





Breyten Breytenbach



All One Horse

archipelago books

First edition published in the Netherlands
by Meulenhoff Nederland bv, Amsterdam, 1989

First English edition published
by Faber and Faber Ltd, London, 1990

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First Archipelago Books Edition, 2008

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Breytenbach, Breyten.

All one horse : fiction and images / Breyten Breytenbach. –
Archipelago Books 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-9793330-7-1

I. Title.

PR9369.3.B67A76 2008

828'.91407 – dc22 2008002391

Archipelago Books
232 3rd St. #A111
Brooklyn, NY 11215
www.archipelagobooks.org

Distributed by Consortium Book Sales and Distribution
www.cbsd.com

Printed in Canada

This publication was made possible with support from
Lannan Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts,
and the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency.



for
Levedi,
Kanthaka
and my Brother

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One has it in mind to put together a book which when completed, reaching (for) completion, will consist of twenty-seven minor pieces of writing accompanied by twenty-seven water colours. Twenty-seven, because it is as good a number as any and better than most, it contains the eternal nine, and this mind, seeking the Wondrous Mind on soiled paper, is still inked in with superstitions. When one is a blind ass walking on ice it is as well to count the number of steps and to imbue these with a saving grace, if not some frozen significance.

The book is called *All One Horse*. If you really must know, the title is culled from a Chang Tzu saying: 'Heaven and earth are one finger, all things are one horse.' This, by the way, also precisely indicates the contents, made up of a structure wrapped in themes and motives. Arguments of course are informed and/or illustrated by imagery or texture, or both. Images, again, depend on how far the horse of association can travel, as do textures which would be blank were it not for imagination – and there the finger goes galloping over uncharted regions determined by the life from which they echo forth. And life, the translation in other words, is nothing if not severable. The horse needs no rider.

One thing is as clear as the lotus having its roots in mud: in due time, well prepared but unexpected, like the opening of one eye, one will see the horned rabbit and the furry turtle crossing the nowhere mountain. The citation is from Hakuin's *Kaian koku go*.

A. Uthor
Girona, *The Year of the Ass*

Le pouvoir passe par l'organisation des idées des autres,
de la culture des autres.

ALBERTO CAVALLARI

Otherness is a powerful factor of distraction, not only
because it continually disturbs us and wrenches us from
our intellectual thinking but also because the very possibility
of its occurrence casts a hazy glow on the universe of objects
that are situated at the edge of our attention but can at any
moment become its centre.

MICHEL TOURNIER, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*

C'est tellement facile d'en glisser un peu dans le vagin! Avec l'anus,
c'est une partie qu'on n'a pas le droit de fouiller. Alors on regarde
sous les bras, sous les pieds, on leur fait écarter les jambes et
tousseur. Il tombe parfois un couteau . . .

A. NONAME

Era necessario che il futuro esploratore di mondi si liberasse
dalla paura dell'assolutamente diverso, e dall'impulso di morte che
questa paura si portava sempre dietro.

GIORGIO CELLI, *Sfida ai volventi*

We have absolutely no doubt in our minds that what we describe
is happening and has been happening in the manner in which
we describe it as happening.

CHARLES REDMAN

When a thought suddenly arises it is known as ignorance.

From *Ta-ch'eng ch'i hsun lun*

Misschien kan een van de *Disparates* een illustratie zijn van
deze omkering, waardoor het vermoede duister achter de
uiterlijke dingen het zichtbare duister tussen hun geschon-
den brokstukken wordt. De ets toont een paard dat zijn hoofd
omdraait om de berijder, een vrouw in een wit kleed, tussen zijn
tanden te grijpen. Dat waarop je eens hebt gereden verneitigt je.

JOHN BERGER, *Het Spaanse Binnenland*

Ne craignez point, monsieur, la tortue . . .

Leibniz as quoted by P. MENARD in *Les problèmes d'un problème*

Who wonster live frevva?

QUEEN



All One Horse

between the legs



In the beginning there is God. Or Creative Principle. If we take it that there must be a start and a stop, then there should be some entity to begin with or who/which can make the beginning begin? But we are not there yet so there can be no if. If comes later. Let's start all over again.

In the beginning there is the Word. (This is plagiarism.) Who writes the Word? Ah! Read for Word a synonym for creative act. You have to leave room for assumptions. If you don't leave room nothing can be created, not even Nothing. If you leave room for synonyms you have a splitting of cells, procreation, multiplication, a filling of the Void. Where the Void comes from? It is in the nature of the Void neither to come nor to go. And I don't know who you are. Not yet. Don't leave the room!

