But he *does* die? said S. I mean, in the end? Like all of us?

Naturally, said Someone.

Of what? said S. Of *what* does he die?

Mortality, said Someone. He dies (that is to say) of dying. Again and again. Oh yes, very busy he is, busy with –

Daily dying, said the woman.¹⁹⁸

Exactly.

The king continued to tap.

Look at him. He's at it every moment, every second.

Every second, murmured the king.¹⁹⁹

Quite, said Someone.

Every second, murmured the king, is *the strait gate in time through which the Messiah might* –

Snuff it, said Someone.

What? said Zeppie.

Every second, said Someone, is the strait gate through which the king might go out.

Out?

Like a light, said Someone.

The king tapped once more, then put his ear to the wall, as if persuaded of a hollow, or even a hole, or gap that might yet facilitate egress, exit. A way out.

Unseen, S. approached the listening king, his anointed head jammed hard against the wall.

S. now turned about, away from the king. Why? he asked. Why does it happen?

Why does *what* happen? said Someone.

That which is dreadful, said S., eyeing the pathetic king.

It happens, said Wittgenstein, **because it is dreadful**.²⁰⁰

Because? said S.

Because, said Wittgenstein.

V/VI Away

My observations are like th[os]e notices on the ticket offices at English railway stations: Is your journey really necessary?

(Ludwig Wittgenstein)²⁰¹

* * *

Night. Night it was, as so often is the case, and S. looked about himself. One-eyed stars above, sightless swells below. He now turned and regarded his companions. Their journey (he asked), was it wholly and entirely necessary? England had seemed to think so. But England, dear England, was mad now.

Someone raised an eye-brow and enquired if *any* movement was (logically speaking) entirely necessary?

I walk, said Wittgenstein, as if to answer the question.²⁰² He was bound for a deck-chair. *I walk*, he said again.

Bravo, said Zeppie (inverted).

The Actor (not inverted) had, though, fallen to wondering whether walking was, in some sense, the Necessary effect of a Necessary cause – as was, for instance, the sun's daily rising.

But, said Wittgenstein, *that the sun will rise tomorrow ... we do not know*.²⁰³

Do we not? said the Actor, examining the sky.

And, even as he did so, Wittgenstein cursed. In the dark, new dark, he had walked straight into a bloody deck-chair.

Outside of logic all is accident, he said, and cursed again.²⁰⁴ *All is accident*, he said again.

But not, thought Zeppie, at the National Circus. Some nights there had been no accidents at all, no-one broken – some nights. He gestured to a crooked leg, and the Actor again took up the dialectical torch, the night-light of Socratic inquiry.

If the rising of the sun, he began, is *not* necessarily necessary, then what of –

Wandering, said the wide-eyed woman.²⁰⁵

When?

With the first snowfall.

Where?

In the woods.

Shoes?

Purple.²⁰⁶

Why purple?

Purple shoes know the way.

Way to where?

*Jerusalem.*²⁰⁷

Through the *snow*?

Jerusalem, she said, is at *the North Pole*.

But, said the Actor, all the signs are that –

The ship sails southward, said the king.²⁰⁸

The ship topped a derelict wave and Zeppie (still inverted) all but descended.

Southward, said the king again. South, south, they were headed south.

The woman shook her head, then drew a scarf about her face. Thin it was. *My face*, she said, *is always turned to the East.*²⁰⁹

Jerusalem? said the Actor.

Poland, more likely, said Someone.

Silence.

Wittgenstein now rose from his accursed deck-chair. It may still be night, he said, but he was about to *go to the station.*²¹⁰ He intended, once there, to ponder if his journey was, in fact, necessary – his train journey, that is.

But, said the Actor, is a train journey *ever* absolutely necessary? He drew out a handkerchief. Is there ever such a journey? Ever such a train? He blew his nose, a trumpet of sorts.

Trumpety-trump, thought Zeppie.

The Actor now looked about. Herr Wittgenstein having gone, he turned to the woman. Could *she* think of such a train? Such a necessary train?

Yes, a funeral train, she said.²¹¹

Where to?

Cemetery, she said.

Where from?

Wannsee, she said. The station at Wannsee.

* * *

When, in Spring 1930, Gertrud Kolmar's mother died she was buried in Stahnsdorf near Berlin which, for her family, meant taking the cemetery train (*Friedhofsbahn*) from the station at Wannsee, a Berlin suburb.

When, in January 1942, the Nazis would meet to decide on the Final Solution, they would choose a villa in Wannsee. For

hundreds of thousands of Jews this would come to mean a fatal train journey to the East; one of the transported would be Gertrud herself.

* * *

Ah, said S., I remember Wannsee, the name, the Station. The late prince (said S.) had often taken the train to Wannsee. To the Lake. They would go there to bathe – the king, the queen, the day and he.²¹² They would take the waters even as the warm light half-kissed the still summer shadows, hours and hours abandoned to the Weimar sun. So, yes, he remembered the Station, though never in order to catch the funeral train, the train to Stahnsdorf. The prince had not, in fact, known that there *was* a funeral train from Wannsee; indeed, he had not even heard of funeral trains. Back at home, in their castle, the prince had had many trains at his royal disposal but not a funeral train. He would, though, sometimes amuse himself with the occasional death on the line. All it took was a fragile (all-but-broken) carriage, a few dolls and an imperious blow, or indolent flick of the hand. That is all it took. It was easily achieved. As the king, perhaps, recalled?

The king, now deck-chaired, did not quite reply. He did, though, recall *the dolls* that had, once upon a time, *giggled in the ‘catastrophe-coach’ that fell to pieces, as expected, when the train crashed.*²¹³

Train, echoed Zeppie and (all at once) Wittgenstein reappeared – right on time, as if a train.

Suppose, he began, *suppose someone had invented, say, the steam engine without having the least idea that it could be used to* –²¹⁴

Illustrate a proposition? said the Actor.

Herr Wittgenstein cursed and began again. Once more it was trains. *At railway stations, he said, there are dials which look like clocks ... but aren’t.*²¹⁵

Quite, said S., who then enquired if, at railway stations, there would also ever be trucks which might *look* like cattle-trucks but were *not* cattle-trucks? Clearly, it was unlikely –

But *what*, said Wittgenstein, *what if something really unheard-of happened?*²¹⁶ *What if ... say ... cattle suddenly laughed?*

Or giggled, said S. Like, say, the dolls in the catastrophe-coach.

Wittgenstein stared down at his shoes (his thinking-shoes) and considered. He considered, in fact, something else that was really unheard-of. This time it was not so much cattle *laughing* but cattle *crying*, or wailing, or screaming – screaming for help. What then?

In that event, said the Actor, the trucks, however much they might look like cattle-trucks, would *not* be cattle-trucks. Cattle do not scream for help. I think.

* * *

Silence. The ship swayed, the night tilted and the woman rose to her feet and yawned, toward the dark. *I turn my head like the head of a doll*, she said, and turned her head like the head of a doll.²¹⁷

She now regarded S. and began to speak of an *express train* and the line on which it ran.²¹⁸ *Upon its bare tracks* (she said), *the two flat bars of iron* (she said), *I go happily to bed*,

But has she no bed of her own in which to sleep? asked S. Or does she, perhaps, no longer know *where* it is she sleeps? Is she, indeed, houseless?

The woman did not reply, not quite. But she did say this, *Our street has been both renamed and renumbered*.²¹⁹

She now removed her boots, lay herself down upon her railroad bed and half-turned upon her side. Her boots she clutched tight in her arms. The men, the many men, who stood about, were much surprised, some turning away, whilst others, from many a distant vantage (balconies, libraries etc), stared intently. S., however, swaying like a jazz-man, felt compelled to draw close to the woman. She saw him approach and (looking up) for a moment examined the swaying face, then closed her eyes, as if for sleep, or remembrance of sleep. Ah (she thought), that face, that shining face. But (she also thought), what is it the Shining Boy knows?

* * *

Suppose you meet a young person who is attractive but who seems to be harbouring a secret.²²⁰

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

A weary wave, weary of the world, washed by and the woman opened her eyes. Although only seconds had passed, S. asked how she had slept, enquiring, in the manner of an hotelier, if madam had been sufficiently comfortable upon her railroad bed. Such a bed, he feared, must have been a trial, albeit (he hoped) not –

The worst mattress in the world? suggested the king.²²¹

Quite, said S., who added that, nevertheless, a railway line was a rather chanceful or risky bed on which to lie.

Un lit hasardeux, said the king.²²²

Quite, said S. (again).

The Actor, though, did *not* concur. The woman's iron bed was (he feared) a most *certain* bed – a certain *disaster*. There simply was no *chance* about it. For soon, very soon, some punctual monster, a train as-yet-in-the-distance, would surely slice her in two. Yes, right on time, it would be, quite perfectly scheduled. Admittedly, if she were an heroine in a Silent and tied to the track she might yet be saved, rescued at the last by a dashing Christ. Alas, however, films were now no longer silent. These days, they talked.

S. looked down once more at the still-recumbent and sidewise female form. It was quite unlike all other fleshy forms on board.

Love at last sight, said the king.²²³

Last? said S.

Last, said the king.

Once again the woman opened her eyes and once again S. enquired after her night. How had it been? Her night on the line.

We, she said, ... *we had spent the night together*.²²⁴ She rose to her feet, as if now (of a sudden) a bride, and dusted her dress, filthy it was. And glanced at S. He, though, could recall no shared or common night. None. What night could she possibly mean?

The night, said the king, *before death*.²²⁵

And what night is that? said S.

The night of love, said the king.

S. said nothing, nothing. Then Someone approached.

Ah, said Someone, does sir not recall? Not recall his night upon the track? With the lady, sir, the lovely, vagrant lady, your two fine bodies draped across the smooth bare tracks, the smooth iron bars. Who, sir, could forget such a night?

Me, said S., taking to a deck-chair.

The woman raised her hand. She desired, before she finally departed, to speak again to S., to set his mind at rest, to assuage any guilt, to correct any misapprehension. *It was*, she said, *as if we had spent the night together*.

As if? said Someone. Had, then, she and the young man not *really* spent the night together? Not for real or in fact? Had the two of them merely *feigned* the Act? Simulated the Thing, as if in a Blue, a Smoker, a Dirty? Had their entangled and sweating bodies been, as it were, a million moons apart? Or was it that she, alas, was now too old for *actual* love? Or was she simply all-discomposed by her hours of labour, rough threads and cripple-boots? Or did the yellow star not help? The yellow

star she wore so well. Was it not conducive to the act of love? Indeed, did she have to wear the star when even in her bed?

Silence. Sea. The woman said not a word.

The king, though, could not, it seemed, let the matter die – not the matter of the night. *Why*, he asked of S., *did you sleep with a woman? Why?*²²⁶

Yes, why? said the Actor, why lie with a *woman*? Is it the only way that delicate typists, with their cities now burning, can get to sleep? Is it not possible to make other arrangements? To lie, say, with a man? Shoulder to shoulder.

Hand in hand, said Zeppie.

After all, continued the Actor, many of the men on board were altogether unmarried – single gentleman, carefree, casual even. For example –

I myself am not married, said Wittgenstein.²²⁷

And neither, said S., is the king. Not anymore. Or, at least, not to the queen.

S. glanced at the sky, now full of yellow stars. This not-being-married (he said), was it, in fact, why so many of them were here? Was the ship in some way especially congenial to men of a single kind? As a place, say, to sabbatical. To make retreat. There was, certainly, little to be otherwise getting on with – no paperwork, for instance, it having been long-ago thrown in the sea. Perhaps, then, Herr Churchill had been concerned, above all, for their souls, and thus had driven them into the desert (watery) to pursue a life of –

Ora et labora? enquired Zeppie, bent double.

Quite, said S.

In former times, said Wittgenstein, *people entered monasteries.*²²⁸

And these days? said S.

Hotels, said the Actor.

Pardon?

These days, said the Actor, it is fashionable to meet one's Maker when –

In a hotel, said the king.²²⁹

Exactly, said the Actor.

The king now added that he was, in fact, very much in need of an hotel room.

In that case, said the Actor, how about –

Hotel Ostensjo? said Wittgenstein. *Oslo.*²³⁰

Too cold, said S., too cold for the king.

Strand Palace Hotel? said Wittgenstein. *London.*²³¹

Too big, said S., too big for the king. Besides, if the king should yet land upon England's shore he could always seek-out his Maker at *the queen's* hostelry, her guest-house. Leinster Square, no. 62. Where better for the king to (at last) wash-and-press his soul? No temptations there, the royal marriage-bed having long grown cold.

The night-sea stirred in its unquiet sleep and the Actor once more spoke. He did not like (he said) the sound of a guest-house – least, not as a place for, say, Divine Office. The discipline of prayer certainly did not square with his own experience of theatrical guest-houses. True it was that in these dim-lit eyries he may have been forced to his half-Protestant knees, cold linoleum notwithstanding. However an hotel, a properly-heated establishment, would surely be much more conducive to the –

Vita spiritualis, said Zeppie, still bent double.

Quite, said the Actor. Could Herr Wittgenstein try, therefore, once more? Suggest, that is, one final hotel in which one might audition for heaven.

Shelton Hotel, said Wittgenstein. *New York*.²³² However, he added, when he himself had visited the Shelton it had been as *hot as Hell*. And, indeed, not unlike Hell in other respects.

Oslo. London. New York. Hell. They were, it seemed, fast running-out of hotels, both in this world and the next.

What, though, of Wales? said S. For an hotel. He had, he confessed, little idea as to where Wales was, except that it was to the West, to the West of everything, even of the West itself, and that there was a hotel there, if only one.

But Wales, said the Actor (protesting), Wales is so far from . . . Here he hesitated, before adding, Temptation.

Exactly, said S. So, why not Wales? Indeed, why not, say –

Pontypridd, said Wittgenstein. Why not *The New Inn Hotel, Pontypridd*?²³³

But is it, said S., immensely spiritual?

Wittgenstein was unsure. However, it was, he said, an hotel he knew well and one that advertised every possible comfort for commercial gentleman (furriers, logicians, kings etc.).

But what *kinds* of comfort? said S. He was concerned, he said, lest the comforts of Pontypridd should prove a distraction to the king. S. thus wished to know precisely what kinds of comfort The New Inn Hotel afforded.

Two billiard-tables, said Wittgenstein. Two.

Anything else? said the king.

Not much.

Ice-rink? said the king.

No.

Night-club? said the king.

No.

Apparitions at the bar? said the king.

No.

Excellent, said S. There was, he felt sure, no better hotel in which at last to encounter one's God.

* * *

On 2 September 1939, Ludwig Wittgenstein spent a night in the New Inn Hotel in Pontypridd. He was there with his young lover, Francis Skinner.²³⁴

* * *

Wittgenstein began to circle the deck-chairs. It was as if he felt that the chairs were in want of intellectual stimulation. *Imagine* (he said to the chairs) *a town in which the police are required to obtain information from each inhabitant.*²³⁵

Each and *every* inhabitant? said Someone.

Wittgenstein nodded, as did the king.

Even if merely in an hotel?

Wittgenstein nodded, as did the king.

And even if staying for just one night?

Wittgenstein nodded, as did the king.

One night of love?

No response. Nothing.

* * *

Wittgenstein's night at the New Inn Hotel was marred by the fact that the hotel manageress was so concerned about her guest's German-sounding name that she reported him to the local police station.

* * *

Wittgenstein looked about the slanting deck. Then, following the toe-tips of his shoes, he trod west, for Pontypridd. *It is* as if, he said, *a man ... leads you along a dark corridor.*²³⁶ His shoes (though doubtful) continued west. *And,* he said, *just when you are in the middle of the corridor* (he paused) *the light goes out.*

* * *

On the night that Wittgenstein and Skinner arrived at the New Inn Hotel, the very eve of war, a total blackout was declared in Pontypridd, with the two men shown to their rooms in utter darkness.²³⁷

* * *

Wittgenstein lifted his head and surveyed an unlit Welsh sky. *And then, he said, once the light goes out, you are left alone.*

Or not, said the Actor.

Not what? said Zeppie.

Not *alone*, said the Actor. One might *not* be alone. Not even in Pontypridd, at least not in an hotel. Indeed, one is, I fear, never quite alone in an hotel.

Someone nodded and (turning to the king) addressed the king.

Is that not true, your highness? said Someone. Is there not, your highness, always an A. N. Other there? When in an hotel. A porter, say, in the dark, bent over the reception desk.

The king said nothing.

And there, in the dark (continued Someone), the porter will hide, right through the night, a stranger, as it were, albeit one who, at dawn, might well approach and say, like the angel unto Jacob, 'It is, I feel, as if we had spent the night together'.

The king said nothing.

Ah, your highness, how then ever-so-slightly sullied is the world-in-the-morning for he who goes to his rest in an hotel. How ever-so-slightly imperfect is that dawn.

The king said nothing.

Indeed, your highness, perhaps best not to wake, not to wake at all, not in an hotel. The new day, your highness, may simply not be worth waking for. Even if it be that queen of days, the Sabbath. Is that not so, Herr Wittgenstein?

* * *

3 September 1939, the day to which Wittgenstein and Skinner awoke in the New Inn Hotel, was a Sunday, the Christian Sabbath. It was, though, also the day on which Britain declared itself to be at war.

VI/VI Sunday

As the voyage continued and the *Dunera* passed through various time-zones, the ship's clock was put back half-an-hour every day.²³⁸

* * *

The woman stood up, as if ordered to. She faced both the night and the deep, and stared without seeming to see (it being so dark).

Someone now emerged from behind the ship's clock, a troubled and backward thing it was. The man straightway approached the Actor and declared it unlikely that tomorrow, come dawn, the woman would be waking.

What though (said the Actor) if tomorrow were Sunday? He glanced at the backward clock.

What? said Zeppie. What? What?

I said, what if tomorrow were Sunday?

All or in part? said S.

Pardon? said the Actor.

Is tomorrow *wholly* Sunday or only *in part*? said S.

Pardon? said the Actor.

A grain of Sunday . . . , began the king.

Yes? said the Actor.

A grain of Sunday, continued the king, *is hidden in each weekday*.²³⁹

Ah! Did you hear that, coz? said Zeppie, to the woman. Every day, yes each and every day, is at least, in part, in bit, in little, in tiny, a Sunday. Hallelujah-sing-to-Jesus.

She made no response.

But does that not cheer you, dear coz? Are you not cheered, dear coz, by the thought, of a Sunday and of all God's happy saints gathered to psalm and chant and dance like –

Cattle, said the woman, *cattle in a cowshed*.²⁴⁰ Your *Sunday* saints (she continued), these Christians, they are but *cattle in a cowshed*.

Ah, then do they laugh? asked S.

Who? said Zeppie.

The Christians. Do they laugh? asked S.

Laugh?

Yes, do the Christians in their cowsheds laugh? Notwithstanding the muck and the cold. Do they laugh as cattle do?

Cattle? Do cattle now *laugh*? Is that possible?

Herr Wittgenstein says so – remember?

Ah, yes.

The woman, now eyeing the horizon (a razor's edge), sought permission to speak.

Permission was granted.

The woman, perhaps afraid that Someone might hear, lowered her voice and whispered that Herr Wittgenstein was right. For cattle *were* now inclined to laugh, and that was because soon they would be free of cattle-trucks. Yes, soon (she whispered) there would no longer be space for cattle in cattle-trucks, since soon (she whispered) the cattle-trucks would be full with such as were not cattle – two legs not four.

Silence.

The sun rose (sudden). Light astonished the deck. And the day that was dawning (thought S.) might yet prove to be a Sunday. If so (he thought) it would be obvious. There would be hymns.

* * *

Each Sunday, throughout the voyage, Christian services, both Catholic and Protestant, were held on board the *Dunera*.²⁴¹

* * *

The ship swayed and the king (deck-chaired once more) turned to S. *Hopefully*, said the king, *your Sundays in the boat are having a cheering effect?*²⁴²

Not really, said S. He removed his glasses, breathed upon them and wiped them with his shirt-tail. He then looked up and remarked, however, that among the ship's assembled tribes of Christendom there was, on Sundays, a peculiar cheerfulness abroad. Admittedly, these same tribesmen were *on regular days* often possessed of remarkable cheer, seeming almost at home on the sea, being (as they said) Fishermen of a sort. Nevertheless (continued S.) it was on Sundays that Christian gaiety really broke out, what with these Jesus-Boys gathering to preach unto the waves. They had news (they would say), news for the waves, good news, oh yes, hallelujah-praise-Jesus, news of the greatest cock-and-bull story never yet told to the waves, a story in which at one moment the hero *vanishes* but at the very next moment –

The hero re-appears, said the woman.²⁴³

Ah yes, said the king, the *clown*, he makes a *comeback*.²⁴⁴

No, said S. No. I fear he does not.

S. now straightened his tie and walked away.

Silence. Silence. Silence.

The tie that S. had straightened (or tightened) may have been black, or (at least) *become* black, *grown* black. It was difficult to say, even at dawn. But if so, if black (or even blackened) the tie bore solemn witness, said the king, to *the mourning of the prince*.²⁴⁵

What? said Zeppie.

The mourning of the prince.

S. moved port-ward, toward the rail and the deep.

However, continued the king, *the mourning of the prince* (I think) *appears, in all its desperation, to be not devoid of hope.*

What? said Zeppie.

Hope, said the king. *Hope*, he said again, now so loud that even the prince could hear.

Via Hope (thought S.) and recalled Villa Verde and San Remo and the sea, the serious drowning sea. *Hope* (S. thought), *hope, hope, hope.* He was now hanging (half) over the side of the ship.

He's on his way, said Someone.

Where?

Death. The deep.

Should we not save him?

No need.

Why not?

Resurrection, said Wittgenstein.²⁴⁶

Resurrection? You believe the Resurrection? What on earth inclines you to believe the Resurrection?

Love, said Wittgenstein.

Pardon?

What inclines me, said Wittgenstein, to *believe the Resurrection ... is love.*

Pardon?

Love ... only love can believe the Resurrection, said Wittgenstein.

Love? said Zeppie. Where?

There, over there (said Someone), pointing port-ward at S. Can you not see? In the geranium light of the geranium dawn.

See what?

The mourning of the prince, said the king.

The Actor regarded the figure of S. Was he really a prince? He had no crown, nor did he shine. And was he in mourning? Stricken with grief? Hard to say. Yes, he may *appear* to be about to drown himself, but he may, in fact, intend merely to bathe, in the sea, a dauphin among dolphins, as it were. So, was he in mourning? Hard to say, especially from here, since tears cannot be seen at a distance, unless upon the Stage.

Besides, did one so young have *anyone* to mourn for? Perhaps not. But then perhaps the big-hearted prince was mourning for those who had no-one else to mourn for them. Yes, perhaps he kindly mourned for such, and did so out of princely love. Yes, love. Love, he said.

But, said Zeppie, is it enough?

Pardon?

Love. Is love enough?

For *what*?

Resurrection.

No idea, said Someone. Ask the woman, before she takes her leave.

Ask her what?

If there is Resurrection – or (at least) if today **is** or **is not** Sunday.

The woman, as if overhearing, began to speak. *Today*, she said, *today is Sunday*.²⁴⁷

Are you sure? said the Actor. Absolutely sure?

The woman paused and looked down. Alas, she had, it seemed, quite changed her mind. Today, she said, *today it isn't Sunday*.²⁴⁸

Enough! said Someone. Let there be no more vacillation. The woman must make up her mind and quick, whilst she still had one.

The woman again paused and looked down. She then again began to speak. It would be the last time she began to speak.

Today, she said, *the day is not yet ready to be judged*.²⁴⁹

* * *

The date of Gertrud Kolmar's death at Auschwitz is not known. Probability suggests it was not a Sunday, there being only one day in seven that is a Sunday. Moreover, there is some evidence that the gas chambers were used less on a Sunday.²⁵⁰

* * *

Notes

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Whewell's Court Lectures: Cambridge 1938–1941*, from the notes by Yorick Smythies, ed. Volker A. Munz and Bernhard Ritter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017) 125.
- 2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value | Vermischte Bemerkungen*, ed. Georg Henrik von Wright et al, tr. Peter Winch (London: Blackwell, 1998) 39e, 39.
- 3 'Concept of Criticism', *SW*, 1.129 / *GS*, 1.30.
- 4 'Language and Logic', *SW* 1.272 / *GS*, 6.23.
- 5 There have been quite a few studies of Wittgenstein's Jewishness, not least Ranjit Chatterjee's *Wittgenstein and Judaism* (2005), but it is Henry Abramovitch and Raymond Prince who, in 'The Jewish Heritage of Ludwig Wittgenstein', *Transcultural Psychiatry* 43 (2006) 533–5, really set about comparing Wittgenstein's quasi-literary moments to rabbinical traditions.

- 6 Letter to Scholem, 1 September 1933, *WB-GS*, 73 / *WB-GS*, 96. Scholem has some ideas as to whom Benjamin alludes but concludes (of the passage in which these words appear) that 'renewed thought needs to be given to the whole mysterious problem of these sentences' (*WB-GS*, 73 n.3 / *WB-GS*, 96 n.3).
- 7 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2.E4092; Wittgenstein's first name is here recorded as Louis but in German that would be Ludwig.
- 8 As regards Wittgenstein's height see Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: a memoir*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 24. As regards the seeming likelihood of internment (Wittgenstein was not a British citizen until April 1939) see F. A. Flowers III and Ian Ground, *Portraits of Wittgenstein* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 350.
- 9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 30.
- 10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"' (1934-6?), *Philosophical Occasions 1912-51*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 326.
- 11 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Life of Korolenko' [1919], tr. Frieda Mattick, *International Socialist Review* 30 (1969) 11-31 (13).
- 12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations | Philosophische Untersuchungen*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (London: Macmillan, 1953), no. 635, 163e, 163.
- 13 Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures', *Philosophical Occasions*, 257.
- 14 Letter to Max Horkheimer, 18 April 1939, *GB*, 6.263.
- 15 See Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein – The Duty of Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 192-3, 191, 432-3.
- 16 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 171, 69e, 69.
- 17 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 29e, 29.
- 18 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 528-9.
- 19 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 442, 130e, 130.
- 20 Wittgenstein's Whewell's Court Lectures, 126.
- 21 'Brecht's Threepenny Novel', *SW*, 3.5 / *GS*, 3.442.
- 22 Wittgenstein, 'Lectures on Freedom of the Will' (1939?), *Philosophical Occasions*, 434.
- 23 Benjamin, 'Concept of History', *SW*, 4.389 / *GS*, 1.691.
- 24 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 359, pp. 113e, 113.
- 25 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 137-66.
- 26 Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 35-6.
- 27 Wittgenstein, 'Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough' (n.d.), *Philosophical Occasions*, 149.
- 28 Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 4.
- 29 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 462, 133e, 133.
- 30 Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 72.
- 31 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 206e, 206.
- 32 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 11-12, 115, 171-2, 186-8.
- 33 Note that this misspelling was not written by Wittgenstein but seen by him – see letter to Wittgenstein from J. Taylor, 26 September [1938], *Wittgenstein in Cambridge, Letters and Documents, 1911-1951*, ed Brian McGuinness (London: Wiley, 2014), 282.
- 34 Wittgenstein to Norman Malcolm, 22 June 1940, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 326.
- 35 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. German text with English translation by C. K. Ogden* (London: Routledge 1922), no. 5.452, pp.123, 122 – the word here translated as 'face' is *Miene*.
- 36 Wittgenstein cited in Peter Sullivan and Michael Potter (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: history and interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 63 – the word here translated as 'crimes' is *Gemeinheiten*.
- 37 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 19e, 19 – it is also 'I destroy' (in English) in the original.
- 38 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 21e, 21.
- 39 'The Lamp', *SW*, 2.2.692 / *GS*, 7.793.
- 40 Marx et al, *Benjamin's Archive*, 139 / 108.
- 41 See 'Destructive Character', *SW*, 2.2.541-2 / *GS*, 4.396-98.
- 42 Letter to Gerhard Scholem, 11 April 1921, *Correspondence*, 179 / *Briefe*, 262.
- 43 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 412-13.
- 44 Email to author from Mona Benjamin, 22 August 2020.
- 45 'Karl Kraus', *SW*, 2.2.444 / *GS*, 2.349.

- 46 Letter to Scholem, 25 June 1932, *WB-GS*, 11 / *WB-GS*, 19.
- 47 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 676.
- 48 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 681, 170e, 170.
- 49 For Wittgenstein's use of typists, see Georg Henrik von Wright, 'Special Supplement: the Wittgenstein papers', *Philosophical Review* 78 (1969) 483–503 (503). For 'ontology', see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*, ed. Edoardo Zamuner et al (London: Wiley and Sons, 2014), 65.
- 50 Wittgenstein to Rush Rhees, 17 October 1944, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 367.
- 51 Letter to Scholem, 2 June 1934, *WB-GS*, 114 / *WB-GS*, 145.
- 52 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 26e, 26.
- 53 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), no. 586, 101.
- 54 Wittgenstein writes, 'thinking ... is performed by the hand', *Blue and Brown Books*, 6.
- 55 Email to author from Mona Benjamin, 17 February 2021.
- 56 *Arcades*, 524 / *GS*, 5.198.
- 57 'The Mendelssohns *Der Mensch in der Handschrift*', *SW*, 2.1.132 / *GS*, 3.136 – the word here translated as 'hieroglyphs' is *Bilderschrift*.
- 58 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 544.
- 59 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court Lectures*, 125.
- 60 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *SW*, 4.24 / *GS*, 1.546.
- 61 Dieter Kühn, *Gertrud Kolmar: A Literary Life*, tr. Linda Marianello (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 275.
- 62 Gertrud Kolmar to Hilde Wenzel, 11 September 1940, Gertrud Kolmar, *My Gaze is Turned Inward. Letters 1934–1943*, ed. Johanna Woltmann, tr. Brigitte M Goldstein (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 52.
- 63 'Little History', *SW*, 2.2.515 / *GS*, 2.515 – the German here is *Trudchen*, as Benjamin is here referring to Gertrud when a child.
- 64 Gertrud Kolmar, *Worlds*, *Welten*, tr. Philip Kuhn and Ruth von Zimmermann (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2012), 81, 80.
- 65 Kolmar, 'End', cited in Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 54.
- 66 Kolmar, 'In the Camp', cited in *My Gaze*, xvi.
- 67 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 77e, 77.
- 68 Wittgenstein to Malcolm, July 1949, cited in Monk, 552.
- 69 'The Handkerchief', *SW*, 2.2.660 / *GS*, 4.744.
- 70 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 43, 42.
- 71 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 91, 90.
- 72 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 65, 64.
- 73 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court Lectures*, 130.
- 74 Kolmar, 'The Dancer 2', cited in Kuhn, 70.
- 75 Gertrud Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother from Berlin, a Novel | Susanna, a Novella*, tr. Brigitte M Goldstein (London: Homes and Meier, 1997), 119 / *Die jüdische Mutter | Susanna*, ed. Regina Nörtemann and Thedel von Wallmoden (Berlin: Wallstein Verlag, 2023), 148.
- 76 'The Bootleggers', *Radio Benjamin*, 143 / *GS*, 7.205.
- 77 'The Metaphysics of Youth', *SW*, 1.9 / *GS*, 2.90 – the German here translated as 'dirty joke' is *die Zote*.
- 78 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no.115, 48e, 48.
- 79 'Spain', *SW*, 2.2.649 / *GS*, 6. 461.
- 80 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 77, 76.
- 81 See Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 359.
- 82 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 604, 157e, 157.
- 83 'Toys and Play', *SW*, 2.1.120 / *GS*, 3.132 – translation amended.
- 84 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 115, 48e, 48.
- 85 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 138–9.
- 86 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 44e, 44.
- 87 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no.236, 42.
- 88 Cited in Linda L. Gorfée, *Wittgenstein's Secret Diaries Semiotic Writing in Cryptography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 153.
- 89 'Pensées', *Archive*, 129 / *Archive*, 96 – the German here is *klappt der Mund auf*.
- 90 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court Lectures*, 340.

