THE NIGHTWATCHES

An English translation
of the anonymous German novel
Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura, 1804
with an introduction
by
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
Comparative Literature

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
April, 1973
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Date **April 27, 1973**
The Nightwatches deserves an attempt at translation into English because it anticipates some of modern literature's preoccupation with meaninglessness and nothingness and elucidates the evolution of this attitude toward life both in form and in content.

Written in 1804, The Nightwatches portrays a position opposed to the transcendental idealism that characterized the philosophical basis of the European Romantic Movement, and instead demonstrates that the indefinite longing for an unknown truth and the emphasis on the self and on the intuitive faculties of man's mind — all hallmarks of this movement which distinguished it from previous literary trends — led as easily to dissolution and nothingness as to certitude and the concept of a living, organic universe.

Turning away from the objective world and placing emphasis largely on the mind with its dangerous dichotomy of intellect and intuition, The Nightwatches presents the result of the Romantic failure to combine the transcendental with the real, a failure that removed the mind's inner foundations of certitude and faith, resulting in a loss of religion and a negative view of existence. Life becomes a delusion, and knowledge mere hypothesis, and The Nightwatches mirrors this new awareness with the help of masks, theatre imagery, and satire.

Thus, The Nightwatches charts a world-view which was developed considerably by nihilistic writers of the latter half of the nineteenth century and which has culminated, in our own times, in the work of playwrights of the absurd, notably the work of Samuel Beckett, which demonstrates great similarity to the content of The Nightwatches.
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Marketa Stankiewicz of the Comparative Literature Programme and to Professor Michael Bullock of the Department of Creative Writing for their valuable suggestions regarding some problems of the introduction and the translation, and I am especially grateful to Professor Edward Mörnin of the Department of German - his patient critical advice and indispensable encouragement made it possible for me to complete this project.
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INTRODUCTION

As we absorb the Western literature of the twentieth century, we are surely aware that it is pervaded with a consciousness of estrangement from the universe and from society. Few writers of stature deny modern man's prevailing state of anxiety and exhaustion. Yeats' prophecy "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" ("The Second Coming"), written at the turn of the century, has become a terse summary of a malaise attributed variously to our advance in technology, to our increasing secularization, and to our discovery that all human knowledge seems mere hypothesis.

As a medium of communication, literature gives faceless abstractions a countenance and translates a concept into an image, a structure or an action. Eliot's "thousand sordid images" ("Preludes", 1917) reflect modern man's alienation, nihilism and loss of identity. The physical state of Hemingway's heroes, castrated, shell -
shocked and scarred, mirrors a spiritual condition. In the modern theatre, the knowledge of estrangement, inherent in modern poetry and the novel, is extensively dramatized - isolation, sterility and emptiness are major themes of the contemporary stage. In the plays of Pirandello, for example, anxiety, fear of a chaotic void, and a consciousness of the illusion of all moral norms and categories play havoc with the concepts of role and identity. Beckett's tragi-comedy *Waiting for Godot* (1953) stresses that meaningful action in life is impossible. Two tramps wait patiently for an unspecified form of salvation, for a "centre" to give their lives purpose and definition. They are images of every man, and the situation in which they find themselves is a metaphor of modern man as a stranger in the universe.

Surveying modern literature's preoccupation with meaninglessness and nothingness, we are confronted with a "fait accompli" in most cases. Beckett's tramps, for example, appear to us at the end of their journey, in a universe where space and time and knowledge are meaningless, where human perception is at best an aberration, and where salvation seems a hopeless dream. We might well ask how this awareness came into being, and for the answer we must turn to the literary evidence of the past.
At first glance, *The Nightwatches*, published under the pseudonym Bonaventura in Germany in 1804, seems an unlikely work for our search. Midnight strikes; a night-watchman puts on his work clothes and crosses himself religiously as he walks out into the night. As we proceed, however, we discover that his tale is modern. We eventually find him sitting at the edge of Nothingness:

Not a single object anywhere except a great, terrible I which fed on itself and instantly gave birth to itself again. I did not sink, for there was no space to sink into, but neither did I seem to rise. All change had disappeared together with time, giving way to dreadful, endless boredom. Terrified, I tried to annihilate myself but I remained and felt myself immortal.

A century and a half later, this literary character has hardly moved — the Nothingness persists. Sartre calls the apprehension of this Nothingness "nausea". Hemingway writes about it in a prayer: "Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee" (*A Clean Well-Lighted Place*, 1927).

Like Sartre's Roquentin and Hemingway's old waiter, the watchman is alienated from his own self, from God, and from society. Throughout his story he pursues his metaphysical identity, his naked ego. He blasphemes the God responsible for his meaningless existence, and he reviles his fellow-men savagely. Finally, he chooses to fight his abysmal vision with laughter. However, some modern heroes have lost even the ability to laugh. They
wait for death with a little patience, or endure like Faulkner's heroes, or drown their sorrows in mescal, as for example does the consul Geoffrey in Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947).

Unlike the modern hero, the watchman hopes, but his hopes are constantly thwarted. He loves, and watches his beloved die in child-birth. He prays, and finds himself mouthing curses, and views the world as an "empty, stupid stage for fools and masks" (p. 124). He examines the chaos of the microcosm, attacks the Church, marriage and justice, and parodies love, joy and sorrow. For the watchman, "the skull is never missing behind the flirtatious mask, and life is only the fool's costume which Nothingness has donned in order to tinkle its bells for a while and then finally to rend it angrily and to discard it" (p. 85).

Embedded in his story, we find literary techniques and images since expanded and explored with greater refinement. Through the medium of masks and theatre imagery borrowed from the "commedia dell' arte" and from Shakespeare, he makes his point that nothing can be known with certainty. He switches time sequence, inserts mad fantasy between rational argument, mixes poetry with prose, constantly stresses the motifs of silence and petrifaction, and revels in satire and irony. *The Nightwatches* are modern not only in their spirit, but also in some of their form and
The year 1804 places The Nightwatches in that period of literary history known as Romanticism, a historical movement in art and ideas which occurred in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Thinkers and writers throughout Germany, France, and England began searching for a new system of explaining the nature of reality and the duties of man, and European thought shifted from conceiving the universe as a mechanism to conceiving it as an organism, in a reaction against the regulated and reasoned universe of Milton and Descartes. Milton in 1674 had seen the universe as an immutable hierarchy, and in Paradise Lost had sought not only "to justify the ways of God to man" - Reason was his trustworthy guide, and he divided the universe into what could be known with certainty and what one could not know - but also admonished the reader: "solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid". Eighteenth century thinkers, however, attacked the rational, mechanistic universe from all sides and tried to deal with the "unknown" factors: Hume was a radical sceptic; Berkeley questioned the reality of matter; and Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason (1781) argued that reason could neither establish nor prove the essence of a thing, and that man lacked the faculties required to perceive God.
Attacking the very bases of traditional metaphysics and philosophy, he pointed out that "the reality of external objects is not capable of any strict proof".\(^4\)

In Germany, thinkers such as Fichte and Schelling also rejected reason as a positive method of perceiving truth, but argued that man could overcome the limitations of the mind and experience truth in a state "out of himself". Fichte postulated, in *The Science of Knowledge* (1794), that the universe existed in man's mind. The self created not only itself, but also the objects surrounding it, and once it learned to observe itself in the act of creation, it in fact perceived truth. Schelling, in his *Ideas concerning a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), blurred the distinction between nature and mind; neither mind nor nature are absolute; the former is invisible nature, the latter visible mind. Moreover, he believed that all solidity was mere appearance – a polarity of molecules. At "death", the illusion of solidity is lost, and one becomes once more a fluctuation of the universe in a return to a greater harmony and a fuller life. For Schelling, truth resided in his concept of the mystical union of man with nature: "...in the absolute identity of the spirit inside of us with nature outside of us".\(^5\)

It was the spiritual and imaginative side of man's mind which interested the Romantic thinkers. In the realm
of religion, Schleiermacher destroyed every link between faith and rational knowledge and placed them in antithesis to each other. Herder, in his *Knowledge and Sentiment of the Soul* (1778), placed emphasis on the heart rather than the logical mind as a true witness of the world and he elected the poet as interpreter of the soul's perceptions: "the prophecies of poets - they alone can provide us with material for the true study of the soul". Friedrich von Schlegel also saw the artist as that man best suited for an understanding of truth. For him, the artist became increasingly aware of himself, during artistic activity, as an individual and at the same time as creator, and could discover the divine element within himself.

In their search for spiritual alternatives to Reason, the German poets and thinkers sought to define Romanticism, and definitions ranged from "a progressive universal poetry" to "an inner regeneration of the totality of existence". Writers such as Ludwig Tieck and Clemens Brentano turned toward love, poetry and imagination and considered them superior to reason as interpreters of man's nature and of existence.

New thoughts similar to those in Germany took place in France. In *The Creed of a Priest of Savoy* (1752), Rousseau, dissatisfied with the concept of a God residing outside His static universe, felt that God was in nature, a pantheistic explanation of the world that
passed into German philosophy with Schelling and Hegel. Moreover, in his Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts (1749), Rousseau claimed that the "natural" man of feeling was superior to the civilized man formed by rational culture and society, and he stressed the uniqueness of each individual.

Rousseau's ideas found acceptance in Germany through Kant in the 1760's and through Goethe, and a little later, German ideas were disseminated in France. Mme. de Staël introduced Friedrich von Schlegel's writings to France in Of Germany (1810), and attributed to him and to Kant the honour of winning for German philosophy a position of distinction.

Between 1817 and 1820, Victor Cousin lectured at the Sorbonne on Fichte, Schelling, and Friedrich von Schlegel and stressed the emotions and the heart as true witnesses of existence.

In England, there was no consciously directed "movement" of Romanticism, but the same forces were at work. In The Enthusiast (1740), Joseph Warton advocated a return to nature in the belief that natural conditions of man and human society are the best conditions. Through Macpherson's Ossian (1762) and Sir Walter Scott's novels (after 1814), nature, primitivism, sentimentalism, and figures such as the prophet and the peasant became major concerns of
English literature. Between 1798 and 1832, however, writers such as Blake and Coleridge placed great emphasis upon the Imagination and saw the spiritual mind of man as the central point and governing factor of true knowledge. For Blake:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity;...This world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal...There exist in that Eternal World the Permament Realities of Every Thing...All Things are comprehended in their Eternal forms in...The Human Imagination.

In 1817, Coleridge set up the concepts of the primary and secondary imagination in his *Biographia Literaria*:

The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime Agent of all human Perceptions, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.

He defined the secondary imagination as that faculty of the mind which fashions poetry out of the experiences encountered by the primary imagination.

Like their German and French counterparts, the English Romantics felt that truth could be apprehended only intuitively and imaginatively. And in a summary of the ideal philosophy prevalent in all three countries, three criteria of Romanticism emerge: imagination and feeling as true interpreters of the world, an organic concept of nature, and symbol and myth for poetic style. Romanticism was a revolution in the European mind against thinking
in terms of mechanism and the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of organism. Its values were "change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination, the unconscious."  

How do The Nightwatches fit into this lofty Romantic movement? The watchman negates rather than affirms existence, and his imagination leads him toward Nothingness instead of infinite and eternal creation. He views the universe as a cosmic clock (p. 33) controlled by death (p. 171) rather than as a living organism.

Despite the optimistic German philosophical formulas, French sentiments of the mysterious and infinite, and the English idea of creative imagination, some writers, while attempting to embrace these transcendent values, had periods of doubt and despair and saw "neither beauty nor goodness in the universe, nor any significance, nor indeed any order at all...". Having shifted the seat of knowledge from the outside to within themselves, they were plagued by doubts about the reality of their perceptions, aware that one man's visions are often nothing more than hallucinations. The indefinite longing for an unknown truth, to be perceived by the intuition alone, led to disenchantment and ennui, and the writers thus afflicted often sought comfort in solitude and reverie and became
the victims of melancholy and pessimism.

In France, Sénancour's Obermann (1802) describes a hero who retreats to Switzerland to live alone and explore the assumption that "the true life of man is within, while that which he derives from without is only adventitious and subservient". Yet even the vista of the Alps cannot make him love nature, and he states in a letter to a friend that knowledge is futile, since it is erroneous, and that all his attempts to learn through his intuition bring him only melancholy and an awareness of death. Among the poets, Alfred de Vigny expressed in his works an ambivalence between belief and disbelief in God and the possibility or impossibility of a supreme vision - neither reason nor feeling led to certainty. In his poem "The Mount of Olives" (1843), even Christ at Gethsemane, the spokesman for a searching mankind, prays and pleads in vain. He prays for man in his search for truth, and for the ability to destroy doubt and evil; but the answer to his pleas is the sound of Judas' approaching foot-steps. For de Vigny, man was condemned never to know the reason for and the goal of his existence, and his only solution was to face the silent God with a despair comprising both rebellion and resignation. De Musset, in A Modern Man's Confession (1835), also discussed despair and diagnosed it as "the malady of the century", noting that with this
A cadaverous and poisonous literature, having only a form, and that a hideous one, commenced to sprinkle with foetid blood all the monsters of nature. He was referring to the cult of decadence which encompassed a literature that dealt with degeneracy and artificiality and denied faith and morality, a literature that had begun already in 1791 with de Sade's *Justine*, which declared that nature was destructive (contrary to Rousseau's view of a benevolent nature) and which featured characters determined to blaspheme Romantic love in every perversion possible. This literature became a serious artistic preoccupation in France especially during the second Empire (1850-1870) and revolted against the Romantic concepts of Nature and ideal love. Often resigned and indifferent, some writers of this cult were seeking no longer supreme emotion, but supreme sensation, interested merely in the fresh titillation of man's jaded senses. Charles Baudelaire, in his *Flowers of Evil* (1861 edition), described a universe bereft of meaning in the poem "The Abyss":

Alas, all is abyss - dream, action, prayer, and word, -
On night's dark depths God's subtle fingers trace
a multiform and pitiless nightmare.  

In "To a Madonna", he begins with blasphemy (the Madonna is his mistress) and ends with the wish to murder her with "seven torture-Knives, keen to the hilt" fashioned out of
the seven deadly sins, and in the poem "The Sunset of Romanticism", an exultant sun-rise is followed by a night of mephitic odours, "black, gloomy, shadowed with dark shuddering fogs".

In England too the experience of a meaningful, blissful world gave way in some writers to an experience of emptiness which included boredom, a collapse of values, and a general sense of helplessness. The typical symbols of this negative attitude were individuals filled with despair and cosmic alienation, individuals such as Byron's Childe Harold (1811–1818) and Manfred (1817). Lord Byron, the most influential of the English Romantics throughout Europe, was an avowed cynic and pessimist and from the outset criticized the Romantic emphasis on imagination and nature. Harold is "the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind" (Canto III), and Manfred considers knowledge a cup full of sorrow:

They who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth, 17
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.

Both Harold and Manfred are outsiders to life, and their cult of the ego and individualism took Europe by storm. In Russia, for example, Pushkin patterned his Eugene Onegin (1833) on Byron's Don Juan (1821) and said outright that Onegin was "...like Childe Harold, gloomy, languid... nothing touched him; he touched nothing",18 and Lermontov's
A Hero of our Time (1840) reflected the world-weariness and ennui of much of Byron's work: the hero Pechorin seduces two women out of sheer boredom and travels across Russia in search of excitement to stimulate his jaded senses. Walking home after witnessing a game of Russian roulette, he attributes his alienated condition to the excessive practice of imagination:

In my early youth, I was a dreamer; I liked to fondle images, gloomy and iridescent by turn, that my restless and vivid imagination pictured to me. But what was left to me of it? Nothing but weariness, as from a night battle with a phantom, and a vague memory full of regrets. In this vain struggle, I exhausted the ardency of soul and the endurance of will, indispensable for real life...I became bored and disgusted.

In Romantic writers such as Carlyle and Coleridge, a negative attitude toward existence was often an aspect of conversion, part of a spiritual death when the old values of Reason died and when the new transcendental values, such as an organic universe with an immament God, made as yet no sense. In Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (1831), Professor Teufelsdröckh loses his religious belief and in the seventh chapter, titled "The Everlasting No", sees the universe void of all life and volition. There follows "The Centre of Indifference" during which he is a wanderer and an observer of the absurdities of life. In "The Everlasting Yea" (chapter nine), a change comes over him and he sees in nature the "Living Garment of God".

Coleridge, in his ballad The Rime of the
Ancient Mariner (1798) portrays a similar death and rebirth. The mariner violates life by shooting the albatross; he fails to believe in nature as a living organism. Isolation and alienation are the consequences. But as he is touched by an impulse of love and acceptance, his despair vanishes and he unawares blesses the water snakes surrounding his ship. The universe takes on life again.

It was not until the Victorian era that in English literature man was seen as a helpless creature in a meaningless universe and at the mercy of forces around him. In his dramatic poem Empedocles on Aetna (1853), Matthew Arnold depicted a hero suffering from alienation based on spiritual isolation. Empedocles' state of mind is depression and ennui in a world which is for him devoid of religious or ethical meaning. To escape his depression and his deadness to joy and animated life, he commits suicide. Robert Browning, in The Ring and the Book (1869), focussed on the fallibility of man's way of knowing truth - ten witnesses testify at a murder trial in seventeenth century Italy, and each has a different story. Browning, turning directly to the reader, asks him to learn this lesson:

...our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation words and wind.
In Germany, the two attitudes toward existence outlined found literary expression in the works of Novalis and Ludwig Tieck. In Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1799), Novalis describes a search for a transcendental world in the figure of Heinrich, whose dreams and conversations with the poet Klingschr point at a totally poetic and intuitive perception of the universe. Heinrich dreams of a union with nature and an ideal reality above and beyond ordinary existence, summed up in the symbol of the "blue flower". Dream, love, and poetry are all means by which he encompasses ideal reality. For Heinrich, the search is a success. Yet even Novalis knew the dangers of imagination. For example, in a letter to Caroline von Schlegel in 1799, he stated:

I know how imagination is most attracted by what is most immoral, most animal, but I also know how like a dream all imagination is, how it loves night, meaninglessness, and solitude.

In the novel William Lovell (1793, completed 1796), Ludwig Tieck describes a hero whose imaginative state of mind leads him to chaotic excesses. He seduces several women for sport, gambles heavily, and cannot decide whether life beyond is an experience of reality or merely a figment of the imagination. He is a man motivated by feeling, yet his ecstatic capability narrows his moral capacities. In the novel, Tieck utilizes dreams, deception,
disguises, mazes and fateful objects to question reality seriously and to reveal it as a complex layer of appearances. Lovell's friend Balder points out that the experiences of the imagination are always subject to a doubting reason and as a consequence:

No one has ever succeeded in establishing a concrete truth about eternity, God, and the meaning of the world; we wander lost through a great prison, we whimper for freedom and cry for daylight, our hand knocks on a hundred iron doors, but they're all locked and a hollow echo answers us.

In *The Rune Mountain* (1802), Tieck describes a man who enters a landscape of mountains and forests, a realm that symbolizes Romantic reality beyond the average grasp. Nature, which was for Novalis a beneficent, living organism, is for Tieck a horrific reality. His hero Christian meets nature personified as a black-haired temptress and he abandons his normal prosaic existence to follow her. To his wife and children, the temptress appears as an ugly crone - transcendental reality appears evil and destructive.

In abandoning himself to nature, it seems that the hero is destroying himself. For Tieck, the Romantic feeling for nature led more often to dissolution and terror than to inner wholeness and joy.

*The Nightwatches*, like the work of Carlyle, de Vigny, and some of Tieck's writings, elucidate the negative attitude toward existence, an attitude that lived in
conjunction with Romanticism and often sought to discredit the Romantic ideals. For Bonaventura, the quest for an embodied ideal is a failure. Neither love, nor imagination, nor religion, nor poetry aid him, and neither Fichtean nor Schellingian philosophy provide him with a key to his self. He experiences Nothingness as he faces the universe. His dreams bring him terror instead of a beatific vision. In his youth, he is plagued by Romantic "Zerrissenheit", the inability to combine the ideal and the real — he is a poet, but his ideals are not accepted by his society. In two nightwatches (X and XI), he tells the story of a blind youth who is cured by a doctor and sees the sun and the living universe for the first time. But in the world of reality, he loses the woman he loves because she is fated to become a nun if he ever regained his sight. Their continued relationship leads to her becoming pregnant, and she is buried alive by her convent sisters. The Romantic vision leads to sorrow and death. Significantly, the nightwatchman has studied Jakob Boehme and Hans Sachs, pointing out that both poets were also competent shoemakers (IV). Moreover, he has learned the Romantic language of nature as he listens to flowers and flies in order to decipher their language, but his fellow workers at the shoe-making shop laugh at him. Unlike Boehme and Sachs, he cannot function both in the ideal world of poetry and the
prosaic world of shoemaking. In the first nightwatch, he warns his alter ego, a poet in an attic, to take up another, more prosaic trade. The poet, however, pursues his calling, and finally commits suicide because his work remains unaccepted; he represents the end to which the watchman himself would have come had he not given up poetry. For Bonaventura, poetry is thus impossible—contrary to Romantic faith in the permanent and real value of poetry in the existence of man.

Bonaventura also expresses the contrast between the ideal and the real in his use of Romantic poetic symbol. Novalis, for example, stresses in *Hymns to the Night* (1797) that the night is a beatific time, suitable for introspection, and describes a joyous nocturnal vision, dropping all spatial and temporal barriers at the grave of his beloved Sophie. But in *The Nightwatches*, this night becomes a dark hour during which the delusions of mankind are unmasked. During the night, a judge signs execution orders (p. 18), a nun is buried alive (p. 109), and the Devil plays godfather (p. 164); and finally, the watchman is reduced to staring into a darkness beside which "nothing else is visible in heaven or earth" (p. 145).

In reaction to Romantic ideals that affirm existence, Bonaventura negates life, and he employs the Romantic language and its metaphors and symbols not to agree with their predominantly positive view of the world, but to
prove these views false. In the words of Michael Novak:

The person gripped by the experience of Nothingness sees nearly everything in 'reverse image'. What others call certain, he sees as pretend; what other persons call pragmatic or effective, he sees as a most ironical delusion. There is no real world out there, he says. Within human beings and outside of them, there is only a great darkness...".

The watchman attacks love in various ways. The idea of love as an entrance into a meaningful world beyond ordinary reality is negated by his own personal experiences - his first love affair takes place in a madhouse, and he cries not so much over the death of his beloved as over their failure to find their selves in the love affair, and he has a vision of Nothingness while his child is being born. He weeps a second tear over the confiscation of a puppet; his truncated capacity for love has been transferred to a lifeless marionette, to a wooden vehicle for satire. In the fourth and fifth nightwatches, he tells the same story of love and murder twice: the second story utilizes a Southern setting popular in Romantic literature, and seeks to provide some psychological detail about Don Juan's murderous motives. More important, however, the nightwatchman explains in the previous nightwatch that Don Juan's crimes are directly attributable to God who has muddled the roles of life and has assigned the wrong parts to the players. In a just universe, Don Juan should have married Ines, but it is Don Ponce who possesses her. The reality
presented in the fifth nightwatch, in a Romantic vein, is stripped of its illusion and deception in the previous watch — emotion, meaning, and the concept of free will are denied. The story told in IV is truer than the same story told in V, and it is this kind of truth which pervades the entire Nightwatches.

Bonaventura's approach to nature is directly opposed to the ideas expressed by Novalis in Germany and by Wordsworth in England. He sees nature not as a reflection of a living universal mind, but as a cold and petrified state reflecting Nothingness and death. While pantheism, the prevalent religious philosophy of the Romantics, identified God with the physical universe, and saw no other God in it than the sum total of matter, law and energy that it contains, Bonaventura considers man separated from creation; in XIII, the watchman indulges in a dithyramb about spring — here is nature, calm in its grandeur, and here is man, ill at ease because nature has not completed him in creation, but has left him unfinished and undefined. The continuum of nature breaks off at the point where man enters the picture. In the pantheistic sense, the heart of nature is God, but the watchman is separated from God: nature is empty, "a dreadful birth-machine which gave birth to itself and to everything else (and) has no heart of its own" (p. 171).

Throughout The Nightwatches, nature is lifeless. In
the first nightwatch, the watchman wanders through the town which seems to have been transformed into lifeless stone. The characters encountered on his nightly rounds are often surrounded by lifeless statues, signifying petrifaction. A dying atheist (I), a judge (III) and a frozen beggar (X) are all described in terms of coldness and rigidity, and these motifs of petrifaction applied to the living, to nature, and to puppets (V) stress the lifelessness and delusion of living organisms in the world as Bonaventura constructs it.

Bonaventura's view of religion too is cynical and opposed to the views of Schleiermacher and Novalis, the two chief Romantic exponents of religion in Germany. The watchman does not believe in a beneficent God, and priests literally play the role of devils (II). The only person to die with a smile on his face is an avowed atheist whose smile, however, is later negated by Bonaventura: life after death is so meaningless and empty that even God, pictured as the inmate of an asylum, finds eternity tedious (IX).

Nor does the watchman share the Romantic love of music best expressed by Wackenroder in Outpourings of an art-loving Friar (1797) in which the character Joseph Berglinger reacts to music as follows:

It seemed to him as if his soul were spreading
great wings, as if he were lifted off an arid moor, as if the clouded sky were disappearing in front of his mortal eyes, and as if he were floating toward the clear heavens.

Music, like poetry, was for the Romantics another method of reaching a transcendental ideal. In The Nightwatches, however, music consists of storms and thunder, dirges, and accompaniments to a dance of death (X). The watchman describes himself as an instrument tuned discordantly (p. 107), and in IV and VIII discusses how Mozart's music is played badly by incompetent musicians. Significant dissonances of life are implied by these allusions.

In his attack on Romantic ideals, Bonaventura resorts to irony and satire to make his point that these ideals are not in accordance with his interpretation of reality. Many of the ironies in the novel deal with death and illusion. The watchman writes a funeral speech to celebrate the birth of a child, pointing out that man begins to die as soon as he is born (pp. 64-65). In IV, he tells the story of Don Juan who seeks death, but is fated to remain immortal. In X, he describes a nun who affirmed life and gave birth to a child and is consequently buried alive by her convent sisters – it is ironic that those who affirm existence must die, while those who seek oblivion must stay alive. Other ironies lie in the watchman's own misconceptions: he acts as a prophet who rails against
mankind's moral and metaphysical delusions, yet he himself
is fooled constantly. For example, he attempts to talk a
youth out of committing suicide (XII) only to learn that
the youth is actually an actor studying a role for a play.
Finally, he admits only uncertainty, and a great void, as
even the corpse of his father, which at first he thinks
has conquered transitoriness and death, falls into dust
beneath his probing hands. Throughout the novel, the
ironies point at Nothingness rather than a meaningful world.

