

**THE AUTO-
BIOGRAPHY
OF ANY ONE
BEING**

**INCLUDING
EVERY ONE
BEFORE**

DEDICATION(S)

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I was not one only, but the steady advance, hour after hour, of an army in close formation, in which there appeared, according to the moment, impassioned ones, indifferent ones, jealous ones ... In a composite mass, these elements may, one by one, *without our noticing it*, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate or reinforce, until in the end a change has been brought about which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person.

This life as it has been lived owes everything to those, who had come into it, stayed long or little, and passed out. Their love as well as their hate, has gone into making this life.

Dedicated to everyone from whom I have learned.

PREFACE(S)

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BEGINNING(S)

A written preface provisionally localizes the place where, between reading and reading, book and book, the inter-inscribing of "reader(s)," "writer(s)," and language is forever at work.

Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred.

"I" is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it.

How true, therefore, is the remark I have often made about my self that like Sheherazade who saved her life by telling fairy tales, so I save my life or keep my self alive by writing.

I have begun on a work which is without precedent, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I propose to set before my fellow-mortals a man in all the truth of nature; and this man shall be myself.

It is with a kind of fear that I begin to write the history of my life. I have, as it were, a superstitious hesitation in lifting the veil that clings about my childhood like a golden mist. The task of writing an autobiography is a difficult one. When I try to classify my earliest impressions, I find that fact and fancy look alike across the years that link the past with the present. The woman paints the child's experiences in her own fantasy. A few impressions stand out vividly from the first years of my life; but "the shadows of the prison-house are on the rest." Besides, many of the joys and sorrows of childhood have lost their poignancy; and many incidents of vital importance in my early education have been forgotten in the excitement of great discoveries. In order, therefore, not to be tedious I shall try to present in a series of sketches only the episodes that seem to me to be the most interesting and important.

On Friday, June 12th, I woke up at six o'clock and no wonder; it was my birthday. But of course I was not allowed to get up at that hour, so I had to control my curiosity until a quarter to seven. Then I could bear it no longer, and went to the dining room, where I received a warm welcome from Moortje (the cat).

Clearly every detail of that day is engraved on my mind. It is the sixth of July, 1892. We are quietly sitting in the back of our little flat. Fedy and I—when suddenly the Girl enters. Her naturally quick, energetic step, sounds more than usually resolute. As I turn to her, I am struck by the peculiar gleam in her eyes and the heightened color.

"Have you read it?" she cries, waving the half-open newspaper.
"What is it?"

Wait a minute. This can't be happening now. Wait.

The fuse is already lit, little sparks flickering forward in a desperate, deadly dance. The steel hands on a big clock tick-tick-tick

relentlessly onward as the world spins further and further out of control. My whole life is about to blow up.

This is not a story of heroic feats, or merely the narrative of a cynic; at least I do not mean it to be. It is a glimpse of two lives running parallel for a time with similar hopes and convergent dreams.

Kishorganj, my birth place, I have called a country town, but this description, I am afraid, will call up wholly wrong associations. The place had nothing of the English country town about it, if I am to judge by the illustrations I have seen and the descriptions I have read, these being my only sources of knowledge about England, since I have never been there, nor in fact anywhere outside my own country.

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

A few months after my twenty-first birthday, a stranger called to give me the news. I was living in New York at the time, on Ninety-fourth between Second and First, part of that unnamed, shifting border between East Harlem and the rest of Manhattan. It was an uninviting block, treeless and barren lined with soot-colored walk-ups that passed heavy shadows for most of the day. The apartment was small with slanting floors and irregular heat and a buzzer downstairs that didn't work, so that visitors had to call ahead from a pay phone at the corner gas station, where a black Doberman the size of a wolf paced through the night in vigilant patrol, its jaws clamped around an empty beer bottle.

I have ever had a pleasure in obtaining any little anecdotes of my ancestors. You may remember the inquiries I made among the remains of my relations when you were with me in England, and the journey I undertook for that purpose. Imagining it may be equally agreeable to you to learn the circumstances of *my* life, many of which you are unacquainted with, and expecting the enjoyment of a few weeks' uninterrupted

leisure, I sit down to write them. Besides, there are some other inducements that excite me to this undertaking. From the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I passed my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world. As constant good fortune has accompanied me even to an advanced period of life, my posterity will perhaps be desirous of learning the means which I employed, and which thanks to Providence, so well succeeded with me. They may also deem them fit to be imitated, should any of them find themselves in similar circumstances.

In my late twenties and early thirties, I went through a period of several years when everything I touched turned to failure. My marriage ended in divorce, my work as a writer foundered, and I was overwhelmed by many problems. I'm not just talking about an occasional shortfall or some periodic belt tightenings—but a constant, grinding, almost suffocating lack of money that poisoned my soul and kept me in a state of never-ending panic.

The Sunday edition of the *Kärntner Volkszeitung* carried the following item under "Local News": "In the village of A. (G. township), a housewife, aged 51, committed suicide on Friday night by taking an overdose of sleeping pills."

When my mother was pregnant with me, she told me later, a party of hooded Ku Klux Klan riders galloped to our home in Omaha, Nebraska, one night. Surrounding the house, brandishing their shotguns and rifles, they shouted for my father to come out. My mother went to the front door and opened it. Standing where they could see her pregnant condition, she told them that she was alone with her three small children and that my father was away, preaching in Milwaukee. The Klansmen shouted threats and warnings at her that we had better get out of town because "the good Christian white people" were not going to stand for my father's "spreading trouble" among the "good" negroes of Omaha with the "back to Africa" preachings of Marcus Garvey.

I was born the 30th of November, 1835, in the almost invisible village of Florida, Monroe County, Missouri. My parents removed to

Missouri in the early thirties; I do not remember just when, for I was not born then and cared nothing for such things. It was a long journey in those days and must have been a rough and tiresome one. The village contained a hundred people and I increased the population by one per cent. It is more than many of the best men in history could have done for a town. It may not be modest in me to refer to this but it is true. There is no record of a person doing as much—not even Shakespeare. But I did it for Florida and it shows that I could have done it for any place—even, London, I suppose.

I was born in the late twenties on the verge of the Great Depression, which was to spread its disastrous arms into every corner of this nation for over a decade. I was much too young to remember the beginning of this depression, but I do recall when I was five years of age, how I questioned my parents about the numerous people standing in bread lines. I can see the effects of this early childhood experience on my anticapitalistic feelings.

"What you looking at me for?"

I didn't come to stay ..."

I hadn't so much forgot as I couldn't bring myself to remember. Other things were more important.

So my heritage is a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze. I'd be lying if I were to tell you I could remember the smell of sweat as I hadn't even been born yet. Conception's just a shot in the dark. I'm supposed to be dead right now but I just woke up this dingo motherfucker having hit me across the head with a slab of marble that instead of splitting my head open laid a neat sliver of eyeglass lens through the bull's-eye center of my left eye. We were coming through this four-and-half-day torture of little or no sleep. That's the breaks. We were staying at this one drag queen's house but her man did her wrong by being seen by some other queen with a vicious tongue in a darkened lot on the west side fucking some cute little Puerto Rican boy in the face and when me and my buddy knocked on the door to try and get a mattress to lay down on she sent a bullet through the door thinking it was her man—after three days of no sleep and maybe a couple of stolen doughnuts

my eyes start separating: one goes left and one goes right and after four days of sitting on some stoop on a side street head cradled in my arms seeing four hours of pairs of legs walking by too much traffic noise and junkies trying to rip us off and sunlight so hot this is a new york summer I feel my brains slowly coming to a boil in whatever red-blue liquid the brains float in and looking down the street or walking around I begin to see large rats the size of shoeboxes; ya see them just outta the corner of your eyes, in the outer sphere of sight and when ya turn sharp to look at them they've just disappeared around the corner or down subway steps and I'm so sick my gums start bleedin' everytime I breathe and after the fifth day I start seeing what looks like the limbs of small kids, arms and legs in the mouths of these rats and no screaming mummies or daddies to lend proof to the image and late last night me and my buddy were walking around with two meat cleavers from Macy's gourmet section stuck in between our belts and dry skin lookin' for someone to mug and some queer in the upper east side tried to pick us up but my buddy's meat cleaver dropped out the back of his pants just as the guy was opening the door to his building and clang clangalang the guy went apeshit he screams bouncing through the night off half a million windows of surrounding apartments we ran thirty blocks till we felt safe. Some nights we had so much hate for the world and each other all these stupid dreams of finding his foster parents who he tried poisoning with a box of rat poison when they let him out of the attic after keeping him locked in there for a month and a half after all dear it's summer vacation and no one will miss you here's a couple a jugs of spring water and serial don't eat it all at once we're off on a holiday after all it's better this than we return you to that nasty kids home. His parent had sharp taste buds and my buddy spent eight years in some jail for the criminally insane even though he was just a minor. Somehow though he had this idea to find his folks and scam lots of cash off them so we could start a new life. Some nights we'd walk seven or eight hundred blocks practically the whole island of Manhattan crisscrossing east and west north and south each on opposite sides of the streets picking up every wino bottle we found and throwing ten feet into the air so it crash exploded a couple of inches away from the other's feet—on nights that called for it every pane of glass in every phone booth from here

to south street would dissolve in a shower of light. We slept good after a night of this in some abandoned car boiler room rooftop or lonely drag queen's palace.

It was on a bright day of midwinter, in New York. The little girl who eventually became me, but as yet was neither me nor anybody else in particular, but merely a soft anonymous morsel of humanity—this little girl, who bore my name, was going for a walk with her father. The episode is literally the first thing I can remember about her, and therefore, I date the birth of her identity from that day.

I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit. The nearest estimate I can give makes me now between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age. I come to this, from hearing my master say, some time during 1835, I was about seventeen years old.

Much as I wish that I had not to write this chapter, I know that I shall have to swallow many such bitter draughts in the course of this narrative. And I cannot do otherwise, if I claim to be a worshipper of truth. It is my painful duty to have to record my marriage at the age of thirteen. As I see the youngsters of the same age about me who are under my care and think of my own marriage, I am inclined to pity myself and congratulate them on having escaped my lot. I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.

If the story of any man's life, truly told, must be interesting, as some sage avers, those of my relatives and immediate friends who have insisted upon having an account of mine may not be unduly disappointed with this result. I may console myself with the assurance that such a story must interest at least a certain number of people who have known me, and that knowledge will encourage me to proceed.

It was the 15th of August 1889, the day of my arrival in New York City. I was 20 years old. All that happened in my life until that time was now left behind me, cast off like a wornout garment. A new world was before me, strange and terrifying. But I had youth, good health, and passionate ideal. Whatever the new held in store for me, I was determined to meet unflinchingly.

Today, as in years past, the temptation to camouflage oneself in the third person remains great: He was going on twelve, though he still loved sitting in his mother's lap, when such and such began and ended. But can something that had a beginning and an end be pin-pointed with such precision? In my case it can.