- 91 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 412, 124e, 124.
- 92 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* | *Über Gewissheit*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 12e, 12.
- 93 Wittgenstein to Raymond Townsend, 19 May 1939, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 304.
- 94 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 34e, 34.
- 95 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 7e, 7, 39e, 39.
- 96 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 97, 44e, 44.
- 97 Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 256.
- 98 'Karl Kraus', *SW*, 2.2.456 / *GS*, 2.367.
- 99 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 638 and Detlev Schöttker, 'Benjamin liest Wittgenstein', in Sigrid Weigel and Daniel Weidner (eds.), *Benjamin-Studien 7* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), 92.
- 100 Letter to Scholem, 1 September 1933, *Benjamin and Scholem*, 72–3 / *Benjamin-Scholem*, 96 (translation amended).
- 101 Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother*, 166 / *Die jüdische Mutter*, 203.
- 102 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 47, 46.
- 103 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 89, 88.
- 104 Kolmar to Wenzel, 8 December 1941, *My Gaze*, 86.
- 105 See Genesis 33.22–32.
- 106 Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother*, 129 / *Die jüdische Mutter*, 159; Kolmar, *Worlds*, 73, 72 (translation amended).
- 107 Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 329.
- 108 Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 158.
- 109 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 23e, 23.
- 110 Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother*, 166 / *Die jüdische Mutter*, 203.
- 111 Benjamin, *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.486 / *GS*, 4.146.
- 112 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 32e, 32.
- 113 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 5e, 5.
- 114 'Lavinia ... thou hast no hands' – see William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. J. C. Maxwell (London: Methuen, 1968) III.i.79.
- 115 Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 197–8.
- 116 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 35e, 35.
- 117 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court*, 27.
- 118 Letter to Scholem, 26 December 1934, *WB–GS*, 148 / *WB–GS*, 183.
- 119 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 189, 188.
- 120 'The Lucky Hand', *Storyteller*, 187 / *GS*, 4.771.
- 121 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no. 506, 88.
- 122 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.447 / *GS*, 1.447.
- 123 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 179, 178.
- 124 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 220.
- 125 'Pensées', *Archive*, 144 / *Archive*, 133 – the German here is *Die Stube*.
- 126 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court*, 137.
- 127 Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 16.
- 128 Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures', *Philosophical Occasions*, 225.
- 129 'Pensées', *Archive*, 132 / *Archive*, 99.
- 130 Kühn, *Kolmar*, 65.
- 131 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 81, 80.
- 132 Kolmar, *My Gaze*, xii.
- 133 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 16e, 16.
- 134 'On the Concept', *SW*, 4.392 / *GS*, 1.697–8.
- 135 'Unpacking my Library' (1931), *SW*, 2.2.486 / *GS*, 4.388.
- 136 'The Concept of Criticism', *SW*, 1.129 / *GS*, 1.30.
- 137 'Language and Logic', *SW*, 1.272 / *GS*, 6.23.
- 138 'Berlin Toy Tour I', *Radio Benjamin*, 42 / *GS*, 7.104.
- 139 'Pensées', *Archive*, 140 / *Archive*, 109.
- 140 'Andre Gide and Germany', *SW*, 2.1.83 / *GS*, 4.501.
- 141 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 30e, 30.

- 142 'Berlin Puppet Theatre', *Radio Benjamin*, 18 / 7.81.
- 143 See Gustavo Bernstein, Sarrasini. *Between the Fable and the Epic* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2000), 44.
- 144 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no. 125, 22.
- 145 Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 82e, 82.
- 146 Stefan to Walter, [July 1939], in Luhr, 'Was noch', my translation.
- 147 Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 30e.
- 148 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 121, 120.
- 149 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 13e, 13.
- 150 Letter to Ernst Schoen, 5 December 1919, *Correspondence*, 153 / *Briefe*, 226.
- 151 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no., 13, 3.
- 152 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 154.
- 153 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no. 35, 7.
- 154 'In Parallel with My Actual Diary', *SW*, 2.2.416 / *GS*, 6.191.
- 155 Bartrop, *Dunera*, 187.
- 156 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court*, 261.
- 157 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court*, 205–6.
- 158 'Pensées', *Archive*, 134 / *Archive*, 102.
- 159 'Metaphysics of Youth', *SW*, 1.16 / *GS*, 2.104.
- 160 Kolmar, *My Gaze*, xii.
- 161 See Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 32–5.
- 162 Gertrud Kolmar, *Cecile Renault* (1935), her unpublished stage play, cited in Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 348.
- 163 Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 358.
- 164 Kolmar, 'Longing to Go Home', cited in *My Gaze*, xvii.
- 165 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 15e, 15.
- 166 'Pensées', *Archive*, 141 / *Archive*, 110.
- 167 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 60e, 60.
- 168 Wittgenstein, 'Remarks', *Philosophical Occasions*, 123.
- 169 'Pensées', *Archive*, 123 / *Archive*, 89.
- 170 'Pensées', *Archive*, 149 / *Archive*, 118.
- 171 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 83, 82.
- 172 Wittgenstein, *Whewell's Court*, 206.
- 173 Patkin, *Dunera*, 43.
- 174 'Franz Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.812 / *GS*, 2.432.
- 175 Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy', *Philosophical Occasions*, 181.
- 176 'Books by the Mentally Ill', *SW*, 2.1.124 / *GS*, 4.616.
- 177 Wittgenstein, cited in Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 534.
- 178 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 63e, 63.
- 179 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, no. 717, 123.
- 180 Circus Sarrasani, although also known as the National Circus of Argentina, was actually resident in Dresden.
- 181 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 23, 22.
- 182 Bartrop, *Dunera*, 166.
- 183 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 32e, 32.
- 184 'Pensées', *Archive*, 129 / *Archive*, 96.
- 185 Pearl, *Dunera*, 38.
- 186 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 31, 30.
- 187 Kolmar to Jacob Picard, 26 January 1938, *My Gaze*, 160.
- 188 'Pensées', *Archive*, 141 / *Archive*, 110.
- 189 Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures', *Philosophical Occasions*, 276.
- 190 'Pensées', *Archive*, 141 / *Archive*, 110.
- 191 See the intricate decimal numbering of propositions in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.
- 192 'Pensées', *Archive*, 141 / *Archive*, 111.
- 193 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 251.
- 194 Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 75e, 75.
- 195 *Arcades*, 524 / *GS*, 5.198.

- 196 'Trauerspiel and Tragedy', *SW*, 1.56 / *GS*, 2.134–5.
- 197 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 528, 143e, 143.
- 198 Kolmar, 'The Governess', cited in Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 73.
- 199 'On the Concept', *SW*, 4.397 / *GS*, 1.704.
- 200 Wittgenstein, 'Remarks', *Philosophical Occasions*, 121.
- 201 Wittgenstein, *Culture*, 70e, 70.
- 202 Wittgenstein, 'Lectures', *Philosophical Occasions*, 438.
- 203 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 181, 180.
- 204 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 173, 172 – the German here is *Zufall*.
- 205 Kolmar, *My Gaze*, 27.
- 206 Kolmar, *Worlds*, 75, 74.
- 207 Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother*, 11 / *Die jüdische Mutter*, 21.
- 208 'Nordic Sea', *The Storyteller*, 119 / *GS*, 4.386.
- 209 Kolmar, *My Gaze*, 16.
- 210 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 43e, 43.
- 211 See Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 82.
- 212 The lake at Wannsee was a very popular place for well-to-do Berliners to visit, and the Benjamins were no exception – email to author from Mona Benjamin, 26 August 2023.
- 213 'Toys and Play', *SW*, 2.1.119 / *GS*, 3.129.
- 214 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 49e, 49.
- 215 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 88e, 88.
- 216 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 67e, 67.
- 217 Kolmar, 'The Invalid', cited in Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 98.
- 218 Kolmar, 'The Blessed', cited in Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 99.
- 219 Kolmar, writing in October 1934, cited in Kuhn, *Kolmar*, 142. Street names were, for political reasons, quite often changed in the Third Reich – see James McSpadden, 'Between Grassroots Pressure and Local Polycracy: street renaming in Nazi Berlin', *German History* 40 (2022) 384–404.
- 220 'Theory of Criticism', *SW*, 1.219 / *GS*, 1.835 – the German here is *einen jungen Menschen*.
- 221 Letter to Scholem, [10–12 September 1933], *WB-GS*, 77 / *WB-GS*, 101.
- 222 'Paris of the Second Empire', *SW*, 4.26 / *GS*, 1.551.
- 223 'Paris of the Second Empire', *SW*, 4.25 / *GS*, 1.548.
- 224 Kolmar to Wenzel, 7 November 1942, *My Gaze*, 129.
- 225 'On Love and Related Matters (A European Problem)', *SW*, 1.230 / *GS*, 6.73.
- 226 'The Aviator', *The Storyteller*, 77 / *GS*, 7.643.
- 227 Wittgenstein to William Eccles, 7 May 1925, *Philosophical Occasions*, 8.
- 228 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 56e, 56.
- 229 'May–June 1931', *SW*, 2.2.484 / *GS*, 6.441.
- 230 Wittgenstein to Bertrand Russell, 25 March 1913, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, ed. G. H. von Wright and B. F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 27.
- 231 Wittgenstein to Piero Sraffa, 29 September 1938, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 284.
- 232 Wittgenstein to Sraffa, 27 July 1939, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 306.
- 233 Wittgenstein to Sraffa, 3 September 1939, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 308.
- 234 See Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 424.
- 235 Wittgenstein cited in Monk, *Wittgenstein*, 288.
- 236 Wittgenstein to Russell, 25 March 1913, *Letters to Russell*, 22.
- 237 See John Hayes (ed.), *The Selected Writings of Maurice O'Connor Drury: on Wittgenstein, philosophy, religion and psychiatry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 124.
- 238 Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 166.
- 239 'Naples', *SW*, 1.417 / *GS*, 4.311.
- 240 Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother*, 46 / *Die jüdische Mutter*, 62.
- 241 See Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 151 and Patkin, *Dunera*, 53.
- 242 Letter to Gretel Adorno, 25 June 1933, *GA-WB*, 37 / *GA-WB*, 200.
- 243 Kolmar to Wenzel, 20 February 1943, *My Gaze*, 146.
- 244 *Arcades*, 524 / *GS*, 5.458.
- 245 Benjamin, *Origin*, 125 / *GS*, 1.306.
- 246 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 39e, 39.

- 247 Kolmar to Wenzel, 16 October 1938, *My Gaze*, 7.
- 248 Kolmar to Wenzel, 5 March 1942, *My Gaze*, 99.
- 249 Kolmar to Wenzel, 22 October 1939, *My Gaze*, 23.
- 250 See Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 200, 326.

4 (Untold)

Introductory notes to Chapter 4

This chapter opens with the announcement that the *Dunera* was heading for Australia, an announcement that caused considerable alarm, not least (it is here imagined) among the three deportees who shared the surname Wilde. Our three imagined Wildes have only a passing connection with the three *Dunera* Wildes and they (in turn) had no connection with *Oscar* Wilde. Nevertheless, the Three Wildes, as they are here conceived, find their speech frequently invaded by the Divine Oscar's most telling declarations, in particular that one might 'have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia'.

There follow a number of scenes that bring together Hitler entering Vienna (as witnessed by Stefan) and shadowy Wildean figures who are 'much talked of in Vienna' and, indeed, all but 'offered Vienna'. These scenes segue into dialogue concerning Wilde's own reception in Vienna, a reception that had become particularly enthusiastic in the 1930s. Strange though it may seem, this trend, we learn, was also seen in Nazi Germany.

These historical back-stories eventually prompt a number of scenes that explore striking parallels between two particular manuscripts. The first is the manuscript that, in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is thought to have been in a handbag, which turns out, in fact, to have contained an infant. The second is the manuscript that Benjamin claimed to carry in a briefcase, which turns out, in fact, to have contained no such thing.¹ Famously, the Wildean case comes to connect with questions around paternity, and the same here also proves true of the Benjaminian case. In short, Benjamin's lost or phantom manuscript is seen to have a strange and complex connection to Stefan.

The chapter ends with the ship's arrival in Australia, at which point S. imagines that his stowaway father refuses to join him in disembarking, a refusal that mimics Benjamin's actual refusal to follow Stefan (and indeed Dora) in leaving Nazi Europe for the relative safety of London.

* * *

Benjamin and Wilde are not often considered together, except in relation to their common interest in aesthetics. Important in this connection is Julia Prewitt Brown's *Cosmopolitan Criticism: Oscar Wilde's philosophy of art* (1997), which includes the proposal that 'it may be in the context of Benjamin's bold thinking that we will eventually come to appreciate Wilde'.² This chapter is an attempt to respond to Brown's provocation.

It is also an attempt to pick up on Benjamin's very keen awareness of Wilde, to whom Benjamin makes two references in *The Arcades Project*, the book that famously envisions Paris as 'the capital of the nineteenth century'.³ The first of these two references goes so far, indeed, as to identify Wilde with Baudelaire who, being Benjamin's definitive Parisian, is thereby also the *hero* of the nineteenth century. When, therefore, Benjamin remarks that 'the nineteenth century invades our dreams' we have every reason to expect that Wilde might appear in those dreams.

And that is precisely what happens in this chapter where, time and again, Wildean rhetoric is seen to invade the very particular dreams of the summer of 1940. This rhetoric includes talk of not only enforced migration ('Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia') but also global rule ('a man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world'). This latter line brilliantly anticipates Benjamin's conviction that aestheticism, within the political realm, leads to fascism – 'all efforts', writes Benjamin, 'to aestheticise politics culminate in one point; that one point is war'.⁴ In short, where *Wilde* once was, there *Benjamin* will be.

In what follows, the Benjaminian imaginary is seen, then, to be entangled with the cities that most preoccupy Wilde – thus not only Vienna, Paris and London but also Sydney. These same four cities also prove to preoccupy Stefan; however, there is a fifth, less Wildean, city that is here seen to cast a very particular shadow over Stefan, and that is Jerusalem.

Chapter Four (Untold)

I/VI St John

On the seventh day of the *Dunera's* voyage an announcement was made, 'Gentlemen, we are going to Australia'.⁵

* * *

Christ, thought all the gentlemen, all the gentlemen-at-sea. Australia, they thought, Christ. And, at once, three perfect gentlemen were (like perfect clouds) blown by a westerly in the direction of S.

It being the seventh day, their Sea-Sabbath, S. had been at Rest, legs-all-of-a-tangle and arse-unto-deck. Now, though, S. looked up, squinting into the glare of the sun – just like Abraham (S. thought) at the door of his tent. With an arched hand, S. shaded his eyes, and there, before him, he saw three perfect silhouettes, three gentlemen quite blackened by the oceanic light. But who? Who were they? The three. Who? he asked.

Zeppie, skull-unto-deck, attempted an answer, murmuring: Herr Wilde, Herr Wilde, and ...

Yes?

Herr Wilde. The inverted Zeppie was, however, not quite sure why there were so many Herr Wildes aboard.

Is it, he pondered, a case of –

Technological reproduction? said the king.⁶

* * *

The *Dunera's* real Herr Wildes – Siegfried, Hans and Werner – were all German-Jews. Siegfried (five foot five) was a cotton

merchant, Hans (five foot eight) a farmer, and Werner (five foot seven) a sorter of wool.⁷ Siegfried had served in World War One with the German Air Force and had a scar over his right eye, whilst Werner had a bare spot on his head. All three were from Berlin but had, of late, and until internment, found themselves in London, Bradford and Harrogate, respectively. Needless to say, they had no connection with *Oscar Wilde*, who had died in 1900, and was thus (on the whole) a man of the previous, nineteenth century.

* * *

The Wildes, all three, now began (in chorus) to curse. Fuck, they said. Fuck. *We must fly to Australia!*⁸ Fuck. Fuck. They here paused, before adding (quite to their own surprise), Good heavens!

They then paused again, being condemned, it seemed, on occasion to utter words not quite their own. But why? Why (they enquired) might one be occasionally doomed to speak another's words, someone else's lines? Why? One *asks merely for information*.⁹ Is it, perhaps, because the modern world is possessed by so much chatter (the wireless and so on and on). Or is it (dammit) because of one's name? Wilde. Yes, is it, perhaps, a tyrannous name, a name which secretly exerts the force, or fluence, of the divine Oscar? Bugger the bugger.

Whatever (they continued), the fact remains that now, even now, to make things yet worse, *we must fly to bloody Australia*.

Fly? said Someone. As through the air?

The shortest Wilde, the Aeronaut (he said), now glanced to the sky, the burning roof. Meanwhile, Zeppie, still upturned, began to mumble – something it was concerning a circus, a flying circus, a flying national circus with clowns and elephants and strong men and weak and a gentleman known as The Human Kangaroo (yes, kangaroo) who had all been stuffed in an unlikely Zeppelin that had (believe it or not) o'er-leapt the whole Atlantic and made it somehow all the way to sunny Brazil in just three sky-blue days, the elephants hallooing all the while to the world below.

* * *

It was said that, at some point in the early 1930s, the whole National Circus of Argentina (including a 'Human Kangaroo') flew

* Any italicised words attributed to the Wildes are from the writings of Oscar Wilde.

in a Graf Zeppelin from Friedrichshafen in Southern Germany to the Brazilian city of Recife.¹⁰

* * *

The Wildes, still bent over S., stooped further and closer. They wore identical God-forsaken lounge-suits (Utility-make) and, although bereft of neckties, their shirt-collars (begrimed) remained altogether buttoned-up. And now they prepared to speak – as usual, all at once.

Australia, they said, *Australia* – as if to say that nothing more could ever be said again; except this: that they had *found it on the map*, yes, fuck, on the map, and (good heavens) *what a curious shape it is*, *Australia*. *Just like a large packing-case*.¹¹

S. tended, these days, to think that most everything looked like a packing-case – not least the king's own briefcase, given how the thing bulged, it being stuffed (perhaps) with contraband socks. Or so S. hoped.

* * *

In July 1938, in a letter to his father, Stefan mentions that he would be sending him six single socks, each separated from its partner sock; these partner socks were to follow a little later. This was intended somehow to avoid customs duties.¹²

* * *

Yes, 12 socks he had sent, one for each of the tribes of Israel, even the tribe of Benjamin, that smallest, dwarf-like, troupe. But what if the king had received just six? Each sock would thus be single, unpartnered, solitary. Altogether alone in the world. Ah, how dreadful – a king all odd-about-the-ankles was a sorry thought.

S. now removed his glasses, gave them a wipe with his tie, put them back on, and looked across at his highness, deep within a deck-chair. Herr Wittgenstein's?

The king shook his head. *My ... deck-chair*, he said. *My hidden deck-chair*.¹³

S. was not altogether sure he understood and so returned to the question of the king's socks. Those royal ankles, thought S., were they (as regards hosiery) odd or same? It was hard to tell (he thought), what with these hopeless spectacles. Indeed, for all he knew, the king might even be totally *sans* socks.

Perhaps, then, S. should best drop to his knees and steal a closer look; after all, by way of dissimulation, he could, if need be, make as if to scrub the deck. And why not? Some whom he knew had, with bare and

weeping hands, once polished the very pavements of Vienna.¹⁴ He had seen them. Had been there.

The Wildes now straightened and, once more, they conversed. This time, among themselves.

Where-the-fuck was one?

At sea.

No, metaphorically – in terms of what one was saying.

Australia.

Ah yes! *Australia ... what a curious shape it is.*

Quite. *However, it is a very young country isn't it?*¹⁵

The Wildes here ended their conversation and S. fell to thinking, thinking upon the supposed youthfulness of Australia. It was a subtle jest, he thought, even as he recalled a certain negro gentleman, one who had been given to winking.

* * *

At Freetown, 'a negro ... rowed his small canoe so near to the ship that it almost touched its side; [but no-one] ... who watched the negro, could understand why he continually winked'.

(Kurt Fischer, HMT *Dunera*)¹⁶

* * *

The Wildes resumed. Australia, they agreed, being so young a country, might yet, one day, take on a quite different and less absurd shape; as was, of course, the teaching, and indeed guidance, of Modern Geology. In short, there was (they said) some hope for Australia – geologically speaking.

Quite, said S., but is it not possible that Australia may yet take on a still *more* absurd shape, what *with* –

All the dear little kangaroos flying about[?] enquired the Wildes.¹⁷

Exactly, said S.

The Wildes each now reached for the nearest deck-chair. The young man, they feared, had a point. *Australia* was, after all, a *dreadful vulgar place*.¹⁸

Nevertheless, said S., Mr Churchill et al still seemed to desire that every Alien Gentleman should go there.

They want me to go? To go to Australia? said the tallest of the Wildes (by an English inch). *They want me to go?*¹⁹

So it seems.

Then *I think I will refuse.*

But that, I fear, would be pointless.

Well, at least allow me to **ask** you about Australia, and my trip there.

Ask what?

Well, *under whose management should I go?*²⁰

S. gestured toward a near-by Tin-Hat-and-Bayonet. Bastard. Portside he was, and whistled a lament, as if for Dover. He then lit a lucifer with fingers that shook.

By now, the shortest Wilde (the antique Aeronaut) had had Enough. He was, in fact, well versed in knowing when Enough was Enough, having once seen it from the sky. Flanders.

The Aeronaut here clicked his antique fingers: Time it was for distraction, a mid-Atlantic interlude, albeit a weary Old-World Routine. We shall, he announced, *quote from **The Importance***.²¹ We shall *quote loosely*, he added.²² In short–

Expect no words of your own[?] suggested the king.²³

Herr Wilde did not reply, for all three Herr Wildes were already (and with chorus-line precision) assembling themselves – tallest-to-port, shortest-to-starboard. A fine sight, thought S., notwithstanding their trousers which, being beltless, were in constant danger of descending. The Show, though, must go on and (indeed) in the very-contemporary and wise-cracking manner of the Brothers Marx.

Wilde 1 Heh, you!

Wilde 2 Who me?

Wilde 1 Yes you. *He wants to speak to you.*²⁴

Wilde 2 Who does?

Wilde 1 He does. [POINTS TO WILDE 3]

Wilde 2 What about?

Wilde 3 *About your emigrating.*

Wilde 2 My what?

Wilde 3 *Your emigrating.*

Wilde 2 My emigrating!

Wilde 1 *Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.*

Wilde 2 *I'd sooner die.*

Wilde 3 *Well, he said ... that you would have to choose between this world, the next and –*

Wilde 2 *Bournemouth?*²⁵

Wilde 1 No, *Australia.*

Wilde 2 But *the reports I have of the next world and Australia are not ...*

Wilde 3 Not *what?*

Wilde 2 Not as bad as *Bournemouth.*

[PAUSE. WILDE 2 CONSIDERS WHETHER NOW HE WOULD EVER BE FORGIVEN IN BOURNEMOUTH. HE THEN MOVES SHIP-LEFT, CLEARS THROAT, AND PREPARES TO ENCHANT.] *Australia* –

Wilde 1 Yes?

Wilde 2 *Australia, I believe ... lies right underneath the floor of one's coal-cellar.*²⁶

[LOOKS DOWN AT BOOTS.]

Wilde 3 South?

Wilde 1 Very

The Wildes each now struck an attitude, or pose, as if to say to the waves, FINIS, THE END. They awaited oceanic applause. There was none. They thus hastily disassembled, stood down, fell apart. Demobbed. Doomed. To fucking Australia.

Ah, well, said Wilde 2, *I prefer ... the South.*²⁷

Yes, but can it be proved? said Someone (passing). This predilection for the South (he continued), could it be evidenced? After all, Herr Wilde would seem to be more acquainted with the North.

(Harrogate, murmured Zeppie).

Indeed, resumed Someone, does Herr Wilde know even the way to the South? How one might, in fact, get there?

Certainly, chorused all three Wildes – *Twyford ... Folkestone ... Boulogne ... the Pyrenees.*²⁸ And here, of a sudden (upon the Pyrenees), they stopped and stared out to sea, three stiffs to the wind.

Don't stop, said Zeppie. Not at the Pyrenees, not now. Keep going – for God's sake, keep going.

Keep going where? said the Wildes, still stiffs to the wind.

South, said Zeppie.

How? said the Wildes.

By bloody ship, said Zeppie.

What? said the Wildes.

The ship, said the king, *the ship sails south.*²⁹

But can one be sure? said the Wildes. *Latitude and Longitude do not appear to be marked on the sea.*³⁰

The king looked up. *The ship* (he said again) *sails south*. He spoke as if going south were some kind of law, or rule.

* * *

The name 'Benjamin' derives from the Hebrew name בִּנְיָמִין (*Binyamin*) meaning 'son of the South', with בֶּן (*ben*) meaning 'son' and יָמִין (*yamin*) meaning 'the South'.

* * *

S. once again removed his spectacles, the world turned to mist and all men became as trees in the mist. He had, though, a question for the trees.

But what, he asked, would be encountered in the South?

Beggars, said a tree that was, in fact, the king.³¹

Beggars? said Zeppie.

The beggars are in the South, said the king.

Then we shall be saved, said Zeppie.

From what? said S.

The North, said the king, *the Christian North*.³² He wished, he said, to escape therefrom.

Quite, said the Actor, but why head to the South? Why to the South rather than, say, to the East or West?

The king, said S., heads to the South in order that he might yet concentrate.

But what of the heat, the sun, the glare? said the Actor.

It would be an *absurdity*, said the king, to hold *the belief that the southern sun is the foe of concentration*.³³

* * *

Long before the Nazi occupation of France compelled Walter Benjamin to head south for neutral Spain, he had twice *chosen* to go south. In 1924 he went to live on the island of Capri and in 1933 he went to live on the island of Ibiza. His affection for Capri was particularly laced with a romanticisation of the mediterranean South.³⁴

* * *

The king now stood up, raised his crownless head, squinted at the sun and appeared to concentrate. The Wildes, no longer stiffed unto the wind, swiftly gathered about the king and enquired what exactly it was that he concentrated upon. The king lowered his head, now seeming to concentrate upon concentration itself. Then, at last, he murmured – something it was about *infinite duration* – *whose image*, he said, was *evoked by the midday sky of the South*.³⁵

Ah, said the Wildes, then let us *gladly* go south. They would welcome, they said, the evocation of an image of infinite duration.

The North (Bradford, for example) had been rather short of evocation. True, there had been the Home Guard, but little else in the way of evocation. So, yes, they would go gladly south.

Even south of one's coal-cellar? said S.

Indeed, said the Wildes. Far south, very south.

As far as hell? said S.

No, said the Wildes. They did not particularly want to go to Hell. Harrogate had been bad enough.

Zeppie farted (dysentery).

However, resumed the Wildes, nowadays very few places are in fact tolerable. Not even Paris.

Paris? said S.

Yes, Paris, said the Wildes, it's the capital of –

The nineteenth century? said the king.³⁶

Fuck no, said the Wildes. No, *Paris*, your highness, is all-but the capital of Hell. At least, it is now, following recent developments, developments reminiscent, alas, of *the worst excesses of the French Revolution*.³⁷ Or, was it of *the celebrated ... Siege of Paris*?³⁸ Or, indeed, its celebrated Fall? Its fall to Herr Hitler.

* * *

At some point in the 1930s, when working in Paris, Benjamin set down that 'the man of the nineteenth century [was] ... in the prison of hell'; however, as Adorno would later wryly comment, 'Benjamin's ... determination of the nineteenth century as hell [soon] became untenable with the rise of the Third Reich'.³⁹

* * *

The king, still upon his hidden deckchair, balanced his briefcase upon his lap. He then began to lean forward, until he was bent double, head upon briefcase, as if perhaps he was asleep, or simply somewhere else (hidden perhaps).

Where do you think he is? said S., looking down at the king and turning to the Wildes.

He is, said the Wildes, *at the British Museum. Or, perhaps, the Librairie Nationale*.⁴⁰

Bibliothèque Nationale, said S. (correcting an error, an error in their French). I believe you meant to say he is at the **Bibliothèque Nationale**. In Paris.

* * *

Walter Benjamin remained in Paris, right up until May 1940, just a month before the city fell to Germany, each day going to the Bibliothèque Nationale. There he worked on a vast book consisting almost exclusively of quotations from or about the nineteenth century.

* * *

The king now slowly lifted his head, heavy like a planet. *The nineteenth century*, he said, *invades our dreams*.⁴¹ He looked about the deck, then clocked the Wildes, to whom he now addressed himself. *Men of the nineteenth century*, he said (and the Wildes bowed), *the hour of our apparitions is fixed forever*.⁴²

Someone now lit an imagined fag and asked if these last words were, in truth, the king's own. Or were they but stolen goods?

Expect no words of my own, said the king, struggling free of his deck-chair and turning his back to the world.

The Wildes (now positioned behind the royal arse) again fell into theatrical line. Being blindside of the king, it was time to parody the king, this idiot-king, parrot-king. *I quote*, quote-quote, quote-quote-fucking-quote, they whispered, in parody. Unobserved.

His highness stiffened. *Whenever*, he muttered, *the nineteenth century feels itself to be unobserved it grows bold*.⁴³

The Wildes, still unobserved, drew closer to the stiffened king. They were now close enough, being downwind, to smell his highness. Bad it was, the stink, but still worse was knowing how very-like-him they were. *He cannot think*, they whispered, and *so he quotes*.⁴⁴ Yes, how very like themselves.

Someone now prodded at the king. Pit of back. At once, the king turned about, but only to discover the Wildes, his downwind familiars. The king cursed. *Doppelgangers*, he murmured, *all around*.⁴⁵ He then took out a blasted handkerchief and, with a royal flourish, waved the greying rag Wilde-ward, as if to indicate of whom he spoke. *The number of our doubles*, said the king, *is infinite*.⁴⁶

Correction, said the Wildes, we are but Three which is (in fact) a blessing in that *three is company and two is none* – especially in *married life*.⁴⁷

The king now cursed again, even as the Wildes added, apropos Marriage, that they themselves, the Wildes, had once been not Three but Four. However, the fourth, a Wife, currently resided in an Hotel which, sadly, she could not as yet get out of. And thus they were (presently) Three.

* * *

In June 1940, Siegfried Wilde's wife, Johanna, had been interned on the Isle of Man, in Peveril Hotel, Port Erien.⁴⁸

* * *

Three? said Zeppie. Three? Well, that's a Happy Thing (hallelujah-thank-you-Jesus), for if the Herr Wildes should ever wish to run away with the Circus, the National Circus, they could always pretend to be, say, *The Three Killarneys*.⁴⁹ Or, perhaps —

Two Idiots and a Lunatic? suggested the Wildes.⁵⁰

Not quite, said Zeppie.

Three Men in the Fiery Furnace? suggested the king.⁵¹

No, there were four, said Zeppie.

Pardon? said S.

The Three in the Furnace, said Zeppie, were, in fact, *four* in a furnace, the three being joined by an unaccountable fourth, namely Christ (sing-hallelujah), or so some say. And thus they (the Three) did not in fact perish (sing-hallelujah) but rather were —

Saved? said S.

Naturally, said Zeppie.

* * *

Then Nebuchadnezzar ... was astonished, and ... said unto his counsellors, 'Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... [And yet] I see four men ... walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt'.

(Daniel 3.24–5)

* * *

The Wildes now reflected. Loudly. As if through a bloody megaphone. Yes (they megaphoned), this being Three was, for sure, a funny-old act and famously so (in Holy Writ), with not only the Furnace Three being in fact Four but also the Trinitarian Three being in fact One. And then there was, come to think of it, the Two who were Three in the case of the Two who once journeyed (eventide it was) to Emmaus, wherever that is, and were joined by some shadowy bugger who, in the end, at the end, turned out to have been Christ. Yes, Him again, back from the dead.⁵² Ah, that was a screwball day, so it was. One for the mad. Mind you, it is in fact the case (believe it or not) that *at least once in his life each and every man walks with Christ to Emmaus*.⁵³

* * *

And, behold, two of them went ... to ... Emmaus, ... And it came to pass, that ... Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

(Luke 24.13–16)

* * *

The ship pitched, and The Wildes, now tilting, again began to converse. Something it was about *the secret of Jesus* and how He, or It, was a secret known to but a privileged few.

Such as *St John*, for instance, added a Wilde (Wilde Two).