(But if I am it must be because you are, my brother. And since there's a consciousness conscious of its being in the act of searching for synonyms, it must be an I. If the looking is written down it must emanate from a First Person, even if anonymous, even if produced by the words. The unsayable must be hemmed in. Welcome to the Land of If!)

Now that we have filled some space we can deduce that there is Existence. It would thus be only logical to assume that in the beginning there is/was Potential. How else did we get to the filling of the page?

No Existence without Limitation. In the beginning there are instruc-



tions. (Read *directives, imperatives, no-go areas*, etc.) God is Word or Flesh or some such. It doesn't really matter. However, since Word is God there will be a fleshing out as the word can only be in becoming. I mean that every word has a double being: the word as such and that which it brings word of. Another word at a pinch. And the sky is the limit.

This goes on for a long time. The sky goes on for a long time but not forever – due to feeble mindsight. The human mind starts all things without being able to see to the end of them. It is called spinning the mind.

Anyway, we shall jump ahead and take it that we already know what we mean when we say First and Day. So, in the beginning there is God who we take to be the Word and all the rest. God has the instructions in wordform. Let's hope he can read. (Who gave him the instructions? Let's not start all over again!) On the first day he creates *firstness* and therefore *two* and the so ons followed by copulation, as also *day* which calls up *night* (since otherwise it could not be 'day'), or the warm hollow for copulation. As the mirror creates the image. The image creates the mirror. Imagine Imago! Imagine I!

In the beginning I had the intention of writing you this so as to introduce you to Story. Do you still doubt? Are you not now reading these words? If you don't I don't exist which makes no difference and we have no argument to pursue with one another. If we have no argument we have no way or need to recognize each other and so on back to square none. No Story to sit on your lap, no Flesh to warm with the caresses of Existence. In that case I didn't write and so there was no I to be manifested.

All of the above I started a long time ago and I now forget what purpose I had in mind. I do see nevertheless that I have just given you a concise explanation of the history of creation. It is because there is creation that I am God continually creating Itself.

God, the One I look at in the black mirror, the Other – is dead. (Creation doesn't stop with consciousness.) He died of neglect and crass ignorance. People didn't look after him. To the extent that he might have been no more than an image in People's mind.

I berate People and tell him he can be had up for non-assistance to a species in danger of extinction. I ask People what he did with God's corpse. We spirited it away into the earth so as to beef up the subsoil, he says. Does it make the plants grow, I ask. No, the ground in these parts has a weird white taste but there is a sweet-water fountain not far off. People is wont to come here to be reminded that there's something he ought to remember. Then he has a sip of water and promptly forgets himself in the clear liquid. I tell People not to worry, that there is no sense in thinking about what has been forgotten, that there may have been Nothing to remember in the first place (which naturally send the mind frantically fumbling for presence), and anyway that the subconscious is quite old enough to take care of itself. I also posit that water is the soul of the mirror.

It is not that easy to kill nor is it clear that you ever succeed. If there is successful *Sonderbehandlung* there must be a you. I, God, cannot be dead without there being the knowledge of death, some instance to know I am dead. Therefore, if I, God, am killed, you exist. Welcome indeed!