In the third nightwatch, two lovers mistake the
watchman for a statue of St. Crispin, and as he moves his
cloak slightly to destroy their illusion, they merely insist
that the statue's foundation has caved in and that it has
lost balance. Although the lovers are describing a statue,
we know, as we proceed through the book, that their
statement describes the watchman himself - he has in fact
lost his inner foundation, and his view of the world is
out of balance.

Romantic satire tended to aim at the literary and
social conditions of the time. Ludwig Tieck wielded this
weapon habitually, mocking, for example, the pedantic
Philistine of the eighteenth century, to whom utility was
the sum total of all activity: in The Memorable Chronicle
of the Gothamites (1796), the populace conceives of poetry
merely as a means of improving erring humanity; criminals
are not executed – one reads them odes or shows them a dramatic scene in an infirmary. Moreover, some writers satirized the Romantics; August von Platen, in his play *The Fateful Fork* (1826), attacked the drama of destiny, conjuring up an amusing fabrication hinging upon fate. All the fateful and accursed knives and daggers which figure in the fate-dramas are symbolized by a dreadful fork which leads an entire family to destruction.

Bonaventura's satire is directed equally at Philistines and Romantics. But more important, an abyss yawns beneath his satire; the satire constantly turns upon itself. *The Nightwatches* may be divided into five sections, each beginning with a satire whose comedy leads to an increasingly bitter denunciation of the world.  

In the second nightwatch, the watchman satirizes religion with his story of three priests disguised as devils who endeavour to kidnap the dead body of an atheist. In III, he foils a pair of adulterers and delivers them ironically into the hands of a stern husband. In VI, however, it becomes certain that neither religion nor love have a meaning – Don Juan's tale reveals a heaven whose God is a fumbling theatre director who will not let the hero die despite his prayers and who has assigned the wrong persons to play the role of lovers.

In II, the watchman also satirizes poetry, replacing
it with a trumpet which he blows to call out the hour and to announce a false Judgement Day in VI. Then he reaches into his own past and describes how his satirical poems landed him first in prison and then in the madhouse. In VIII, he recounts the suicide of the town poet, who hangs himself upon receipt of his rejected tragedy; poetry is a meaningless undertaking in this world.

Again the watchman returns to satire, describing the inmates of a madhouse in the ninth nightwatch. Subsequently, the satire yields to three vignettes: a beggar freezing to death, the wedding of a youth and at the same time the funeral of his previous beloved, and a misanthropic porter who directs the watchman to the burial of a nun. In XI, he tells part of the story of the nun's lover and shows how the Romantic ideal is negated in the world of reality.

A fourth time he turns to satire, describing a character who prides himself on owning the discarded clothes of great men to assume importance in his society. (XII). This is followed by a visit to an art museum, in which the statues of antiquity seem to come alive in a bitter phantasy. In XIV, he describes his own love affair in the madhouse where he learns that the self is nothing and where he has a dream about Nothingness.

He reaches again into the past and describes his career as a puppet director, and closes the work with a scene in
the cemetery where he watches his father dissolve into dust.

Each section begins with satire that mocks the imperfection of man's world - adultery, bad poetry, Romantic love, rationalism and sanity, and immortality are all attacked with equal relish. But instead of pointing at new ideals to replace those which the satire has mocked as being insufficient, each section ends in a catastrophe - Don Juan's tale of love and crime, the suicide of the poet, the young man whose beloved is buried, the end of the watchman's happiness in the madhouse, and the final nihilistic outburst in the cemetery. In each section, the satire becomes less occasional, the comedy more hollow - even satire is meaningless and without use in a world that has no cosmic meaning or value. Bonaventura's satiric method may be summed with the last nightwatch in which the watchman parodies the musings of the English grave-yard school of poets, notably Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742) and the third section of Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* (1797) in order to conclude:

> And the echo in the charnel house cries out for the last time: NOTHING! (p. 173)

The very structure of the book reflects Bonaventura's conviction that the universe is chaos. The work is a fictional biography told out of chronological order.
For example, the watchman was conceived by a gypsy woman and an alchemist (XVI); the gypsy buried the boy in a casket and he was found by a shoemaker (IV); the watchman grew up as a shoemaker and poet, is thrown into a madhouse (VII) and has a love affair there (XIV). The tenth watch takes place on a winter night, while the first sentence of XIII places the action at the vernal equinox. In III, he blows his horn to intervene in an adultery, but in VI, which chronologically precedes III, he relates how he has lost the right to blow his horn. Nightwatch V, the watchman tells us, is actually written during the day. It is only in the light of the thematic structure with its five sections that the work makes sense, and the confusion of time elements serves to reinforce Bonaventura's view of man's precarious, uncertain existence.

The stylistic elements of The Nightwatches show a similar lack of unity. Only the first two nightwatches tell a unified story. The third watch begins with a summary of the first two. The fourth watch mixes biography with an account of a puppet play. The tenth watch describes a beggar freezing to death, moves on to a poetic account of love and the love for love (a red and a white bride), and ends with the death of the nun. The fourteenth watch mixes poems about the moon and love with an exchange of letters between two madhouse inmates. In its structural and stylistic approach, the novel is quite modern. It is, for example,
reminiscent of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) in which the author reorganizes his own writing, slicing pages and shuffling them so that events appear in random order; sometimes it is the work of other writers or paragraphs from newspapers which he cuts or folds in. Like Bonaventura, Burroughs detaches the reader from a steady forward plot of narrative, and offers fragments of incidents that blur past and present, fact and dream.

The watchman informs us that life is a stage and that men are puppets playing confused roles. The motif of the marionette underlines the meaninglessness of life. In IV, the wooden puppets representing Don Juan and his brother are controlled by wires; they have no volition of their own, and the place of fate is taken by a buffoon whose blundering prevents Don Juan from pursuing his love — he tries to follow her and runs into the clown instead. In XV, the watchman says of a puppet's head that it is "the most mechanical thing in the world and doesn't contain one single thought" (p. 155). In *The Nightwatches*, the use of the puppet motif rests:

...in the antithesis of the uncanny mechanical control of courageous will and man's spirit striving toward the infinite, an antithesis which makes all human actions and deeds and all moral endeavours seem absurd.

Throughout *The Nightwatches*, the watchman examines reality and strips away layer after layer, but reaches only "nothing" instead of truth, and as he uncovers all appearances,
all the false manifestations of the self, all the masks, he is left with a derelict self and a hatred for the world. With metaphors of masks and illusion, he tries to convince us that nothing can be known with certainty. At first, the masks seem harmless: the atheist's features in the first nightwatch are rigid because he is dead. In II, the priests wear devils' masks. By the time we reach the tenth watch, the motif of the masks, which at first seems a mere stylistic feature and a satire, takes on a bitter metaphysical meaning - searching for the self, the watchman is unable to find anything except a series of masks which include his feelings of joy, sorrow, and hatred. Existence itself is a mask, because "everything is role, the role itself as well as the player inside it" (p. 143).

We can find observations on roles and masks akin to Bonaventura's especially in the early twentieth century. Pirandello in 1917 dramatized the contradiction between appearance and reality that makes the pursuit of absolute knowledge chimerical. In Right You Are (If You Think So), the character Laudin proclaims:

You are condemned to the 'wonderful' torment of having before your very eyes, suddenly close to you, on the one hand this world of fantasy and on the other, reality...and of not being able to distinguish one from the other.

Personal identity is seen as the product of the roles and situations which circumstance forces upon us. We all,
suggests Pirandello in his collected plays *Naked Masks* (1914), are stereotyped characters with roles prescribed by long tradition, a statement which Bonaventura would have applauded since one of his characters comes to the same conclusion:

...You must know I've been playing this role for centuries, and that I'm one of the Italian stock characters that never leave the theatre. (p. 41)

In Bonaventura's world, where everything is merely appearance, any sort of knowledge is an illusion. Yet man's conduct is based on what he knows; it is therefore no wonder that the watchman himself is amoral. In the tenth nightwatch, he watches a beggar freeze to death and does nothing to intervene, having noted in IV that "when the drama of life writes itself, one should not interfere even with its catastrophe" (p. 31). In VI, the watchman's Judgement Day prank leads to the suicide of a young man, a direct result of the watchman's grim prophecy. Although in III he reveals the adulterous pair to the husband, in the course of the novel we are made aware that for him, justice has no meaning, since he denies free will (IV) and since morality and religion have no base if God is incompetent and does not even know his own mind (IX).

In summary of *The Nightwatches*, it is clear that the watchman's experiences have led only to disillusion, and that throughout the story he takes pains to contradict
the conceit of Romantic beliefs, optimistic faith in the mind's power to find truth, and the reality of the mind's constructs. He discovers that abandonment of the self leads not to harmony and communion with the infinite, but to terror. For the watchman, life is a delusion, and knowledge, whether in the form of intellect or imagination, is a mask thrown over a core of meaninglessness. Life is not only transitory, beginning and ending in death, it is so meaningless that an afterlife would be horrible. In the midst of a botched universe, over which the Devil presides, cowers the self, consuming itself to no purpose, able to retain its integrity only by calling attention constantly to the true condition of reality.

Although the watchman uses the term "nothing" frequently, he does not use the word "nihilist" to describe himself. It remained for Turgenev to invent the self-styled nihilist, the character Barazov in Fathers and Sons (1861). Use of the word spread rapidly throughout Europe, losing most of its anarchistic and revolutionary flavour, and implying instead the doctrine that moral norms or standards cannot be justified by rational argument, and the concept of despair over the emptiness and triviality of human existence. The Nightwatches embraced all three connotations in 1804. Moreover, nihilism was generally equated with atheism, since both views denied any moral norms, and there
are many literary types of the nihilist-atheist, as for example Stepan Trofimovitch who states, in Dostoevsky's The Possessed (1871), that "life is pain, life is terror, and man is unhappy...there is no freedom beyond; that is all, and there is nothing beyond". 30

Nietzsche was the first philosopher to make extensive use of the term "nihilism", recognizing that as a matter of historical fact, atheism was ushering in the age of nihilism. "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him", he proclaimed in 1882. 31 Six years later, he explained:

The belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim- and meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary effect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable. 32

Clearly, the watchman is a nihilist in the fullest sense of the word, and Nietzsche has summarized a condition which we have seen already expressed during the European Romantic Movement. The Nightwatches elucidate the shift from a positive to a negative view of heaven and earth. "Nihilism is an ideological interpretation imposed on the experience of nothingness", 33 and Bonaventura's story qualifies as an introduction to a large amount of nihilistic literature since 1804.

However, except for his pose of laughter and anger, the watchman does not elaborate upon the spiritual behaviour and the psychological symptoms of the nihilist. The
qualities of ennui, anxiety, and despair, and more refined enquiries into masks and metaphors of illusion, were pursued by later writers. Bonaventura presents the watchman's lack of morality with little detail, for example, and it remained for Dostoevsky to explore the ethical position of the nihilist; in Crime and Punishment (1880), the student Raskolnikov commits murder to test the power of his amorality, on the assumption that a man of genius and personal moral convictions can justify to himself any act, including murder. And with Notes from the Underground (1864), a confession in the Romantic vein, the character of the nihilist is fully fixed in Dostoevsky's depiction of an alienated and rejected man who is bent on revenge against society, who has given up all search for meaning, and who in his own words might as well be a "piano-key", as far as his human significance is concerned.

In Germany, Büchner wrote dramas that perfectly expressed the watchman's condition some thirty years after 1804, using similar motifs of puppet theatre and masks of the self, as for example the dissolution of the self in Valeria's mask scene in Leonce and Lena (1836), and stating in The Death of Danton (1835) that "the world is chaos. Nothingness is the God about to be born". 34

A particularly modern feature of The Nightwatches is its
treatment of drama. Bonaventura employs the terms "tragi-comedy" and "farce" (p. 33) to point out that the classic concept of tragedy with its three unities and a defined moral universe has no meaning in the world as he constructs it. Two plays are offered in the novel — the story of Don Juan, performed as puppet theatre (IV), and the poet's rejected tragedy *Man*. In both plays, the figure of the fool dominates, acting as an agent who strips away the masks of existence such as pretensions of the intellect and feelings of love and sorrow. In IV, Harlequin explains that it is useless to take life seriously, because "in the last analysis life is a comedy in which Harlequin alone can play a decent role because he recognizes the play for what it is:— a farce" (p. 40). In VIII, the poet substitutes the Greek chorus for a buffoon, a "tragic clown" — tragic because he lives a senseless existence and is aware of the fact, and a fool because he mocks his knowledge and thereby expresses his freedom. The puppet play is "sublimely unmotivated...although we stupid creatures love to supply causal explanations for everything..." (p. 41), and the poet's tragedy "will be funny enough to kill the audience with laughter no matter how serious the poet intended it to be" (p. 84). Moreover, the buffoon wants to make sure that in the poet's tragedy, "man will reach only blindness, and not transfiguration somewhere
in a sub-plot" (p. 86). His role is to turn tragedy into
tragi-comedy in the modern sense.

This is essentially the role now attributed to the
modern playwright. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, for example,
explains:

The universe for me is chaos. The world (hence
the stage which represents the world) is for me
something monstrous, a riddle of misfortunes which
must be accepted but before which one must not 35
capitulate.

For him, comedy supposes an unformed world, a world turned
upside down and about to fold. Tragedy, on the other hand,
presupposes guilt, despair, vision and a sense of res­
ponsibility, but these concepts are absurd in a world that
is merely appearance and has no value - comedy alone is a
suitable dramatic medium, and laughter is man's only
possible response to the riddle of existence. In laughter,
man's freedom becomes manifest. Consequently, Dürrenmatt
sees in the evolution of the tragic hero a trend toward
comedy. Analogously, the fool becomes more and more of a
tragic figure.

The nature of the modern playwright's laughter is
best explained by Samuel Beckett in his novel Watt (1953),
as follows:

...only three I think need detain us, I mean
the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless. They
 correspond to successive...excoriations of the
understanding...the bitter laugh laughs at that
which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The
hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well well. But the mirthless laugh is the diabolic laugh, down the snout...It is the laugh of laughs...the laugh laughing at the laugh...

The modern playwright invites the audience to laugh with him at the deluded antics of his characters on the stage, and Bonaventura also employs all three forms of this laughter. The bitter and the hollow laugh are inherent in the irony and the satire that permeate The Nightwatches, and the mirthless laugh is the only response and the only hope left to Bonaventura's characters in a world that is void - the watchman advises Don Juan to survive world history until the last act, and to stand on the last mountain peak and to amuse himself "by whistling and stomping at the whole farce" (p. 33). In the eleventh nightwatch, the watchman discusses the nature of laughter and concludes, "Let me have laughter for the rest of my life and I shall endure."

There are other similarities especially between Bonaventura and Beckett. Both employ the figure of the fool, but while Bonaventura draws from the sources of his day and uses a Harlequin and a buffoon, Beckett, in Waiting for Godot, models his two clowns Vladimir and Estragon on more contemporary sources - the two are vaudeville characters with unsuitable bowler hats and scavenged clothes.

In The Nightwatches, the poet's tragedy seeks to hold life up to a distorting mirror to reveal "its abysses
in the furrows and wrinkles on the beautiful cheek" (p. 75) and to reveal the void beneath all appearances through the use of laughter employed by the buffoon. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is essentially similar - the play describes a universe devoid of meaning. For Beckett, "the reality we see is just a projection of our consciousness. We're habitually adapting, falsifying, faking evidence in order to adjust the human organism to the conditions of its existence". For Vladimir and Estragon experience in ignorance and pain an existence which they can neither understand nor identify. Nor can they in reality comprehend the form or essence of anything they encounter.

Bonaventura's Harlequin plays a role similar to that of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*. Both perform a dance and utter a speech which points out that God's creation is a mistake and unfinished. Lucky's speech is a tirade against science, education, and religion, and the words "for reasons unknown" predominate. Harlequin's speech seeks to point out that everything in life is no more than illusion, but he contradicts himself constantly "and after a long, ridiculous discourse finds himself back where he started" (p. 38).

Like Bonaventura's characters, Beckett's heroes are stuck in time, suspended in eternity. A world without time and space have little human significance, and it is
a world which Bonaventura constructs with the motifs of statues and of petrifaction. Both the watchman and Vladimir have been poets, and while the first is reduced to silence, the second has been reduced to rags. The watchman writes a speech explaining that man dies as soon as he is born, and Pozzo, in Waiting for Godot, concludes:

\[
\text{They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.}
\]

Beckett's play stresses his conviction that "a universe lacking a meaning, an answer, a gesture of grace not to be found in mind or body, is worthless", and we have seen that The Nightwatches express a similar conviction. However, the watchman still has his laughter. Vladimir and Estragon do not laugh, and we must assume that Beckett expects his audience to attempt the mirthless laugh in response to his depiction of existence.

Fortunately, both the views of Beckett and Bonaventura are only one aspect of modern thought. Modern exponents of "expanded consciousness" such as Teilhard de Chardin and Alan Watts, for example, consider the apprehension of Nothingness an out-moded and misdirected world-view. De Chardin traces the pattern of man's psychical and spiritual development and establishes a movement from primitive animal consciousness to reason and imagination, and he envisions an increased consciousness, a process from
within directed by an indwelling God who took charge of evolution by inserting himself into matter. This evolution should lead man to a final state of awareness which de Chardin terms "the omega point", which will place man's mind in the centre of the living universe. Alan Watts, in negating the anxious questioning of the nihilists, draws upon Zen Buddhism and Taoism to discuss a form of awareness in which the mutual interrelationship of all things and all events becomes a constant sensation in man's consciousness. For Watts, man has become a being centred in his own ego, whose nature is universal rather than individual, and has become centred in clash, conflict and discord, searching for an isolated self that does not exist, ignoring the perfection of his organism as a whole. In The Joyous Cosmology (1962), he explains:

Life is basically a gesture, but no one, no thing, is making it...For it isn't driven by anything; it just happens freely of itself...There is simply no problem of life; it is completely purposeless play - exuberance which is its own end. Basically there is the gesture. Time, space and multiplicity are complications of it. There is no reason whatever to explain it, for explanations are just another form of complexity, a new manifestation of life on top of life, of gestures gesturing.

In conclusion, it is clear that in some respects The Nightwatches is an immature work, the pose of a man angry at the world, incapable of struggling toward a positive statement about society and the nature of man
and God. His wit is often entertaining, and his stylistic devices, including the structure and the use of masks and laughter, are sometimes startling in their relationship to modern literature - but his constant process of negation hardly does justice to the world. "Writers to whom nothing is sacred, and who accordingly stop thereat, have no occasion for surprise on finding, at the end of their operation, that nothing is all they have left". Such a one-sided interpretation is unsatisfactory, and The Nightwatches extends this operation of negation to its logical and unhappy conclusion: "It's nobler to hate the world than to love it" (p. 165).

The specific modernity of the novel rests in its use of modern thought and to some extent in its style. Turning away from the objective world and placing emphasis largely on the mind with its dangerous dichotomy of intellect and imagination, Bonaventura was caught in illusions of his own making which led just as easily to Nothingness as to meaning. The loss of contact with finite reality and concomitantly, with the integrity of the self, became a shattering and terrifying experience. As he sought to separate the All from his consciousness, he graduated toward an examination of the processes with which he perceived the world. The loss of religion was one of the prices he paid. Moreover, he was caught in an endless
game - he could construct anything he pleased, and yet he could not point at a living truth. Beckett's tramps, when introduced on the stage, became an international sensation. The universe they portray, and man's condition therein, was explored some hundred and seventy years ago by the watchman as he made his nightly rounds.
FOOTNOTES

1. The Nightwatches went at first unnoticed except by E.T.A. Hoffmann, who attributed authorship to the philosopher Schelling. After a reprinted edition in 1877, the mystery of the author became a focal point of scholarly criticism. E.T.A Hoffmann was considered a likely candidate (R.M. Meyer, "Nachtwachen von Bonaventura", in Euphorion, X, 1903). In 1909, F. Schultz, in his Der Verfasser der N.v.B.: Untersuchungen zur deutschen Romantik, destroyed previous authorship arguments and advocated F.G. Wetzel (1779-1819) by setting up parallels between The Nightwatches and Wetzel's other works. In 1912, E. Frank ("Clemens Brentano, Nachtwachen von Bonaventura", GRM, IV) used philological techniques similar to those of Schultz and attributed authorship to Clemens Brentano, and in 1921, Karl Hofmann, in his Prague dissertation Zur Verfasserfrage der Nachtwachen, also ascribed the work to Brentano, discussing stylistic parallels between the two writers to plead his cause. However, the authorship of The Nightwatches will remain a mystery unless some direct evidence is found. More recent scholars avoid the question of the author and instead deal with the content of the novel.

2. Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura (Munich, 1960), p. 146. (All subsequent page references in parenthesis will refer to this translation.)

3. Morse Peckham, in his "Toward a Theory of Romanticism", PMLA, LXVI, March 1951, points out that since Descartes' times, the universe was seen as a perfectly running machine. God gave it laws, set it in motion, and retired from it. In this mechanism, all possible events and realities were realized from the very beginning, leaving no room for adjustment or change.


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The gypsy - the visionary - my father's grave.
The midnight hour struck; I wrapped myself up in my strange garb, took my pike and horn, went out into the darkness, and called out the hour after first crossing myself against evil spirits.

It was one of those eerie nights in which light and dark alternate in flashes. Wind-swept clouds winged through the sky like great monsters and the moon kept constantly vanishing and reappearing. A deathly calm reigned in the streets, but high up in the air the storm was raging like an invisible spirit.

I didn't mind at all and smiled at the lonely echo of my steps. Surrounded by sleepers, I felt like the prince in the tale of the enchanted city where a demon had turned every living thing into stone, or like the sole survivor of a world-wide plague or flood.

The last comparison made me shiver and I was glad to discover a single dim lamp still burning high above
the city in a solitary attic.

I knew who lived up there - a ruined poet who worked only at night when all his creditors (everybody except the Muses) were asleep.

I couldn't resist haranguing him as follows:

"You, stalking around up there...I know you well because I used to be like you. But I gave it all up for an honest trade which affords me a living and which isn't without its own poetry once you get used to it. I've been put in your way as a kind of satirical Stentor, to interrupt the dreams of immortality which you're spinning up there with reminders about time and change, every hour on the hour. We both keep watch by night, but it's too bad that your hours bring no profit at all in these cold prosaic days while mine yield at least enough to keep me alive. When I wrote poetry in the night like you, I had to starve like you and sang to deaf ears...which I still do now, except I get paid for it. Oh, friend poet: whoever seeks to survive in this age must not write poetry! And if you were born to sing and just can't live without it, become a watchman like me and at least they'll let you sing without starving you to death. Goodnight, brother poet."

I looked up once more and glimpsed the posture of his shadow against the wall, one hand clutching his hair
and the other a sheet of paper from which he was probably reciting his claim to glory.

I blew my horn, shouted out the time to him as loud as I could, and went on my way.

Wait! There a sick man lies awake, dreaming feverish dreams like the poet.

The man was an incurable freethinker, facing his final hour as staunchly as Voltaire. I can see him through a crack in the shutter: pale and calm, he stares into the void which he must soon enter to sleep a dreamless sleep forever. The roses of life have left his cheeks, but they are blooming in the faces of the three handsome boys around him. In childish ignorance, the youngest threatens the pale countenance because it no longer smiles at him as it once did. The other two stand looking on earnestly, unable yet to sense the presence of death in their fresh young lives.

The young wife, however, her hair wild and her beautiful breasts bare, gazes despairingly into the black abyss, now and then mechanically wiping the sweat from the dying man's cold brow.

Burning with rage, a priest stands nearby, holding up a cross to convert the freethinker. His words swell like a tide as he paints the beyond in furious strokes - not the beautiful dawn of a new day, not unfolding blossoms
and angels, but the flames and pits and all the horrors of Dante's Inferno, like a painting by Hell Breughel.

In vain! The dying man remains mute and firm. With a terrible calm he sees one leaf after the other fall from the tree of his life and feels the cold rind of death rise higher and higher toward his heart.

The night wind rattled the decayed shutters and whistled through my hair like an approaching spirit of death. I shuddered: as if healed by a miracle, the sick man suddenly cast around the room a vigorous glance that betrayed a new, more intense life. This swift brilliant surge of the fading flame, certain harbinger of near death, casts a lustrous glow on the night-scene before the dying man and illuminates, for a moment, its poetic, vernal world of faith and poetry - the twin gleam of a Coreggio night which blends the earthly and the heavenly into a divine whole.

By his firm denial of all higher things, the dying man now provoked a dramatic scene. The enraged priest cast thunder and lightning into his soul and in desperation conjured up a flaming picture of hell itself in the man's last hour. But the victim just smiled and shook his head.

At that moment, I was certain of his continuation, for only a mortal creature fears annihilation while the immortal soul can freely sacrifice itself, just as Indian
women hurl themselves into fire and dedicate themselves to immolation.

As he watched this, the priest was seized by a frenzy, and since mere description seemed useless, he now acted the Devil in the flesh, a role that fitted him well. He played with great virtuosity, genuinely demonic in the grand style, far superior to the shallow manners of the modern Devil.

This was too much for the sick man. He turned away sullenly and looked at the three spring roses standing at his bed-side. Glowing love blazed in his heart for the last time. A blush lit his pale face like a memory. He asked for his children, kissed them with great effort, and then dropped his heavy head on the swelling breast of his wife. Breathing a low, "Aaah..." which seemed to express sensual delight rather than pain, he died lovingly in love's embrace.

True to his satanic role, the priest thundered into the corpse's ear, acting in accordance with the belief that a dead man's hearing remains sensitive for some time, and swore in his own name that the Devil would carry away not only the soul, but also the body of the sinner.

With that, he rushed out into the street. I had become confused and in my delusion really believed he was the Devil and jabbed my pike against his chest as he tried
to get past. "Go to the Devil!" he snorted. At that, I gathered my wits and said, "Pardon me, Your Reverence, but in a moment of madness I took you for the Devil and therefore set my pike against your heart to save myself from you. Forgive me this time."

He stormed away.

Back in the room, the scene was more peaceful now. The beautiful wife cradled her beloved in her arms as if he were asleep. She seemed unaware of his death yet, thinking perhaps that sleep would give him new life - a noble thought not altogether inaccurate in a higher sense. The children knelt solemnly at the bed-side; only the youngest son was trying to wake his father, while the mother silently called him with a glance and laid her hand on his curly head.

The scene was too moving - I turned away to miss the moment her illusion vanished.

In a low voice, I sang a requiem beneath the window to banish with more gentle tones the priest's burning words from the still listening ear. Music is a friend to the dying - it is the first sweet sound of the next world, and the Muse of song is a mystic sister of Mercy, who leads the way to heaven.