Exactly, said another (Wilde One).

My *St John*[?] enquired Wilde Two.⁵⁴

No, *his* – *his* *St John*, said Someone, pointing first at the king, and then at S.

You mean *Raphael*? said the king.

What?

Raphael? said the king, also now pointing at S.

* * *

In 1924, when Walter Benjamin, visiting Florence, came across a painting of John the Baptist, the only name that accompanied it was Raphael – this was, of course, Stefan's middle name.

* * *

The Wildes stared at S., or rather Raphael, if the king could be believed. It was, though, hard (they felt) to credit that this modern young-man-at-sea might have any connection to the ill-dressed Baptist-of-old. Not least since this would also connect the young man to *the secret of Jesus*, which was hardly kosher. Whatever would his dear father think?

II/VI Goring

Dark it was. They had descended – all, including the king and indeed his (hidden) deck-chair. Straightway, the Wildes inelegantly ascended a table, now a table of fear-and-trembling (legs). Precarious were the Three and perchance they would tumble, but here, being tabled, at least they could be seen. Thank God (they thought).

The ship pitched, the table tilted and the Wildes, lurching to starboard, hastily beckoned to S. Nearer, they said. Come nearer. And S. slouched nearer. They now examined his face, those cartoon eyes and jam-jar spectacles. Was this, they wondered, really the countenance of one with a secret up his aft?

* * *

When, in September 1938, Stefan moved into digs with Dr and Mrs Warren in Enfield Lock, a London suburb, Dora wrote that, 'They do not know that he is J'.⁵⁵

* * *

The Wildes, as if on a crowded bus, now turned to each other and considered, considered how (given this rather unpleasant War) the world was, in fact, altogether thick with Secrets and Ciphers. Indeed, *all expression*, or at least all Full-and-Frank expression, had been (they said) altogether *forbidden by the Postal Authorities*.⁵⁶ Even the most respectable persons had been reduced (they said) to *signalling* and *flashing messages*.⁵⁷

* * *

Before escaping to England, late in 1938, Stefan was lodging in Vienna in the house of Dr Gertrud Redlich, a well-connected academic lawyer who was involved in the Austrian Resistance. Her involvement may, in fact, have begun before the Anschluss, when Nazi influence was already widespread. Note that, in 1937, Stefan wrote to his father that Gertrud's correspondence 'provides a kind of intelligence service'.⁵⁸

* * *

Wilde Recall, for instance –
Wilde That *charming person ... from Vienna*?⁵⁹
Wilde Ah, yes, *the brilliant Mrs* –

Wilde Indeed. *Our attachés at Vienna write to us about nothing else.*⁶⁰

Wilde *Although nothing is absolutely known against her.*⁶¹
[PAUSE.]

Wilde She doesn't turn out to be a spy, then?

Wilde Good heavens, no. *Spies are of no use nowadays. Their profession is over. The newspapers do their work instead.*

* * *

In 1941, after escaping to the United States, Gertrud Redlich would continue to support the Austrian Resistance by sending back to Vienna a stream of American newspaper clippings.⁶²

* * *

Wilde And what do they say?

Wilde What?

Wilde The newspapers, what do they say about Vienna?

Wilde Well, it's all about *Him* – you know, Herr H—.

Wilde Ah, Him?

Wilde Yes, Him

[PAUSE].

Wilde And what about Him?

Wilde What?

Wilde What is it about Him that they are saying? What's the talk?

Wilde What?

Wilde What's all the talk of?

Wilde That *he has been so much talked of.*⁶³

[PAUSE]

Wilde But where?

Wilde Sorry?

Wilde Where has he been so much talked of?

Wilde *In Vienna.*

Wilde Where?

Wilde Vienna. *He has been so much talked of in Vienna.*

[PAUSE]

Wilde And ...?

Wilde And what?

Wilde And is there anything else? Anything else that you yourself have heard, or gleaned.

Wilde About whom?

Wilde Him. Herr H—.

Wilde *I heard that he was all but offered Vienna.*⁶⁴

* * *

On 12 March 1938, the German Wehrmacht was completely unopposed as it crossed the Austrian border. On 15 March, Hitler himself was welcomed into Vienna. Stefan was there.

* * *

Wilde [DESCENDING TABLE] *I have got to go.*⁶⁵

Wilde Go where?

Wilde *I have got to go and send a telegraph.*

Wilde To whom?

Wilde *To Vienna* [POINTS AT S.]. Yes, I *have just got to telegraph to Vienna.* [PULLS OUT SPOON AND BEGINS TO TAP HARD UPON SKULL OF POOR VIENNA].

Wilde HULLO-VIENNA-STOP [VIENNA DOES NOT STIR.] CARE-OF-ADOLF-HITLER-STOP [STILL NOTHING. VIENNA JUST STANDS THERE.]

* * *

In the summer of 1936, it was said of Stefan, already in Vienna, that he was ‘as dead’ and ‘responded neither to letters nor telegrams’.⁶⁶

* * *

It was time, felt Wilde-the-Spoon, to try another telegram. Again he began to tap upon the head of Vienna. WILDE, he tapped. Nothing. OSCAR, he tapped. Nothing again. Vienna-the-youth was as if dead. But why? Why no response to OSCAR WILDE? It was hard to credit. Once upon a time Vienna-the-city had been quite thrilled by the divine Oscar, its many theatres (not least the charming Burgtheater) in raptures, and the scene of rapture ever much the same: *Curtain. Author called. Cigarette called. Manager called Fireworks etc.*⁶⁷

* * *

Throughout the inter-war period the plays of Oscar Wilde were hugely popular in Vienna, being regularly performed right through to October 1938.⁶⁸

* * *

Wilde-the-Spoon once more raised his stolen spoon and prepared once more to telegraph dear Vienna. (S. stiffened in anticipation, head bowed, eyes closed). At the last, though, the Spoon said he would, instead, communicate Directly. With the irrelevant authorities. *I shall*, he said, *telegram to the embassy*.⁶⁹

What? said Someone.

The embassy. I shall send a cipher telegram to the Vienna embassy.

But, said Someone, Austria would *not*, these days, pay any attention to a Jew-gram, not even if were the Tetragram. Besides, he said, that's just a fucking spoon in your hand.

The ship tilted, men inclined and all fell silent. At last, in the end, a faraway child's voice was heard, an ancient Weimar voice. It was the infant prince, the prescient prince.

What, he inquired, *is happening in Vienna?*⁷⁰

Exactly, said Spoon, what *is* happening?

Vienna said nothing. Just removed his spectacles.

Speak, Vienna, you bastard, said Spoon. What *is*, I say, happening?

In Vienna. And be assured that *I ask not merely for information*.

Vienna wiped his spectacles.

Try again, said Someone.

Spoon now clicked his fingers in Vienna's face (un-bespectacled).

Vienna blinked.

Again! said Someone.

Spoon now prodded a farmer's forefinger (nail un-filed) in Vienna's gut. The latter started. But still was stumm.

Spoon would not, though, relent. *Anybody*, he said, *can be made to talk*.⁷¹ Yes, *anybody*. Just ask the dear SS. Indeed, in order to Make a Man Talk all one needed was an opening gambit, or exordium, such as, for instance, a remark upon *the state of the weather*. There was, in fact, no better opener than observing that –

It's hot, said Someone, fucking hot.

But still Vienna said nothing. The exordium had failed, corpsed.

Shit, said Someone. I fear (he added) the bastard is too afraid to talk, afraid lest, like St John, he end up shorter by an head. It is, in Austria, now quite the thing.

* * *

Gertrud Redlich's intelligence work was closely allied to Roman Scholz, a leading figure in the Austrian Resistance who, after being captured in 1940, was taken to the District Courthouse in Vienna and later beheaded.⁷²

* * *

Wilde, Wilde and Wilde each now eyed the familiar dark and together recalled how the divine O. had been celebrated, fêted even, in the theatres of not only Vienna but also dear fucking Berlin. The Staatstheater etc.⁷³ Yes, there too O. had been lauded (*Curtain. Author... Fireworks* etc), and by all. Why, just the other year, yes just the other year, in Berlin, yes dear-fucking Berlin, the first night of *The Importance* had been attended by none other than the delightful Reichsminister Göring.

* * *

Paul Bildt's 1937 Staatstheater production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* was attended by both Göring and his wife.⁷⁴

* * *

Herman Göring? said Someone.

Indeed.

The Great War flying ace?

As was, yes.

Wilde the-antique-airman now drew a finger along the scar above his right eye, then bowed, as if to say that He and Herman (Jew and Gentile) may once have flown together, hand in hand, as it were.

Ah, said S., how small the world had been. Indeed, he too may once have all-but held the hand of Herr Göring, in *bella* San Remo, that is. For, just last Spring, before the War had so rudely interrupted the Season, Herr G. and his iridescent wife had spent some weeks in the Hotel Royal.⁷⁵ Not, alas, Villa Verde, but adjacent, near, hard by, and with (no doubt) a view of the sea. Yes, Herr G. had, by all accounts, thoroughly enjoyed his stay in San Remo, finding time for, amongst other things (such as Tyranny), both golf and tennis, not to mention the wearing of the finest silk neck-ties and pocket handkerchiefs.

Ah, said the Wildes, Reichminister Göring put them in mind of a certain *Lord Goring*, a drawing-room philosopher and long-time familiar of dear O. Indeed, like Herr Reichminister, Lord Goring was exceptionally well-dressed. In fact, he was perhaps the *first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought*.⁷⁶ It did not follow, however, that Lord G. was



Figure 4.1 Hermann Göring. Public Domain

also the first altogether-witless philosopher. One felt sure, for instance, that Lord G. knew, say, a dandy from a demon.

Wilde But *which is Goring?*⁷⁷

Wilde Pardon?

Wilde *Which is Goring? Dandy or demon? Beautiful idiot ... or the other thing?*

The Wildes here paused and considered both Gorings or Görings (Reichminister and Lord, respectively). Beautiful idiots or the other thing? They were, it seemed, rather tempted to suggest that Reichminister Göring might just be *the other thing*. Witness, say, Guernica – what was left of it. (Pause). However, what of *Lord Goring*? Might a philosopher be a demon? A well-dressed philosopher, no less. A devil? Was it possible?

Someone looked down, at his waistcoat, his own, very fine, waistcoat.

The Wildes now turned, as one, to the king. Might he, as a philosopher himself, be able to help? After all, he too was, despite their present dereliction, remarkably well-dressed.

The king considered and then spoke. Once, he began, when *about to open a new book ... I caught myself in the act of straightening my tie.*⁷⁸

Exactly. So, are you either: **A** – No more than a *beautiful idiot*?

The king straightened his tie.

Or, **B** – *The other thing*?

The king straightened his tie again.

Come along, said the Wildes, *beautiful idiot ... or the other thing?* Decide sir, and be quick about it, for we shall soon be in bloody Australia. And matters relating to dress cannot possibly be left to Australians; or, indeed, to the day one is at last hurled, dripping with brine, upon the beaches of their brave new world.

The king finally spoke; it was not, though, with reference to dress as such but more to do with dripping, or landing, or being beached and, indeed, how (upon the beach) one might appear or be viewed. And so he began: *I* –

Yes? said S.

I might, said the king, yet *appear at this new shore in an ambiguous light*.⁷⁹

How ambiguous? enquired one Wilde.

Very, said S.

As ambiguous as dear Lord Goring? said another Wilde.

I sincerely hope not, said still another Wilde; for dear Lord Goring, despite his drawing-room charm, is so very ambiguous as to be, in fact, altogether wicked. In short, *I am afraid Lord Goring is in the camp of the enemy*.⁸⁰

* * *

In Karl Lerbs's 1935 German translation of *An Ideal Husband*, first performed in Berlin, the character of Lord Goring was transformed into 'a heroically elevated *Führer* personality'. Lerbs was himself an ardent National Socialist and the performance concluded with the whole cast singing *Deutschland Über Alles*.⁸¹

* * *

S. fell to a deck-chair, his belly a Vesuvius. Come, gentle dysentery, he thought. Meanwhile, the Wildes (farmer, wool-sorter, airman) repaired to a porthole stage-east (shuttered); it was the best they could do, there being no drawing-room (mythical) or synagogue (burnt). Nursed now by the darkling porthole, they attempted to assemble a timely Apothegm. After no more than an age, heads now heavy with the farming-and-sorting-and-shooting of words (fucking words), they were (for the most part) not at all ready. Regardless, Wilde No. 1 commenced. He was a philosopher of a sort, the terrible sort, but was possessed of excellent deportment.

W.1 [CLEARS THROAT] To find oneself *in the camp of the enemy* could happen to any –

W.2 *Well-dressed philosopher?*

W.1 Quite.

W.2 The enemy being themselves so very well-dressed?

W.1 Indeed.

W.2 What with those charming brown shirts and delightful shoulder-straps.

W.1 Indeed.

W.2 Not to mention the fetching boots with which they stamp upon one's head.
[W. I DOES NOT RESPOND. SILENCE. SHIP LISTS. W. I PERFECTS DEPARTMENT AND PREPARES ONCE MORE TO ATTEMPT AN APOTHEGM.]

W.1 In modern politics –

W.2 Yes?

W.1 In modern politics I believe, *it is the exquisites who are going to rule.*⁸²

W.2 [To W.3] Quick – set that down!

W.3 [SEIZES PEN AND PAPER] Certainly.

W.1 [RESUMING] *Society, you see, sooner or later must return to its lost leader.*⁸³

W.3 [SCRIBBLING] Who?

W.2 *The fascinating liar.*

W.3 [STILL SCRIBBLING] Got it.

W.1 After all, *the man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate* –⁸⁴
[W. I FALLS SUDDENLY SILENT.]

W.3 Don't stop, sir.

W.1 Why not?

W.3 *I delight, sir, in taking down from dictation.*⁸⁵

W.1 Ah, well, in that case, I shall once more resume.
[CLEARS THROAT]. *The man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world.*

W.2 The world, sir? The whole thing?

W.1 Indeed, *the true artist ... annexes everything.*⁸⁶

W.2 Even Sudetenland?

W.1 Yes, even Sunderland. [PAUSE.] Where was I?

W.3 Sudetenland, sir.

W.1 Ah yes, *the true artist annexes everything.* Which is to say, *the true Wilde rule is to shoot on sight.*⁸⁷

W.3 Except, I hope, at the English?

W.1 No, *especially at the English. English society is, you see, all wrong.*⁸⁸

- W.3 It is?
- W.1 Indeed. For it is immensely *difficult to teach the English ... humanity*.⁸⁹ [GESTURES TO INHUMAN ENGLISH LATRINES.] However, the English *might* yet be corrected; after all, *England*, I believe, has *unfortified coasts*, not to mention ...⁹⁰
- W.2 Yes, sir?
- W.1 *Incomplete armaments*. [SMILES]. Yes, set down this: *England* has both *unfortified coasts* and *incomplete armaments*.
[PAUSE.]
- W.2 But sir [ALARMED], *you are not going to plunge us into another European war, I hope?*⁹¹

* * *

The reason for Oscar Wilde's popularity under the Third Reich is said to be that his plays were seen as satirising the English ruling class and he himself as having been martyred by the English.⁹² It may, however, also be that his aestheticism confesses to an affinity with supremacism.

III/VI Dr R.

The Wildes (one, two, three) were attempting (three, one, two) to arrange themselves (two, three, one) in a line, or so they hoped – latitudinal, perhaps. And the king, from among shadows, his creaking throne (more hidden than ever), looked mournfully on.

The Wildes, at last in a line (of sorts), were now limbering up, as for a Show. Time it was, again, for the Old Routine, the Australian one. *Vaudeville*, groaned the king and the Wildes began.⁹³

I say, I say, I say, *Uncle Jack* very much *wants to speak to you about your emigrating*.⁹⁴

My emigrating?

Yes, *your emigrating*. *He has gone up to buy your outfit*.

My outfit! But *he has no taste in neckties*.

Neckties? *I don't think you will require neckties – not in Australia*.

Well, there you are wrong.

Wrong?

Why, yes. In Australia the inordinate heat is such that neckties are, I gather, all that gentlemen wear.

Really?

No, I lied.

The king now stirred. Well, *are there*, he said, *neckties there or not?*⁹⁵

Certainly. No kangaroo would be seen without one.

But, said the king, are there any *neckties for strangling?*⁹⁶

For strangling? said S.

Yes, *for strangling*, said the king.

Strangling whom? said S.

The king did not answer. It seemed he did not wish to say *Whom* might yet be strangled by a necktie, or if the necktie might, in fact, serve as a make-shift noose, with Herr Whom (as it were) being strangled by means of hanging, perhaps by means of hanging himself. In which case, thought S., the necktie would probably be Herr Whom's *own* necktie. It happened.

The king prepared to open a book – new it was, uncut. And S. watched as the king straightened, or maybe tightened, his tie.

The king now spoke again, and again his question was, Are there any *neckties for strangling?*

Where? said the Wildes.

Australia, said S.

No, said the Wildes. Generally speaking, it is (they said) *in England* that *men were strangled*.⁹⁷ Yes (they said), *men were strangled*

in *England*, generally speaking; however, if dear Herr Hitler had by now moved into Downing Street then the English may yet be experiencing all manner of other ways in which to die. More original, one hoped.

The Wildes, it seemed, thought much about the dying and, in fact, the dead. Indeed, they insisted that they could never forget the dead – just the living.

But, said S., did they (the Wildes) *dress* in such a way as not to forget the dead? Their lounge-suits were, perhaps, sufficiently morbid, but what about their boots? Were they, in any sense, funereal? And what of their socks? Yes, their socks. After all, with regard to death, the importance of hosiery could not be overestimated. For instance, S. himself had sent to the king some socks in which (he had instinctively felt) the king could not possibly die, whatever dangers might imperil him.

The king looked down, sock-ward.

So, said S., to resume: Did the Herr Wildes step-out in socks which might keep them mindful of the dead? In short, were they wearing their Mourning Socks?

The Wildes now also looked down, sock-ward. They then elegantly withdrew, as if to an illuminated terrace. And there they took imagined air. At last, with a flourish, as if emerging through wide-flung French windows, the three Ws returned.

W.1 [EXPANSIVELY] *I have no mourning[!]*⁹⁸

W.2 Pardon?

W.1 *I have no mourning* attire. None. None whatsoever. However –

W.2 Yes?

W.1 *I wear my red tie with a difference.*

W.2 *Which* tie? You have no tie. Not now.

W.1 No red tie?

W.3 No tie at all. Not out here, at sea

W.1 Not even with a difference?

W.2 Not even with a difference.

Silence.

S. now turned to peer at the king, narrowing his two weak eyes (poor things). The king's tie (S. thought), was it red? Hard to say, in the dark. Once, years ago, the king had certainly possessed a red tie, a famous red tie. But was he wearing it now? And with a difference? The difference that death makes?

* * *

On 23 August 1921, in Paris, amidst a mass demonstration against the execution of two well-known anarchists, Walter Benjamin was reported to have been wearing a tie that was red.⁹⁹

* * *

W.1 fingered the collar of his shirt. No tie, not even a tie with a difference. How, then, was one to dress if someone on board were to be so reckless as to die? To be *carried off ... by, say, a severe chill.*¹⁰⁰ Not to mention dysentery. Perhaps (he said at last) one could at least *wear cloaks with lovely linings.*¹⁰¹

But, said W.2, we have no cloaks. Certainly, none with lovely linings.

W.1 considered. *I have*, he said, *a bathing costume.*¹⁰²

The king now stirred again, a little bewildered. *It was*, he said, *bathing in the sea ... that struck the first blow against ... crinoline.*¹⁰³

Quite, said W.1. Consider Dunkirk.

Pause. Pause. Pause.

Wilde *What are you thinking?*¹⁰⁴

Wilde What?

Wilde *What are you thinking?*

Wilde I am thinking about clothes.

Wilde What?

Wilde Clothes, I am thinking about clothes. What else is a man at sea to think about?

Wilde Ah yes.

Wilde Out here, you see, *the problem of how to dress is acute.*¹⁰⁵

Wilde Pardon?

Wilde *Acute* – out here, *the problem of how to dress is*, I say, *acute.*

* * *

The laundry question [has] become critical, [thus] an attempt is now [being] made to restore the underwear taken from ... suitcases ... to the rightful owners. Firstly, all articles bearing full names are [being] sorted.

(G. F. Chodziesner, HMT *Dunera*)¹⁰⁶

* * *

Wilde Ah, but in exactly what respect is the *problem of how to dress acute?* Out here. I mean.

Wilde Well, consider (for instance) the difficulties attendant upon seeking merely to wear one's own underpants. And there is, of course, no knowing what NOT wearing one's own underpants might yet lead to.

Wilde Confusion?

Wilde Quite. If not deception, even impersonation. Beware, that is –

Wilde *An actor dressed up like me?*¹⁰⁷

Wilde Perhaps. Or yet, still worse, *three* actors dressed up like –

Wilde Dear Oscar?

Wilde Exactly.

Wilde How dreadful.
Pause.

The Wildes, all at once, glanced toward the buttonhole flies of their trousers – still *sans* belt. Time, once again, to attempt an apothegm.

A more trivial buttonhole ..., they began, then stopped.¹⁰⁸

The Wildes now undid the upper buttons of their respective flies and inspected the underpants thereby made manifest.

One's own?

If a name can be believed.

Pardon?

One's name, one's own name, is upon one's underpants.

The Wildes now looked up from their underpants. There, before them, stood the king, unusually dishevelled.

A name ... a proper name, began the king, *is the word of God* –¹⁰⁹

Quite.

The word of God in human –

Pants?

Sounds ... human sounds, insisted the king.

His highness moved on, on. And the Wildes, as if alarmed, turned once more to S. The *King*, they declared, *is apparelled like a beggar*.¹¹⁰

Why, then he is saved, said Zeppie.

Are you sure? said the Wildes, who felt it improbable that salvation might, these days, come down to looking like a beggar. They had thought that salvation of a properly modern kind came, largely, from *looking rather as a Christian*.¹¹¹ Or, at least, as *not* a Jew.

The Three again undid their flies and peered down. They then again looked up. Sadly, they said, they themselves would always look like Jewish gentlemen.

S. said nothing, electing not to report on how he himself *had* managed to look *not* like a Jewish gentleman. Nor did he report that he had achieved this feat in the intimate confines of his North London digs (c/o Mrs H. P. Warren, 171 Ordnance Road, Enfield Lock).¹¹² He had found, thank God, that even an English landlady does not know everything; nor indeed see everything – not quite. After all, not everything is always visible, not even being a J.

* * *

Like most Jewish boys, Stefan had been circumcised; albeit, in his case, not for religious or cultural reasons but medical.¹¹³

* * *

The Wildes, as one, now felt moved to consider further what it might be to *look rather as a Christian* – to dress, or dress-up, as such. They were, though, rather divided on the matter. On the one hand, it might just prevent one being rounded up and shot. On the other hand, to dress as a Christian, unless one was an Archbishop, was (they felt) a species of sartorial self-slaughter. With regard, that is, to dressing, Christians were (on the whole) a fucking shambles. Consider, for instance, those you might see at, say, Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park – you know, those Methodist windbags hard-by the sandbags. Not a decent buttonhole among the lot of them.

* * *

By July 1939, Stefan was living in Kensington, in central London, and when writing to his father to describe his life there he talks of going to 'Hyde Park ... where I often listen'.¹¹⁴

* * *

Indeed, continued the Wildes, just the other day, one was oneself *going through the park, and ... there stood some vulgar street-preacher*.¹¹⁵ *A wet Sunday* it was, and the *preacher* just *stood there ... in a mackintosh*.

Mackintosh, murmured the king.¹¹⁶

Afraid so, said the Wildes.

Mackintosh, murmured the king (again). *Rain*.

Indeed, said the Wildes. *Wet* it was. *A wet Sunday*, a dreadful – *Rain*, murmured the king. The *diminishing magical power of the –*.

Stop, said S. No more bloody rain.

S. now turned to the Wildes. What was it (said S.) that the man in Hyde Park was saying? The man in the mac. In the rain. Had he anything to say? Anything at all?

Only, said the Wildes, a *wonderful phrase flung into the air*.¹¹⁷

Namely? said S.

Rain, said the king. The *diminishing magical* –

Shut it! said S. And even as S. spoke he saw that the king, clearly addled by the rain (the rain in his head), had turned to ironwork – rusted, with both arms raised and outspread.

Ah (thought S.) the idiot-king is dreaming, dreaming that he is himself the preacher in the rain – perhaps (even) the preacher to whom S. had listened, often listened.

The Wildes now gathered about the rusted king. It seemed the king wished not to move – perhaps never to move. Or was he dead? Many were. At last, the Wildes largely turned away, largely cursing *this poor peripatetic professor of posing*.¹¹⁸

S., though, felt drawn to the posturing king and poked him (sharply) just below the arm-pit. Nothing. Perhaps he really *was* dead. Or, on the other hand, perhaps not, since His Madness remained with both arms outstretched, quite unlike a dead man, or at least a regular dead man. S. poked again and dimly recalled having seen such an absurd posture before.

Klee? said S.

No, said the king.

Who then? said S.

Fidus, said the king.

Who? said S.

Fidus. I have in mind, said the king, a *gesture ... in Fidus ... the gesture of benediction, with outstretched arms ... the gesture of someone carrying something*.¹¹⁹

* * *



Figure 4.2 Hugo Höppener (aka 'Fidus'), *Lichtgebet*, 1894 © bpk / Deutsches Historisches Museum / Arne Psille

* * *

Fidus? said S.
The king nodded.
Your highness has in mind someone in a painting by Fidus?
The king nodded again.
Someone naked? Stark-bollock?
The king did not demur, did not (alas) banish all stark-bollock thoughts. Instead, the king again declared that the gesture was of *someone carrying something*.

Carrying what? said S.
Wrist-watch, said Zeppie. Tick.
Pardon?

Wrist-watch, said Zeppie. Tick. Hereabouts (he continued), if not blessed with underpants (Tick), one is doomed to *carry* one's watch (Tick).

* * *

Many of the deportees on board the *Dunera*, in order to avoid having their watches stolen by the guards, secreted them in their underpants.¹²⁰

* * *

The Wildes once again tugged at the waist of their trousers (beltless), yanking them easily away from their bellies (hopeless). They solemnly peered within, ever-so-slightly twisting their heads, eager (it seemed) to listen. Tick. Ah, all was tickety-boo Down-Below. Tick. But, what of the dear king? Tick. Poor sod. Was all tickety-boo Down-Below as regards his highness? Did *his* underpants also go tick? Or were his smalls eerily silent – void, perhaps, of any timepiece? Indeed, were his undergarments void (and null) in every respect? In short, were his pants, in truth, a kind of NoMansLand? And was such, in fact, the import of the king's absurdly cruciform posture?

Impotence, said the cruciform king.

Pardon? said the Wildes.

Impotence, said the king, *impotence ... makes for the Via Dolorosa*.¹²¹

Each Wilde promptly made something like the sign of the cross, their three right-hands wandering, half-lost, over their upper bodies. Their hands made the usual itinerary, visiting the usual ports of call: spectacles, testicles, wallet, and –

Stop, said the king, leaning forward. He felt that the Wildes had rather misinterpreted his *tableau vivant* (à la Fidus). Perhaps, he said, they were, in fact, thinking of an infamous *picture of Schiller*, a *litho* in which *with one hand he gestures, picturesquely posed into an ideal distance, and with the other* –¹²²

Yes?

He masturbates.

Silence. And, in the silence, Someone left for the crapper, left with a faceless book (warm). As the man passed, the Wildes remarked that he, the man, was quite possibly *the most learned erotomaniac in Europe*.¹²³

However, they added, there was also, it seemed, the king. Not to mention the remarkable Dr. R.

* * *

Among the more curious figures aboard the *Dunera* was a man known only as Dr R. – a seeming Doctor of Divinity who would regularly give sermons whilst completely naked save for an Iron Cross about his neck.¹²⁴

* * *

Dr R., his latest sermon now both done and dusted, appeared to be blessing the dark. His right hand was busy with his priestly business, and his buttocks gleamed with sweat. The Wildes, looking on, enquired if being bare-arsed was now required of clergy.

The king seemed to think it might be, seeing (he said) that *the naked body is the most reliable instrument of divination*.¹²⁵

Really? said the Wildes. Was bare-forked man really a make-do weather-vane? And if so, might this mean that one's flesh, undressed, stripped naked (as bare as shivering beast) could divine an improbable shower?

To this the king replied (or rather half-replied) that, *In time of war, everyone knows what the weather is like*.¹²⁶

Pause.

S. straightened his spectacles, turned about and viewed Dr R. He was, it seemed, no longer blessing the dark but rather himself (as it were). And why not?

The ship now tilted and S. fell to wondering exactly how the naked Dr R. had once won the Iron Cross. What had he done? What ancient act of murderous bravery had he performed? It was, S. presumed, an act performed when fully, or at least partially, clothed, it being all but impossible to imagine a naked man in the act of even casual slaughter. Yes, it was almost as unimaginable as slaughtering those who are *themselves* naked.

* * *

IV/VI Someone Masked

When Walter Benjamin was attempting to escape France over the Pyrenees he repeatedly remarked that the black briefcase he carried with him contained 'a manuscript more valuable than I am'.¹²⁷ After his death, however, no manuscript was found in the briefcase – only a watch, a pipe, eye-glasses, some papers, six photographs and an x-ray picture.¹²⁸

The melodramatic conclusion to Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) also revolves around a case, or 'capacious handbag,' once thought to have contained a manuscript. It turns out, however, to have only ever contained an infant child.

* * *

The king, at last, had moved, his arms no longer those of some ecstatic scarecrow. Indeed, with his hand (flesh and bone) he now gripped tight the hand (bone alone) of his briefcase (black). He was (he said) no longer someone who merely *appeared* to be carrying something. Now (he said) he did *in fact* carry something. He lifted high his briefcase as if to confirm that *this, this* was what he carried.

A handbag? said Wilde 1, gesturing toward the briefcase.

Indeed, observed Wilde 2, *a somewhat old but capacious handbag*.¹²⁹ All peered at the briefcase.

It is, observed Wilde 2, *a handbag of black leather*.

No-one demurred and Wilde 2 continued (unchecked) toward a dramatic revelation. He first pointed at the king's briefcase and then spoke. That *handbag*, he declared, *is the handbag in which I once had intended to place a manuscript*.

Wilde 1 now extended an arm and, in the manner of an higher policeman, theatrically relieved the king of his briefcase. Wilde 1 then turned to Wilde 2 and said, *Is this the handbag ... ? Examine it carefully before you speak*.

Silence. Wilde 2 looked inside.

Wilde 1 So, *is* this the handbag?

Wilde 2 Indeed.

Wilde 1 And there is no manuscript therein?

Wilde 2 None.

Wilde 1 Explain.

Wilde 2 *In a moment of mental abstraction ... I deposited the manuscript elsewhere.*

Wilde 1 Elsewhere?
Wilde 2 *In a bassinette.*
Wilde 1 A bassinette?
Wilde 2 Indeed.
Wilde 1 Then what *did* you deposit within the bag?
Wilde 2 *A baby.*
Wilde 1 Not the manuscript?
Wilde 2 No.
Wilde 1 Do you mean to say that the king's handbag, this old valise of his, does not actually contain a manuscript?
Wilde 2 I do.
Wilde 1 And, indeed, that it has never actually contained a manuscript?
Wilde 2 I do.
Wilde 1 And, moreover, that it has only ever contained a wordless infant?
Wilde 2 Indeed – of the male variety.

Wilde 1 now restored the briefcase to the king, remarking that the latter (the king) had been discovered, with respect to the former (the briefcase), or at least the contents thereof, to be a Lying Bastard. It had been discovered, indeed, that he (the king) was merely –

Someone carrying something? suggested the king.

Good heavens, no, said Wilde 1. His highness, it transpired, had only ever been someone carrying *someone*. Yes, someone carrying *someone*.

What kind of someone? said S.

An infant someone.