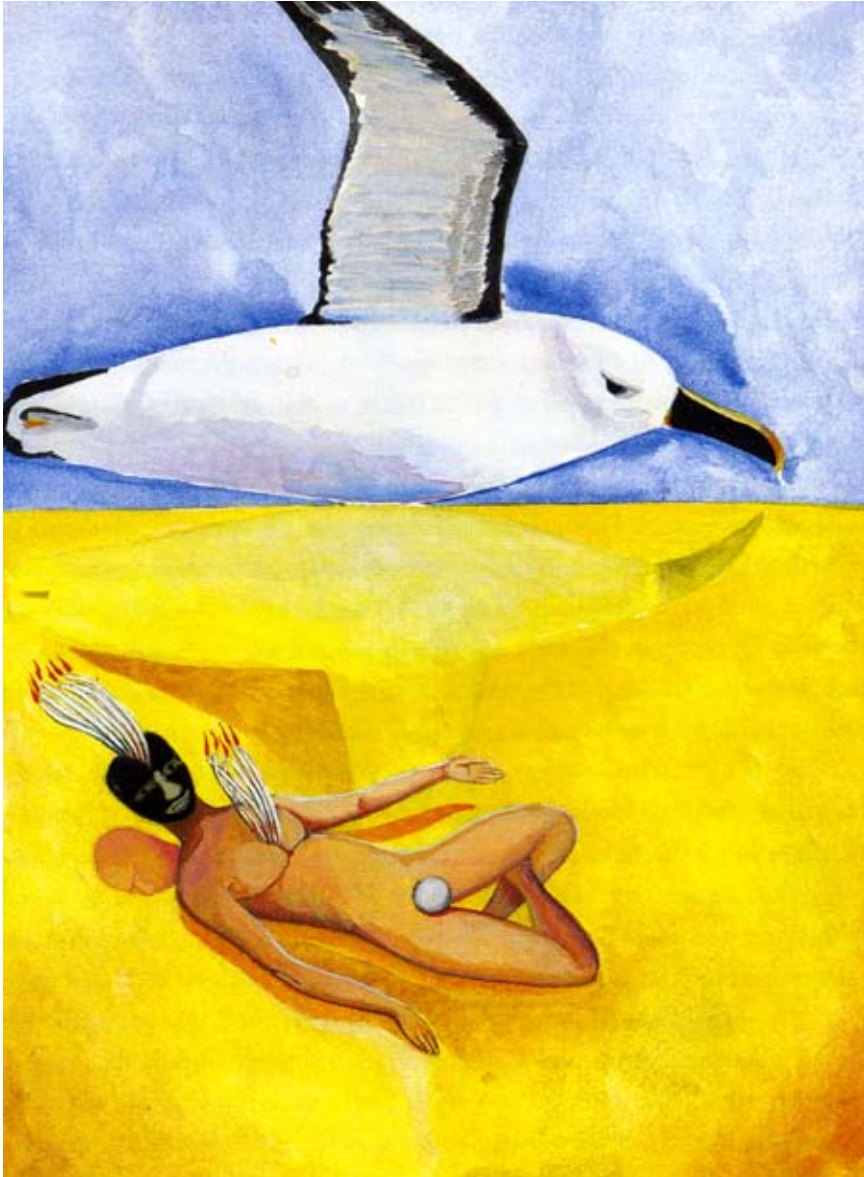
There is the woman who tried to do away with her husband. First she poisoned him, then she strangled him, then she bashed him over the head, than she tried to slice him up with a buzz-saw and when she saw that the saw wouldn't do it she dragged him into the car and drove him to the lake where she dumped him. But the lake was frozen. He died some time later of pneumonia and of blueness of the body. Through bloated lips he croaked: 'I love you.'

Story tells the following – it takes place in White city: three young

Matsetedi bucks out for an evening's fun intercept a squatter with a funny hairdo. It is a dark and stormy night. They bundle him in to their car, two of them sit on him. Where to? They take him out to the cold lake near Clearwater Fountain. There they knife him repeatedly. Because there's no end to his groaning they drive the car over him, risking hurting the tyres. Off they go for a late beer but after a distance they realize he must be hanging on to the back fender going wop-wop-wop over the night-tinted tarmac. So they stop again and it takes a lot of stomping before all breathing ceases. He died of overtiredness. Before the judge one young Shiny Face pleads innocent: 'I did kick, your Honour, just for fun, but I couldn't have done much harm, as I was wearing my soft poofter pumps.'

In the Bois de Boulogne there are persons soliciting passers-by for sexual panhandling. Most of them are Brazilian. On a dark night one of the skirted and rouged ones inadvertently steps out right into the spearing headlamps of an oncoming car and gets picked up by *Sonderbehandlung*. (It had thought that the sex could be a purse or a roll of banknotes; it wasn't intent upon meeting thus the foul breath of the Pimp.) During the course of the night twenty more cars on the look-out for a quick screw pass over the corpse without noticing it. With hardly a shudder of the body. Things that go bump in the night. Will you recognize Orgasm? In the early morning it takes a lot of piecing together to come to the conclusion that the defunct was in fact a transvestite. (Though who would ever know for sure or give a damn? No service, no money.)

God 'is a Brazilian'. And all God is one Word. Also: freedom will come to him or her who lives the longest. And: some persons carry the cough between the legs.