In the same way, Jakob Boehme fell asleep forever to the sounds of distant music that nobody but he could hear as he lay dying.
SECOND NIGHTWATCH

Again night called me to my nocturnal round. The streets in front of me were deserted except for an occasional merry flash of lightning, while in the far distance there was a mumbling like an unintelligible spell.

My poet had quenched his lamp, for the sky was lit up with lights which he thought more poetic and also cheaper. Leaning out of his window high above, he stared into the thunderbolts, his white nightshirt open at the throat, his black hair bristling. I remembered similar poetic moments of my own, moments of inner storm when the lips would speak thunder and the hand would seek lightning instead of the quill to write words of fire. Then the mind speeds from pole and pole and flies on wings across the universe, but the words which it finally utters are a childish babbling and the hand quickly tears up the page.

I used to banish this poetic demon, who in the end
always gloated over my defeat, with the incantations of music. Now I usually blast a few discordant notes on my horn with the same effect.

I would like to recommend the sound of my watchman's horn as an antidote against the poetic urge to all those who fear this disease like a fever. My preventative is inexpensive and of great value, since nowadays, in agreement with Plato, poetry is generally considered a delirium, the only difference being that the old Greek called it a curse from the gods, not from the madhouse.

Whatever the case, poetry has become a dubious trade at best because there are so few lunatics as compared with such an overflow of sane people who among themselves can fill up all trades, including poetry. Under such conditions a true madman like myself can't find a job anywhere. So I now merely skirt around poetry, meaning I have become a humorist, a profession for which a watchman has all the time and opportunity in the world.

Perhaps I ought to demonstrate by work as a humorist, but there is no need, since at the moment the world is concerned with vocalization rather than vocation. Thus, we have poets who have no calling, although they feel called upon - I'll leave it at that.

A moment ago, a flash of lightning singed the air, and I caught sight of three carnival masks slinking past
the wall of the churchyard. I challenged them, but black night had already fallen again and I saw nothing except a glowing tail and fiery eyes, and I heard the distant thunder merge with a voice nearby like an accompaniment to a Don Giovanni aria. "Mind your own business, you night owl, and don't meddle with the work of spirits."

This was too much for me and I hurled my pike in the direction of the voice; lightning flashed again, but the three had vanished into the air like Macbeth's witches.

"Spirits," I shouted after them in anger, hoping they would hear me, "You don't accept me as one of your kind, and yet I've been a poet, a minstrel, a puppet director, and a few other spirited things one after the other. I wish I had known your spirits during life - provided they are already out of it - to see if mine was equal to yours; or has death given you an extra touch of spirit, as sometimes happens to great men who grow famous only after their deaths, and whose writing gathers spirit by lying around, just as wine gathers spirit with age?"

I had almost reached the house of the excommunicated freethinker. A pale light shone out into the night through the open door, merging strangely with the lightning, and the rumbling from the far mountains grew louder as if the spirit realm were about to enter the drama.
The corpse was stretched out in the hall as custom demanded. A few unconsecrated candles burned around it because the priest, of diabolical memory, had refused to bless them. The corpse was smiling, perhaps at the priest, or at his own foolishness in denying an afterlife, and the smile gleamed like a distant reflection of life across his rigid features.

At the end of a long dark hall, in an alcove hung in black, the three boys and the wan mother knelt motionless before an altar — Niobe with her children — praying desperately to snatch the body and the soul from the Devil in spite of the priest.

The brother of the dead man, a soldier with a calm faith in heaven and in his own courage which could face even the Devil, was the only person standing watch at the coffin. He stood placidly and expectantly, looking alternately into the still face of the deceased and into the lightning which cut malevolently into the flicker of the candles. His unsheathed saber rested on the dead body, and with its cross-shaped pommel it seemed to me at once a worldly and a clerical weapon.

The silence of the grave reigned everywhere, and except for the distant mumbling of the storm and the crackling of burning candles I heard nothing.

So it remained, until the slow booming cathedral bell

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announced midnight – then the winds high above suddenly whipped along the storm cloud like a nightmare until its winding-sheet had covered the whole sky.

The candles around the coffin went out, thunder pealed angrily like a rebellious power, rousing even the heaviest sleeper, and the clouds spat flame after flame, periodically and brutally illuminating the dead face.

I saw the soldier's sabre flash in the night as he prepared for battle.

Just in time – the air bubbled and the three Macbeth witches were suddenly visible again, as if the storm had dragged them along by the hair. The lightning flashed into contorted masks, snake hair – into all of the hellish masquerade.

And now the Devil dragged me in by a hair too, and as the three came sweeping up the street, I joined them. They seemed startled by an uninvited fourth member, as if they were up to no good.

"What the hell? Can the Devil walk a straight path as well?" I laughed wildly. "In that case, don't fret that I've caught you on a crooked one. I'm on your side, brothers. Let me join you."

They really seemed embarrassed. One of them gasped, "God preserve us!" and crossed himself. I thought this was rather odd and said, "Brother Nick, don't step out of
character like that or I'll lose all faith in you and mistake you for a saint or at least for someone who's been baptised. But the more I think about it, the more I feel like congratulating you for finally digesting the cross and developing the talent to change at will from a born devil into a saint."

My manner of speaking gave me away. They turned on me and threatened me in truly clerical tones with excommunication and the like if I stood in their way much longer.

"Don't worry," I said. "Up to now I never really believed in the Devil, but now I've seen the light and I'm certain you know your trade well. Don't let me disturb you. No watchman can handle both hell and the Church at once."

They swept away into the house and I followed them diffidently.

The scene was appalling. Lightning and darkness alternated in flashes. First it was bright and I saw the three of them struggle for the coffin while the sabre flashed in the hand of the steadfast soldier and the dead man looked on unmoved, his pale rigid face like a mask. Then it turned deep night except for the pale shimmer from the alcove in the background where the kneeling mother and her children laboured in desperate prayers.
The battle raged silently, but suddenly the sky crashed as if Satan had gained the upper hand. The lightning ceased and dense night settled for a long time. But soon, two figures came rushing through the door and I saw, in the light of their glinting eyes, that they were really carrying a corpse.

Cursing to myself, I stood in front of the door; the hall was black and lifeless, and I thought that the valiant soldier too had at least a broken neck.

Then the cloud discharged itself completely: an ecstatic sheet of lightning lit the air, a raised torch that would not die. And I saw the soldier standing calmly and coldly beside the coffin, and the corpse smiling as before but - what a surprise! A demonic mask without a body leered beside the dead man's face, and a scarlet river of blood coloured the freethinker's shroud.

Shuddering, I wrapped my mantle tighter, forgot altogether to blow my horn and sing out the time, and fled toward my hut.
THIRD NIGHTWATCH

We watchmen and poets care little about man's daytime activities; nowadays it is common knowledge: men are much too prosaic when they are at their most active and become interesting only in their dreams.

Consequently, I received only incoherent reports about the outcome of the foregoing events, and I shall have to repeat them equally incoherently.

It was the head which puzzled most heads since it was no ordinary head, but the Devil's very own. The law, faced with this head, dismissed the case saying that heads lay outside its jurisdiction. It was indeed a confounded business and there were arguments as to whether the soldier should be charged with a criminal offense since he had committed manslaughter, or whether he should be canonized since the victim was the Devil. This, in turn, led to more controversy: for several months nobody desired absolution,
denying the very existence of the Devil and citing the head, which had meanwhile been taken into custody, as proof. From their pulpits, the priests preached themselves hoarse claiming that the Devil could live without a head, a theory which they sought to support with a variety of evidence from their own experience.

No-one could make head or tail of the head. It had a physiognomy of iron, but a padlock on one side invited the suspicion that the Devil might have a second face hidden beneath the first, a face perhaps reserved for special holidays. Unfortunately, the key to the lock, and thus to the second face, was missing. Who knows what alarming observations might have been made about the Devil's countenance - but without a key only the standard features portrayed in any wood-cut were available for study.

Amidst all this confusion and uncertainty about the head's authenticity, a decision was made to send it to Doctor Gall in Vienna so that he might examine it and establish conclusively the presence of satanic protuberances. But now the Church entered the fray and, declaring Herself alone qualified to make decisions, ordered the head be handed over to Her safekeeping, and soon rumours spread that it had vanished. Several gentlemen of the clergy insisted that they had seen the Devil himself steal his
head at a lonely hour of the night.

Thus, the case remained as good as unsolved, especially as the only man who might have explained the mystery, namely the priest who excommunicated the free-thinker, had suddenly died of a stroke. So at least rumour and the Church had it - for nobody had actually seen the corpse as it had been buried quickly on account of the hot weather.

The story plagued me considerably during my watch because until now I had believed only in a poetic Devil, never a real one. And as far as the poetic one is concerned, it's unfortunate that we've neglected him: instead of accepting a principle of absolute evil, we cultivate the virtuous villains of Iffland's and Kotzebue's dramas, in which the Devil appears human and human beings demonic. A tottering world distrusts all absolutes and all that can stand on its own, and thus we tolerate neither true joy nor true seriousness, neither ultimate virtue nor ultimate evil. The character of our age is stitched together like a fool's jacket, and what is worst - the fool inside tries to be serious.

Absorbed in these thoughts, I had come to a halt in a corner, in front of a statue of St. Crispin, who was wearing a grey cloak like mine. Suddenly a man and a woman approached and almost leaned against me thinking I was the
blind, deaf, and dumb statue.

The man worked himself into a rhetorical lather and ranted in the same breath about love and constancy, while the woman hesitated convincingly and wrung her hands artfully. Now the man called upon me audaciously and swore he would be as constant and faithful as the stone saint. At this, the rogue in me awoke, and as the man clutched my cloak as if to swear by me, I shook myself slightly in spite. Although they were both startled, the lover recovered quickly, saying that probably my foundation had caved in and that I had lost balance somewhat.

Imitating at least ten characters from the latest dramas and tragedies, he then swore by his soul to be faithful; finally he raved like Don Giovanni in the play he had seen that evening, and concluded significantly, "May this marble statue appear at our dinner tonight if I break my vow to love you always."

I made a mental note of this and further overheard her describing the house and a secret spring on the door so he could open it, while at the same time she settled on midnight for dinner.

I arrived there half an hour early, found the house, the door, and the hidden spring, and crept quietly up several flights of backstairs until I reached a gloomy hall. Light fell through two glass doors; I approached and looked through one of them and saw a creature in a
dressing-gown in front of a desk. At first I couldn't
decide whether it was a man or a clock-work figure — all
traces of humanity were eradicated leaving only an expression
of too much work. This creature sat writing, surrounded
with documents, like a Laplander buried alive. It seemed
to me as if he wished to experience the activity and the
life of the dead while still alive, for all passion and
sympathy had been wiped from his brow — he was a puppet,
lifeless and erect in a coffin made of documents full of
bookworms.

An invisible thread was pulled, and the fingers
clacked, grasped a pen, and signed three papers. I looked
closer: three death warrants. Justinian and the Institutes
lay beside him on his desk like an image of his puppet
soul personified.

I could hardly criticize, but this frozen judge
reminded me of the guillotine which cleaves without will,
and his desk of an execution yard on which he had, with
three strokes of the pen, destroyed three lives in a
minute. God, if I had the choice, I'd rather be the living
sinner than this dead servant of the law.

I was even more incensed when I saw his likeness,
sculpted in wax, sitting motionless in front of him as
if one lifeless original were not enough, but required a
double to display this dead wonder from two different sides.
Now the woman already mentioned entered, and the puppet, seemingly afraid, took off his cap and placed it beside him.

"Haven't you gone to bed yet?" she said. "What kind of life you are leading...too much work kills the imagination, you know!"

"Imagination? What do you mean?" he asked in surprise. "I can hardly understand the new jargon you use these days."

"Because you have no interest in higher things; not even in the tragic!"

"Tragic? Why, of course!" he answered smugly, "Look here...I'm having three criminals executed."

"Good grief, what sentiments!"

"What? I was hoping to please you with this because you read those books in which everybody dies all the time. I've even set the execution date for your birthday!"

"God, my nerves!"

"Oh no. Lately you've been having fainting spells so often I'm scared before it even happens!"

"Well, there's nothing you can do to help me. Just go away, please. Go to bed!"

The conversation was finished and he left, drying the sweat from his brow. Diabolically enough, I now resolved to create a situation in which his wife would stand accused in his court, so that he might gain jurisdiction over her
again.

Before long, Mars came creeping to his Venus. Since I was born with a limp and a certain homeliness, I lacked nothing to play the role of Vulcan except a golden net, which I hoped to replace with a few golden truths and moral maxims. At first the performance before me went tolerably well; the youth sinned only against poetry with his tendency toward fleshly descriptions: he painted a heaven full of nymphs, and teasing Cupids on the canopy of the bed on which he lusted to sport, and he strewed the path leading in that direction with roses which he scattered profusely in elegant conceits, avoiding the thorns, which now and again wound his feet, with frivolous leaps.

But as this wretch threw himself totally into a poetic fury, and as he rolled down the green silk curtains above the doors to turn the play into a bedroom farce, I hurriedly employed my poetic antidote - I blew my horn piercingly. At the same time, I leaped onto an empty pedestal reserved for a statue of Justice still being modelled, and stood silent and still.

The dreadful sound roused the two lovers from their poetry and the husband from his bed, and all three came rushing in through two different doors.

"The marble statue." cried the lover and quivered.

"Ah, my statue of Justice," said the husband. "It's finally completed. What a lovely surprise, darling."

"You're making a bad mistake," I said. "Justice is
still over at the sculptor's workshop. I'm just standing in temporarily so the pedestal won't be empty at important moments like this. Of course it's only an emergency measure because the real statue is marble-cold and has no heart, while I'm a poor wretch who's gone soft with sentimentality and who's occasionally inclined toward the poetic. However, I am good enough for ordinary house-calls and I can be a marble guest in an emergency. Such guests have the advantage over others in that they don't eat or catch fire where it could be harmful, while the others disrupt the household by catching fire very easily, much to the sorrow of husbands."

"What is this?" stammered the husband.

"That stones are starting to speak, you mean? That's the frivolity of our age. One should never talk of the Devil, I always say, but our young men of the world ignore this while trying to seduce the weaker sex and display their heroic side. I took this man at his word, although I belong out in the market place, as St. Crispin in my grey cloak."

My God, what is this!" the husband asked in fear. "This is out of order and unheard of."

"Certainly, for a lawyer! St. Crispin was actually a shoemaker, but he became a thief out of sheer holiness and an overdose of virtue and stole leather to make shoes
for the poor. What is your verdict? Tell me. I see no solution except to hang him first and make him a saint afterwards. And adulterers, who after all break the law to keep peace in the home, should be dealt with in the same fashion, their motives are good, and that's the most important point. If it weren't for family friends gifted with a fine moral sense which has turned them into lechers, many wives would soon nag their husbands to death. There...I've touched upon the main issue, and in the name of God let us begin our inquisition. But I see the two heretics are unconscious. So let us adjourn for the moment."

"Heretics? I don't see any," said the husband dully. "That one over there is my other half."

"Fine. We'll deal with her first. Other half, you said? That's always the half that supplies the cross and agony of marriage. And merely half a cross is actually an exemplary union. If you are the half that provides joy and blessing, your matrimony must be heaven on earth."

"Joy and blessing!" he sighed deeply.

"Please, no maudlin marginal notes, my friend. Let us now deal with the other accused who is likewise lying unconscious since meeting a talking statue. If we are allowed to plead for leniency for people with arguments based on their own ethics, I'd like to be this man's
attorney, to protect him from a beheading, a fate which our Carolina would surely insist upon. Besides, to execute such wretches is like beheading effigies, since these poor souls lacks a good head to begin with."

"You mean to say Carolina has suddenly become so cruel?" he asked, very confused now. "A few moments ago she shuddered when I mentioned the word execution."

"I don't blame you for mixing up the two Carolinas," I replied, "Because your living one is easily mistaken for the legal one - neither is the type to turn earth into heaven. In fact, I'd almost say that the one made of flesh is worse than the one made of books - at least there is no talk of lifelong torture in the second one."

"Good God, this can't go on," the husband said, seeming to wake up all of a sudden. "I'm not sure if I'm waking or sleeping, and I'd have to pinch myself to make sure, but I could swear I heard the watchman a while ago."

"Yes, by God," I cried. "You just woke me up - you called me by name. Thank heavens I wasn't standing too high, on a roof somewhere, or on the crest of some poetic inspiration. Otherwise I would've fallen and broken my neck for sure. Luckily I'm no higher than Justice is supposed to be, and I'm glad to find myself still a man among men. Don't look at me like that...I'll explain. I'm the watchman of this city, and at the same time I'm a
sleep-walker — there's room for both in most people — and when I'm working, I often have the urge for sleep-walking along steep gables and in other hazardous areas, and that's how I must have reached this pedestal of Themis. Someday my desperate inclination will cost me my neck, but in the meantime it helps me to protect the good citizens of this city from all sorts of theft precisely because I crawl and climb into every corner. It's the ones who work in the open, forcing closed shutters with crow-bars, who are the least dangerous of crooks. This observation excuses me, I think, and I'll therefore say goodnight."

I left the surprised husband and the two lovers, who had regained consciousness. I have no idea what they talked about after I left.
FOURTH NIGHTWATCH

The burial chapel of the old gothic cathedral is one of my favourite haunts during my nightwatches. Here I sit by the dim glow of the single eternal flame and often think of myself as a night spirit. The place invites meditation, and tonight it leads me into my own history. More or less out of boredom, I am leafing through the crazy and confused book of my life.

The very first page is already questionable, and by the time we reach the fifth page, we are no longer talking about my birth, but about treasure-hunting. I'm looking at mystic Cabbalistic signs and at some wood-cuts depicting a cobbler who wanted to give up shoe-making and learn how to make gold instead. Thin and yellow, her hair matted and tousled, a gypsy woman beside him instructs him in how to dig for treasure, hands him a divining rod, and reveals the exact location where he is to lift the treasure three days later.

But tonight, I'd rather study the wood-cuts than the
text, and so I turn to the

Second Wood-cut.

And here is our cobbler again, without the gypsy woman, and this time the artist has succeeded in making his face more expressive. Its strong features show that the man did not stop at the bottom, but went beyond his feet and let things go to his head. This strikes me as a satirical comment on the blunders of genius and explains why a man who could have made good hats turns out bad shoes, or vice versa if the example is stood on its head.

The background shows a crossroad, and black lines convey an image of night while a zig-zag against the sky suggests a flash of lightning. It is clear that the average honest workman would have fled such surroundings, but our shoemaker is untroubled. He has lifted a massive chest from a deep hole, and has indeed already opened it. But oh heavens, only a collector of curiosities would call its contents a treasure - for I myself am inside, without any possessions, but a ready-made cosmopolite nevertheless.

Our treasure-hunters's reaction to his find is not recorded on the wood-cut, for the artist had no desire to reach beyond the limits of his art.

Third Wood-cut.

Here a shrewd commentator is required. - I am sitting on one book while reading another. My foster father is busy
with a shoe, and at the same time he seems engrossed in some private meditations about eternity. The book on which I'm sitting contains Hans Sachs' shrovetide plays, and the one I'm reading is Jakob Boehme's Aurora. These two are the kernel of our library because both authors were competent shoemakers and poets at the same time.

Since the wood-cut deals mostly with my own precocity, I'll go no farther in my explanations. Instead, I'll quietly read the accompanying third chapter to myself. It's written by my cobbler who recorded my life as best as he could, and it begins as follows:

"I often have my doubts about Crossroads (according to custom, I was named after the place where I was found). I can't fit him into any of the usual categories, for there is something exuberant in him, like there was in old Boehme, who started by looking at shoes and ended up in mystery. Crossroads is just like that - ordinary things seems to him very extraordinary, things like the sun-rise for example, which after all takes place every day and which is thought of by most people as a normal occurrence. Or the stars in the sky, or the flowers of the earth: he's sure they talk to each other and get up to all sorts of nonsense together. Not so long ago, he confused me by asking about a shoe. First he asked me about the different parts of a shoe and when I answered him about each material,
he led me higher and higher, at first into the natural sciences as he traced the leather to the cow, then even farther until I found myself with my shoe high in the realms of theology, at which point he told me straight that I was a bungler in my trade because I couldn't answer his final questions. And he often calls flowers a secret language which we haven't yet learned to read, and the same with varicoloured pebbles and rocks. He hopes to learn their language someday and has promised to tell me some marvellous things in it. Often he listens quite secretly to gnats and flies as they buzz in the sun because he believes they're discussing important matters of which no man is yet aware. When he babbles these things to the apprentices and other workers in the shop, they laugh at him, but he very seriously calls them deaf and blind because they can't hear or see the world around them.

Now he sits day and night over his Jakob Boehme and Hans Sachs, two strange shoemakers who confused everybody even in their own day and age. One thing is very clear - Crossroads is no ordinary child. After all, I didn't come to him by ordinary means.

I'll never forget the evening when I fell asleep over my three-legged last, disappointed at my low earnings - that it was three-footed is not without significance, I've been told - and dreamed about finding a treasure in a locked
chest, but I was told not to open this chest until I was awake. It was all so clear and obvious, since dreaming and sleeping were so clearly differentiated, that I couldn't get it out of my head, and finally I found myself a gypsy to help me find the treasure.

Everything went well. I found the chest which I had dreamed about, made sure I was really awake, and then opened it. But instead of the gold I expected, I found this prodigy in the earth.

At first I was disconcerted because a living treasure should always be accompanied by an inanimate one if it is to make you rich. Besides, the boy was stark naked and laughed about it when I stared at him. But when I thought it over, I felt there was more to all this than met the eye, and I carefully carried my treasure home."

So much for our honest shoemaker - when suddenly I was interrupted in my reading by an odd spectacle. A tall man, wrapped in a cape, stepped toward me through the vault and stopped at a gravestone. Silently, I crept behind a nearby column just as he threw off the cape, and I saw a dark and sullen face, with a pale-grey Southern complexion, behind black hair tumbling deep over the forehead.

Invariably, I approach a foreign, unusual person with the same feelings as I have on waiting for the curtain to rise on a Shakespeare play. I'm most impressed when the
performance, like the one I was watching, is a tragedy; besides true seriousness I like only tragic humour, and fools like in *King Lear* — only these are truly bold and great in their laughter, which stands above concern for ordinary humanity. On the other hand, I thoroughly detest the tiny wits and sentimental hacks who struggle only with family dramas and never dare, like Aristophanes, to mock the gods themselves, and I equally detest the maudlin souls who, instead of destroying one life to raise mankind above life itself, deal only with minor sufferings and even supply their tormented characters with a doctor to prescribe the exact degree of torture so that the poor wretch, although half-broken on the wheel, might still escape with his life — as if one man's life were more important than mankind, which goes beyond existence. Life is hardly more than the first act, hardly more than the Inferno of the *Divine Comedy* which man traverses in pursuit of his ideal.

The man who knelt near me on the gravestone, a gleaming sharp dagger in his hand drawn from a beautifully worked sheath, seemed of the truly tragic stuff, and I was chained to his presence.

I had no desire to sound the alarm if he did something serious. Neither did I want to play the confidant who in the fifth act at a certain cue rushes out from behind the curtain to stop the hero's arm. His life seemed to me like
the artfully wrought sheath in his hand concealing the dagger, or like Cleopatra's basket with roses hiding the deadly poisonous snake - when the drama of life writes itself, one should not interfere even with its catastrophe.

When I was a puppet director, I owned a King Saul who resembled this man to a hair. The same mechanical gestures, the same wooden, antique style which distinguishes puppets from live actors, who don't even know these days how to die properly on our stages.

The play had nearly reached the final curtain - the man's arm was poised for the death-dealing blow. But all of a sudden he froze and knelt on the stone like a statue. Only an inch of space remained between the dagger's tip and the man's breast, which it was supposed to pierce, and death crowded close upon life. But time seemed suspended, refusing to march onward, and the one moment between life and death seemed turned into an eternity beyond all changes.

I grew afraid and glanced aghast at the face of the cathedral clock, and there the hand pointed still and straight at midnight. I felt paralyzed, and the world around me was frozen and dead. The man on the grave, the church with its lifeless stone columns and monuments, its carved, kneeling knights and saints - all seemed to be waiting for a new time, for a new life in a new age to animate them.

It passed - the clock freed itself, the hand slid
forward, and the first stroke of midnight boomed slowly through the deserted arches. It seemed as if the man had come alive through the clock. The dagger clattered to the stone floor and shattered.

"A curse on this catalepsy," he said coldly, as if he were used to this disease. "It never lets me finish the blow." He stood up and turned to go as if nothing had happened.

"I like you," I cried. "You've got poise in your life, and genuine tragic serenity. I've always loved the classic dignity of men who hated words where action was more suitable, and a death leap like the one for which you were preparing is no small gesture - it's the kind of tour de force that you reserve for the very end."

"If you can help me jump," he said morosely, "speak up. If not, don't strain yourself with compliments and opinions. Too much has been written about the art of living, but I'm still looking for a volume on the art of dying. In vain! I cannot die."

"If only some of our most popular writers had your talent for immortality!" I cried out. "Their work could remain ephemeral while they themselves could be immortal and could continue their transitory writings eternally to remain popular until Judgement Day. Unfortunately, their hour comes much too soon, and they must die together with their
May-flies. My friend, if only I could lift you right now to the level of a Kotzebue, your work would never die and even when everything comes to an end, your achievements could be a Hogarthian tail-piece to everything that has ever been said, and time could light his last pipe to a scene from your last play and could then skip enthusiastically over into eternity."

The man tried to exit quietly, without launching into a resounding tirade like a bad actor, but I grasped his hand and said, "Don't be in such a hurry, my friend. It's not necessary because you have so much time, provided that time applies to your case since, judging from your words, I think you are the Wandering Jew, punished to live forever among the dying because he mocked eternity. You are grieved, you unique man, perhaps because the thread of your life cannot be severed by the hand of time, which whirls around the cosmic clock-face like a sharp sword, never ceasing to murder. You cannot die until the clock itself is destroyed. But think of the bright side of your situation. It will be very funny and worth your while to be the only spectator to watch this tragi-comedy, this history of the world, until the last act. On the Last Day, as the only survivor of the flood, you can stand on the last mountain peak, amuse yourself by whistling and stomping at the whole farce, and finally hurl yourself into the
abyss, wild and angry like a second Prometheus."

"I'll whistle all right," the man said defiantly," if only the author of the play hadn't saddled me with a leading role - I'll never forgive him for that."

"All the better," I laughed. "We'll have a revolt in the play. The hero rebels against the playwright. After all, it happens often enough in the little comedies all imitating the great comedy of life. In the end, the hero grows larger than the author intended so that the latter can no longer control him. Eternal wanderer, I'd like to hear your story, so I can kill myself with laughter. I always laugh heartily during a profound tragedy, just as I occasionally weep during a good comedy because the truly great and profound must be approached from both extremes at once."

