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THE DEVIL WITHOUT CONFESSING HIM

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All I need is to open one of my beloved great books to find a print of the cloven hoof. He is there, black in the blackness or black on black, the hidden figure, incarnation of literature, his delict and his delectable. What am I doing here? I am evoking the devil, I follow him, everywhere, the indissociable dissociator. We shall see him steal past, discreetly leaving his mark, the inaugural figure and artisan at the origin of each and every work of art. Isn't it astounding to think Kafka enters literature with a cry of victory, this tale, a poem, he insists, called *das Urteil* at its moment of birth, *The Verdict* which puts *the devil* on stage, on trial, and calls him by name, in a family setting that resembles a courthouse? This particular Verdict calls up, recalls, all the Verdicts (any verdict is all verdicts) that we can never put out of our minds again, the one that taxes Jacques Derrida as Augustine, Rousseau, Stendhal, Dostoyevsky, Tsvetaeva, Proust, Bernhard God only knows how many I can think of. What a deal of devils, from Thot right up to the undecidevil! I'm afraid I can't let them all address us here today, I shall follow only and all too briefly in the tracks of Jacques Derrida Kafka Stendhal Rousseau.

What to say of the devil, what has the devil to say to us, Diabolos, der Teufel, le Diable, Tchort, dia does he say dispersion, expediting *balein*, like Jacques Derrida he starts up and he disperses he is the enemy of the point which claims to posit, to nail down.

The devil, it is said, speaks evil, one speaks ill of the devil who introduces such so-called evils as separation, as autoseparation, as fendingness [*fendance*, riving, clefiness], as defending. He says the One is not one, the proof is *I divide it*, I Devil God. Of the Devil the diabolic-child it is said he says one thing which says something else, he writes a letter which writes another letter he splits hairs on God's tongue.

The Devil is the soul of Literature, he is its genius its wit. We have him to thank if it is originally viewed askance, ill-considered misunderstood denounced, since it and he and Jacques Derrida have in common to always get away, which no goody-goody can stand.

And literature, Jacques Derrida, the devil, what have they got to say for themselves? 1) evil exists; 2) nothing bad about evil existing; 3) work like the devil nothing's better for the soul.

Let us not speak ill of evil it's too easy.

And let us follow the wise advice of Jacques Derrida in *Circumfession* and take an interest in *the experience of evil*. From Augustine to Joyce, Felix Culpa is, beyond doubt, the name of the fortunate fault called literature. Coupling opposites does not in the least dilute either term. There is fault and there is milk. Yes, yes, *fel-ix* is first of all *one who gives milk*: then that which, fecond, produces fruit. So Augustine's tongue murmurs to us: happy he who nurses at the fault—who sucks the juice of the fault.

Right away you realize that the milk of this fault, this fault as milk, is another version (another outpouring) of the poison-gift. Every great work of literature starts with, is inaugurated by a fault, by a misdeed, by a crime.

I wish to report here on a few cases of structurally fruitful misdemeanors. But before I push off into textual waters, three remarks: 1) fault or crime, big or small, are not separated from their consequence: a harsh, very harsh punishment. Hence I shall always speak of (the scene in two acts) crime and punishment. 2) We shall see that if there is always crime at the start (crime or misdemeanor) the author of the crime is not always who you think or hasten to think, or are in a rush to call a criminal.

Let's just say, to speed things up, that among our so-called criminals, our criminal verdicts, some swear they are not, the others cannot not be it, do not want not to be it...

3) Mixed with the punishment, or before it or being it, literature makes its entry in the form of the *Avowal* or *Confession*. From the accused, the tribunal constituted by the family or vice versa, wants an avowal. The avowal which would be the first kind of punishment. One does not own up, without it being painful and in more ways than one, before any punishment, and first of all, without hurting oneself on the crime.

Admit! But how, why? One doesn't want to admit, one wants to admit one admits wanting not to want to but how to go about it and what?

Oh this word of admission, this *avowal*, this morsel of ver-(dict), this wormwood, it is (the porter or) the usher or the useless, viscous key which would make the famous great *Tor* of the Law swing back on its hinges. If we knew how to turn the avowal would we go in? In where?

No one to say.

Only Jacques Derrida to speak of what we cannot grasp:

[et faire la vérité en ce cas dont je ne suis pas sûr qu'il relève d'aucune religion, pour cause de littérature, ni d'aucune littérature, pour cause de religion, faire *la vérité* n'a sans doute rien à voir avec ce que vous appelez la vérité], car pour avouer, il ne suffit pas de *porter à la connaissance*, de *faire savoir ce qui est*, par exemple de vous *informer* que j'ai porté la mort, trahi, blasphémé, parjuré, il ne suffit pas que *je me présente* à Dieu ou à vous, la présentation de ce qui est ou de ce que je suis, soit par révélation soit par jugement adéquat, la "vérité", donc, n'ayant jamais donné lieu à l'aveu, à l'aveu véritable, la vérité *essentielle* de l'aveu n'ayant rien à voir avec la vérité, mais consistant, si du moins on tient à ce qu'il consiste et qu'il y en ait, en pardon demandé, en une demande plutôt, à la religion demandée comme à la littérature, *avant* l'une et l'autre qui n'ont droit qu'à ce temps, de pardonner, pardon, pour rien.

[*and make* the truth in this case that I'm not sure comes under any religion, for reason of literature, nor under any literature, for reason of religion, making *truth* has no doubt nothing to do with what you call truth], for in order to confess, it is not enough to *bring to knowledge*, to make *known what is*, for example to

inform you that I have done to death, betrayed, blasphemed, perjured, it is not enough that I *present myself* to God or you, the presentation of what is or what I am, either by revelation or by adequate judgment. "truth" then, having never given rise to avowal, to true avowal, the *essential* truth of avowal having therefore nothing to do with truth, but consisting, if, that is, one is concerned that it consist and that there be any, in asked-for pardon, in a request rather, asked of religion as of literature, *before* the one and the other which have a right only to this time, for pardoning, pardon, for nothing.

And there we are left hanging on the avowal, on the lips of the avowal before the country, the earth, the place, the book in other words, in which religion and literature are the Siamese causes we know not what we do with writing or in writing. Save perhaps—but who knows—"ask for pardon." We want *to-ask-for-pardon*. To-want-to-ask-for-pardon is not wanting to be pardoned or pardonable—as both Jacques Derrida and Dostoyevsky clearly show.

Let us linger a moment with Period 9 of *Circumfession* for it speaks, in the densest and most prophetic manner, of the suffering which forever attends us in all of writing's times. Inexhaustible suffering, poisoned wellspring, but spring nonetheless.

Here I should write a book on the theme of the crime of circumcision as crime in *Circumfession*, but I won't because it would be a crime against my audience, but a crime, nonetheless, not to do so; therefore I shall keep just a trace: it is that Jacques Derrida says there was crime "for good and all," a wound, original violence, which gave birth, unthinkingly, to the work called Jacques Derrida. There was crime, but crimes reverse, violence about-faces, assailant and assailed change place. One might think that he who undergoes, without warning, this kind of operation, mutilation, excision, inscription, pays as if he'd been singled out in advance, marked for the crime that wasn't committed, not by him not yet, but already marked, as in the case, we shall see, of St. Augustine or Rousseau.

And so he began with the cruel inscription, a simulacrum of punishment. First the punishment, an infliction of the verdict. Next the deeds, made crimes.