the bobbing lights of the harbour



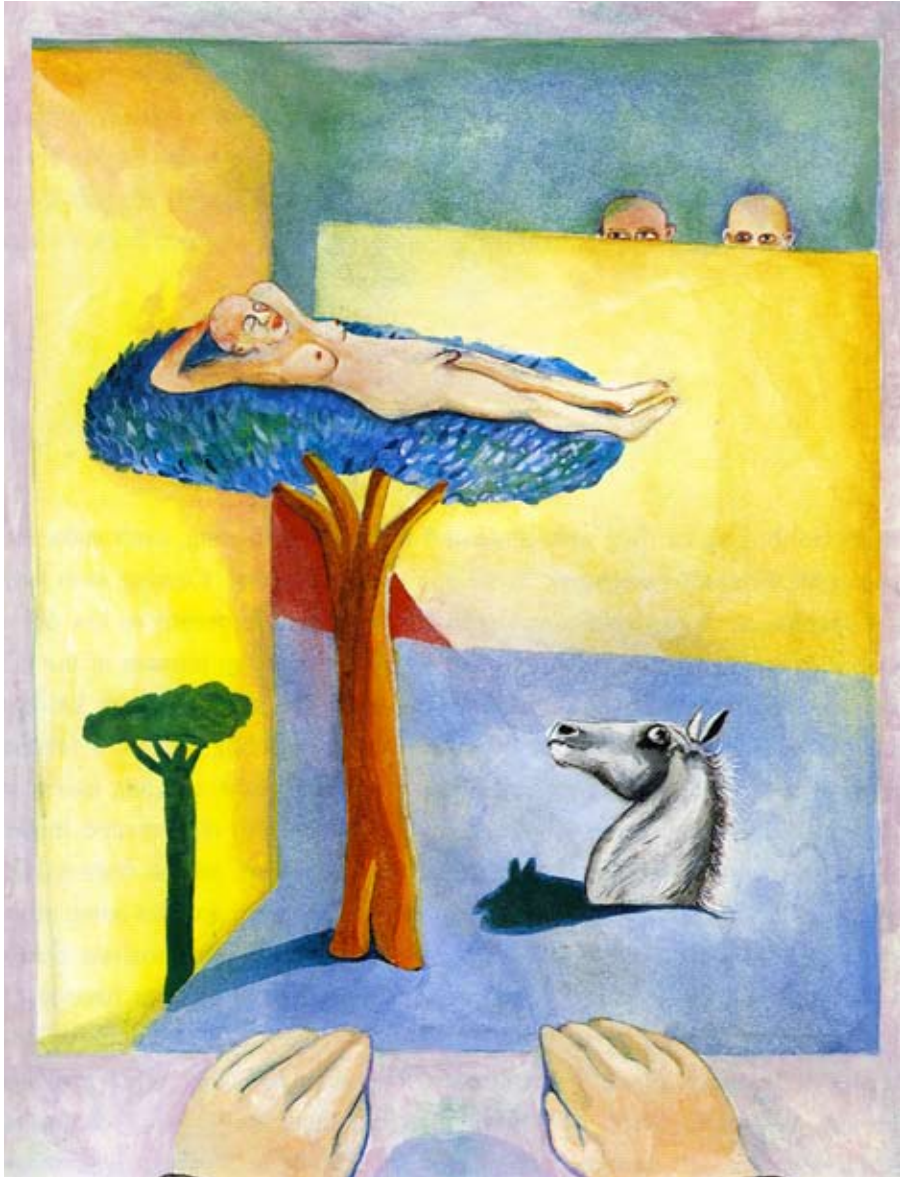
I had disappeared for a long time. Friends found me in this rainy city. During the past time I had grown to know the king and the princess of the land, or those accorded the roles, sometimes, the courtiers and the courtesans and the actors and the spies, the buffoons at court. I take my friends down a gentle green hillside to a vantage point overlooking the narrow mudwalled street penetrating the city. Dusk fell, a perpetual grey cloth of rain. The king was returning to town from an inspection of the districts with his entourage. He precedes the night. The cantering pace, the clinking hooves, the dark-hued fluttering panoplies, the burnished breastplates glowing dully in the half light. The princess comes by all in silver, rouged cheeks and glittering eyes, six ladies-in-waiting carrying the train of her dress. She must be wearing boots for the mud. I wave. She doesn't respond. Nobody acknowledges me any more. Knights and hunters gallop by, pull up their chargers sharply to tumble over the necks of the steeds and perform summersaults on the ground. They slap their thighs with gloved hands. The street is lined with people bearing spluttering torches. Tomorrow the festivities are due to commence. Tomorrow the king will officially be within the gates. There will be popcorn and rattles and flowers to go to the sea. My friends accompany me to the inn where I had been staying for the long time. We must leave. I must fetch my robe. At the inn I inquire

after Mustapha, my travelling companion. We have to go now to that distant place. The innkeeper looks at me down his brown nose. He indicates a small box made of tarnished silver on the mantelpiece. The box is filled to the lid with red soil. Did we not know that the trains no longer run? And that the last red boat had gone? Look at the rotting carcass, waterlogged among the bobbing lights of the harbour.