"I understand you, clown," the man said. "Right now, I feel mad enough to laugh and tell you the whole story. But by God, a single frown from you and I'll stop immediately."

"Don't worry, my friend," I said. "I'll help you laugh." He sat down among a marble family of knights praying at a grave and began.

"You'll agree it's tedious to tell one's life story leisurely from chapter to chapter. I prefer action and so I'll present it in the form of a puppet play complete
with Harlequin — it'll make my tale more graphic and amusing.

First we have a Mozart symphony, played by amateur village musicians. This fits in very well with a ruined life and elevates the mind by means of noble thoughts, while at the same time one wishes the fiddle-scraping all to hell. Now Harlequin enters and excuses the director of the play who has been playing God and has given the most important roles to the actors with the least talent. He mentions that such blunders have their good points insofar as the performance will be terribly maudlin, which is the fate of all great and tragic material tackled by hack artists. He concludes his speech with some inane remarks about life and the nature of the age in general, declaring that both have degenerated from comedy into melodrama, and that one could cry rather than laugh about mankind, so that he himself has become a moral, sober buffoon appearing only in this noble genre in which he has received much applause.

Enter the puppets themselves. Two brothers without hearts embrace each other, and Harlequin laughs at the clacking of their arms and at their wooden kiss into which no life will come. One of the brothers plays the puppet perfectly, talking in stiff sentences with long, dry periods in a perfect demonstration of prose style. The other
puppet, however, would like to play a live actor and falls occasionally into poor iambics and rhymed end-syllables, and Harlequin nods his head and launches into a speech about the warmth of a puppet's feelings and about the elegant delivery of heroic poetry. In conclusion, the brothers pump each other's hand and exit. As an added attraction between acts, Harlequin dances a solo, and then Mozart is once more butchered by the villagers.

The curtain rises again. Two new puppets enter: Columbine and a page-boy who has opened a parasol over her head. She is the primadonna of the puppet troupe and, without flattering her, the formcutter's masterpiece. Her features are truly Greek with a strong tendency toward idealization. The brother who talks in prose now enters. He sees her, immediately strikes himself in the place where his heart is, and suddenly begins to gush verse, rhyming his endings and even using assonance until Columbine, completely terrified, flees off-stage with her page-boy.

He rushes after her, but since the director has committed a blunder, he collides with Harlequin who ad-libs a very cruel, ironical speech in which he explains to the distraught puppet that his creator — namely the director of the play — has no intention of giving him the lady, and that this will make for a very funny play because the actions of a melancholy fool are always the most amusing part of
a comedy - in reply, the other puppet curses and in his despair slanders even the director until the audience is in tears with laughter. But at last, he grasps at the hope of finding her, and he decides to search at least the theatre. Harlequin accompanies him.

In the third act, Columbine returns and flirts with the second brother. They sing a tender duet and exchange rings. An old, harassed Pantaloon arrives with a group of musicians who play gay music except that the notes are inaudible, which puzzles the audience. Everyone dances to the music, and Pantaloon ventures a few comments on music appreciation and defends the old tale about notes being frozen at the North-pole and thawing and becoming audible only in the warm South. The play has become very strange, and impossibly to judge either seriously or humorously - a few critics among the audience think it's utterly mad.

Finally, the two love birds go to bed, just as Harlequin and the first brother return. The puppet describes how he went from pole to pole without finding Columbine, and in despair declares he will take his own life. Harlequin opens a flap in the puppet's breast and finds to his surprise that it actually has a heart. The discovery shakes him so much that he can't help spilling out some clever ideas. He insists, for example, that everything in life,
pain as well as joy, is no more than illusion, and that such illusions are forever a secret so that the puppets never suspect themselves of being fooled and exploited, but instead consider themselves important and legitimate human beings. Excitedly, he harangues the first brother, attempting to reveal to him the true nature of puppets, but he contradicts himself constantly and after a long, ridiculous discourse finds himself back where he started.

In an aside to the audience, he laughs maliciously, then makes his exit.

In the fourth act, the two brothers meet, and as the one with the heart begins to speak, the soundless strains of the previous act can be heard accompanying his words. The brother without the heart is very confused. Harlequin joins the two and comments on love, saying that it is hardly a heroic sentiment since it doesn't contribute to the general good. He also demands that the director remove love from the rest of the play and instil higher moral values in his actors. And finally, he demands a re-examination of the human race and an urgently required overhaul of the world, and then he stubbornly insists on being told why he must play the fool in front of an unknown audience.

And now, a tragic incident is performed most ineptly. The beautiful Columbine appears, and as the brother
without the heart introduces her as his wife, the other sags to the floor clumsily and hits his wooden head against a stone. The two lovers hasten off-stage to get assistance. But Harlequin helps him up, wipes the blood from his head, and asks him quite calmly to stop breaking his head over a stone and over the whole stupid affair since there is no such thing as things in themselves. Then he praises the director for dispensing with Greek fate and introducing instead a new, moral philosophy of happy endings into the theatre.

The last act is really too absurd for words. First the musicians grind out silly waltzes to soothe the minds, and then the puppet with the heart enters and resorts to syllogisms and sophisms to convince Columbine that the director has mixed up the puppets, that her marriage is therefore a mistake, and that she belongs to him because the modern plot demands a happy ending. Columbine seems convinced, but her moral sense and her respect for the director prevent her from co-operating. He despairs and threatens to abduct her. She pushes him away contemptuously. He acts insane, batters his wooden head against the wall, and loads his verse with assonance. Finally he exits, but not before he has hurled the handsome page-boy, who is stumbling around sleepily in his night gown, into her room. He locks the door and storms away.
In a moment, he returns with his brother, who is holding a sword, and who launches a short, wooden speech, and stabs first the page-boy, then Columbine, and finally himself. The other brother stands still and wide-eyed among the three puppets now sprawling on the boards. Without saying another word, he snatches the sword and attempts to run himself through to follow the others, but at that moment the wire, pulled too energetically by the director, snaps and his arm cannot complete the thrust and dangles uselessly. At the same time, a strange voice sounds in his throat, saying, "You must live forever!"

Harlequin enters once more to comfort and calm the puppet, who is carrying on far too much, by saying that it is idiotic for a puppet to reflect about himself since he's no more than a pawn to the fits and moods of the director who can easily put him back into storage if he pleases. He comments intelligently on free will and on the madness of puppet brains, discussing the issues quite realistically - all in an effort to explain that it is useless to take things seriously, because in the last analysis life is a comedy in which Harlequin alone can play a decent role because he recognizes the play for what it is: a farce."

Here the man ceased for a moment and then blurted out wildly, "There you have the whole carnival performance
in which I've played the brother with the heart. I think it's right to carve the story into wood and to act it out accordingly - I can be as blasphemous as I please without inviting the criticism of moralists. Told my way, the tale appears sublimely unmotivated, just as it was in reality, although we stupid creatures love to supply causal explanations for everything while the director does no such thing, which accounts for the fact that he never strikes out mistaken roles like mine. For ages, I've tried to leap out of the play and escape that director, but he will not let me go no matter how inventive my attempts at escape. The worst part is my boredom, which plagues me more and more, for you must know that I've been playing this role for centuries, and that I'm one of the Italian stock characters who never leave the theatre.

I've tried in every way. First I surrendered myself to the law and confessed I was a criminal and three times a murderer. They tried me and pronounced their verdict: I was to stay alive because my defense established that I hadn't ordered the assassinations in clear and unequivocal terms, and that therefore my crime was of a mental nature outside their jurisdiction. I cursed my defense counsel, and the result was a mild slander suit, after which they let me go.

I joined the army and missed not a single battle, but
fate didn't write my name on a single bullet, and death embraced me on the battlefield amidst a thousand dying soldiers and tore his laurels to share them with me. Yes, I even had to play a hero's role in the detestable drama of life, and I cursed my immortality which frustrated me at every turn.

A thousand times I have put the poisoned goblet to my lips, and a thousand times it has fallen from my hand before I could empty it. Every midnight I step out of obscurity like a figure on a clockface, to complete the murderous blow, and every night I step back again after the last stroke, to return and disappear into eternity like the figure. If only I knew where to find the clockwork of time - I'd hurl myself into the wheels to tear it apart or to be destroyed. I go mad trying to fulfil my obsession, and in despair I hatch a thousand plans to make my death possible - and then I suddenly look deep inside myself, into a bottomless abyss in which time flows darkly like a river that never dries. And out of the black depths the word FOREVER echoes up, and I shudder and flee from myself, and yet I cannot escape."

The man ended, and I longed to give this sleepless wretch the healing draught with my own hand, the hemlock for which his fevered and red eyes longed in vain. But I was afraid that his obsession might abandon him at the
decisive moment, that at the door of death he would suddenly love life again, love it for its very transitoriness. We are made up of such paradoxes: we love life because we fear death, and we would hate to lose what we fear.

I could do nothing for him, and so I left him to his madness and his destiny.
FIFTH NIGHTWATCH

The last nightwatch had lasted a long time, with the result that I had insomnia, like the wandering stranger, and instead of snoring through the prosaic daylight hours, a habit I had copied from the Spanish, who treat day as if it were night, I was forced to stay awake and to bore myself to death in this bourgeois life, among all the wakeful sleepers.

For lack of anything better to do, I translated my wild, poetic night into clear and dull prose, I captured the life of the madman on paper, supplying some motivation and an appearance of objectivity, and had it printed, for the delight and edification of all the clever daywalkers. Actually, the writing was an attempt to put myself to sleep, and I planned to proof-read my opus during tonight's watch because I could hardly face daylight and prose combined for a second time.

Everything has worked out accordingly to plan, as
follows:

The home of Don Juan was fiery, passionate Spain, where every tree and man thrives more wantonly and where life is more fiercely colourful. Don Juan, however, seemed transplanted into this perpetual spring like a Northern glacier - he was cold and severe. Yet it seemed that sometimes an earthquake trembled beneath his feet, and men were afraid and avoided him.

His brother Don Ponce, on the other hand, was as mild as a virgin, and had a manner of speech which flowed and wreathed itself around everything so that he strolled through life as if through a magic garden wrapped in green.

The world adored him, and Juan himself did not exactly hate him - he merely resented his manner of speech, which choked all that is stark and noble in needless flourishes and excessive ornamentation in order to fashion a more delectable world, not unlike hack poets who garnish nature a second time rather than to create a new world through their own efforts.

The two lived without regard for each other, and whenever they embraced, it was as if two corpses stood supporting each other: their hearts were cold, possessed neither by love nor hatred. Ponce held the simpering mask of love in front of his face, but his hollow speeches lacked the friendly banter and roughness of brother-talk.
In reply, Don Juan grew more brittle, more reserved, and the austere North blew destruction into the mild South, and the artificial flowers shed their petals rapidly.

Fate seemed incensed at the indifference in the brothers' hearts and malignantly sowed hate and chaos in their path. Scorning love, they might reach each other as enemies.

It was in Seville, where Juan was watching a bullfight, with great boredom. His glances strayed from the arena toward the rows of spectators and were captivated less by the lively crowd than by the imaginative decorations and embroidered rugs which covered the balustrades. He noticed a box that was still empty and watched it, without any real interest, perhaps hoping that here the curtain was about to rise on the real drama of the day. At last, a single noble woman wrapped deep in a black mantilla appeared, followed by a dazzling page-boy who protected her against the heat with a parasol. She stood very still in the box, and across from her, Juan stood equally still. He felt as if an important secret of his life were hidden behind that veil, but at the same time he dreaded the moment the veil would be lifted as though it might reveal the bloody ghost of a Banquo.

Finally the moment came and the mantilla opened to reveal an enchanting feminine figure like a white lily.
Her cheeks were lifeless, and her pale lips were closed; she seemed the portentous picture of a wonderful, otherworldly being rather than a woman of flesh and blood.

Juan experienced both a deep terror and passionate love. A chaos uncoiled within him, but a single, loud cry was all that escaped him. The woman stared at him sharply and left, at the same time throwing the mantilla back over her face.

Juan hastened to find her. He combed Seville without success. Terror and love drove him away from the city, and back again, but in rare moments he often saw the instant in which he would find her, both dreadful and longed for; he struggled to hold on to his premonition, if only once, in order to understand it, but it flowed past him quickly like a nocturnal dream and when he found himself back in reality, it was once more darkness, and his mind was empty.

Three times he journeyed through Spain without meeting the wan face which had shone into his life so lethal and loving. Finally, homesickness drove him back to Seville, and the first man he met was Don Ponce.

Each was disturbed at the sight of the other; they had become so estranged as to be puzzles to each other. Juan's severity had vanished: he was on fire, a volcano whose inner flame had at last burst through its thousand
ancient layers of rock; but now it seemed all the more
dangerous in his proximity. Ponce's mildness, on the other
hand, had turned austere, and he seemed frozen beside his
brother. All the false tinsel had dropped away from his
life so that he stood like a tree reaching naked branches
into the sky, robbed of its vernal glory. The same lightning
that strikes a forest, to fill the horizon with flames for
a thousand nights, might blast only superficially across
a moor to score and whither sparse flowers without showing
a trace.

With cold courtesy, Ponce invited Don Juan to his
home, to introduce him to his wife. Juan accepted listless­
ly. It was siesta time; the brothers walked into a vine­
covered pavilion - and there Juan's pale vision rested
quietly, leaning against a sarcophagus, beside a statue
of Death whose inverted torch touched her breast.

Juan stood rooted to the ground: his dark forebodings
rose up into his consciousness and did not sink back as
before, and everything grew terribly clear, like Oedipus'
secret as it was suddenly unravelled. His senses fled and
he slumped unconscious against a stone.

When he awoke, he found himself forsaken except for
the silent page-boy, who had stayed behind to attend him.
With turmoil and revolt inside him, he rushed out into the
open.
Around him, the world seemed changed now. The past had returned and a grey destiny had roused itself from sleep to rule over heaven and earth once again. Like Orestes, he felt himself pursued at every turn by a Fury who parted her snake hair to display her fair face maliciously.

When business forced Ponce to leave Seville for some time, Don Juan crawled out of hiding like a criminal afraid of the light. In his soul, everything was fixed and determined, but he fled his own company so that he would not have to take account against himself. A secret to himself, he sought out Ponce's estate and entered the room of Dona Ines: she recognized him at once and, for the first time, the white rose bloomed red and ardent—love animated Pygmalion's cold statue. The evening sun shone red through the trees and Ines, in innocence, blamed the fires of heaven for her blushes. Trembling, she reached for her harp, and as Juan accompanied her on the flute, their forbidden conversation without words began, and the notes confessed and answered love.

So it stayed, until Juan grew bolder, scorned the mystic hieroglyph, and revealed his beautiful, mysterious sin in clear language. Then and there, the twilight trance left the innocent woman, and only now did she seem to recognize everything around her as if through a hostile glow of torches, and for the first time shivering and
terrified, she said his name, "Brother!"

At the same moment, the sun went down, and the face that had just been illuminated was now as pale as before. Juan stood silenced. Ines rang the bell and as the page-boy, as perfect as a god of love, entered the room, he left.

It was black in the forest outside, and he stumbled aimlessly. Suddenly, Don Ponce appeared before him. Juan pulled his dagger and stabbed wildly - his vision faded. The dagger stuck deep in a tree trunk. Only in his dreams had he murdered his brother.

Ponce finally returned, but Ines did not reveal Juan's secret. She hid love and sin deep in her breast. Juan learned to loathe the daylight, and he began to live only for the night: the things within him were light-shy and dangerous. As soon as night fell, he crept toward Ponce's estate and spied at Ines' window, but as soon as dawn came, he left wildly and grudgingly. One night, he saw Ines with her page-boy in the lamp light, and his imagination whispered that she had rejected him for the boy, and that she devoted all her sweet night hours secretly to him. With savage jealousy, he swore death to the boy and resolved to kill him as soon as possible. As he kept watch, he saw that the light in her room never faded, and he imagined the boy always at her side. Trembling with rage and love
he waited until midnight and then crept toward the entrance of the house, half-mad and out of control, and found it only partly closed. With uncertain, tottering steps, he reached her door, gave it a quick push, and swung it open.

She was sleeping quietly, as if she were still leaning against the sarcophagus. Her night gown billowed softly, and her hair had wrapped itself in garlands around the strings of the harp against her breast. Involuntarily, the name of his brother escaped Juan's lips, and he suddenly thought he saw in her the Fury who had separated them, and the locks which framed the beautiful face seemed to change into a nest of vipers. Then she became the woman of his love again, and beyond self-control, he sank down at her feet and pressed his fevered lips to her breast. She staggered up startled, recognized him in the glow of the lamp, and pushed him away from herself with a violent thrust, her eyes filled with terror and revulsion.

For a moment, this single glance crushed him, but his demon took hold and he rushed away, not knowing what he was about to do - the bloody plan was hidden too deeply in his mind.

Roused by all the noise, the page-boy stumbled sleepily from his quarters in the front room, and Juan grasped him and said quickly, "Your mistress wants you at her side; she wants to go to early mass!" The boy rubbed
his eyes and Juan watched him until he had vanished into her room. Fate had planned the catastrophe well: Don Juan found his brother's room, roused him from his first sleep, and revealed to him his wife's adultery. Ponce arose quickly, demanding more explanations, but Juan prodded him along the halls and pressed a dagger into his hand. He pushed Ponce into her room.

Then, a dead calm surrounded Don Juan. His teeth chattering, he stood terrified and alone in the night and searched frenziedly for the dagger he had just given to his brother. And now chaos filled the night. Now there came a noise, and the door crashed open on its hinges.

The lamp illuminated the dreadful nightscape. The page-boy sprawled dead on the floor and a river of blood spouted from Ines' breast, clinging to her snow-white veil like a wreath of roses.

Juan stood like a statue. Ines looked at him, but her pale lips were closed, and she revealed nothing. A profound sleep touched her eyes tenderly.

As she died, Ponce was the first to awake fully, and he seemed really to love her for the first time now because he had lost love, and to feel love in his heart only so he could pierce it. Silently, he married her once again.

Don Juan stood mute and insane among the dead.
What I wouldn't give for the gift of organizing and polishing a story like other honest Protestant poets and pamphleteers who in so doing have made their fame and glory and have traded in their golden visions for golden realities! I don't have the talent, however, and this short, simple tale of murder has cost me sweat and toil enough though it still looks unpolished and confused.

Unfortunately, the years of my youth were wasted — I was a flower nipped in the bud. Unlike other educated youths and promising youngsters who allowed themselves to become ever more sensible and clever, I for my part always had a special liking for madness, and I have tried to create within myself absolute disorder so that, like the good Lord, I might first complete a good and entire state of chaos out of which to fashion a passable world later on, whenever I felt like it. Yes, in strained states of mind, I often think that man has botched chaos itself by
fashioning law and order much too soon, so that nothing has ever been put in its right place, and I wish the Creator would soon dismiss and erase this world as a failed system.

This obsession has often led me into trouble. Once it nearly cost me my job when during the last hour of the century, I decided to anticipate Judgement Day and, instead of calling out the time, called out the end of the world. The first result was that clerical and worldly gentlemen alike flew out of their beds, embarrassed by and unprepared for such an unexpected event.

The spectacle of this false alarm, of which I happened to be the only calm spectator among a crowd serving me as impassioned actors, was highly entertaining. The frenzy and hysteria of the people was worth seeing. Aristocrats thronged together and tried desperately to organize themselves according to rank in preparation for meeting their Lord. A pack of lawyers and other sorts of wolves tried to jump out of their skin by struggling fiercely to change into sheep, flinging huge pensions at widows and orphans who ran around in terror, publicly revoking unjust convictions, and promising to repay, right after Judgement Day, all the money which they had extorted and which had reduced some poor devils to beggary. A host of blood-suckers and vampires denounced themselves worthy of being
first hanged and then beheaded, insisting that the sentence be carried out immediately, so that they would escape punishment from a higher hand. The proudest man in the state, his crown in his hand, stood humble and almost crawled to trade compliments with a pauper, because the dawn of a universal brotherhood suddenly seemed a possibility.

High offices were abandoned, ribbons and medals were torn off by their unworthy owners and shepherds of the soul vowed solemnly to provide their flock not only with good words, but also with a good example if only the Lord would let them off this time.

It is hard to describe how the people on the stage before me ran around in the utmost confusion, praying, cursing, lamenting, and howling in their terror; how suddenly every face of this grand ball lost its mask, revealing kings in pauper's clothes and vice versa, and weaklings in knightly armour, demonstrating the eternal paradox between man and his clothes.

I was delighted to note that the crowd, in their mortal fear, hardly noticed the tardiness of heaven's justice: the whole city found time to uncover its virtues and vices before me, its humblest citizen. Only one atrocious youth, plagued by so much boredom that he had already resolved not to enter the new century, committed a stroke of genius by shooting himself during the old one,
to determine whether death was still possible in this moment of indifference between dying and resurrection because he felt no desire to carry his boredom directly over into eternity with him.

Apart from myself, the only other calm person was the poet at his window. He stared down defiantly into this Michelangelo painting, contemplating the end of the world poetically from his Olympian heights.

Not far from me an astronomer finally remarked that the great moment had been prolonged too long, and that the flaming sword in the North might be the Northern Lights instead of the sword of Justice. At this decisive moment, when some wretches were already trying to lift their heads again, I thought it necessary to prolong their remorse somewhat by means of a short, edifying speech.

"Fellow citizens. A star-gazer can hardly be considered a competent judge of this event – the awful phenomenon that fills our sky can't simply be taken for an insignificant comet. Rather does it appear only once in the history of the world. Therefore, let us not abandon our solemn mood so lightly, but let us make some important observations relevant to our existence.

"On this Day of Judgement, nothing could interest us more than a last look at this planet trembling beneath our feet, the planet that is about to collapse with all its
Edens and dungeons, its madhouses and its centres of learning. In this final hour, now that we end the world's history, let us review shortly how we have carried on and what we have accomplished since we emerged from chaos. Since Adam, a multitude of years has passed - unless we accept the calendar of the Chinese - and what have we achieved? I say - nothing.

"Don't gape at me like that; today is not a time for self-importance. Let us rise above ourselves and practice humility.

"Tell me, how will you face your creator, my brothers, rulers, usurers, warriors, murderers, capitalists, thieves, civil servants, jurists, theologians, philosophers, fools, and whatever else your trade and profession might be - because today no-one dare absent himself from this assembly, although I see some of you would gladly take to your heels. Give truth its due! What have you done that was worth all the effort?

"You philosophers, for example, have you ever said anything more important than that you did not know what to say - the essential and most enlightening statement of all philosophies to date! You scholars, what has your learning brought except a decay and evaporation of the human spirit, until finally you can expend your time and your simple-minded self-importance on the remaining 'caput mortuum'. 
You theologians, trying to be counted among the members of heaven's court by ogling at and fawning on God, what have you done except organize the earth into a den of cut-throats by driving men apart instead of uniting them, by hacking them into sects so that you have torn asunder universal brotherhood and the family. And what have you done, you jurists, you half-men who should be of one flesh with the theologians but instead became separated from them at some accursed hour to condemn men's bodies as the theologians condemn their souls? The two of you meet again only at the gallows, shaking hands in front of the dangling sinner, and the hangman of the body and the hangman of the soul stand dignified beside each other.

"What am I to say of you, you men of state, you who have reduced men to mechanical principles? Will you survive a heavenly inspection with your political maxims? And how will you comfort the hollow men who stumble beside you through eternity? - you knew only how to use their shells, because you killed their spirit. And what about the solitary giants among you, the rulers and kings who pay with men instead of coins, contracting a dreadful slave-trade with death?

"I've watched you, and I've grown angry. As I see you, crawling along with your dubious virtues and merits, I'd love to be the Devil for just one hour on this Judgement
Day, if only to shake you with more violent speeches.

"The final act is still delayed to give you time to repent. So go ahead, pray and howl, you hypocrites, just as you always do before death, when your mistaken life no longer has a purpose, when you've become incapable of more sinning.

"The history of the world lies behind you like a foolish novel, with a few acceptable and innumerable hopeless characters. God made only one mistake in that he didn't collaborate, but left you to write it yourself. Tell me, will he consider it worthwhile to translate your botched creation into a higher language, or isn't it more likely when he sees it lying before him in all its shallowness that he'll tear it apart in wrath and assign you and your plans to oblivion? I can't see any other way. Can any of you justifiably make a claim either to heaven or hell? For the one you are too wicked, for the other too boring.

"The solemn deed is still delayed, but I beseech you not to relax. Forge ahead, into contrition, before the world collapses. I'll give you the best reason for doing so: the Lord once spared Sodom and Gomorrha because of one righteous man, and you might be insolent enough to think that He will harbour a planet full of hypocrites because of a few reasonably pious men. Can any of you offer a sensible suggestion as to where He should place you? The
late Kant explained some time ago that time and space are merely products of the senses. You know that neither exists in the world of eternity, and I ask you - how will you find room where no room is, if you have lived only through your lusting senses? What will you do when time comes to an end? Even when applied to your greatest scholars and poets, immortality is no more than an empty label. What does it mean to poor wretches like you who have dealt with nothing except earthly goods and who know nothing of the spirit except the spirit of wine, through which your poets induce an experience akin to inspiration. - Just let one of you find a likely solution; for by the Devil, I don't know where to put you."

I noted a disturbance in the crowd before me and clearly heard some youthful freethinkers (nowadays synonymous with non-thinkers) declare boldly that the affair was only a false alarm. The king had already put his crown back on his head, and the first reeve, who had previously denounced himself, now spouted angrily that anyone who played the fool with the whole city should be punished severely, and that I was the chief culprit.

I gave up now and asked only for one more moment of silence by appealing to the king, saying," A Judgement Day speech like this could be useful even if it were merely a false alarm - for the sake of government, it would be
nice to hurl lightning from every peak and tower regularly, with the help of some physical experiments and a few hundred-weights of gun powder, in order to mount such a phantasmagoric preview of Judgement Day that the king, who is by no means omniscient, could organize a general revision of his state now and again. He could examine the government in its natural naked state and view its diseases, because usually it is presented to him only on parade, or clothed deceptively by the state's tailors and Jews who adorn the favourites and the advisors. Yes, I myself, as the original inventor of this government experiment, demand a patent on my invention so that I can put the profits of these pseudo-Judgement Days - profits like the blessings of poor souls raised again and the curses of saints suddenly fallen - into my meagre purse."

Gathering courage from the silence around me, I even dared to suggest that "I had already mounted such a preview by means of my alarm, and that now it would not be amiss to start repairs and to straighten up the tilted house of state with a few replacements in offices, executions, etc.

