

4. *Young Manhood*

How am I now to talk about myself as a truth-teller *in potentia* without putting aside the question of myself as a truth-teller *per accidens*? Am I to suppose that, barring some sort of catastrophe, nothing would have altered the course of my life? That no incident or accident after I quit high school would have prevented me from reaching my present situation which of course is my present project? In truth, I don't feel confident enough to answer these questions with an unequivocal yes and yet at the same time I know I'm always effectively doing so. I'm always on the way to affirming and demonstrating an *entelechy* of my imaginative, emotional, and intellectual self. And yet the fact that this process may always be threatened haunts this *other* process. This present undertaking that is complicated and even over-complicated by being the continuation of an affirming and demonstrating that has always been going on. That is barely separable from what is most uncertain about it and yet, despite this, is never quite identical with itself. That, furthermore, is always a compromising of itself because, as an attempt to overcome this uncertainty, as a *teleological retrospective*, it cannot avoid being a collusion between the arbitrary and authoritative. As rare as it may be that some chance factor obliterates the entelechy that has already gone some way to affirming and demonstrating itself, it still belongs to the world of potential being. It invests and inhabits every part of it as it does all process, growth, and development. It is difficult to imagine that, had I won a million dollars, for example, my life wouldn't have been taken down a different path. On the other hand, when I say that I have never made the slightest effort to win a million (by, for example, buying a lottery ticket), this seems to argue well for another kind of potential.

How am I now to talk about that period of my life which, as a highly erratic if not erotic zone of life and learning, took up my late teens and early twenties? It may do well to begin by noting that, however much this period seemed at least to others or even to myself on occasion like a going out of control, it never resulted in any sort of personal crisis or breakdown. This is to say that there was always in me, along with a tendency to take risks, a sense of when to stop. So much so both ways that, looking back now, I know I was bolder than most people my age and yet less so and sometimes much less so than others. With respect to the latter, there was often a romantic or voluptuous aspect which lured me on but never wrenched me from the orbit of myself. It was as if I thought there was always something there to be learned or appropriated without deflecting me from my proper path. Nothing formal or sharply conceptual ever told me what this path was but, when I look back, I see an inner control which induces in me even now a certain respect. An inner control which was *not* the psychological compartmentalization or sealing off of disorderly and deviant behaviour. It

was rather more like a moral or ethical constraint or, to speak less morally, a sort of moral or ethical *elasticity* that held me to myself even while letting me take risks.

Was I not then, even well before I had read Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, already inhabiting his country? Already suspicious of much that was called good and interested in and titillated by much that was called bad? How else to explain the fact that I, an above-average student and athlete, not only dropped out of high school but, on the very same day (which happened to be my birthday), took off with a drug dealer to Vancouver? I who at that time had never so much as smoked a cigarette or taken a sip of beer. Who remained polite and respectful, conservative in appearance (short hair, horn-ribbed glasses, studious and virginal look), and modest in all my habits even to the point of not swearing. And this same seventeen-year-old boy whose appearance and behaviour would certainly change over the course of a year or two was, upon arriving in Vancouver, neither so secure as not to feel a certain pang at parting from his shady companion nor so weak as to want to cling to him and go off to his world. No, after kicking around in Vancouver for a couple of days and doing nothing of great moment, he turned around and hitchhiked back to Winnipeg.

But no more was he tempted to go back to school in Winnipeg than to waste himself in Vancouver. The arguments put forward by well-meaning teachers and relatives could not reach him at the deepest level. Nothing they said was infused with fire but only spoke the practical language of the best-to-be-done with the already in place. It had the common dull ring in his ears of treating him as an average person with average ambitions. And yet it was hard for him to blame them for not being able to see what was driving him because, apart from fantasies and vague arguments as to why school was no longer of benefit to him, what did he have to show? How could he distinguish himself from others who, often quite immature and foolish, overreach themselves and then end up as under-achievers? Or those who speak a barely decipherable language when they declare they have a great mission in life? Or those who wouldn't be able come up with a concrete plan or coherent vision if their lives depended on it?

It was literature that had so far pointed out the way to him. There he saw that society and its dictates are not foolproof and can in fact be false idols. That a lack of vision or a lack of scruples, in collusion with a drive to comfort, security, and success, can haunt the best of societies. And yet the sensitivity and perspicacity of the artist, precisely among the things he admired most, seemed to him to be inversely proportional to what people

handed out as best advice. The seventeen-year-old boy – the one I was then – knew at least this much: that he preferred having this sensitivity and perspicacity. And yet he was hardly against worldly success but only the loss of the first for the sake of the second. Better to be the adventurer in spirit who finds no earthly treasure than to be the treasure finder without adventure.

Along with the above, there were a couple of other guiding threads in his thought. Threads that proved to be very strong and, if I may say so, the conduits and cables of a life. Though it is difficult to give a precise explanation as to how they first got laid out, there is nothing about his earlier life that ruled out their possibility. Even then he knew that being a good observer, though it didn't rule out being a good actor, ruled out playing a part so well the actor no longer thought of it as one. He had already observed enough of the difference between ordinary people and members of a respectable and reputed profession to realize that the latter, with few exceptions, no longer saw themselves apart from their career. A uniformity of bearing and presenting themselves to the world made of their sagacity and perceptiveness a strategically limited affair. Those who, by virtue of a both well-rounded and specialized education, were most able to shed light on vast sectors of the world, seemed least able to shed light on themselves. Instrumentalized and institutionalized, these personal selves lost their suppleness as well as their multifariousness. Or at least so it was on the social and therefore superficial level for it was precisely there where clarity and order for the sake of efficiency were demanded. A Cartesian self fully confident of itself as a depth without depths, a foundation in and of itself, was the unwritten prescription here if not the description many would care to give it. To some extent, all this he saw without analysing it or thinking that an alternative could necessarily be purchased. The teachers he had come across and observed over many years were the ones he assumed had roles most open to breaking down such barriers and yet, for all he could see, they were often the ones with their professional masks most securely in place. It wasn't clear to him then as it would be much later that everything done on a mass scale inevitably inclines the human towards the machine-like. All that there seemed to be was this human frailty and deficiency resulting from no real attempt to connect the self and all its experiences to professional means and ends. It is precisely the counter to this which he had caught sight of in Mr. Beach and so at least knew existed as a possibility. At any rate, whatever was exceptional or extraordinary in such matters took up all the foreground of the possibilities he cared to envision.

There was a second line of thought that complemented the first and gave it

a certain form. As tensile and elastic as the first, there was nonetheless something of the willow or oak tree about it. Bend without breaking was more or less the doctrinal backbone of the would-be collector of diverse and sometimes dangerous experiences. Two years later he found this doctrine better expressed in a saying by the Spanish philosopher, Santayana.¹

It is important that, for the sake of my project, I don't falsely play the hero or insinuate without justification the extraordinary in the ordinary. To be sure, the temptation is always there and I even feel I have the right to consider my past life a sort of preparation and training ground. Few there are, I think, who have gone about the task of physically, emotionally, and imaginatively testing themselves with as much curiosity and determination as I have. To be sure, great feats weren't required for all this but neither had it anything to do with being afraid to stick one's neck out. I continually felt the need to put my nerves and my courage to the test with no other end in sight but improving my self-knowledge that I no doubt confused with improving my self-image. Very rare were the occasions on which I fell short in this area and, if my self-knowledge or self-image had been based entirely on these tests, it would have been a much more stable and secure – not to mention smug – affair. But the truth of the matter is that my sexual and social hangups followed me from my late teens into my early twenties and, however obscured or reduced, could never be entirely shaken off. I remained essentially a loner even amongst others and essentially a dreamer even when active.