So he says:

n'empêche, l'écriture n'intéresse qu'à l'expérience du mal, même s'il s'agit en effet de "faire la vérité" dans un style, un livre et devant des témoins, [...] et *faire* la vérité en ce cas dont je ne suis pas sûr qu'il relève d'aucune religion, faire la vérité n'a sans doute rien à voir avec ce que vous appelez la vérité, car pour avouer, il ne suffit pas de *porter à la connaissance*, de faire *savoir ce qui est*, par exemple, de vous *informer* que j'ai porté la mort, trahi, blasphémé, parjuré, il ne suffit pas que *je me présente* à Dieu ou à vous, la présentation de ce qui est ou de ce que je suis, soit par révélation soit par jugement adéquat, la "vérité", donc, n'ayant jamais donné lieu à l'aveu, à l'aveu véritable, la vérité *essentielle* de l'aveu n'ayant rien à voir avec la vérité, mais consistant, si du moins on tient à ce qu'il consiste et

qu'il y en ait, en pardon demandé, en une demande plutôt, à la religion demandée comme à la littérature, *avant* l'une et l'autre qui n'ont droit qu'à ce temps, de pardonner, pardon, pour rien.

no matter, writing is only interested in the experience of evil, even if the point is indeed to "make" truth in a style, a book and before witnesses, (...) *and make* the truth in this case that I'm not sure comes under any religion, for reason of literature, nor under any literature, for reason of religion, making *truth* has no doubt nothing to do with what you call truth), for in order to confess, it is not enough to *bring to knowledge*, to make *known what is*, for example to *inform* you that I have done to death, betrayed, blasphemed, perjured, it is not enough that I *present myself* to God or you, the presentation of what is or what I am, either by revelation or by adequate judgment, "truth" then, having never given rise to avowal, to true avowal, the *essential* truth of avowal having therefore nothing to do with truth, but consisting, if, that is, one is concerned that it consist and that there be any, in asked-for pardon, in a request rather, asked of religion as of literature, *before* the one and the other which have a right only to this time, for pardoning, pardon, for nothing.

In order to *make* a proper reading of this sentence full of sentences ready to lead us astray you must not only hear it said but look at it. Then you see (the words) *make* and *the truth* blinking off and on, sometimes in italics, sometimes in quotation marks sometimes in Roman type. Under our very eyes making the truth divides itself into an infinity of artful and musical variations. This *make the Truth* is, in English, St Augustine's—who in Latin claims to write his *Confessions* in order to *veritatem facere*. Make can mean make, make, make and truth can be heard truly as truth, truth, truth... Watch out, Jacques Derrida reminds us, because truth does not mean truth it doesn't want to tell it either. But is *telling making*? What Augustine seems to me to want to *make* is a *veritatem facere* that can only be attempted by a writing: by a written telling. Is truth made in writing truth? in what does its truth consist, is it true? More true or less true than truth made by telling? Murmured? Shouted out? The first great modern man of letters in a language that proliferates signifiers, literary player, anagrammarian, Augustine, it seems, made a least two sorts of attempts at confession, one addressed to some receiver in a confessional the other addressed to God, you and me, in a piece of writing designed to outlast the hour of avowal. This latter project, the *Written Confessions*, no doubt they answer, as is the case with Jacques Derrida when he tries to pursue the febrile logic of the avowal, a concern to track whatever flees into the countless dim recesses where this elusive glow-worm glimmers, no doubt Augustine great man of letters but a believer also, dreamed of the truth he would make, with the help of God. But, reading him, it appears to me that he didn't so much make truth as make a work of art of it. To know if and how truth and the work of art touch, are interchangeable, was not his concern but that of his compatriot Jacques Derrida. It takes a great deal of effort to make truth in writing so that the truth as one dreams it may have the best chance of

being—not approached, not glimpsed—but better dreamed. Writing leaves nothing it touches intact. Touch it, he says, and the concept is done for. Should one desire to catch the truth by surprise or caress it or draw it close or spit it out, at that instant the writing, a born seductress, leads you down the garden path. Too beautiful to make true. What to do?

Never mind, cries Augustine *legat qui volet et interpretetur!* Read if you like! It's not my problem! Interpret it if you can! It's God I'm talking to—in this lovely human Latin. Hm. We shall see about that.

Jacques Derrida can play this game too, but without illusions. He's not one to believe that a letter ever reaches its destination. True, a letter can start perhaps from me, a sentence perhaps. And yet, who knows? Having departed, it is no longer mine. Off it goes ahead of me, if it is "writing worthy of the name" as he says, detached, autonomous, as the character goes off to live its life in the theater once the author has passed. Here, have a look at this one for example, which is the main character of Period 9 of *Circumfession*, a sentence which has the brief, majestic allure of the prophet, it says few words but after one can't stop interpreting its pullulating offspring.

According to Jacques Derrida it is the sentence of sentences.

Here it is, in the first instance, in the midst of a procession of hypotaxis, surrounded, set apart:

Parmi les phrases que G. a raison de ne pas citer, toutes en somme, il en est une, la seule, je la rappelle moi-même, mais justement comme si je ne l'avais pas écrite alors, il y a plus de dix ans, comme si je n'avais pas encore lu l'adresse ainsi gardée en réserve pour le contre-exemple ou le démenti que je veux apporter sans cesse à G. autrement dit à la survivante éternelle, à la figure théologicielle ou maternelle du savoir absolu pour laquelle la surprise d'aucun aveu n'est possible, et cette phrase dit qu' "on demande toujours pardon quand on écrit", afin de laisser suspendue la question de savoir si on demande enfin pardon par écrit pour quelque crime, blasphème, parjure antérieur ou si on demande pardon pour écrire, pardon pour le crime, le blasphème ou le parjure en lesquels consiste présentement l'acte d'écrire, le simulacre d'aveu dont a besoin la surenchère perverse du crime pour épuiser le mal, celui que j'ai fait en vérité, le pire, sans être sûr de l'avoir même épongé de ma vie, et c'est le pire, mais mon compatriote l'a pressenti, si une écriture digne de ce nom avoue pour demander pardon du pire, littéralement, *et nunc, domine, confiteor tibi in litteris*, et se détourne de Dieu par l'écrit même qui s'adresse aux frères à la mort de la mère [...]

Among the sentences that G. is right not to quote, all of them in short, there is one, the only one, I recall it myself, but precisely as though I had not written it then, more than ten years ago, as though I had not yet read the address thus kept in reserve for the counterexample or the denial that I want constantly to

oppose to G., in other words to the eternal survivress, to the theological program or maternal figure of absolute knowledge for which the surprise of no avowal is possible, and this sentence says that "one always asks for pardon when one writes," so as to leave suspended the question of knowing if one is finally asking pardon in writing for some earlier crime, blasphemy, or perjury or if one is asking for pardon for the crime, blasphemy, or perjury in which consists presently the act of writing, the simulacrum of avowal needed by the perverse overbidding of the crime to exhaust evil, the evil I have committed in truth, the worst, without being sure of having even sponged it from my life, and it's the worst, but my compatriot had a premonition of it, if a writing worthy of the name avows so as to ask pardon for the worst, literally, *et nunc, domine, confiteor tibi in litteris*, and turns away from God through the very piece of writing, addressed to his brothers on the death of their mother (...)

The terms in which it is wrapped are performative: they reproduce and enact the suspense of discovery, the effect of the mind wandering in search of a reading or a response or an explanation to calm the anguish this sentence breathes.