When she joined the household, it was said, she was hardly more than a beast. They had peeled her out of her peasant garb and had instantly consigned the shirt, the wrap skirt, the sleeveless sheepskin jacket and the leather buskins to the flames. But clad in city clothes, she looked so utterly absurd as to be frightening.

The page that was blank to begin with is now crossed from top to bottom with tiny black characters—letters, words, commas, exclamation marks—and it's because of them the page is said to be legible. But a kind of uneasiness, a feeling close to nausea, an irresolution that stays my hand—these make me wonder: do these black marks add up to reality? The white of the paper is an artifice that's replaced the translucency of parchment and the ochre surface of clay tablets; but the ochre and the translucency and the whiteness may all possess more reality than the signs that mar them.

I could see them from the dais: families and friends sitting on the risers, young students

spilling out onto the grass, black-robed faculty members standing in front of their seats—all watching for the first graduates to begin their march down the grassy aisle between the folding chairs on the green. Someone let out a whoop as they appeared, the girls in their white dresses and the boys in their jackets and ties.

In April 1915 a Bavarian sharpshooter did me the favor of putting a bullet through my leg. As a result of the wound I was eventually transferred to a hospital in Paris, where my father had been brought so as to be near me. The death of my mother had completely crushed him and his physical condition was worse than ever. The journey from Nice to Paris had tired him so much that he was unable to visit me in the hospital. But as soon as I was well enough to dispense with having my leg dressed, I easily got permission to spend most of my time at home.

Sunday, 9 March [1941]. Here goes, then. This is a painful and well-nigh insuperable step for me: yielding up so much that has been suppressed to a blank sheet of lined paper. The thoughts in my head are sometimes so clear and so sharp and my feelings so deep, but writing about them comes hard. The main difficulty, I think, is a sense of shame. So many inhibitions, so much fear of letting go, of allowing things to pour out of me, and yet that is what I must do if I am ever to give my life a reasonable and satisfactory purpose. It is like the final, liberating scream that always sticks bashfully in your throat when you make love.

The progressive development of man is vitally dependent on invention. It is the most important product of his creative brain. Its ultimate purpose is the complete mastery of mind over the material world, the harnessing of the forces of nature to human needs. This is the difficult task of the inventor who is often misunderstood and unrewarded. But he finds ample compensation in the pleasing exercises of his powers and in the knowledge of being one of that exceptionally privileged class without whom the race would have long ago perished in the bitter struggle against pitiless elements.

Then there was the bad weather. It would come in one day when the fall was over. We would have to shut the windows in the night against the rain and the cold wind would strip the

leaves from the trees in the Place Contrescarpe. The leaves lay sodden in the rain and the wind drove the rain against the big green autobus at the terminal and the Café des Amateurs was crowded and the windows misted over from the heat and smoke inside. It was a sad, evilly run café where the drunkards of the quarter crowded together and I kept away from it because of the smell of dirty bodies and the sour smell of drunkenness. The men and women who frequented the Amateurs stayed drunk all of the time, or all of the time they could afford it, mostly on wine which they bought by the half-liter or liter.

I was an innocent sort of child and have remained so to this day. Only yesterday, reading Chapman's *The Iliad of Homer*, did I realize for the first time that a derivation of the adjective venereal is from Venus! And I a physician practicing medicine for forty years. I was stunned!

Terror dominated my youth, not fear. I was not afraid. I had the normal fears, naturally, but they could be condoned, not the terror that flared from hidden places and all "heaven."

Out of one dream, another dream is born:

– *Are you well? I mean, are you alive?*

– *How did you know? I was just this moment laying my head on your knee to sleep?*

– *Because you woke me up when you stirred in my belly. I knew then I was your coffin.*

Are you alive? Can you hear me?

– *Does it happen much, that you are awakened from one dream by another, itself an interpretation of the dream?*

– *Here it is, happening to you and to me.*

Are you alive?

– *Almost.*

I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia. I am not quite sure of the exact place or exact date of my birth, but at any rate I suspect I must have been born somewhere and at some time. As nearly as I have been able to learn, I was born near a cross-roads post-office called Hale's Ford, and the year was 1858 or 1859. I do not know the month or the day. The earliest impressions I can now recall are the plantation and the slave quarters—the latter being the part of the plantation where the slaves had their cabins.

My mother was a wit. She wrote poetry, composed epigrams, penned the liveliest letters, and scribbled off the bitterest ballads on all her friends and acquaintances. Her tongue was always tipped with gall and bitterness; her pen was finely pointed with venom. Scandal was her great delight; her eye flashed with glee at a double meaning; a loose anecdote of one of her lady loves lifted her into Paradise for the day. Happily for her, the enchanting freedom of her female friends was such, that she was seldom without the ambrosial essence which made her blest. She kept a diary, in which she noted down, in the broadest terms, every little slip, or sally, or frail foible which her dearly beloved of the masculine, feminine, or neuter gender—and these last constitute a great proportion of what is called "the best society"—committed, or were said to have committed; and when the story was not in itself particularly piquant, she spiced and seasoned it in her own fashion, so as to render it hot, agreeable, or stimulating to the depraved taste of those in whom her heart sought comfortable fellowship.

In the year 1791, December 16th, I was born, and baptized by the clergyman of the Established Church, whose ministry, strictly limited to Sabbath morning prayers and sermon, was duly attended by all our family. I was taken to church when almost an infant. I was also equally early and well familiarized, as will be easily supposed, to the Wesleyan preaching of Sunday evenings; and thus, by the combination of the two systems, I was preserved from extremes: the arrogant exclusiveness of High Church prejudices, and the contracted bigotry of hostile sectarianism.

It seems proper that I should prefix to the following biographical sketch, some mention of the reasons which have made me think it desirable that I should leave behind me such a memorial of so uneventful a life as mine. I do not for a moment imagine that any part of what I have to relate, can be interesting to the public as narrative, or as being connected with myself.

Believing that truth is often stranger than fiction, I have resolved to record some of the actual experiences of my life both in the normal and clairvoyant state.

It was the newest hours of a new day, when I promised to tell the old, old story of a new life, the story of the birth of Man—my birth—my story.

In spite of the fact that this story is the oldest story in the world, and every being through all ages has been himself or herself the hero or the heroine, I am told that only a few have heard it, and fewer yet are the brave ones who dare tell it.

Will West stood in the recording office of the Fort Leavenworth Penitentiary. It was a fresh May morning in Kansas and even in the confines of that office it was possible to feel a cool breeze. The recording clerk looked again at West. He was certain he had documented this prisoner before. The prisoner continued to deny it. So, the clerk took his measurements. He measured his right ear, his left foot, the middle finger of his left hand, the little finger of his left hand, his left forearm, his torso, the length of his head and the width of his outstretched arms. Then he turned to a set of wooden cabinets against the wall and drew out an index card. It was William West. The same measurements, the same face in the photo. West still denied it and insisted it wasn't true.

On the 28th of August, 1749, at mid-day, as the clock struck twelve, I came into the world, at Frankfort-on-the-Maine. My horoscope was propitious: the sun stood in the sign of the Virgin, and had culminated for the day; Jupiter and Venus looked on him with a friendly eye, and Mercury not adversely; while Saturn and Mars kept themselves indifferent; the Moon alone, just full, exerted the power of her reflection all the more, as she had then reached her planetary hour. She opposed herself, therefore, to my birth, which could not be accomplished until this hour was passed.

My first appearance upon this stage was on the 5th day of July, Anno Domini 1810. Independence Day had gone by the cannons had ceased to thunder forth their remembrances of our National Anniversary, the smoke had all cleared away, the drums had finished their rattle, and when peace and quiet were restored, I made my *debut*. This propensity of keeping out of harm's way has always stuck by me. I have often thought that were I forced to go to war, the first arms that I should examine would be

my legs. I should scarcely fulfil the plan of the Yankee soldier who fired a few stray shots at the enemy on his own hook, and then departed, singing,

"He that fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day."

I am decidedly a man of peace, and the first three words of the first line would never correctly apply to me if it was possible for me to appropriate the three words which follow them.

I was born in the Year 1632, in the City of York, of a good Family, tho' not of that Country, my Father being a Foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull: He got a good Estate by Merchandise, and leaving off his Trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my Mother, Relations were named Robinson, a very good Family at Country, and from whom I was called Robinson Keutznaer; but by the usual Corruption of Words in England, we are now called, nay we call our Selves, and writer Name Crusoe, and so my Companions always call'd me.

I have always been meaning to explain the way in which I came to write certain of my books. It involved a very special method.

And it seems to me that it is my duty to reveal this method, since I have the feeling that future writers may perhaps be able to exploit it fruitfully.

I always remembered that Victor Hugo said that if it had not rained on the night of the 17th of June, 1815, the fate of Europe would have been changed. Of course it is not so, if you win you do not lose and if you lose you do not win, at least if you win or if you lose it seems so. Well anyway, there are floods, when one reads about them in the paper they seem worse than they are, and yet they often are worse than they seem in the newspaper only those there are busy and so they do not worry and so it is not as bad as it reads.

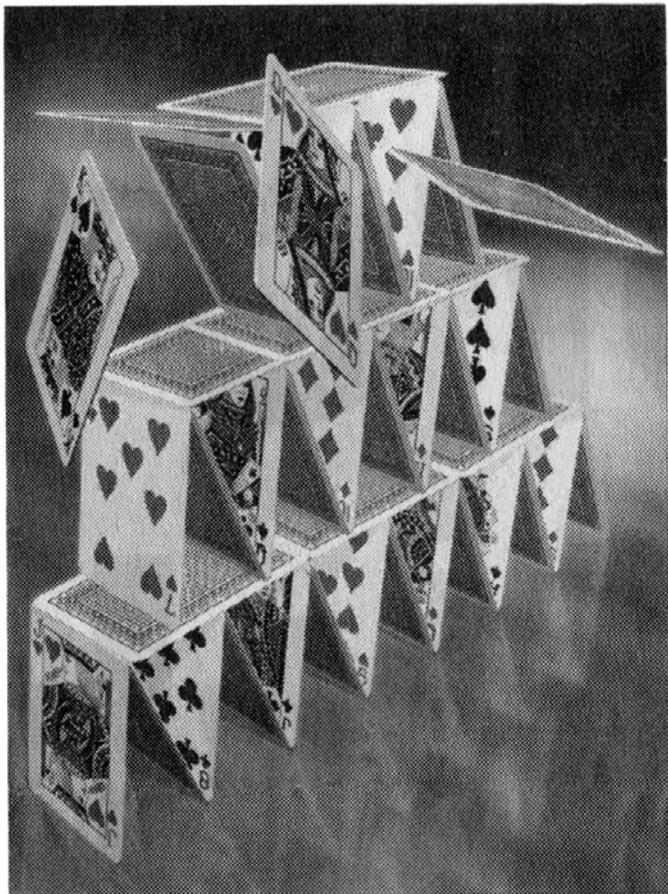
i was in prison long ago and it was the first grade and I have to take a shit and even when you have to take a shit the law says you must first raise your hand and ask the teacher for permission so I obeyer of the lore of the lamb am therefore busy raising my hand to the fuhrer who says yes thomas what is it? and i thomas say i have to take a i mean may i go to the bathroom please? didn't you go to the bathroom

yesterday thomas she says and I say yes ma'am
 mrs parsley sir but i have to go again today
 but she says NO and i say but mrs parsley judge
 sir ma'am i gotta go make number two! eh?
 she say and i say eh my goddamm ass I
 GOTTA TAKE A SHIT GOD DAMMIT and again
 she says NO but i go anyway except that it was
 not out but in my pants that is to say right in
 my corduroy knickers goddamm ...