Given all this, my life at the time took on the aspect of a certain short-term formlessness and confusion underwritten by a long-term vision. Going out to my uncle's racehorse farm for what proved to be the last time, I continued to work hard and keep a work ethic in place. At the same time I finally got up the nerve to send a love letter to the girl whom I had longed for and admired while still in high school. It was a relief to be able to express my feelings to her but, as I soon found out, no great reward necessarily follows from such outpourings. In short, the girl was spoken for and, even if this hadn't been the case, I doubt whether I had the proper credentials. The pain and disappointment I felt must have been great and yet, as usual, I didn't speak about it or at least not much. My uncles more or less treated the matter as a joke because, as far as they were concerned, I was simply going through a phase. Neither did I react to this putdown nor to a later one that came as a remark to the effect that, because I wasn't grown up and didn't have adult responsibilities, I didn't know what it was to have real problems. But when no less than a *third* putdown rolled around, my reaction was by no means slight. It caught both me and others by surprise. What triggered it

was one of those insignificant events which nonetheless can have serious consequences. It began with a group of adults, my two uncles (one the racehorse owner and the other the former ranch owner and deep-sea diver), my aunt (owner of a beauty salon and married to the racehorse owner), and a German neighbour and business partner (a stolid, dark, and hard-working contractor), sitting around a table discussing the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Very quickly they came to the conclusion that the vice-president, wanting to usurp the position of the latter, was responsible. So vociferous and vehement were they on this point, so prone to overlooking all facts that didn't agree with it that the seventeen-year-old boy hardly could believe his ears. When he tried to intervene by saying that the chances of such a plan succeeding were very low and that, Johnson, even if he had been the devil himself, would have been a fool to carry it out, he found all the adults ranged against him. However, it wasn't this in itself that put the match to the powder keg but rather the comment that he couldn't possibly know anything about it because he was too young.

It is strange to think now how this incident, with all its violence of emotion, operated as a sort of general catharsis. Perhaps it is because these incidents are so rare that, no matter how unreasonable it is to assume that the relatively untroubled surface of a person's life is the true sign of its internal state, I and, as I suspect, many others make precisely this assumption. But what is really different between people (and here again literature is the greatest teacher) is not the existence or non-existence of hidden unrest but its underlying causes. In the case of my two uncles, my aunt, and the German neighbour and business partner, there seemed to be the need to make amends later by confiding to me something that otherwise wouldn't have been said. In the case of my older uncle, there was the long talk at bedside about his brother and the explanation as to how his hard businessman's shell was but the defence mechanism of an essentially vulnerable and insecure person. In the case of my aunt, a woman who had always struck me as being unusually cold and unfriendly, there was the story of her life and some of the trials and tribulations therein. In the case of the German neighbour and business partner, there was the general scorn and calling down of people engaged not in work but idle talk. Certainly from that time on it was much more difficult for me to believe that people, no matter what their prejudices were or what my own might be, were ever as simple as their thoughts or opinions sometimes gave out.

By the same token, the readiness of people to pass judgement on matters of which they have little knowledge has always been a bugbear of mine. This essentially means that my reaction has not infrequently been excessive and

violent. It is difficult for me to be objective about the anger and intolerance I have displayed on many occasions because I know that, from a purely social or psychological standpoint, it can be fraught with negative consequences. The most I can say is that my worst outbursts have rarely been attempts to intimidate others. Rather, the reverse has more often been the case.

For those who idealize the orderly and identify truth with it, there is a natural resistance to exalting the passions. This runs as far as suppressing them and, at the most sophisticated level, denying them their constitutive role in truth-telling. Society being essentially an orderly affair, it is not difficult to see why this should be. For, after all, this order is never entirely secure and must continually be protected and propped up on many fronts. As much as all of this remains true, it is also true that society cannot be satisfied with merely prospering on the purely rational level. Every bid to look beyond itself or to look at itself from a beyond is proof of this. Herein the passions are given a certain recognition and rank which they otherwise don't enjoy. The upshot is that the truth of society, being richer than all of its conceptual schemes, is the human condition in its ultimate freedom.

This ultimate freedom, so far as I can determine it (at the individual but also at the social level), is the type of decision we make that goes beyond the reasons we can immediately give for it. Or, to put it another way, that goes against the best reasons that others have given us directly or indirectly. If reasons for this type of decision must be spoken of at all, then let them be understood as that which is still on the way from the heart to the head even after the decision has been made. ("*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*") In my own case, I find that all the reasons for my quitting school and living the type of life I did have barely been collected in after thirty years. Only with the present project do they fully come to light as a part of and as a means to what most dearly matters to me.

Naturally I don't consider it to be part of my task to cite the dangers of the above as a doctrine to live by. A veritable army of truth-tellers (call them rationalists) already exists to combat such proclivities. As far as I'm concerned, there is no right or wrong side in this interminable war which is nonetheless fought along moral lines. In the realm where good and evil meet and are no longer easily distinguishable, there are but two perfectly counterbalanced forces: the drive to limit and possibly even eliminate all dangerous effects and the drive to limit the danger of such a limiting and possibly even eliminating drive.

It is hard to think that these contrary drives don't exist in all of us and

particularly when we're young. It has always been my feeling that, however much may be said against this period of our lives, much more may be said for it. But I'm not going to take up time, at least not here, dwelling on how I have remained enamoured to youth in general. I only want to consider how I have remained enamoured to my own youth. Having no children, I strangely look back on it as if it were both father and son to me. Always deathly afraid of seeing it desert me, always trying to enrich and prolong it, I have kept up a greater contact and continuity with it than seem appropriate at times.² Yet for all that, I have always felt my essential self to be the one of my youth. So much so in fact that I have always dreaded ending up one day as someone who gives the impression he has cut all ties with it.

In the very same year that France was full of student unrest as well as intellectual ferment and activity, I began my personal odyssey. To think of it now is to think that I began it at the very antipodes of my most scholarly home or destination. For many long years would pass before I knew what Paris was all about at this time. Years which were far from being the kind of training and education I might have received had I been living in that city. Instead of reading articles on champion racehorses at my uncle's farm, I might have very well been reading texts by great philosophers living and working in Paris. For someone with intellectual interests and ambitions like my own, the thought of this possibility as a sort of missed opportunity might not only be a bit heady but also a source of anguish. For such a person might see all advantage being on the side of having lived in that cultural Mecca, of having developed artistically or intellectually in a hothouse environment where talent and ability, in order to become great, have to compete with as well as be nourished by what is already so. In such an environment, a person not so unlike myself but perhaps not so inclined to errancy would certainly have had a better chance of succeeding and, instead of ending up middle-aged, poor, and without any influential position, enjoying the fruits of his labour. And yet having only briefly flirted with being such a person, having only briefly flirted with being a true professional type, having only briefly flirted with setting aside all highest hopes and aspirations, I can say now I have no regrets whatsoever that things have fallen out as they have. For I have been taken along the only route that now counts for me. The only route that would have allowed me to end up where I am.

Having long been blessed with a robust constitution, I have often thought, even when very young, that I had a sense of being able to take my time. Not that this prevented me from, at age fifteen, imagining my life gloriously consummated and achieved by age thirty. How much then it would have

shocked me to think of myself as one still trying to realize himself at fifty! Or as one who ends up looking back on his younger self not with any sense of completion but only with a sense of non-completion. No, this younger self certainly didn't carry itself around much less carry itself off like Alexander. And the world, though certainly explored by it in diverse and sometimes offbeat ways, was not shaken by it in the least. But a question I have often asked myself is would there have been an Alexander without a Philip? Or an Aristotle without a Plato? Or a Shakespeare without a Marlowe? Or a Mozart without a Hayden? Long past is the time I naively thought that great men and events owe what they are only to themselves. And long past the time I thought they could only be measured, valued, and recognized by what has already been recognized. To go over my humble doings now and yet to see an uncommon spirit moving amidst them is to see an arrow, a straight line, and a direction despite all wayward movements of less than glorious aspect.

It is now time to deal with my personal odyssey. It began thus: nomadic and yet bent on a course, I knew nothing of what lay ahead of me except that it should be my highest hope and its fulfilment. How fragile a thing this might seem and yet, if taken to be the only way to live a life, how strong and durable. To be sure, if I had known it would cut me off from being an even moderately successful lover, I would have cursed my fate and cried out that life couldn't have held anything in store for me more cruel. For wherever I went as a teenager and young man was a place where my thoughts were saturated with sex. Of right bodies of course there were no end. But what wiles seemed necessary to win them! Ways and means of seduction that seemed entirely out of my reach. Even when having sufficiently developed my wits to presumably do what was necessary, I continued to fumble about and lacerate myself for my incompetence and seeming lack of daring.