Among all the sentences there is one, it is a sentence it is one, the only one. I recall it, *as though I had not written it then myself*

...there is a sentence, the only one, he is himself attached to recalling, a sentence which takes to its heels, the moment it is emitted, even throws whoever pronounces it off track, cuts itself into six times six segments each time changes its apparent subject, a masterpiece, a demonstration of a peerless aptitude for writing that uses all the resources of syntax in order to track down its quarry without ever being out of bounds, *says he*: I quote and this sentence says that "one is always asking for pardon when one writes"

— it is *the sentence* that says that, not him—

This sentence, he says, or he writes in 1989, he recalls it or it recalls itself to him *as if he* hadn't written it more than ten years ago (all these *as ifs* should be pondered at length), thus saying there are sentences one writes as if one were not writing them then but ten years later, and not only ten years, thus recounting the time lag the advance the delay the prophetic adventure of the sentence or the book or the letter

whereupon this sentence—as if... is recalled—in the here and now, dated 1989, at the bedside of the mother who has outlived the mother herself, the sentence outlasting itself ten years later here it is back again or on the way back, I no longer know the time of the then, nor if he is present or on his way, ten years later in 1999 saying in long, desperate strokes, page after page "*Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire!* Forgive me for not wanting to say" saying without being able to stop himself during the whole time of the sublime book of Abraham called *Donner la Mort (The Gift of Death)* forgive me, forgive me for not wanting to say forgive me, for the sentence which sets off all by itself never ceases throughout time to repent. Once in 79, in 89, it says "one is always asking for pardon when one writes," but what does that mean he asks again, he asks himself, he asks it, commands it, comments on it, who is *one*, who asks or commands, the writing or me,

who seems to ask for pardon—to whom for what, and immediately right away again as ten years previously he is back in the whirl of rising stakes, in the spiral of guilt with neither head nor tail, where each movement draws the knot a little tighter around the guilty throat, the crime increases with each gesture of diminution, each letter of confession adds another fault to the fault, that's what he says it is trying to say, the sentence that got away, decades ago, ten years later and one can predict predicting already a further sighting, which would be, which will be, in 2009.

Here I must add a footnote—

Where and when was that? Well he says in a note/asterisk, or the note says for him: *The Postcard—from Socrates to Freud and Beyond (I believe)*—he's the one who says this *I believe* in parentheses, effacing the place and the origin, even as the note says it, with an *I believe* which in French has the ring of belief tottering, as soon as I say I believe I doubt. And this *I believe* set in the place of a page number on which one could count makes the whole sentence vibrate comically, I mean diabolically, the whole proposition, the sense, Socrates Freud and beyond.

This wink of a word let us take it as the key, fairly well stashed away I believe, of all that has just been affirmed—avowed, at each avowal, his "I believe". Are you guilty? I believe. But it only works, I can't emphasize enough, in *writing*.

To the question of whether one asks for pardon in writing is promptly associated the verbal crime. And let's not forget, if possible, any of the tricks of this question which attempts to be honest in its twisting and turning or at least to remain faithful to its structural infidelity.

But before this question is raised, a preliminary question is smuggled in: *can one* ask for pardon in writing, how's it done?

There is an answer in the famous last scene of Dostoyevsky's *The Devils* (a scene not meant for publication, unavowable in a book) the one where Stavrogin the Devil prince comes to confess his crime (but which?) to the saintly Tikhon. *In writing*, what's more. Now, among the pages that he gives Tikhon to read who lets us read them over his shoulder, missing are precisely the pages which—something funny happens—I believe I'd better read you the lines:

For a few seconds he stared fixedly [at Tikhon]. ...At last he took some printed sheets out of his side pocket and put them on the table.

"[...]If one man reads them I shall not conceal them any longer and they will be read by everyone. That's settled. I don't need you at all because my mind is made up. But do read them. Don't say anything while you're reading them. Tell me everything after you've read them."

"Shall I read?" Tikhon asked hesitantly.

"Yes, read. I don't mind."

"I'm afraid I shall not be able to read without my glasses. The print is very small. Foreign."

"Here are your glasses... ."

2

The print really was foreign: [five] sheets of ordinary notepaper printed and stitched together. It must have been printed secretly on some foreign press abroad. At the first glance the sheets of paper looked like some political pamphlet. The heading read: From Stavrogin.

I insert this document verbatim in my chronicle (it is well known by now).

...In my opinion, this document is a morbid work, the work of the devil who took possession of that man [...] not only to relieve his pain, but to change it, if only for a moment, for another kind of suffering.

[...]

The basic idea of the document is an undisguised, terrible need for retribution, the need for the cross, for a public execution. And yet this need for the cross tortures a man who does not believe in the cross... . On the other hand, the whole of this document is something wild and reckless, though apparently written with a different intention. The author declares that he could not help writing it, that he was 'forced' to write it, and that seems quite likely to have been the case. He would have been glad to have that cup pass from him, if only he could, but it seems he really could not do so and jumped at the first favourable opportunity for indulging in a new act of violence. Yes, indeed, a sick man tosses about in bed and wishes to change one kind of suffering for another.

[...] I took her hand and kissed it quietly, forced her down on the bench again and began looking into her eyes. ... Her eyes were motionless with terror and her lips began to quiver as though she were on the verge of tears.... I kissed her hand again and put her on my knee. [...] I was whispering to her all the time, as though drunk. At last a most strange thing happened, something I shall never forget, something that quite amazed me: the little girl flung her arms round my neck and all of a sudden began to kiss me frenziedly. Her face expressed complete rapture. I nearly got up and went away, so shocked was I to find this sort of thing in a little creature for whom I suddenly felt pity... ."

3

The page stopped there, the sentence cut off. Something happened then which I must relate. There were five pages in all: Tikhon had the one he had just read in his hands; the last sentence was unfinished. Stavrogin held the other four. When Tikhon looked up, he passed him the next sheet.

"But this sentence is incomplete," said Tikhon, examining the sheet. This is the third page; it's the second we need.

"Yes, it's the third; as for the second... The second is censored for the time being," Stavrogin replied rapidly, with an awkward smile. He was sitting on a corner of the divan, feverishly, without moving, not taking his eyes off Tikhon.

"You will have it soon, when...when you are worthy," he added with a shrug. He was laughing, but was pitiful to see.

"Still, at this point, the second or the third—what difference does it make?" Tikhon remarked.

"What do you mean? Why?" shouted Stavrogin, leaping up. "It's not the same thing at all. Ah! You monks, right away you imagine the most dreadful villainies. Monks would make excellent magistrates."

Tikhon stared at him without speaking.

"Calm down. It's not my fault if the child was stupid and didn't understand me. Nothing happened. Nothing at all."

"Thank God!" Tikhon crossed himself.

"It's long to explain...there was...there was a psychological misunderstanding."

He flushed suddenly. Disgust, anguish, despair were reflected on his face. He fell silent. They didn't look at one another and there was silence between them for a minute longer.

"You know, it'd be better if you were to read," Stavrogin said mechanically, wiping sweat off his brow with his fingers. And...it would be best if you didn't look at me at all... For me it is like a dream ... And..."

-- Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, Penguin, London 1971 pp. 680-697, translation David Magarshack, translation Part 3, BB from the French.