The apparently haphazard chronology of this memoir may need excuse. The excuse, I fear, is Art. It contains a number of surprises, perhaps I may call them shocks, which, as history, came to me rather bunched up toward the end of the story. Artistically shocks should never be bunched, they need spacing for maximum individual effect. To afford them this I could not tell my story straightforwardly and have therefore disregarded chronology and adopted the method of ploughing to and fro over my father's life and my own, turning up a little more sub-soil each time as the plough turned. Looking at it with as much detachment as I can command, I think I have not seriously confused the narrative.



Seeing that before long I must confront humanity with the most difficult demand that has ever been made of it, it seems to me indispensable to say in *who I am*. Really, one should know it, for I have not left myself "without testimony." But the disproportion between the greatness of my task and the smallness of my contemporaries has found expression in the fact that one has neither heard nor even seen me. I live on my own credit (I go along living on my own credit, the credit I establish and give myself); it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live.



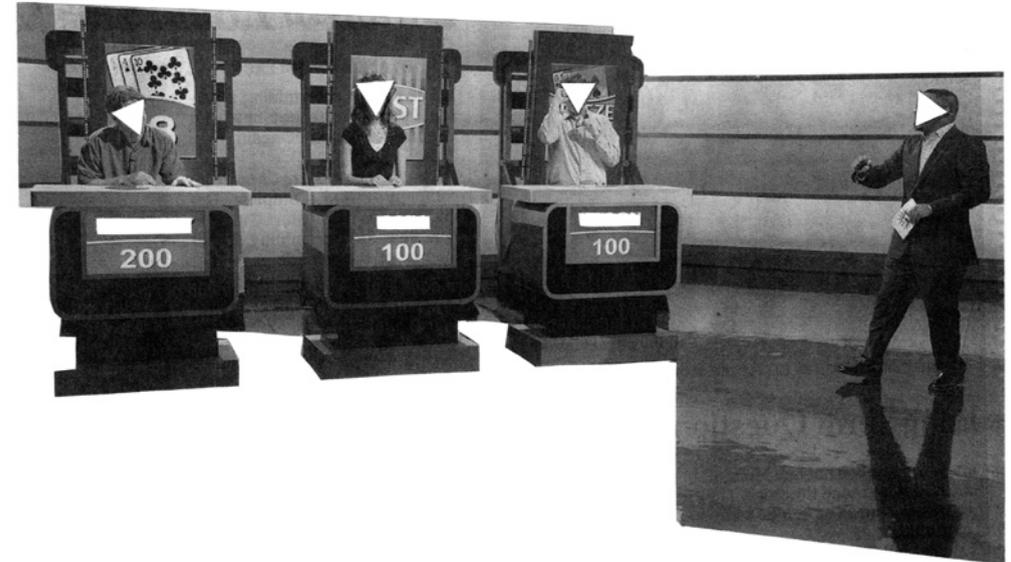
Has not writing been for centuries the acknowledgment of debt, the guarantee of an exchange, the sign of a representation? But today writing gradually drifts toward the session of bourgeois debts, toward perversion, the extremity of meaning, the text ...



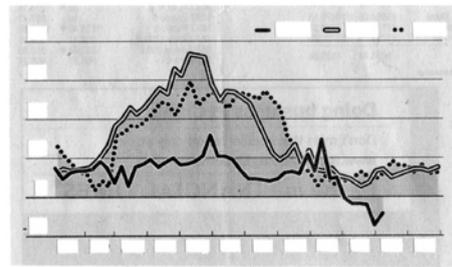
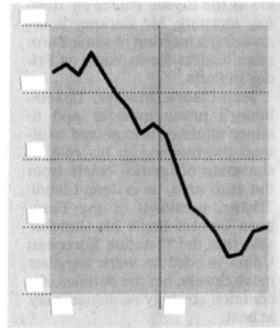
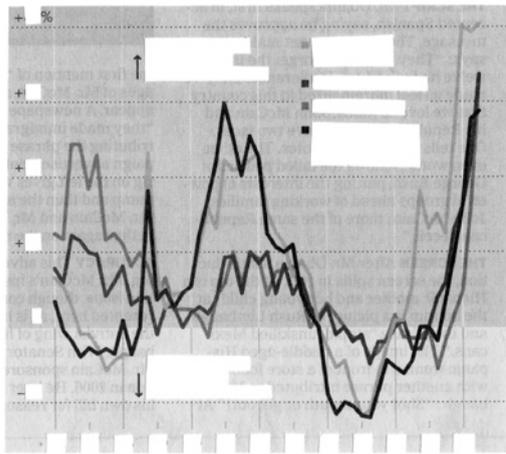
I'm looking in the mirror at my back molars and my yak out my whole toothiness jaw so's ya can see like the skeletal hint of what's to be, the leer of bone teeth—the Molars are huge and have a single verticle dirty line running down em that makes me sick shudder to think Ive grown so old-&-decayed & am such a skeleton—I snap my jaw back in



I'm at my rainy morning workdesk in shroudy Manhattan and I look down by the dock and see the Navyvessels anchored in the bay and the crowds of sailors walking on the water towards the land—I say "Everybody's learnt that trick now—it seems to be easy—too easy—it must be some simple gimmick"—



Defending myself to a jury of men including the white haired old judge but I'm up in the air, in levitation, floating over them vociferously explaining why I am not guilty & they smile either because my arguments are silly or naturally that since I'm free of earth now who can prosecute?—As if, "look at that absurd angel worried about things of the earth"— "doesnt even know he's free"—"goes on haranguing to explain his position and there he is free as air" —s'this mean?



I also dreamed that everything in existence was a total abstract ideal mathematical whole, i.e., like, by subtracting 740 from 1000 you got 260 which meant "Egg" more or less, & or figures, so if you wanted an egg you *had* the egg in its ideal mathematical wholeness & didnt even have to see it or eat it to have it!—The same with the universe, a vast Ideal you can have without seeing it, feeling, tasting or touching or smelling it—Just thinking it, right there, yours before the being! Flashing back & forth in my head all creation was there before the asking or wanting—*complete*—& *abstract*—(Mathematical Buddhism)

“There is no way to become original, except to be born so,” says Stevenson, and although I may not be original, I hope sometimes to outgrow my artificial, periwigged compositions. Then, perhaps, my own thoughts and experiences will come to the surface.

I saw my face in the mirror and it looks quite different. My eyes look so clear and deep, my cheeks are pink—which they haven’t been for weeks—my mouth is much softer; I look as if I am happy, and yet there is something so sad in my expression and my smile slips away from my lips as soon as it has come.

Dinner hour is approaching. Officer Gerst, in charge of the kitchen squad, enters the cell-house. Behind him, a score of prisoners carry large wooden tubs filled with steaming liquid. The negro trusty, his nostrils expanded and eyes glistening, sniffs the air, and announces with a grin: “Dooke’s mixchoor foh dinneh teh day!”

The scene becomes animated at the front. Tables are noisily moved about, the tinplate rattles, and men talk and shout. With a large ladle the soup is dished out from the tubs, and the pans, bent and rusty, stacked up in long rows. The deputy warden flounces in, splatters some orders that remained ignored, and looks critically at the dinner pans. He produces a pocketknife, and ambles along the tables, spearing a potato here and a bit of floating vegetable there. Guard Hughes, his inspection of the cells completed, saunters along casting greedy eyes at the food. He hovers about, waiting for the deputy to leave. The latter stands, hands dug into his pockets, short legs wide apart, scraggy beard keeping time with the moving jaws. Guard Hughes winks at one of the kitchen men, and slinks into an open cell. The prisoner fusses about, pretends to move the empty tubs out of the way, and then quickly snatches a pan of soup, and passes it to the guard. Negro Jasper, alert and watchful, strolls by Woods, surreptitiously whispering. The officer walks to the open cell and surprises the guard, his head thrown back the large pan covering his face. Woods smiles disdainfully, the prisoners giggle and chuckle.

The collectives engaged in bizarre competitions, content to prove our worth, our revolutionary zeal: we heard that a women’s group in

Pittsburgh entered a big city high school, seized the office, and spoke for half an hour over the PA before they were arrested, and another captured the public address system at a stock car race. So we took over a movie theater and lectured the crowd until the police arrived.

In the Sicutani market we were pondering the whole range of colors overflowing from the stalls, dangling with the vendors’ monotone cries and the monotone buzz of the crowd, when we noticed a gathering of people on a corner and went to investigate.

Surrounded by a dense, silent multitude a procession advanced, at the head of which were a dozen monks wearing colored habits, followed by a train of serious-looking notables wearing black dress and carrying a coffin. They marked the end of the formal funeral party and a teeming mass of people followed, without order or direction. The procession halted and one of the black suited individuals appeared on a balcony—papers in hand: “It is our duty, as we say farewell to this great and worthy man, somebody or other ...” etc. After his interminable babbling, the procession moved a block further and another darkly dressed character materialized on a balcony. “Somebody or other is dead, but the memory of his good deeds and his unblemished integrity ...” etc. And so—poor old somebody or other crossed to his final resting place like that, pursued by the hatred of his fellow villagers who on every street corner unburdened themselves of him in flooding words.

Within a minute or two of our coming my father also arrived and asked us not to be afraid and to go away. After that nobody talked about the incident. We instinctively avoided it. Years later, when we were grown up, my mother referred to it once or twice very vaguely, but was always agitated by the mere recollection of it and could never call up strength to relate her experience. Once she actually began before one of my sisters, saying that she had seen a thing so horrible that she had never been able to forget it, but going only as far as that point she broke off and postponed her narration for another time. She never returned to the subject.

[Trattenbach]
23.10.21

Dear R.

Forgive me for only now answering your letter from China. I got it after a very long delay. I wasn’t in Trattenbach when it arrived and it was forwarded to several places before it reached me.—I am very sorry that you have been ill—and seriously ill! *How are you now, then?* As regards me, nothing has changed. I am still at Trattenbach, surrounded, as ever, by odiousness and baseness. I know that human beings on the average are not worth much anywhere, but here they are much more good-for-nothing and irresponsible than elsewhere. I will perhaps stay on in Trattenbach for the present year but probably not any longer, because I don’t get on well here even with the other teachers (perhaps that won’t be any better in another place). Yes, it would be nice indeed, if you would visit me sometimes. I am glad to hear that my manuscript is in safety. And if it is printed, that will suit me too.—

Write me a few lines soon, to say how you are, etc. etc.

*Kindest regards
Yours ever
L.*

Remember me to Miss Black.