Nobody spoke at first when I was finished, and the king shoved his crown back and forth on his head as if undecided what to do. But in the end, my invention was rejected as unfeasible, and it was by mercy alone that I was merely
regarded as a fool and that I was not punished with the loss of my job.

To insure that I would never again sound a false alarm, a cabinet order implemented the use of the night-clock invented by Samuel Day,* so that from a singing and trumpeting watchman I was reduced to a silent one because, it was alleged, my blowing and singing gave me away to thieves and therefore must be abolished as unfunctional.

Consequently, the day-thieves are removed from my vigil and I wander quietly and sadly through the empty streets, banging my card into the night-clock every hour. It's unbelievable how my silence has improved everybody's sleep. Those secret sinners who once slept fitfully, afraid of Judgement Day, are now no longer disturbed by my Last Trump. They snore soundly in their pillows.

* These night-clocks are so constructed that the watchman must stick a slip of paper into a slot, which moves forward and becomes accessible only at certain hours, in order for him to prove that he has made his regular rounds. In the morning, a police officer unlocks the clock to see if there is a slip of paper in each slot.
I've got onto the subject of my madnesses, but my life has been the worst insanity of all, and since I'm no longer allowed to spend my time singing and tooting, I might as well continue with my life story tonight.

Sitting in front of the mirror of my imagination, I have often tried to construct a passable self-portrait, but I've always ended up by smashing my fist into the reflection because I finally recognized it as a trick painting depicting a Grace, a monkey and seen from the front, a devil, all depending on which angle I was viewing from. Finally, I grew so confused about myself that to explain the ultimate reason for my existence, I have concluded hypothetically that one dark night the Devil himself crept between the sheets of a newly canonized woman and wrote me down as a 'lex cruciata' for our dear Lord, so that He would go out of His mind puzzling about me on Judgement Day.
This damned contradiction in my nature has got so far out of hand that the Pope himself couldn't be more devout in his prayers than I am in my blasphemy, since whenever I happen to be reading a morally edifying book, I can't help making malicious marginal notes. While other intelligent and sensitive people wander out into nature to build themselves poetical tabernacles and Tabor huts, I collect the most durable and exquisite building materials for a madhouse into which I long to throw poets and prose writers alike. Several times I've been chased out of churches because I went there to laugh, and out of whorehouses because I went there to pray. Only one conclusion is possible: either the world is mad, or I am. If the voice of the majority decides, I am lost.

Whatever the case, and whether my features are ugly or handsome, I will continue to delineate them for a while. I won't paint a flattering picture, for I am painting at night and can't use bright colours and must limit myself to strong shades and hues.

I first made a modest reputation for myself with a few poetic pamphlets which I launched from the shop of my shoemaker. The first one was a funeral sermon which I wrote to celebrate the birth of his son. I can remember only the beginning, which went something like this:

"There they are preparing him for his first coffin
until they've finished the second one on which all his deeds and misdeeds will be inscribed, just as the corpses of kings are placed first in a temporary box and later in a casket covered with trophies and inscriptions which is carried to a tomb where the body is coffined for a second time. I beg you to distrust the shimmer of life and the roses on the cheeks of this child - that's nature's way of preserving the embalmed body in a state resembling life, like a skilled doctor; inside, decay is already gnawing and if you were to open up his innards, you would see worms growing from seeds of joy and pain, worms which gnaw quickly so that the corpse falls to dust. He lived only before he was born, just as happiness lives only in hope - as soon as it becomes real, it destroys itself. Right now, they are parading him on his bed, but the flowers which you toss on him are autumnal flowers for his shroud. In the distance, the coffin-bearers are already preparing to carry him away with all his joys, and earth is making ready her vault to receive him. Everywhere, only death and decay are stretching out their arms greedily, to consume him little by little, to finally rest on his empty tomb, tired from all their murdering when his pains, his joys, his memories and his dust are swept away. By that time, nature will already have used his ashes to nourish flowers for new corpses."

I have forgotten the rest of the speech. Everybody
praised it but said that the title seemed an error, since obviously I was talking about death instead of birth - so my oration was used at several children's funerals.

A young author has enormous obstacles to cope with since he can become known only through his works. An established and applauded writer, on the other hand, can thrive by means of his name alone; people rarely admit that great poets and great heroes have their off-days during which they bring to the light of day poems and deeds which are often worse than the worst work of other mediocre talents. Height and depth are never far apart, and only the man on the level plain has no fear of falling.

I, however, was pursued by good fortune, and soon I was given more rhymes to hammer together than shoes, so that we were able to hang out the old Hans Sachs sign over the shop door again, thereby amalgamating two arts important to the state. And since I was paid almost as much for a poem as for a shoe, my shoemaker was pleased and allowed my disreputable trade to live peacefully beside his respectable one. Thus my Delphic triad stood beside his three-legged last.

I think Providence has done a sensible thing in confining many people to a narrow, pitiful sphere of action between four walls, where their light can glimmer only feebly in the musty dungeon air, illuminating nothing but
the prison itself. The same light flaming in freedom might burst forth like a volcano and set the world on fire. As for myself, I began to sparkle and spark at an early age, but my light consisted only of flares which illuminated the terrain rather than bombs to ravage and devastate it. Sometimes dreadful terror would take hold of me and I felt like a giant who has been walled up in a low room as a child and who grows and expands only to discover that his brain is slowly being crushed by the ceiling, that he is being compressed into a deformed cretin. If such men could break out of their dungeons, they would rise as enemies of mankind — they would fall upon men like a plague, an earthquake or a hurricane, and rub open a good portion of the planet and burn it to powder. But we guard these sons of Enak closely, and mountains have been placed on top of them as on top of the Titans, and they can do nothing underneath except shake themselves furiously. Their fuel burns out slowly, and very seldom do they succeed in freeing themselves and hurling their fires at heaven.

I, however, threw the populace into turmoil merely with my fireworks, and a superficial satirical speech, purporting to be by an ass wondering why asses must exist at all, caused a sensation. I had nothing serious in mind, by God, and the whole thing was directed at everyone in general, but a satire is like a touchstone: every metal
you touch it with leaves behind a mark of its value or its worthlessness; and so it was here too — *** read my work and thought that every word applied to him. I was thrown into the tower, where I had lots of time to grow angrier. I discovered, incidentally, that my hatred for man is like that of kings, who favour the individual man only to destroy him in whole armies.

Finally, they let me go when the unknown payments to keep me in prison stopped, and because my old shoemaker had died I was all alone in the world, as if I had fallen from another planet. Now I saw clearly how man no longer counts as a man and how man has no possessions other than those which he buys or wins in battle. It enraged me that beggars and vagabonds and other wretches like me had surrendered their law of the sword, giving it instead to the kings who exercised it on a mass scale as their royal privilege. I could not find a single piece of earth for myself — they had divided every part among themselves, ignoring the law of nature, the only positive and universal law, and pushing their own special rights and beliefs into every nook and cranny remaining. In Sparta, they praised the thief who stole best, and next door in Athens they hanged him.

I saw that they had seized all of nature's free and common property short of the birds in the sky and the fish
in the water, and that I would never be granted as much as a single seed unless I paid for it. Yet I had to do something to stave off starvation, so I took up the first trade which enabled me to sing about them and their schemes - I became a singer like the blind Homer, who was also forced to make his living as a minstrel.

I had learned that people love blood above everything else, and that when they are not spilling it themselves, they adore watching it flow elsewhere in paintings and poems and in real life, preferably in the form of great battles. So I began to entertain them with murder stories and I made a good living. Before long, I even came to consider myself a beneficial member of the state, the equal of fencing masters, gunpowder millers, munition makers, ministers of war, doctors, and so on, all of whom apparently worked hand in hand with death, and I began to think highly of myself since I tried mightily to harden my listeners and students and to inure them to all manner of blood and gore.

Eventually, however, I grew tired of little murder stories and hazarded some more ambitious pieces, such as spiritual assassinations rigged by Church and State, for which I derived good material from history. Occasionally, I would add delightful interludes, such as: Honour butchered by malicious Rumour, Love annihilated by cold-hearted youths, Loyalty slain by false friends, Justice
murdered by law-courts, Reason killed by Censorship, and so on. And this led to trouble – I was suddenly confronted with more than fifty charges of slander. I appeared in court, as my own devil's advocate; half a dozen men sat around a table in front of me, holding their individual masks of justice before their faces to hide their own comic physiognomies and the second half of their Hogarth faces. These men understand the art of Rubens, his skill in changing a laughing face into a crying visage at a single stroke, and they employ his technique as soon as they lower themselves into their chairs, so that nobody might ever be tempted to confuse them with the sinners they are about to judge. After having been issued a stern warning to tell the truth regarding the charges laid against me, I began:

"Your honours! I stand before you accused of slander, and all the evidence points against me. But I would like to count you, your honours, among my evidence, because it is not only objects such as crowbars and thieves' ladders, which hint at specific crimes, that should be considered 'corpora delicti', but also objects such as human beings, whose bodies house crime. It wouldn't be a bad idea if you were acquainted with crime not only in theory, but also in practice. Many poets, for example, complain bitterly that their critics are incapable of writing a single decent
verse, but that they nevertheless judge poetry - so what would you say, your honours, if a thief, adulterer, or some other such scoundrel whom you planned to judge, gave you a similar nut to crack and refused to acknowledge you as competent in his field since you have never practiced his profession.

"In fact, it seems to me that the law has recognized its own shortcomings and has therefore made arrangements to absolve you of many crimes you commit. For example, you may strangle with cords, hack with swords, and smash with clubs; you may burn, sack, quarter, torture and bury alive - all gross misdeeds which only you can perform without fear of punishment. The laws even absolve you of small crimes, such as those which force me to appear in the role of the accused. LEX XIII, paragraph 1 and 2 'de inuriis' allows you to insult those very people who are caught in the meshes of a libel suit.

"It is unbelievable what advantages these arrangements could give to the state; for example, many more crimes could be dragged into the light of day if respectable jurors were to visit whorehouses personally, to leap into lust so as to indict the guilty party immediately afterwards, or if they would mix as thieves among thieves in order to let their comrades hang, or if they would commit adultery, so as to recognize potential adulteresses and
others who have an inclination and liking for this crime and should be considered harmful members of the state.

"Good God, the advantages of these arrangements are so obvious I'll not discuss them further. But I think that my immeasurable suggestion alone entitles me to an immediate acquittal.

"I shall now present my actual defense, your honours! I have been charged with an 'iniuria oralis', a 'chanted insult' according to subsection 'beta', to be precise. And here I already discern a reason for dismissing this case: singers belong to the caste of poets and the latter, since in accordance with the new school they do not aim at a purpose, should be allowed to slander and blaspheme as much as they want in their poetic inspiration. Indeed, poets and singers should be immune to the charge of slander for the very reason that inspiration is essentially a drunkenness, which should immediately free them from all punishment, unless the accused culpably put himself into this condition, hardly the case with inspiration since it is a gift of the gods. I'll formulate my defense even more convincingly by referring you to the works of our best new legal theoreticians, in which it is proved that justice has nothing to do with morality and that only such offense as infringes a man's material rights can be termed punishable by law. Now, I have injured and slandered in a
moral or inner sense only, so I dismiss the charges brought against me as insufficient because as a moral person I stand under the 'foro privilegatio' of another world.

"Furthermore, since according to Weber's discussion of slander in his first chapter, page XXIX "no insult can be uttered against a person who has renounced honour and morality", I would like to extend the analogy to conclude that you, as judges, have abjured all morality. Therefore, I am free to insult you, with every slander possible, here in open court. If I dare to denounce you as cold, heartless, and immoral although kind and just gentlemen, my words are to be construed as praise rather than slander, and I dismiss any charges arising against me out of this."

Here I stopped, and all six of them looked at each other without coming to a verdict. I waited calmly. If they had punished me with the strappado, the spinning cage, the iron maiden, or with frying, skinning or disembowelment (which in Japan is thought very honourable), I would have much preferred it to the malice which the judge and chairman perpetrated upon me when he gave the verdict that the crimes could not be counted against me because I was 'mente captis'. My trespassing was the result of partial insanity, so that I should be delivered to the asylum without fail.

It's too much; I'll end this confession and go to bed.
EIGHTH NIGHTWATCH

Poets are a harmless breed with their dreams and ecstasies and heavens full of Greek gods which they carry with them in their imagination. But as soon as they dare to apply their vision to the world of reality, they become dangerous by invading a world with which they have nothing in common. However, they would remain harmless if only they were given their place in reality and if they were not constantly forced to look back into reality and all its scrambling and hurrying. The world is much too small for the scale of their ideals, which reaches past the clouds, though they can't see the end of their stick so that they choose the stars as their provisional limits, although God only knows how many stars are still invisible to this day with their light still on its journey towards us.

The poet in his attic was one of those idealists who have been forcibly converted into realists through hunger, creditors, court trials, etc., not unlike Charlemagne, who drove the pagans into the river with his sword to baptise
them. I had struck up an acquaintance with the night-owl, and after punching the time clock I often went to see him, marveling as he fermented and bubbled, pacing the attic like an ecstatic apostle raging against man, a flame dancing over his head. He was pouring all his talents into the completion of a tragedy in which the sublime and mysterious figures of Love, Hatred, Time, and Eternity, presented as if having a body and outer coverings, were starring as the grand spirits of mankind, and which had running through it, instead of a chorus, a tragic clown, a grotesque and terrible mask. With an iron fist, the dramatist held life's handsome features up to his great distorting mirror, in which the face contorted wildly and revealed its abysses in the furrows and ugly wrinkles on the beautiful cheeks - and this he copied.

It is good that many did not understand, because in our age of optics the greatest subjects are so far removed that one can see them only vaguely in the distance with the help of telescopes; little things, however, are thoroughly cultivated because the short-sighted see near things much more sharply.

The poet had finished the play recently and hoped that the gods cited in his invocation would for once appear in the form of a golden rain so that he could banish his hunger, his creditors, and the court clerk. Today, he
was to receive the 'imprimatur' of the most influential of all censors — to wit his publisher. Curiosity and the desire to see him in joyous celebration with the gods here on earth speeded my steps. But isn't it sad that mankind locks and bars the entrance to its banquets with guards and armed servants, so that a poor beggar, unable to afford a bribe, must steal away frightened?

Panting, I climbed up to the poet's Olympus and opened the door. But instead of one tragedy, which frankly I didn't expect to be back from the publisher, I found two of them. One had been returned from the publisher, and the other was its author, who had composed the second one ex-tempore and had himself played the protagonist. Since he lacked the tragic dagger, he had, in a hurry which can be excused in improvised dramas, chosen for his weapon the cord which had served the returned manuscript as a belt during its travels, and he was dangling from it above his work, quite air-borne with all his earthly ballast cast off, like a saint rising toward heaven.

The room was silent and ghastly except for a pair of tame mice, who were playing peacefully at my feet like pets, squeeking with hunger or else happiness—probably hunger, since one of them began to gnaw on the poet's immortality, on his posthumous opus returned from the publisher.

"You poor devil," I said looking up at him," I don't know whether your ascension is comic or sad. However, I
find it amusing that you tried to act the Mozart among poor village musicians, and it's natural that you quit; in a country full of limping cripples anyone who walks properly is laughed at as a strange misshapen 'lusus naturae', just as honesty would have to be punished with hanging in a state full of thieves. Everything in this world is relative, and since your countrymen were used to abominable shrieks rather than noble songs, they ignored you as they would a nightwatchman, which is incidentally my reason for becoming one. Oh, how man forges onward, and I would like to skip a thousand years ahead and then stick my head into this silly world; I bet I would see antique cabinets and museums displaying the vilest form of ugliness in an attempt to achieve the ultimate in horror because beauty has been denounced as a second French school of poetry. Or I would like to attend one of the new mechanistic lectures on nature in which they will probably teach that a world can be built with little or no effort, and where they'll train young men to become creators of worlds, since at the moment they're merely trained to be creators of their own egos. Good God, what advances will have been made in a thousand years in all sciences—what progress we have made already! There will be as many repairmen of nature as there are now clock-makers; there will be correspondence with the moon, which already furnishes us with rocks;
Shakespearian pieces will become exercises for the retarded; love and friendship and loyalty will stop being standard theatre fare – already we have abolished the role of the fool; madhouses will be built for the sane only, doctors will be exterminated as harmful members of society because they’ve found a cure for death; and storms and earthquakes will be arranged as easily as firework displays nowadays. You poor dangling devil, your immortality would have no meaning a thousand years from now. You have done yourself a favour by getting out in time."

But just as a man laughing uproariously finally bursts into tears, so I suddenly grew sentimental in my good mood when I looked into a corner where his childhood silently and meaningfully confronted the pale deceased like his only joy and at the same time as his only remaining piece of furniture; it was an old, weathered painting on which the colours were already half-faded, just as, according to superstition, portraits of the dead lose the red of their cheeks. It depicted the poet as a child with a friendly smile, playing at his mother's breast; alas, her handsome face was his first and only love, and she remained loyal to him until she died. Here in the picture, childhood still surrounded him merrily, and he stood in its vernal garden full of closed buds, whose fragrance he longed for and whose poison petals, once open, brought him
death. I had to turn away shuddering as I compared the copy, this smiling curly-haired boy, with the model in its present state, a dangling Hippocratic face staring black and terrible like a Medusa at the portrait of his youth. In his final minute, he seemed to have thrown a last glance at the painting, for his body was twisted in that direction, and the lamp was burning in front of it as if before an altar. Oh, the passions are sly restorators who retouch the blossoming Raphael features of youth with the passing years and contort and distort it with constantly harsher strokes until the angel's head has become a Hell Breughel's mask.

The poet's desk - his altar of Appollo - was a stone slab, for all the wood he had possessed had long since been consumed by the flames of his nocturnal sacrifices to the Muses, all except the picture frame. His rejected tragedy lay on the slab. It was entitled MAN, and beside it was a letter of resignation to life, as follows:

A Letter of Resignation to Life.

Man is worthless, and I strike him out. My MAN has not found a publisher, either as fiction or non-fiction. Man as fiction (my tragedy) hasn't even found a publisher to advance the cost of printing, and man as non-fiction (myself) has been abandoned even by the Devil. The world
starves me like an Ugolino in the greatest dungeon of them all, the world itself, and has thrown the key into the sea before my very eyes. I am lucky to have enough strength left to climb the tower of my prison and to hurl myself off. I thank the publisher for this, here in my testament, for although he didn't help me get away, he at least threw a cord down to me in my tower so that I can climb up.

I think that everything is merry up there, and has a good, open view; in any case it will be better than down here even if I should see nothing, because I no longer care; — but old Ugolino had to stumble in his tower, blind from hunger, and knew he was blind, and life struggled so madly inside him that he could not kill himself.

Like him I too had some golden children with whom I dallied in my prison, children whom I created alone, at night, and who played by my side in youth and in golden dreams. Through them, whom I planned to leave behind, I tied myself warmly to life — but even they have been taken away from me, for the hungry animals imprisoned with me have gnawed them to pieces, and I have only memories to delight me now.

So be it! The door has been slammed shut behind me, and the last time they opened it, it was only to carry in the coffin of my last child — and now I leave nothing behind and walk toward you defiantly, God or Nothing!
This was all that was left of a flame which had been forced to consume itself. I took the letter and collected as much of the relics of MAN as I could from the hungry mice, appointing myself heir to the poet's property.

If I am ever given a chance to make more money, I shall print the tragedy MAN, however gnawed and incomplete, at my own cost and distribute it free. For the moment, I can only relate a part of the fool's prologue. In a short introductory speech, the poet first excuses himself for daring to introduce the fool into a tragedy:

"In their tragedies, the ancient Greeks had a chorus whose universal comments turned the gaze of the audience away from the single dreadful action and therefore soothed the mind. I think this is no time for soothing, and that one should instead be making people angry and rebellious, because nothing else has any effect, and mankind on the whole has become so slack and malicious that it acts mechanically and commits its sins out of sheer lassitude. Mankind should be strongly stimulated, like an asthenic person, and I am therefore introducing the fool to make men go wild because just as, according to the proverb, the truth comes from the mouths of babes and fools, so they also promote that which is dreadful and tragic, since the first put it so bluntly in their innocence while the second
even mock and play foolish games with it. Aestheticians of the future will do justice unto me."

The part I would like to quote from the manuscript goes as follows:

The Fool's Prologue to the Tragedy Man.

"I appear as man's prologist. A judicious audience will the more readily overlook the fact that I'm a fool by trade when I point out that according to Dr. Darwin the ape, undoubtedly more silly than a mere fool, is actually prologist for the whole human race, and that my and your thoughts and feelings have been merely refined and cultivated through the passing of time although they are still thoughts and feelings which originally were born in the head and heart of the ape. Dr. Darwin, whom I quote as my spokesman and attorney in this matter, maintains that man owes his existence to a species of ape found near the Mediterranean Sea, a species which acquired refinement when it learned to use its thumb muscles so that thumb and fingertips were able to touch. After several succeeding generations of apes, this accomplishment culminated in conceptual thought, until finally the species took on the form of rational men, a form which, incidentally, can still be seen walking about today in court
dress and other uniforms.

Darwin's theory has merit; after thousands of years, we can still find parallels and contrasts to the original species. Indeed, I think I could point to a few admired persons here and there who haven't yet learned to use their thumb muscles properly, like certain writers for instance, and others who push pens for their living. If my observations are correct, it's another mark for Darwin. By contrast, we find that the ape has retained several skills and emotions which we, in our daring leap to become civilized creatures, have lost completely. For example, to this very day a mother ape loves her son more than many mothers of princes love theirs, and the only thing one could say in disagreement is to argue that the latter neglects her child through too much love in order to achieve the same thing as the former who get there a bit faster by crushing their child to death.

Enough, I agree with Dr. Darwin and offer a philanthropic suggestion that we should value our younger brothers, the apes of the world, more highly and that we should raise them, who are now only our parodists, up to our level with thorough instructions on how to bring together thumb and fingertips so that they can at least push a pen. It is better to consider the ape our ancestor with the first Dr. Darwin than to wait for a second one to suggest other
wild animals as our predecessors, which he could perhaps support with equally good reason since most people, if one covers the lower part of their face with its mouth whose words seek to hide their animal nature, have a remarkable resemblance especially to birds of prey, such as vultures and falcons, etc. Yes, the old aristocrats too can trace their families more easily to beasts of prey rather than to apes, which clears up not only the meaning of their passion for robbery during the Middle Ages, but also the meaning of their escutcheons, which portray mostly lions, tigers, eagles, and other wild animals.

These remarks are meant to justify my role as figure and mask in the tragedy MAN, which is about to begin. I promise my esteemed audience in advance that it will be funny enough to kill them with laughter, no matter how serious and tragic the poet intended it to be. After all, what is the use of seriousness, since man is by nature a foolish beast who is simply playing upon a stage larger than the one occupied by the actors in Hamlet; no matter how important he thinks himself, he must take off crown and sceptre and theatre dagger behind the curtains and creep as an actor who has left the stage into his dark changing-room until it pleases the director to announce a new comedy. If he were to show his self in its natural state, or even in its night gown and sleeping cap, by the
Devil, everybody would run away from such insipidness and uselessness; so he covers it with colourful theatrical rags and holds the masks of joy and love in front of his face, to appear more interesting, and to make his words sound more meaningful through the speaking-tube mounted inside the mask; and finally the self looks down upon the rags and thinks they are the important thing. Yes, no doubt there exist other selves dressed even poorer who praise and worship this patched-up pomposity; but seen under the light, the second mandilion, which has put up an artificial breast to feign the existence of a heart, is merely stitched together more artfully and holds a more deceivingly crafted mask in front of the skull.

The skull is never missing behind the flirtatious mask, and life is only the fool's costume that Nothingness has donned in order to tinkle its bells for a while and then finally to rend it angrily and to discard it. Everything is Nothing and chokes and gulps itself greedily, and this very feeding upon itself is the malicious sham-struggle which fraudulently suggests that something is happening while actually, if the gulping would stop just for once, Nothing would appear very clearly so that they would be frightened of it; fools think that this pause is eternity, but it is really and essentially Nothing and absolute death, since on the contrary life is created only through continuous
dying.

If all this were taken seriously, it could easily lead to the madhouse, but I only take it like a fool and use it to lead the prologue towards the tragedy, in which the poet has certainly taken everything seriously and has even invented a God and an immortality in order to make his man more meaningful. However, I hope to play in it the part of the old destiny that among the Greeks ruled even the gods, and to confuse the leading figures to distraction so that they will never make sense of themselves until man shall finally think that he is God Himself or shall at least pattern himself after such a mask, like idealists, and world history.

Now I have more or less introduced myself and can let the tragedy begin on its own with its three unities: Time - which I shall strictly adhere to, so that man won't lose himself in eternity of all things; Place - which will always remain within limits -; and Action, which I will limit as much as possible, so that Oedipus, or man, will reach only blindness, and not transfiguration somewhere in a sub-plot.

I have not opposed the use of masks, because the more masks are piled on top of each other, the more fun it is to pull them off one after another down to the penultimate satirical one, the Hippocratic one, and the
final solid one which no longer laughs or cries — the skull without hair or pigtail with which the tragicomedian makes his exit at the end. Nor have I opposed the use of verse which is no more than a comic lie, just as the cothurnus is only a more comic conceit."

Exit Prologus!
NINTH NIGHTWATCH

I am happy to say that I found at least one full rose among the many thorns of my life; although she was so surrounded by thorns that I could reach her only with bleeding hands and with her leaves half torn, I plucked her nevertheless, and her dying fragrance did me good. This single blessed month of my life, the only rosy summer among my many winters and autumns, was spent — in a madhouse.

Man is like an onion and hides beneath layer upon layer until he has disappeared into a tiny core. We take the temple of the universe, on whose dome the worlds float like sacred hieroglyphics, and build within it smaller temples with smaller domes and imitation stars, and into these we squeeze still smaller chapels and tabernacles until we have reduced the Highest to a miniature in a ring, while around us the great Mystery hovers in mountains and forests and lifts its holy wafer of the sun into the sky so that nations fall down before it. And in the same manner,
we hack the great religion of life, which nature reveals to us in her thousand forms, into smaller national and tribal religions for Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians. And the last group, not even satisfied with this, continues to chop itself into still smaller sects.

Yes, even the madhouse of the world, its windows full of heads sometimes partially, sometimes totally insane, has been divided into further madhouses designed for special cases. They dragged me out the big one and threw me into a small one—probably because the first was too overcrowded. I discovered, however, that one was very much like the other; indeed I even preferred the smaller one because I found the insanity of the inmates very congenial.