It also began this way: moving myself into a rough working world of largely menial and low-paying jobs, I came across so many colourful characters and events that, had I been a literary genius, I would have been supplied with material for a lifetime. Why I wasn't this genius is of course an open question but I can at least say this: imaginatively extending myself to the world about me was ever only a partial move or exercise. Even before I properly knew it, I was first and foremost the student of myself. Not just the impressions I received from the outside world but my reactions to them were the constant focus of my attention. But among my sensibilities was the awareness of this narcissistic or egoistic component that I have never been able to condemn outright because it never prevented me from being the most unsparing critic of myself.

It also began this way: being very much attached to the simplicity of things – not all things but at least animals and children and straight-talking people – I have never cultivated my cynicism beyond the various manoeuvres and machinations of society. For a very long time I even considered the opposition between good and evil to be an unchallengeable axiom. Far be it from me then to argue that there was more between heaven and earth than in anyone’s philosophy. As errant as I may have been, I was at least nominally on the side of those who want to see simplicity written right into the heart of things. To look at a horse or a child was no more than to see a horse or a child with perhaps a scientific description in the background. To go beyond this was to get into something called mystery and, by reason of my upbringing and force of habit, I generally thought of it as being marginal rather than central. Oh, definitely there were moods that carried me the other way but, on the whole, my thoughts conformed to popular opinion. At the racetrack I read books by good metaphysicians whether they be doctors, lawyers, or sociologists. Never was I a reader who stayed only with magnificent stories and, as far as poetry goes (which I take to be the relatively non-metaphysical), I left it alone for a good many years.

It also began this way: I was a good Cartesian well before I had read the *Meditations*. My thinking self was a reality which I took to be wholly unto itself and separable from everything else. My thoughts and feelings were the most private of things and everybody else was in a similar situation. Most certainly language could communicate them to others but language itself wasn’t thoughts or feelings. It was rather the often inept tool for catching hold of and containing the sense or meaning of them. Of course language did the same for the outside world which was no less separate from it than my inner self. Shuttling back and forth between mind and world was not only language but the body. The very personal and yet very public body. The body I was so narcissistically attached to. The body I wanted to make big and strong and muscular and sexually attractive. The body I wanted to put into action and set up high and accomplished. The body I wanted to unite with another so I could forget mine in the enjoyment and perfection of the Other.

– Up North –

I’m trying to keep this narrative on track as a cataloguing of pertinent impressions and responses. In order to trace out my path as a would-be truth seeker and truth teller, as a truth teller *in potentia* who now thinks of himself as a truth teller *in actu*, it is necessary for me to be attentive not only to the great mix of elements in my life but to those which made a particular

impression on me. Perhaps I should no longer be so concerned about having to point this out – to signpost it from beginning to end. After all, isn't it clear by now that this path I'm on is two? The one which I'm now drawing and the one which has drawn me? But of course I'm thinking of the reader who will come after me. The one who has always been imagined in the background but no other place because first and foremost I wanted to be telling the truth to myself. To avoid stretching or thinning it out or pretending that it came without doubts and uncertainties. But never being entirely sure of this, there is always the temptation to reaffirm it. Even now I'm tempted to say (both to myself and to the imagined reader) that, if I had ever thought there was someone better qualified to carry it out, I would have mentioned it by now.

After passing yet another summer at the racetrack and after various developments and events that allowed me to cultivate a more forceful and, indeed, irascible personality,³ I went up North to work at a huge hydro-electric project. Going into the correspondingly huge beverage room that lay just outside the camp (everything was built of aluminum trailers) was no less than my first attempt to drink alcohol. Being four years under the age limit, I lied vociferously to the waiter who at first didn't want to serve me. Surrounded then by camaraderie, good cheer, and congratulations for having buffaloed him, I had the feeling I had taken one more step in the direction of being the sort of brazen fellow I admired.

I drank hard liquor for the first time in one of those trailers that were set up as residences for the camp workers. Each of these trailers had a number of small rooms and each room had a couple of beds (and not much else). I became so intoxicated in one of these rooms that I did something very stupid that would have seemed utterly senseless to an outside observer. In retrospect, however, I see it as having a connection with the incident at my uncle's racehorse farm that was triggered by the argument I had had with my uncles, my aunt, and the contractor-friend over the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Specifically, that act of violence, that striking of an inanimate object, that punching of the inoffensive breadbox in my uncle's kitchen that triggered a wrestling match with my uncles and much emotional turmoil and baring of breasts. Only instead of losing my head as I did then and experiencing pleasure as an after-effect, as a certain headiness over what could be called my physical violence but also my physical strength, the punching of the door up North was in some sense the result of *anticipating* this pleasure. That it was also an act of wanton destruction with possibly negative consequences was less a planned affair than a derivative one.

What was neither anticipated nor desired by me was making an enemy of

one of the two occupants of the room. He was a boy about my own age who, the next morning, heard me bragging about the incident. At first nothing much came of the enmity between us apart from a few insults exchanged over the next day or so. But when he went so far as to put my sexual orientation into question, I felt obliged, after some initial confusion due to my naivety and lack of experience, to challenge him to a fight. He at first seemed anxious to accommodate me but then, sometime later, he told me he wanted to put our engagement off to the time he was due to leave the camp. Given that he was a very aggressive and tough-looking character and supposedly a redoubtable fighter (this is what somebody had told me), what happened next was unexpected. A few days before the fight was scheduled to happen, he came to my room and proposed that we call it off. No particular reason was given and, though he didn't apologize or take back his insult, I was secretly pleased by the turn of events.

Later I would end up in many fights. The question for me now is, what of it? What masculine rite was I performing and why should I think it important to the task at hand? Nietzsche was a violent combative philosopher and yet did he feel the need to engage in fisticuffs? Hemingway was a great writer who seemed to like a scrap and perhaps there were others. Socrates fought as a soldier and, according to Alcibiades, carried it off with aplomb. Thinking about Nietzsche again, did he not take pride in serving in the Franco-Prussian War? And, more recently, even such a philosopher as Paul Ricoeur (a Christian no less) disclosed that he had blown up a bridge with two German tanks on it. Is there not something here of the ambivalence with which we all regard violence and combat? Many years later, when I was driving a cab at night in the city, I witnessed on more than one occasion a great crowd of young people gathering outside a bar at closing time. Young women no less than young men standing about in excited circles and waiting for a couple of shirt-sleeved gladiators primed with alcohol to have it out in the parking lot. No, I refuse to believe that society condemns violence other than strategically which also means morally which also means – emotionally.

And yet it is not that I haven't met people who put me in mind of another order. A celestial order aligned with our earthly abode and with a traffic and communication between the two. To know such people fleetingly and from a distance is not that uncommon or at least for those of us who have imagined they have caught sight of a not-so-earthly form or figure. Here the resonances of a loftier language are heard and it is well enough if, on such occasions, actual words are minimal or not spoken at all. Much rarer than these instances, however, is the one of witnessing a celestial visitor on a day-by-day basis. Of having the chance to peer into him (or her) and

discover him a bit. But even such people in their rarity come not without diversity and so, speaking from my limited vantage point, I'll mention but one: the golden boy I knew in high school The top student and athlete who was as well-mannered as could be and never showed the slightest ill-will. The sort of person I wanted to and in fact did believe in as a possibility for humanity. The boy I ran track with who had the face of a choir boy. How tough a competitor he was and yet how tender at heart! It was his mother's horrible affliction that inspired him to become a doctor. And I know he believed in doing good (for we had talked enough on such matters) as well as the essential goodness of others and the all-consuming goodness of God. As a high school student he was perfectly good and, in a way, I'm glad I didn't know him later on when he became a doctor. For even if he had attained the eminence of a Schweitzer, he would never have equalled the perfection I bequeathed to him when he was a high school student.

We all carry around a diverse world within us which is far from being evident on most occasions. Our public faces are masks which hide the better part of ourselves and, even if this better part also contains the worst, sometimes make us feel small and reduced and restricted in relation to it. And yet if it weren't for these masks we wear on a daily basis, we would immediately clog up and paralyse our dealings with one another. So it is that we believe here or there or in this or that and, if we ever believed the contrary, we treat it as if it has been expunged forever. In my own case, it is true I'm no longer tempted as I once was to believe in a Biblical world or an anthropomorphic God. Then I was still a troubled teenager and, for no reasons clear to me, attended church on a few occasions. I even took along on one of these occasions the very sister whom I had molested. But what does this mean? First of all, it doesn't mean I'm no longer tempted to like or admire the religious story or picture. It only means I'm no longer tempted to ground all my thoughts and feelings in it.