Almost a year had passed since my arrival in Chicago, and our labor had finally begun to bear fruit. Will’s and Mary’s street corner group had grown to fifty strong; they organized neighborhood cleanups, sponsored career days for area youth, won agreements from the alderman to improve sanitation services. Farther north, Mrs. Crenshaw and Mrs. Stevens had pressed the Park District into overhauling run down parks and playlots; the work there had already begun. Streets had been repaired, sewers rooted, crime-watch programs instituted. And now the new job intake center, where once only an empty store front had been.

	SCHEME	Hours
	5	Rise, wash and address
	6	Powerful Goodness!
	7	Contrive day’s business and take the resolution of the day; prosecute the present study and breakfast.
MORNING	8	Work.
<i>The Question.</i>	9	
<i>What good shall I do this day?</i>	10	
	11	
NOON	12	Read or look over my accounts and dine.
	1	
AFTERNOON	2	Work.
	3	
	4	
	5	
EVENING	6	Put things in their
<i>The Question.</i>	7	places. Supper.
<i>What good have I done today?</i>	8	Music or diversion
	9	or conversation.
		Examination of the day.
NIGHT	10	Sleep.
	11	
	12	
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	

Then, as I pushed open the door and stepped into the lobby, I heard him speak. Accompanied by wild theatrical gestures—a sweep of the left arm, a finger darting from his right hand and pointing to the sky—a sentence came booming out of him, a string of words so unlikely and unexpected that at first I didn’t believe my ears.

No one had anything to say about himself; even in church, at Easter confession, when at least once a year there was an opportunity to reveal something of oneself, there was only a mumbling of catchwords out of catechism, and the word “I” seemed stranger to the speaker himself than a chunk out of the moon. If in talking about himself anyone went beyond relating some droll incident, he was said to be “peculiar.” Personal life, if it had ever developed a character of its own, was depersonalized except for ream tatters swallowed up by the rites of religion,

custom, and good manners; little remained of the human individual and indeed, the word “individual” was known only in pejorative combinations.

I stood up and asked, “What color was Paul?” And I kept talking, with pauses, “He had to be black ... because he was a Hebrew ... and the original Hebrews were black, weren’t they?”

He had started flushing red. You know the way white people do. He said, “Yes.”

I wasn’t through yet. “What color was Jesus ... he was Hebrew too ... wasn’t he?”

Both the negro and the white convicts had sat bolt upright. I don’t care how tough the convict, be he brainwashed black Christian, or a “devil” white Christian, neither of them is ready to hear anybody saying Jesus wasn’t white. The instructor walked around. He shouldn’t have felt bad. In all of the years since, I never have met any intelligent white men who would try to insist that Jesus was white. How could they? He said, “Jesus was brown.”

I let him get away with that compromise.

It took me a good while to finish my toilet. I extended the time unnecessarily in trying to make up my mind as to what I would best do in the circumstances I tried to hope that Mrs. Clemens was asleep but I knew better. I could not escape by the window. It was narrow and suited only to shirts. At last I made up my mind to boldly loaf through the bedroom with the air of a person who had not been doing anything. I made half the journey successfully. I did not turn my eyes in her direction, because that would not be safe. It is very difficult to look as if you have not been doing anything when the facts are the other way, and my confidence in my performance oozed steadily out of me as I went along. I was aiming for the left-hand door because it was farthest from my wife. It had never been opened from the day that house was built but it seemed a blessed refuge for me now. The bed was this one, wherein I am lying now and dictating these histories morning after morning with so much serenity. It was this same old elaborately carved black Venetian bedstead—the most comfortable bedstead that ever was, with space enough in it for a family, and carved angels enough surmounting its twisted columns and its headboard and footboard to bring peace to the sleepers, and pleasant dreams. I had to stop in the middle of

the room. I hadn’t the strength to go on. I believed that I was under accusing eyes—that even the carved angels were inspecting me with an unfriendly gaze. You know how it is when you are convinced that somebody behind you is looking steadily at you. You have to turn your face—you can’t help it. I turned mine. The bed was placed as it is now, with the foot where the head ought to be. If it had been placed as it should have been, the high headboard would have sheltered me. But the footboard was not sufficient protection and I could be seen over it. I was exposed. I was wholly without protection. I turned because I couldn’t help it—and my memory of what I saw is still vivid after all these years.

I thought I was standing at the center of all that my life had brought me to be. I thought of the twenty-four people, waiting in the next room. I thought of the 300, waiting in prison. I thought of the Birmingham Negro community, waiting. Then my tortured mind leaped beyond the Gaston Motel, past the city jail, past the city and state lines, and I thought of the twenty million black people who dreamed that someday they might be able to cross the Red Sea of injustice and find their way into the promised land of integration and freedom. There was no more room for doubt.

I couldn’t lie to my friend and I wasn’t about to freshen old ghosts.

There have been statements made in the press that seemed to use the fact that I have AIDS as an excuse for the tone of my writings—for my anger at these individuals. This is insulting to me. Anybody has the right to be outraged and the right to express these things. I have been writing about these issues in this “tone” well before my diagnosis with AIDS.

This sensitiveness to criticism or comment of any sort had nothing to do with vanity; it was caused by the great artist’s deep consciousness of his powers, combined with a bitter, a life-long disappointment at his lack of popular recognition. I am not sure that Henry James had not secretly dreamed of being a “best seller” in the days when that odd form of literary fame was at its height; at any rate he certainly suffered all his life—and more and more as time went on—from the lack of recognition

among the very readers who had most warmly welcomed his early novels.

I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed. While in this state of mind, I was eager to hear any one speak of slavery. I was a ready listener. Every little while, I could hear something about the abolitionists. It was some time before I found what the word meant. It was always used in such connections as to make it an interesting word to me. If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did any thing very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of abolition. Hearing the word in this connection very often, I set about learning what it meant. The dictionary afforded me little or no help. I found it was “the act of abolishing;” but then I did not know what was to be abolished. Here I was perplexed. I did not dare to ask any one about its meaning, for I was satisfied that it was something they wanted me to know very little about.

I smarted under the insult, but as I had pocketed many such in the past I had become inured to them. I therefore decided to forget this latest one and take what course a dispassionate view of the case might suggest.

It would be false, however, to give the impression that I was entirely miserable. I enjoyed, I am sure, a good deal of my life. But there was always, underlying everything, this fret in my mind about not knowing where I was going, not being able to get on. I felt guilty. I felt guilty when I spoke unkindly to my mother for tapping timidly upon my sacred study door as she sometimes did, though she interrupted nothing, for there was nothing to interrupt.

I believe the true road to preeminent success in any line is to make yourself master in that line. I have no faith in the policy of scattering one’s resources, and in my experience I have rarely if ever met a man who achieved preeminence in money-making—certainly never one in manufacturing—who was interested in many concerns. The men who

have succeeded are men who have chosen one line and stuck to it.

19 March

One has only to walk the streets and keep one’s eyes open to see the most inimitable pictures. Yesterday at the Molo, which is the noisiest corner of the city, I came across a wooden stage on which a Pulcinella was having a quarrel with a monkey. On a balcony overhead a pretty girl exposed her charms to all. Beside the stage with monkey stood a quack offering his nostrums against all ailments to a credulous crowd. Painted by Gerard Dow, such a scene would delight our contemporaries and posterity.

Today is the Feast of St. Joseph, the patron saint of all *frittariuoli*, or pastry cooks, using the word ‘pastry’ in its crudest sense. Since, under the black, boiling oil they use for frying, there is a constant flare of flame, all fiery torments are assigned to their mystery. Last night they decorated their house fronts with appropriate paintings: Souls in Purgatory and Last Judgments were blazing on all side. In front of their doors large frying pans stood on hastily erected stoves. One apprentice kneaded the dough, while a second shaped it into crullers and threw them into the boiling oil. A third stood beside the pan with a small skewer, picked out the crullers when they were cooked and put them upon another skewer held by a fourth apprentice, who then offered them to the bystanders. The third and fourth apprentices were young boys wearing blonde, elaborately bearded wigs, which are regarded as the attribute of angels. To complete the group, there were some persons who handed wine to the cooks, drank themselves and cried their wares. Angels, cooks, everybody shouted at the top of their voices. They drew a great crowd because, on this night, all pastry goods are sold at greatly reduced prices and even a portion of the profits is given to the poor.

One could go on for ever describing similar scenes, each crazier than the last, not to mention the infinite variety of costumes or the hordes of people you can see on the Toledo alone.

You can find many other original entertainments if you live among these people, who are so natural that one might even become natural oneself. As an example, take Pulcinella, the mask native to this country, as Harlequin is to Bergamo or Hanswurst to

the Tirol. Pulcinella is the imperturbable servant, somewhat careless, almost lazy, but humorous. You can find waiters or house servants of this type everywhere. I got enormous fun today out of ours, though it was over nothing more than sending him to buy me paper and pens. Partial misunderstanding, procrastination, good will and a touch of roguery combined created a charming scene which would be successful on any stage.

The next job was already at hand, the Lawrence strike. Twenty-five thousand textile workers, men, women, and children, were involved in the struggle for a fifteen-per-cent increase in their wage. For years they had toiled fifty-six hours a week for an average weekly pay of eight dollars. Out of the strength of these people, the mill-owners had grown immensely rich. Poverty and misery had at last driven the Lawrence textile workers to strike. The struggle was hardly underway when the mill lords began to show their teeth. In this they had the support of the state, and even of the college authorities. The Governor of Massachusetts, himself a mill-owner, sent the militia to protect his interests and those of his mill-owning colleagues. The president of Harvard was, as one of the stock holders, equally interested in dividends from the Lawrence mills. The result of this unity between State, capitalism, and seats of learning in Massachusetts was a horde of police, detectives, soldiers and collegiate ruffians let loose on the helpless strikers.

And was that really me, whispering this and that in the haystack? Profundities about the firmament? About the moon's comings and goings? I probably tried to be original and lyrical, because whenever something threw me off course I used to wax poetic, in rhymed verse or free.

Or did I stutter when she asked me out of concern of simple curiosity what I wanted to be, when I grew up, so to speak? Did I say there in the hay, "An artist. No two ways about it!"?

Of the fleshy flow of skin under skin the onion knows nothing. Only gaps in a garbled text. Unless I myself try to decipher what appears illegible, and put together a rhyme ...

If I am to say which of his traits was most characteristic of him, I would say his brightly luminous temperament.

Around us there was nothing but a stretch of yellowish grass, a few trees, and of course, some basalt rocks. We had the sort of light snack that commandos eat when they're in action. It was then that the son of a Gulf prince, a lad of about eighteen, speaking the French he'd learned in luxurious Swiss boarding schools, said: "Tell us frankly what you think of us. Are we real revolutionaries, or intellectuals playing at revolution?"

Who was I, sitting, stomach sucked in desperately on account of the leotards, and my head, full of smoke and chemicals, screaming for air? Who was I, who pinched crumpled dollar bills from empty rooms in Simpson? Who was I, who had experienced the pinnacle of Romance and could only lie still as a corpse while the deed was done and weep with bitterness when it was finished.