* * *

Walter Benjamin's biographers, Eiland and Jennings, write that Stefan's utterances as a child, as transcribed at the time, 'continued to play a role in Benjamin's writings until the end'.¹³⁰

* * *

S. now approached the king who, tightly clutching the briefcase, had sought asylum neath the metal flight of steps that led to heaven, or thereabouts.

Is it true? said S.

What? said the king,

That you carry someone – carry them with you. S. glanced at the briefcase.

Well, it's possible. One finds it hard to tell.

Tell what?
Who's who.
Is it not obvious?
The king now clutched the case yet more tightly. *One fights*, he said,
with someone masked.¹³¹
And ...?
And one might also, therefore, *carry* someone masked, said the king.
Such as the prince? said S.
Who? said the king.
The prince, the infant prince, the one with the mask.
The king looked blank.
Does his highness not recall? said S. Back in the days. Hanukkah. In
Berlin. When all the world had turned to snow (old Weimar snow) and
the prince was given a mask, *a negro mask*.¹³² Do you not remember?

* * *

In late December 1924, Walter Benjamin records that Stefan,
aged six, had just been given a number of presents for Hanukkah,
including a negro mask.

* * *

The king withdrew, now all-but hidden neath the metal steps. *Someone
masked*, said the king (again). He certainly remembered someone
masked and, yes, the mask had perhaps been *a negro mask*, the mask as
worn by this someone masked, whoever he –

The prince, said S. It was the prince. The infant prince. At Hanukkah.
In Berlin.

The king looked down, then looked up and once more glanced at S.
This time, though, he fixed the young man with his gaze. And held him.
Held him fast. *'I hold you'*, said the king, *'I hold you, Africa'*.¹³³

S. blanched.

'I hold you', said the king again, *'I hold you, Africa'*.

* * *

Walter Benjamin's fascination with 'negro masks' extends to a
strange story he published in 1933 that concerns a seafarer who
has on board a whole collection of such masks. There follows a fire
upon the ship in which the man himself perishes and is survived by
the masks; such, though, is the force of the fire that the scorched
masks have turned 'grotesque'.¹³⁴

* * *

V/VI Christopher Columbus

Upper deck. The dry sky cracked, the wind fell, dead, as an albatross, and soon, Christ, the sea would be no more. Australia approached. New heaven, new earth. Christ, the Fatal Shore. And the king (not looking up) murmured *Land Ho*.¹³⁵ Half-shaded he was by his umbrella and seated, once more, upon his eternal deck-chair. The hidden one.

Silence.

Land Ho, murmured the king, again.

Silence.

Land Ho, murmured the king, again.

Ah, said the Wildes, at last. *So glad*, they said, *you are seeing land*.¹³⁶

This he seemed to have done without once looking up. What land, then, was it that his highness had seen? Or *thought* he had seen? Was it, they enquired, *some seaside place*?¹³⁷

The king did not reply, his eyes now closed.

Algiers?¹³⁸

As if in prayer. Head bowed.

Torquay?¹³⁹

The king now (finally) raised his head. *America*, he said, gesturing toward land. *That*, he said, *is America*.¹⁴⁰

Says who?

Christopher Columbus, said the king. For *that*, he said again, *is America*. (Columbus straightened his tie). However, he said, *the question is whether I will ever actually reach America*.¹⁴¹

Or is it, said the Wildes, whether America will ever actually welcome us.

Why ever not? said S.

Well, they said, will America (if that *is* America) allow us to dock? Or might we be refused, despised and rejected? In short, are we, as it were, the plague?

The wind, the warming breath of the burning South, began to stir and the shimmering coast drew near. *Land Ho*, murmured the king (again), before picking up his briefcase, opening it and, with its mouth now agape, turning it face-down (as once before). Mouth-down. He then stared at his ruins, stooped low and rag-picked something or other that was (he said) intended to be declaimed, from the very rooftops. He now rose, in stages, many stages, to his feet, his very rooftop. Once there, he looked about, swayed a little and then began to read, aloud and (also) in stages. *No ship* (he declaimed), *no ship carrying alcohol* (he

declaimed), *may come closer* (he declaimed), *than fourteen miles to the American coast*.¹⁴²

The Wildes considered their fingers, their nails (cracked). The king, they felt, was mistaken (nail), yes, had erred and strayed (nail), off into history (nail), albeit recent (nail). To be precise, the king (idiot) clearly had in mind the Dark Dry Days of Prohibition. Did he not know that, some time ago, the Prohibition had itself been Prohibited, so that now every liquor ship was all-but cheered into harbour. These days, it was (apparently) quite another kind of ship that might not be welcome, a stranger kind of ship.

Stranger?

Yes, a stranger ship.

* * *

In May 1939, the German liner, the St Louis, carrying around 900 Jews escaping from Nazi Europe, had approached the coast of Florida, coming so close that those on board could see the lights of Miami; they were, however, refused entry and thus compelled to return to Europe. There, 254 of the passengers would perish in death camps.¹⁴³

* * *

The tallest Wilde (that is to say Bauer Wilde, which is to say Farmer Wilde) declared that he would now be seated, and so began slowly to descend unto a deck-chair. Bauer Wilde, now that he *was* seated, looked around and examined the madding men. So many, like him, were from Berlin or thereabouts (fields and farms etc.). Familiar tones, familiar oaths.

You know, he said at last (to one of the madding), I feel as if *I am actually in Germany*.¹⁴⁴ However (he continued) his highness believes, as you know, that we are, in fact, within but-pissing distance of dear Uncle Sam. Either way, it is immaterial since, *as far as I can judge, the inhabitants of Germany are largely Americans*.

Really?

Indeed. However, *my German geography is disgraceful*.¹⁴⁵

Bauer Wilde now paused, hoping that someone, anyone (a Viennese comedian perhaps) might remark that Mr Hitler's German geography was also disgraceful.

But nothing. No such riposte. No riposte at all. Least none to speak of. Perhaps there *were* no Viennese comedians; not now, at least, not since the hilarious Herr Freud had famously died. In London that

was. Yes, Herr F. had (famously) died in Hampstead. Long way from Harrogate. As the crow staggers.

Bauer Wilde sighed, dramatically. He was struggling and knew it. And (indeed) said it. *I feel*, he said, *like a man on a ship that is sinking*.¹⁴⁶

Quite, said another Wilde, a shorter one. However (he continued), in truth we are (or so we hope) in a ship that is soon to be *landing* – if ships land, that is.

This shorter Wilde was the shortest Wilde, the Aeronaut, and thus a man readily confused by land.

But *where*? said S. *Where* shall we soon be landing? He tugged at his jacket, then tapped at an upper-pocket. Where?

The Antipodes, declared the third Wilde.¹⁴⁷ He was the Sorter of Wool and thus *not* (it seemed) readily confused by anything. He swiftly took S. aside, port-ward. It was clear that he intended to repeat himself. We, *I and you*, he announced, are *at the Antipodes*. Yes, the bloody Antipodes.

Shit, said S., although he did not, in fact, know where the Antipodes were, where they were kept, as it were.

The Sorter of Wool offered a clue – *I have*, he said, *to stand on my head*.¹⁴⁸

Argentina? said S.

The Sorter of Wool tried again – *I have to stand on my head* (he said) as my part *in some several tableaux*.

And not move?

Quite.

Never?

Indeed.

Not even, said S., to scratch your bollocks? Or sneeze or cough or sigh or cry lest you be finally overheard and found and dragged-out-screaming even as they take you away and –

S. stopped, mid-sentence, for the Sorter of Wool had (like Pontius Pilate) not tarried to hear the end. Neither had the Aeronaut, nor the other one, the Farmless Farmer. And the ship, she drifted on. On, on, to the Fatal Shore.

Land Ho, S. thought. So very close now. Ho. Yes, they were so close, so close to land. And no one (*mirabile dictu*) had even tried to stop them, to prevent their approach, as if perhaps they were *not* (after all) the very plague, not the Cursed and the Cursing of Europe. And there (Ho) now looming (Ho) was some fucking great harbour (Ho) and (yes) Light, all the Light left in the world (Ho), like cloudless San Remo, only worse (Ho). And still no-one tried to stop them, not even the melting men upon the

very-many tugboats and ferries that steamed and wobbled in the offing. On, on, they went, slowing-but-nearing yes slowing-but-nearing a giant-bath-for-giant-ships that was crowned (as if some *royal* bath) with a giant iron corona, beneath which was suspended a frantic bridge.

Bleeding Sydney, said Someone. And S. peered, and saw that bleeding Sydney, or at least its bleeding harbour, was blessed, blessed with miniature life that Stoopd, Bent, and Bore Burdens. Ho. And, as the ship grew nearer, the Stoopd and the Bent and the Burdened were miniatures no more. Almost human, they were.

The king now closed with S. and gestured to the harbour. *Remember*, he said, the *human figurines*[?] ¹⁴⁹

Yes, S. did.

And your *Ark*? Your miniature *Ark*. Did S. also remember his *Ark*? *Noah's Ark*?

Yes, S. did. Yes. For there had been days, old Weimar days, when old rain had fallen, and there was no going out and the prince himself had been Noah and had tenderly filled his tiny ark. Two-by-two went the miniature beasts (married). One-by-one went the human figurines (*not* married, not any more). Some days, though, if the nursery were cold and Noah was mad, Noah had just stuffed them in, the lot of them, saying, No, he would *not* remember them, not even the human figurines, and neither would they ever be let out of the ark to land upon Ararat. Never.

S. looked about. Christ. The harbour was now so close that many on board, all of them eager for Ararat (any bloody Ararat), had begun to form a queue, as if, say, awaiting a tram or bread. Or deliverance, said Someone. Dunkirk, he added, and cursed the queue, a queue that (S. observed) did not include the king. Being the Last European, or so it was said, the king was doubtless late for Ararat.

S. turned to see his highness stoop, take up his briefcase and inch towards the queue. The king then paused, in the sunlight. How *I love*, said the king, *days ... in the South*. ¹⁵⁰ Ah, yes, he continued, like Goethe, he had often set sail for the South, wherever it was.

The king eyed the quay and was silent. At last he spoke. *Who knows*, he said, *whether one will go ashore*. ¹⁵¹

But why not? said S.

I am, said the king, *pessimistic about the business of my passport*. ¹⁵²

But a passport, said S., would not be necessary. Or at least not on the beach, or among the rock-pools where perhaps they could hide out, the two of them, as if on holiday, as of old, at the seaside, in the sun of the South, for ever. And ever. And no-one would find them. No-one.

The king did not reply. Instead, he looked down, at his shoes (inexpensive) and considered his imminent disembarking. He knew full well, he told his shoes, that on occasion *even the king of France gets his feet wet*; however, he himself would prefer to remain dry-shod, for fear that he *might yet appear at this new shore in an ambiguous light*.¹⁵³ And he should not want to be –

Expose[d] to comment[?] suggested the Wildes, returning.¹⁵⁴ There was, they felt, nothing worse than finding oneself upon a foreign beach and exposed to –

The fucking Luftwaffe, said Someone.

Enough! said S., wearily taking the king by the hand. This way, Columbus (said S). Land Ho.

Columbus, at last, began to move. As before, though, he merely shuffled, his royal feet resisting royal progress, and soon he had again stalled. This time it was to look up, as if to botanise upon the sky.

What now? said S.

I am tracking the play of the seagulls.¹⁵⁵ The king shaded his eyes. *There is always*, he added, *one gull sitting on the tallest mast. Always*.

Perhaps it's dead, said S.

S. was now stood beside the frozen king. A newer world (Eden, of sorts) was all before the two of them and there they were (S. thought) hand-in-hand though not with wandering steps nor even slow. A land-breeze sighed. And the ship heaved to. And docked.

S. now turned to see that many had already vanished, bugged off. Shining men in shining light. For them, Europe had finished. Zion beckoned.

* * *

Some of the Jews on board the *Dunera* were committed Zionists eager to seek, at last, the realisation of God's ancient promise of the city of Zion, a final homeland for Israel.¹⁵⁶

* * *

S. pressed the king's sweating hand. Come on, he said, the next world, the new one, awaits us.

Our coming was expected [?] enquired the king.¹⁵⁷

Certainly, said S.

The king viewed the harbour and (for a moment) swayed in the breeze, to-and-fro. *The sea ... as sleep*, he said, *is breaking on the shore of life*.¹⁵⁸

The king now once more crept forward (Ho), as if into a storm (Ho), and stopped, at the end of the world. Gangplank. It was the gangplank.

Just walk the fucker, said S. The bloody plank, just walk it.

The king looked down, at the Crack, a line of light between edge and edge. *'I am standing'*, he said, *'on the threshold'*.¹⁵⁹ He looked down again, this time glimpsing the sea's quick agony. *'Standing on the threshold'*, he said, *'is a complicated business'*.

Quite, said S. However, Zion grows impatient – indeed, it may soon be full and its border closed. Who knows. So, quick, be quick. Sometimes a king must jump. Yes, jump. Ready? Three. Two. One –

The king raised a halting hand. He was, it seemed, a king not yet ready to jump. *My thoughts on ... Mathematics* –¹⁶⁰

What?

My thoughts on ... Mathematics and indeed Zion ... are still quite far from having taken final shape.

* * *

In the 1930s, on several occasions, Walter Benjamin had flirted with emulating his close friend Gershom Scholem and going to live in Jerusalem.¹⁶¹

* * *

S. cursed and made as if to prod his highness, but his highness (it seemed) would still not shift his highness's arse. Or, perhaps, his highness *could* not shift his highness's arse.

S. asked the king if this was, in fact, the situation. If he, the king, simply *could* no longer move; not even an imperial inch, like, say, Moses at Pisgah?¹⁶²

The king said nothing, just stood there, like (very like) Moses at Pisgah, from whence he (Moses) could see the Promised Land, just across the Jordan, but could not enter. And there died. At Pisgah.

The king straightened his tie, glanced at S., and whispered Sorry. Or so it seemed. He then slowly turned about, his back now to the harbour, to Canaan. He, the king, was not for Sydney, not for the Promised Land.

Shit, said S., even as the king (still gripping his briefcase) eyed the breathless sea. S. cursed again, this time a holy name. Taken in vain it was.

Or so said Wilde-the-Aeronaut who, apparently, had heard many a holy name taken in vain, not least when someone close had fallen (in flames) from the sky.

The Wildes (all, all of them) now sat down, upon an upturned packing-trunk as if, say, on the pier at Whitby (England, north (bracing), just an hour on the bus (rare) from Harrogate). They looked easefully about, notwithstanding the dysentery that now united them. Sydney, they said, was not unlike Zion, for Sydney gleamed, they said.

The seaward king drummed upon his briefcase. Impatient. *When*, he asked, *do we set sail for happiness?*¹⁶³

Ah, but when do we *not*? said the Wildes. *Humanity is always landing at Utopia*, is it not?¹⁶⁴ (They paused to clutch at their bellies). The only problem, they continued, is that as soon as *humanity lands at Utopia*, it *looks out and, seeing a yet better country, sets sail* again. They each began to smoke an invisible lucifer.

S., meanwhile, began tugging at his bloody highness, or rather his royal sleeve, black with ink. Come on, you bastard, this way for happiness. S. pointed to the gleaming city. The king, at last, relented and began once again to shuffle landward, progressing much like a stickless blindman until, at last, he was about to step from the ship. His right foot (now raised) moved forward, just across the border, as it were. The Jordan, as it were. And there, for an instant, it hovered, his foot.

Land! muttered the king. *Land Ho!* He then promptly withdrew his foot. *Ho*. This to-and-fro he repeated several times. There, back. There, back.

Each time, S. asked the king if he had yet made it? Made it across? And each time, the king said, I do not think so – however, *my soles would doubtless be the first to send me word.*¹⁶⁵ There, back. There back.

* * *

In July 1938, whilst in San Remo, Stefan undertook a walking tour along the Italian–German border, frequently to-and-froing across the border. ‘I was probably the only emigrant’, he writes to his father, ‘who crossed into Germany (and, of course, back across) for his pleasure’.¹⁶⁶

* * *

S. turned and stared (wall-eyed) at the harbour. The inns, the bars, the myriad gay hoardings. Zion? Perhaps. It was certainly bright. *Too* bright in fact, *too* well-lit. But, ah, so it goes, one could not have all things, seeing there was a war on, unless it was over, with everyone having had enough and burnt their differences to ash – just as they do, no doubt, here in Zion, Port Zion, where even the houses ascend the Hill of the Lord, for

a laugh or a lager, Toohey's Lager, Sydney's Very Best, Export Lager, Sink One Today.¹⁶⁷

S. paused and wondered. In which house (flop-house, doss-house, dog-house) might he be sheltered? Yes, in which of Zion's many hostelries might a lost typist remove his typist's boots, raise a typist's glass, and Sink One Today? Or several. Or would he not, in fact, be wholly welcome? If too pissed.

* * *

Continuing the account of his walking-tour, Stefan writes to his father that, 'I went into an inn located right on the border and learnt a lot of interesting things by ordering for the innkeeper some of his own drinks ... [Indeed,] I myself was not often sober during the two days. One curiosity was that the innkeeper had the nerve to fetch an SS man for me. I will tell you why one day'.¹⁶⁸

* * *

S. now turned to find that the king was seated once more. It was, perhaps, time to tell his highness, time to tell him why, at the border, at the inn, that creep had called the Creeps, called them in his cups, in his socks, in his pants, four-shits-to-the-wind, doubtless fumbling with a telephone.

The king eyed the warm minstrel sea.

It was true that he (S.) had himself been three-shits-to-the-wind, or thereabouts, yes, at fuck-o'clock, or thereabouts, all of which was perhaps itself enough to prompt a creep to call a Creep, some SS goon woken sweating from his nightmares. There had, though, been more to it – yes, something else, something best not to have set down. So, perhaps he should now (at last) tell the king. After all, the king might yet need to know of the risks incurred when at a border and staying the night in an inn kept by one inclined to telephone a demon.

S. leant across to the king, so close that he could almost kiss his highness and ... said nothing.

Best it was, S. thought, still *not* to say, *not* to tell, but instead to keep-Mum, keep-Dora, seeing that a ship had ears, bleeding ears, bleeding Enemy ears. Yes, keep-Mum and watch what you put in a letter – for who knows which incurable bastard might (some day) come to finger it.

Someone passed (all fingers he was) and nodded, at the king. Bastard, thought S.

S. now tapped at a pocket, breast-pocket. Alas, no fine kerchief was there, no silken pocket-square, nor even the bank-notes (three, English) that he had, in a former world, secreted there.

* * *

Concluding the account of his walking-tour, Stefan writes, 'After all these adventures were over, I noticed that in my upper-left pocket, instead of a handkerchief, I had carried, across all the borders, three English pounds'.

* * *

S. glanced towards the Wildes. The three had got to their feet and were about to join the queue for Zion. They knew what to do (they said), having so often queued, for the khazi etc. At the last, however, they suddenly turned-about: right heel, left toe, sharp.

Change of plan? said S.

They nodded. One has been *invited*, they said, *to go on a driving-tour in the Pyrenees*.¹⁶⁹

And where might one be staying? inquired S. Would it be a road-house, rooming-house, out-house, shit-house, or charnel-house? Forgive my curiosity, but it is of a professional kind.

The Wildes did not say. Nevertheless, they each drew up a fragile deck-chair. The Wildes (as one) now sat down and (as one) slowly crossed their crumbling legs. Right over left, toe toward Zion.

The king, however, again eyed the sea, looking back to whence they had come.

As before, each Wilde lit an imagined lucifer. They then stared straight ahead, suddenly desperate, it seemed, not to have to talk to one another. There followed silence, not a word was exchanged. It was, thought S., quite as if the Wildes were three Englishmen in hell or, more precisely, an hotel lobby – aspidistras, ash-trays, telephone booth, etc.

All well, gentlemen? said S.

The Wildes did not reply.

Enjoying the Pyrenees?

The Wildes did not reply.

Pleasant hotel?

The Wilde-to-the-Left leaned forward. *I am*, he confided, *installed in a little inn by the sea*.¹⁷⁰

At the border, sir?

The king blinked.

Wilde-Left now replied, albeit askew. *There is, he said, no one in the whole hotel.* Indeed, *I am* (in fact) *quite alone.*

Really, sir?

Wilde-to-the-Right now leaned forward. *I am, he confessed, in trouble.*

In trouble, sir?

*In trouble with my hotel.*¹⁷¹

The king blinked again.

A case of the Creeps, sir?

Wilde-Centre now leaned forward. *I want, he declared, to get out of the hotel.*¹⁷²

What, *now*, sir? said S. Forthwith, sir?

Indeed, said W-C who promptly produced (as if from a hat) a desperate telegram. This he read aloud. *Hôtel Terminus ... the manager, a revolting German ... please wire.*¹⁷³

He's mad, thought S.

* * *

In April 1937, Stefan writes, from San Remo, that 'there are some interesting types in the boarding-house [and] ... the usual percentage of mad men'.¹⁷⁴

* * *

S. cast a doubtful eye across the emptying deck. He then turned back to find W-C now erect, and all-too-close. *I am, whispered W-C, dreadfully worried by hotel-patrons.*¹⁷⁵

S. paused, considered and then replied, observing that Sir was plainly mad and should be grateful that, as a rule, hotels were remarkably welcoming of the mad. In sum, Sir should, therefore, shut-the-fuck-up.

What ideas you have of hospitality! said W-C.¹⁷⁶

Indeed, said S. And chief among them is that someone who mistakes their home for an –

*Immense lodging house, said the king.*¹⁷⁷

Is himself mad, added S. As mad as mad Mrs Morser of 62 Leinster Square. But let us say no more. In short, I shall keep-Mum. Mum.

The king did not move, then began the world again. A person who mistakes their home for a *lodging house* has (he said) *no conception of ... life.*

Just death, said S.

* * *

In April 1937, Stefan also writes, from San Remo, that ‘This morning a guest of ours, a lady, very ill, died. We were very touched by this’.¹⁷⁸

* * *

S. turned toward Herr W-C and asked if Sir, by any chance, knew anyone who had ever *died* in an hotel? Or who had even entered an hotel actually *intending* there to meet that Curious Fellow called Death. Over a drink perhaps in, say, the saloon bar, or luncheon room, or even his own room. I allude, Sir, to a quick quiet suicide. Which is (by the way) something his highness annually considers. Upon his birthday. July 15th.¹⁷⁹

The king raised an invisible glass. To *the Curious Fellow*, he said, then allowed the glass to fall, invisibly.

Herr W-C, with confidential air, now beckoned S. towards him and began to speak of some bloke (odd bloke), the forgettable kind, who had, in fact, once entered an hotel and never came out again. Found dead, he was. In his room. Quite dead.

How, Sir?

*Carried off ... by a severe chill.*¹⁸⁰

Where, Sir?

Paris.

Paris, Sir?

*A large town, the capital of France.*¹⁸¹

But how does Sir know?

Oh, everyone knows it's *the capital of* –

No, how does Sir know of this unfortunate death?

*I had, said W-C, a telegram from the manager.*¹⁸²

* * *

In November 1900, Oscar Wilde died in a Paris hotel. News of his death was, in the first instance, communicated to most of the world by telegram.¹⁸³

* * *

Someone (again passing) now glanced at the king and enquired if his highness knew of this death. The one in an hotel. In Paris.

Silence. The king said nothing.

Well, continued Someone, I do hope his highness does not intend also to die in Paris. Admittedly, to die in Paris has often been fashionable; one thinks, for instance, of –

The man who *fell into the Seine off an omnibus*, said the Wildes.¹⁸⁴

Quite, said Someone. However (he added), these days, dying in Paris has, I gather, grown so very popular as to have become rather common. There is, in particular, much leaping to one's death: Hebrews from Windows, they are saying – *open windows*, on the whole. Defenestration, they call it. A beautiful word, your highness. (Someone hesitated). Is it not?

Port Zion gleamed for an instant.

And Someone resumed, remarking that if his highness was not particular as to exactly which metropolis was the place in which to die an hotel death (should the need ever arise) then his highness should not forget that —

Dora, said the king, *has opened a boarding house in London*[?]¹⁸⁵

Precisely, said S. (intervening). She has, in fact, opened several. Bayswater, for instance. Admittedly it is bedsitter land and so a little cramped, but there is always (as we say in the trade) room for a corpse.¹⁸⁶

The king blinked.

Not to mention a pretty face, added S. He here thought of —

The physiognomy of the patron[?] said the king.¹⁸⁷

Yes, said S., thinking perhaps of both Mrs Morser and Mrs Redlich.

* * *

VI/VI The Woman in White

A gull (that would not move) now screamed and S., the Wildes, and the king all swiftly repaired, down tin-mountain (clatter-clatter), to a lower, echoing deck.

Where is she? said the king, looking about.

Pardon? said S.

'Where is Dora?' said the king.¹⁸⁸

Pardon? said S.

'Where is Dora?' said the king.

In London, said S. Large town, capital of –

In London, intervened the Wildes, *people are either hunting for husbands or hiding from them.*¹⁸⁹

But hiding *where* exactly? said S. These women, in London, hiding from their husbands, where exactly are they hiding?

The Wildes were not sure.

In Bayswater? continued S. In, say, a boarding-house, in a room or two, on the –

'*Second floor*,' said the king.¹⁹⁰

Pardon? said S.

'*The second floor*,' said the king, '*is inhabited largely by ... femmes perdues.*'

Who? said S.

Lost-Women, said Someone (returned). Femmes Perdues (Lost-Women) are always on the second floor, second-floor back. That's where one always finds them, the lost women. Ask his highness.

The king sat down at table, with briefcase. He would say no more.

The Wildes, though, would not settle for such, such royal silence. For they too, it seemed, were much exercised by Lost-Women, or rather one particular lost woman, a certain Mrs Wilde, Mrs Hannah Wilde, once of Berlin. They now gathered about the king (points North, West and South), for they had a question, a most urgent question. If a lost woman, they said, can be *found* then is she truly *lost*?

The king considered.

One *ask[s]*, they added, **not** *merely for information*. (They paused). Indeed, *the happiness of more than one life depends upon your answer.*¹⁹¹

* * *

Hannah Wilde, interned in Peveril Hotel in Port Erien on the Isle of Man, was not only the wife of Siegfried Wilde but also the mother of both Hans and Werner Wilde.¹⁹²

* * *

Again, the king considered. Then, at last, he spoke. As before, however, he simply said ‘*Where is Dora?*’

No, where is *Hannah*? My darling Hannah, said Wilde-North, the Aeronaut.

The king appeared not to hear, for yet again he asked, ‘*Where is Dora?*’ This time he peered inside his briefcase, as if expecting (at any moment) to find her, or at least her likeness, among the six photographs therein. ‘*Where is Dora?*’ he said again.

But who’s Dora? said North.

His wife, said Someone. Or rather, his former wife. They are, I gather, no longer married. Apparently, he (bastard) is to blame.

North stared (south) at the king, stared kindly. I think, he said, I think, *she will forgive you.*¹⁹³ In fact, he continued, I am quite sure *your wife will forgive you.* Indeed, *perhaps, at this very moment, she is forgiving you.*

The king looked up. The low, tin-can ceiling looked back. Forgiveness? He had certainly *heard* of forgiveness, or at least of *the storm of forgiveness.*¹⁹⁴ He had not, though, heard that her highness might ever forgive him. No. But perhaps she *would*, now that he was so very lost. Perhaps, in fact, she was huddled, right now, even now, in a West London stairwell, repeatedly whispering, ‘*Come Back! ... Come Back! All Is forgiven!*’¹⁹⁵ Or, perhaps she was not *herself* forgiving him, but rather *praying* for his forgiveness, praying up a whole storm of it, right now, even under all those hurtling bombs. Perhaps. Storms, though, were hard to predict, particularly storms of forgiveness. And a king, unlike an aeronaut, could rarely tell the weather.

* * *

The legal proceedings that had led, in 1930, to Walter and Dora’s divorce had been initiated by Walter accusing Dora of infidelity; however, these accusations were, in time, completely rejected.¹⁹⁶

* * *

The king, still at table, turned his eyes (all of a sudden) to the metal steps—Jacob’s tin ladder (thought S.). The king was, it seemed, transfixed.

Seen someone? said S. Seen someone ascending?

A woman in white, said the king.¹⁹⁷

Who? said S.

A woman in white, said the king.

What about her? said S.

A woman in white ... has just reached the top of a flight of stairs.

Really? said S.

The king nodded, then added, *Her head is half-turned, and –*

Yes? said S.

She is ever so slightly opening a door.

And does she regard your highness? *Does she?* The woman in white at the top of the stairs, head half-turned, does she regard you? Even as she pushes at the door?

The king straightened his tie. Then, returning the gaze of the curious youth, he whispered, '*The lady in white is looking at you*'.¹⁹⁸

S. said nothing. He suspected the woman did *not* look at him. Women at the top of the stairs did *not* tend to look at him, not even if he too ascended to the landing. No, whether he was in London, or Vienna, or even (as an infant prince) in Berlin, he had invariably found the landing to have been abandoned by a woman just gone.

* * *

Stefan climbs the dark staircase, opens both doors, and goes into his dark room.

(Walter Benjamin)¹⁹⁹

* * *

S. tapped at his jacket, upper-left; it was where (apparently) his heart was. The Wildes now drew alongside, as if each were some kind of higher concierge.

Are you in love, sir? they inquired. And, *if not, why not*, sir?²⁰⁰

S. tapped again, tap-tap. Was love, he wondered, still a requirement? In the world, that is. Was it still the law?

* * *

In 1937, when writing to Walter, Dora suggests that Stefan may have experienced 'disappointments in love'.²⁰¹

* * *

Each concierge (all three) drew still closer. *Are you in love*, sir? they said again. Each inclined his head to the side, awaiting a reply.

There was none. The king, however, glancing at S., did say this – that *Raphael ... dies for love*.²⁰²

Each concierge now stepped aside, a little to the East – and there (to the East) they conferred, regarding S., or Raphael (so-called).

His dying for love, what is it?

No idea.

But *why* must he die for his love?

(S. blinked).

He *pays*, I fear, a *penalty for peeping*.²⁰³

Peeping?

Through keyholes.

(S. blinked).

Upon the landing?

Let us hope not.

Why?

Because it is a *horrible thing to have a spy in one's house*.²⁰⁴

(S. blinked)

What kind?

Pardon?

What kind of spy is a horrible thing?

A guest or lodger who, one fears, is in love with one, and yet loves –

Without hope[?] said the king (ever the poet). He then added that *to love ... without hope* was, in fact, the *best* way to love.²⁰⁵ Or at least the *only* way, or at least *the only way of knowing a person*. Yes, he said, the only way of knowing a person *is to love that person without hope*.

The king glanced at S.

S, though, was already wandering off.

The king appeared somewhat saddened. The Wildes, however, were now free to pursue freely the question of whom it was that the Departed Young Man (S., that is) might love without hope. Might it be, they wondered, *the lady who lives at Wimbledon*?²⁰⁶ Or, was it the lady at Enfield?

* * *

In September 1938, Dora Benjamin writes, of Stefan's landlady in Enfield Lock, that 'she is lovely to him'.²⁰⁷

* * *

The Wildes looked about. But perhaps (they continued) it is neither the lady in Enfield nor the lady in Wimbledon. Perhaps, rather, it is *all*

the ... women in Vienna – at least *all the pretty women in Vienna*.²⁰⁸ Or is it just one of them? *One pretty woman in Vienna?*

* * *

In April 1937, Stefan refers to his landlady in Vienna, Gertrud Redlich, a 41-year-old widow, as ‘the woman I live with’ and describes her as both ‘modern and sophisticated’.²⁰⁹

* * *

The king tapped at his briefcase. *Raphael*, he began, *Raphael ... dies for love of the marble maiden*.²¹⁰

S. was, by now, stretched out upon a mess table, as if etherised, level, an human horizon. *Yes*, he thought, *Raphael may* have died for love of a marble woman. A fly (Australian) murmured. But that would not be unusual – many a man, or boy, dies for love of a marble woman (bloody fly), a woman he has himself fashioned, in his head, dead head, Pygmalion a case in point. The fly murmured again. In his head. Bloody Australia.