I can best describe my fellow lunatics by portraying them during the doctor's visit, when I had to introduce them to him, which happened now and again because due to my harmless madness, the warden of the institute had appointed me his vice-warden and sergeant. The last time, I led the doctor around with the following speech:

"Dr. Oehlmann, or rather 'Olearius'—as you call yourself in dissertations and abstracts, translating your name into a higher form through the medium of a dead language—all men suffer more or less from fixed ideas; not only single individuals, but whole groups and faculties. For example, many of the latter sell not only wisdom, but
also apply themselves to the hat-trade, thinking that they can turn stupid people into wise ones merely by lightly pressing a hat from their factory upon their heads; yes, sometimes they put such a hat upon their own bare body and thus apparently form philosophers, since the latter usually tend to go into hiding anyway beneath the brim of their hats when faced with overly difficult speculations. - Now I've lost the thread of my speech with all the examples that sprung to mind, and I'd better start again."

Here Oehlmann shook his doctor's hat as if he doubted that my head would ever deserve any of the hats I had mentioned.

"Are you shaking your head because I was created a fool by nature rather than made a doctor by the authority of the Emperor?" I asked. "Never mind, let's move on and leave my insanity and its cure until the end."

"Patient number one is a shining example of humanity, excelling all definitions ever published. I can never walk past him without thinking of the great heroes of antiquity, of Curtius, Coriolanus or Regulus. His madness consists of thinking too highly of mankind and too low of himself. And so, unlike bad poets, he keeps his bladder in constant check, because he fears that if he lets it all flow, the world will be drowned in a deluge. Sometimes I feel angry because I don't have in reality the problem which
he thinks he has - truly, I'd use the earth as my chamber pot and drown all doctors until only their hats floated on the surface. A great thought, but this wretch can't seem to grasp it. See for yourself how he stands and suffers and crosses his legs out of sheer love for mankind. And unless we help him, he will die. I've prescribed fires, empty rivers with idle mills and starving men on the shores. I think Dante's hell may make good therapy - I conduct him through it every day and he has made it his goal to extinguish it. Apparently, he used to be a poet who couldn't channel his creative outpourings through the booksellers.

Numbers two and three are philosophical opposites: an idealist and a realist. The first is suffering from a glass breast, while the second is suffering from a glass rear-end and has to stand up constantly. The idealist finds it easy to sit down, of course, but he avoids any moral statement and covers his glass breast carefully.

Number four is here only because his knowledge put him half a century ahead of everybody else - there are others like him still free, but they are, quite reasonably, considered as mad as he is.

Number five spoke too rationally and reasonably, so they brought him here.

Number six turned mad because he was crazy enough to
take the jokes of a king seriously.

Number seven singed his brain when he climbed too high into poetry, and number eight put so much sentiment into his comedies that his reason was swept away by all the tears. While the former thinks he is a burning flame, the latter flows around like water. Once or twice I tried to consume the two opposing elements by pitting them against each other, but the fire mauled the water so badly that I had to call for number nine, who thinks he is God, to separate the two. This last number often holds very strange monologues, and you can listen to one of them just now if you have the patience."

Monologue of the Insane Creator.

"This thing here in my hand is very strange, and as I watch it through my magnifying glass from one moment to the next (down there they call each of these moments a century), the situation appears to me more confused than ever, and I don't know whether I should laugh or become angry — if either were a proper thing for me to do. That little speck of sundust crawling around calls itself man; when I created it, I thought it was all right because it was a novelty — but I certainly spoke too soon. However, I had my fun, and anything that's new is welcome up here in eternity; I'm entirely without recreation or amusement. Of course, I am still satisfied with some of the things I made, such as
bright flowers and children playing among them, and the flying flowers, the butterflies and insects, which in their careless youth left their mothers and yet return to drink their milk and sleep and die at their mother's breast.* But this tiny piece of dirt into which I breathed life angers me now and again with its spark of divinity which I gave away much too hastily. The creature's gone crazy. I should've known right away that so little divinity would cause nothing but trouble, for the poor creature no longer knows which way to turn, and its awareness of God within it does little except cause it more confusion. In the one second they called the Golden Age, they carved charming figures and put them into little houses whose ruins are now marvelled at in the next second as the homes of Gods. They used to pray to the sun which I lit up for them and which is, compared to the light in my study, a mere spark. Finally - and this is the worst - the dust has come to think it is God, and has built systems to glorify itself. Hell, I should have left the puppet un-carved. What am I going to do with it? Let it leap about madly up here in eternity which bothers even me sometimes? On the other hand, I don't want to destroy them, because I would be without entertainment. Sometimes they discuss immortality and think that because they can dream about it that it will become true. Yet I have to do something! Truly, the problem

* Some scientist set up the hypothesis that the first insects were only plant filaments which accidentally separated from the plants.
is too much even for me! Shall I let the creature die, and die again, each time erasing its memories of itself so that it rises and walks about anew? But in the end that would bore me because to repeat the nonsense again and again would be tiring. The best thing to do is to wait until I can think of a definite date for Judgement Day, at which time I might come up with a better idea -" "What an abominable madness," I interrupted, as number nine ceased for a second. "If a normal person were to rattle off this kind of thing on paper, it would be confiscated immediately."

Oehlmann shook his head and made a few significant comments on diseases of the mind in general.

The creator, who now began to play with a child's ball which he was holding in his hand, continued after a pause," How the doctors of physics must now be puzzling about the change in temperature! How they will be trying to build new theories to suit it! Yes, this playing of mine is perhaps causing earthquakes and other visitations and giving teleologists wide scope for speculation. Oh, this speck of dust has a wondrous mind and reduces even the most confused and accidental conditions to some order; yes, it often praises and worships me because it is surprised that I am as intelligent as it is. How they run around in confusion and then gather together like ants,
holding meetings as if they had something to say! Through my ear-trumpet I can hear something – the pulpits and lecterns are buzzing with profound speeches about the wise order of nature. And all the time I'm only playing with the ball, destroying a few dozen countries and cities and these ants, which are multiplying much too quickly anyway since they invented a remedy for the cow-pox. Hell, in one second they've become so inquisitive that I can't even sneeze up here without their investigating the phenomenon thoroughly. I must be crazy to play God with such creatures and to be criticized! I'd like to crush the whole ball!"

"Just look how angry he is at the world, doctor," I added as the creator finished. "Life could become dangerous for us other fools because we tolerate such a Titan among us – his system of reducing everything to a small scale is as consequential as that of Fichte, and he actually thinks even less of mankind than the latter, who separates man merely from heaven and hell, but in compensation takes all that is classical and compresses it into the small "I" which any little child can pronounce. As each of us pleases, we can extract from this insignificant shell whole cosmogenies, theosophies, histories, and what not, together with their matching pictures. This would be great and wonderful if only the format were not so tiny! Even Schlegel fumed against such microcosms, and I too must
confess that the *Iliad*, published in a pocket volume, would never please me; it would mean the Olympus packed into a nutshell, so that the gods and heroes must either accustom themselves to a lower ceiling or break their necks.

You're looking at me and shaking your head again, doctor. Yes, you're right, this is all part of my madness and normally I am exactly of the opposite opinion. Let's leave the creator.

Numbers ten and eleven here exemplify the transmigration of souls: the first barks like a dog and used to serve at court; the second has changed from a civil servant into a wolf. There is room for thought here, don't you think?

Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and sixteen are variations of the same street song - love.

Number seventeen is absorbed entirely in his nose. Do you find that peculiar? Not me! Often whole faculties absorb themselves in a single letter of the alphabet to decide whether to take it for an alpha or an omega.

Eighteen is a mathematician trying to find the last number. Nineteen is brooding about a theft which the government committed against him - but he can brood about this only in the madhouse.

Number twenty finally is my own little cell. Come in and look around; before God, we're all the same and suffer only from different lunacies; our collective insanity simply
manifests itself in different nuances. Over there, you can see a bust of Socrates, whose wisdom you can gauge by the size of his nose just as you can see folly by the nose of Scaramouche over there. This manuscript I have here contains parallels which I have drawn between the two, and it favours the fool. The attitude of mine really ought to be cured, shouldn't it? I'm very stubborn - everything rational seems absurd to me, and vice versa. I can't at all defend myself against this thought!

I've often tried to seize wisdom by the hair, and to that end I have studied privately in all three professional faculties so that after some short academic nuptials with the Muses, I might have myself declared a Holy Trinity for the good of mankind and walk around with three doctor's hats on top of one another. Oh, I thought to myself, how you could wander around like a Proteus in practical and theoretical terms simply through a quick unnoticed change of hats! To write dissertations about the shortest methods of healing diseases and to relieve the patient himself of all his ills in the quickest manner! To embrace the dying man, after a quick change of hats, as his lawyer and to settle his chattels, and to finally show him the true way to heaven simply by putting on the cassock. In this manner, one could achieve the best and the highest result through different hats, like different machines in a
factory. And what an abundance of wisdom and wealth - the desired combination of two opposing blessings, a sublime idealization of man's centaur nature, in which the well-sated animal prances insolently beneath its divine rider.

But when I examined all my ideas more clearly, I found in all our vaunted wisdom only a blanket draped over the Moses features of life to hide God.

You can see where all this has led, and it is my obsession that I'm more rational than the rationality which we have reduced to a system, and wiser than the wisdom taught at our universities.

I'd like to consult you longer in your capacity as doctor to discover how my madness can be approached and to learn what cures are available. This issue is important, for how can one fight a disease when one is, as you know, uncertain of one's premises as to its nature, and when one is suspicious of the system; yes, when once confuses sublime health with disease, and vice versa.

Who decides in the end whether it is we fools here in the madhouse who are mistaken or the professors in their auditoriums? Perhaps delusion is truth, madness wisdom, death life - while rationally we assume the opposite! Oh, I can see I'm incurable."

After prolonged deliberation, Dr. Oehlmann prescribed vigorous exercise and little or no thinking since he thought
that my madness was caused by excessive intellectual revelry, just as indigestion is often caused by too much culinary indulgence. I let him go.

I'll save another nightwatch for an account of the rose mentioned at the beginning.
It is a strange night; moon beams come and go like ghosts through the gothic arches of the cathedral—a sleep-walker is climbing around on the lantern of the tower with a baby under his arm. It is the sexton, and his wife is watching him from a window, wringing her hands, but as silent as the grave, so that the sleep-walker, who is scaling the most dangerous places in perfect safety and with the self-possession of a man without cares, will not wake at the calling of his name and fall to his death together with the child. Across town, a burglar is breaking into a palace, but it's not my territory and besides, I've been condemned to silence. So let him steal. Quiet strains of music come from the distance, like the buzzing of gnats, or as if Koch were improvising late at night on his mouth-organ; and near the horizon, skaters turn airily and joyfully on the icy mirror of a meadow, dancing the Basel Death Dance.

The world itself lies cold and motionless and rough, and
nature's body stands mutilated, reaching petrified stumps naked of her garlands of petals and leaves into the sky. The night is still and eerie, full of a cold death which lurks invisible with a strangle-hold on life. Occasionally, a frozen crow tumbles from the roof of the church, and nearby a beggar without home or trade is struggling against sleep which is seeking to steer him secretly into the tempting arms of death, like the siren who lures irresponsible fishermen into the waves with her song.

Shall I cheat death of a beggar's life? By the devil, I don't know which is better - To Be or Not To Be! Oh, those with a concertina South and spring-time painted on their bedroom walls when the real one outside has died never consider such a question and instead prepare their own version of nature like a dainty meal on a plate, sipping in interrupted pauses so as to retain their taste. But this vagabond rests right at the breast of old mother Nature who now warms, now crushes her children, eccentric and moody like all old women. But no - you are forever constant, mother nature, and you offer your children the fruits of the green garden with which you shade them, and you give them fires, and memories of you when you sleep; but Joseph was cast out into the wilderness by his brothers and they locked away your gifts maliciously which you had given to him as to the other children. Oh, the brothers don't deserve
a Joseph among them. Let him rest in peace!

But now the face is already cold and rigid, and sleep has put his stiff corpse into the arms of his brother. I shall raise it up so that it will stand and stare like a Medusa into the rising sun. Murderous death, the beggar still had knowledge of life and love - a lock of brown hair from the head of his wife is hidden beneath the rags on his breast. You shouldn't have murdered him, - and yet -

The Dream of Love

Love is not beautiful - it's only the dream of love that enchants us. Hear my prayer, burning youth! If you see my beloved at my breast, pluck the rose quickly and cast a white veil over her blushing face. The white rose of death is lovelier than her red sister, for she promises memories of life and renders it precious and desirable. Garlanded and forever young, her image hovers above the grave of the beloved and reality never contorts her features and does not touch her to make her grow cold and interrupt the embrace. Oh youth, quickly rob me of my beloved, because she returns again in my dreams and songs, and she winds the wreath of my songs, and in my notes rises away toward heaven. Only the living one dies; the dead one remains with me, and our love and our embrace is eternal!

Listen! - Dance music and funeral chants - ringing
cheerfully like the bells of a fool. Fine! Play harder, by all means! Whoever drowns out the dirge will take home the bride. But alas! I see two brides, a white one and a red one - two marriages, to one of which the mourners are howling their dirges on the lower floor; one story higher the musicians are blowing and fiddling merrily, and the ceiling above the death-chamber and the coffin is trembling and booming from the dancing.

Will somebody please explain this nocturnal noise!

Leonore rides past - the white bride here in the silent marriage chamber loves the youth who is waltzing upstairs; and this is life - she loved, he forgot, she grew pale, and he caught fire for a red rose which he is taking home today while the first one is carried away. -

There is the old mother of the white bride, at the coffin - she does not weep; she is blind - and the white one does not cry either and sleeps and dreams sweetly. -

Now the wedding guests, still dancing, come thundering down the stairs - and suddenly the youth is standing between two brides. He turns a little pale. Silence! The blind mother recognizes him by his footsteps. - She leads him to the wedding-bed of the sleeping bride.

"She went to sleep earlier tonight than you. Don't wake her. She is sleeping so sweetly, but she was thinking about you until sleep overtook her. There is your picture,
on her breast. Oh, don't pull your hand back from her breast so frightened; the night with the heaviest frost is always the longest, and she lies alone in bed, without the bride-groom."

Look! Horror has turned the red rose white, and the youth now stands between two pale brides. Away, away, that's the course of life. Oh, if only I were allowed to trumpet and sing!

Now the corpse glides through the streets followed by the silent glow of lanterns on the walls, as if death were passing by and trying to hide from life. The frozen earth cracks under the steps of the coffin-bearers — that is the furtive and insidious wedding song. They lay her in her chamber.

But nearby, other youths sing and revel and squander away their lives and loves and poetries in short, quick bursts which have fled by morning, when all their deeds, dreams, hopes, and wishes and worlds have grown sober and cold again.

Late that night, I noticed strange goings-on in the nunnery of St. Ursula. The bell tolled softly and dully now and again, as muffled as a storm in a dream, and on the church windows, whose arches looked over the nunnery walls, a strange light fled past and died quickly. Lonely, I walked around the walls which surround the holy virgins
like a magic circle. Suddenly, I encountered someone in a dark cloak, but what I learned from him belongs in the next nightwatch. What I did, however, still belongs in this one.

The porter at the gate was a bitter, old misanthrope who liked me because I acted as a wall against which he could throw his rage. I often visited him at night to give his gall some exercise, and tonight I went to see him. He was sitting in his hut by his lamp, in the company of a black bird whose head he had covered with a cap and to whom he was talking. "Do you know the creature whose face laughs maliciously while the mask in front of it weeps? The creature that mentions God when it thinks of the Devil, the creature whose inside is filled with deadly dust like the thorn apple? The creature that sings melodic lines through the artfully wound speaking-tube into which it calls out revolt, the creature that smiles like a sphinx only to tear you to pieces, the creature that embraces you like a snake before it strikes its deadly fang into your breast? - Who is this creature, black one?"

"Man," the animal cawed unpleasantly.

"It's the only word the black one speaks," said the porter," but that is why he answers each of my questions correctly. Go to sleep, black one."

The bird repeated "man" three more times before
perching in a dark corner as if meditating deeply - but it was only dozing.

"They're performing burial rites at the nunnery tonight," said the old man. "Would you like to watch? A chaste Ursuline nun became a mother today. In the old days, it would've been noted down as a miracle and become a legend, but they've looked into God's cards long ago so nobody believes in miracles any more. Tonight the holy virgin will be buried alive. I'll let you in - amuse yourself."

He took the key and the hinges squeaked, and I walked through the cloisters stepping over graves. The glow of torches danced over the monuments on which slept the white statues of virgins, their faces sculptured in an attitude of prayer - but down in the nunnery, the originals had already thrown off their masks.

I hid behind a column and looked into an open vault - a lonely undressing room for the dead. A dim death-lamp burned in the vault, and a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, a crucifix and a prayer book stood on a raised slab of stone. In the chapel above the vault, deep silence reigned among the saints looking down from their niches in the walls. Occasionally, a gust of wind swept the organ and a pipe sang shrilly.

The funeral procession finally appeared through the columns - a host of silent virgins with the living bride
of death in their midst. For a poetically sentimental spectator, the whole scene would have evoked a sense of horror, for it was performed in an almost mechanically frightening manner, just as the tragic Muse affects us more the less she wrings her hands. However, my soul (which is like a harp potentially out of tune so that nobody can ever play sweet music on it unless it were the Devil himself who were playing) was hardly moved, and basically nothing was accomplished except a mad run through the scale, which went roughly as follows and broke off in a discord:

Run Through the Scale.

"Life hurries past man so quickly that he cries in vain for it to stand still for a moment so that he can ask what it wants of him and why it leers at him. The masks of emotion fly by, one as distorted as the other. Joy, answer me - cries man - why do you smile at me? The mask grins and passes by. Pain, look into my eyes! Why do you appear before me? But already it has fled. Rage, why do you look at me like that - I no sooner ask than you disappear.

"In a riotous dance, the masks twist around me - around me who am called a man - and I stumble in their midst, giddy at the sight, trying hopelessly to grasp a whirling shape and to rip off its masks so that I can see the real face - but they dance on and on - and I - what am I doing in the circle? Who am I if the masks disappear? Give me a mirror,
you carnival players, so that I might see myself as I am -
I'm sick of watching your changing features. You shake
your heads. What! Is there no vision of my self in the
mirror when I step before it? Am I merely the thought of
a thought, the dream of a dream? Can't you help me to a
body, and will you shake your fool's bells forever while
I keep pretending that they are mine? Oh! It is terribly
lonely here in the I as I detain you, masks, and try to
look at myself - all is a music without a dying fall -
nowhere a shape I can grasp, and yet I see - it must be
Nothing that I see! Away, away from myself - dance on,
masks!"

Now the nun is climbing down into the vault. Oh,
let the play end so that I may know whether I am watching
a comedy or a tragedy. Even during her last walk in life,
the bride of death is followed by a mask - madness. The
mask smiles mysteriously. Who can tell me whether the real
face beneath it trembles or smiles ecstatically?

The nuns are burying her with a viper to keep her
company, the viper of hunger which will soon crawl across
her breast and gnaw into her self. And when the last mask
is eaten away, when the self is alone with itself - how will
it spend eternity?

Now the hammers of the brick layers echo through the
vault. One stone after another is fitted into the vault
of the tomb. By the lantern light, I can now see only through a narrow crack the mysterious smile of the buried nun — now only a shimmer creeping through — and now everything is closed. The living dead sing a 'Miserere' as a good-night over the head of the interred nun.

I went and found the porter again. He was sitting as usual with his ancient mask of hatred. "Now do you hate mankind?" he asked me.

"I'm almost alone with myself," I answered, "and I hate and love as little as possible. I try to think I'm not thinking, and maybe in the end I might even learn who I am."

"Take this creature with you," he continued, raising a blanket to reveal a sleeping child. "I don't want to keep him here, because sometimes I get attacks of love for my fellow men, and during one of these spells I might choke the child to death."

I cradled the baby in my arms, and the life which rested still dreaming in my hand reconciled me with the waking life around me again.

"They told me to get rid of it," the porter added. "They don't tolerate anything male among them, these pious nuns, except in paintings, to stimulate their fantasies. You have just seen the mother of the boy being buried. Now look for the father, or just throw the child out into the
world - he'll be in no danger, for mankind will never sink."

"I know the father," I answered, leaving the hut. Outside, the stranger stood huddled in his cloak and reached out his hand to stop me.

"The bride is buried. This is your son." With these words I put the child in his arms, and he pressed it silently to his breast.
The following is a fragment from the story of the stranger in the cloak. I love the self, so let the man speak for himself.

"What is the sun?" I asked my mother one day as she described to me the sunrise over the mountains.

"My poor child, you'll never know, you were born blind," she said, passing her hand gently over my forehead and my eyes.

I was on fire - her descriptions held me spell-bound. There was a dividing wall between mankind and my love for mankind - if only I could see the sun just once, I thought, the wall would crumble, and I could be closer to my mother.

From then on, my imagination was busy as my longing spirit strove with all its might to break beyond the limitations of my body to behold the light. In the light was the land of my premonitions, an Italy full of the miracles of art and nature.
Around me, everybody talked constantly about night and about day, but for me there was only eternal day, or perhaps an eternal night — everybody thought it was the latter.

I sat in my darkness, and although the marvel of the world was alive in my mind, illumination was missing, and I was merely climbing around on life with blind-folded eyes as on a towering rock; I felt the silk of flowers and drank their smell, but in my dreams I knew that the flower itself was infinitely more beautiful than her smell or her silken cheek.

One night, I had a marvellous dream in which I saw the light. Everything in the dream was real. Yet when I awoke, I tried in vain to recall the vision.

It was during this time that music walked like a tender genius into my dark dungeon, sweet garlands of poetry wrapped around the strings of her harp. She led me onto sacred soil — the first Italy of my longings.

There was also an angel who hovered between the two Muses and introduced them to me, an angel to whom the divine Madonna herself had given her name — Maria. She was my own age, and she enraptured the blind boy with songs and melodies, reviving the love and hope of his worn dreams until they stepped back into his life like beautiful Vestal virgins.
Maria was an orphan, and on adopting her my mother had made a solemn vow to dedicate her to the service of God if I should ever regain my sight. And now I longed less for the sun, because that would take Maria and her songs away from me.

Soon I heard about a doctor whose skill might help me. I wavered between conflicting passions - love for the sun and love for Maria struggled in my soul. I almost had to be forced to see the doctor.

He told me to be calm - and my spirit stormed instead. I stood at the gates of life as if I were born a second time. I felt a searing pain in my eyes and screamed because my dream returned - I saw light. A thousand brilliant flashes and beams; a brief glance into the treasure of life.

Then the familiar darkness fell again. They put a blindfold over my eyes, making certain that I did not enter the new world except by small steps.

I'll say nothing of all the stages between the steps - I was shown a few objects, but nothing alive except for the doctor, until he thought me strong enough to face even the greatest experience.

He led me out into the night. Above me, the constellations burned, infinitely removed, and I reeled like a drunkard beneath a thousand worlds, aware of God without having to call His name. In front of me, the mountains surged up, dark and splintered in the night, ruins
of a previous earth, and pale lightning from a cloudless sky flickered above their summits. Forests slept deep and sheltered at their feet, and only the black peaks of the trees trembled softly. Sombre and silent, the doctor stood beside me - a few steps away something moved, not unlike a veiled figure. - I prayed.

Suddenly the landscape changed; spirits seemed to gather over the mountains, and the stars grew dim with fear. Behind me, a great mirror unfolded - the ocean.

I trembled at the thought that God was approaching. And mists pressed down on the earth, veiling her tenderly. But in the sky the spirits advanced powerfully, and as the stars died, golden roses flew up over the mountains into the blue air, and a magic spring blessed the sky - mightier and mightier - now a whole sea rolled past, and flame after flame burned in the waves of heaven.

Now, gleaming in a thousand lights, the sun rose above the pines like a world on fire. I threw up my hands to cover my eyes and fell to the ground.

When I awoke, the god of earth hovered in the sky, and his bride had cast aside her veils, displaying her most intimate charms to the eye of the god.

Sacred ground everywhere - spring hung like a sweet dream in all the mountains and meadows, the stars shone as flowers in the dark grass, and a sea of light flowed from
a thousand sources into the garden of creation and colours rose from it like magic spirits. A universe filled with love and life - red fruits and blossoming garlands in the trees, and fragrant wreaths around the hills and mountains - brilliant diamonds in the grapes - butterflies like flying, dancing flowers in the air - song from a thousand glad throats, praising, worshipping - and the eye of God looked back from the infinite sea of the universe and from the dewy pearls in the calixes of the flowers.

I dared to see God!

Suddenly, I heard a rustling behind me - new veils dropped from my eyes - I looked back and saw, for the first time, the eye of my mother, weeping.

Oh night, night come back! I can no longer suffer all this light and love.
TWELFTH NIGHTWATCH

The affairs of the world come and go in total disorder, so I feel free to interrupt the stranger in the middle of his story. I also think that there is no harm in my wishing that many a great poet and author would sometimes interrupt himself at the proper moment, and that death might interrupt the lives of some great men - certain examples immediately spring to mind.

Sometimes, a man will soar up to the sun like an eagle and seem so removed that the earth-bound gape after the transfigured being in all his glory. - But suddenly, the egotist returns from his flight, and instead of bringing back the stolen rays of the sun like a second Prometheus, he covers up the eyes of the people gathered around him in the belief that the sun is blinding them.

Who hasn't seen this eagle soaring through our recent history!

Incidentally, as far as the stranger is concerned, I
give my word to any authors hungering after romantic material that his story promises a reasonable income in royalties - let them find him if they want to and let him finish his tale.

During tonight's watch I witnessed a great commotion: a wig, followed immediately by its owner, came flying out of the door of a famous poet, and it was uncertain whether he was chasing the article before him or whether he was being chased. Intrigued by this ambiguity, I detained him and forced him to confess.

"My friend," he said, "I'm in flying pursuit of immortality, and in turn she is chasing me. No doubt you know how difficult it is to become a celebrity, and how infinitely more difficult it is to live; every business is complaining about excessive competition, and the business of becoming famous and staying alive is no exception. Moreover, there have been so many complaints about all the shoddy workers admitted by mistake into both businesses that now you can't believe anybody any more. In my case especially, there were many obstacles put in my way, and at first I was unable to amount to anything.

You yourself know - what chance does a man have in this world if he enters it with nothing but his naked self and sound limbs? - Unless, that is, he happens to have with him, already formed in the womb, a crown for his head,
or the ability to climb up the branches of his family tree the moment he has crawled from his egg. I can't think of any greater nonsense in this age of ours, where offices, titles, and ribbons and stars are ready for a person before he is ready to wear them. Wouldn't a poor devil who at his birth couldn't slip right away into a warm coat prefer to leave his mother's body as a Christmas log, to be admired and consumed immediately? I hope you understand me, my friend!