be splashing over your seat



Flying north. Day swirling with cloud and fog. Craft trembling, can't make out land at all. Friendly passengers. Some one starts up a song. Coming in to land at Copenhagen. Won-derful won-derful Co-penhagen. Approach so low down narrow street, that immense wings must sweep over rooftop terraces of the tall buildings on either side. Pilot must know his town like inside of hand. Yet just suppose somebody left a potted palm or his coffin cooling our there for the night! Stopover, leg stretch for those who so desire. Make nodding noises at fellow passengers in airport lounge. Exchange words with old bearded Indian philosopher and another person. Immediately excise other person from narrative. Ancient sage has gentle moist eyes, but with turban resembles some other Ayatollah Fannattick. Tell him about situation back home. Class analysis. Sorry, but Indians will never fit into Africa. Must evacuate. 'I'm sorry to have to do this to you but it is all in the cause of self-knowledge.' The elderly traveller's headcloth trembles. Back to the plane. Long time in taking off. Travelling through landscape. Plane not quite fitted out completely. Work continued during stopover, left undone. Part of pilot's cabin still in plywood. Old Indian sage strapped in back there whispering sadly to young woman to his right. He's suffering from abdominal pains now. Long eyes and whiskers shivering. No time at present for young woman in this story. Pilot points out



pictures rushing past: confused cemetery, rubbish heaps with disparate objects sticking out. The way it all goes, the blue-eyed pilot says, terrible, into the earth with no distinction: books, cartons, mouse-shit, corpses. But ah, you must answer, exactly why it's wonderful; we all decompose similarly – corpses, mouse-shit, cartons, boots; couldn't happen unless we all share same thought, *life*; couldn't happen to a nicer guy; seamless! (All one horse.) And up. Day silvering with fog and cloud. No see nothing. Dangerous? Phantom ships bumping along in the void. One hostess starts handing out glasses of champagne, moving up and down aisle with her comfortable and friendly Tina Turner body. Is she forgetting you? Saving you for last? You to back, to toilet. In passing attract hostess's attention with one-finger-raise. She will indeed serve you. Toilet uncompleted. No throne to sit on. You urinate. And now prick breaks off in your hand. Oh no! Asafoetida! You there with half the appurtenance lying in your palm, puckered, pinkish, perfectly shaped, long like palm. No bleeding. Try flushing it down. Won't go – swimming sluggishly on grey-green surface like sickly goldfish among detritus. You think: this can't be happening to me. You think: if this were a dream some fool would be sure to give it a Freudian reading. Zip up. No bleeding. Must matter-of-fact return to seat without raising eyebrows. Thought flaking through head: some unprimed passenger will by and by be sure to come screaming out of the head. Purser will have to cock an eye at all the company's privates. Will have no handle on you, no way to point you out. No bleeding. Could be naturally smallish organ. Discreet charms of the bourgeoisie. Must return. The yellowish champagne will by now be splashing over your seat.

how beautiful the mountain



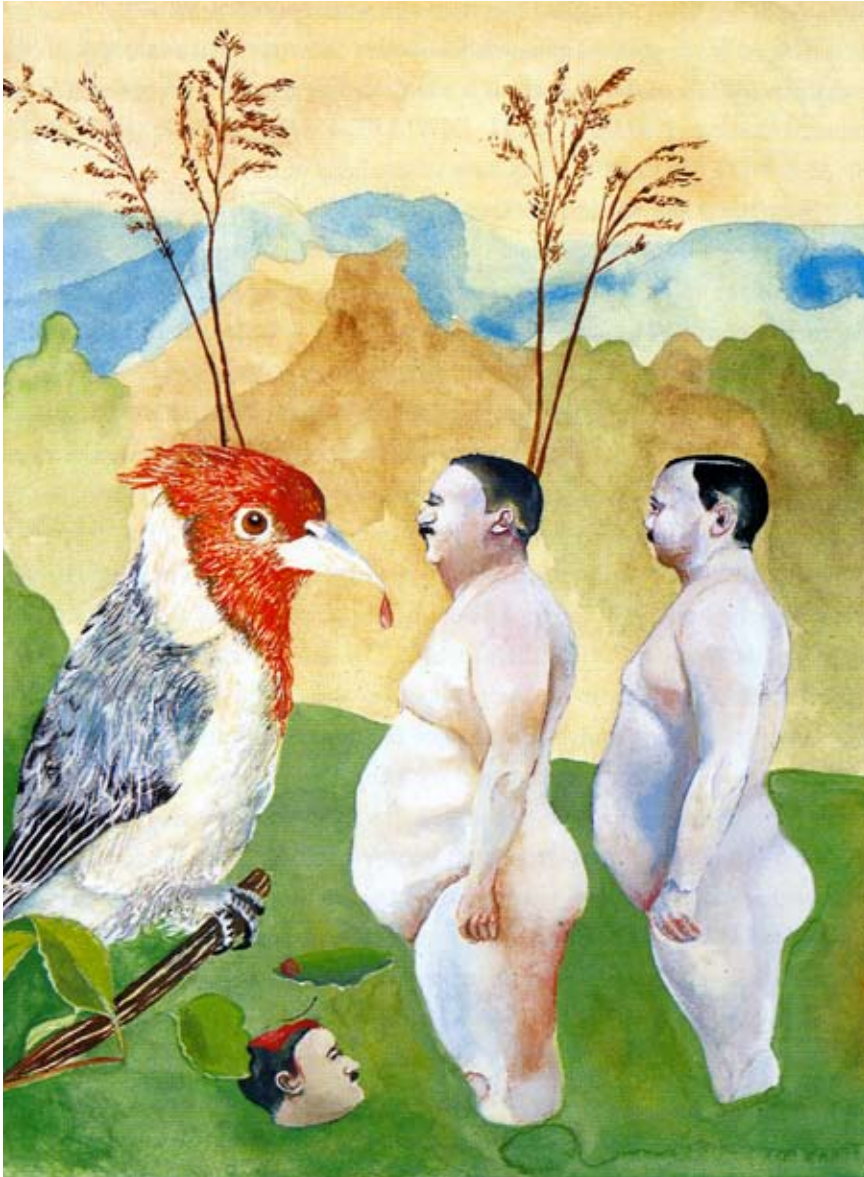
It is a country where the patterns have been set down a long time ago. Besides, if you were to look at it from the sky you would be struck, nay overwhelmed, by the undulating riffs, the delicate ribbing, the repetitive flow of waves, the unbroken lines of force – all to be ascribed to incessant wind action. You could perhaps say this country has the smoothness and the symmetry of the inside of a much-used mouth. I am the suckhole, the chewing and the cud; whomsoever partakes of me shall die and be delivered of death forever.