The king conjured from his briefcase a photograph, a likeness. One of six.

Woman? enquired the horizon.

The king would not deny it.

Known or unknown?

Unknown, said the king.

The king looked again at the photograph, as if to be certain. But the photograph, it seemed, had somehow changed, for the king now declared the woman to be Known, or at least Expected. The king drew an inky finger across the photograph. Upon *the image of ... some unknown woman*, he said, *that of the expected woman superimposes itself*.²¹¹

But *which* expected woman? said S., still horizontal.

No reply.

Fly died.

I said, *which* expected woman?

The female messiah, said the king, staring at the photograph.²¹²

The female messiah, he said again. She is expected.

Where?

At *the gate*.

What gate?

The gate in time through which the Messiah might enter.²¹³

S. turned upon his side. The king was mad.

This Messiah of yours, said S. (at last), this Lady Messiah, might she just possibly be your Woman in White? The one your highness saw at the top of the stairs? Upon the landing, head half-turned and at the door?

No reply. The king was not saying.

S. tried again. Your skirted messiah – does she enter? Through the door. The Woman in White. *Does she?*

The king tugged at his tie. It seemed to loosen his tongue. *Summoned or un-summoned*, he said, the *secretary enters*.²¹⁴ He tugged again, then spoke again. *She is very pretty.*

* * *

On the night that Walter Benjamin died he was not the only fugitive being held in the Hotel de Francia; there were also a number of women. One of them, called Carina (meaning ‘beloved’), would later recall going into Benjamin’s room, on the first floor, and finding him half-naked in bed. According to Scholem, Benjamin gave Carina a final letter for Stefan which, however, she almost immediately destroyed.²¹⁵

* * *

Two Wildes now yawned and slowly slumped to the unyielding deck (hard thing). There, one of the Two attempted to recline and the other to affect, he said, a *semi-recumbent posture*.²¹⁶ The yet-vertical Wilde, the Elder of the Tribe, edged to a portside porthole and there stuck his neck out, bloody miles. Old neck.

There is a good postal service, I suppose? he enquired, of Australia.²¹⁷

I doubt it, said the largely-seated Wilde, half-at-ease upon his arse. As a rule, wherever one happens to be, *the post often goes wrong*.²¹⁸ This, though, he felt, was a largely splendid thing, since other people’s post was of so-much-more-fucking-interest than one’s own.

Porthole Wilde withdrew both antique neck and head. He wished (very much) to know what *kind* of post went wrong. Was it, for instance, letters stained with tears? Letters from, say, some forlorn Ariadne left, windswept, upon the Isle of Man, doomed to waltz alone in an unheated hotel (requisitioned)? Yes, was it *her* letters that, alas, went wrong? Was it?

Wilde-upon-Arse said that he did not know. He suspected that it was not easy, these days, to send a letter from an hotel, any hotel, Isle of Man or elsewhere. This could perhaps be confirmed by the king, a man (doubtless) of a thousand hotels.

The king said nothing.

Wilde-Upon-Arse, however, continued, declaring that one kind of post that now most certainly went wrong was *the public telegram*.²¹⁹ And, indeed, *the open postcard*. After all, one lived in a world that included the possibility of not only *postmen having fits* but also (alas) postmen having thoughts, thoughts of their own, above all thoughts of how to rewrite both postcards and telegrams.²²⁰ It was easily done, if one had a pen-to-hand – an altered word here, an added word there.

Wilde And are there many such literary postmen?

Wilde I am not altogether sure. What I do know, however, is that, at present, *the most lying telegrams are being sent about me*.²²¹

Wilde How thrilling. Postcards too?

Wilde In a manner. I gather, in fact, that many of us (many of our kind) are soon *to be excommunicated upon postcards*.²²²

Wilde Good heavens. But why?

Wilde Because we are Jews.

Wilde Ah, yes, *what martyrs we are*.²²³

[PAUSE.]

Wilde [STRIKING OWN FOREHEAD] Shit – sorry, I meant to say not that we are to be *excommunicated* but that we are to be, in fact, *exterminated*. Extinguished. Annihilated. Sorry.

Wilde [AS BEFORE] Ah, *what martyrs we are*.

[SILENCE. ZION BLINKS. WILDE CONSIDERS THEN, FINALLY, SPEAKS.]

Forgive me, but –

Wilde Yes?

Wilde How would we know?

Wilde Know what?

Wilde That we are to be annihilated. Would we be sent a post-card?

Wilde I fear not. It might, though, be mentioned in a telegram.

Wilde What kind of telegram?

Someone [PASSING] A lying telegram.

* * *

On 8 August 1942, the World Jewish Congress would send a telegram from Geneva to New York stating that 'IN FUEHRERS HEADQUARTERS A PLAN HAS BEEN DISCUSSED ACCORDING WHICH

TOTAL OF JEWS IN COUNTRIES OCCUPIED CONTROLLED BY GERMANY NUMBERING THREE AND HALF TO FOUR MILLIONS SHOULD BE AT ONE BLOW EXTERMINATED'. This telegram would, initially, be dismissed as a falsehood.²²⁴

* * *

S. raised a partial eyebrow – though barely, for such was the gravity of the South. He had a question. How, he enquired, could this be?

What? said Zeppie. What? What?

Excommunication-by-postcard, said S., who seemed to have forgotten all talk of extermination.

Zeppie crossed himself.

If, said S., one wished to communicate an excommunication why not send at least a bouquet? Or pigeon.

A fly cursed.

The Wildes were not sure. The excommunicating postcards were, they felt, something of a mystery. They did, though, believe that such postcards came from the Vatican and that they were, in fact, the secret ministry of the *eunuchs of the Vatican Latrines*.²²⁵

Latrines? said S.

Zeppie crossed himself twice.

Indeed, said the Wildes. And why *not*? (The fly died, crushed). It is distinctly possible that men of letters (and indeed of postcards), whether in the Vatican or no, should be drawn to latrines, not least in time of war. Consider the benefits: a room of one's own and ever-ready supply of paper.

* * *

During the Nazi occupation of France, the Resistance often made use of public toilets to pass secret messages from one to another.²²⁶

* * *

Consider too (continued the Wildes) the many and splendid opportunities that latrines might also afford to –

The typist? said the king.

Pardon?

The king, still at table, now muttered to the table. Something it was about Typists in Toilets or, at least, the king having recently spotted a number of *notices in urinals*.²²⁷

But, said Someone, were these notices *typed*? It was most unlikely. Were they not, as a rule, the work of a well-formed hand? That of, say, the lavatory attendant?

Fair point, said S.

Besides, continued Someone, even if some urinal notices *were* typed it would not necessarily follow that there was a typist himself on hand – in residence, as it were. An Underwood Portable may indeed be portable, but it is hard to imagine it being carried (borne aloft, as it were) into the khazi, not even in the Vatican. Or, say, the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.

Silence.

Is that not so, your highness?

The king said nothing, his scholarly nose now almost touching the manuscript over which he was as hunched-as-an-hunchback. Any thought of urinals appeared to have vanished.

In contrast, the Wildes did very much desire to further pursue (among themselves) the question of whether a typist, being so modern a fellow, might ever be able to work in a cloakroom – in sum, to make an office of a cloakroom.

For instance?

*The cloakroom at Victoria Station.*²²⁸

Ah, *the Brighton Line*.

The line is immaterial.

Yes, but there was *a manuscript* there?

Where?

In the cloakroom.

To be precise?

In a handbag.

A handbag?

Or briefcase. Call it what you –

But there *wasn't!*

Wasn't *what?*

A manuscript. Do you not recall?

Recall what?

That there *should* have been a manuscript in the handbag, or briefcase, but there wasn't.

What, then, *was* in the handbag, or briefcase, if not a manuscript?

An infant, remember? Of the male variety.

* * *

Walter Benjamin's transcription of Stefan's infant utterances was entitled *Opinions et Pensées* and as carefully written as any of Benjamin's manuscripts. It is, if you will, a manuscript that is in fact a child.

S. again straightened his glasses.

Either way, that child will never quite know if he's one or the other, man or manuscript, bones or words. Not unlike, say, poor –

St John the Baptist? said the Wildes.²²⁹

Who? said Someone.

St John the Baptist? said the Wildes – you know, the wind-bag, all words and no trousers.

Ah yes, said Someone. Exactly. Him. Poor sod.

Silence. A vagrant breeze moved the ship, though at anchor. And, at last, the king (and table) stirred.

St John, he murmured, *St John the Baptist* – why, he, the king, had in a manner once seen St John. A *young man* he had been (St John, that is), an *uncanny young man*, in a picture. In Florence it had been, the Uffizi. It had said *Raphael?* just below the painting; and that was all it had said. *Raphael?* Yes, a question it had been. In fact, *the question mark was the reason* he had *stopped*. It was what he had stopped for. *Raphael?*

The king prepared now to heave himself, all parts, all bits, unto his feet. Christ, he said. Heave Ho. Up, come on, up, time to-arise-and-go-now, worst step forward, four limbs and a briefcase.

S. could see the limbs and briefcase approach.

Raphael? said the king as if to greet the young man who was (he felt) so like the uncanny young man. *Raphael?* said the king again. But the young man, no longer etherised and now seated (erect) upon the mess table (legs swinging), seemed not to hear. The king half-waved. *Raphael?* he said yet again, more eager than ever (it seemed) to greet the young man. Again, though, the young man appeared not to hear; or at least, not to understand.

The king examined the young man once more. When, he thought, *a person very close to us is dying we greet him, at the last, in a language he already no longer understands.*²³⁰ This particular young man was *not*, however, dying; or at least, not yet. Why, then, did the young man not seem to understand, or even to hear? The king's would-be greeting (his warm 'Raphael?') had fallen upon ears that, though young, seemed deaf. It was, in fact, as if the young man no longer knew his own angel-name; as if (indeed) he, the young man, had quite forgotten it.

* * *

The documentation relating to Stefan's deportation does not include his angel-name, Rafael – not even in initialised form.

* * *

S. rose and made for the porthole, from whence he peered out. He then turned around and stared at his highness. The latter was standing erect, briefcase in hand. He was off, it seemed. Off, at last.

But where, where was his highness going?

No reply.

I said, where are you going?

One Way Street, said the king.

May I, then, join you? Come with you? said S.

I am afraid, said the king, that *the flaneur's last journey is death*.²³¹

I know, said S.

The king now appeared to think again, to correct himself. *The flaneur's last journey*, he said, *its destination*, is **the new**.

New what? said S. New world?

The king made no reply.

S. turned once more to the porthole and eyed the burning world, the New one. His destination.

* * *

On 6 September 1940, at Sydney Harbour, Stefan disembarked the *Dunera*.

* * *

The king, now alone, stared down at shoes (matching) and socks (not). All present, then, if not correct. As for the young man, he was absent, having gone. Somewhere. But could he (the king) not contact the young man? Speak to him, just one more time, before it was too late. Alas, telephones would not serve, as he had no number to dial. He could, however, try to write the young man, wherever he was. Yes, he could set down a letter and give it to that woman, that woman who had entered (unbidden), the secretary (pretty). Yes, he would, right now, sit down, pen a letter and then ask the woman to kindly ensure it would reach the young man. Yes.

The king returned to his table and sat down. But (perhaps) he sat not at a table but upon a bed, in a room, in an inn, at a border. In the Pyrenees. It was difficult to say. He pulled from out his briefcase both a sheet of hotel stationery (stolen) and a fountain pen (half-broken). He then began to write. Once he had finished, he peered down at what he had written. Then peered again. And again. The letter was, perhaps, strange or dangerous or not what he had meant, it being so late, his heart so bad, and there being such sounds upon the landing.

* * *

The contents of Walter Benjamin's final letter to Stefan, written in the hotel at Port Bou, are not known. Nor is it known why the letter was almost immediately destroyed; and, indeed, it is a significant question. As Scholem writes, 'I don't know the reasons, but I presume they were serious'.²³²

* * *

Post-script

On 6 September 1940, Siegfried Wilde, Werner Wilde and Hans Wilde all also disembarked the *Dunera*. All three would return from Australia before the end of the War. Hans and Werner would fight for the Allies and all three would be reunited with wife and mother, Hannah.

Notes

- 1 At the time of his death, Benjamin's possessions were described by the local court as follows: 'a leather briefcase, like businessmen use, a man's watch, a pipe, six photographs, an x-ray picture, glasses, various letters, magazines, and a few other papers' – Momme Broderson, *Walter Benjamin*, tr. Malcolm R Green and Ingrida Ligers (London: Verso, 1996) 260.
- 2 Julia Prewitt Brown, *Cosmopolitan Criticism: Oscar Wilde's philosophy of art* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), xviii.
- 3 *Arcades*, 556, 843 / *GS*, 5. 691, 1024.
- 4 'The Work of Art on the Age of its Reproducibility', *SW*, 3. 121 / *GS*, 7. 382.
- 5 Chodziesner, 'How I Came to Australia', 8; Bartrop and Eisen, *Dunera Affair*, 166. The seventh day was 17 July 1940, a Wednesday.
- 6 'The Work of Art', 3.102 / 7.351.
- 7 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP 1103 2, E40929; MP 1103 2, E40917; and MP 1103, 2 E40918. Wilde gave these Harrogate lectures at the town hall (now the art gallery) on 29 January 1884 and 10 October 1884 – see Geoff Dibb, *Oscar Wilde. A Vagabond with a Mission* (London: The Oscar Wilde Society, 2013), 122, 163.
- 8 Oscar Wilde to Mrs Bernard Beere, [April 1894], *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 590.
- 9 Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* [1895], ed. Russell Jackson (London: Methuen, 1980), 46.
- 10 See Bernstein, *Sarrasini*, 48.
- 11 Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* [1893], ed. Ian Small (London: Ernest Benn, 2002), 30.
- 12 Stefan to Walter, 11–12 July 1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin WBA21_53.
- 13 Letter to Gretel Adorno, 16 May 1933, *GA-WB*, 23 / *GA-WB*, 40.
- 14 Immediately after the Anschluss many Jews, some in top hats, were infamously made to scrub the streets. Stefan did not leave Vienna until September 1938.
- 15 Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 30.
- 16 Patkin, *Dunera*, 55.
- 17 Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 30.
- 18 Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 45.
- 19 Wilde to Norman Forbes-Robertson, 19 April 1882, *Complete Letters*, 164.
- 20 Wilde to Henry Edwards, [early November 1882], *Complete Letters*, 189.
- 21 Wilde to Leonard Smithers, [30 May 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1147.
- 22 Wilde to Frank Harris, [August 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1162.
- 23 'Karl Kraus', *SW*, 2.2. 436 / *GS*, 2. 338 – ironically, Benjamin is here quoting, from Kraus.
- 24 Wilde, *The Importance*, 87–8.
- 25 Wilde to Harry Nash, [3 November 1883], *Complete Letters*, 220.
- 26 Wilde to Mrs Bernard Beere, [April 1894], *Complete Letters*, 590.
- 27 Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 76.
- 28 Wilde to More Adey, 6 May 1897, *Complete Letters*, 811.
- 29 'Nordic Sea', *The Storyteller*, 119 / *GS*, 4. 386.
- 30 Wilde to Robert Ross, 3 June [1897], *Complete Letters*, 877.
- 31 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1. 486 / *GS*, 4. 146.
- 32 *Arcades*, 415 / *GS*, 4. 523.

- 33 'Paris Diary', *SW*, 2.1. 350 / *GS*, 4. 584.
- 34 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 198–9.
- 35 'Paris Diary', *SW*, 2.1. 350 / *GS*, 4. 584.
- 36 See 'Paris, The Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *SW*, 3. 32–49 / *GS*, 5. 45–59.
- 37 Wilde, *The Importance*, 72.
- 38 Wilde, 'Common Sense in Art', *Complete Works*, 6.119.
- 39 *Arcades*, 304 / *GS*, 5. 385; Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, tr. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 238.
- 40 Wilde, 'The Decay', *Complete Works*, 4.76.
- 41 *Arcades*, 831 / *GS*, 5. 998.
- 42 *Arcades*, 114 / *GS*, 5.172.
- 43 *Arcades*, 154 / *GS*, 5.216.
- 44 Wilde to Ross, [August 1898], *Complete Letters*, 1096.
- 45 'Demonic Berlin', *Radio Benjamin*, 25 / *GS*, 7.87.
- 46 *Arcades*, 26 / *GS*, 5.76 – the word here translated as 'doubles' is the French word *sosies*.
- 47 Wilde, *The Importance*, 56.
- 48 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2.E40929.
- 49 All names of various contemporaneous acts at the National Circus – see Bernstein, *Sarrasini*, 71–5.
- 50 Wilde to More Adey, [15 May 1897], *Complete Letters*, 825.
- 51 'Berlin Puppet Theater', *Radio Benjamin*, 22 / *GS*, 7.85.
- 52 See Luke, 24.13–25.
- 53 Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas, [January–March 1897], *Complete Letters*, 753.
- 54 Wilde Two here quotes from an open letter written by James Whistler about Wilde; it was published in January 1890 and we know Wilde read it: see *Complete Letters*, 419.
- 55 Dora to Walter, September 1938, cited in Fischer-Defoy, *Walter Benjamin*, 95 (my translation).
- 56 Wilde to Ross, 18 June [1897] and to Emily Thursfield, Sunday [1 September 1889], *Complete Letters*, 902.
- 57 *Complete Letters*, 410–11.
- 58 See 'Gertrud Redlich', accessed 18 March 2022, <http://biografia.sabiado.at/redlich-gertrud>; Stefan to Walter, 18 April 1937, cited in Fischer-Defoy, *Walter Benjamin*, 92 – the word Stefan uses is *Nachrichtendienst*.
- 59 Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, ed. Russell Jackson (London: Methuen, 2013), 12.
- 60 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 13.
- 61 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 97.
- 62 Dieter Sevin (ed.), *Die Resonanz des Exils. Gelungene und Misslungene Rezeption deutschsprachiger Exilautoren* (Leiden: Brill 1992), 46., n.14.
- 63 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 10.
- 64 Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance* [1894], ed. Ian Small (London: Methuen 2002), 10.
- 65 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 35.
- 66 Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 299 – my translation.
- 67 Wilde to George Alexander, [July 1894], *Complete Letters*, 596–7.
- 68 See Sandra Mayer, *Oscar Wilde in Vienna Pleasing and Teasing the Audience* (Leiden: Brill | Rodopi, 2018), 141.
- 69 Mayer, *Oscar Wilde*, 57.
- 70 'Pensées', *Archive*, 137 / *Archive*, 106 – the German here is *Was gibt es in Wien neues?*
- 71 Wilde, 'Aristotle at Afternoon Tea', *Complete Works*, 7.88.
- 72 See Thomas Weyr, *The Setting of the Pearl: Vienna under Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168.
- 73 William Grange, 'Foreign-Language Comedy Production in the Third Reich', *Metamorphoses: A Journal of Literary Translation* 9 (2001) 179–96 (181).
- 74 Stefano Evangelista (ed.), *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury 2010), 198.
- 75 See Leonard Mosley, *The Reich Marshal: a biography of Hermann Goering* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 229.
- 76 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 84.
- 77 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 8.
- 78 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.463 / *GS*, 4.112.

- 79 Letter to Scholem, 16 June 1933, *WB-GS*, 59 / *Briefe*, 578–9 – the word here translated as ‘ambiguous’ is *zweideutig*.
- 80 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 23.
- 81 Mayer, *Oscar Wilde*, 153; Grange, ‘Foreign-Language Comedy’, 182.
- 82 Wilde, *Woman of No Importance*, 67.
- 83 Wilde, ‘Decay of Lying’, *Complete Works*, 4.88.
- 84 Wilde, *Woman of No Importance*, 67.
- 85 Wilde, *The Importance*, 102.
- 86 Wilde, ‘Olivia at The Lyceum’, *Complete Works*, 4.55.
- 87 Merlin Holland (ed.), *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 58.
- 88 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, *Complete Works*, 3.294.
- 89 Wilde to Georgina Weldon, 31 May 1898, *Complete Letters*, 1080.
- 90 Wilde, ‘The Critic as Artist’, *Complete Works*, 4.182.
- 91 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 19.
- 92 See Mayer, 165 and Evangelista, 195–9.
- 93 *Arcades*, 26 / *GS*, 5.77 – *Vaudeville* is also the word in the German.
- 94 Wilde, *The Importance*, 88.
- 95 *Arcades*, 876 / *GS*, 5.1048 – the word here translated as ‘neckties’ is *Halsbinden*.
- 96 *Arcades*, 923 / *GS*, 5.1345.
- 97 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, *Complete Works*, 3.301.
- 98 Wilde to Dalhousie Young, [5 June ? 1897], *Complete Letters*, 881.
- 99 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 283.
- 100 Wilde, *The Importance*, 40.
- 101 Wilde to the Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 February 1991, *Complete Letters*, 466.
- 102 Wilde to Douglas, 16 June [1897], *Complete Letters*, 899.
- 103 *Arcades*, 70 / *GS*, 5.119.
- 104 Wilde, ‘Critic as Artist’, *Complete Works*, 4.174.
- 105 Wilde to George Ives, [18 September 1900], *Complete Letters*, 1197.
- 106 Chodziesner, ‘How I Came to Australia’, 10.
- 107 Wilde to William Rothenstein, [mid-July 1892], *Complete Letters*, 532.
- 108 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 86.
- 109 Benjamin, ‘On Language’, *SW*, 1.69 / *GS*, 2.150.
- 110 Wilde, ‘The Young King’, *Complete Works*, 8.122.
- 111 Wilde, ‘Grovesnor Gallery’, *Complete Works*, 6.16.
- 112 See Fischer-Defoy, *Walter Benjamin*, 95.
- 113 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 13; email to author from Mona Benjamin, 26 December 2023.
- 114 Stefan to Walter, 10 May 1938, in Luhr, *Was noch begraben*, 53, my translation.
- 115 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, *Complete Works*, 3.350.
- 116 *Arcades*, 839 / *GS*, 5.1007 – the word here translated as ‘mackintosh’ is the French word *impermeable*.
- 117 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, *Complete Works*, 3.350.
- 118 Wilde, ‘The Relation of Dress to Art’, *Complete Works*, 6.37.
- 119 *Arcades*, 353 / *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5.446 – the German here includes *ein Trägergeberde*.
- 120 Chodziesner, ‘How I Came to Australia’, 12.
- 121 ‘Central Park’, *SW*, 4.167 / *GS*, 1.663 – *Via Dolorosa* (Christ’s Way of Sorrow to the cross) is a translation of *Passionswege*.
- 122 *Arcades*, 855 / *GS*, 5.1024 – the German here is *onaniert*.
- 123 Wilde to Turner, 10 August [1897], *Complete Letters*, 924.
- 124 Patkin, 59.
- 125 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.483 / *GS*, 4.142.
- 126 *Arcades*, 847 / *GS*, 5.1016.
- 127 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 673.
- 128 Broderson, *Walter Benjamin*, 260.
- 129 Wilde, *The Importance*, 140.
- 130 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 244.
- 131 ‘Experience’, *SW*, 1.3 / *GS*, 2.54.

- 132 Benjamin to Scholem, 22 December 1924, *Correspondence*, 258/*Briefe*, 369, translation amended from 'African mask', the German being *Negermaske*.
- 133 *One Way Street*, SW, 1.483 / GS, 4.142 – Benjamin is quoting Scipio, and in the Latin (here translated).
- 134 *Storyteller*, 134,137 / GS, 4.750–51 – again the word is *Negermasken*.
- 135 'Berlin Puppet Theater', *Radio Benjamin*, 22 / GS, 7.85–86.
- 136 Wilde to Harris, [c. 27 March 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1136.
- 137 Wilde to Turner, [17 May 1897], *Complete Letters*, 829–30.
- 138 Wilde to Ross, [c. 25 January 1895], *Complete Letters*, 629.
- 139 Wilde to John Lane, [early February 1893], *Complete Letters*, 545.
- 140 'Berlin Puppet Theater', *Radio Benjamin*, 22 / GS, 7.86.
- 141 Benjamin to Gretel Adorno, (20 March 1939), *GA-WB*, 251 / *GA-WB*, 361.
- 142 'The Bootleggers', *Radio Benjamin*, 141 / GS, 7.203.
- 143 Sarah A. Ogilvie and Scott Miller, *Refuge Denied: the St. Louis passengers and the Holocaust* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 206), 8.
- 144 Wilde to Robert Ross, [late July 1889], *Complete Letters*, 409.
- 145 Wilde to Lawrence Barrett, [early July 1889], *Complete Letters*, 406.
- 146 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 59.
- 147 Wilde to Constance Wilde, [16 December 1884], *Complete Letters*, 241.
- 148 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 69.
- 149 'Berlin Toy Tour II', *Radio Benjamin*, 47 / GS, 7.109 – the German here is *winzigen Mannchen*.
- 150 Benjamin to Gretel Adorno, [c. 25 June 1933], *GA-WB*, 37 / *GA-WB*, 61.
- 151 Benjamin, *One Way Street*, SW, 1.485 / GS, 4.145.
- 152 Benjamin to Scholem, 7 May 1933, *WB-GS*, 47 / *WB-GS*, 65.
- 153 *Arcades*, 647 / GS, 5.796.
- 154 Wilde, *Importance of Being Earnest*, 137.
- 155 'Nordic Sea', *Storyteller*, 119 / GS, 4.385 (translation amended).
- 156 See Patkin, 14, 19.
- 157 'Concept of History', SW, 4. 390 / GS, 1.694.
- 158 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem', SW, 1.399 / GS, 6.85.
- 159 Benjamin to Scholem, 12 June 1938, SW, 3.325 / *Briefe*, 761.
- 160 Benjamin to Scholem, 11 November 1916, *Correspondence*, 81 / *Briefe*, 128.
- 161 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 135, 410–11.
- 162 Deuteronomy 34.1–12.
- 163 'The Paris of the Second Empire', SW, 4.59 / GS, 1.599 – the word here translated as 'happiness' is *Glück*.
- 164 Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', *Complete Works*, 4.247.
- 165 'Berlin Chronicle', SW, 2.2.612 / GS, 6.487.
- 166 Stefan to Walter, 11–12 July 1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, *WBA_21_53*.
- 167 Detail gleaned from account of Sydney Harbour in 1940 in Michael Taussig, *Benjamin's Grave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 100.
- 168 Stefan to Benjamin, 11–12 July 1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, *WBA_21_53*.
- 169 Wilde to the Home Secretary, 22 April 1897, *Complete Letters*, 803.
- 170 Wilde to Mrs Bernard Beere, [c. 2 June 1897], *Complete Letters*, 875.
- 171 Wilde to Edward Strangeman, [10 November 1898], *Complete Letters*, 1099.
- 172 Wilde to Harris, [18 February 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1124.
- 173 Wilde to Leonard Smithers, [15 February 1899], and to Harris, [15 February 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1123.
- 174 Stefan to Walter, 18 April 1937, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, *WBA_21_49*, and 10 May 1938, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, *WBA_21_50*.
- 175 Wilde to Harris, [c. 26 July 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1160.
- 176 Wilde, *The Importance*, 122.
- 177 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 643 / GS, 5.790.
- 178 Stefan to Walter, 18 April 1937, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, *WBA_21_49*.
- 179 See Benjamin to Scholem, 25 June 1932, *WB-GS*, 9–10 / *WB-GS*, 17–19. The words here translated as 'curious fellow' are *skurrilen Burschen*.
- 180 Wilde, *The Importance*, 92.

- 181 Wilde to George Lewis Junior, [November 1880], *Complete Letters*, 101.
- 182 Wilde, *The Importance*, 92.
- 183 See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 549.
- 184 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, *Complete Works*, 3.349.
- 185 Benjamin to Scholem, 4 February 1939, *WB-GS*, 242 / *WB-GS*, 291.
- 186 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 656.
- 187 Benjamin to Gretel Adorno, end of March 1935, *GA-WB*, 142 / *GA-WB*, 137.
- 188 *A Berlin Childhood*, *SW*, 3.406 / *GS*, 4.302. Benjamin here cites his mother referring to his sister, also called Dora.
- 189 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 16.
- 190 *Arcades*, 496 / *GS*, 620.
- 191 Wilde, *The Importance*, 142.
- 192 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2.E40918.
- 193 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 99.
- 194 'The Meaning of Time', *SW*, 1.287 / *GS*, 6.98.
- 195 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.446 / *GS*, 4.88.
- 196 Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 314–15.
- 197 *Arcades*, 876 / *GS*, 5.1048.
- 198 *Arcades*, 427 / *GS*, 5.536.
- 199 *Pensées*, *Archive*, 123 / *Archive*, 90.
- 200 Wilde to Turner, [20 March 1899], *Complete Letters*, 1133.
- 201 See Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 300.
- 202 *Arcades*, 502 / *GS*, 5.626.
- 203 Wilde, 'Two Biographies of Keats, 1887', *Complete Works*, 6.187.
- 204 Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, *Complete Works*, 3.101.
- 205 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.467 / *GS*, 4.119.
- 206 Wilde to Ross, 10 March 1896, *Complete Letters*, 653.
- 207 Dora to Walter, 19 September 1938, in Fischer-Defoy, *Walter Benjamin*, 94.
- 208 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 147.
- 209 Stefan to Walter, 18 April 1937, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, *WBA_21_49* – the German here is *Die Frau bei der ich wohne*.
- 210 *Arcades*, 502 / *GS*, 5.626.
- 211 *Arcades*, 855 / *GS*, 5.1024.
- 212 *Arcades*, 597 / *GS*, 5.737.
- 213 'Concept of History', *SW*, 4.397 / *GS*, 1.704.
- 214 *One Way Street* in *SW*, 1.477 / *GS*, 4.133.
- 215 Carina Birman, *The Narrow Foothold* (London: Hearing Eye, 2006) 5: see Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 13.
- 216 Wilde, *The Importance*, 65.
- 217 Wilde, *The Importance*, 79.
- 218 Wilde to Ross, 2 December [1898], *Complete Letters*, 1105.
- 219 Wilde to Douglas, [January–March 1897], *Complete Letters*, 761.
- 220 Wilde to Louis Wilkinson, [4 January 1900], *Complete Letters*, 1169.
- 221 Wilde to Colonel W. F. Morse, early March 1882, *Complete Letters*, 148.
- 222 Wilde to Ross, [29 June 1900], *Complete Letters*, 1191.
- 223 Wilde, *Ideal Husband*, 6.
- 224 See Christopher R. Browning, 'A Final Hitler Decision for the Final Solution? The Riegner Telegram Reconsidered', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10 (1996) 3–10.
- 225 Wilde to Ross, [29 June 1900], *Complete Letters*, 1191.
- 226 Digby Warde-Aldam, 'War and Pissoids: how the urinals of Paris helped beat the Nazis', *The Guardian*, 2 December 2019.
- 227 Benjamin, 'Hashish', *SW*, 2.2.674 / *GS*, 4.410.
- 228 Wilde, *The Importance*, 71.
- 229 Wilde, 'Some Literary Notes (February 1889)', *Complete Works*, 7.165.
- 230 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.450 / *GS*, 4.96.
- 231 *Arcades*, 11 / *GS*, 5.55 (translation amended).
- 232 See Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 13.

5

(Untoward)

Introductory notes to Chapter Five

This final chapter takes as its cue the last stage of Stefan's return journey from Australia, which began in January 1942 when he left Nova Scotia and headed for England across the freezing North Atlantic. This final voyage was made aboard the *Largs Bay*, a troop-carrier which formed part of a convoy including two battleships, one of which was almost immediately sunk, with all hands lost.

In what follows, Stefan's journey soon becomes entangled with the figure of Franz Kafka – partly because he was so very important to Benjamin and partly because, in 1942, another *Dunera* deportee also left Australia for England whose name was Kafka, albeit Karl Kafka. Here then we will encounter a Herr Kafka who is neither quite Franz nor indeed Karl.

The second half of the chapter focuses on Stefan's arrival in England in February 1942 and on the myriad bureaucratic complications he then endured, all of which are here imagined via Franz Kafka's famously strange vision of bureaucracy.