I tried to promote myself in every way possible. In vain, until I discovered one day that I had Kant's nose, Goethe's eyes, Lessing's forehead, Schiller's mouth and the buttocks of several other great spirits; I advertised all this, and people began to marvel at me. I went further, and wrote to famous men asking them for their old discarded junk. I was lucky. For example, I am walking in the shoes which Kant used to wear. During the day, I put on Goethe's hat and Lessing's wig, and in the evening I wear Schiller's nightcap. I even learned how to cry like Kotzebue and sneeze like Tieck, and you'd hardly believe the attention I now command. We are creatures of the body and we would rather stick with that than the soul; I'm not joking when I tell you that somebody who saw me strolling in front of him like Goethe, with his hat on back to front and with my hands in the folds of my cloak, assured me that
this was more amusing than Goethe's latest writings.
- Since then, I've been invited to the most distinguished tables, and I'm enjoying myself.

But today I've been unlucky – when I tried to eavesdrop in private on a celebrity who often speaks in public, I was welcomed like a thief despite the fact that anything I managed to acquire by eye and ear is hardly worth mentioning."

At this, he put Lessing's wig back on his head and added sarcastically: "My friend, what is the use of immortal fame if after his death the wig is more important than the man who wore it? – I don't even want to talk about immortality during life, for the most mortal wretch can strut about like an immortal god during his lifetime while the genius is attacked with fists whenever he shows himself – remember the head that wore this wig before me. Good night."

I let the fool run off.

There was a young man loitering in the grave-yard by moonlight. I walked right up to him without his noticing me because he was busy whipping himself into a state of despair with the help of intense gestures and declamation. His method is effective – I used to know a preacher who had the early morning mass who couldn't be moved to tears except by the sound of his own ranting. The
whole performance finally seemed a little dubious to me, so I leaped in to help him out and handed him back his pig-tail together with a speech suitable for the occasion. But in his first excitement, he nearly mistook it for a dagger, with which in vain he tried to stab himself several times.

I tried to calm him down with the comment that tragic situations are destroyed by certain comic touches, such as King Lear dropping his pig-tail while he is in his passion, and I was successful insofar as I got him to sit down on a grave and agree to me fastening his pig-tail back onto his head. While I did this, I tried to reform him by means of an apology on life, to which he had to sit and listen quietly since I was holding him by the hair:

Apology on Life.

By God, life is beautiful. How can you possibly throw it away like a pig-tail, young man. Hold this ribbon here. While I wind your hair I'll try to unwind a few beauties to you as briefly as possible.

What in heaven's name—provided there is a second heaven, or a third or a fourth beside the one in the sky—could be better than earth? Don't you find the world to your liking? The sciences, the arts and manners are in full flower and walk the streets in modern fashion. Like
Holland, the state is intersected by canals and ditches, into which all human talents are divided and channelled cleverly, so that there is no fear of their uniting to flood the whole country. There are men who are so well-situated that one might consider them very good hammers and pliers, though their immortality suffers no decline; just look at this colossus of mankind, how his whole body is busy and working and alive, as one man climbs over the other, and over this second climbs a third, like a group of aerial artists, with one carrying inventions and another dragging ideas up on the way to the top, and it is inevitable that the human race, as it climbs higher and higher on its own shoulders, as it pulls itself up by its own hair like Münchhausen, will eventually climb right into heaven until there is no need to think of a second heaven. - If the pig-tail on the head of mankind holds together and if it is not a false one like the one which I am plaiting, what's the use of trying to find any other way than this of reaching a higher world?

My friend, what do you think you'll gain up there? Better laws perhaps? Centuries are ready to vouch for ours down here! Better customs? We have refined them to such a point that we are almost placed above them! Better constitutions? Haven't you got enough of them lying before you like all the colours on a map? Go to France, my friend,
where constitutions change with fashions, and you can try
on one after another, from monarchy to republic, and back
to despotism again. There you can be big, and then small,
and finally average, the state which seems to suit mankind
best.

My friend, there are excellent remedies for misanthropy;
I myself once had an experience where a good meal prevented
me from committing suicide and where I said, well-sated,
"Life is beautiful indeed!" While others consider the
head or the heart to be the seat of life, I think it's the
stomach - the stomach is responsible for all things great
and marvellous accomplished in this world. Man is a
ravenous beast, and if he is given too much to eat, he
vomits up the most wonderful things during digestion and is
transfigured through his eating and becomes immortal.

Thus, what a wise arrangement of the state to let
its citizen starve periodically - as you would dogs in
training them to perform! For the sake of a meal, poets
warble like nightingales, philosophers concoct systems,
judges pass sentence, doctors heal, priests howl, workers
hammer, pound, build, and plough, and the world feeds
itself into a higher state. Yes, I claim that if the Lord
had forgotten the stomach, the world would still be as
crude as when it was created and now would hardly be worth
discussing.
What do you think of any life beyond into which you won't take the stomach, this very soul of culture, and which you plan to enter only in the spirit! — Don't move, I'm just knotting the first ribbon to tie your hair and pig-tail together. — My friend, without the stomach the spirit is like a lazy bear sucking its own paws. The spirit is only the first minister of the royal purse of the stomach, and if you eliminate the stomach, the spirit is done for. If there is such a thing as transmigration, which I don't doubt in the least, and if the souls of the dead enter flowers and fruits as well as animals, which is also probable, then where else can the connection lie but in the stomach that eats them? The soul climbs up from the stomach as it loses its animal attributes and rises as a vapour into the mind — in any case, it's certain that we can absorb the greatest sages such as Plato, or Hemsterhuis, or Kant, simply by ingesting a good meal.

Consider these examples: Goethe, who assimilated Hans Sachs, the Romantics and the Greeks, is as good an eater as he is a poet, and in all likelihood he has dined on their spirits. Bonaparte may have dined on Julius Caesar, and only the spirit of Brutus seems to exist uneaten somewhere.

How is it possible for you to renounce this stomach and this life, my friend, and try to escape this artificial
machine in which a thousand wheels turn and prod you along. Look at the possibilities still open to you as protagonist! Battle-fields, almanacs, journals, the small theatres and the theatre of life" -

"I'm engaged at the court theatre," the young man interrupted, giving a bow of thanks for the tail now secure again. "The pistol, by the way, is not loaded, and I'm here only because I'm trying to absorb the role of a suicide which I must play on stage tomorrow. Sobriety is the grave of art! If I possibly can slip into passions as I would into combat-gloves, I can play my characters with feeling. Like the greatest masters, I can be miserly if I am studying the role of a miser, and I can be mad if I have to play a lunatic."

With that, he left me standing there, feeling absurd and foolish. "Oh deceitful world," I cried angrily, "Nothing about you is honest, not even the pig-tails of your inhabitants. You are an empty, stupid stage for fools and masks, and it is impossible to feel any sense of exaltation while standing on you."

It seemed to me as if I were dissolving in the night under the blanketed moon and were hovering on great black wings over the earth like the Devil. I shook myself and laughed, hoping to arouse every sleeper below me and to surprise man in his underwear, stripped of make-up,
false teeth, false pig-tails, false breasts and false arses so that I could whistle and stomp my feet at the whole absurd heap.
I climbed up the hill outside the city — it was the time of the vernal equinox, and Mother Earth lay outside brewing her nocturnal herbs to rise again in the morning, her silver hair put aside and her wrinkles smoothed out, wreathed and ringleted like a young nymph, and to raise her newborn children up to her swelling breasts. Down in the valley, a shepherd was blowing his horn, and the notes told such an entrancing tale of a distant country and love and youth and hope that to their accompaniment I couldn't resist composing the following:

A Spring Dithyramb.

You approach, and your dark brother takes to his heels in fright. His shield and armour clatter to the ground and break; and behold, blushing in the fire of dawn, the young Earth steps forward, like a blossoming virgin; and you kiss the beloved, oh youth, and wind the bridal
garland in her hair. Now the last glacier must thaw, and
the frozen element flows free and silent among the flowers,
canopied by green bushes. The mountains hold their Alpine
huts high into the blue sky, and dappled herds cling to
the slopes. Flowers bloom and dream of love, and the
nightingale sings in the bushes. The trees wind their
branches into fragrant garlands and offer them to heaven;
the eagle soars praying up to the sun as if aiming towards
God, and the lark whirls in his wake, exulting high above
the adorned earth. The calix of every flower becomes a
bridal chamber, and every leaf a tiny world. All creation
sucks life and love from the warm heart of the mother!
- Only man -

Here the alp-horn suddenly ceased, and the last note
and the last word faded and died together.

Did you write only thus, Mother Nature? Into whose
hand did you put the pen to continue the work? Will you
never tell us why all your creatures dream and are happy
while only man stands wide awake asking questions which
are never answered? - Where lies the temple of Apollo -
where is the voice that will finally reply? I hear nothing
but the echo of my own words - am I so alone?

Alone! sneers the malicious voice. Mother, mother,
why are you so silent? You should not have written creation's
last word if you planned to stop there. I leaf and leaf
through the pages of the great book and find nothing except this one word about me and behind it a dash, as if the poet had kept the definition of the character he meant to complete inside his head and had given me only a name. If my character was too difficult to develop, why didn't the poet also cross out my name, which now stands alone wondering at itself, unable to fathom its existence?

Close the book, name, until the poet is in the mood to fill the empty pages to which you are no more than a title! –

On the mountain, in the midst of that huge museum of nature, a small art museum had been erected, and now a number of experts and amateurs filed into it, carrying torches so that they might imagine the dead to be alive in the flickering flame. I too occasionally get into the mood for art, more or less out of perversity, and I often like to step from the great museum into the lesser one to see how man, though he lacks the ability to breathe life itself into his creations, nevertheless sculpts and carves quite nicely and even insists afterwards that his work transcends nature.

I followed the experts and amateurs!

The marble gods which I saw there were cripples without arms and legs, and some even lacked heads: the most beautiful and exalted visions dreamt by man, the whole heaven
of a great and vanished race dug up as corpses from Herculaneum and the bed of the Tiber. A resthome of immortal gods and heroes standing among a pitiful mankind.

The ancient artists who had thought and shaped these torsos wandered through my mind.

Now a little amateur from among the visitors began to climb a Medici Venus who had lost her arms. His mouth puckered, and almost weeping, he struggled to kiss her rear-end, famous as the most successfully executed part of the goddess. I grew angry because in these heartless times I can't stand the mask of enthusiasm which some faces can assume so easily, and I leaped enraged onto an empty pedestal to squander away a few words.

"Young art lover," I said," The divine arse is much too high for you. With your short stature, you can't reach it without breaking your neck. I'm speaking out of the kindness of my heart because I'm sorry to see you climbing around endangering your life. According to the rabbis, Adam measured a hundred ells before the fall of man, but we have grown significantly smaller since then, and we are progressively diminishing throughout the ages so that in our century one should be warned against all neck-breaking attempts such as the one we are now witnessing. What do you want of this marble maiden, who at any moment could turn into an iron maiden for you if she weren't lacking
real arms for an embrace; her substitute arms are useless and couldn't even serve as a fist for Berlichingen, for they resemble only the wooden arms of soldiers who have been shot to pieces. My friend, no matter how our art restorers heal and mend, they will never put together again these gods maimed by cruel time like this fallen torso here, and they can be reconstructed only as invalids and celebrities of the past. Once, they stood tall and had arms and thighs and heads, and a race of heroes knelt before them in the dust. Now the situation is reversed: they lie on the ground while our enlightened century stands high and while we ourselves try to pass as gods.

My dear art lover, what has become of us that we dare to dig up these great graves of gods and drag the immortal dead into the light though we know that the Romans punished the violation even of human graves. Of course, our enlightened critics consider the dead gods to be idols, and art to be a pagan sect which has crept in to deify and worship these idols. But what is your opinion, my friend? The ancients chanted hymns. Aeschylus and Sophocles constructed the chorus to praise the gods, our modern art religion prays in critiques and holds its devotions in the brain rather than the heart as the true believer does. We should put the ancients back in their graves again, I think. Kiss the arse, young man - go ahead and kiss it -
and then let it be!

But if you don't really want to worship, my friend, I refuse to let you gawk and marvel at the expense of nature; I protest your attempt to turn these gods into men. Take your choice — either pray to them, or bury them! —

My dear fellow, don't look at me like that! Why don't you bring nature, and I mean real nature, into this gallery and let her speak? By the Devil, she will laugh at man's foolish features, which must appear to her as absurd as the bugbear in Horace's epistles to the Pisones.

Let her tell you whether she would ever have created this nose to fit that toe, this forehead to fit that mouth, those buttocks for that hand; I'm sure she would be angry if you tried to insist that she did. This Apollo would probably have been a cripple if she had continued the job begun at the little toe, and this Antinous would probably have turned out a Thersites, and that tragic, magnificent Laocoön perhaps a kind of Caliban if everything were reformed according to her laws. Yes, what would happen to this Minerva, this epitome of an ideal, whose spirit, invisible like all spirits, is now enthroned inside her missing head?

This headless Minerva, by the way, excites my imagination much more than Agamemnon weeping beneath his cloak in Timanthes' famous painting. Just as the latter advised
artists merely to hint at the presence of agony, so does this Minerva merely hint at the possibility of sublime beauty. Our modern sculptors still follow Timanthes' advice, and their heads should therefore be seen as nothing but surrogates for heads in a two-fold sense, standing up there like ornaments merely to complete the figure. - The ancients, like Prometheus over there in the corner, baked their human figures out of clay, but they also breathed into them the fire of the sun; - we, however, are afraid of danger and don't like to play with fire, and therefore we dispense with the spark; - we even have a fire brigade - censorship and review boards -, which quickly chokes any flame which threatens to break out. With us, the spark of life doesn't stand a chance. What a fine social arrangement of ours to prefer functional machinery to courageous spirit among our citizens, to whip the fox out of his skin and to use only the skin, and to value the hands and feet of our subjects, which are durable spinning and treadling machines, higher than the head. - The state needs only one head, but a hundred arms, like Briareus - but that's enough! -

I broke off in fright, because in the deceptive glow of the torches the whole crippled Olympus around me suddenly seemed to come to life; an angry Jupiter struggled up from his throne, an earnest Apollo reached for his bow and his
ringing harp, the serpents coiled mightily around a struggling Laocoon and his dying sons, Prometheus formed men with the stumps of his arms, and mute Niobe protected the smallest of her children against the falling arrows of the sun. The Muses, without hands, arms or lips stirred as if labouring to play and sing ancient songs long dead - but everything remained silent and no more than the spasms of the dying on a battle-field; - only deep in the background beyond the light, a chorus of Furies stood frozen and petrified, staring dark-eyed and terrible at the struggle.
FOURTEENTH NIGHTWATCH

Come back with me to the madhouse, dear reader, silent companion of my nightly rounds.

You will remember my little cell, provided you haven't lost the thread of my tale, which weaves hidden like a little brook between the rocks and forests which I have heaped around it. I was lying in that cell as in the cave of the Sphinx, shut in with my own riddle, and I was happily on the road toward accepting madness as the only decent system, having discovered that lunacy was the most durable of all philosophies. After all, I had opportunity enough to compare the results of the universal school of life with this smaller institution.

"Let me explain," say writers whenever they want to start from the beginning, and I must do likewise, since tonight I plan to hatch the single nightingale egg of my love; for around me nightingales are singing in every branch and bush tonight and are bursting in unison into one great song.
In a guest role, I once performed *Hamlet* at a court theatre because of my anger at mankind, and to vent my spleen at the front row of the audience as they sat there. That evening it happened that Ophelia took her imagined madness too seriously and ran off the stage quite insane. There was a great turmoil, and while other directors busy themselves coaching people into roles, ours struggled with all his might to coach his primadonna out of her role; but in vain, the powerful hand of Shakespeare, that second creator, had seized her too violently, and to the amazement of everyone backstage, he would not let her go. For me, this intrusion of a giant's hand into a stranger's life was an interesting spectacle, this metamorphosis of a real person into a poetic one, who now began to pace the stage on her buskins and to sing ragged verses that sounded like divine oracles. No matter how good were the reasons everybody gave, she refused to come to her senses, fighting so bitterly that there was no choice but to send her to an asylum.

Much to my surprise, I met her here again. Her door was close to mine, and I could hear her sing every day about the clogs and the shell-hat of her lover. A wretch like me, full of hatred and scorn, born not from a mother's body like other men but from a pregnant volcano, has no sympathy for love and such like; nevertheless, it was
something like that which crept up on me here in the mad-
house, and yet instead of revealing itself in the usual
symptoms, such as a proclivity for moonlight, poetic
headaches, and such like, it first came as a hectic attempt
on my part to write a manifesto for fools and to found a
colony for lunatics who were eventually to be set loose
upon the world.

But soon this insane emotion called love, which once
dropped like a patch of heaven upon the arid desert we
call earth, took hold of me in earnest, and to my horror
I wrote several poems in verse, gaped at the moon, and
sometimes even warbled to accompany the nightingales
 clamouring outside my window. Once, I honestly felt some
emotion on a so-called sentimental evening; yes, in rare
moments I could look contentedly out of the hole of my
Caucasian cave and think about less than nothing. — I even
put some of these meditations on paper during that time, and
I'll resurrect a few of them for the benefit of any souls
inclined toward the sentimental:

To the Moon.

Gentle face filled with goodness and feeling; surely
you must possess both since you never open your mouth up
there in the sky, neither to curse nor to yawn when a
thousand fools and lovers address their sighs and prayers
to you and pick you as their confidant; as long as you have been running around this earth, as her companion and Cicisbeo, you have always been a steady and true friend, and one can't find a single example in world history all the way back to Adam of your becoming unwilling or blowing your nose or assuming sly faces although you have heard these sighs and laments repeated times without number. You always pay attention, and sometimes you even hide behind the handkerchief of a cloud to dry your tears. What better audience than you could a poet choose to read his work to, what better friend could I choose as I waste away with love here in the asylum. How pale you are, my friend. How sympathetic, how accessible to all those who stand and stare at you right now. The gentleness of your face could easily be mistaken for stupidity, especially today as your face has gained weight and you look quite rotund and well-fed; but gain as you will, I have no doubt about your unwavering sympathy, for you are still the same good old man and will lose weight and consume yourself – yes, you even cover your face, when sympathy overpowers you, like the weeping Agamemnon, so that one can see nothing of you except the back of your head grown bald with grief! – Goodbye, you trusty one, you good one!

To Love.

Woman, what do you want from me, clinging to me like
that? Haven't you looked closely at my face yet? — You with your smile and your sweet, flirting glances, and I with all that rage and anger in my Medusa face. My beloved, consider, we present a much too unmatched pair. Let me go, by the Devil! I will have nothing to do with you! You smile again and hold me back? What is this mask of a god in front of your face with which you look at me? I'll tear it away from you to learn about the animal behind it; really, I don't think your true face is one of the most enchanting. — Heavens, I'm getting worse and worse, I coo and languish pitifully — are you trying to drive me completely mad! Woman, how can you enjoy playing a screeching fiddle like me! The composition was written to accompany a curse, and I'm forced to sing a love song! Oh, let me curse rather than pine away in such dreadful tones. Breathe your sighs into a flute — from me they issue forth as from a bugle, and when I coo I'm pounding battle drums. — And now even the first kiss — oh, everything else I could've survived, like everything which exists only in language and in sound, and I still would've been permitted to have my own silent doubts — but the first kiss — I have never kissed before, out of hatred for all tender and moving hypocrisy — monster, if I knew you could trick me into that, I would summon my last strength and fling you from me!

In suchlike fragments, I tried to bring myself down
to earth and to rid myself of my passions in an orderly
and methodical fashion, like many a writer who flings down
his emotions on paper for so long that finally they've
all gone and he can stand there burned-out and sober.

But everything went wrong. Indeed, the symptoms
became ever more critical and I began to wander around
very much absorbed in myself and felt almost human and
humbled before the world. Once I even thought that this
might possibly be the best of all worlds, that man might
be more than the first of the animals, that he might be of
some value and might even be immortal.

At this point, I gave myself up for lost and became
as tedious and trite as any lover. I was no longer horrified
at writing verse, and I could even stay sentimental for
a length of time and grew used to certain love-sick
expressions which previously I would've refused to utter.
Now I launched my first love letter, which together with
the other exchanges of letters, I will add for your
edification.

Hamlet to Ophelia.

"To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most
beautified Ophelia". This introduction, which I used in
my first letter to you when we were only lovers on the
stage, might delude you into thinking that I still labour
under a feigned lunacy, as in those days, and under metaphysical sophistries gathered in my student years. But don't let yourself be deceived, my idol, because this time I'm really insane - everything really lies in ourselves, and outside of us nothing is real. Indeed, according to the most recent school of thought, we don't really know whether we are standing on our heads or our heels, and we have only accepted the former through trust and faith. - I'm deadly serious, Ophelia, and you must not believe for a moment that I'm faking. - Oh, how everything is changed in your poor Hamlet - this whole earth, which once seemed to him a neglected garden of thorns and nettles, a gathering-place of pestilential vapours, has been transformed before his eyes into an Eldorado, into a blossoming garden of the Hesperides; when he used to hate the world, he was so free and healthy, and now that he loves it, he is a slave and nearly ill. - My dearest - I wish I could say "my most detested", and then there would be nothing which could chain me to this stupid planet and I could fling myself down from it happily and joyfully into eternal Nothing - my dearest, unfortunately! I will no longer tell you as I did before, "Get thee to a nunnery!", for I'm mad enough to believe that if a man loves, he is something more than nothing even though he is still rushing headlong towards death and death towards him until the two finally
meet and embrace firmly and forever — whether it be at the stone where St. Gustav died, on the scaffold where the beautiful Maria bled, or at any worse or better place. I know for sure that the Devil hovers over the earth, laughing scornfully, and that he has thrown love, as an enchanting mask, down upon it for all the children of man to fight over just so that they can hold it up in front of their faces for a moment. See, I too have to my misfortune seized the mask and am flirting tenderly with the death's head that lies behind it and, by the Devil, have a mind to propagate the human race with you. Oh, if the accursed mask did not exist, then the sons of earth would surely have circumvented Judgement Day with a law against propagation so that our Lord, or whoever else might want to see the world's final hour, would to his amazement find it altogether depopulated of man.

But let me finally get to the point which I can no longer avoid no matter how I try — to my declaration of love!

Since my birth, no moment has been madder, wilder or more misanthropic than this moment when I write in a rage that I love you, that I worship you, and that besides the urge to hate and loathe you, I have no greater desire than to hear you confess your love for me.

Your loving

Hamlet.
Ophelia to Hamlet

My role demands love and hatred, and finally madness as well - but tell me, do any of these really exist in themselves so that I might know and choose accordingly?

Is there anything in itself or is it all only word and breath and much fantasy? - See, I can't find my way, whether I'm a dream - whether it is only illusion or truth, and whether truth is more than dream - one onion layer around the other, and I'm often at the point of losing my mind about it.

Help me study myself back into my role until I find myself. Do I exist at all outside my role, or is everything role, and I myself nothing? The ancients had their gods, and they called one of them Dream. He must have felt strange imagining himself real though he knew he was only a dream. I sometimes think that man is like that god. I'd like to talk with myself for a moment to learn whether it is I who loves, or whether it's the name Ophelia that does the loving. See, I'm trying to catch up to myself, but I'm always running ahead while my name trails behind, and now I'm back to my role again - but the role is not I. If you can lead me to my self, I'll ask it if it loves you.

Ophelia.
Hamlet to Ophelia.

Don't think so much about these things, my dear Ophelia, for they are so confusing that they could easily lead to the madhouse! Everything is role, the role itself and the actor who is inside, and inside him his thoughts and schemes and joys and foolish pranks – everything belongs to the moment and flees quickly like the word from the lips of the actor. – Everything is only theatre, whether the actor plays on the earth itself or two steps higher on the boards, or two steps down in the soil, where the worms snatch up the departed king's cue-lines, whether spring, winter, summer or autumn decorate the stage and whether the director hangs out a sun or a moon or makes thunder and storms off-stage – everything passes, is extinguished and changes – except for spring in the heart of man; and when the scenery has finally been removed, it's only a strange, naked skeleton standing behind it, without colour and life, and the skeleton grins at the other actors still running around.

You want to study yourself out of your role, down to the self? – Behold, there stands the skeleton, throws a handful of dust into the air and collapses – and in the background there is mocking laughter. It's the ghost of the universe, or the Devil – or an echo of nothing!
To be or not to be! How stupid I was when I asked that question, placing my finger to my nose, and how infinitely more stupid all those who repeated the phrase after me and puzzled about the meaning behind it all. I should've asked "to be" about its own existence, and then something might be fathomed later about the "not to be".

In those days on the stage, I was still burdened with the doctrine of immortality which I had picked up at university, and I pursued it through all its categories. As a matter of fact, I used to be afraid of death because of the immortality — and by God, I would be justified in so doing if this tedious 'comedie larmoyante' were to be followed by a second one — I think it doesn't mean anything.

So, my dear Ophelia, forget all you have been saying and let us love and propagate and commit every foolishness — if only out of revenge so that our seed will help to perpetuate this tedious life until an actor finally arrives who will tear the script apart and fall out of his role to stop this senseless play-acting for the benefit of a non-existent audience.

Love me, in other words, without further brooding!

Hamlet.

Ophelia to Hamlet.

You are a cue-word in the role I play, and I cannot
erase you any more than I can tear out the pages on which my love for you is written. And since I can't study myself out of my role, I'll study on to the end and the final exit, behind which the essential self will be waiting. Then I'll perhaps be able to tell you if there's anything besides the role, if my self is alive, and if it loves you.

Ophelia.

This exchange of letters was followed by an exchange of words, and further exchanges of glances and kisses and such like finally led to an exchange of our selves.

A few months later we had created the cue-word for a new role. - I felt almost happy during this time and experienced for the first time a sort of love for man in the asylum, so that I thought seriously about plans for making Plato's Republic a reality with the help of fellow lunatics. But then the Dream God crossed out all my plans.

Ophelia became paler and paler and more and more rational, although the doctor thought that her madness was increasing: this was the only time he had ever talked sense.

It was storming furiously outside the asylum - I pressed against the bars and stared into the night - nothing else was visible in heaven or earth. It seemed as if I
were standing on the brink of a void calling into it without making a sound — I grew scared, thinking that I had actually cried out loud, but I only heard myself somewhere inside myself. Lightning without its accompaniment of thunder cut arrow-sharp through the night, and with it a kind of daylight came and went rapidly. On one side of me, a madman rattled his chains horribly, and on the other side, I could hear Ophelia singing fragments of her ballads, but often her melodies turned into sighs, and finally everything seemed a great disharmony to which the rattling chains played the accompaniment. I felt as if I had died. I saw myself alone in nowhere; in the far distance the last dim light of earth faded — but it was only a thought of mine which had just ended. A single note trembled darkly through the nothingness — it was the final tolling of time, and now eternity began. I thought my self; I had stopped thinking everything else. Not a single object anywhere except a great, terrible I which fed on itself and instantly gave birth to itself again. I did not sink, for there was no space to sink into, but neither did I seem to rise. All change had disappeared together with time, giving way to dreadful, endless boredom. Terrified, I tried to annihilate myself — but I remained and felt myself immortal.