And this gap in the pages...well you have to understand it as Jacques Derrida also means us to get the silent message: *when it comes to avowing* there are always some missing pages. The author admits: "It is impossible not to own up despite oneself it is impossible to own up so I raise the chalice to my lips but at the last second the devil replaces it with—silence—"

When it turns up again, in 1999, for *The Gift of Death*, then, one recognizes it first of all by the way it comes forward all by itself like a foundling (a menace these foundlings as all literature shows) seductive as ever, enigmatic, provoking astonishment, uneasiness, playful, saying sorry in other words, for in the meantime it has had a chance to up the ante, saying "forgive me for not wanting to say," 1.2.3.4.5, ten times in a row (in one or two pages) differently, it is a deafening aria, draped in all possible sorts of punctuation braving any presumptive reader who might harbor the dream of decoding it. And this sentence is again declared to be of unknown origin, it has the force and the

weakness of those meteoric phenomena. words, illuminations. menaces promises promenaces, promises of menaces, pray forgive...

"The interpreter then bends over it," he says, that's Jacques Derrida writing on p. 161. And in his wake, an archeologist, a hermeneut. him, you, me.

—What's that you say? We say. Or perhaps: What do you say? – Pardon... Pardon

One examines it and page 161 where it turns up, first, and yes, one does make out the reflection of a figure one has met before, a little blurred, ephemeral but recurrent, a scene but without a face, and yet: here it is here: p. 161

Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire.

Imaginez que nous laissions cet énoncé à son sort.

Acceptez au moins que pour un temps je l'abandonne ainsi, seul, aussi démuné, sans fin, errant, voire erratique: "Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire..." Est-ce là cet énoncé, une phrase? Une phrase de prière? Une demande dont il est encore trop tôt ou déjà trop tard pour savoir si elle aura été seulement interrompue, méritant ou excluant les points de suspension? "Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire [...]"

A moins que je ne l'aie un jour trouvée, cette phrase improbable, à moins qu'elle ne se trouve, elle-même, seule, visible et abandonnée, exposée à tout passant, inscrite sur un tableau, lisible sur un mur, à même une pierre, à la surface d'une feuille de papier ou en réserve dans une disquette d'ordinateur.

Forgive me for not wanting to say.

Suppose we were to leave this proposition to its fate.

Allow me for the moment at least to abandon it thus, alone, stripped of everything, endless, wandering, erratic even: "Forgive me for not wanting to say..." Is that, that statement, a sentence? A sentence of prayer? A request which it is still too soon or already too late to know whether it was merely cut off, deserving of or precluding suspension points? "Forgive me for not wanting to say(...)"

Unless it's something I found one day, this improbable sentence, unless it turned up, all by itself, visible and abandoned, exposed to all comers, inscribed on a board, legible on a wall, on bare stone, on the surface of a sheet of paper or saved on a computer.

One doesn't know, does one, in the moment of abandonment, who abandons who is abandoned, who is alone, stripped of everything, left to wander...

Besides here it is, the abandonment scene. This time it takes place on a seminar day Wednesday January 28 1998: everything repeats *from the beginning*.

The play *begins* with abandonments, by an act and a confession of abandonment.

Not a premeditated abandonment, but conscious and deliberate, which doesn't signify that all its meanings and consequences have been accounted for.

On that day, he was to let the following question drop, you be the witnesses, *slowly* (here we need stage directions) into the conversation:

De Confessions en Confessions, d'Augustin à Rousseau, de Confessions en Fleurs du mal, de Fleurs du mal en Lettre au père, à la Recherche du Temps perdu, et toujours dans la "Crainte et le tremblement" qui furent, je le rappelle, des mots de Saint Paul, est-ce que toute l'écriture, toute la littérature occidentale se serait ainsi inscrite dans le pardon demandé, dans l'expiation—pour quel péché...? Laissons, suspendons, abandonnons là cette question, laissons-la provisoirement à l'abandon.

From Confessions to Confessions, from Augustine to Rousseau, from Confessions to Fleurs du mal, from Fleurs du mal to Letter to the father to the Search for Lost Time, and always in "fear and trembling" which were, I remind you, the words of Saint Paul, is all writing, all Western literature thus to be put down as an asking for pardon, as expiation—for which sin...? Never mind, let's leave it in suspense, let's abandon this question, forget about it for the time being.

At this point I notice I've been saying "*la* phrase" all along, for the sentence, which is feminine in French. While he says *elle* (or she) sometimes, meaning *la* question, *la* phrase. At other times, more often *il* (or he) for the statement, the masculine abandoned, the son who is perhaps his or perhaps he himself has been abandoned by the great Abandonment that operates every Bible, Hebrew or Greek, and *makes* it literature.

The hypothesis, his, advanced with precaution, would be a collection of stories engendering one another through collisions and substitutions, but in secret and around a secret, passing the secret on like a hot potato, suffering and making oneself suffer: the history of the pardon (if there is one and if there are any) the history of the writing of the pardon (if there is one etc.) the history of writing as the experience of the pardon, (if there is one etc.)—all these utterly equivocal histories being (incarnated) represented by two characters the father and the son in a specular scene he says, which makes the tragedy unending, for the father is the one *in the place of* the father, and he may be the son and vice versa. As if there were two seats carved in the rock on the windy peak of a mountain—let's call it Mount Moria—but it may be, say, Mount Cithaeron—and that in the tragedy, and it would be the motor of tragedy, now one, now the other would take the place of one or the other and would play the role of killer and killed both in turn and simultaneously, sacrificer and sacrificed, one in the other, one for the other both together victims of the Evil which feeds on blood and love.

All these interconnected stories compose the story of the human soul which literature insists on trying to give an account of without ever reaching the end of it, writing letter after letter, without ever, one starts to suspect, wanting to finish. For, back we come to the sentence of 1979, 1989, 1999, *writing is only interesting in proportion to*

and in the experience of evil, writing is the interest of evil, evil is only interesting in proportion to writing, writing has the utmost difficulty in writing evil well and that is where its interest lies.

* * *

One hardly dares imagine a story with experience of evil without writing without pardon without writing the pardon if there is one. If there is one, and only one, I believe, it is (intolerable) perhaps in *The Most Lamentable Roman Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*, whose capacity to lament has been cut out, *Titus Andronicus*, "figured" by the very cruel scene (Act II, scene iv) of Lavinia's imprisonment:

(Enter DEMETRIUS and CHIRON, with LAVINIA,
ravished.

her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out.)

DEM. So, now go tell, an if thy tongue can speak,

Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee.

CHI. Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so,

An if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe.

DEM. See how with signs and tokens she can scowl,

CHI. Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.

DEM. She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash;
And so let's leave her to her silent walks.

CHI. An 'twere my case, I should go hang myself.

DEM. If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord.

(Exeunt

DEMETRIUS and CHIRON.)

Cut off from life, deprived of death, Lavinia hasn't even got hands to hang herself with, more wretched even than little Matryosha, who has hands to make hanging take the place of life and a confession. Soon to be followed by her torturer. A cord to reknit a bond with human meaning.

* * *

Here, two questions in reserve: 1) as for the secret: all literature is the result of a not-wanting-to-tell, is the consequence of this silence, is the sworn guardian of a terrible secret it speaks not to tell?

2) Kept secret attached to the secret tête-à-tête in a double silence, silence to silence for silence in an almost mortal economy, the characters subjects victims and masters of the pardon would seem to be as Jacques Derrida reminds us, repeats, questions, the *father* and the *son* and therefore the question of Sexual Difference steals into the chapter *The Father the Son and the Literature* in fourth or first place. Among the other questions raised by Jacques Derrida: what is literature? What is the function of literature? What relationship might there be between literature and meaning? Between literature and the undecidability of the secret?