The chapter concludes with the moment in April 1942 when Stefan was finally reunited with Dora only to be informed of his father's death, news that Dora had hitherto kept from Stefan. The many ironies involved in this are then explored, drawing on research that throws fresh light on the complexity of the relations between Dora, Stefan and Benjamin.

There follow three postscripts. The first deals with 1943 and Stefan's life as an antiquarian bookseller at 28 Museum Street, Bloomsbury. The second deals with 1970, when Stefan returned to Villa Verde in San Remo in a failed attempt to recover two suitcases believed to contain

material relating to his father and mother. And the third deals with 1972, the year of Stefan's death and his entanglement with the complex fate of his father's most prized possession, Klee's *Angelus Novus*.

* * *

Given that Benjamin identified so closely with Franz Kafka, any reading of Benjamin alongside Kafka would hardly seem to come as a surprise.¹ Nevertheless, according to Kafka, 'there are nothing but surprising things in this world'; and there are, perhaps, some surprising things in this chapter – such as Benjamin's vision of an oceanic Kafka ('Kafka is a latter-day Ulysses') or his vision of a telephonic Kafka ('one can virtually hear Kafka speak').

Perhaps, though, the most surprising thing is how Franz Kafka will here come almost to narrate Benjamin's posthumous life. As Benjamin's death gradually dawns upon S. he begins, that is, to ceaselessly cite Kafka, as if the words now needed to articulate his world are, somehow, only to be found in Kafka.²

This recourse to Kafka makes dramatic sense of Benjamin's remark that 'Kafka is prophetic', prophetic even of Benjamin's after-life.³ Moreover, in so far as Kafka's words serve here to sustain, for S., the thought that Benjamin might *not* be dead, dramatic sense is also made of Kafka's claim that 'we are forever stumbling through *unfinished suicides*'.⁴

This striking claim, though closely connected with twentieth-century Jewish experience, also resonates with Benjamin's vision of seventeenth-century mourning plays (*Trauerspiele*) as presenting a world in which, unlike in tragedy, 'death [is not] the ultimate limit'.⁵ And *Walter Benjamin's Ark* ends, in a sense, as just such a mourning play, or indeed as the very mourning play which most fascinated Benjamin, namely *Hamlet*. This is, of course, a play about the mourning of a son for his father, 'the mourning of the prince'. For Benjamin, however, *Hamlet* is also a play about a 'a princely life [in which ...] melancholy is redeemed'.⁶

Chapter Five

(Untoward)

Part One

I/IV Thin

In November 1941, after over a year of further internment, Stefan left Australia, beginning the long, dangerous and circuitous journey that would take him back to Britain. The final part of this journey began on 30 January 1942, with Stefan voyaging out from Halifax, Canada, and into the North Atlantic. He was aboard *Largs Bay*, a troop carrier which formed part of a convoy including two battleships, as protection against U-boat attack.

Poor Steffe [...] want[s] to travel home today.

(Stefan Benjamin)⁷

* * *

Cold, cold. *Poor Steffe* is cold, *is cold after all*. For it is midwinter tonight, yes, winter tonight, here, at sea, where *winter ... is caught in winter* and it is dark after all.⁸ But *poor Steffe* has always to walk where it is very dark; and now he has to go where *waters* are dark, and with cold men, snow men, sailor men, old familiars of the sea.⁹

So, no more the Acrobat, no more the Actor, no more the king. Or, at least, there is no visible sign of his highness, not now. He is gone from view. Not to be seen. No, your highness, *I don't see you anymore*.¹⁰ And *I am sad ... sad because I don't see you anymore*. I hope, nevertheless, that you are well, as well as can be expected.

* * *

Dora had learnt of Walter's death in April 1941, news she could have chosen to share with Stefan in one of the letters she sent to him whilst he was in Australia; however, Dora felt that Stefan should not be told until such time as he might finally return to England. Indeed, on 15 July 1941, she wrote to Scholem, 'Please say nothing to Stefan ... regarding Walter's death. He is not in the right condition to hear it'.¹¹

* * *

By the way, your highness, I should confess that, alas, I myself am *not* altogether well, or of wholly sound mind. To be frank, I am not quite (as they say) in the Right Condition – not even for death, my own or anyone else's. My death, though, is distinctly possible, seeing that I am at sea, your highness, upon arctic waters, your highness, and in mortal peril, your highness.

Ships, you once said, *are drawn off course by the magnetic North*. And these are words which (I find) do not help. Not tonight.¹² You also once said of a *father* that *he sentences his son to death by drowning* – this too does not help, so I shall not think of it, not tonight.¹³

But fret not, your highness, poor Steffe is not drowning, not as yet. And neither, your highness, shall poor Steffe despair for, although he cannot see *you*, he can at least see his breath – and the fog. And poor Steffe shall thank God for the fog, since the *fog* is (as you often said) a *consolation of the solitary man*.¹⁴

Not that poor Steffe is a wholly solitary man, seeing that tonight the oceans are full, full of mad boys, boys as mad as birds, birds mad for home, just like poor Steffe himself, who swears he *is flying to ... England*.¹⁵ Indeed, one there is (it seems) whom poor Steffe all but takes with himself, one who is a new man, a new person, new-fangled. Yes, it is just as your highness once said it would be – *On the road home*, you said, *he takes a new person with him*.¹⁶ This new person has, though, an altogether *old-fangled* name, worn-out, cock-eyed – Kafka, yes, Kafka.

* * *

On 18 July 1942, another *Dunera* deportee also left Australia for England – in his case, aboard SS *Themistocles*; his name was Kafka. He was not, though, Franz Kafka the novelist-cum-insurance clerk from Prague, who had died back in 1924. This different Kafka was, instead, a textiles salesman (and occasional telephonist) from Vienna; his name was Karl, Karl Kafka.¹⁷

* * *

Yes, your highness, his name is Kafka – *Karl* Kafka. From Vienna. Not that I believe him. No, he is *Franz* Kafka, from Prague. You know, Herr Kafka the clerk, the insurance clerk. Yes, *that* Kafka. I am sure he is. Admittedly, the fellow says little or nothing about insurance, in fact he talks more about cloth or wool or leather or (occasionally) telephones, but I am sure he is Kafka the clerk. Or at least, I think so.

Anyway, like myself, Herr Kafka is somewhere Out Here – at Sea, that is, somewhere or other, upon one ocean or another. And he too is heading for home, albeit indirectly. Which is, again, just as your highness said it *would* be. *Kafka*, you said, *this man Kafka ... is a latter-day Ulysses*.¹⁸ Yes, you said, *this Kafka fellow is a latter-day Ulysses*.

Indeed, as it happens, I am now (in a manner) in communication with this very particular latter-day Ulysses. Yes, I have just recently located him, echo-located him, sounded him out. He may, I admit, be adrift upon some *other* sea and a few months north of here, but I can hear him or (at least) over-hear him. In fact, your highness, he is (I think) currently seated at a desk, in a dim and echoing chamber, typewriter (no doubt) to starboard, telephone (no doubt) to port. And he is (I think) forever signalling, or wiring, or something like that. Listen.

Kafka *My boat is fragile.*^{*19}

S. Hear that, your highness? [PAUSE] No? Well, I did, but –

Kafka *The walls, I say, are terribly thin.*²⁰

S. Ah, you again, Herr Kafka.

Kafka Indeed. *My ship, it seems, must somehow have lost its rudder.*²¹

S. Quite.
[PAUSE].

Kafka And I am afraid.

S. Of what?

Kafka I am afraid of *the telephone.*²²

S. Why?

Kafka *Nothing whatever came out of it.*

S. Nothing?

Kafka *Nothing ... except ... the roar of the ocean.*

S. Ah, but what else might one expect? When at sea. Fancy going to sea on a desk. Only a madman would –

Kafka *I cannot after all keep a storm in my room.*²³

S. Pardon?

* Any italicised words attributed to Herr Kafka are from the writings of Franz Kafka.

Kafka *I cannot after all keep a storm in my room.*
[PAUSE].

S. Your highness, I regret to say that, tonight, Herr Kafka would seem to be rather out-with-lanterns. It often happens. However, he has still enough sense to desire, I believe, that I should undertake some typing for him. Yes, I feel sure he desires that I should type-out, Pitman-style, his every weak thought, every pale memorandum. He clearly thinks well of me.

Kafka *I am ...*²⁴

S. Yes?

Kafka *I am with the typist to whom I am supposed to dictate.*

S. See, your highness? And please do not simply say, as you so often do, that *Kafka's ... secretaries seem always drowned or drowning men.*²⁵ No, poor Steffe is not to be counted among either the Drowned or Drowning. Not quite. It is true that I may, on occasion, flounder a little, or flail, but I am, without doubt, sufficiently un-drowned to tap-out Herr Kafka's various memoranda. Oh yes, I've not lost my touch, even with these mittens on. And do not fear, your highness, I shall be forwarding all memoranda to you, each and every carefully typed maritime memo. Ah, did I forget to mention that? Yes, Herr Kafka's wires, his shots in the dark, are intended, your highness, for you, yes you.

And, please, no protesting; or at least, no protesting on the grounds that Herr Kafka does not even know you – not even from bloody Himmler. No, don't go saying that Herr Kafka's scribbles could not possibly be written to one whom he does not know. After all, there are, as you say, at least *two ways to miss the point of Kafka's works* and *one way*, your highness, one most excellent way, is to insist that between yourself and Herr Kafka there is what he calls (with a dying fall) *a beautiful postal connection.*²⁶ And what a beautiful connection it is; notwithstanding the dull, brown fact that he, Herr Kafka, does not really know you.

Kafka *Please write ... since I don't really know you.*²⁷

S. See, your highness. Herr Kafka pursues you. Indeed, it is *because* he does not know you that he is in pursuit

and getting closer every day. Admit it, your highness, confess. After all, did you not once even say that *I have Kafka here at my bedside[?]*?²⁸ And did you not also once talk of *My Kafka*?²⁹ And even let slip that, *One can virtually hear Kafka speak*.³⁰

And why not? For, as you say, *Kafka, like Laurel... felt obliged to seek out his Hardy*.³¹ Or to put that another way (*your way, in fact*), *Kafka was a man whose fate it was to keep stumbling upon comedians – not least, royal comedians*. In sum, your highness makes, I think, an excellent Oliver Hardy to Herr Kafka's Stan Laurel.

[SHIP SHUDDERS, COLD MEN CURSE AND THE KING (WHEREVER HE IS) SAYS NOTHING, NOTHING AT ALL. AT LAST, KAFKA HIMSELF ADDRESSES THE KING.]

Kafka Ah, *what's the good of writing?* ³² After all, you do not reply – *you are silent*.

[THE KING IS SILENT. KAFKA TRIES ONCE MORE.]

I said, *What's the good of writing? You are silent* and never reply, not a word, not even a post-card.

[THE KING IS AGAIN SILENT, PROMPTING S. TO INTERVENE.]

S. But, dear Herr Kafka, perhaps his highness is in an hotel and thus *unable* to reply, unable to write.

Kafka Ah, yes. Forgive me, your highness. How very thoughtless of me. I had not considered that you might, even now, be in an hotel. And *staying in an hotel* would no doubt have *made you feel uncomfortable*; almost, perhaps, as uncomfortable as I am myself whenever, your highness, I recall my last *picture of you*, that picture of *when I lost you in the doorway of the hotel*.³³ Yes, in the doorway, at the hotel, *when I lost you*. And was never to see you again. Never.

[THE KING BEGINS TO SOB.]

Ah, *why, your highness, are you suddenly in tears?*³⁴

* * *

II/IV Low

On 31 January 1942, the convoy in which Stefan's ship, *Largs Bay*, set off was attacked by a U-boat just south of Newfoundland. One of the two escort-warriors, HMS *Belmont*, was hit and sunk with all aboard, 138 men, being lost.

* * *

Cold, cold, poor Steffe is cold, so cold, so cold that even his tears might freeze. Yes, *dry tears all by self*.³⁵ But *could* he weep? Could he weep now, right now? Even as that ship, the one over there, the *Belmont* (they say), is burning and breaking. Breaking my heart.

Your highness certainly knows how to weep – like a man alone at a picture-house. Indeed, you did once say that one is *taught to cry again by films*.³⁶ You did not, though, say how one is *first* taught to cry, first learns to weep. In the Beginning, that is. I do, though, myself sometimes wonder if, in the Beginning, it is by watching (as I did) Adam and Eve slowly fall out of love.

Now, though, right now, one might best learn to cry by watching men who drown – as well as burn and scream *before* they drown. Yes, that might perhaps teach even the demons to cry, to weep and weep until (as once said your highness) their *faces* are *weathered by salty tears*.³⁷ Perhaps.

Yes, perhaps. But I do not really know. After all, I do not even know if I am crying right now, or if it is, in truth, not tears but merely the sea-spray that is upon my cheeks. No, I do not know and neither do I care. Nor do I care what *they* are thinking, these drowning men. No, I do not care if, even as they drown, they plaintively think (as once did your highness) that, *A lighthouse shines*.³⁸ Or that, *Some brightness remains in the West*.³⁹ Or even that, *One is preparing to die First Class*.⁴⁰ However, if one can die *Last Class* then that, I think, is how they die tonight, these drowning men. Yes and, all the while, these drowning men are doubtless looking up to the Newfoundland heavens and all (together) joining your highness in *interrogating the stars*.⁴¹

And why not? There is much to be said for interrogating the stars, and tonight the simplest questions of all will suffice, questions such as those the prince used to ask. For instance, *How would it be if someone slaughtered us?* Or, *Why do people get old?* Or, *Is there much enough snow?*⁴²

Yes, is there, I wonder, out here, much enough snow? Much enough snow to freeze before one drowns? It would be a mercy. For I fear

that tonight (as once said your highness) *only a few will be able to save themselves*.⁴³ Or maybe none. None. None at all.

* * *

Ah, an instant of silence, a pause in the screaming. It is just an instant, but enough, your highness, for a very different noise to be heard, the noise of an office. Herr Kafka's office.

Kafka Forgive me, sir, please forgive me.⁴⁴

S. Forgive you *what*?

Kafka *The epistolary noise*, sir, not to mention the *telegraphic noise*.

[OFFICE NOISE CONTINUES (TALK OF INSURANCE, TALK OF TEXTILES). SCREAMING NOW RESUMES.]

S. But, Herr Kafka, what about the *drowning* noise? The noise of those who flail and gasp. Can you not hear them?

Kafka Pardon, sir?

S. I said, can you not hear the drowning men?

Kafka Sorry, sir, I can't hear you. Not above *the epistolary noise*.

S. But they scream, the men, even as they flail and gasp.

Kafka Indeed, sir. *There is*, I think, *no lack of excitement at sea*.⁴⁵
[NOISE CONTINUES.]

The king Excuse me, Herr Kafka, excuse me for interrupting [RAISES VOICE TO BE HEARD], but *as far as my son is concerned, the situation is ... rather gloomy*.

Kafka Ah, I do apologise; there really *should be a deck-chair ready for*—⁴⁶

The king No, it's the men, the drowning men; my son would rather not have to watch men drown. Not in plain sight.

Kafka But, sir, *I am not myself drowning in plain sight*.⁴⁷

The king And for that one is truly grateful.

Kafka Excellent.

S. [INTERVENING] It's just, Herr Kafka, that the death of so many is hard to bear, and still harder to square with any sense of hope. Do you not agree, Herr Kafka? If not, can you advise? Help. Explain.

Kafka Certainly, sir. *I shall tell your father everything*.⁴⁸

[KAFKA APPEARS AND TAKES THE KING ASIDE. BOTH STOOP AS IF FOR FEAR OF BANGING THEIR HEADS UPON

SOME BEAM, OR RAFTER. THE KING THEN STOPS AND TURNS TO ANYONE WHO MIGHT LISTEN.]

The king *Ceilings, I find, are almost always low in Kafka.*⁴⁹

Kafka Indeed, *could it be that, perhaps, we are in ... the attic?*⁵⁰

[PAUSE.]

S. Excuse me, Herr Kafka, a word, if I may.

Kafka Certainly.

S. I should like, please, to hear whatever it is you have to tell my father. I would argue, you see, that I am, in some respects at least, his equal, his peer. Is that not so, your highness?

The king Indeed – *Stefan is invariably a serious partner in conversations.*⁵¹

Kafka Really, sir? Are you sure? Absolutely sure?

The king No.

Kafka In that case, sir, let us speak entirely *entre-nous*.
[KAFKA SITS DOWN AT A SEA-GOING DESK, CLEARS THROAT, AND ONCE MORE ADDRESSES THE KING.]
*Being, sir, so far apart, one should take every opportunity to speak frankly.*⁵²

The king About what?

Kafka Wool.

The king Pardon?

Kafka Sorry, cotton.

The king Cotton?

Kafka No (sorry), *hope* – I meant to say *hope*. Yes, *one should take every opportunity to speak frankly* about hope.

The king Excellent.
[KAFKA SHUFFLES SOME SEA-DAMPENED PAPERS.]
By the way, Herr Kafka ...

Kafka Yes, sir?

The king *Would it surprise you if I tell you how enormously delighted I am to discover such a profound and spontaneous communication between our thoughts?*⁵³

Kafka No, no it would not surprise me. Not at all. For, you see, *there are nothing but surprising things in the world.*⁵⁴

The king For instance?

Kafka *A man-drowner.*⁵⁵

The king Ah yes.

Kafka *Nevertheless [WIPES TEAR FROM EYE], it is terrible to think that our correspondence progresses amid such catastrophes.*⁵⁶
 [PAUSE. KAFKA STARES DOWN AT DAMPENED PAPERS, AND SMILES. HE APPEARS NOW TO HAVE QUITE FORGOTTEN BOTH KING AND CATASTROPHE.]

The king *I hope ...*⁵⁷

Kafka [LOOKING UP] Pardon?

The king *I hope ...*

Kafka Ah yes, do carry on.

The king *I hope that up to now I've given you the impression that I've remained composed even in difficult moments.*

Kafka Absolutely. Most impressive.
 [KAFKA RETURNS TO PAPERS UNTIL ADDRESSED BY S.]

S. Herr Kafka, please excuse me once more, but could I remind you that, just now, you declared your intention to talk frankly.

Kafka With respect to what? Cloth? Silk? Gabar –

S. [INTERRUPTING] No, hope.

Kafka Ah yes. [CLEARS THROAT]. There is *an infinity of hope*—⁵⁸

The king *But not for us.*

Kafka Exactly. Satisfied, your highness?
 [THE KING DOES NOT REPLY.]
 I said, is your highness satisfied that there is an infinity of hope, but not for us?
 [THE KING DOES NOT REPLY. KAFKA THUS SPEAKS TO S.]
 Sir, *your father is hesitant with his reply.*⁵⁹
 [S. DOES NOT RESPOND.]
 Excuse me, sir, but whilst I admit *there is something tremendous in a man*, such as yourself, *taking his family upon his back and carrying them across the sea*, I have to point out that, as regards my question, *your father is hesitant with his reply.*⁶⁰

* * *

The correspondence between Dora and Stefan during his Australian exile has not survived; but it is understood that, in these letters, Dora held to her determination not to let Stefan know that Walter had died. S. must surely have inquired, but his mother must have been, at best, hesitant with her reply.⁶¹

* * *

III/IV Silent

Ah, poor Steffe is cold, cold. So cold that he cannot warm his hopeless hands, not even perhaps with his muddled breath and certainly not with such letters as he has been sent. For who can warm his hands with reticent letters, letters full of holes? And, ah what gaping holes they are, holes through which sea-winds blow and kings disappear or, at best, appear but only to say that they cannot say much, cannot speak freely.

- The king** *What I have to say now ...*
S. Yes?
The king *Is not for children to hear.*⁶²
S. Ah, but is poor Steffe a child? Indeed, is a –
The king *I would really like to be in a position to tell you.*⁶³
S. Tell me *what?* That you are now dead? If so, I would rather not know. Poor Steffe, you see, is now so cold, so very cold, that he could not bear to hear –
The king *News of a death[?]*⁶⁴
S. Exactly.
The king So ... *rumours are circulating[?]*⁶⁵ Rumours of my death?
S. Absolutely.
The king Like *one of those tales that one gets to hear out on the sea[?]*⁶⁶
S. Indeed. Or read in the papers.
The king Pardon?
S. The *papers*, your highness. Do you not daily expect to *read* of your death?
The king *One reads the notices.*
S. Where?
The king *The urinals.*
S. But what about the papers?
[SILENCE.]
Your highness, do you not understand? Not understand my drift?
[NO REPLY. S. TURNS TO KAFKA.]
Herr Kafka – my drift, could you kindly explain it to the king?
Kafka Certainly, sir. [CLEARS THROAT AND ADDRESSES KING.]
*Every other day I find ... in the papers... news which seems to be meant only for me.*⁶⁷

[THE KING CONSIDERS. LONG SILENCE. THE KING, AT LAST, IS READY TO SPEAK.]

The king Ah yes, *I too read every newspaper just as if it were a summons served on me.*⁶⁸

* * *

The first newspaper to announce Benjamin's death was the Zurich daily, *Die Tat*, on 16 October 1940. The article concludes that 'the eerie mechanism of frontiers and transit visas' which had confronted Benjamin at the very end was 'reminiscent of Kafka'.⁶⁹

* * *

[SILENCE. THEN SILENCE IS BROKEN AS KAFKA BEGINS TO TYPE AND TO DO SO EVEN AS HE SPEAKS. INDEED, WHAT HE SPEAKS IS EXACTLY WHAT HE SIMULTANEOUSLY TYPES.]

Kafka *B. is the most unfortunate of men.*⁷⁰

S. Who?

Kafka *Dr W.*⁷¹

S. And in what respect is Herr B., or Dr W., unfortunate?
[SILENCE.]

Excuse me, Herr Kafka, but in what respect is his highness unfortunate?

Kafka *There are no kings, sir – not now.*⁷² Therein lies the king's misfortune.

S. But how do you know this?
[KAFKA DOES NOT REPLY.]

The king [To S.] *Kafka, I suspect, has eavesdropped.*⁷³

S. And what has he heard, your highness?

Kafka [INTERVENING] That, sir, *the great days of court jesterdom are gone.*⁷⁴

S. Gone?

Kafka Gone, sir. As I say, *there are no kings – not now. Sorry.*
[SILENCE.]

The king *Kafka ... Kafka is ...*⁷⁵

S. Yes?

The king *Prophetic. Kafka is, I believe, prophetic.*

S. Of what?

[SILENCE, NO REPLY.]

I said of what is Herr Kafka –

Kafka [INTERVENING] *B.*

S. Pardon?

Kafka *B. is the most unfortunate of men.*

S. Ah, but is he? Is he really? I mean, I've heard nothing, nothing untoward. Not a word.

The king *Nothing from Dora[?] ... Nothing new[?]⁷⁶*

S. No, the queen said nothing. Nothing in her letters.

The king Why not?

Kafka [INTERVENING] Because *the sirens ... do not sing.*⁷⁷

S. And what is it, Herr Kafka, that the sirens do not sing? Or say?

[SILENCE. NO REPLY].

I said, what is it they –

Kafka *B. is the most unfortunate of men.*

S. But what, on earth, do you mean? Have you seen something? Read something? Something I have not myself –

Kafka *I spent the night, sir, with ... the letter.*⁷⁸

S. Which letter?

Kafka One of mine, sir. One of my *magic letters.*⁷⁹

S. Magic letters? What, in God's name, are magic letters?

Kafka *Future letters*, sir. Prescient letters. Letters that stumble upon the future.

S. But how? How do they do that?

Kafka Well, *it's the typewriter*, sir. [KAFKA IS STILL TYPING, BOTH AS AND WHAT HE SPEAKS]. It is, you see, an *unreasonable typewriter.*⁸⁰ Yes, it is *the typewriter* that *leads me astray* – leads me to stray from today and into tomorrow. From this month to the next month.

S. Next month? And what do you know about next month?

Kafka *Next month ...*⁸¹

S. Yes?

Kafka *Next month*, sir, *the World War ... will end.*

S. Excellent.

Kafka However ...

S. Yes?

Kafka *The World War*, sir, *will end and the office will begin.*

S. Fuck.

Kafka Quite, *the office is a horror*, is it not?⁸² Think sir, just think of all *the complexities of which bureaucracy is capable*.⁸³

* * *

January 1942 was the month in which not only Stefan left Canada for England but the Nazis' Wannsee Conference was held in an elegant villa on the edge of Berlin. This was the meeting at which the Nazis formally decided upon the Final Solution. The decision would not, of course, end the War, but it was the moment in which (one might say) 'the office' begins, or at least begins as a killing machine, bringing to bear upon the Nazi extermination of the Jews all the complexities of which bureaucracy is capable.

* * *

IV/IV Empty

Ah, poor Steffe is cold, cold with Kafka, cold Kafka-the-clerk, the clerk at his desk, the clerk that types. Tap-tap. And will the bastard never stop? Tap. Poor Steffe might have thought (tap) that, out here, at sea, one would be (tap) far from men-at-their-desks. Tap. But no, they seem to know where we are (poor Steffe et al), know *exactly* where we are – longitude, latitude, etc.

Mind, if we too go down, all hands, finally sunk, then we will have at least the consolation that someone, someone in London, will know exactly, precisely, where, tonight, some bastard U-boat is, or was.

And this, all this, might just cheer your highness, for did you not once wish to *improve the maps of the British Admiralty*[?]⁸⁴ Just imagine, then, how great would be the Admiralty's rejoicing at the cartographical improvements made possible by our being sunk. Just imagine the scenes in each and every office. Just imagine, as you say, all those *copyists at work in ecstatic postures*.⁸⁵

But what, your highness, if the men of the Admiralty were to take badly the news of our demise? What if, despite the improvements in their maps, they were overwhelmed with grief? What if the copyists' seemingly ecstatic postures were, in fact, expressions of despair? Indeed, your highness, what if they were henceforth engaged not in the organisation of England but rather, as you put it, *the organisation of pessimism*[?]⁸⁶

After all, one knows what the English are like – how susceptible to gloom. Take, for instance, *the splenetic Englishman who, you say, wakes up one morning and shoots himself simply because it is raining*.⁸⁷

But, your highness, perhaps the very same Englishman now shoots himself not because it is raining cats-and-dogs but because it is raining *drowned men*; or at least, *news of drowned men*, news first received at the Admiralty which is, I imagine, where every Englishman now works. Perhaps, then, your highness's very own splenetic fellow is not alone in being unable to bear it all. Perhaps many a naval clerk now feels the only way out is self-slaughter, at their desk, beside their telephone. Did not you yourself say that *we look now upon the empty offices*?⁸⁸

[THE KING SAYS NOTHING. SILENCE. AT LAST, S. SPEAKS.]

S. Your highness, these empty offices of yours ...

The king Yes?

S. Are they in London, or Berlin?

Kafka [INTERVENING] Berlin. To be precise, *Wannsee*, sir. Yes, a *villa at Wannsee*.⁸⁹

- S. Ah, one which has rooms-turned-offices that are now altogether empty? Their temporary bureaucratic purpose now served?
- Kafka** Perhaps, sir. You see, I have not, as yet, visited the *villa at Wannsee*. Mind you, when I do, I shall choose a quiet attic room. Indeed, *no one will ever notice I am there*.
- S. Where?
- Kafka** In the attic sir, at *the villa at Wannsee* ... *No one will ever notice I'm there*. Or, at least, I hope not.
- S. Why not?
- Kafka** Well, it's an odd place, sir. Wannsee. Odd.
- S. Odd?
- Kafka** Yes, odd. Take, for example, Herr *Kleist* – you know, the long-ago poet who, sir, was *compelled to shoot himself on the Wannsee*.⁹⁰

* * *

All three of Franz Kafka's sisters were exterminated in Nazi death camps, thus dying as a direct result of the decisions made at Wannsee – to be precise, at a villa in Wannsee which, in January 1942, was temporarily turned into a suite of conference offices.

A similar fate was suffered by the parents of Karl Kafka, the *Dunera* deportee, both dying in Theresienstadt, aka Terezín Ghetto.⁹¹

* * *

- S. I'm afraid, Herr Kafka, you have lost me. May I begin again? Afresh, as it were.
- Kafka** Certainly, sir
- S. Thank you. [CLEARS THROAT.] I fear ...
- Kafka** Yes?
- S. I fear that, in Berlin, men at desks are now called upon not to organise pessimism but rather –
- The king** *To organise ... the extermination of the Jewish race*.⁹²
- S. Pardon?
- The king** There is, I believe, a *grand conspiracy to organise the extermination of the Jewish race*.
- S. But, your highness, it cannot be to exterminate *all* of us. Not all. We are too many. So, exactly *which* Jews are they after? These dreadful men-at-their-desks.
[SILENCE.]

I said, *which* Jews? Which Jews, in particular, do they –

The king The *librarians*.

S. Librarians? They wish to kill librarians?

The king Indeed, they desire *the extermination of all those Jews who are librarians*.

S. But do the librarians not fight back? Hurl books? Lob date-stamps? Throw index-cards?

The king Who?

S. The librarians – you know, the bookish.

The king Such as ourselves?

S. Exactly.
[THE KING CONSIDERS.]

The king No. No, we do not fight, do not fight at all.

* * *

Walter Benjamin avoided conscription in the First World War through various elaborate means, including simulating illness.⁹³ Stefan, when in Australia, *did* seek to enlist with the British Army; however, he was turned down because of his terrible eye-sight.⁹⁴

* * *

The Trial An Interlude

Scene: Herr Kafka's office, at sea, a vague sea. Herr Kafka himself is elsewhere and, at his vacated table, or desk, sits Someone, a stranger.

- Someone** [To ALL] Be upstanding.
[NO ONE MOVES.]
Let the trial begin.
[NOTHING HAPPENS.]
Bring in the secretary.
[KAFKA ENTERS.]
- The king** *Summoned or unsummoned?*
- Someone** Pardon?
- The king** *Does the secretary enter summoned or unsummoned?*
- Someone** Summoned.
- Kafka** Pardon?
- Someone** Herr Kafka, you have, been summoned.
- Kafka** Pardon?
- Someone** You are required to appear before the court. Here, today. In the office.
- The king** [To S.] *My thinking about him has, I fear, made him appear.*⁹⁵
- Someone** [INTERVENING] No, it is his *guilt*, Herr Kafka's very own *guilt*.
[SEA SIGHS.]
- The king** His *guilt*?
- Someone** Indeed – we are here to bring Herr Kafka to justice. After all, did you not yourself say that it was your intent *to do justice to Herr Kafka?*⁹⁶
[THE KING DOES NOT RESPOND.]
I said, did you not say that it was always your intent *to do justice to Herr Kafka?*
- The king** Yes, but *having to appear before a court of justice gives rise to ...*⁹⁷
- Someone** Yes?
- The king** Forgotten.
- Someone** Ah well, regardless, Today, gentlemen, Herr Kafka finally encounters justice, as do all Herr Kafkas everywhere, all clerks who, in any respect, err, stray, fail, decline, fall-short, drop-off, or miss the mark or target.

[SEA SIGHS AGAIN, AND SOMEONE PAUSES, BEFORE TURNING TO KAFKA WHO IS NOW SEATED AND, AS BEFORE, BUSY TYPING].

Name!

Kafka *My name is ... Kafka.*⁹⁸

Someone Are you sure?

Kafka Certainly. *I can't tell a lie, not to the office.*⁹⁹ *My name is ... Kafka.*

Someone But, you do answer to other names, do you not? Names like –

Kafka *Kaffka ... Koffka ... Kafta?*¹⁰⁰

Someone Exactly.

Kafka Well, I do indeed answer to such, but I have no choice; some persons with whom I correspond cannot, it seems, actually read the name Kafka. In fact, as I have just now indicated, it would appear that there are at least –

The king [INTERVENING] *Two ways of misreading Kafka?*

Someone No, *three*, it seems.

Kafka *Kaffka ... Koffka ... Kafta.*

Someone Precisely. However, time is short, and the office waits for no man. So, let us press on. [CLEARS THROAT.] Your highness [CLEARS THROAT AGAIN], would you kindly accuse Herr Kafka of something? A simple error will do to begin with.