"Who are you?" I asked from my great height on the table that served as a mushroom. I asked it with no sympathy whatsoever. I wanted her, this intrusive white child, to qualify herself. Try it. *Who the fuck are you?* I liked her confusion. I liked my distance. I liked my own fear that called up for itself a protective and theatrical rigidity. It felt the most natural thing in the world, as natural as the sub-zero loneliness of the observatory and the cold telescope bringing the Pleiades, like tiny crystals of ice, to my eyes.

"Leonardo Da Vinci bores me. He ought to have stuck to his flying machines. His Apostles and Christ are all sentimental. I am very sure that those good Jewish fishermen could risk their skins for their faith without needing to look like dying ducks in a thunderstorm." On the other hand, when Franz Jourdain, the architect of the Samaritaine department store, asked him if he liked Rembrandt better than Rubens, he replied, "I don't give out awards."

Friday morning.

One moment it is Hitler, the next it is Ivan the Terrible; one moment it is resignation and the next war, pestilence, earthquake, or famine. Ultimately what matters most is to bear the pain, to cope with it, and to keep a small corner of one's soul unsullied come what may.

Of that meal, I remember also that being particularly fond of watercress, we ordered

something, a meat order of some sort, perhaps *filet mignon*, which happened to have served with it a large amount of cress. On top of that, since we didn't know what we would get with the first order, we had asked for a cress salad besides, so that we were fairly smothered in cress, but we ate it all and drank our wine besides. It was one our last meals together on that trip. We were served the meal on the terrace on the street that is, Floss remembers, since a ragged woman walked up and down in front of the tables, complaining bitterly of those who could afford to eat so well while she was in misery.

In other cities, memory can resort to a piece of paper. You may sit waiting for something, in a white void, and a passing idea may descend on you. You catch it, lest it escape, and as days roll and you come upon it again, you recognize its sources and thank the city that gave you this present. But in Beirut you flow away and scatter. The only container is water itself. Memory assumes the shape of the city's chaos and takes up a speech that makes you forget words that went before.

Rarely do you notice Beirut is beautiful.

Rarely in Beirut do you distinguish between content and form.

The individual who can do something that the world wants done will, in the end, make his way regardless of race. One man may go into a community prepared to supply the people there with an analysis of Greek sentences. The community may not at the time be prepared for, or feel the need of, Greek analysis, but it may feel its need of bricks and houses and wagons. If the man can supply the need for those, then, it will lead eventually to a demand for the first product, and with the demand will come the ability to appreciate it and to profit by it.

1. The said prisoner, being in a certain Monastery in the province of Biscay, did procure a dish of bacon, and being reminded to take heed, for it was a fast and such food was forbidden, did nevertheless proceed to eat the same, and mocked and derided the person who had so warned him.

2. Furthermore, the said prisoner being of a nation infected with heresy, it is presumed that he has on many other occasions eaten

flesh on forbidden days, after the manner of the sect of Luther, and committed many other offences against our Holy Faith, besides knowing that others have committed the same offences; and the said prisoner having been admonished by your Excellencies to declare the truth, has not done it, but has perjured himself.

3. The said prisoner likewise declared that he possessed a Book, which if it were thrown into a fire along with a crucifix, would remain unhurt, while the crucifix would be consumed.

4. From the above, it is to be presumed that the said prisoner has uttered many other superstitious and blasphemous speeches, and done many other things appertaining to the Devil; also that he is cognizant of the commission by others of many such crimes, the whole of which he has maliciously concealed.

5. The said prisoner, while he resided in the Monastery aforesaid, could not be persuaded to confess, although he received many admonitions to that effect, but remained careless of the salvation of his soul. And the said prisoner being rebuked therefor, blasphemed God and the Saints with such fury and malice that he appeared like a demoniac. Being threatened with a punishment from the Inquisition, he replied that he did not care for the Inquisition, and that he would not confess; also that he wanted nothing from God which the Devil could not give him.

January 1, 1814.—We whose names are hereunto subscribed, looking back with sorrow on the years spent in sin and forgetfulness of God, and firmly purposing, through Divine grace, an entire reformation of conduct, do enter into the following resolutions, commencing from the date hereof, viz. :

First.
We will use private prayer at least three times a day.

Second.
We will, in a place of worship, avoid all irreverent or seemingly careless behaviour.

Third.
We will be cautious of hurting the feelings of our fellow creatures even in jest, reflecting that if we ridicule them for a bodily infirmity, 'twas their Maker inflicted it, and shall we tax His wise dispensations? If for their faults, better to reprove gently in secret than expose them to the sneers of others.

Fourth. We will not only abstain from cursing, lying, and evil speaking ourselves, but we will reprove it in another.

Fifth. We will watch our tempers, avoiding all causeless anger, and, where cause may appear sufficient, we will pause and consider that those who injure us are under the influence of a bad passion, and consequently more deserving of our pity than resentment.

Sixth. We will admonish mildly, advise sincerely, acknowledge our faults truly, and bear reproof patiently.

Seventh. We will diligence in our business, and sobriety in our conduct.

Eighth. We will bear in mind that the all-seeing eyes of a pure King are upon our actions, and that we must one day render an account of the deeds done in the body.

Ninth. We will let love govern our thoughts, truth preside over our words, and honestly regulate our actions.

Next to aristocracy, an established church, or corporation of priests, as being by position the great depravers of religion, and interested in opposing the progress of the human mind, was the object of his greatest detestation though he disliked no clergyman personally who did not deserve it, and was on terms of sincere friendship with several. In ethics, his moral feelings were energetic and rigid on all points which he deemed important to human well being, while he was supremely indifferent in opinion (though his indifference did not show itself in personal conduct) to all those doctrines of the common morality, which he thought had no foundation but in asceticism and priest-craft. He looked forward, for example, to a considerable increase of freedom in the relations between the sexes, though without pretending to define exactly what would be, or ought to be, the precise conditions of that freedom. This opinion was connected in him with no sensuality either of a theoretical or of a practical kind. He anticipated, on the contrary, as one of the beneficial effects of increased freedom, that the imagination would no longer dwell upon the physical relation

and its adjuncts, and swell this into one of the principal objects of life; a perversion of the imagination and feelings, which he regarded as one of the deepest seated and most pervading evils in the human mind. In psychology, his fundamental doctrine was the formation of all human character by circumstances, through the universal Principle of Association, and the consequent unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education. Of all his doctrines none was more important than this, or needs more to be insisted on: unfortunately there is none which is more contradictory to the prevailing tendencies of speculation, both in his time and since.

The air passage is not to be very long. The portion entering the mouth is called the larynx. It is to contain that wonderful sound-producing mechanism—the vocal chords—which consist of two muscular bands strung on each side of this tube. When the air passes upward back into the mouth it stretches these cords, and the sudden pressure produces certain sounds known as the “human voice.” The quality and quantity of the produced sound will depend greatly on the thickness and the length of these cords and also on the resounding passage’s cavities, such as the mouth and the nose.

I am told most remarkable tales of the power of the human voice. They say it rules and governs the whole world. Man and beast obey its call. Yet it is the sole igniter of happiness and sorrow—it is the cupid’s arrow as well as the sword of wrath. Would that I could possess such a voice!

At intervals I was subject to ill-treatment from my husband, who returned again to his passion for gambling, and once more I felt that we were drifting into the fatal flood which had so often washed away our domestic hearth. He was a good husband and kind father when sober, but a demon possessed him when excited with wine and cards.

Again I warned him with prophetic sight of the cloud forming on the horizon, and begged him to take heed and avert the storm. Time and again he solemnly promised to turn from his fast companions, and leave the gaming-table. As often were these promises broken, and his frequent absence from home confirmed the impressions I with many bitter tears was forced to accept. During his fits of rage my fact and

person were the principal objects of his insane brutality.

It’s incredible to think now that we got away with that. Even if it was low security and from time to time everyone made a trip out. In the end, I fell foul of something else. I lent a guy called Fritz \$50 to buy booze, and when he offered me a little jar from his liquor store, the hacks were waiting for me in the corridor. Someone had ratted on me.

I had often pressed my friend Behrisch, too, that he would make plain to me what experience might be? But because he was full of nonsense, he put me off with fair words from one day to another, and at last, after great preparations disclosed to me, that true experience was properly when one experiences how an experienced man must experience in experiencing his experience. Now when we scolded him outrageously, and called him to account for this, he assured us that a great mystery lay hidden behind these words, which we could not comprehend until we had experience ... and so on without end;—for it cost him nothing to talk on in that way by the quarter of an hour;—since the experience would always become more experienced and at last come to true experience. When we were falling into despair at such fooleries, he protested that he had learned this way of making himself intelligible and impressive from the latest and greatest authors, who had made us observe how one can rest a restful rest, and how silence, in being silent, can constantly become more silent.

I lived with my Theresa as agreeably as with the finest genius in the world. Her mother, proud of having been brought up under the Marchioness of Monpipeau, attempted to be witty, wished to direct the judgment of her daughter, and by her knavish cunning destroyed the simplicity of our intercourse.

The fatigue of this importunity made me in some degree surmount the foolish shame which prevented me from appearing with Theresa in public; and we took short country walks, tete-a-tete, and partook of little collations, which, to me, were delicious. I perceived she loved me sincerely, and this increased my tenderness. This charming intimacy left me nothing to wish; futurity no longer gave me the least concern,

or at most appeared only as the present moment prolonged: I had no other desire than that of insuring its duration.

“I see,” said he in broken English, “that you understand the value of the press, and that is the great thing. Nothing helps the showman like the types and the ink. When your old woman dies,” he added, “you come to me, and I will make your fortune. I will let you have my ‘carousal’ my automaton trumpet-player, and many curious things which will make plenty of money.”

I thanked him for his generous proposals, and assured him that should circumstances render it feasible, I should apply to him.

Our exhibition room continued to attract large numbers of visitors for several weeks before there was any visible falling off. I kept up a constant succession of novel advertisements and unique notices in the newspapers, which tended to keep old Joice fresh in the minds of the public, and served to sharpen the curiosity of the people.

When the audiences began to decrease in numbers, a short communication appeared in one of the newspapers, signed “A Visitor,” in which the writer claimed to have made an important discovery. He stated that Joice Heth, as at present exhibited, was a humbug, whereas if the simple truth was told with regard to the exhibition, it was really vastly curious and interesting. “The fact is,” said the communication, “Joice Heth is not a human being. What purports to be a remarkably old woman is simply a curiously constructed automaton, made up of whalebone, India-rubber, and numberless springs, ingeniously put together, and made to move at the slightest touch, according to the will of the operator. The exhibitor is a ventriloquist, and all the conversations apparently held with the ancient lady are purely imaginary, so far as she is concerned, for the answers and incidents purporting to be given and related by her, are merely the ventriloquial voice of the exhibitor.”