Wandering also, alone and just as forlorn, the question of Sexual Difference.

It remains "up in the air." Perhaps it is even it which remains "up in the air" and whose phantom place is indicated by the suspension marks which allow a free and uninterpretable issue to the statement "Forgive me for not wanting to say," *when* there are any. I myself in a little while shall go and take all these questions to the askers-of-pardon or refusers to ask pardon some of whom belong to the father-son affiliation others to the mother-son affiliation and we shall see if it makes a difference. Of course it will be necessary to open the inquiry to other relationships, mother, daughter and literature. Or if I don't get around to it here I'll do it elsewhere.

But let's get back to the letter, to the letters that literature never stops writing—in order to beg forgiveness or to accuse itself or to...why not—keep itself company, speak to itself, in its extreme solitude, literature which arises or descends from some of the world's greatest hermits, those who receive, who've received, a letter from God, a missive in the language no one speaks, that speaks No One.

Why does one write the letter to the Language and in the Language spoken by no one? too many possible answers to this question for me to choose one of them here.

Let's keep to the writingness of the letter for the time being.

And the question here is: who is writing the letter? The father? The son? Or literature? This question, in a moment I shall take it to the martyr of martyrs of the Letter, Kafka.

Next, I note that for the moment we are speaking of the gesture of writing, of writing. In a second development comes the sending of the letter.

Who is writing a letter to whom? Who doesn't write the letter, thereby writing an absence of letter of incalculable effect?

As Jacques Derrida has so brilliantly shown in his reading of the Letter to the Father, one must expect to find more than one letter in a letter. Thus in the famous so-called Letter to the Father is a letter written to the son written for the father by the son to the son who plays the father and the son etc. Happy she who understands. Before signing it, before having finished writing, the minute one writes a letter (or a sentence or a book) one has already caught the other one is already caught by the other in the other, right away it's a battle a free-for-all. But the ring still holds a pair of stools on which, during time-out in the free-for-all, the wrestlers slump into place, momentarily at least the son in the son's place the father in the father's place.

Or maybe the distinction is still exempt from the undecidable, at dawn, in the prologue of the life or the story, before the play begins, in the moment that precedes the tornado of *The Verdict*.

We are in Bohemia.

It is a Sunday morning, spring at its loveliest. Georg Bendemann is sitting in his bedroom. He appears to be alone. Everything is so calm. The window, the river, the bridge the river the hills. The letter is there already. From the start. One doesn't know yet and for a long time that across the hall there is the darkness room where the father is getting ready. But the letter is there already. The son, the literature. An hour later the father explodes and the tale is borne off in a torrent of hate towards its much-acclaimed end by drowning.

At that point the reader is so overwhelmed by events he's forgotten the letter.

In my shock, I hadn't noticed that Period 9 of *Circumfession* is a comment on Kafka's *Verdict das Urteil*, like Jacques Derrida's *Verdict in the Ver à Soie*, and inversely the *Verdict das Urteil* is a commentary on the Laws set out in Period 9. Similarly, in the scrimmage around the sentencing to death and execution of Georg Bendemann, I hadn't noticed the theme of the devil, decisive nonetheless in the final phase. Meanwhile, before I go to the devil in a moment I wish to get back to this letter which had escaped me—and yet which is the motive or the cause the symptom of the tale and the destiny of Bendemann son—and to its fateful commentary the sentence saying “one always asks for pardon when one writes”—in the words of Jacques Derrida, words that issue from him, sent like a letter and like any letter destined to unpredictable deliveries or non-deliveries. He says it says. It says: one does not write one cannot simply write. You write *and* you ask for pardon, in the same breath, without being able to say that the one takes precedence over the other, without it being possible to say that the asking for pardon gives rise to/ precedes the writing, that the writing gives rise to the asking for pardon, it is a split simultaneity, you write, you commit you crime-write (*tu écrites*) the minute you pick up your pen, the letter starts to duel with you against itself it avows before in advance it is itself the crime in advance, all that remains is to compose (qualify) the misdeed which is what the letter sets out to do, both camps exist in your heart, you cough up a fragment of lung a lump of phlegm, your two hands stab each other, you write a letter to announce your engagement it is a letter of denunciation, who writes is not who writes denies, who writes writes what is not you ask-for-pardon for not wanting to say what you wish you were able to want to say, a monstrous preterition shreds your tongue with your teeth.

It was a beautiful spring morning and all of a sudden one hour later but as if it were one minute later Georg feels himself literally chased from the room poor gamebird, the staircase slippery as a board skimmed down the maid cried out, “Jesus!” as if she had seen the devil and covered her face with her apron, as the father is wrapped in his covers his sheet, covers himself up, is covered, you mustn't see him, the door in a single bound, a death wish urging him on, his wish, *es*, his the father's the son's, as on parallel bars he swings over the parapet—quick, a farewell letter before he drops. “Dear parents,” it says, “*Liebe Eltern, ich habe euch doch immer geliebt.*” That letter gets sent. Plop.

In diesem Augenblick ging über die Brücke ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr. At that moment the traffic was passing over the bridge in a truly unending stream. It all happened so quickly, the event is so terrifying. The last sentence, alone, remains. Unforgettable. Remains like a signature at the testamentary bottom of this “poem.” *Gedicht* he would say, dreadful. Unbelievable what worlds there were in Georg's head, a traffic of people (some of them) close distant pushedpulled, all of them pulling in the opposite direction but all agreed to carry out the sentence pronounced in the father's thundering voice: “I now condemn you to death by drowning.”

And why this death sentence?—Given that you *were*—says the father in the preterite—an innocent child, literally, but even more literally you *were* a *devilish creature*. All the more devilish because innocent. *Ein unschuldiges Kind warst du ja eigentlich aber noch eigentlicher warst du ein teuflischer Mensch!*—*Und darum wisse: Ich verurteile dich jetzt zum Tode des Ertrinkens.* As innocent, diabolical, all the more the one as the other. And indeed, *eigentlich*, probably it's the devil's logic to be the very portrait of innocence. What creature is more hurtful than a dangerously innocent child.

who if not Isaac makes Abraham groan in silent suffering? A father must defend himself in his role of a father. And so he utters the terrible words of the Supreme Judge I now sentence you to death by *Ertrinken*. Under the provisions of the Verdict the son *and* the father are executed on the spot. The father collapsed the son drowned. The instant the father gives in to Telling the Truth he's done for. It's absolute—it works like magic. Never before had there been such an incalculable interior multiplicity of traitors of assassins of plotters and schemers in the little house. And why so many? It's what Kafka, in his 1912 Journal called the invention of the devil, die Erfindung des Teufels. His two-fold invention: on the one hand to be himself an invention, ours, on the other to be an inventor, and of what, of devilry, of divisions, seeing double, being a crowd, *eine Menge*, and he insists on it, being numerous, legion as they say, is his destiny and his work, my passion and my labor he says (in *De Quoi Demain*). He insists on this deracinating division, "one suffers from it but it emancipates" he affirms now one now the other, now both at once, one suffers also from emancipation. And now and again one suffers from being condemned to a deadly reduction: "The devil's invention. If we are possessed by the devil, it is not possible that he alone, for then, on earth at least, we should live in peace (...) in unity (...). It is only a crowd of devils that can cause so much misery on earth. Why don't they exterminate themselves leaving one or two only, or why don't they submit to a single grand devil? These two possibilities would fit the diabolical principle of deceiving us as perfectly as possible" (*Journal*, 9 July 1912).