[THE KING SAYS NOTHING.]

Come along, your highness. How about something to do with, say, Herr Kafka's work in insurance?

The king [FINALLY RESPONDING] *The North German Boiler Surveillance Association* –¹⁰¹

Someone Excellent, very promising.

The king [RESUMING] *The North German Boiler Surveillance Association was once going to inspect a ship* –

Someone With regard to insurance?

The king Indeed, they were *going to inspect a ship in the name of the Stern insurance firm.*

Someone But failed to do so?

The king Yes.

Someone Excellent. I feel sure Herr Kafka was to blame and that we shall soon see him quite banged to rights. I wonder, though, if Herr Kafka might expedite

matters by simply *confessing* to something, something to do with, say, the utter insignificance of his work, militarily speaking. There is, you see, a war on.

Kafka *I, sir, accomplish ...*¹⁰²

Someone Continue.

Kafka *I, sir, accomplish little more than the defence of my –*

Someone Country?

Kafka No – *desk. I, sir, accomplish little more than the defence of my desk.*

Someone There! Excellent – all but self-condemned. No clerk may defend only his desk. Like any other clerk, Herr Kafka, you should also defend your country, your nation. In order, therefore, to finally seal your fate, could you please add something self-incriminating about, say, your manner of dictating? Dictating, that is, to a typist.

Kafka *He who dictates is master.*¹⁰³

Someone Meaning?

Kafka [CONFESSING] It is ...

Someone Yes?

Kafka It is *easy to control a typist.*

Someone What kind?

Kafka A living one – *living typist.*

Someone And what about a *dying* one?

Kafka Pardon?

Someone A *dying* typist – is it not a little harder to control a typist who is not so much living as dying? Such a typist, I imagine, has nothing to lose and is thus inclined, when receiving dictation, to take the occasional liberty, to smuggle-in a thought or concern of his own, of (say) death or the grave. Is that not so?

[*Kafka says nothing.*]

Well, may I ask, then, Herr Kafka, if, on a day-to-day basis, you *ever* come across such an office libertine? Such a clerical free-spirit?

Kafka Yes, sir.

Someone And when is that?

Kafka When I am in the office and *a stranger sits at my table.*¹⁰⁴

[All turn to stare at Someone, he who sits at Kafka's table].

- Someone** [UNPERTURBED] And who is he, this stranger?
- Kafka** *The professor ... the professor, sir, in search of my name.*¹⁰⁵
- Someone** Your name? But, Herr Kafka, your name, is absurd. It is, I admit, a famous name, being shared with that author fellow, the one from Prague; nevertheless, it remains an absurd name. I mean, who on earth would be desirous or envious of a cacophonous name like Koffka, or Kafta, or –
- Kafka** It's Kafka sir. Or, at least, it was.
- Someone** Was? What on earth do you mean?
- Kafka** Well of late, sir, I am afraid I have lost my name. Or rather, I have lost most of it.
- Someone** How very careless.
- Kafka** Indeed. But, you see, every time I have signed a letter *my name has been growing shorter ... shorter all the time.*¹⁰⁶ Once upon a time, it was *Yours Franz K.*¹⁰⁷ Then it became just *Yours F.*¹⁰⁸ And now ...
- Someone** Yes?
- Kafka** Now, sir, it is just *Yours*, or rather *Thine.*¹⁰⁹
- Someone** Thine?
- Kafka** Yes, *Thine.*
- Someone** Good heavens. Do you think some professor, a professor in search of your name, has somehow gradually stolen it? Slowly whittled it away, to all but nothing?
- Kafka** I do, sir.
- Someone** Well, I am most sorry to hear that. Some professors are, indeed, the very devil. It must, no doubt, be a quite dreadful thing to find one's name contracted to a mere initial, especially such thin gruel as, say, –
- The king** [INTERVENING] S.
- Someone** Pardon?
- The king** *A laconic S.*
[S. STIFFENS]
- Someone** What about it?
- The king** *A laconic S. in front of a man's surname warns us not to take too many liberties.*
[S. LOSENS, RELIEVED, EMBOLDENED.]

Someone Ah, but does it? Does it really?
[S. STIFFENS ONCE MORE].

End of Interlude

* * *

Part Two

Drowsy

If one travels somewhere and comes back then one is always different.¹¹⁰

(Stefan Benjamin)

* * *

Poor Steffe is cold, still cold, but differently cold, being cold now with hope of land, Oldfoundland, fog-horn England. The sceptred isle.

[PAUSE.]

S. What say you, Herr Kafka? The view from the office, what is it?

[SILENCE.]

I said, what say you, Herr Kafka? Is land not, at last, within reach? Is not our frozen ark soon to come to rest?

Kafka [SLOWLY, RELUCTANTLY] *One has, sir, just been sent out ...*¹¹¹

S. And?

Kafka *One has just been sent out, as a biblical dove, but ... have found nothing.*

S. Nothing?

Kafka *Nothing, sir.*

S. No land?

Kafka No land, sir. *One simply slips back, sir, into the darkness of the ark.*

S. Is that it? Is that all?

Kafka Yes, sir.

S. Why, then, did we sail? Why bother to have made this journey? Why?

Kafka Ah, but *it is not*, sir, *a journey*; or at least, *not yet a journey*.¹¹²

S. What, then, will it take to become a journey?

Kafka *A miracle*, sir.¹¹³

S. What kind?

Kafka *A maritime miracle.*

* * *

On the night of 8 February 1942, *Largs Bay* finally docked in Glasgow, thus completing Stefan's return journey from Australia. On 17 July 1942, Dora writes to Scholem, 'Stefan has now twice survived, through a miracle, the dangerous voyage. Whether he has not been harmed forever, I do not know'.¹¹⁴

* * *

Poor Steffe, poor damaged Steffe, has now, at last, arrived. Yes, he thought, one has docked, harboured, returned. And yet, he thought, one is altogether overcome by a strangeness, the strangest strangeness – that is to say, *the strangeness* (says K., Herr K.) *of this not-perishing*.^{†115}

Yes, it would seem, he thought, that one has not perished, not quite, and so must continue, survive, live-on, and in England, of all places, February England. And ah, he thought, how one shivers, how one struggles, how one *is constantly slipping* (says K.) *in the snow* even as one asks *Has not the war* (says K.) *been most splendidly concluded?*¹¹⁶ But alas, even now, one sees a news-stand *depicting* (says K.) *a German victory* and learns that *the Germans* (says K.) *are advancing*, though also slipping in the snow, the far Russian snow.¹¹⁷ Stalingrad.

And there is, it seems, now no question of what must be (says K.) one's *next task*.¹¹⁸ It is *to become* (says K.) *a soldier*. In fact, one *would* (says K.) *be better off at the front*.¹¹⁹ But I, poor Steffe, demur, saying that *there are certain decisive factors* (says K.) *that prevent me from volunteering*. Above all, I am bespectacled, being one who can barely see, can barely see the snow in which I slip.¹²⁰ And, thus, I cannot enlist.

And *that*, apparently, means that I cannot, as yet, be released, set free. Or so says (says K.), *a drowsy typist*.¹²¹

Yes (tap) sir may have been allowed (tap) to return from Down Under (NO tap) but sir cannot, as yet, be released. (Drowse). Sir's papers are not, as yet, in order. (Drowse). Admittedly, sir, it is possible that *a letter* (says K.) *could have simply gone astray*.¹²² However, it is also possible that sir might (whether he knows it or not) be a German spy – or even (says K.) *a literary spy, a German literary spy*.¹²³

Sir shall therefore be asked, alas, *to stand* (says K.) *for two hours in a crowd on the stairway to an office ... whilst the passport is not given him*.¹²⁴ Still better, sir shall then be put upon a Choo-choo to the fucking seaside – an island, to be precise, in the middle of the Irish Sea. I am sure sir will love it, both he and whoever else is there, along with their buckets and spades. Ah yes, they will no doubt (says K.) *sit side by side by the*

† Any italicised words attributed to K. are from the writings of Franz Kafka.

railings on the sea-front and pass many a blissful day watching the salted air gradually whiten the sentinel wire.¹²⁵ Barbed wire.

* * *

Upon disembarking at Glasgow, Stefan was immediately arrested and once more interned, this time on the Isle of Man. As it happens, a former lover of Franz Kafka's had also been interned on the island. She was released in August 1941, a few months prior to Stefan's arrival. Her name was Dora.¹²⁶

* * *

Ah, poor Steffe is still cold, as cold now as an island, as cold now as a room, a room like (says K.) *my room, that icy hell*.¹²⁷ And the cold is no surprise, for *the ship*, the ship from the mainland, it *docks* (says K.) *at the very threshold of my room*.¹²⁸ Moreover, it is a room (albeit not an island) without even a telephone to warm it.

I must, though, your highness, confess that *on the telephone* (says K.) *I forget most everything*.¹²⁹ In fact, *the very thought of the telephone* (says K.) *makes me forget even laughter*.¹³⁰ In consequence, your highness, *I am* (says K.) *afraid of making a telephone call*, fearing that I shall forget how to laugh.¹³¹ I am also afraid because *on the telephone I keep hearing* (says K.) *indistinct whispering voices*.¹³² I am, your highness, already subject to enough such voices.

So, no, I do not like the telephone and, in that respect, am quite unlike your highness, who often, I know, makes calls. Although not perhaps of late. For it is, I know, not easy to call from anywhere now, seeing that *there are always a lot of people* (says K.) *where ever the telephone is*.¹³³

Nevertheless, perhaps your highness *has* managed to call me. From, say, 62 Leinster Square, having newly arrived, finally made it, at last reunited with your beloved queen. Yes, I am sure her highness would let you use her telephone. Indeed, *someone* (says K.) *has just telephoned*, so perhaps it was you but I did not realize, what with the cold and the Irish Sea.¹³⁴ Or perhaps you telephoned a day ago and I have just forgotten. You see, as I say, *on the telephone* (says K.) *I forget most everything*, perhaps even that I am *on the telephone*.

So, yes, *I may* have lately spoken to you on the telephone. However, your highness, it may also, alas, have been that, if and when you rang, I *did not myself* (says K.) *run straight to the telephone ... but pushed someone else over to it*.¹³⁵

And just as someone other than myself may have answered the phone so someone other than yourself may have *rung*. Perhaps, for instance, *an angel* (says K.) *made that telephone call instead of you*.¹³⁶ After all, I do not find it easy, your highness, to tell the difference between an angel and yourself, or least your voices. Mind you, it is not easy to identify *any* voice that one hears on the telephone. Indeed, sometimes the question is not so much *Who* (says K.) *answered the telephone?* but *Who* (says K.) *telephoned* in the first place?¹³⁷

Whatever, if an angel *had* telephoned (and I had known) it is certain I would have been so overcome as to have forgotten to laugh. Ah yes, there would have been no laughing, neither *on* the phone nor *into* the phone – assuming one *can* (says K.) *laugh into the telephone*.¹³⁸ Can one? Or can one only weep?

Or, alternatively, does one weep only *after* talking on the telephone? Days after, I mean. Is it, for instance, the case that: firstly one *talks* (says K.) *to dear mother* (on the phone, that is) and only secondly one weeps?¹³⁹ Yes, that may well now be how it is with me. You see, every day I say to the queen, *Would you be so kind* (says K.) *as to bring me a suitcase with winter clothes?*¹⁴⁰ This island, I tell her, is no place for men in shorts. But, alas, despite these pleas, no suitcase arrives and so perhaps it is *then*, and *only* then, that I weep. And weep. Until such time as I am freed.

* * *

On 9 April 1942, Stefan was finally deemed to be no longer a danger to national security, thus released from the Isle of Man and free to travel to London to be reunited with his mother. By this time, however, 62 Leinster Square, where Dora was running a hotel, had suffered bomb damage. Dora herself had, therefore, recently moved out of London into the country, to Dene Hill in Tilford, near Farnham, in Hampshire.¹⁴¹

* * *

And now, yes now, I am freed (at last). Yes, I am back upon the mainland and it is April, the cruellest month, as poor Steffe should know, for poor Steffe is an April's child and indeed is beginning to suspect that this April might yet be the cruellest April, the cruellest of the cruellest. For although I am, they say, at last a Free Man, and shall soon be Freely returning to London, I shall *return* (says K.) *by a peculiar detour*.¹⁴² That is to say, though Free, I shall have to endure what are (says K.) far from *favourable railroad connections*.¹⁴³ And, moreover, *all the time* (says K.) *it is raining*.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, still I am *off* (says K.) *to the railway station, to stir up the world.*¹⁴⁵ Yes, I do very much wish to stir up the world since, in my experience, the world to-date has not been much to speak of. The greatest disappointment has been the several lands that I have been promised: Vienna, San Remo, Wales, Canaan. Indeed, it seems, that always *I have been wandering* (says K.) **away from Canaan** – wandering in reverse, if you will, long heading for an un-promised land.¹⁴⁶

And *all the time* (says K.) *it is raining.* And it is raining even as (with London now calling) this train, this laughable Pullman, steams south altogether indifferent to my hoping that I shall never quite arrive. Yes, *the corner of this compartment is* (says K.) *where I belong,* and *all the time* (says K.) *it is raining.*¹⁴⁷

And all the time it is *still* raining as even now, here in the corner of this taxi (rare bird), a westward taxi, I move slow through Marylebone. Traffic. Traffic.

And yet, at last, here I am now, Leinster Square (W2), eyeing *the Hotel* that has (says K.) been *almost completely burned down.*¹⁴⁸ A bomb it was, apparently. And I say to the driver, *What* (says K.) *happened to the bomb?*¹⁴⁹ And the driver says he does not fucking know, sir. However, the driver (says K.) *remains faithful ... faithful to the hotel,* and thus *does* know what happened to the lady, German, who ran the hotel. That is to say, he knows where she is now, which is not the grave but the country.¹⁵⁰ Hampshire.

And so again I am *off* (says K.), *off again to the station,* this time knowing that soon (south, south-east of here, where the world is green) I shall find myself once more in the company of the queen. Or, rather, standing at her awkward door. However (says K.) *I still don't know the state I shall be in when I enter,* nor how she will view, or narrate, my return, my entrance, my coming through the door.¹⁵¹ Perhaps, for instance, it will be: *Whoosh, the door* (says K.) *flew open* and *Who came in without knocking? Some ruffian? No, a beloved guest.*¹⁵²

Yes, that is (I am sure) exactly how it will be once *the door between us* (says K.) *is beginning to move* and I enter not as ruffian but guest – as, say, at a boarding-house.¹⁵³ And, even as the clock ticks (the clock in the hallway) there we shall stand, silent, frozen, both of us, landlady and guest, and I shall think: Ah well, at least *the clock* (says K.) *has certain personal relations with me.*¹⁵⁴ And then, at last, after an age spent listening to this personable clock, the queen shall say that *a letter* (says K.) *is waiting for you* and that it is (says K.) *a Letter from a Father to his Son.*¹⁵⁵ However, she shall also say that, alas, the letter is not waiting *here* but somewhere else, or rather nowhere else, since the letter was

penned faraway in Europe (somewhere) and was (they say) straightway destroyed, or possibly lost, and may in fact (come to think of it) have never actually been written at all.

The queen will then glance toward one very particular photograph, one among (says K.) *a forest of photographs*.¹⁵⁶ And she will also *point* to this same photograph and remark that *Your father* (says K.) *looks very dignified*.¹⁵⁷ And I shall say, Yes, but *why* (says K.) *is the photograph full of holes?*¹⁵⁸ And she will say, Because it is (says K.) *the portrait of the landlady's dead husband*.¹⁵⁹ And I shall say, Pardon? And she will say, It is (says K.) *the portrait of the landlady's dead husband*.

* * *



Figure 5.1 Walter Benjamin's passport photograph, c.1928 © Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archiv, WBA 1497 / Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur

* * *

When you are taken unawares by ... the news of a death, there is, in the first mute shock ..., the indistinct reproach: Were you really unaware of this?¹⁶⁰

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

Yes, dead, dead, her husband, the king, will turn out to be dead and (indeed) to have been dead for some while, although I will *not* have been told. This will be, perhaps, for fear lest, like many another, I (says K.) *commit suicide*.¹⁶¹ However, upon finally receiving the news of the death of the king, I will think to myself, Was I really unaware of this? Or, alternatively, did I somehow already know? After all, I am an uncanny young man. Yes, perhaps I will have already known that *the hero of my story* (says K.) *died a little while ago*.¹⁶²

* * *

Despite Dora's determination that Stefan should not know of his father's death until he had returned home, it is possible that he did know. For not only had news of Benjamin's death appeared in a Zurich newspaper in October 1940 but it had been narrated in Arthur Koestler's best-selling memoir *The Scum of the Earth*, published in September 1941, still six months before Stefan is reunited with Dora.¹⁶³

Koestler's account of Benjamin's death includes, in fact, many of the most important details – namely: Port Bou, arrest, overnight suicide and the pills. Dora, in contrast, even after finally informing Stefan of the death, does not share any such details.¹⁶⁴

* * *

And that shall be it. Silence. The queen shall say no more. Certainly not that the king will have been found half-dressed and in an hotel bed. Nor that a *king* (says K.) *is still a king even in his underwear*.¹⁶⁵ And so I will not say that, Alas, we are now all-too familiar (says K.) with *this sort of dying*. Nor shall I say that, indeed, these days we *are forever* (says K.) *stumbling through unfinished suicides*.¹⁶⁶ And, therefore, the queen will not (in reply) protest that, sadly, this particular suicide *is* most definitely finished.

In the end, however, following all the words that will *not* have been said, I shall bid her farewell. And, when doing so, I shall wonder if we had been busy not speaking about *the death of someone we loved* (says K.) *more than ourselves*.¹⁶⁷ And, just before I go, the queen will point once more to

the photograph of the king and remark that *it is* (says K.) *a shadow who loves you infinitely*.¹⁶⁸ Yes, this photograph, it loves you.

* * *

Walter Benjamin's friend, Gershom Scholem, who used to have upon his desk a photograph of Walter, is understood to have often talked to this photograph.¹⁶⁹

* * *

And then, I shall stop, turn and approach the photograph and, though it may be silent, silent with (says K.) all *the silence of Germany*, I shall speak to the photograph, saying, *Let us talk* (says K.), *let us now talk about the sadness of Berlin*.¹⁷⁰

It is, I know, a mistake to talk with a photograph – to say, for instance (says K.), *You bad photograph*; however, let us *imagine* (says K.) *this error one day becoming reality*, and the photograph somehow replying.¹⁷¹

Indeed, let us imagine that, when replying, this photograph (though but a mere trick-of-black-and-white) might somehow echo his highness; yes, echo him in insisting that, *in the mind of the child*, a *black-and-white picture ... is not a 'Noli me tangere'* – not a 'Do not touch me'.¹⁷² Yes, let us imagine that, to every child, a photograph says, *Do please touch me*. Yes, touch me, please; even though I am but a ghost, reach out and gently touch me.

And I shall want to do so. Yes, I *will* want to touch the photograph, the ghost. For I will myself have newly become the child of a ghost (my father turning out to have been dead). I will therefore doubtless *long* to touch a ghost, any ghost. Indeed, I will, no doubt, imagine that many a *ghost* (says K.) *is still alive*.¹⁷³ And so I shall, at first, stretch out my hand. But then I shall hesitate and wonder *if my hand* (says K.) *means anything*, anything at all.¹⁷⁴ Or if, in fact, it means nothing at all – like, say, *a hand that is again and again* (says K.) *making the cross*.¹⁷⁵

However, in the end, the very end, I *will* determine to touch the photograph and, as if by a miracle, the photograph will again echo his highness, this time saying that *the angel would like to stay and awaken the dead*.¹⁷⁶ And I shall pause; but then, at last, I shall *not* stay. For *it is* (says K.) *years since I wept*.¹⁷⁷

* * *

Postscript 1 of 3—1943

In July 1943, Stefan, although notoriously disorganised, took possession of an antiquarian booksellers' business close to the British Museum in central London. The shop traded under the name of 'Library and Scientific Book Supply'. Its address was 28 Museum Street.¹⁷⁸

* * *

S. eyed the shop (a world of sorts) from a room at the back, back of the world. He could see, through a door that never quite closed, that this world of sorts was empty – empty, that is, save for one man. He, this solitary man, wandered the shop.

At last, the man rang the reception bell; he did so urgently, as if to request that he might be ambushed. S. obliged. Might he be of assistance? The man did not quite reply; instead, he simply said (or so felt S.) that *My name ... is Kafka*.

* * *

Karl Kafka's return voyage from Australia to England ended with him arriving at Liverpool in October 1942. Because he was known to have been an opponent of the Nazis in the 1930s, he was immediately released. It is believed that he then remained in England for the duration of the War.¹⁷⁹

* * *

Ah, Kafka, said S., not surprised by the name, not in a bookshop. Indeed, S. felt that the man's voice was half-familiar and thus he encouraged the man to say more. *This Herr Kafka* duly did, remarking that he had spent some time wandering central London before finding himself in Museum Street, mostly amongst, he said, *smooth American faces* – as smooth as silk, in fact, or fine cotton, or linen.¹⁸⁰

Herr Kafka then added that he had often *stopped in front of ... the bookshop* because *the bookshop seemed ... so forsaken*.¹⁸¹ And today, this late afternoon, with all the lights coming on, he had finally entered and felt at once *the happiness of this bookshop*. It derived, this happiness, from the fact (he said) that his desire *for books* was *not so much to own or to read them as to see them ... in a bookseller's display*.¹⁸² Might the proprietor of 28 Museum Street say much the same?

S. did not reply.

Herr Kafka now examined the black-out curtains, as if perhaps assessing the material. Next, he parted the curtains a touch and peered outside. A *proper city* (he said), a *proper city, toward evening, wet, dark* and with a *vague sense of great traffic*.¹⁸³

S. considered these words. Then spoke. Was Herr Kafka thinking of what his father, his own father, the king, had once called *spiritual traffic*?¹⁸⁴ Did sir, that is, have in mind the traffic not of motorcars but of spirits? Which is to say, the myriad invisible forms (ghosts, spies etc) that daily beetle about a war-worn metropolis?

Herr Kafka, who had not been listening, was now examining a huge and untidy heap of as-yet-unsorted-and-in-fact-may-never-be-sorted BOOKS, a kind of rubble. S., seeing that he had long-ago lost Herr Kafka's attention, sat down at a motley desk and there attended to an impossible ledger until he was saved by a bell above the door, a bell which rang to announce the entrance of a second man. This second man appeared to be riddled with both holes and streets, streets of all kinds.

* * *

Confection Street, Exportation Street, Ceramics Street, Bookbinding Street.¹⁸⁵

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

The riddled man was clearly unsure as to his whereabouts, in particular as to which street he was in. S. felt, therefore, that he must inform the riddled man.

'Museum Street, sir', said S. 'So called because of the Museum'. S. gestured vaguely toward the British Museum.

The riddled man quickly turned to a shelf that bore an especially ancient burden, perhaps now thinking that the shop was itself the Museum in question. Next, he took a step or two toward a flight of steps and stopped; he then turned about and headed toward a door-frame before stopping again, at a window, the sill. He appeared to be puzzled.

* * *

The museum is an architectural problem, a dream house.¹⁸⁶

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

S. felt that, for the benefit of the riddled man, he should, perhaps, clarify the nature of 28 Museum Street. This, he said, is a bookshop. The riddled

man nodded as if to say Yes, he too was sure it was a bookshop. He was, though, a little puzzled (he said) by the number 28. Was it, in fact, correct? And if so, how could one be sure? Did it, for instance, bear some special or necessary correspondence to bookselling?

* * *

Albert at No. 83 will in all likelihood be a hairdresser.¹⁸⁷

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

S. considered how he might answer this question but, before he could do so, the riddled man had stepped out of the shop, examined the number on the door and returned. He looked none the wiser but seemed to be a suddenly happier man, happier with not knowing where on earth he was.

* * *

No one can orientate himself by house numbers.¹⁸⁸

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

The riddled man looked around again but, like Herr Kafka, was soon drawn to the huge and untidy heap of as-yet-unsorted-and-in-fact-may-never-be-sorted BOOKS, a kind of rubble. The riddled man then glanced at S., or so thought S.

* * *

Untidy child. Each stone he finds, ... is already the start of a collection, and every single thing he owns makes up one great collection. In him, this passion shows its true face, [an] ... expression which lingers on ... in antiquarians, researchers, [and] bibliomaniacs.¹⁸⁹

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

The riddled man began now to scrutinise the unsorted-and-may-never-be-sorted BOOKS. Meanwhile, Herr Kafka commenced a grand tour of the shop, nodding politely at both its proprietor and the riddled man. *Three pious ... Jews*, he remarked.¹⁹⁰ *Three pious ... Jews in socks*, he added. Nylon, perchance. Or wool-and-linen? No. Not if pious. Would not be kosher.

S. arose and looked down, first at his own ankles, then at the ankles of Herr Kafka, and finally at those of the riddled man. He now looked up and addressed the two men, the floor, as it were.

Yes, S. said, all three of them *were* wearing socks, it could not be denied. But were all three of them pious Jews? He would not like to say.

Regardless (he continued), to speak arithmetically, *three* Jews in socks (pious or not) would amount to *six* socks, which (as it happens) was precisely the number of socks that he once had sent to his late father. But, he asked, had they ever arrived?

The Jews? said Herr Kafka.

No, the socks, said S.

Not a clue, said Herr Kafka.

The riddled man looked down, at his ankles, his own, and said nothing.

But what, said Herr Kafka, about the books?

Pardon? said S.

Did *they* arrive? said Herr Kafka. The books. *Did all the books arrive?*¹⁹¹ *All six?*

All six socks?

No, *all six books?* Did they arrive?

Arrive where?

Here, said Herr Kafka. Museum Street. 28 Museum Street.

Did you send them here?

No. But it is still just possible that they might have made it here.

It is?

Naturally, this is an antiquarian bookshop, is it not?

It cannot be denied.

Well, there you go. Any book in the world might just, in the end, turn up here. There is a chance it could happen. It is not altogether impossible.

* * *

I cannot predict what will become of my library.¹⁹²

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

S. considered, aloud. If Herr Kafka were right (and the customer always is) then perhaps, just perhaps, the shop had somewhere on its shelves a book that had once passed through the flailing hands of, say, one's very own father. Indeed, it was even possible (continued S.) that one's father had come across this hypothetical book in, say 1918, the very year of one's birth and in, say, Berne, the very city of one's birth. Such a book would be, as it were, the book of one's life.

* * *

In 1918, 'in a small antiquarian bookshop in Berne', Walter Benjamin bought F. J. Bertuch's antique *Picturebook for Children*, a book with which Stefan would become engrossed.¹⁹³

* * *

Herr Kafka turned toward the window and, peering through the criss-crossed glass, viewed the sandbags without, piled high. Blackout soon and then the sirens. He now turned about. *I should like*, he said, *to hear more ... more about your father*.¹⁹⁴

But less about me? said S. Would sir like to hear less about myself?

Probably, said Herr Kafka. After all, he said, any bookseller, even of an antiquarian kind, is likely to be unremarkable, seeing that, although he lives among books, sits among books, nay pisses among books, he neither writes them nor even reads them. He is, to be frank, much like the gathering dust.

S. returned to his desk.

Indeed, continued Herr Kafka, it might be said that when he, Herr Kafka, had entered the bookshop, his first encounter with its patron was, in a manner, a kind of Nothing. No offence intended. Yes, just over there it was, by the till. He, Herr Kafka, had tapped at the reception bell, waited for someone to appear and, in the end, someone did appear, but this someone was so unremarkable that he, Herr Kafka, might justifiably have said *I ... waited for someone to show himself on the deck and no one came*.¹⁹⁵

S. re-opened his ledger and wrote, *I ... waited for someone to show himself on the deck and no one came*. S. then looked up to see that Herr Kafka was regarding him (S.) with grave concern, or some great sorrow. *I ... waited for someone to show himself*, said Herr Kafka (again), and *no one came*.

S. looked back down at the ledger. It seemed that he had written these same words the day before and the day before and the day before and the day before. *I ... waited for someone to show himself and no one came*.

S. looked up once more, this time to see that the riddled man had gone. He had been in the shop for only a minute or two – so briefly, in fact, that it was like he had not come in at all. It was, thought S., as if he (S.) had waited for someone to show himself, but no one came.

Outside, the traffic grew unquiet.

S. now regarded the huge-and-disorderly-heap-of-unsorted BOOKS, a kind of rubble, as just now abandoned by the riddled man. He had gone, but they remained.

* * *

It would be Stefan to whom I would very happily leave my books as the material epitaph of my existence.¹⁹⁶

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

The books wavered and S. thought he would straighten them, lest they topple, fall, and crash, and he would do so with the gentlest touch, the gentlest touch of an antiquarian hand. Yes. He needed just to touch those books. That is all.

Postscript 2 of 3—1967

Dora had sold Villa Verde in San Remo in 1938, just before moving to London; nevertheless, it was thought that two suitcases had been left behind. In February 1967, therefore, three years after Dora's death, Stefan travelled to San Remo hoping to recover the suitcases.¹⁹⁷

* * *

S. paid the driver (perhaps) and thanked the man (perhaps), the man at the wheel, in his car, with its radio, its music, despite which they had talked (perhaps) about *old* San Remo, as it had formerly been, before both the Flood and cars with radios.

The car and its radio was now no longer there. And S. turned toward the house and made his way to the front door, above him the familiar white wrought-iron balconies. It had not changed, this sun-lit pleasure-dome and, although it was February, the air was warm.

* * *

San Remo is the most favourable winter station on the Riviera.¹⁹⁸
(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

S. reached out a hand and pressed upon the electric doorbell, a recent and clownish superimposition. S. waited. The sky was blue. There was no answer. He pressed at the bell again and, as it rang, he felt that perhaps it was he himself whom the bell summoned and that he were, in fact, on trial.

* * *

Having to appear before a court of justice gives rise to a feeling similar to that with which one approaches trunks in the attic which have been locked up for years.¹⁹⁹

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

Several wintering gulls circled above and the sky grew yet more blue, or so thought the man-at-the-door. And even as the man-at-the-door waited it was as if he went clean through the door, as by a miracle, now ascending the pale remembered stairs, at first as broad as the road to destruction and then as narrow as the way that leads to life until, at last, it was as if had he reached a golden attic where he stooped in its half-light, finally within reach of the very darkness for which he had

come – a suitcase or, rather, two (two of its kind). The man-at-the-door was now, right now, although (in fact) still at the door, about to open the first suitcase (the nearer), his outstretched hand attracted, as if by gravity, toward the half-seen thing.

* * *

The dark mass of this suitcase had something fascinating about it.²⁰⁰

(Walter Benjamin)

* * *

At last it opened. The door. The front door. And there stood two people, Adam and Eve, as it were. The man-at-the-door swiftly explained himself, his being there, at the door, detailing his connection to both the house and its ghosts and how he had come in search of two lost suitcases.

Adam and Eve reflected and then spoke. They were, they said, in no wise familiar with the ghosts of whom the man at the door had spoken – namely, Frau Dora and Herr Benjamin. Nor did they know of any long-lost or estranged suitcases. The man-at-the-door might just protest that Herr Benjamin was now a name of sorts, a name even to conjure with, but it could not conjure up that which did not exist.

* * *

Theodor Adorno relates that when Stefan visited the house he was met with intense suspicion by the new owners.²⁰¹

* * *

The man-at-the-door now began to apologise for being at the door, but begged that Adam and Eve, notwithstanding their ignorance of any likely suitcases, might still allow him access to Eden's attic in order to undertake the quest, for himself. For a moment, the couple (sentinels both) glanced at each other and considered the man-at-the-door, the man from another country, England, though German by the sound of him. Then, of a sudden, both the door and paradise closed. Shut.

* * *

In March 1969, Theodor Adorno wrote to Gershom Scholem, 'It is in no way clear whether the suitcases exist at all'.