In the middle of these Cogitations, Apprehensions and Reflections, it came into my Thought one Day, that all this might be a meer Chimera of my own; and that this Foot might be the Print of my own Foot, when I came on Shore from my Boat: This cheer’d me up a little too, and I began to persuade

my self it was all a Delusion; that it was nothing else but my own Foot, and why might not I come that way from the Boat, as well as I was going that way to the Boat; again, I consider'd also that I could by no Means tell for certain where I had trod, and where I had not; and that if at last this was only the Print of my own Foot, I had play'd the Part of those Fools, who strive to make stories of Spectres, and Apparitions; and then are frightened at them more than any body.

But I cannot cite everything; I shall confine myself to what has already been said concerning invention based in the pairing of two words taken in different senses.

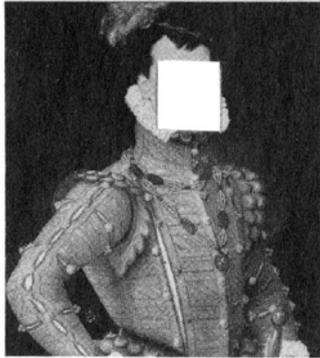
As the method developed I was led to take a random phrase from which I drew images by distorting it, a little as though it were a case of deriving them from the drawing of a rebus.

After all it is very simple, we are on the earth and we have to live on it and there is beyond all there is and there is no extending it because after all there it is and here we are, and we are always here and we are always there and any little while is a pleasure is a treasure. Anyway my aunt Fanny did always count by one and one and she still does and she still can manage to have everything come out the way it should by the simple process of counting one and one. I saw her when I was in Baltimore and she had again won by counting one one one.

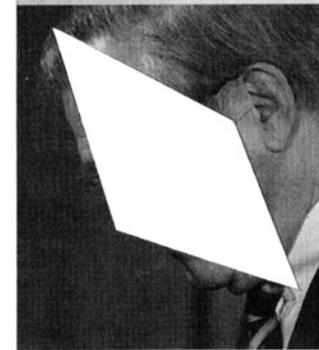
i'm on the dance floor dancing with this other chick and all of sudden i hear BANG BANG BANG i don't know how many times BANG BANG BANG and i see frank and this dude from new york shooting their guns at the dance floor and the ceiling and the walls like some badass cowboys drunk in a movie saloon and theyre laughing like mad so i start into drinking so me more everybody is standing around in the back near the juke box screeching laughs and BOOM an explosion explodes from the gun in the hand of this dude from new york who had shot this goddamm cannon off right next to my ear ringing ringing ringing my head is spinning in a crash all dizzy while everybody just goes right on laughing and carrying on and the bartender is saying look it's closing time please put the guns away

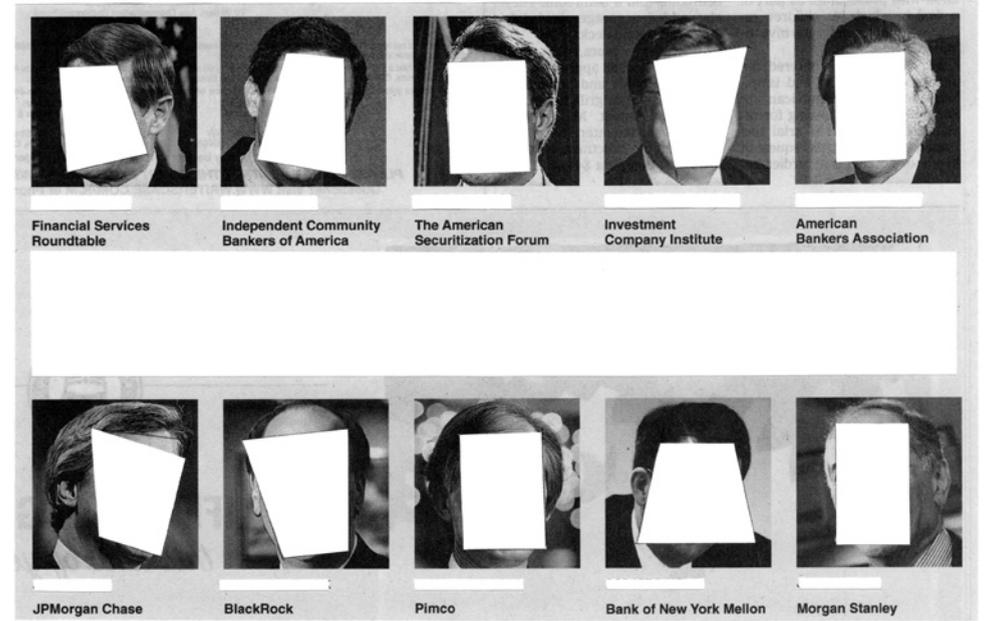
Can one ever be too clearly distinguished from the pronouncements and the language of people whom one learns more and more to avoid in life?

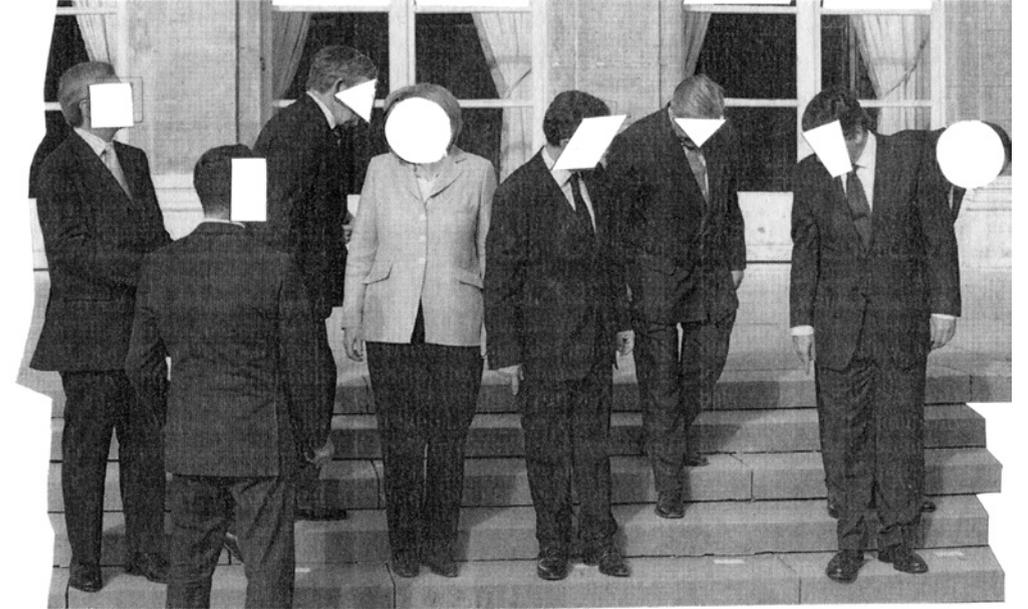
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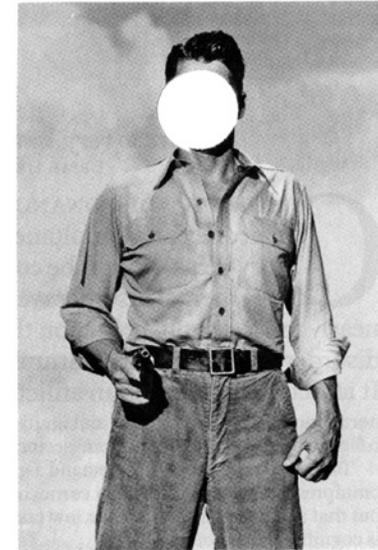