And why by drowning?

If the father spoke French I would interpret his choice of torture as recourse to the signifier: *noyé*, which is *necare*, to kill. I'd assume the father wished to condemn his son to death by dying. But we're talking about *Ertrinken*. I must therefore dream up a scene with muddy waves, putting kitten to death, a scene which haunted Kafka and the delectableness of whose temptation he confided to Max Brod. Drown the son give him back to the waters of birth, it's one way to annul what has occurred. Return whence you come says the Judge speaking for God, I made a mess of you, I have no faith in you and, as Jacques Derrida reminds us, the trait of Yahweh being his capacity to repent; since God believes he's made a mess of his creation, with a deluge he wipes it out.

But before the Verdict and before the *Verkehr*, there was already—a satanic letter. A letter which at first sight seemed an inoffensive sort of letter, friendly, docile, like the father in his room, a letter which had allowed itself to be tucked into its envelope like the father into his bed, a dozy letter, about as dozy as a volcano.

This lovely Sunday, there was a letter. The sky must be very blue and the meadow in bloom for Evil to make its forever unforeseen entry. Georg Bendemann has just finished writing. He believes. A letter to an old friend who is abroad. He believes. He seals it *spielerisch* slowly. End of the first sequence. The camera focuses on the mellow landscape through the window.

Second sequence: now the camera is on the addressee, we see the addressee, another businessman but the exactly the reverse of our businessman, one of them *in der Fremde*—in "Russia," the other not, one prosperous the other failing. Completely the other portrait. If it weren't for the beard the friend sports to give himself a foreign appearance he would look devilishly like Georg Bendemann just an impression. At that very moment, to the spectator's astonishment, the letter seems to have been intercepted, but on the spot, by its addressee. During the whole writing scene which follows, the

camera shows the letter now in the right hand of Georg our young businessman, now in the left, the same one a mirror image, the other hand, the one belonging to the bearded businessman who has the strange look of being in a foreign country. Every now and then the letter heaves a sigh. Trembles. Palpitates. (We don't know what the other's name is. There's only one name, Georg Bendemann.) Finally the letter doesn't get sent. Why should it get sent? Is it not addressed, without it saying so, to his phantasy twin, his catastrophic Russian virtuality, the one he'd be if...? Besides what does the letter say? Camera on the letter now, which seems to be about to pop out of its double envelope. Chrysalis imagery. No, that's not it. What *should* it say to someone who is on the wrong track, someone who gets everything wrong *ganz verkehrt*, even the beard on the babyish face, the sender wonders. "as though he had not written it then," as though it were Jacques Derrida asking (himself) who wrote the letter that he wrote then, or that sentence which leads us down labyrinths *in litteris* and which he, Jacques Derrida, thinks he may have written ten years ago and he adds in a note to help us out, the better to lead us astray, in "*The Postcard from Socrates to Friend—and Beyond— (I believe)*," he says—let's see what was I saying?—say I and says every letter—yes what should a letter say or have said to somebody who is a *great baby*? All the same we aren't going to tell him that only his friends understood things and that he was nothing but a great baby, *dass nur sein Freunde etwas verstünden und dass er ein altes Kind sei*. Not forgetting that a letter is always the remains or the slough of another letter, there is always the skin of a dead letter flaking onto the letter that's fluttering around.

Close-up on the strips of the letter, the letter in shreds. Focus on the words *er nur ein altes Kind sei*.

—Stop!—A great baby? watch out, there's more than one—there's going to be more than one in this *Gedicht das Urteil*—the great baby, the addressee, that is, the one who is carefully scorned and manipulated, he is now the one now the other, the friend, the father, the son, each and all, Freud too therefore of whom Kafka was thinking when he received *das Urteil* one night, that lovely night of 22-23 September 1912. A lovely phone call! From whom? From Socrates. To whom do you wish to speak? Jacques Derrida? No. A great baby.

There is a letter in destinerrancy. It's synonymous. Like Georg Bendemann and *der Freund am Fremde*.

But you did say: what should it say? Isn't it written then? *Beendet?* It's not so simple. For in the experience of evil according to Kafka a letter which has been written, even once it has been destroyed can go on sending itself, especially when it confessed an engagement, even a broken one, (letter to Max, 28-9-1913) and therefore even though the thing is over and done with, and I am no longer writing and not the least word is forthcoming, nonetheless nonetheless I cannot feel free of it. It's that here in the realm of imagined facts, the impossibilities are every bit as densely packed as in reality.

I cannot write this letter of judgment. I cannot not write it. Perhaps. But perhaps it is written all wrong. Or not yet? Besides I ought to say *he* for the letter, not *she* as in French—don't forget that a letter's masculine in German, *der Brief*.

Kafka's extraordinary invention here is the letter that once written gets itself unwritten, mutes, multiplies like Jacques Derrida's sentence which once it has been dipped into the waters of time does just as it pleases with its head of a sentence. Page after page, the letter to the impotent bearded friend twists itself in all directions, carps at

itself, starts all over again, probes itself, and during this time, as it sits in the hand of George Bendemann who is sitting at his window, what a deal of corruption, it's a mess, a ruckus, everybody ends up getting involved, even the fiancée sticks her oar in. —And what was the subject of the letter? Something it wasn't supposed to talk about, the letter. Yes, that's it: Georg was writing his friend so as not to tell him he'd got engaged. To keep the secret from him. Model: a stolen letter. A stolen engagement. Therefore he didn't stop talking about engagements, but not his. Whereupon Freud says—

But the fiancée intervenes. Hasn't she her word to say? And to rewrite the letter? A real battlefield (divorce) this letter. And the friend. He too is getting involved. Signs of him all over the place, his initial, which is to say *F*. *F*. for *Freund*, for *Fremd*, for *Freud*, for *Folgen*, his initial is *F*, you find his *X* on every line. Increasingly insistent, increasingly distant. One cannot *admit* to something as outrageous as an engagement with a certain Miss Frieda Brandenfeld, yet another sort of *Fremd*, twin to Miss Felice Bauer, to such a foreign friend *rusé* hinterland Russian, it would be dreadful if the Russian heard about it he would know he would come, he would be there, it's as if one were telling it to oneself, some things one cannot do, save not know a thing about it. Therefore as long as the *alter ego* of a friend is kept in the dark, *ipse ego* it's as if nothing had happened. Between the fiancée and the friend things are not so smooth. So he won't come to our marriage worries *F1*. All the same I have the right to know all your friends says Frieda Felice the phantom fiancée smells a fish: if *F2*, *der Fremder Freund* the foreigner stashed in the Russian hinterland is kept in the dark it's as if there were no marriage if the *Fremder Freund* hears about it it's worse he will turn up in spite of himself, discontent and incapable of *voiding* his dissatisfaction, he'd go off *by himself* again. Even worse than worse he might hear about the marriage "in some other way," how to prevent it, all of a sudden there he is, the one George absolutely wants to keep secret in his Russian heartland he 'd know he is married!