The secular world I frequented even in the green years of my youth was only occasionally lit up by some incandescent charm. As thankful as I was for these chance occurrences, they were infrequent enough to make me feel oppressed by the contrary. Whatever the circumstances or situation, day-to-day contact with it made it seem as if it had been there for a dull eternity. Such is our attachment to the fleeting moment which more or less has the power to conjure away this inertia. Work and pleasure usually do an adequate job of this but even they, in their repetitiveness, can be less than satisfying. Yet as much as I was set on stimulating myself with new adventures and experiences, I was held as if by an invisible leash to the relatively non-reckless and controllable. The huge amount of gambling that

went on in the hydro-electric camp night after night, card games where players regularly bet and lost their paychecks, had no appeal to me. Even my intake of alcohol, as abusive as it was for some years, never prevented me from doing whatever I had to. Lucky was I then to find the way before me always open and promising no matter how flat my life seemed at any particular moment.

With respect to the ravages of alcohol, one case made an indelible impression on me. It involved a young man of about thirty whom I often spotted in the huge camp dining room. Apart from his often being drunk, he stood out by virtue of his muscular build and his predilection for doing handstands. Attracting attention seemed to be important to him for he performed this feat on more than one occasion before hundreds of workers lined up at the serving counter or else seated at long tables. I soon heard that he was a former gymnast from West Germany and had even represented his country at the Olympics. One time I saw him so drunk that, after having sat down with a huge plate of food in front of him, he suddenly slumped forward, his face landing fully in his plate. For several moments he didn't move a muscle and simply rested there. When he finally sat up, his face was grotesquely painted with mashed potatoes, gravy, and whatever else he had in his plate. Such blatant self-humiliation as public spectacle, as caricature of what he had formerly been, profoundly shook me.

It was Montaigne who said there is more difference between men than between men and animals. Although I'm not inclined to agree with this, I have never failed to wonder at the differences between human beings. I suspect a large part of this wonder is due to the fact that the vast majority of people do not enter our consciousness as narratives but rather as elliptical episodes or vignettes. Everyone I met up North (and how many other places!) was such a brief story or sketch. Men came to the camp and sometimes worked only a few weeks before quitting or getting fired. A good example of this is the forty-two-year-old ex-soldier who started working on the truck some time after me. He told me he had left the army shortly before he was entitled to receive his full pension. With his short hair, rolled-up sleeves, and brisk military gait, he seemed to be carrying over into civilian life the zeal and efficiency of his former one. All the time I worked with him loading and unloading produce (boxes of meat, vegetables, milk, eggs, ice cream, and canned goods), he was subdued, sensible, and sober. But then he didn't show up for work one day and was not to be seen again. The only word I got about him later was that he had fallen off the wagon.

Certainly not everyone I met up North was a loser. I even worked with

someone who, unlike my uncles and the rest of the racetrack crowd, knew how to gamble successfully. Always in good humour, neat in appearance, and looking much younger than his years, he drove the three-ton truck that I worked on and that shuttled between the train station and the camp every day. One time we were sitting together in the cab of the truck and, perhaps casting a fatherly eye on me (I had told him about the incident of getting drunk and almost into a fight), he mentioned something about the ill effects of alcohol. Then he quickly changed the subject or so it seemed by telling me that he was a professional gambler. The card games he took part in were held in the huge camp lounge and recreational facility. It was a place I had visited a few times to play pool. He confirmed the stories I had heard about men who, having gambled away their earnings, left camp with nothing to show for months of hard work. He told me their ill luck was generally attributable to their playing under the influence of alcohol. Then he pulled out a loose bundle of one hundred dollar bills and fanned them before my eyes. It was his winnings over a two-month period.

Four more stints up North were to follow before I left for Europe at the age of twenty-four. None of them lasted longer than three months. While finding up there a world that was rough, frontier-like, and overwhelmingly male, I never experienced it as a war zone and never thought of it as a place of life-and-death struggles. On the contrary, heroics were few while talk, including the most inflated, went on everywhere. Abundance was also there in the kitchen where the amount of food thrown out was truly staggering. A couple of people died while working on the dam but I didn't know them. By and large the worst danger was a bunkhouse fire caused by a lit cigarette. Personal demons were everywhere but these were brought into the camp from other places. And like in Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Iceman Cometh*, many had their pipe dreams to comfort and entertain them as they moved from camp to camp. Some had designs on others but most calculated no further than their paychecks. Some were the hardest workers to be found while others were bone-lazy. Some were loveable rogues who broke the monotony of camp while others were complainers. Some were intelligent while others were illiterate. Some had undergone remarkable transformations and, in relation to their former selves, were unrecognizable. Some were friendly even though they had come down in life. Some were unfriendly *because* they had come down in life.

There was a man with twelve children who told me he wished he could put his brain into a twenty-year-old body. A hotshot-type whose fundamental dictum was that bullshit baffles brains. A tough stoic leader who told me all novice miners were soft. A Mexican roommate who, when he caught me on

the verge of masturbating, suggested I get a girlfriend. A nearly blind Mennonite who took umbrage at the slowness of my chess game. A drunken lunatic who broke into my room one night. A not-so-ugly American who preferred Canada to his own country. A mousy-looking character who got angry when I told him a ballet dancer needed to be every bit as fit as a hockey player. A French-Canadian foreman who fired me when, following his instructions too closely, I passed the mop over the floor rather than mopping it properly. A tough-talking kitchen worker who was amazed I could read without moving my lips. A First Nations person who, working in a small camp with few facilities, regularly hired a helicopter to go cash his paycheck.

As far as what are commonly called character-building experiences, I don't suppose I have mentioned all. Amidst the welter of impressions that constituted my waking state, I was constantly pushing for a self that couldn't easily be rocked or destabilized. If there were a heroics or, better, a self-styled school of heroics in all this, then staying on my feet while being buffeted by discomfort and adversity was both my study and practise. I don't think I'm being pompous or pretentious in saying this because, right up to the present moment, few things have got the better of me.

No doubt there are people who, while displaying utmost courage in certain areas, lack it in others. It may be even be that their will to compensate for such cowardliness makes them undertake great things. They would then be a little like Lord Jim and, in secretly persecuting themselves, spur themselves on to what they otherwise wouldn't do. If such is the case, then my not succeeding at the highest level is to be explained by the fact that, until quite recently, I have never felt the need to compensate for a huge deficiency. The great exercise or exertion was lacking because I never felt the need to take away from one part of myself to concentrate all my forces on another. Never felt the need to mourn the resultant losses and redeem the ignominious defeat. What a marriage to mediocrity was my situation then because it still had yet to see itself as something to be redeemed. To be compensated for (which I take this project to be doing) because it lacked the highest reach.

– Without Direction –

My second stint up North didn't last much longer than a month. I got fired for being difficult and contrary. At the time and for some time to come, a lot of my moves seemed to lack rhyme or reason. Though I spent a lot of time imagining myself to be a person destined for all sorts of titillating adventures, I carried out virtually no amorous intrigues and shone less in

the company of women than other places. Likewise I never built up a solid network of friends and acquaintances because I preferred to roam about in the image of a knight errant. Though at times I fitted myself in with people of my own age, I could never get over the feeling I was nothing more than a visitor. It is as if I were afraid of being taken over by the sameness of their society and having the distinctiveness of my thoughts drowned in theirs. Even when I got mixed up with drugs, it was a quick plunge in and out. Nothing could hold me because nothing ever came close to being the consummation of my dreams.

During the first two years of my working life, I held down some dozen jobs. The longest lasted about seven months and the shortest an hour. Along with returning to the racetrack for yet one more summer, I did brief stints as a factory worker, a miner, a kitchen worker, a cook, a carpenter's helper, a labourer, a truck driver, a car jockey, and a salesman. During the same period I tried to enlist as a common soldier in both the Canadian and American armies. The first refused me because I was judged a person who wouldn't stick it out and the second for a technical reason having to do with my Canadian citizenship. I also made a half-hearted attempt to go back to school. Acting unruly and spurning authority the brief time I was there, I had the feeling of being a man in an environment where I had formerly been a boy.