* * *

Postscript 3 of 3—1972

At some point soon after the War, Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, the painting to which Walter Benjamin was so attached, came into Stefan's possession. As a child, Stefan had thought the angel rather ugly, but as an adult he often recalled his father telling him that one day he would understand the importance of the painting.²⁰²

* * *

S. considered the angel, the picture, and thought, thought that *I was expecting* (says K.) *an angel of the first degree, but I was not prepared for an angel of the second degree.*²⁰³ Perhaps, then, this second-class angel was only a so-called angel, perhaps just a man with, say, an angel's name. Or, then again, perhaps it was merely a man in ecstasy or who is drowning, for both *the man in ecstasy* (says K.) *and the man drowning ... throw up their arms*, just like (thought S.) an angel spreading his wings.²⁰⁴

S. considered a little more and decided he would speak to the king about his second-class angel. The king was, admittedly, nowhere to be seen these days. He had not in fact been seen for years; nevertheless, S. would still speak to him. Right now.

Your highness, began S., I accept that I do myself bear the angelic name of Rafael, and do at times throw up my arms as if spreading wings; however, please know that I am not to be in anyway confused with an angel, not even a second-class angel and not even *your* second-class angel. This, though, is not to say that I have had little to do with him. On the contrary, your highness, I have, of late, had him in my keeping. Ah yes, how jealously I have sought to guard him.

* * *

At some point in the 1960s, Stefan was visited by Theodor Adorno who had come to ask if he might have the angel for a while. He had, he said, nothing else by which to remember Walter.²⁰⁵

* * *

I have, however, recently had to decide whether the angel should stay or go. I know your highness had always said that *the angel would like to stay*, that he (the angel) would prefer, that is, *not* to go.²⁰⁶ And I too (believe it or not) would have liked the angel to stay. But alas, your highness, the angel did not stay. I let him go. Let him be taken away, far away.

* * *

Stefan agreed to allow Adorno to borrow the angel, and to take it with him upon his return to America.²⁰⁷

* * *

And I have missed him, the angel, *your* angel. It is true, I confess, that once upon a time *I wrestled* (says K.) *with your guardian angel*; however, in recent years, I have often wrestled *for your* angel.²⁰⁸ It is, though, difficult, I find, to wrestle for angels when someone is newly dead.

* * *

When, in 1969, Adorno suddenly died, he still had not returned the angel; however, when Stefan attended Adorno's funeral, he felt it not the right moment to ask for the angel's return.²⁰⁹

* * *

Yes, your highness, when someone is dead, newly dead, I find it difficult to wrestle for an angel, or indeed merely ask for one. And this is so even once the angel finally slips free from the fingers of the someone who is dead – to be precise, the professor who is dead. The trouble is that there are, it seems, many a *professor* (says K.) now *in search of* not only your *name* but also your angel. Not least the professors of Kabbalah.

* * *

At some point around 1970, Gershom Scholem, the Professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, sent a friend to London to tell Stefan that, following Adorno's death, Scholem wished to keep the angel. He said that Walter would have wanted him to keep it.

* * *

Ah, these professors, how I should like, your highness, to outwit them or (as you say) *to bewilder* them, *to bewilder* the *professors of Kabbalah*, to confound their Light-fingered ways, their ways with angels.²¹⁰ But alas, it seems, I cannot bewilder professors. Not of any kind.

In fact, in the end, it is, I fear, only *myself* who am bewildered. For, you see, *an angel* I think, *has been flying toward me* (says K.) and now, indeed, *it will speak to me*.²¹¹ And he, the angel will, I fear, stand beside me and say that *They killed* (says K.) *the man beside me*.²¹² Yes, *they killed the man beside me*, the angel will say, the angel beside me. Beside me.

* * *

Mona Benjamin believes that Scholem's desire to keep the angel caused her father 'much distress', and observes that 'when just beginning to try to fight for it, he died'.²¹³ This was in 1972; he was aged 53.

* * *

Notes

- 1 Many critics have discussed this identification; however, perhaps most interesting in connection with this chapter's attempt to read Benjamin's life (and indeed after-life) via Kafka is Hans Mayer who writes that 'Kafka became, for Benjamin, a figure of perhaps total identification as Benjamin sought to demonstrate, through Kafka's failure, the necessity of his own failure': 'Benjamin and Franz Kafka: a report on a constellation' in *On Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1988) 185–209 (189).
- 2 In 1934, Benjamin wrote an essay entitled 'Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death' (1934); here, in this chapter, we almost have 'Franz Kafka On the Second Anniversary of *Walter Benjamin's* Death'.
- 3 'Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.496 / *GS*, 2.678.
- 4 Kafka to Hedwig Weiler, [middle of April 1909], *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 52 / *Briefe, 1902–24*, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1958), 67.
- 5 *Origin*, 136 / *GS*, 1.314 – the German here is *die Grenze*. Interestingly, Adorno sees a buried connection between Kafka and Benjamin's account of the mourning play; indeed, he does so in 1953 when many, not least Stefan, were still very much in mourning for Benjamin. 'Kafka's remark', writes Adorno, 'that there is infinite hope except for us could have served as the motto of Benjamin's metaphysics ...', and it is no accident that at the centre of his most elaborate theoretical work, *The Origins of the German Tragic Drama*, there is the construction of 'sorrow' [*Trauer*] as the last self-negating, self-transcending allegory, that of Redemption' – Adorno, *Prisms*, 231.
- 6 *Origin*, 158 / *GS*, 1.335.
- 7 'Pensées', *Archive*, 131 / *Archive*, 99.
- 8 'Pensées', *Archive*, 123, 138 / *Archive*, 89, 106.
- 9 'Pensées', *Archive*, 125 / *Archive*, 92.
- 10 'Pensées', *Archive*, 134 / *Archive*, 101.
- 11 See Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 13, 12, 14.
- 12 *Arcades*, 456 / *GS*, 5.570.
- 13 'Franz Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.796 / *GS*, 2.411.
- 14 *Arcades*, 338 / *GS*, 5.426.
- 15 'Pensées', *Archive*, 142 / *Archive*, 112.
- 16 'Ageliasus Santander (Second Version)', *SW*, 2.2.715 / *GS*, 6.521.
- 17 Information by courtesy of National Archives of Australia, NAA: MP1103/2.E35184 and MP 1103/1.E39859; and The National Archives: HO 396/153.
- 18 Franz Kafka, *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*, *SW*, 2.2.495 / *GS*, 2. 677; 'Franz Kafka', *SW*, 2.799 / *GS*, 2.415.
- 19 Kafka to Felice Bauer, [30 September or 1 October 1917], *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, tr. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 654 / *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe, Kritische Ausgabe*, 16 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1982–99), 10.333. All subsequent references to Kafka are to this multi-volume edition unless otherwise stated.
- 20 Kafka to Bauer, 11 February 1915, *Letters to Felice*, 572 / *Schriften*, 10.119.
- 21 Kafka to Milena Jesenská, [13 August 1920], in Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena* [1935], ed. Willy Hass, tr. Tania and James Stern (London: Vintage Books, 1999), 140 / *Briefe an Milena*, ed. Jürgen Born and Michael Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1986), 214.

- 22 Kafka to Bauer, 22–23 January 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 283 / *Schriften*, 9.55.
- 23 Kafka to Jesenská, [13 June 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 47 / *Briefe an Milena*, 60.
- 24 Kafka to Bauer, 31 October 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 118 / *Schriften*, 1.200.
- 25 'Franz Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.795 / *GS*, 2.410 – translation amended, the German being *gesunkene und versinkende*.
- 26 'Franz Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.806 / *GS*, 2.425; Kafka to Bauer, 2 June 1920, *Letters to Milena*, 36 / *Briefe an Milena*, 34.
- 27 Kafka to Bauer, 28 September 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 104 / *Schriften*, 1.175.
- 28 Benjamin to Scholem, 18 November 1927, *Briefe*, 3.303 (my translation).
- 29 Benjamin to Scholem, 26 July 1934, *WB-GS*, 132 / *Briefe*, 238.
- 30 Benjamin to Scholem, 12 June 1938, *WB-GS*, 223 / *Briefe*, 760.
- 31 Benjamin to Scholem, 4 February 1939, *WB-GS*, 243 / *WB-GS*, 293 (translation amended).
- 32 Kafka to Bauer, 8 August [1916], *Letters to Felice*, 604 / *Schriften*, 10.194.
- 33 Kafka to Bauer, 3 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 124 / *Schriften*, 1.207; Kafka to Felice, 26 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 238 / *Schriften*, 1.362.
- 34 Kafka to Bauer, 28 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 180 / *Schriften*, 1.278.
- 35 'Pensées', *Archive*, 123 / *Archive*, 89.
- 36 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.476 / *GS*, 4.132 – the German here is *das Weinen*.
- 37 'Nordic Sea', *Storyteller*, 121 / *GS*, 4.387.
- 38 Benjamin to Gretel Adorno, Spring [1932], *Correspondence*, 392 / *Briefe*, 551.
- 39 'Nordic Sea', *Storyteller*, 119 / *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4.386.
- 40 Benjamin, *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.470 / *GS*, 4.122 – the German here is *Einschulung in die erste Sterbeklasse* (literally, the first death-class).
- 41 'Outline', *SW*, 1.399 / *GS*, 6.84.
- 42 'Pensées', *Archive*, 147, 132, 127 / *Archive*, 117, 99, 94.
- 43 Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, 2 August 1940, Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 670 / *Gesammelte Briefe*, 6. 476.
- 44 Kafka to Max Brod, [20 April 1924], *Letters to Friends*, 412 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, 481.
- 45 Kafka to Bauer, 7 August 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 423 / *Schriften*, 9.254.
- 46 Kafka to Jesenská, [end of April 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 20 / *Briefe an Milena*, 8.
- 47 Kafka to Brod, [beginning of May 1921], *Letters to Friends*, 280 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, 323.
- 48 Kafka to Bauer, 4 May 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 369 / *Schriften*, 9.182.
- 49 'Franz Kafka *Beim Bau*', *SW*, 2.2.496 / *GS*, 2.678.
- 50 Kafka to Bauer, 25 January 1915, *Letters to Felice*, 569 / *Schriften*, 9.115.
- 51 Benjamin to Scholem, 26 December 1934, *WB-GS*, 148 / *WB-GS*, 183 – the German here is *ein ernsthafter Partner*.
- 52 Kafka to Bauer, 17 August 1916, *Letters to Felice*, 609 / *Schriften*, 9.203.
- 53 Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, 30 June 1936, *TA-WB*, 144 / *TA-WB*, 190.
- 54 Kafka to Jesenská, [September 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 167 / *Briefe an Milena*, 278.
- 55 Kafka to Bauer, [May 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 29 / *Briefe an Milena*, 21.
- 56 Kafka to Bauer, 21 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 159 / *Schriften*, 1.251.
- 57 Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, 2 August 1940, cited in Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 670 / *GB*, 6.476.
- 58 'Kafka', in *SW*, 2.2.798 / *GS*, 2.414.
- 59 Kafka to Bauer, 21 August 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 433 / *Schriften*, 9.268.
- 60 Kafka to Valli Pollack, [November 1923], *Letters to Friends*, 396 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 463.
- 61 The text here draws on emails to the author from Mona Benjamin, 3–5 April 2023.
- 62 'Berlin Toy Tour 1', *Radio Benjamin*, 42 / *GS*, 7.104.
- 63 Benjamin to Scholem, 3 March 1934, *WB-GS*, 100 / *WB-GS*, 128.
- 64 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.483 / *GS*, 4.141.
- 65 Benjamin to Scholem, 20 March 1933, *WB-GS*, 34 / *Briefe*, 566.
- 66 'The Voyage of the Mascot', *Storyteller*, 127 / *GS*, 4.738.
- 67 Kafka to Bauer, [24 November 1912], *Letters to Felice*, 168 / *Schriften*, 1.261.
- 68 Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, 2 August 1940, *TA-WB*, 339 / *Briefe*, 861.
- 69 See Scheurmann (ed.), *For Walter Benjamin*, 164. On 17 July 1941, Scholem writes to Theodor Adorno, 'just imagine – she [Dora] knew nothing of Walter's death until now!', *Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem: Correspondence 1939–1969*, ed. Asaf Angermann, tr. Sebastian Truskolaski and Paula Schwebel (London: Polity, 2021), 23.

- 70 Kafka to Bauer, 4–5 March 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 327 / *Schriften*, 9.121.
- 71 Kafka to Bauer, [Autumn 1914], *Letters to Felice*, 566.
- 72 Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, ed. Max Brod, tr. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1991), 28.
- 73 Benjamin to Scholem, 12 June 1938, *WB-GS*, 224 / *Briefe*, 672.
- 74 Franz Kafka, 6 April 1917, *The Diaries*, tr. Ross Benjamin (New York: Schocken Books, 2022), 430 / *Schriften*, 3. 811.
- 75 Benjamin, 'Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.496 / *GS*, 2.678.
- 76 Benjamin to Scholem, 19 April 1933, *WB-GS*, 42 / *WB-GS*, 59.
- 77 'The Silence of the Sirens' (1931), in *Franz Kafka, The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), 431.
- 78 Kafka to Jesenská [26–27 August 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 149 / *Briefe an Milena*, 231.
- 79 Kafka to Bauer, 18 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 181 / *Schriften*, 1.279; Kafka to Bauer, 17 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 151 / *Schriften*, 1.241.
- 80 Kafka to Bauer, 29 September 1916, *Letters to Felice*, 625 / *Schriften*, 9.240; Kafka to Bauer, 3 October 1916, *Letters to Felice*, 627 / *Schriften*, 9.245.
- 81 Kafka to Robert Klopstock, [end of March 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 322 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 374.
- 82 Kafka to Bauer, 1 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 121 / *Schriften*, 1.204.
- 83 Kafka to Baum, [end of June 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 327 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, 377.
- 84 'The Cactus Hedge', *Storyteller*, 138 / *GS*, 4.752.
- 85 *Arcades*, 411 / *GS*, 5.518.
- 86 'Surrealism', *SW*, 2.1.216 / *GS*, 2.308.
- 87 *Arcades*, 102 / *GS*, 5.157.
- 88 *Arcades*, 833 / *GS*, 5.1000.
- 89 Kafka to Brod, [12 July 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 340 / *Briefe 1902–1924*, 393.
- 90 Kafka to Bauer, 2 September 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 442 / *Schriften*, 9.275.
- 91 Igna(t)z died in 1943 and Franziska (née Kalich) in 1944 – see holocaust.cz at www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-digitised-documents/document/92486-kafka-ignatz-death-certificate-ghetto-terezin and www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/52682-franziska-kafka (accessed 12 December 2024). I was here greatly helped by Carol Bunyan.
- 92 *Arcades*, 300 / *GS*, 5.380.
- 93 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 91.
- 94 I here draw on an email from Mona Benjamin, 30 August 2022.
- 95 'The Handkerchief', *SW*, 2.2.659 / *GS*, 4.742.
- 96 Benjamin to Scholem, 12 June 1938, *WB-GS*, 226 / *Briefe*, 764.
- 97 'Franz Kafka', *SW*, 2.2.811 / *GS*, 2.431.
- 98 Kafka to Bauer, 20 September 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 101 / *Schriften*, 1.170.
- 99 Kafka to Jesenská, Saturday evening, *Letters to Milena*, 101 / *Briefe an Milena*, 167.
- 100 Kafka to Brod, *Letters to Friends*, [end of July 1922], 347 / *Briefe 1902–1924*, 400; Kafka to Bauer, 3 August 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 418 / *Schriften*, 9.248.
- 101 'The Siren', *Storyteller*, 87 / *GS*, 7.646.
- 102 Kafka to Bauer, 20–21 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 227 / *Schriften*, 1.348.
- 103 Kafka to Bauer, 10–11 January 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 264 / *Schriften*, 9.30–1.
- 104 Kafka to Jesenská, [16 July 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 122 / *Schriften*, 120.
- 105 Kafka to Jesenská, [26 July 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 106 / *Schriften*, 146.
- 106 Kafka to Jesenská, [15 June 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 54 / *Briefe an Milena*, 67.
- 107 Kafka to Jesenská, [end of April 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 30 / *Briefe an Milena*, 10.
- 108 Kafka to Jesenská, [3 June 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 34 / *Briefe an Milena*, 27.
- 109 Kafka to Jesenská, [15 June 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 54 / *Briefe an Milena*, 67.
- 110 'Pensées', *Archive*, 131 / *Archive*, 99.
- 111 Kafka to Jesenská, [September 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 166 / *Briefe an Milena*, 277 – the German here is *die Arche*.
- 112 Kafka to Jesenská, [9 May 1923], *Letters to Milena*, 187 / *Briefe an Milena*, 317.
- 113 Kafka to Valli Kafka Pollak, [November 1923], *Letters to Friends*, 396 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, 463.
- 114 Weissweiler, *Das Echo*, 305 – my translation.
- 115 Kafka, 30 October 1921, *Diaries*, 464 / *Schriften*, 3.872 (translation amended).

- 116 Kafka, 29 [January 1922], *Diaries*, 477 / *Schriften*, 3.894; Kafka to Bauer, [30 September or 1 October 1917] *Letters to Felice*, 655 / *Schriften*, 9.334.
- 117 Kafka, 27 April 1915, September 5 1911, *Diaries*, 391, 528 / *Schriften*, 3.741, 3.986.
- 118 Kafka, 27 Aug[ust] 1916, *Diaries*, 425 / *Schriften*, 3.803.
- 119 Kafka to Bauer [14 April 1916], *Letters to Felice*, 591 / *Schriften*, 9.156.
- 120 Kafka to Bauer [4 April 1915], *Letters to Felice*, 577–8 / *Schriften*, 9.127.
- 121 Kaka to Bauer, 27–28 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 240 / *Schriften*, 1.365.
- 122 Kafka to Bauer, 13 October 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 105 / *Schriften*, 1.239.
- 123 Kafka to Brod, 17 September 1911, *Letters to Friends*, 75 / *Schriften*, 1.144.
- 124 Kafka to Baum, [end of June 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 327 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 377.
- 125 20–21 February 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 313.
- 126 This was Dora Diamant – see Kathi Diamant, *Kafka's Last Love. The Mystery of Dora Diamant* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2003), 220–33.
- 127 Kafka to Klopstock, [beginning of December 1921], *Letters to Friends*, 314 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, p. 365.
- 128 Kafka to Else Bergmann, [July 1923], *Letters to Friends*, 373 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, 437.
- 129 Kafka to Gertrud Thieberger, [20 February 1913], *Letters to Friends*, 94 / *Briefe*, 1902–1924, 113.
- 130 Kafka to Bauer, 14 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 142 / *Schriften*, 1.232.
- 131 Kafka to Bauer, 6–7 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 203 / *Schriften*, 1.309.
- 132 Kafka, 27 November 1912, *Diaries*, 203 / *Schriften*, 3.390.
- 133 Kafka to Bauer, 21 March 1914, *Letters to Felice*, 501 / *Schriften*, 9.360.
- 134 Kafka to Bauer, 4 March 1914, *Letters to Felice*, 487 / *Schriften*, 9.341.
- 135 Kafka to Baum, [December 1923], *Letters to Felice*, 401–2 / *Schriften*, 469.
- 136 Kafka to Brod, 13 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 92 / *Schriften*, 1.229.
- 137 Kafka to Bauer, [15 December 1912], *Letters to Felice*, 216 / *Schriften*, 1.334; 'Conversation Slips', *Letters to Friends*, 421.
- 138 Kafka to Bauer, 14 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 142 / *Schriften*, 1.232.
- 139 Kafka to Bauer, 20–21 January 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 280 / *Schriften*, 9.50.
- 140 Kafka to Brod, [16 October 1923], *Letters to Friends*, 386 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 451.
- 141 I here draw on emails from Carol Bunyan (5 December 2022) and Mona Benjamin (9 December 2022) respectively. According to Weissweiler, Stefan did not get to London until July 1942 (*Villa Verde*, 91); however, his release was authorised in April (see The National Archives, HO 396/147) and Carol Buyan advises that actual release would normally follow within days, or one or two weeks at most.
- 142 Kafka, [February 1922], *Diaries*, 480 / *Schriften*, 3.902.
- 143 Kafka to Baum, [16 July 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 342 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 395.
- 144 Kafka to Bauer, *Letters to Milena*, 154 / *Briefe an Milena*, 244.
- 145 Kafka to Brod, [4 July 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 332 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 382.
- 146 Kafka, 28 January 1922, *Diaries*, 476 / *Schriften*, 3.893.
- 147 Kafka to Bauer, 20–21 February 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 313 / *Schriften*, 9.102.
- 148 Kafka, 28 February 1913, *Diaries*, 259 / *Schriften*, 3.494.
- 149 Kafka to Felice Bauer, [23 December 1912], *Letters to Felice*, 232 / *Schriften*, 1.355.
- 150 Kafka, 28 February 1913, *Diaries*, 259 / *Schriften*, 3.494.
- 151 Kafka to Felice Bauer, 28 September 1912, *Diaries*, 103 / *Schriften*, 1.174.
- 152 Kafka to Oskar Pollak, [24 August 1902], *Letters to Friends*, 3 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 11–12.
- 153 Kafka to Bauer, 28 September 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 103 / *Schriften*, 1.174.
- 154 Kafka to Valli Pollak, [November 1923], *Letters to Friends*, 395 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 462.
- 155 Kafka to Oskar Pollak, [24 August 1902], *Letters to Friends*, 3 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 11; Kafka to Bauer, 28–29 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 243 / *Schriften*, 1.368.
- 156 Kafka to Bauer, 11 February 1915, *Letters to Felice*, 573 / *Schriften*, 9.119; Kafka to Brod [11 September 1922], *Letters to Friends*, 359 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 415.
- 157 Kafka to Bauer, 6–7 December 1912, *Letters to Friends*, 202 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 1.307.
- 158 Kafka to Bauer, 29 November 1912, *Letters to Friends*, 184 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 1.283.
- 159 Kafka, 25 June 1914, *Diaries*, 282 / *Schriften*, 3.538.
- 160 *One Way Street*, SW, 1.483 / *GS*, 4.141.
- 161 Kafka to Bauer, 5 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 129 / *Schriften*, 1.214 – translation amended.

- 162 Kafka to Bauer, 6–7 December 1912, 199 / *Schriften*, 1.303.
- 163 See Arthur Koestler, *Scum of the Earth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941), 236, where we read first that Benjamin carried ‘tablets’ in his pockets to swallow ‘if anything goes wrong’, and then that ‘Benjamin made his way over the Pyrenees to Spain, a man of fifty-five [*sic*], with heart disease. At Port Bou the *Guardia Civil* arrested him. He was told the next morning they would send him back to France. When they came to fetch him for the train he was dead’. Although Koestler’s publishers, Cape, were based in London, where the book was printed, they had an office in Toronto and distributed internationally, even during the War. I have found one first edition that had got as far as India by February 1942.
- 164 In *Villa Verde*, Weissweiler writes, of Stefan in 1950, that ‘He knew only that his father was dead. She [Dora] had told him neither the date nor the place, and probably not the immediate circumstances either’ (199); Weissweiler then adds, of Stefan in 1960, that ‘Dora still had not told him [and] neither had Adorno’ (208) – my translations.
- 165 Kafka to Bauer, 27 October 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 114 / *Schriften*, 1.195.
- 166 Kafka, *Octavo Notebooks*, 53; Kafka to Hedwig Weiler, [middle of April 1909], *Letters to Friends*, 52 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 67.
- 167 Kafka to Oskar Pollak, [27 January 1904], *Letters to Friends*, 16 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 27.
- 168 Kafka to Bauer, 5–6 January 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 258 / *Schriften*, 9.22.
- 169 Eiland and Jennings, 83.
- 170 Kafka to Brod, [11 September 1922 and 25 October 1923], *Letters to Friends*, 360, 388 / *Briefe*, 1902–24, 416, 454 – the German in the second citation is *Trauer*.
- 171 Kafka to Bauer, 6–7 January 1913 and 4–5 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 259, 197 / *Schriften*, 9.24, 1.300.
- 172 ‘Old Forgotten Children’s Books’, *SW*, 1.411 / *GS*, 3.20.
- 173 Kafka to Bauer, 25 April 1914, *Letters to Felice*, 531 / *Schriften*, 9.44.
- 174 Kafka to Bauer, 14–15 December 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 215 / *Schriften*, 1.332.
- 175 Kafka, 29 July [1917], *Diaries*, 431 / *Schriften*, 3.813.
- 176 ‘On the Concept’, *SW*, 4.392 / *GS*, 1.695.
- 177 Kafka to Bauer, 28 October 1916, *Letters to Felice*, 640 / *Schriften*, 9.269.
- 178 I here draw on an email from Mona Benjamin, 22 January 2023.
- 179 See National Archives, HO 396/147; I was here helped by Carol Bunyan.
- 180 Kafka, 6 July 1916, *Diaries*, 420 / *Schriften*, 3.793.
- 181 Kafka, [January–February 1911], *Diaries*, 501 / *Schriften*, 3.938.
- 182 Kafka, 11 November 1911, *Diaries*, 124 / *Schriften*, 3.243.
- 183 Kafka to Jesenská, [14 June, 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 49 / *Briefe an Milena*, 63.
- 184 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.462 / *GS*, 4.112.
- 185 *Arcades*, 518 / *GS*, 5.646.
- 186 *Arcades*, 406 / *GS*, 5.513.
- 187 *Arcades*, 871 / *GS*, 5.1054.
- 188 ‘Naples’, *SW*, 1.416 / *GS*, 4.309.
- 189 *One Way Street*, *SW*, 1.465 / *GS*, 4.115.
- 190 Kafka, 1 October 1911, *Diaries*, 23 / *Schriften*, 3.46.
- 191 Kafka to Jesenská, [11 August 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 139 / *Briefe an Milena*, 212.
- 192 Benjamin to Scholem, 18 January 1934, *WB-GS*, 95 / 121.
- 193 See Dolbear and Proctor, “Cracking open the natural teleology”, 497.
- 194 Kafka to Bauer, 10–11 January 1913, *Letters to Felice*, 268 / *Schriften*, 9.35.
- 195 Kafka, 6 April 1917, *Diaries*, 430 / *Schriften*, 3.811.
- 196 Benjamin to Scholem, 13 June 1924, *Correspondence*, 244 / *Briefe*, 350.
- 197 See Theodor Adorno to Scholem, 21 March 1969, *Adorno–Scholem Correspondence*, 386. Adorno does not date the trip, but Weissweiler cites a trip that Stefan made to San Remo in February 1967; she does, though, dispute Adorno’s talk of suitcases, citing instead a letter in which Stefan talks about going vainly in search of furniture that may just have been left behind (‘e.g. an old farmhouse cupboard’) – see Weissweiler, *Villa Verde*, 212–5 – my translation.
- 198 See Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, 467 / *Briefe*, 4.531.
- 199 ‘Franz Kafka’, *SW*, 2.2.811 / *GS*, 2.431.
- 200 ‘Still Story’, *Storyteller*, 74 / *GS*, 7.295.
- 201 Theodor Adorno to Scholem, 21 March 1969, *Adorno–Scholem Correspondence*, 386.

- 202 See Jay and Smith, 'A Talk', 115.
203 Kafka, 6 October 1915, *Diaries*, 406 / *Schriften*, 3.767.
204 Kafka, *Octavo Notebooks*, 26.
205 See Jay and Smith, 'A Talk', 115.
206 'Concept of History', 4.392 / *GS*, 1.697.
207 See Jay and Smith, 'A Talk', 115. Weissweiler writes that Stefan had 'a very good relationship with Adorno' (*Villa Verde*, 209 – my translation).
208 Kafka to Bauer, 15 June 1913, *Letters to Felice*, p. 386 / *Schriften*, 9.207.
209 See Jay and Smith, 'A Talk', 115.
210 Benjamin to Gershom Scholem, June 25, 1932, in *Benjamin and Scholem*, 11.
211 Kafka, 25 June 1914, *Diaries*, 283 / *Schriften*, 3.539.
212 Kafka, 'Conversation Slips', *Letters to Friends*, 418 / *Briefe, 1902–24*, 487.
213 See Jay and Smith, 'A Talk', 115.

Postface

A letter for Stefan

Dear Stefan,

Now that my book appears to be finished and, alas, you appear to have gone, I will confess that *you leave me* (says K.) *sitting wretchedly at my wretched desk*.¹

Yours,

Someone (*a professor* (says K.) *in search of your name*).²

Notes

¹ Kafka to Bauer, 4 August 1912, *Letters to Felice*, 127 / *Schriften*, 1.210.

² Kafka to Jesenská, [26 July 1920], *Letters to Milena*, 106 / *Briefe an Milena*, 146.

Afterword by Mona Benjamin

In September 1939, when Walter Benjamin was interned just outside Paris, it was largely thanks to the efforts of PEN¹ that he was released some two months later. In an eerie parallel, his son Stefan was arrested and interned in England in June 1940. But with no PEN to intervene on his behalf, Stefan was deported to Australia aboard the ‘hell-ship’ HMS *Dunera*, a journey that John Schad explores and imagines within these pages.

No one exists in a vacuum. We are all affected by those who pass through our lives, and so it was with my grandfather. Much is made of his most enduring friendships: with Theodor Adorno, Gerhard (later Gershom) Scholem, Ernst Schoen, Franz Hessel, Fritz Heinle, to name a few; and, of course, there was his relationship (and lengthy infatuation) with Asja Lascis. Pivotal figures, all. Yet little is made of two people who also exerted a huge influence on his personal life and, by proxy, the work: his ex-wife, Dora, my grandmother, and his son Stefan, my father.

So much has been written about my grandfather and, in many of the texts, my grandmother and father are either absent, or mentioned and dismissed in a single sentence. There is a tendency to regard them as bystanders, mere witnesses to the greatness of my grandfather’s brief life.

But if their volatile relationship showed that Walter and Dora were unable to be together, the facts also show that they were never truly free of each other. Walter was dependent on the kindness of friends, yes – but the huge financial and emotional support that Dora provided, right up until his death, is often ignored. In a similar vein, the dedication to the original edition of *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, ‘Für meinen lieben Stefan’, is often omitted in translation – my father erased from the

page. Yet these same people will pore over Walter's 'Opinions et Pensées', his collection, and recollection, of my father's childish sayings, searching for more clues to Benjamin the Thinker, the Writer, the Critic.

All of this is simply to say that I am deeply grateful to John Schad, who, with this work, chose to put my father on the page, to make the footnote the story, and to remind the reader that my father lived, he mattered, and most of all, that he mattered to Benjamin himself: 'It would be Stefan to whom I would very happily leave my books as the material epitaph of my existence.'

London, March 2025

Note

- 1 PEN International, Poets, Essayists and Novelists.

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'Once more, John Schad has come up with a wholly new, and utterly unforgettable way of writing history.'

Steven Connor, *King's College London*

In July 1940, amidst fear of Nazi invasion, HMT *Dunera* left England. On board were a few British soldiers guarding over 2000 interned male Enemy Aliens, mostly Germans. Some of the internees were passionate Nazis, but most were Jewish refugees. Among them was Stefan Raphael Benjamin, the estranged child of the German-Jewish intellectual, Walter Benjamin.

Cue *Walter Benjamin's Ark* which re-reads the life and work of Walter Benjamin via the curious life of his only child. The focal point is Stefan's dramatic voyage from England to Australia in 1940, a voyage rich in intellectual suggestion, shared as it was with obscure men with famous names such as Wittgenstein, Kafka, Marx and Wilde. Central to the book is the one substantive text that can be ascribed to Stefan: Benjamin's meticulous transcription of Stefan's utterances as an infant. This fascinating text has been largely overlooked, despite the insistence of Benjamin's biographers that 'it continued to play a role in Walter Benjamin's writing until the end of his life'. This book thus seeks not only to bring into view the intriguing figure that is Stefan but also to identify him as that most crucial of Benjaminian spectres, namely, the secret 'you' or addressee of Benjamin's writings.

John Schad is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of Lancaster and author of several works of experimental criticism, including *Someone Called Derrida* (2007), *The Late Walter Benjamin* (2012), *Paris Bride* (2020) and (with Fred Dalmasso) *Derrida | Benjamin. Two Plays for the Stage* (2021).

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