Georg, if that's what your friends are like says *F1* Frieda Felice with her peasant common sense you should never have got engaged in the first place, and that's *exactly* what I think, Georg tells himself but I didn't dare say it, but you said it! Yes! he says, relieved and promptly owning up to his double guilt. —*Ja, das is unser beider Schuld*. It is both our fault. It's our fault if there are two of us. *Aber ich wollte es auch nichts anders haben*. It is my fault to be two of us but even now I wouldn't have it otherwise.

His double guilt, I said, by which I mean his fault as Georg Bendemann containing an inner friend hostile contrary in charge of destroying whatever Bendemann builds. In brief his own personal devil behind the false beard. He freely chooses to have inside him his enemy as friend, to be attacked from the side at every step by the attacker that is he himself, particularly in the case of an engagement. He can count on himself to be at cross purposes. No rest for either of him. Let him set off in one direction, one step and it's about face. No way the friend is going to find out that he is himself engaged. Therefore no way he won't find out. That's how I am, I take him as he is and he must take me as I am. He has to accept my being in favor of marriage against which I am on his side. Otherwise we'd go crazy. It's a bomb, this letter, therefore Georg handles it with care as he handles us so that in the end we haven't the foggiest notion whether he's admitted it or not. What's it supposed to have said, *in the end*, that letter, once it got sent? Of all the letters Geroge Bendemann has in his hand and that he is slowly sealing in case another letter should come along and slip itself into the letter at the last minute,

which will get sent, the preletter the postletter or the hyperletter? And the letter the son suddenly shoves into his father's box, is it a letter? a single letter? And will we ever know who has written it? As to that, yes: it is *I* who dictated the letter to *you*, or rather *Man*, this German *one* who wrote to a *Mann* who is clearly lost (*was sollte man einem solchen Manne schreiben der sich offenbar verrannt hatte?*) Destinerrancy is in full swing. *Das Urteil* being addressed, please note, to Jacques Derrida.

So you're going to send it? What does it look like I'm doing? Says he. The great baby. One of the great babies. I'm off. At once. One step. One of those steps—not too step. I leave my room. I cross the little rubicon of a passageway that for months has kept me away from the father. There it goes again! First it's the letter which turns itself into a pack of letters each bringing discredit on the next. Next it's the sending which gets itself divided up the instant he prepares to do it. Watch how he goes about it—1) Georg seals the letter slowly—all this filmed close-up 2) He keeps it in his right hand for pages. 3) Finally he stuffs it into his pocket. 4) In the father's room he draws the letter out of his pocket a little and lets it fall back. 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, meanwhile in Russia the camera shows the friend crumpling up one of the letters which is the letter in his left hand without having read it-

No, really, whichever it is, it's impossible, as we've said a dozen times, you agree? Didn't everything make it impossible, supposing one had truly wished to carry on a correspondance, to share no real news, as one would do unhesitatingly with even the most distant acquaintances? The friend being therefore even more distant than the most distant, more impossible than the most impossible. Whereupon and to prove it another letter comes along to add itself to the already completely impossible letter, as proof of its impossibility, it is this *Beileidsbrief*, the friend's sympathy letter on Georg's mother's death, a letter whose lack of feeling could only be explained by one's having become stranger than *The Stranger* (in Camus) one can no longer even conceive of such grief, but this *Beileidsbrief* this impossible letter of condolence mightn't Georg himself be its author? according to the father, the strangest of all he who didn't spill a tear when our dear little mother died, the Stranger, the other, it's you, I beg you Georg admit it, don't lie to me.

But where are they going all these destinerrant letters? Oh dear oh dear! They are going where they mustn't go. They don't destinerr any old how. Once the crime has been committed one should get oneself pinched. Not go and toss it in the box, oh no, one more turn of the screw in the opposite direction. Oh! how far away the city with its beautiful sky seems all of a sudden. The father's room is dark as the devil. And it is all the plot of this letter possessed by demons, like any letter, like any letter. Thinking it over I think this letter increasingly resembles a worm [ver]. One more step, but we mustn't, and it is going to turn itself into The Verdict. And on this false step Georg goes to his father. And right away it is the other. The letter was therefore meant for the father! Or could it be the fate of all letters: to go to the father in order to be arrested, censored, thrashed. There is something irresistibly attractive about the paternal box in which the son-letter tosses himself as into the maw of the wolf. Poor devil! He doesn't stop jumping, how like the devil to leave oneself in the lurch. And the devil it's you it's me it's us, it's beyond our control, it's Jacques Derrida.

One can't stop oneself. One does exactly what one must not do. One commits the crime, makes a confession, even when none is possible or on offer. One is

determined to suffer. The machine is out of control. As soon as there is a father therefore son therefore father and a secret in the middle, the fault factory spews out evil and no way to turn it off. There is always such *Verkehr* between unconscious and reckonings, and such inevitable and inevitably dangerous speculations about what one should never say, so as to hurt them as little as possible cause the least possible pain and this in the name of God as is the case between Abraham and Isaac, his beloved son.

It is dark. Georg Bendemann has just entered his father's bedroom for the first time in months. In the dark the father is so big he touches the ceiling, the son, dazzled, can't see a thing. So this is what he says: I really just wanted *eigentlich* to tell you that I have announced my engagement. Let the atrocious avowal hang there a few moments.

-I wish to note at this point that structurally there is always a secret between two (or more) people joined in one of the figures of love, among which one must also include hate. I mean an unshared secret, a secret that keeps them apart, unspeakable, and therein the cause of an inescapable feeling of guilt, on the one hand, on the other solitude, if every such tie contains a factor which loosens yet tightens it, if one always has something to notsay on the order of God or love, this secret is not the prerogative of one character, who would be, most frequently, on the model of Abraham, the father. It is all a matter of point of view. In the story of Abraham those who write the writings are interested in the experience of suffering from the point of view of Abraham. But one could tell the story from Isaac's viewpoint.

Of course Abraham's suffering is increased and infinitely intensified by the suffering suffered in the imagined place of Isaac without ever being suffered for him. Abraham bears within him the small adored ghost of Isaac. But Isaac also suffers doubly. But if one suffering is equal to another, one may suppose, in the heart's ravages, the images which shred it are not the same.

In *das Urteil* it is the son's point of view we are given to share, a "point" which is immediately divided in two, one must add, by the introjection of the friend who from afar as from up close compels confidence, doubles the mystifications, fashions the confession in a series of simulacrum. And so goes it with the counterfeit of sons into whose secret we are supposed to slip ourselves, caught up in the series of pleadings, but no sooner in the paternal den than one realizes that nothing, nought, of everything we thought we had cemented together as a defensive construction has prepared us for the paternal offensive. The secret is not where we thought. The father isn't where he ought to be, he does not resemble either the father or a father, he is furthermore elastic, versatile, vertiginous, he goes from shaky old age ready to croak to prodigious erections. The persecutor knows everything says he, but if that's *Deo Scienti*, then all the sinners in the world must be horrified at the way the father-knows and says he wants to know this everything he already knows, the way he summons the son to tell the whole truth and not to lie, the way he shouts that the son is cracked, *durchgeschaut*, so that daylight shines through him, it is the very definition of a father, a father cracks shouts, this entire monologue is not only inspired by the Prague police station and courthouse but worse yet it contains a sort of philosophical thought elaborated and then horribly misdirected towards an inquisition. Each sentence can be heard two ways, doubly-unhinged, saying at once what is true and what is false. For example: "Georg," (spoken softly and imperatively as God to Abraham), "here I am" (And, as Jacques Derrida notes in a brilliant and terrifying parenthesis p. 164 *The Gift of Death*, the request for secret, and therefore the *test* in other

words the ordeal, *das Urteil*, begins precisely at this moment when in a low, even inaudible voice, the father pronounces your name, that is, *you feel called*, for, admit it, *you* are the one who *feels* called, so you kneel down, your eyes at the level of the enormous pupils staring at you, you say very low: here I am, and that's it, you're done for you are totally engaged in a definitive co-responsibility)

"Georg" *sage der Vater leise*. Ssht. Don't tell a soul. You have no friend in Petersburg.