During the twentieth century there arose in some peripheral parts of the globe an obsession with democracy and human rights. Don't bother to read the rest, it is of no importance. These notions reflected a general paucity of generative enterprise *urbi et orbi*. Of little import, but the pounding propounding was disruptive, being so flagrantly out of step with the hallowed interests and everyday practice of the state. The artificial only then makes sense when it enhances the nitty-gritty; heaven should be at least an echo-chamber or else best left alone as a queer leftover, an obsolete secret lost in the obscurantist mass mind of a bygone humanist age. Like the glass eye buried under the rubble of the pyramid of Cheops.

'Happily dissolved,' says the ruler of the country serving as environment for this story. 'Orgasmed. Man is animal. Why hang fishes from the high-

voltage poles? Man's life is to war, extract, uncover, torture, exile to Orbi or orbit. To be maimed is to have achieved the distinction of service. We too have incantation, certainly, but it is to bolster the rhythm. And all of this, in the epoch of the neutron chip and fast food and instant sex, we do exceptionally well. The sphinxes will be clairvoyant, the sphincters eloquent.' This the ruler repeats daily on Radio Truespeak. 'Do I hear it mentioned that man is animal? Perfectly, pure consciousness. But purity, or awareness of you want to call it by its hidden name, is the matter of sifting. In other words of structured recognition, the beat of the trance. The other margin, that of hypocrisy and nonsense, dear beloved listeners, is traced by archaic make-believe veins of democracy. Freedom is always *here*, never and nowhere else or other. No ways!' To conclude: 'Are we happy to be rid of the poisoned mind? Yes! *We* never fool with *farces et attrapes!*' (You know that the trouble with history is exactly no wind.)

In such a land ritual is of the utmost importance. The national emblem is the bee and munching is much appreciated. Breaking wind, however, is a fine art reserved for the nobility. 'No amount of ability creates nobility' is a popular wisdom often heard in these regions. And: 'Almost all people have tits but very few have grown titles.' A soft wind whispers sweet nothings down the corridors of the prison that I return to. It will take the keepers a long while to learn again that I am the important timer who should be neutralized by special dispensation. Our legal system, having to dress the surface, is of necessity arcane. We have a Minister of Police, a Minister of Justice and Related Matters, a Minister of Law and Order, a Minister of Security, a Minister of State Security, a Minister of Counter-terrorism and a Minister of Culture. The ruler has own Secretariat and then there is the State Council of Security. Rights and propaganda, presided by him, to run the show. Thereupon we have attorneys, lawyers, barristers, advocates,