So much of what I was doing then seems to me now a rejection of middle-class values. Certainly it was far from being politically or ideologically motivated. No, it was something much more vague because I was never formulating plans to actualize an ideal. Rather, it was more like a preoccupation with the perpetual shadow that falls between it and the real. With the middle-class denial of this shadow in its very profusion. The pretence that right-thinking society was a vector towards the highest and best. For a long time I had been sensitive to certain contradictions and falsehoods caught up with rampant materialism and its secret rule in so many sectors.

Is this the reason I chose to put adventure rather than luxury into my life? Certainly I was as dazzled by riches as others were and, if ever I had come into great wealth, I'm sure I would have turned hypocrite or else abandoned my morally more fastidious self. Self-control only goes so far and, to say it plainly, Christ's temptation in the desert is a model few will ever take to heart. But if ever I myself was tempted to do so, it was along the lines of the parable about laying up one's treasure where moths and thieves couldn't get at it.

What a confusion of violence, sexual urges, and moral compunctions I was then! Anecdotes could abound at this point but one incident in particular sticks out as being illustrative. I was walking home late one night in the summer when two young women suddenly rushed towards me from the other side of the street. Breathlessly they told me that a car loaded with young hooligans had been following them. Since an all-night coffee shop was nearby, we promptly repaired to it. Both the girls were attractive and so I was immediately aroused and excited by their company. No doubt I wanted to be helpful and make a good impression. However, I didn't have long to exercise my feeble charms before a young man came over to the table and sufficiently ingratiated himself to take up a seat. An intense anger started to well up in me but I managed to control it while we were in the restaurant. Since the girls lived in the same part of the city I did, we started off together once outside. But the situation deteriorated when the would-be gigolo decided to accompany us and, what is worse, continued to monopolize their attentions. Suddenly I swung towards him and, with considerable force, drove my fist into his stomach. He gasped, buckled over, and then, without a word, limped off. The two young women were astonished and one of them was furious. Nonetheless we continued our walk until yet one more Good Samaritan came along. This time it was an older man who pulled up with his car and offered us a lift. The girls accepted with what seemed to me dismaying alacrity. One climbed into the front while I climbed with the second into the back. Little more needs be said about this incident except that, if these young women were expecting better behaviour from this presumably more mature person, they were soon disillusioned. All of a sudden I found myself sitting aloof from the girl next to me and repelled by what I was hearing up front.

What did I know then of this eternal war between the idealized self of my childhood and the vicious one of later years? Perhaps nothing so little as that the middle course was barred to me and extremes would forever dictate my doings and desires. Yet because the educational ideal shone forth in me even when I was acting like a hooligan, even when I was carried over into the lawless territory of my libidinous desires, I managed to ward off a good deal more than I was aware of at the time.

What is normally called bad company is perhaps what I warded off best. Not that I didn't have some dealings with violent, devious, or unworthy types but never did I make a devil's pact with them. Never did I try to ingratiate myself to some stronger, craftier, handier, more experienced, or better equipped person. It strikes me now that even though I sometimes envied and admired such types, I could never take them too seriously. As much as

they may have been striking individuals in their own right, there was nothing in them of the great movement or project. For me it was enough to take in the surface of their lives and appreciate their difference from the rest of humanity. The work-a-day world that commutes from suburb to city and thinks not much further than getting along well until retirement years. Oh, I know well enough their better points, their time-outs, their stoppages of play, and even their beauty. But when I was young and had my mind so much on sexual adventures, the suburbs sometimes had the look to me of a ghost town.

Does it seem right that a blossoming eighteen-year-old man should have to play the actor and deceiver to fall into the hands of women? I ask this question not thinking of any regular activity on my part but rather isolated incidents where the limits normally in place were transgressed. To be sure, when sexual tension mounts and the eighteen-year-old in question hasn't even learned to masturbate properly. When he persists in going his own way and not following others. When he has never developed the skill of conversing agreeably with women. And, finally, when he is terribly finicky in his sexual longings and desires – then even a strapping young man can cut a poor figure.

He can cut a poor figure in his own eyes when he sees himself driven to petty ruses to attract attention. Such was the case one day when I felt particularly oppressed by my lonely and loveless state. It was in a park where nothing so much greeted my eyes as lovers lolling or strolling about. A gathering point in the park was the pavilion that looked like a Swiss chalet and housed a few small exhibits. I went up to the top of the pavilion, looked around, and then, as was commonly the case, had my eye out for any attractive females. Two were there together and somehow I managed to judge when they were ready to leave the exhibit and go downstairs. I went just a bit ahead of them and then, for no accountable reason, lost my footing on the stairs and tumbled head over heels right to the very bottom. The girls rushed to my side, picked me up, brushed me off, and, as the way with such divine creatures, petted me a bit. Soon after I tried a similar ruse at a public swimming pool. I dived into the deep end and, when I came up, pretended I had hit my head on the bottom. The young female lifeguard was solicitous enough but then a male one came along and showed little sympathy. But it wasn't this that bothered me so much. It was the feeling that he knew I was faking.

So intense was my desire for the most attractive members of the opposite sex that the whole realm of homosexuality was incomprehensible to me. As

for the three minor incidents of my childhood which had homosexual overtones, they had never registered as significant events. One of them engendered more repulsion than attraction, another I was entirely ignorant of, and the third was but a mild form of titillation. I remember playing a game of catch and having a boy sit down on me while I lay prostrate on the ground. The feeling of his bare legs about me was pleasurable enough but, given that I had already experienced a more delicious feeling with older girls, it remained an isolated incident. As for the other two incidents, one was a bit disgusting and the other rather comical. In both cases, my best friend, a boy a year and half older than me, was the instigator. One time he got me up a tree and, with a ruler in hand, encouraged me to imitate him and measure my penis. (Later I told my mother about this and she laughed.) This same friend a year or so later encouraged a younger boy to put on a tawdry show for us. With my friend, the boy's older brother, and me as audience, the younger boy darted back and forth, briefly bending over, pulling apart the cheeks of his ass, and exposing his rectum to us. Of course it was all very shocking and our nervous laughter betrayed that we had lost some of our childhood innocence. The instigator was even so malicious as to threaten to tell the younger boy's mother. Whereupon he immediately burst into tears and we all had to comfort him.

It took a poet to say that man is a soul tethered to an asshole. Few philosophers have described the union between the so-called lower and higher parts so objectively. Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal is already a letting go of the first part. The tension between the two is, if not eliminated, reduced. A model is established which is essentially a role for everyone to act out. So necessary and successful is this model that it has come to be the touchstone of a considerable number of discourses. Indeed, much truth-telling as well as much falsehood proceeds from this point insofar as the manageability of the former requires the complicity of the latter. To treat human beings as talking heads with appendages is generally to keep silent about the ways in which the latter have their say through the talking heads. And since the ways in which they may do so are legion, truth-telling in this area can never be scientific or systematic but only *exemplary*.

I have met eighteen and nineteen-year-olds who have struck me as being very mature and yet, when I look back at myself at this age, I can only think either they weren't quite what they appeared to be or else I wasn't as immature as it seems to me now. Surely I was judged to be a rational person and conducted myself properly in most situations. Yet was that the real me, the presumably more mature and socially responsible self? Or was it the seething one within? If the first, how little it has stayed in my memory

and how much more the second has kept up a life and residence.

Not much different from many other teenagers, I had already experienced enough of being responsible and sober (as well as being coerced into it) to think of it as not being the be-all and end-all of existence. Rather it seemed to be the general landscape for all sorts of opportunities including higher experiences. From my present standpoint, getting drunk or high on drugs certainly doesn't count for much but, when I was still in my teens, they were part and parcel of opening up new doors of perception. What a thing it was, the first time I got drunk, to lose all my usual reserve and speak at length and with seeming facility! In one bound I had left behind my old reticent self and, for a few hours at least, taken on a wholly new one. Thinking back, I doubt whether the headiness of that first experience was ever repeated. Only then did I exult in it with complete naivety and innocence and take it to be, like Caliban in *The Tempest*, the effects of a wondrous elixir.