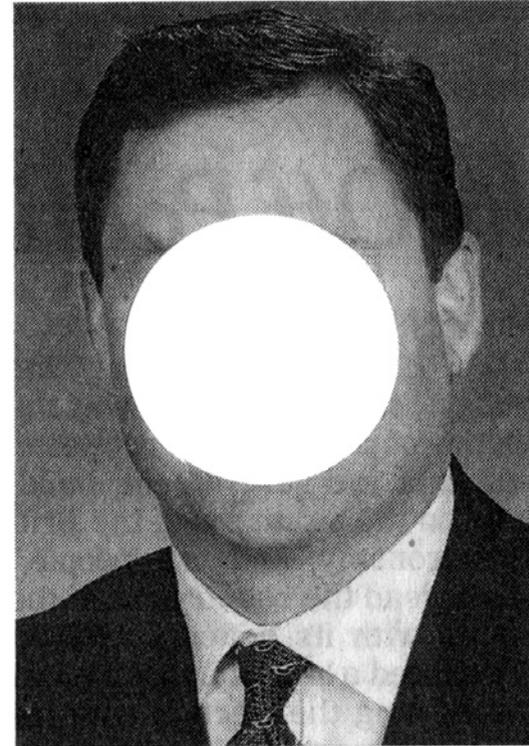
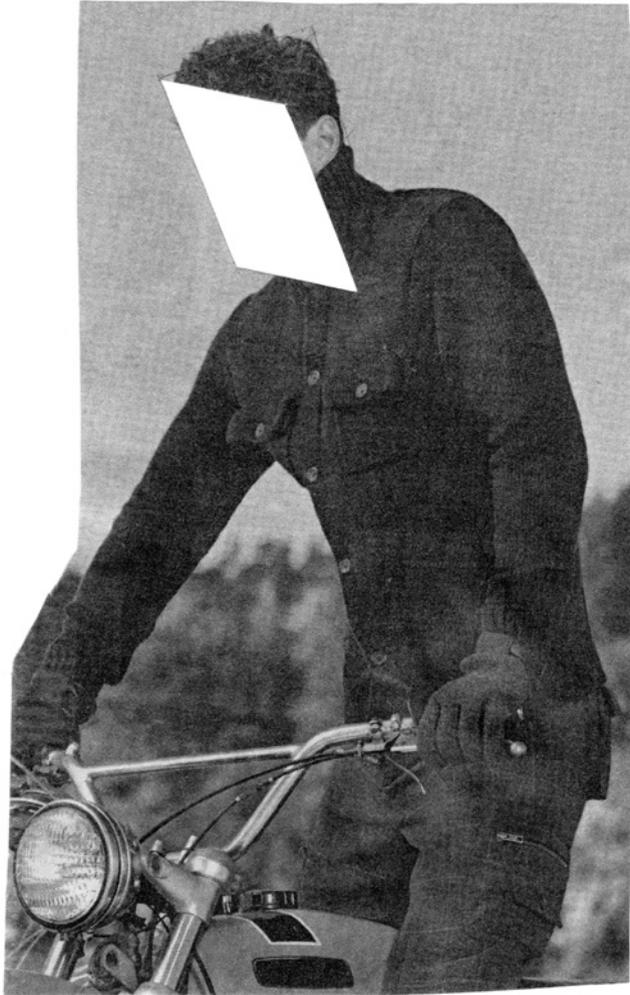
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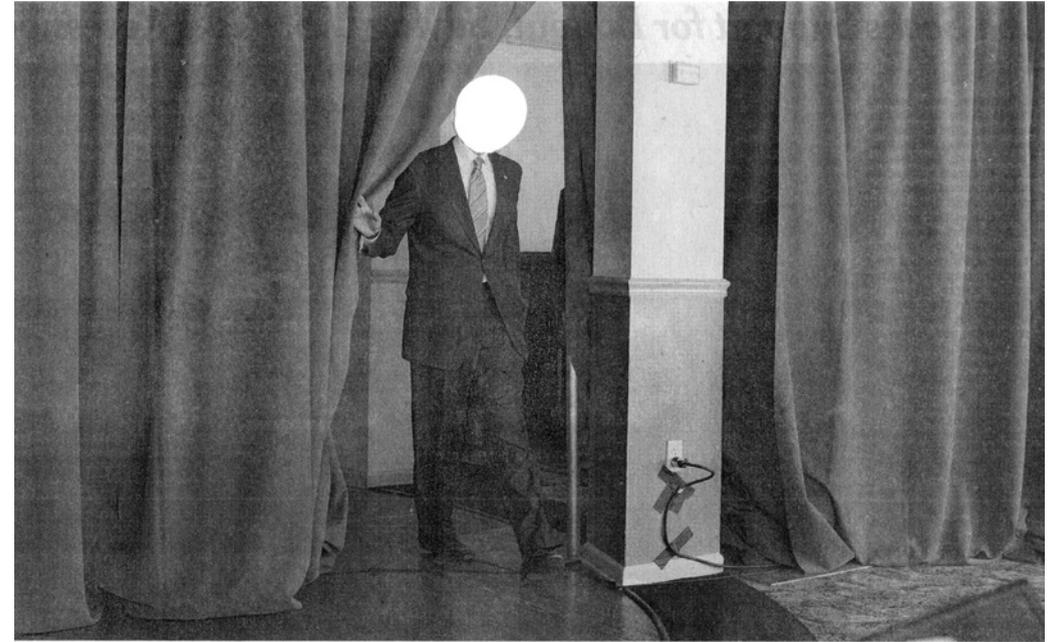
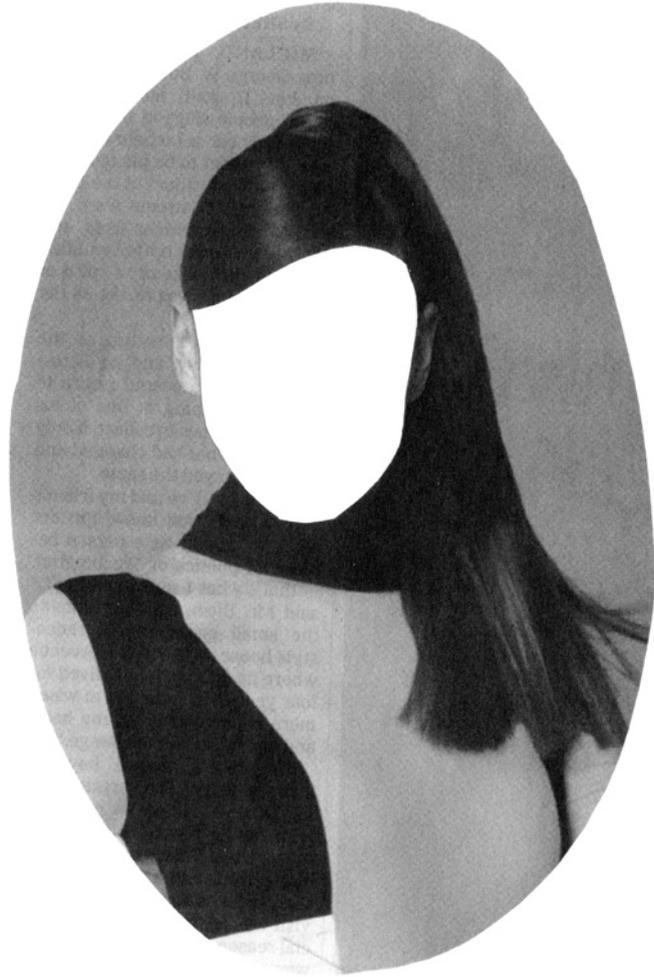














leave the door open
leave the door open

but

lock the lock
lock the lock
i'm comin
lock the lock
i'm comin

lock the lock I'M COMIN

HOME

And I like being in London and I like having a ballet in London and I like everything they did to the ballet in London and I like the way they liked the ballet in London and then we went back again to Paris and going back I saw the only thing I have ever seen from and airplane that was frightening, a wide layer of fog close to the water that went down the middle of the Channel, but the large part near the shore was clear I do not know why but it was frightening and there we gathered everything together and left for Bilignin. That is a natural thing, perhaps I am not I even if my little dog knows me but anyway I like what I have and now it is today.

The only kind of success I have ever really experienced derived from singing to my own piano accompaniment, and above all my numerous impersonations of actors and ordinary folk. But there at least my success was enormous and complete.

And so I seek solace, for want of something better, in the hope that I may perhaps gain a little posthumous recognition for my books. All these things, with some very surprising incidents in some new Adventures of my own, for ten Years more, I may perhaps give a farther Account of hereafter.

I have not yet wholly retired from business, though I desire hereafter to restrict my attention chiefly to the American Museum, and my interests in Bridgeport. I am frequently in New York, and occasionally in other great cities, yet I am never so happy as when I return to my "homestead." I am writing, the closing pages of this Autobiography on the sixth anniversary of the "house-warming," and my heart is warm with gratitude. I am at the home, in the bosom of my family; and "home" and

"family" are the highest and most expressive symbols of the kingdom of heaven.

"I have written the truth: if any person has heard of things contrary to those I have just stated, were they a thousand times proved, he has heard calumny and falsehood; and if he refuses thoroughly to examine and compare them with me whilst I am alive, he is not a friend either to justice or truth. For my part, I openly, and without the least fear declare, that whoever, even without having read my works, shall have examined with his own eyes my disposition, character, manners, inclinations, pleasures, and habits, and pronounce me a dishonest man, is himself one who deserves a gibbet."

Thus I concluded, and every person was silent; Madam d'Egmont was the only person who seemed affected: she visibly trembled, but soon recovered herself, and was silent like the rest of the company. Such were the fruits of my reading and declaration.

But this is our purest and sweetest illusion—one which we cannot resign, however much pain it may cause us through life—that we would, where possible, appropriate to ourselves, nay, even reproduce and exhibit as our own, that which we prize and honour in others.

Dupree, my cat, is sitting outside on the windowsill, his back leaning against the glass, his face lifted, basking, to the sun. From somewhere nearby I can hear Frank Sinatra on the radio. He's singing 'Strangers in the Night.' I'd never noticed before how he draws out each syllable of each word, just behind the beat, reluctant to move on. You can hear the lovers slowing down time, willing the darkness to stretch further, long past the dawn.

Not everyone could sing that lyric. But Frank, he did the research.

With my hopes and ambitions once more revived, and a feeling that a triumphant finale awaited me in the future, despite the trials which at times had assailed me during the troubled course of a Marked Life—with steadfast faith in the star of my destiny, and with the tenacity of my gipsy nature unshaken—I found myself one bright morning whirling away over the sunny hill-slopes of Merry England, to the metropolis of the world—London.

My extremities are well formed and the finger tips have each a nail to assist in their work.

In short, I am ready to take up life and to battle with its problems as they may present themselves.

Hark, orders for my removal have gone out. I hurry to close my story. And here ends the first chapter of my life and the story of my birth.

And the concluding volumes of "Democracy in America," having just then come out, I inaugurated myself as a contributor to the Edinburgh, by the article on that work, which heads the second volume of the "Dissertations."

I felt I could not rest, and again I proved the Divine faithfulness in cleansing from all unrighteousness. This took place about eighteen years ago, and though I am consciously but a babe in this to the present moment, and though I have not been as faithful as I might have been since I first obtained it, yet I bless the Lord I have been kept in that spirit which prefers His will to everything, and would delight to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

One winter morning—

His courage was as usual unflinching, and as he could not murder, he resolved to fight me. He remained on his steed awaiting my attack. He had not long to do so. My horse was already going at a furious pace, and I resolved not to check him. On the contrary, I had no doubt I should bear him down like a whirlwind before me. So far, therefore, from reining in my steed, I urged him still more resolutely with voice, and hand, and heel, and rode him right against Balthazar. The shock was dreadful. He flew out of the saddle like a rocket, and fell heavily on the ground. As he did so, the sword which he held still in his hand entered his heart, and he was dead in an instant. Thus perished Dom Balthazar. I left him to the wolves, and rode back to Granada, much more satisfied than when I left. I was cool enough to lead back to Captain Bermudez the footsore Arab, which the dead devil had run away with; and we both rejoiced merrily over many a flask of Val De Penas.

As I write the closing words of this autobiography I find myself—not by design—in the city of Richmond, Virginia: the city which only

a few decades ago was the capital of the Southern Confederacy, and where, about twenty-five years ago, because of my poverty I slept night after night under a sidewalk.

This time I am in Richmond as the guest of the coloured people of the city; and came at their request to deliver an address last night to both races in the Academy of Music, the largest and finest audience room in the city. This was the first time that the coloured people had ever been permitted to use this hall. The day before I came, the City Council passed a vote to attend the meeting in a body to hear me speak. The state Legislature, including the House of Delegates and the Senate, also passed a unanimous vote to attend in a body. In the presence of hundreds of coloured people, many distinguished white citizens, the City Council, the state Legislature, and state officials, I delivered my message, which was one of hope and cheer; and from the bottom of my heart I thanked both races for this welcome back to the state that gave me birth.

No one understands anyone.

And no one understands anyone.

No one understands.

No one ...

No one.

The sea is walking in the streets. The sea is dangling from windows and the branches of shriveled trees. The sea drops from the sky and comes into the room. Blue, white, foam, waves. I don't like the sea. I don't want the sea, because I don't see a shore, or a dove. I see in the sea nothing except the sea.

I don't see a shore.

I don't see a dove.

Next day the desert, across from the cotton fields, the railroad track dividing them. Copper, the smoke of the smelter stretching out across the desert miles—the endless waste of rubble—night-fall on the desert and the train gradually ascending in slow curves a thousand feet in a few miles. *Cholla, Okeechoya*. The moon coming up.

Next day Louisiana sugar-cane. New Orleans. Cold. Bourbon Street, the Cathedral. The excuses by the sexton:

A new organ. A good one. It ought to be. It cost over twenty thousand dollars.

or

"Quite a story, quite a story."

“You can’t blame me for picking it up,
can you?”

“How deep is the water?” asked Paul.
“I mean at the deepest place?”

We should be willing to act as a balm for all
wounds.

He had several times expressed his fear of
being buried alive. I insisted that Prat should do
whatever was necessary. He asked me to leave
the room. When I came back, he was able to
assure me that Auguste was dead.

I have never skated on black ice, but perhaps
my children will. They’ll know it, at least, when
it appears: that the earth can stretch smooth
and unbroken like grace, and they’ll know as
they know my voice that they were meant to
have their share.