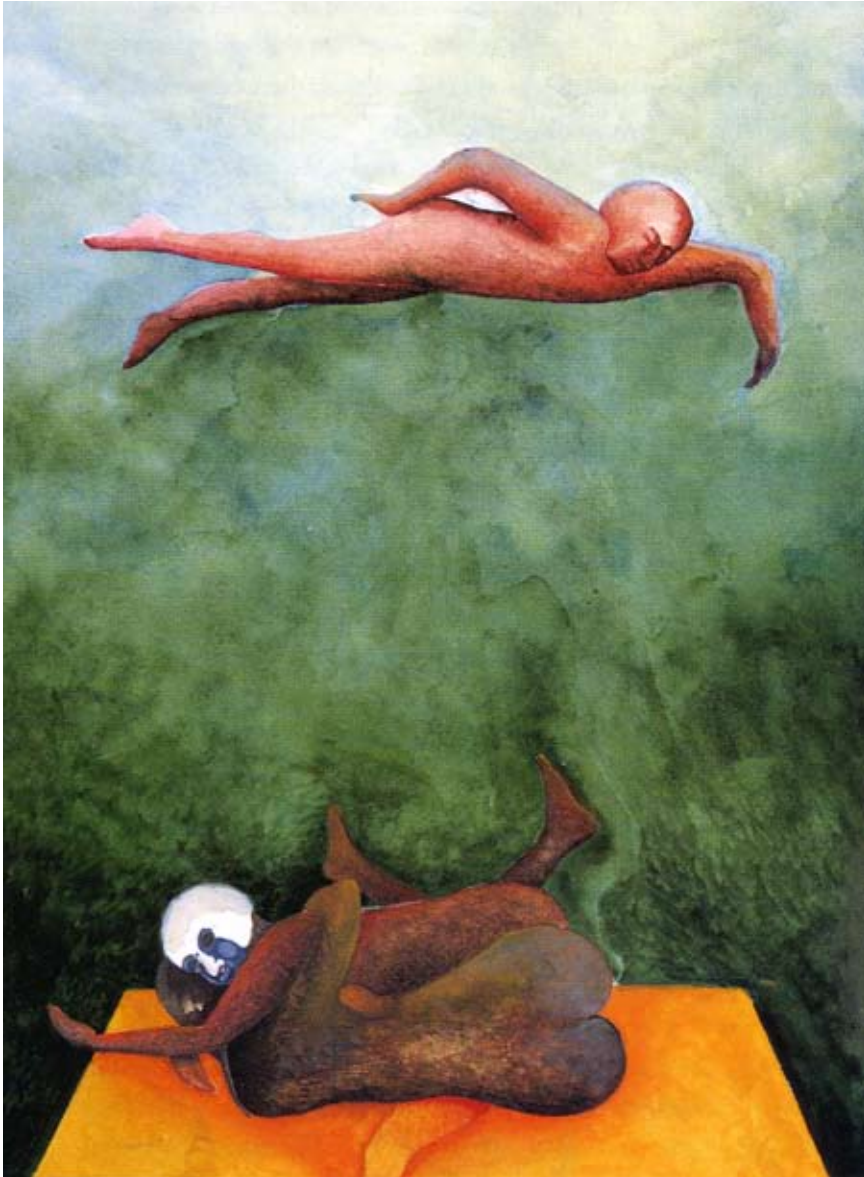
procurators, magistrates, justices of the peace, judges and diverse orderlies, clerks, officials and functionaries and flunkies of the court delegated to search and fetch the filth.

The walls are painted an aubergine colour. It promotes a sentiment of bliss and recitation. In each cell there is a white-clad figure down on the well honed knees, chanting : I SHALL NOT DEVIATE I SHALL NOT DEVIATE I SHALL NOT DEVIATE. They have years ahead of them.

Sometimes the outside working population must revolt because it gives us the chance to air and recapitulate old grievances. The male workers will gather in front of the ruler's palace early in the morning when a thin fog still shrouds the public places. The strikers are young: labour is a question of virility. We show our discontent in a quaint but effective way – we unbutton our private parts to all masturbate together. The catch is to have the cum shoot straight into the mouth of the I. There we are quietly bending our minds to the ritual, hunched over our shaking meats as if paying allegiance or humbly thanking the deity for the back-breaking work. It normally takes us two and a half minutes to complete the cycle because we are well constituted and broken in to synchronization. People straighten up, wipe their members, and speak to one another in husky voices. Some may clear their throats. The sun also rises.

But when you go to be helped out of this life it is always very cold. Executions take place under a bridge not far from the capital. Steps lead down to the sandy bed of the naked river. We cling to one another like a cluster of atoms. A typical quota will include a few greybeards, some loose-bellied mothers, two or three men strong and mature with well muscled forearms, and at least three children. The latter must be big enough to walk by themselves. It is expected of the candidate executees to dress up in disguises for the occasion. We have false noses and conical hats, and tears painted

on our cheeks. One or two of the weaker ones will sport shaven heads and be wearing striped pyjamas. We are the *farces et attrapes*. And the terrible wind plunging with a howl down the sheer rockface of the mountainside. When we get to the bottom we all start dancing, Jew and Gentile and Animist, slowly at first and then progressively more gaily, repeating the same simple steps circling closer livelier clinging to partners changing hands grips around waists and buttocks closer the heavy sand faster happier to where the oiled gallows loom. On the bridge above us the wind will be fluttering the trouser legs of Graf v. Dood, the Observer of Proceedings. How beautiful the mountain!



remnants of my story



We live deep in the country where it takes a long time to fashion a phrase to perfection. It rains incessantly, strands of hair cling to our foreheads, our hands are painted with water, our legs are browned to the thighs with mud. The trees submit to the ongoing gossiping of uncountable wet tongues.