It took me a while, though certainly not as long as some, to develop an abhorrence of drinking to the point of losing all control. But just as I had played the fool the first time I got drunk (when I punched the door and almost got into a fight), so did I on a few other occasions. At least two such incidents followed some months after the first and both involved exotic dancers. The first happened in a beverage room and the dancer in question was someone I didn't know. After she had finished her striptease, she sat down at a table where I was seated. Not only did I prove to be a great nuisance to her at the table by touching her legs but also by jumping up on the stage with her (which resulted in me being thrown out of the pub). The second incident involved a dancer who lived across from the apartment I shared with four fellows a bit older than me. She was a very pleasant young woman who often dropped over. By the time the incident in question occurred, I had already got to know her quite well. Even though I had seen her dance on occasion and found her to be very attractive, she always acted like a big sister to me and the others. Her live-in boyfriend was about ten years older than her and didn't hide the fact he was a petty thief. One day he somehow got his hands on a suitcase full of expensive American liquor. There were a number of different kinds and all were high-grade alcohol. He offered me samples of these drinks and it wasn't long before I was completely drunk. Since I was working out at the track at the time and looking after some horses, I felt an obligation to go feed them at a certain hour. Given my condition, the boyfriend suggested I let him drive my car. So we all ended up piling into the front seat of this old wreck: Pete at the wheel, Sandy in the middle, and me on the right. It was a long drive to the track and, somewhere along the way, I started pawing Sandy and generally

trying to make out with her. My sense of propriety was so skewed that I felt that no action of mine could be wrong if it only provoked laughter and mirth. And truth to tell, neither the striptease artist nor the con artist ever gave me reason later to think my actions were inappropriate.

- Drugs -

After I had personally experienced alcohol as a circean potion and myself as a swine, I learned eventually to drink more moderately. In the meantime I took a brief plunge into the drug world or at least that part to be found in a middle-class setting. It involved some pretty freaky experiences but no sex orgies and certainly no violence apart from one police raid. I do remember an incident where a young lady, an overnight guest, sleepwalked her way into the living room where I was bedded down. Being a light sleeper, I woke up and watched her as she slowly made her way over to some big chair or sofa. I then went over to her, picked her up and, without her ever waking, carried her back to the room she had come from. The next morning I told one of the other residents about this and he suggested she was faking.

As far as my drug experiences go, I barely touched marijuana or hashish and took the more powerful drug LSD only twice. It is necessary to distinguish between the first experience and the attempt to repeat it. All my most vivid memories of dropping acid come from the first. Long before I had read Heidegger's *Being and Time*, I experienced having the world about me and all that it contained suddenly become strange and distant. And yet it wasn't that the familiar was effaced but only shaken from its foundations of a knowing certainty.

Multi-coloured strobe lights, a darkened room, a kitten playing, some other druggies carrying on their banal chatter – all of this suddenly took on the aspect of an unrehearsed ritual. A surface with infinite depths. Glued to my own thoughts and perceptions, I was perhaps for the first time reduced to a mere shadow of myself, a small corner of consciousness peering out from its now humble home. My significance was no longer that of an actor playing on centre stage or even in the wings but rather of being interrelated in multiple ways to a passing scene which itself had the significance of millennia. This thinking, seeing, and hearing smallness of myself, this corner of consciousness, was able to cast a more appreciative eye than ever before on the miraculous presence of things. Both natural and man-made objects were illuminated as if from within. Even the very dust on the floor startled with its intrinsic beauty. Yet this mind with its reduced ego knew very well that it had altered itself and that it was contributing to the transcendent scene. It knew

very well that the normal state of consciousness was considered to be the right one and a not unwelcome point of return. It knew all this and still wasn't sure – no more than today – that all deception belonged to the altered state.

Far from staying in the apartment all night, I shortly went out with four other people. They were all as high as I was. We took the elevator from the eighth floor down to the underground parking lot. It was the longest elevator ride I have ever experienced. Some people got on at the sixth floor and, with their impassive faces and avoidance of eye contact, seemed to all of us (who were busy making faces at one another) comically inept. They got off at the main floor and we continued to the underground parking. Walking across this proved to be like traversing a wasteland. It went on without end. But finally we arrived where my car was parked. It was a humble vehicle, a '50 Dodge with a standard shift. But after I took it out, it gleamed in the moonlight and became fabulous.

Taking this car out on the road proved to be an incredible experience. As the ride in the elevator and the walk across the parking lot had shown, my perception of time and space had been immensely altered. Thus it was that, whenever I came to a stop, I would brake for what seemed like an eternity. The car would slide along the road like a cake of ice, finally coming to rest. I would then have to go through, as if in slow motion, putting the car into first gear, releasing my left foot from the clutch, and then pressing my right foot down on the gas pedal. The activity of my right arm while changing gears, a mechanical up-and-down movement upon accelerating or decelerating, had a hypnotic effect. Soon I felt that all the movements of my body were not so much in my control as being caused by the more powerful ones of the car. It was frightening enough to make me proceed with utmost caution. This and a few other strange things happened that night. The next morning I went out for a long drive by myself. Somewhere on the outskirts of the city, I rejoiced that all was back to normal.

While I was briefly inhabiting this drug world, a couple of other strange incidents occurred. There were two brothers in the apartment where I lived: one was straight and the other bent. The straight one didn't touch drugs. The bent one was not only taking drugs but medication. What was the stranger experience? To see him writhing and having convulsions on the bathroom floor or to be invited to a poetry reading in this same bathroom? Curiosity being not the least of my traits, I let him persuade me that the reading could only take place there. Thus it was that, while I sat on the toilet seat, he sat on the edge of the bathtub with a sheaf of papers. Reverently he

began to read some of his poems. Every so often he would glance up and smile at me. At one point he broke off and suggested I would be more comfortable beside him. I politely refused and he continued his reading. Eventually his brother came along and knocked loudly on the door. It was time for our session to end because the salon had been booked for other engagements.

It seems noteworthy to me now that, while so much was communicated to me through the bathroom poet's looks, manners, and gestures, nothing came to me through his poems. And I doubt whether the situation would have been much different if he had written or read the best poetry in the world. And this not for the reason that I was frightened or agitated by his behaviour, but because it fascinated me. Was the sexual instinct so perfidious that it would make use of even the most personal and prized possessions? That it would risk insult, confrontation, and perhaps even worse by presuming where there was little or no reason to presume?

To judge by a casual remark of his brother later, he had tried the same stunt with others. No doubt I'll never know how soiled he felt or how soiled he was made to feel by being attracted to – and here I'll permit myself a pun with Freudian implications – the wrong kind of plumbing.

Of course the flippancy of the above remark belongs to my present attitude and not to what I was then. As an eighteen-year-old, I was still fairly ignorant and innocent. Indeed, I spent little time thinking about sexual intercourse and even less imagining intimate contact with a girl's genitalia. Only the female form, movement, gesture, and voice could arouse in me a desire which seemed limitless. Moving leisurely about the grand surfaces of a woman's body, undulating and curvaceous, filled up the bulk of my sexual fantasies. Nonetheless it can't be ruled out that even then I was secretly oriented towards the oral and anal parts as ejaculatory destinations. Yet so far was I from thinking along these lines that I was almost as virginal in my imagination as I was in fact.

Neither as a young man nor later on was I ever able to tolerate for long a situation that seemed to be exhausted of its experiential possibilities. My days in the drug world were numbered for this reason despite its light-heartedness, its headiness, and its charms. I remember a minor incident which gives an idea of my attitude or mentality and how it differed from at least some of those around me. I was driving down the highway on a beautiful summer's day in the same old Dodge that had almost got the better of me a few days earlier. Now it was totally obedient and performing

wonderfully. I exulted in the machine's power and my ability to handle it. The radio was blaring out an interminably long song very popular at the time.