"*Du has keinen Freund in Petersburg*" -

What do you mean, I have no friend in Petersburg? we exclaim, reminding the father, senile old fool, of all the scenes, the one more horrible than the next, when the friend was there, right in the next room, and wanting to humor the father, we betrayed him and denied him twice, isn't that proof we have a friend? Therefore it is false to say we don't have a friend abroad. But as we speak there arises from our words a sort of ghostly double the *truthtelling*, smoking the *verdict* out of our vehemence. Are we not merely putting our guilt and mental aberration on display? What sort of friend is the sort of friend for whom we for our part are a strange friend as well? No, no! My friends there's no such thing as friends. Bang!

And that's what this father, if you can call him a father, has led us do: turn our confession into a self-denunciation, a mortal accusation, our milk into poison. And now we must drink it.

And slowly but surely the friend, the good friend, the double, the one who would have been the son of the father's heart's desire and who is therefore the real son and not the imposter, the foreigner, the dream son, steps between the two wrestlers, like an ectoplasm woven of their shadow thoughts, while the real Georg is shut up in his study far away from the father in the next room for months, farthest is closest, true is false and there is no friend.

—*Your* friend, this demi-Georg, his better half is mine. In me, even. In my pocket. And what have you got in *your* pocket? The letter. The so-called letter-to-your-friend? hisshouts the father.

Now just what has Georg come to do in his father's room that he's kept away from for months, since death or the friend stole into the corridor all unawares?

Turn himself in? Own up? Beg for pardon? Betray? Who? What?

It seems he meant to tell his father that one had written a letter to tell the friend who, if he is really a friend and one thing leads to the next and in fact one has come to be put to death.

In *The Verdict*—one is unable to affirm—even if one tends to be on the side of the son—(for in general we prefer to not be on the side of the judge), that it's all the father's fault, or that the desire or the will to assassinate belongs only to the mutant and formidable father figure. The son also has the urge to kill. But who? *Who* does he want to kill? Who knows *who* one wants to kill when one wants to kill?

How to respond when you are swept away by circumstances that one moment resemble a runaway merry-go-round the next a bunch of banana skins, when, in the passion that has taken over, states of being and mind are carried off in a wave of substitutional confusion? When, cradling the father in your arms to put him to bed you have a horrible feeling: when the old father begins to fiddle with the chain of his watch and refuses to give up his dinky toy—what's that called? The Senility Scene? Surely

not! Who started it? Whose idea was it to put daddy to beddy-byes? You were looking for trouble? My dears, there is no such thing as a parent, or child either.

My father reproaches me for not having mourned our dear sweet mummy, if my mother is daddy's dear sweet mummy then I must be his brother and therefore my uncle as well. Oh miserable offspring of Oedipus we need a Jacques Derrida to give the magic mysteries called "the family" some thinkable form. A perverse infantilisation infests all such ties. Each of us dreams of wrapping the other up in a sheet, of diapering him, of gagging him, of binding him, of suffocating him, of doing him in. And so it goes.

Besides, even as I am speaking to you I can hear them killing each other.

One of them seems have the upperhand, the one who was underneath, as a matter of fact. The weakest is always the strongest. So the verdict falls on Georg. Let's follow him. "And yet I always loved you" are the last words of this frightful scene. In a low voice writes the condemned to himself *Er Rief leise*: Dear parents, "*Liebe Eltern, ich habe euch doch immer geliebt*" und liess sich hinabfallen.

This murmured appeal, like an appeal to justice, you have to hear the tones of voice and the readings in their interminable reverberations. The last words of the suicidal sentenced-to-death, the son who executes himself on the father's orders, are horribly ambiguous in each and every inflection of the sentence: from the *Dear Parents* of the salutation which is both adieu and denunciation of the parental pact in that in the father the mother also condemns and is condemned, "our dear little mumsie" who we have heard was in the father's pocket (like Kafka's mutti) that she added herself to him, that she gives the father all the weight of the mother; a murderous confusion of hostile powers.

But in another way his ultimate missive is both a declaration of innocence and an avowal, as seen in the *doch* which modalises his declaration of love. I am not guilty! Yet I always loved you! the son cries softly, as if he had been reproached with the crime of not always having loved; the son speaker for the accusation attorney public *prosecutor* of himself and *executioner* wrenching from himself, without intending to, the avowal of crime in this incongruous *doch*, pitiful, which in a low voice attempts to swear: *but I did always love you*, as if love needed a *doch* or anything in addition.

Horrible last words, inaudible in the hubbub and in the absence of those they are addressed to. A feeble negotiation without hope of absolution. Basically, they all agree at the bottom of the water.

Had I time I'd come back to the room where the father collapsed, knocked down by the blow of the blow he has given, dying maybe dead. Surely his last words would be: Yet I always loved you. But I don't have time. They've all vanished.

What remains is the last word of the tale, come to sum up and sign for all the people who were involved in their *Verkehr* a while back, this traffic, these associations, this murky sexual current which Kafka himself emphasizes also means: to sleep with. For that's what the two of them, father and son, try to blame one another for and inflict on themselves: this dreadful sexual relationship. What is the meaning of "*doch lieben*," "yetlove"? And to think it all started with a letter which wondered if it would or would not avow an act of incalculable consequences...oh never mind. One shouldn't get engaged one shouldn't tell anyone one shouldn't run away from oneself to a foreign county and inversely one shouldn't not get engaged or one shouldn't write letters, one should not, that's what it is: one should not. Especially not a letter. For isn't the letter in

itself an act of incalculable consequences. isn't the letter a sort of promise, a kind of engagement perhaps. One gets engaged in order to ask for pardon. One asks for pardon when one gets engaged. One writes a letter, one doesn't know what one is up to, what it will lead to, where the letter will lead us.

One writes a letter to a friend and suddenly one posts it to the father.

One always asks for pardon when one writes.

One never asks for pardon except for the unpardonable (170 *The Gift of Death*)

One always writes to be unpardoned for the unpardonable

The unpardonable is at every moment in danger of a pardon that is feeble, useless, impotent but effacing. That's why one cannot stop writing in order to repeat over and over again the evil on which feeds the vital and insatiable need to admit what one will never be able to admit, at least in one's lifetime. Georg lets himself fall into the water. The letter goes down with him. And now who'll read the letter?

"Never ever confess!" says my mother the midwife wagging her finger.

—Once I was at a meeting of midwives practically all of them had done time for abortion. They all said: *never confess to the judge*, it's the smart thing. *In front of the judge* says my mother one must never confess. The rest of the time I have nothing to hide.

I question my mother: —Why before the judge? —Oh come on! when you are accused of something how can it be in your *interest* to confess?

—The interest of the confession, that is our question. Jacques Derrida says the interest is the writing. —Some people confess out of bravado says my mother. I don't see the point of that. For Kafka, say I, the point is poetic.

To be continued...

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