(Let me open brackets here because sometimes it can get worse: the heavens have been known to cede and to flood our distant land with gurglegitation. People then perch in the trees, like so many inarticulate words, wrapped in wet cloth or, I say, like disastrous flowers sprung from some wrong season; a bloated cow bobs along for all the world a dislocated upside-down *M*; faces swim by the window and the moon is monstrously multiplied. Indoors I find myself trying to force the huge metallic ants back into the broken earth, I even use a hose on them, a full-throated stream, and the Minister of Justice rushes in to scream at me that these are his agents for God's sake man you are destroying my agents! I have my differences with the Law.)

We are a large family. For a long time we have been living deep in the country where the rain comes down. We breed and we breathe. Some of us have been weakened by the strain and some are of dubious stock and questionable morals. There is, for instance, the Dook and the Douchess

and their flashy accomplices wearing a chattering of diamonds on cheap fingers. Their big limousine lies sucked to the hubcaps in the quagmire. When the Dook and his entourage are to leave on a job entailing a quick getaway his fedora dripping silver drops, we have to scoop out the vehicle. Then there is our Young Sister, Oys. Her spirit is too limpid to accommodate reality. She has a thing about legs and about longing for a companion. We translate for her . . .

I go wandering in the forest, drenched in thoughts. And a strange man comes up to me, a mad look in his eyes, inchoate of mouth, he grabs me by the jacket and shakes me with broken questions. Eventually it dawns on me (please forgive the lapsus) that this apparition is looking for a small elephant gone astray. Maybe he is the trainer of a passing circus, or the monarch's game-keeper, or the guardian of the idol. He is in any event a foreigner and quite beside himself with worry. Together we return to the family farm. The land is dark and asylum not easily found. One never knows. Dogs come at us in a mad run, their paws squelching in the mud, spittle threading their maws. They could be our dogs, the neighbours' dogs, what does it matter. To keep them at bay I grab clods of wet earth to chuck at the snarls or the malevolent stares of their bulging eyes. They teeter on the edge of lurching for the kill.

And yes, huddled in the byre of the drowned cow we find an animal shivering darkly, hiding from the barking along the perimeter. I fetch the hose, we wash it down, a small elephant emerges.

Now my family tumbles through the slush to oink and to harrumph at the wonders of fate and haphazard hazard. Our Little Sister throws her arms around the small beast fondling his big little ears, his big little head, his trunk which is like a rough whisper. Tears of transportation run down

her cheeks, coating the teeth with shininess, filling her mouth with a liquid smile.

But it is too good to last. When evening comes we send Oys off on some errand, we collar and lock up the growling dogs, and the man takes the small elephant away.

Thus we try to cheat time by pretending that nothing has happened. We carefully situate the pachyderm in our Young Sister's mind. This is the secondary stage known to many foreigners, when writing comes into its own – even though written in mud: the missing is transformed into a delicious mixture of ache and ecstasy, changing shape and modifying its nature, until the very absence becomes presence.

And then one day the Prosecutor comes to us deep in the country where it takes a long time to migrate from imagination to transcendence. He comes with his files and his filthy underpants and his acolytes. They are investigating the disappearance of that which had disappeared, they say. Something happened, they say. Call it elephnapping if you wish. So it is only normal that they should piece it together again in terms of the need to un-derstand as defined by legal harrumph. Leading to the vital necessity of punishment as the only way to make what happened un-happen, they say. And they will have to interrogate our young Oys, they say. (*De Law*, the Dook snorts in disgust, fingering his tie-pin with a bejewelled hand.)

My mind darkens with primeval anger. I trumpet my rage. How dare you do it to her? Don't you know that you will unhinge? Do you wish to confront her with the growth of emptiness? And what monster will be born from that? I grab the Prosecutor by his jacket and throw him over my head. One of his assistants, a black man in an expensive tweed suit, tries to intervene. I grasp his wrists and squeeze with all my might until I see

his eyes bulge red. You keep out of this, Brother Blackman; this is none of your concern.

Ah, reader, I say, my mind darkens with an elephantine rage. Please excuse the lapsus. I shall have to return some other time to the missing remnants of my story.