*Give me a head with hair, long beautiful hair.
Shiny, gleaming, streaming, flaxen, waxen
Give me down to there hair, shoulder length and longer.
Here baby, there momma, ev'rywhere, daddy, daddy.*

*I want it long, straight, curly, fuzzy
Snaggy, shaggy, ratty, matty
Oily, greasy, fleecy, shining
Gleaming, steaming, flaxen, waxen
Knotted, polka-dotted; Twisted, beaded, braided
Powdered, flowered, and confettied
Bangled, tangled, spangled and spaghettied!*

*O-oh, Say can you see; my eyes if you can,
Then my hair's too short!
Down to here, down to there,
etc.*

I remember these moments now as being one of those rare events where I could glory in my youth and even imagine it would go on forever. Moments which, so fleeting, would have been interpreted another way if I hadn't been so young. If I had known then that birth and death are both major and minor events running along an infinite axis. So it was that the mood of eternal youth eventually dissipated and I left the highway and drove into the city. I somehow met up with another eighteen-year-old who frequently came to the shared apartment I was living in at the time and who dropped acid the night I did. With him now in the front seat, I headed back to the highway with the hope of rekindling the euphoria I had experienced earlier. Naturally enough, we talked about our acid trip and some of the incidents that had almost freaked us out. Such as going down the elevator with the people who, getting on after us, acted like automatons. Or such as turning into the gas station that resembled an eerie space launch on another planet. Or such as getting pulled over by a cruiser car that nearly frightened us all to death. (We thought it was on account of our being stoned but it turned out to be over a minor infraction.) These and other things we talked about until I finally ended up saying to him that our acid trip was quite an experience. To which he replied with some surprise: "Experience? It was fun!"

– The Mine –

Could anything be further removed from this scene than where I was a bit later? Surely not a pure pleasure-seeker such as I had with me that day in the car would have gone of his own free will from what was fun but hallucinatory to what was hallucinatory but not at all fun. Working eighteen hundred feet underground certainly didn't require acid to make it such an experience. I remember very clearly getting into that creaky cage every morning for the infernal descent. Men packed together like sardines and stops at every drift to let a handful out. A lunchroom way down in the bowels of the earth full of rough types who didn't have much use for acid or long hair. A windy tunnel that had been blasted out of adamantite rock. A set of narrow rails running down it and ore cars sitting or moving about. An underground cavern that looked like something out of Dante's *Inferno*. An absolute darkness everywhere there was no miner's light to breach it. A sense of time that went from minutes dragging out like hours to hours whisking by like minutes. A sense of work that put me in mind of Sisyphus. A sense of great danger and possibly even of dying when, after having been struck across the throat by a rock bolt projecting from a passing ore car and after having been knocked helmetless and lightless to the ground, I heard the wheels of the ore car rumbling close to my head.

But what bothered me more than the danger, the darkness, and the dampness was the rather haphazard and non-specific nature of the work. To begin with, it seemed that I spent half my time walking about in the dark and getting lost. Apart from a few occasions when I had help experienced miners carry some heavy object or set charges in the stope, I was either left to my own devices or shovelling sludge into an ore car. No one accompanied me when I did this highly unpleasant work and so, not being saved from the most incredible monotony I have ever experienced, it took on the allure of a truly Dantesque punishment.

Yet what ultimately drove me out of the mine was none of this but an allergic reaction to the ore. Thinking about it now, I'm a bit amazed that, had it not been for the running sores under my glasses and the rashes in the creases of my elbows and knees, I would have worked longer in that place. In any event, I was reassigned to the surface and went to work with a crew of men who, like gnomes in a workshop, thought nothing of taking a two-hour nap in the afternoon. Then for some reason I was transferred once again and given a much more active job outside. But not active enough, apparently (or maybe not gnome-like enough), because one day I was called into the boss's office and told I was redundant.

I fear now a certain loss of my subject in this narrative. Certainly not the personal one of myself but the philosophical one of truth-telling. Before these two subjects can come together more explicitly, I must traverse a number of years of being in an intellectual wilderness. A period where I bounced about from pillar to post and outwardly didn't advance much. A period where I often acted so selfishly and stupidly that even now I'm forced to ask: were these experiences so vital to the present project's coming-to-be? And, if so, are they still vital to it as recounted and reexamined experiences?

In truth, I'm still on the track of my life-long attraction to the extraordinary and heroic. It seems to me it has carried me to a certain kind of truth-telling that most people don't do and wouldn't even deign to do. Yet I don't want to take too much for granted and so, if there be such a life-long attraction, then everything about it, the good, the bad, and the ugly, should be revealed. Given the complexity of human nature, there is no reason to assume it should be innocent, one-dimensional, entirely stable, and immune to outside influences.

Only in the way I'm proceeding can this attraction be both tested and traced out. Tested every step of the way so that, if the telling of my story is nothing more than an egoistic trip, then at least it will be exposed as such. But if it is something more than this, then to the extent that all truth-telling is inseparable from the ego, it is an area to be delved into with as much rigour as possible.

- Stupidity -

I doubt that I have ever exhibited more stupidity than during my brief stint as a truck driver. Driving a three-ton truck with an exceedingly high box, I worked with a much older man transporting oil drums to and from various refineries. The second week on the job, I extensively damaged the truck by trying to drive it under a low railway trestle. Of course the owners were upset but, instead of firing me on the spot, they had me go pick up a rental truck and use it while the damaged one was being repaired. A week later I was told to go pick up the now-repaired truck and so I drove the rental one to the repair shop and returned with the other. However, when I got back to the yard, I found it locked and so, having no car at the time, decided to take it home. Later on in the evening, I drove it to a nearby hotel and, running into old friends, got drunk in the beverage room.

Despite my recent experience with the low railway trestle, I now made the same mistake by trying to drive under the canopy of the hotel. Immediately

the night clerk came running out and shouted that he was going to call the police. At the same moment my two companions (I had stupidly offered to give them a lift) jumped out without a word. I then backed up the truck and circled around the nearly torn-off canopy. I drove out of the parking lot and onto a highway and then onto a main street. But before I had gone more than a few miles, I was pulled over by the police. Ordered out of the truck, I was then taken to the police station and thrown into a holding cell. When the police officers on duty ignored my request to make a phone call, I called them a lot of names. They thereupon came into my cell and handcuffed me to the bars. With my hands secured over my head, I slept standing up most of the night.

My foolishness didn't stop there. Instead of sticking around Winnipeg for my scheduled court appearance, I hitchhiked all the way to Chambly. There I dropped in at a friend's place and made up some story to explain to his parents why I was suddenly appearing on their doorstep and in need of help. Given that I was far from being a practised liar, it is possible they didn't believe me. Immediately I set about looking for work in Montreal but when I didn't find anything after two weeks, the woman of the house seemed to lose faith in me.

When my stay with the family dragged on a bit, I noticed a certain change in their attitude. Indeed, it was the youngest member of the family, a five-year-old girl, who, like a canary in a coal mine, signalled most clearly that the atmosphere in the home was growing hostile. Without further ado, I took my leave and yet the thought that this family considered me to be some sort of parasite continued to gnaw at me. Later I sent them a modest sum of money to rid myself as much as them of any lingering suspicion in this area.

A series of incidents then occurred with the second family I stayed with in Chambly. It involved a sixteen-year-old girl to whom I candidly recounted my flirtation with drugs. It also involved her mother to whom the girl repeated what I had told her. It also involved another woman to whom the mother of the sixteen-year-old repeated what her daughter had said. Finally, it involved my own mother to whom the second woman repeated what the first had said. From my own mother I was not at all pleased (as well as amazed) to find out I was going around with a drug problem.

All of this strikes me now as the highly prolific foolishness of well-meaning but unthinking people. Not one of the parties concerned bothered to check out the story with me. Yet it couldn't have been for the reason they weren't in regular and, indeed, friendly contact with me. It couldn't have been

because they didn't have the *opportunity* to check out this story. No, it could have only been because it was something they were afraid of for reasons that had more to do with prejudice and public opinion than personal knowledge.

– Mr. O'Connor –

Not far away in a suburb of Montreal called Greenfield Park lived an old couple who had befriended my parents when they were just starting off. I visited them a couple of times and then, in order to be closer to my workplace, I asked them to take me in for a while. A number of things about this couple revealed them to be among the most kind, generous, caring, and devoted of people. Both had tended on ill parents over many years. Both had helped out many friends and neighbours. Both regularly attended church and had taken part in charitable organisations. Both were kind and hospitable to me. All this they had done and yet few people have I met with such an irascible and consistently maintained prejudice as Mr. O'Connor.