This anxiety, to which perhaps all my other
anxieties had been tending and was their last
phase, now took charge. I never approached
any bed without the worry: “Shall I be able to
function?” I would try, sometimes in advance of
a meeting, sometimes with closed eyes during
the desirable but fearful act, to put myself into
a prosperous frame of mind, telling myself that
I was perfectly unworried, comfortable,
welcome, free, safe and happy, that everything
was exactly “right.” Sometimes I managed;
often the very fear perhaps of the frustration
and humiliation of failure caused me to fail.

The experiences and experiments have
sustained me and given me great joy. But I
know that I have still before me a difficult path
to traverse. I must reduce myself to zero.
So long as a man does not of his own free will
put himself last among his fellow creatures,
there is no salvation for him. Ahimsa is the
farthest limit of humility.

In bidding farewell to the reader, for the
time being at any rate, I ask him to join with me
in prayer to the God of Truth that He may grant
me the boon of Ahimsa in mind, word and deed.

A PARODY

Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell
How pious priests whip Jack and Nell,
And women buy and children sell,
And preach all sinners down to hell,
And sing of heavenly union.

They’ll bleat and baa, dona like goats,
Gorge down black sheep, and strain at motes,
Array their backs in fine black coats,
Then seize their negroes by their throats,
And choke, for heavenly union.

They’ll church you if you sip a dram,
And damn you if you steal a lamb;
Yet rob old Tony, Doll, and Sam,
Of human rights, and bread and ham;
Kidnapper’s heavenly union.

They’ll loudly talk of Christ’s reward,
And bind his image with a cord,
And scold, and swing the lash abhorred,
And sell their brother in the Lord
To handcuffed heavenly union.

“They’ll crack old Tony on the skull,
And preach and roar like Bashan bull,
Or braying ass, of mischief full,
Then seize old Jacob by the wool,
And pull for heavenly union.

A roaring, ranting, sleek man-thief,
Who lived on mutton, veal, and beef,
Yet never would afford relief
To needy, sable sons of grief,
Was big with heavenly union.

“Love not the world,” the preacher said,
And winked his eye, and shook his head;
He seized on Tom, and Dick, and Ned,
Cut short their meat, and clothes, and bread,
Yet still loved heavenly union.

Another preacher whining spoke
Of One whose heart for sinners broke:
He tied old Nanny to an oak,
And drew the blood at every stroke,
And prayed for heavenly union.

They’ll read and sing a sacred song,
And make a prayer both loud and long,
And teach the right and do the wrong,
Hailing the brother, sister throng,
With words of heavenly union.

We wonder how such saints can sing,
Or praise the Lord upon the wing,
Who roar, and scold, and whip, and sting,
And to their slaves and mammon cling,
In guilty conscience union.

They’ll raise tobacco, corn, and rye,
And drive, and thief, and cheat, and lie,
And lay up treasures in the sky,
By making switch and cowskin fly,
In hope of heavenly union.

Two others oped their iron jaws,
And waved their children-stealing paws;
There sat their children in gawgaws;
By stinging negroes’ backs and maws,
They kept up heavenly union.

All good from Jack another takes,
And entertains their flirts and rakes,
Who dress as sleek as glossy snakes,
And cram their mouths with sweetened cakes;
And this goes down for union.

Sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little
book may do something toward throwing light
on the American slave system, and hastening
the glad day of deliverance to the millions of
my brethren in bonds—faithfully relying upon
the power of truth, love, and justice, for success
in my humble efforts—and solemnly pledging
myself anew to the sacred cause,—I subscribe
myself,

The welter is always there, and the present
generation hears close underfoot the growling
of the volcano on which ours danced so long;
but in our individual lives, though the years
are sad, the days have a way of being jubilant.
Life is the saddest thing there is, next to death;
yet there are always new countries to see,
new books to read (and I hope to write), a
thousand little daily wonders to marvel at and
rejoice in, and those magical moments when
the mere discovery that “the woodspurge has
a cup of three” brings not despair but delight.
The visible world is a daily miracle for those
who have eyes and ears; and I still warm my
hands thankfully at the old fire, though every
year it is fed with the dry wood of more old
memories.

We stay for two more fights and then stand up
in the dizzying heat and head toward the
concrete archways of the exit. We leave behind
us the confirmed and imminent deaths of five
more bulls. Moving through the cool silence
of the shadowed passageways, we eventually
step out into the sunlit grounds of the field
surrounding the arena. To our left we notice a
line of forty or more people waiting patiently
for their turn at a make shift counter that
comprises, along with a metal-poled structure,
a spontaneous meat market. Huge dripping
sections of dead bulls are impaled on hooks
or draped over the table. So little has been
quartered that I could almost recognize which
animal was which. The people waiting on line
have the clothes and postures of exhausted
poverty. As we stop to witness, the bulls
disappear piece by piece. Behind us, far over
the walls of the arena, the vague notes of the
band begin again and float like thin banner

across the hot sky. Meat. Blood. Memory.
War. We rise to greet the State, to confront the
State. Smell the flowers while you can.

Mother whispered, “See you don’t have to think
about doing the right thing. If you’re for the
right thing, then you do it without thinking.”

She turned out the light and I patted my
son’s body and went back to sleep.

I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can
cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can
show somebody he’s traveling wrong, then my
living will not be in vain. If I can do my duty
as a Christian ought, if I can bring salvation to
a world once wrought, if I can spread the
message as the master taught, then my living
will not be in vain.

December 26.—The dog came to me at eight
o’clock this morning. He was very affectionate,
poor orphan!

My room will be his quarters hereafter.
The storm raged all night. It has raged all the
morning. The snow drives across the landscape
in the vast clouds, superb, sublime—and Jean
not here to see.

2.30 P.M.—It is the time appointed.
The funeral has begun. Four hundred miles
away, but I can see it all just as if I were
there. The scene is the library in the Langdon
homestead. Jean’s coffin stands where her
mother and I stood, forty years ago, and were
married; and where Susy’s coffin stood thirteen
years ago; where her mother’s stood five years
and a half ago; and where mine will stand,
after a little time.

Five o’clock.—It is all over.

When Clara went away two weeks ago to
live in Europe, it was hard but I could bear it,
for I had Jean left. I said we would be a family.
We said we would be close comrades and
happy—just we two. That fair dream was in my
mind when Jean met me at the steamer last
Monday; it was in my mind when she received
me at the door last Tuesday evening. We were
together, *we were a family!* the dream had to
come true—oh, precious true, contentedly
true, satisfyingly true! And remained true two
whole days.

And now? Now Jean is in her grave!

In the grave—if I can believe it. God rest her
sweet spirit!

Horror is something perfectly natural: the mind's *horror vacui*. A thought is taking shape, then suddenly it notices that there is nothing more to think. Whereupon it crashes to the ground like a figure in a comic strip who suddenly realizes that he has been walking on air.

Someday I shall write about all this in greater detail.

Yes, I have cherished my "demagogue" role. I know that societies often have killed the people who have helped to change those societies. And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help to destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America—then, all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine.

I set out immediately with my son for London, and we only stopped a little by the way to view Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain, and Lord Pembroke's house and gardens with the very curious antiquities, at Wilton. We arrived in London the 27th of July, 1757.

I felt vindicated, and I didn't care about the details anymore. After splitting the advance with the original publisher (as per contract), I was left with a thousand dollars. Deduct the ten percent agent's commission, and I wound up making a grand total of nine hundred dollars. So much for writing books to make money. So much for selling out.

"To those who are not here with us," he said.
"And to a happy ending," I said.

We dribbled our drinks onto the checkered-tile floor. And for that moment, at least, I felt like the luckiest man alive.

I may have thought the road to a world of free and happy human beings shorter than it is proving to be, but I was not wrong in thinking that such a world is possible, and that it is worthwhile to live with a view to bringing it nearer. I have lived in the pursuit of a vision, both personal and social. Personal: to care for what is noble, for what is beautiful, for what is gentle: to allow moments of insight to give wisdom at more mundane times. Social: to see in imagination the society that is to be created,

where individuals grow freely, and where hate and greed and envy die because there is nothing to nourish them. These things I believe, and the world, for all its horrors, has left me unshaken. But in the last five or six years, through another miracle, I have been able to put an end to this duality and found peace in a new form of monism. I have come to see that I and the universe are inseparable, because I am only a particle of the universe and remain so in every manifestation of my existence—intellectual, moral, and spiritual, as well as physical. Thus on the one hand I have been disenthralled by knowledge. On the other I have believed in order to understand, and have been rewarded with joy. I have found that to sit by the rivers of Babylon is not necessarily to weep in Hebraic sorrow. Today, borne on a great flood of faith, hope, and joy in the midst of infinite degradation, I feel that I shall be content to be nothing for ever after death in the ecstasy of having lived and been alive for a moment. I have made the discovery that the last act is glorious however squalid the play may be in all the rest.

If we already possess all the elements with which to march toward the future, let us then recall that phrase of José Martí, which at this moment I am not putting into practise, but which we must constantly put into practise. "The best form of saying is doing." And let us then march toward the future of Cuba.

We have to agitate for democracy and egalitarianism, press harder for human rights, learn to build a new society through our self-transformations and our limited everyday struggles. At the turn of the last century Eugene Debs told a group of workers in Chicago, "I would not lead you into this promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else would lead you out." We must figure out how to become the people we have been waiting for.

A deep peace pervades me, and I feel a great joy in my heart.

"Sasha, what is it?" Philo cries in alarm.

"My resurrection, dear friend. I have found work to do."

A voice sobs within me: "There you are, that's what's become of you: you're uncharitable, you look supercilious and peevish, people dislike

you and all because you won't listen to the advice given to you by your own better half." Oh, I would like to listen, but it doesn't work; if I'm quiet and serious, everyone thinks it's a new comedy and then I have to get out of it by turning it into a joke, not to mention my own family, who are sure to think I'm ill, make me swallow pills for headaches and nerves, feel my neck and my head to see whether I'm running a temperature, ask if I'm constipated and criticize me for being in a bad mood. I can't keep that up: if I'm watched to that extent, I start by getting snappy, then unhappy, and finally I twist my heart round again, so that the bad is on the outside and the good is on the inside and keep on trying to find a way of becoming what I would so like to be, and what I could be, if ... there weren't any other people living in the world.

Thus it is that my friends have made the story of my life. In a thousand ways they have turned my limitations into beautiful privileges, and enabled me to walk serene and happy in the shadow cast by my deprivation.

I did the best I could to understand how different this revolution was from others, and in a way I did understand it. But what will remain with me is the little house in Irbid where I slept for one night, and fourteen years during which I tried to find out if that night ever happened.

This last page of my book is transparent.

I had to leave as quickly as possible. You must never undertake the search for time lost in the spirit of nostalgic tourism.

And from then on I lived from page to page and between book and book, my inner world still rich in characters. But to tell of all that, I have neither the onions nor the desire.

I was returning to France, to lovely Saint-Tropez and my enchanting little cottage to write my life. My life—I had lived in its heights and its depths, in bitter sorrow and ecstatic joy, in black despair and fervent hope. I had drunk the cup to the last drop. I had lived my life. Would I have had the gift to paint the life I had lived!

[Here the manuscript ends abruptly.]