Here the dream destroyed itself through its own greatness and I awoke; sighing deeply — the light was gone, and
night was everywhere; I heard Ophelia singing her ballads quietly, like lullabies. I felt my way along the walls of my cell, and outside in the darkness some lunatics crept along beside me, hissing softly.

I opened Ophelia's door. She was lying pale on her bed, trying to lull a still-born child to sleep at her breast; a crazy girl stood beside her, her finger held to her lips as if warning me to silence.

"Now it's sleeping," said Ophelia smiling, and her smile was like an open grave. "Thank God there's such a thing as death without eternity," I said involuntarily.

She kept on smiling and began to whisper, as if her words were about to melt into vapour and vanish into silence," My role is finished, but my self remains, and it's only the role which they bury. Thank God that I've found my way out of the play and can cast away my assumed name; after the performance, the self begins."

"The self is nothing," I said, shaking my head.

Almost inaudible, she continued, "There it stands behind the scenes waiting for me; if only the curtain were fully down! - I love you! That is my last speech in the play and the only part I'll try to keep - it was the best part! Let them bury the rest! -

The curtain fell, and Ophelia exited - nobody applauded, and it was as if the theatre were empty. She slept with
her child at her breast and both were pale and one could not hear any breath, for death had already put his white mask upon them.

I stood beside the bed with a storm gathering inside me, and something burst out of me into the air, like wild laughter - I grew afraid, for instead of the expected laughter, I wept the first tear in my life. Nearby, someone else was howling - but it was only the storm whistling through the madhouse.

When I looked up, I saw lunatics in a semi-circle around the bed, and although they remained silent, they were gesticulating and miming in strange ways; a few were smiling, others were deep in thought, while others were shaking their heads or woodenly watching the pale sleeper and the child. Number nine was among them, holding his finger to his lips in a significant gesture.

I felt a shudder of fear in their circle!
Although everyday experience proves that fools are tolerated in every walk of life, the authorities nevertheless resented my attempt to propagate fools, and as punishment they threw me out of the asylum.

Alas, I felt very unhappy having to say farewell to my brothers and to consort with the sane again; and as the door of the asylum clanged shut behind me, I stood all by myself and went sadly to find the graveyard to which they had carried Ophelia. If only I could have found some Laertes to fight with beside the grave, for when I left the asylum, I took with me an increased hatred for all the sane people walking past me on the street with their dull, vacant faces.

Both the rich and the poor have one great advantage over all other men in that they can indulge their urge to travel as much as they please. The rich man unlocks the splendours of the earth with a golden key, while the pauper
has free admission to nature and can move into the best mansions if he wants; today into Aetna, tomorrow into Fingal's cave; this week into Rousseau's summer place at Lake Geneva and next week into the marvellous crystal halls of the Falls of the Rhine, where the sun weaves rainbows instead of a painted ceiling over his head and where nature re-builds his palace by destroying it constantly.

Show me the king who can live in greater splendour than a pauper!

Moreover, I travelled with the advantage of no-one hounding me to pay for my drinks, and I had to thank nobody for my evening supper except old Mother Nature herself; for the earth still kept a few roots in her lap which she did not deny me, and she offered my thirsty lips a fresh, bubbling drink from her water-fall in a dish carved out in the rock. - I was free and happy and hated men, whenever I felt like it, for creeping about this great sun temple in their paltry and useless ways.

Once, I had just got up from my bed of fragrant, flowering turf, and was looking into the dawn as it rose like a spirit out of the sea while I was biting on a piece of root which I had dug up out of the ground, thus combining the practical with the pleasant. It is a characteristic of human greatness to be able to indulge
in secondary business in the presence of awesome events, such as confronting the sun with a pipe in one's mouth, or dining on macaroni during a tragedy, and so on; man has made extraordinary progress in such matters.

As I lay there so comfortably, my mood prompted me to soliloquize as follows:

"There's nothing better than laughter, and I value it almost as much as other educated men praise weeping, though a tear is easily brought forth simply by staring at one spot, or by mechanically reading a Kotzebue drama, or even by bouts of laughter. Didn't I recently see an emaciated man shed plentiful tears at the sight of the rising sun, while others standing nearby praised the tears as proof of a sensitive soul until they too began to weep at the crying man? I was the only one to ask, "My friend, does the sight really move you so much?" "Of course not!" he said," But according to new observations, the rays of the sun, besides causing sneezes and tears, also affect sexual reproduction; and I was in Italy!" I understood the man, who was staring into the sun looking for something more real than fantastic. As I turned away laughing, the others, still weeping, berated me harshly. Struck by the contrast, I laughed all the harder, and if I hadn't run, they would've stoned me out of sheer sensitivity! --

What could be a better weapon than laughter for
defying the world's scorn and fate itself? Even the most heavily-armed enemy is frightened by the satirical mask, and misfortune itself moves away from me, scared, whenever I dare to mock it with laughter! By the Devil, what is this earth and its sentimental companion the moon good for if not for laughing at — indeed, if the earth has any value at all, it's only because laughter is at home here. Everything on this planet was arranged so thoroughly and sensitively that the Devil, once looking it over to pass the time, grew angry; to avenge himself on the master builder he sent down Laughter, which managed to sneak in masked as Joy so that mankind accepted her willingly, until in the end the mask dropped to mock the world with the face of satire. Let me have laughter for the length of my life and I shall endure."

"Hoho," somebody shouted in my ear, and when I turned around, I found a wooden puppet staring me in the face insolently and defiantly. "He's my patron," said a huge man, holding the puppet toward me. A large travelling trunk stood beside him. "You'd make a talented clown, and I happen to need one for the one I had just died today. If you feel like it, join me; the job pays well, so you can stuff yourself with better things than roots."

During this conversation, the puppet looked at me so trustingly that I felt drawn to him as if to a friend.
"The fellow was carved in Venice," said the puppet-player as if to encourage me - "and I bet he does his job better than any other. Just look how he stands and struts as if his legs were real; see how he puts his hand to his heart, how he drinks and eats when I pull the strings and how he laughs and cries like a normal human when the string is pulled lightly."

"All right, I'll accept your offer," I said, putting the trunk on my shoulders. As I carried it along, the wooden society inside rattled as if performing a French Revolution to pass the time.

At the inn, we found the theatre ready and some villagers waiting to see the performance. The director gave me a quick lesson on the theory of tragedy and comedy, and to amuse me he opened a small side-door where my predecessor was lying in the straw dressed in a shroud, with his role all finished; his face was contorted maliciously, and the director said," He died because he was laughing so hard he choked."

"A beautiful death," I replied, and we made preparations to direct the troupe of puppets. My partner's specialty was lovers and mistresses, whom he played in a high falsetto. My major role, on the other hand, was the clown, but as a side-line I also had to look after the kings. When the curtain fell, the director embraced me passionately
and insisted I was a credit to the profession.

However, how dearly one can pay for directing was a thing we had opportunity to learn even among puppets; it all happened like this:

We had set up our stage in a little German village near the French border. On the other side, they were just enacting the great tragi-comedy in which a king makes an unsuccessful debut and in which the buffoon, in the role of equality and liberty, rattles skulls instead of bells. We had the unfortunate idea of introducing Holofernes on the stage, and this so enraged the farmers who were present that they stormed the stage, kidnapping our puppet Judith and dragging her together with Holofernes' severed wooden head to the house of the mayor, where they demanded no less than the latter's own head. The head thus threatened grew very pale as the rebels confronted him with the bloody wooden one, and since the situation seemed to be becoming worse and worse, I decided to change things for the better. I seized the head of Holofernes, jumped onto a rock, and in my fright tried to put together this speech:

"Dear Countrymen.

Look at this bleeding wooden head of a king that I'm holding up for all of you to see. When it was still sitting on its neck, it was controlled by strings, and
the string in turn was controlled by my hand and so on to infinity, where the seat of control remains a mystery. This is the head of a king, but I who pulled the strings so that it nodded or shook like this, or like that, I am an average wretch of little importance to the state. How can you then be angry at this Holofernes when he nods and shakes as I please? - I think my words make sense, countrymen! - Yet somehow your anger at this head has been transferred to the head of your mayor - and I find that unjustified. - Let me explain myself more clearly: my Holofernes doesn't play to your liking; so slap me, a miserable wretch, on the hands, so that my ministers, the wires which I pull, might change direction until the head will nod or shake more gracefully, or more intelligently. What has this poor head done to you that you treat it so; it is the most mechanical thing in the world and doesn't contain one single thought. Don't ask this head for liberty - it doesn't have any! - Moreover, what you call freedom is a dubious thing at best; the puppet play you saw today in which the wooden king was so easily deprived of his head is nothing - I have others even more full of errors in my trunk, in which the author was not equal to his material so that like the poets of politics he made the republic of which he was writing into a tyranny. I could play such things for you! - However, unnatural
punishment, such as cutting off a brainless head, is always unjustified, for this wooden head here is only something to look at, and fortunately I know how to put it back on its neck again, which couldn't be done successfully in a lot of other cases. And God help my poor puppets if a real head ever got the notion to substitute for the wooden one here in my hand, to nod and shake and break the string - that could easily make a serious tragedy of a comedy. - I think I've said enough, dear countrymen!"

On the whole, man is an honest, simple creature whenever he is not suffering from fixed ideas, and he easily reconciles himself to contradictions; yes, I'm sure if today he broke some thin snare that tied him down, he would let himself be thrown into chains tomorrow with the same enthusiasm. Anybody looking on from above must have pity for such a race. So, my farmers abandoned their revolution good-naturedly and feted their mayor instead. Unfortunately, the happiness of the live actors brought bitter misery upon the wooden ones.

It happened that during the next night we directors were roused by a steady noise coming from the direction of the theatre; at first, we blamed it on the actors' jealousy of each other or on an intrigue among the troupe, but when we investigated, we found the mayor, whose head I had just put back on his shoulders, clutching our Holofernes,
accompanied by court-clerks who proceeded to arrest our whole cast in the name of the law, explaining that our players were politically dangerous. All my arguments were in vain and before my very eyes they pulled several kings and gentlemen, such as Solomon, Herod, David and Alexander from the trunk in order to drag them away. This is how the state treats its own representatives! - My clown was the last one to go; I nearly stooped to begging to save him - but I was told that a strict censorship decree forbade all satire in the state without exception and that measures had been taken to confiscate the aforementioned satire while it was still lodged in the head. Finally, I was allowed to hold the puppet for a fleeting moment, and I took him behind one of the wings and here in the solitude I furtively pressed his wooden mouth to mine and wept a second tear, for besides Ophelia, he was the only creature on earth I had truly loved. My partner stumbled through the next day like a man in a dream and toward evening they found him dangling from a stage cloud, too ashamed to cancel the tragi-comedy which he had announced.

And so, this undertaking of my life ended sadly like all the others, and worn out by the trials of life, I tried seriously to find a steady job in society. There is nothing better on earth than being needed and enjoying a safe income; - man is not only a wanderer, but also a
Blessed is the man who has connections — I was able to obtain an audience with the minister's servant, who happened to be in a good mood and recommended me to his master. I was pushed higher and higher up the ladder of state until I reached the top rung, where I threw myself to the ground and was mercifully given hopes of obtaining the job. I submitted to and passed a thorough examination in which I had to demonstrate that I had both a quiet voice, so as not to wake the monarch when he was asleep, and an educated and sonorous one, so as not to offend his musical sensibilities on sleepless nights, and after further study had been highly recommended to me, I had the happiness of seeing myself hired as watchman.
I wish I could paint this finale and Hogarthian tail-piece to my nightwatches clearly before everybody's eyes; but sadly enough I'm lacking the colours of the day here in the night, and so I can project only shadows and dissolving pictures through the lens of my magic lantern.

Whenever I feel in the mood to group kings and paupers together in a happy brotherly society, I wander around the church yard over their graves and imagine them lying peacefully down there in the ground beside each other, in an environment of the greatest freedom and equality, where only in their sleep to they have satirical dreams and grin maliciously from their hollow eye sockets. Down there they are all brothers, and above them on the turf there is nothing to be seen except perhaps a moss-covered stone on which the old, battered coat-of-arms of some noble are inscribed, while the beggar's grave has perhaps a wild flower or a nettle as its sole ornament. -
So tonight I visited this favourite spot of mine again, this suburban theatre where Death is the producer and directs mad poetic burlesques as sequels to the prosaic dramas performed at court and on the world stage. The night was oppressive and sultry, and the moon peered furtively at the graves while blue streaks of lightning flashed across his face now and then.

There was a poet there who thought that the lightning was God and eternal life illuminating the graves — I, however, took it for granted that it was merely a mocking reflection, a dull, deluding light which followed the dead life for a while; just as a rotting tree seems to glow for a while at night, until it finally crumbles into dust. —

Unconsciously, I had come to a stop at the grave-stone of an alchemist; a strong, old head looked out of the carved stone inscribed with unintelligible symbols from the Cabbala.

The poet wandered among the graves for a while talking to skulls scattered on the ground, to set himself on fire, as he said; I became bored and fell asleep at the grave-stone.

And in my sleep I heard a storm rising, and the poet wanted to put the thunder into music and the music into words, but the notes would not be organized, and the words
seemed to explode and fly into fragmented syllables. 
Sweat ran from the poet's brow because he could not make 
any sense out of his nature poem — so far the fool had 
tried composing only on paper.

The dream became more involved. Using a skull as a 
desk, the poet once more seized his pen and started to 
write — he actually began, and soon I saw his title 
completed:

A Poem on Immortality.

The skull began to leer beneath the paper, but the 
poet was untroubled as he wrote his invocation, calling 
on imagination to dictate to him. Then he began a gruesome portrait of death in order to glorify immortality 
the more in the end, like a sun-rise after darkest night. 
He was totally lost in his fantasies and did not notice 
that all the graves around him had opened and that their 
sleepers were smiling malevolently, but without moving. 
Now he had reached the turning point of his poem and began 
to sound trumpets and prepare for Judgement Day. He was 
just about to resurrect the dead when suddenly some invisible thing seemed to stop his hand. He looked up 
amazed — and down in their death-chambers the dead still 
slept and smiled, and none would wake. He quickly picked 
up his pen again and called louder, giving voice to 
thunder and trumpets — in vain, the dead merely shook their
heads ill-humouredly, turned over on their sides to sleep more soundly, and showed him the naked backs of their heads.

"What, is there no God then!" he cried out distraught, and the echo threw back the word "God" loud and clear. He stood dumbfounded and chewed on his pen stupidly. "The Devil created the echo!" he said finally, "It's impossible to tell whether the sound is an echo or whether someone is actually talking back."

He tried once more, but no words came to the page; finally tired and almost calmed down he put his pen back behind his ear and said dully, "Immortality is stubborn, publishers pay by the page, and royalties are small these days; writing this stuff is unprofitable - so I'll go back to dramas again!"

With these words, I woke up and found that the dream and the poet had vanished together. Instead, a brown Gypsy woman was sitting by my side, and she seemed to be studying my face intently. Her gigantic frame and her dark face whose vivid features seemed to have been written down by an unusual and singular way of life nearly frightened me to death. "Give me your hand, stranger," she said mysteriously, and I stretched it toward her involuntarily.

The stronger and surer a man is of himself, the more
he will deride every mystery and marvel, from the Masonic Order to the secrets of another world. But today I trembled for the first time in my life because as if she were reading out of a book, the woman read my complete early history from my hand as far as the part where I was lifted from the ground as a treasure. (See the fourth nightwatch.) Then she added, "You shall also see your father, stranger; turn around, he is standing behind you!" - I turned around quickly - and the solemn, stone head of the alchemist was staring at me. She rested her hand on the stone, smiling oddly, "That's him, and I'm your mother."

What a mad, touching family reunion - the brown Gypsy mother and the stone alchemist who was sticking half out of the ground as if he were trying to clasp his son to his cold breast. To round off the family tableau, I embraced both of them, and as I sat down between them, the woman chanted like a balladeer, "It was Christmas Eve, and your father wanted to conjure up the Devil. He read passages from a book by the light of three unsanctified candles - something began to stir underneath the ground, as if the earth were making waves, and the light turned blue. We stopped just before the part where heaven is denied and hell pledged, and looked at each other silently. "Well, it's only for fun," your father said then and we read the passage out loudly - something began to laugh stealthily
somewhere between the two of us, and we laughed too, so as not to stand there stupidly. Now something began to move around us in the night and we noticed we weren't alone. I pressed closer to your father in the middle of the ring we had drawn around us, and as we accidentally touched the sign of the earth spirit, we were suddenly in heat. The Devil came when our eyes were half-closed - the very moment we created you...we hardly saw him. He was in a fine mood and wanted to be your godfather; he seemed a pleasant man in the prime of life, and I'm really surprised at your resemblance to him, except you're more saturnine, a habit you should break. When you were born, I felt enough conscience to have you put into Christian hands, and I played you into the hands of that treasure-hunter who brought you up. And now you know your family background, stranger."

What an illumination this speech was for me only a psychologist can imagine: I had been given the key to my self and I was able to open for the first time with awe and secret trembling the long-closed door - and there it looked like Bluebeard's secret room, and it would've throttled me had I dared to be less frightened. It was a dangerous psychological key!

I'd like to lie down before a group of skilled psychologists for dissection and anatomy to see whether
they could detect in me what I could now in fact read — by which, incidentally, I imply no offense to a science which I admire the more highly because it does not bother to waste time and energy on such a hypothetical object as the soul.

I must've spoken some of these reflections out loud, for the Gypsy said like an oracle," It's nobler to hate the world than to love it; whoever loves, needs. But he who hates is self-sufficient and needs nothing except the hatred inside him."

These words were the motto of her life, and I finally recognized her as truly belonging to my family. After some silence, she said mysteriously," I'd like to see the old codger again and watch him perform his last chemical experiments on himself; he's been underground for so long — could there be anything left of him? — Let's have a look!"

— After these words, she crept over skulls and bones to the charnel-house, came back with a pick and a shovel, and began to dig up the ground mysteriously.

I left her alone at her strange work, for there was someone stumbling among the graves nearby, walking in loops and circles as if trying to dodge some invisible figure blocking his way. At times he seemed to smile, but often he turned away frightened and trembling and shied away a
few steps, until something would force him to flee again in yet another direction. As I approached, he grasped my hand, gave a sigh of relief, and said, "Thank God, a living person! Help me get to that grave over there." I thought he was mad and went with him to see what would happen. Sometimes, when I brushed too close to a grave, he would push me aside so that I wouldn't touch the air above it, but finally he seemed to gather courage and caught his breath for a while between three large monuments, toppled columns with tablets bearing the names of dead princes.

"We can rest a while," he said. "There is nothing above the ground here except stones and monuments, and underground there is probably only a handful of dust beside the crowns and sceptres; such grand gentlemen rot away quickly, for they feast and eat too much during their lifetimes and absorb a large amount of earth matter very early."

I looked at him surprised, and he continued, "You must think I'm mad, but you're wrong! I don't like coming here, for I was born with some kind of sixth sense, and despite myself I can see the dead in their graves more or less clearly according to their degree of decomposition. As long as the deceased down there is still whole, I can see his form above the grave, and only as the body corrupts
does the form also dissolve into shadow and vapour, until it finally evaporates completely when the grave is empty. The whole earth, of course, is one giant graveyard, but the figures of the decayed assume a friendlier aspect than when they were alive, and turn into pretty flowers. But here in the cemetery, they are still recognizable and they keep looking at me, so I grow afraid. I would never have come here if it weren’t for my rendez-vous."

"Your sweetheart could surely have picked a better place than this," I said, angry at his unknown beloved, as he ceased talking for a moment.

"She doesn't have any choice," he said. - "She lives here!"

Now it dawned on me, and I understood him when he pointed to a distant grave. -"She lives down there—she died in full flower, and this is the only wedding-chamber I'll ever see her in. She's smiling at me from the distance, and I've got to hurry; lately her form has begun to grow hazy, and only the smile on her lips is still clearly visible."

"An uncommon love affair, to say the least," I added. "And by the way, there's nothing more tedious on this earth than a man in love."

As we continued our course, he drew a few sketches of the tenants laying along the way. "Over there is a
court fool who has kept in good shape, including the scorn and the satire in his smile. - Here a poet is waiting for the day when all the dead will rise again, but he himself is almost finished now because I can see only thin vapour and have to strain my imagination to make any sense out of him. Here's a mother with a child at her breast, and they're both smiling! - (This shook me, because it was Ophelia's grave!) - Here lie a politician and a banker together, but they're both in very bad shape. - The grave over there must belong to a notorious miser; although his hand has nearly vanished, he is still clutching the edge of his shroud."

We had reached the lover's grave and he asked me to leave him alone; from the distance I could see him embrace the air and plant passionate kisses - it was an odd rendezvous indeed! -

Meanwhile, the Gypsy had opened my father's grave, and the decayed coffin emerged. The moonlight, curious, slipped down along half-faded emblems and decorations, and the cross on the lid gleamed bright and white. I felt nervous as I witnessed the grey past projecting itself into the present, and as my father's last cradle which had rocked him to sleep rose up. I hesitated to remove the lid, and to give myself courage I picked up a worm wriggling out of the ground beside the coffin and addressed it thus:
"Except for the favourites of kings and nobles, there is only one other breed which enjoys living off the flesh of his majesty; and you're one of them, worm! The king feeds on the marrow of his country, and in turn you feed on him, and thus the king is soon brought back into the lap, or at least into the bellies, of his loyal subjects, after a journey through three or four different stomachs, as Hamlet has already pointed out. On how many kingly and noble brains have you stuffed yourself, you fat parasite, to reach this state of well-being and corpulence? The ideals of how many philosophers have you reduced to your brand of realism. You're an irrefutable argument for the pragmatic application of all ideals, for you've grown fat off the wisdom of many heads. You hold nothing sacred, neither beauty nor ugliness, neither virtue nor vice; you're like Laocoön's snake, wrapping yourself around everything, and you prove your intensive superiority over the whole of mankind. What happened to the eye which once smiled enchantment or flashed commands? You squat alone inside the empty socket and glance insolently about you, you satirist, and the head which perhaps hatched the schemes of a Caesar or an Alexander is turned into a home, or a sty, for you. What is this palace now which encloses a whole world and a heaven in itself; this fairy castle in which love and magic dance; this microcosm in which
everything that is great and noble, and everything that is dreadful and awe-inspiring lies together in the same germ, this microcosm which gave birth to temples and gods, inquisitions and devils; this culmination of creation — the head of man! — It's the home of a worm. What is the world if its thoughts are nothing, if everything is but a fleeting illusion! What is the use of earth's dreams, the use of spring and of flowers, if the dreams fade inside the house of the grave, if here in the final Pantheon, all gods must stumble from their pedestals until worms and decay take possession. Oh, don't talk to me about the separate life of the spirit — here lies its ruined factory, and the thousand threads which once used to weave the net of the world are all torn, and with them the world itself. Even the old-timer here in his bedroom will have thrown off his costume, and this malicious wretch in my hand probably came from the clean-up campaign which is taking place in my father's last house. Whatever the case, I'll face the void and join him in my mind so that I won't feel a single trace of humanity when at last I too must go!" —

Now I had the courage I needed to lift the lid, although I felt my anger and rage were part of a great nothing, like all the rest. —

How strange — as the silent chamber which I expected to be empty opened, he was still lying intact on his pillow,
his face solemn and pale, his hair black and tousled around brow and temple; it was still the form modelled after life which was stored here in death's underground museum as a rarity, and the old magician seemed to defy nothingness.

"That's exactly what he looked like when he conjured up the Devil," the Gypsy said," Only they folded his hands after he died so that he's forced to pray against his will!"

- And why should he be praying?" I asked angrily. "Up above us, innumerable stars sparkle and float in the sea of heaven, but if they are worlds, as many clever heads insist, there are also skulls and worms upon them, like down here; and so it continues through the whole of infinity, and the Basel Death Dance merely becomes funnier and wilder and the dance hall larger. - Oh, how all of them who run around on top of graves and on top of the thousand-fold, piled-up lava of past generations - how they all whimper for love and for a noble heart above the clouds against which they could nestle with all their worlds! Whimper no more – these myriad worlds hurtle through the heavens only through the giant strength of nature, and this dreadful birth-machine which gave birth to itself and to everything else has no heart of its own, but merely forms little hearts for amusement and distributes them among us – go ahead and cling to them, and love and coo as long as your own hearts don't break! - I refuse to love and will remain
cold and unmoved so that perhaps I can laugh about it all when the giant hand eventually crushes me! -

"The old magician seems to be laughing at me. Is your world a better one, conjurer of the Devil? Have you got a new, more magnificent Pantheon than this crushed and empty one, a new one that reaches into the clouds, where noble gods can really stand up without smashing their heads against the low ceiling. If you have, then let it be praised. It might even be worth the trouble to watch some great spirit finally reach his necessary infinite space to live in so that he will no longer have to choke and hate, but can rise freely into the sky on open, shining wings. The idea almost inspires me! - But not all of them should be resurrected; not all of them! - What do all the pygmies and cripples want in this great, marvellous Pantheon, in which only beauty should throne, and the gods! Oh, one is afraid of such a crowd often enough down here on earth, and how could one share heaven with them! - Only you should be allowed to rise from your slumber, you great, kingly heads who appear crowned throughout the history of the world, and you inspired singers who speak enraptured of the sublime and worship it! The others can sleep quietly and peacefully and have pleasant dreams, for all I care.

"I wouldn't mind walking the road together with you, old alchemist, but don't plead with heaven for me - don't
beg — rather take it by storm if you have the strength. A falling Titan is worth more than an earth full of hypocrites attempting to sneak into the Pantheon with a bit of morality and some threadbare virtues. Let us march in arms against the giant of the higher world; we can plant our flag only if we are worthy of living there! — Cease your begging; I will tear your folded hands apart by might! —

"Alas! What is this — are you too only a mask to delude me? — I can no longer see you, father; where are you? — As I touched you, you fell into ashes, and only a handful of dust remains on the ground, and a few well-fed worms creeping away like moralistic funeral preachers who have over-indulged at the wake. I commit this handful of paternal dust to the winds — nothing remains!"

"In the distance, the visionary is still standing over the beloved grave, embracing Nothing!

"And the echo in the charnel-house cries for the last time:

NOTHING!"