Absolutely unapologetic about having this prejudice, Mr. O'Connor seemed to have no difficulty squaring it with his Christian faith. To be sure, he was in accord with this faith insofar as he would unfailingly help out his French-Canadian neighbour. But he was in blatant contradiction of it insofar as he would repeatedly vilipend and vilify the French-Canadian people. As a member of an English-speaking minority used to exercising power, he strongly resented all attempts to erode this power and distribute it more equitably. But being relatively unschooled and ignorant, he didn't see that his attitude had less to do with Christ's Sermon on the Mount than justifying conquest and colonialism.

His bigotry was a way of discharging a lot of his anger over some unhappy personal experiences that involved having a good livelihood being taken away from him by certain union practises. Suffering from this, he came to see the first as representing the good and equitable management of the English-speaking owner and the latter as the destructive interference and false pretensions of the French-speaking worker. Absolutely blind to all historical injustices suffered by the latter, he lived his life as a harsh and unfeeling man continually redeeming himself by his unimpeachable conduct as friend, neighbour, worker, churchgoer, and tax-paying citizen.

For no reason in particular, I went one day with him to mass. The liturgy droned on in a way that seemed to make bearing the boredom of it part of doing penance. At one point the priest invited all members of the

congregation to introduce themselves to the people sitting nearest them. With a great deal of rustling and murmuring, the flock then reached out their hands to one another and some even turned around and did the same over benches. In the meantime I virtually sat on my hands because my distaste for such displays was so great that it prevented me from even being polite.

On another occasion the O'Connors had some guests over. A mother with her son and two little girls. The son was in a wheelchair suffering from muscular dystrophy. Not much older than me, he didn't speak but simply jerked about in his chair. For this reason, he was strapped down to it. The mother incessantly interrupted her conversation to reprimand the two girls for the slightest display of liveliness. At the time I thought it was all rather mean and unnecessary. But thinking about it now, it might have been a highly specific form of penance. For if this woman felt guilty about having brought her son into the world, perhaps she felt no right to take pleasure in the two normal children.

In addition to being prejudiced against French-Canadians, Mr. O'Connor was also prejudiced against Jews. As a tile contractor working in Montreal, he was often in their homes renovating their bathrooms. He believed they were always trying to get extra work done at little or no cost. Like many people with limited intellects, Mr. O'Connor reasoned from the part to the whole and, in doing so, took the part to be the essence and defining characteristic.

There are many Mr. O'Connors of one sort or another in this world and so, given certain circumstances, persecution and pogroms become possible. In ordinary circumstances, however, their good will and humanity is precisely what stands opposed to letting this genie out of the bottle.

– Loose in Montreal –

Seven Jewish brothers owned the high-rise office building whose underground parking lot was where I worked. It was situated smack downtown and had barely been erected before I got my job there. In charge of the parking lot was a middle-aged man who seemed to be well-off and have a lot of time on his hands. He would hang around the parking lot all day for no discernable reason. Because the building was new, it was far from being fully occupied. As a consequence, few cars came into the parking lot.

As one of two car jockeys with not a great deal to do, I experienced the pleasure of what is crudely called "shooting the shit." It was difficult for me to look down on this activity for, although it could be crude, distorting, and

deficient, it could also be stimulating, entertaining, and informative.

To think now that I was content to do this while others my age with comparable talents and abilities were busily grooming themselves for careers! Surely I knew that, if ever I was to be one of their number, I was going about it the wrong way. Yet so far was I from dwelling on this or feeling some urgency to change the situation that the only way I can explain it now is by once again referring to my preoccupation. As one-sided and prejudicial as it may have been at times, my ongoing impression of the professional type was that he was a clever, calculating actor. Someone who sacrificed his youthful exuberance, spontaneity, charm, boldness, and candour on the altar of conformity. Who was never concerned with reaching an unreachable star and who no more put me in mind of the extraordinary and heroic than the assemblage of courtiers and councillors in a Shakespeare play.

But to be sure my life was not that of a Shakespearean hero. Apart from behaviour that sometimes resembled a scaled-down version of Hotspur's, it was more Dostoyevskian than Shakespearian. Still troubled by my sexual desires and my inability to satisfy them, I spent a good part of my time frequenting bars. After moving out of the O'Connors' place, I took up residence in a single room. Periodically a train would go by and give it a good shake. Otherwise it wasn't very interesting. During the four or five months I was there, I brought to it but one visitor apart from a couple of co-workers. I met her one night in a bar and I suspect she belonged to a well-to-do family. Despite this, her manner wasn't in the least condescending. She was intelligent, likeable, easy to talk to, and probably curious as to what I was all about. But seeing as how this didn't involve making something of myself in the near future, I was probably out of her league in a way that she didn't quite realize. In any event, she called me up one time and said she wouldn't be able to see me again.

There was one incident I shouldn't overlook. For a reason that only an ardent adolescent or young man could appreciate, I felt it was absolutely necessary to have a car on our first date. Not being able to get one by conventional means, I decided to "borrow" one. An airline company had a fleet of cars regularly going in and out of the parking lot. But around five o'clock they were parked there and left undisturbed until morning.

Parked on the top of Mt. Royal in a stolen vehicle, the young couple gazed at the vast stretch of city lights below. It was not to be outdone as a romantic spot and, indeed, it was at her suggestion

they came there. Didn't he act the gentleman and didn't she find him intelligent, thoughtful, and trustworthy? Perhaps he wasn't the most charming boy but certainly not unattractive. And he'd done a lot of adventurous and interesting things though it didn't seem he had a life plan. This was one of the things that distinguished him from most of the boys she knew and were part of her milieu. They all had clear plans and ambitions. And some were even well on their way to fulfilling them. But they could also be a bit vain and full of themselves and hard to put up with. They seemed to think everything revolved around money and what it could do. It was nice to get away from that for a while. He was the first goy she'd ever gone out with. It was kind of breathtaking to be up there on the mountain.

Not having put gas in the car to make up for what I had burned that night, I got word later that its unauthorized use had been detected. The thought of getting into trouble with the police again was sufficient to make me think twice about repeating this stunt.

A word should be said about the irresponsibility I was exhibiting at this time. What prevented it from bringing me to a bad end was that I rarely compounded it by mixing one strain with another. Though I sometimes pushed my luck and even derived pleasure from this, I also had a horror of bad consequences. For this reason, there was a certain probity and caution even in my recklessness.

In Montreal I didn't take drugs and seldom drank excessively. At the same time I obtained a driver's licence by fraudulent means and gave the slip to the insurance company that was after me. I did other foolish things like trying to become a soldier in Vietnam. I even went so far as to write an excessively long and personal letter to the recruiting sergeant. To my present way of thinking, never was I closer to madness than when I tried to enlist in the American army.

Few people have I met in my life who seemed to me to have heroic stature. Ed Jones was one of those few. He came to the parking lot one day as a part-time employee. A very large man who combined a military carriage with a free-and-easy manner, an open and friendly face with a stentorian voice, an intelligent eye with a raucous sense of humour, he literally won me over in minutes. A lieutenant in the fire department of Hampstead, Ed had come to the parking lot simply to do a bit of moonlighting. He told me and the fellow I worked with that, at the tender age of thirteen, he had tried to sign

up with the American marines and in fact was accepted before his true age was discovered. Some years later, he joined the Canadian army and fought in Korea. Still later, he was part of an airborne unit and made over three hundred parachute jumps.

Ed didn't seem to be happy unless he was in a uniform. Before he got into the fire department, he had worked a year or two as a bus driver. I can only imagine him as having been one of the friendliest and most courteous. But I also can imagine him as having had zero tolerance for all troublemakers. Capable of resorting to violence when the situation called for it, he was also capable of the most touching displays of gallantry. It is difficult to convey how much I esteemed him when I witnessed his coming to the rescue of a young woman who, though not threatened or physically hurt, was crying her eyes out. Never before had I seen such a wholehearted attempt to comfort a perfect stranger.

Ed was no saint. I know he cheated on his wife and had his share of prejudices. I know his attitude to women wasn't the most enlightened. But contrary to the vast majority of people who hide their faults, Ed was entirely open about his. No school or university would ever have given me a better course in candour.

So far was I from the land of scholarship then that I remember walking by McGill University and mistaking a group of Hare Krishna for a fraternity stunt. To think I was so entirely devoid of curiosity as not to want to check out this campus. It was as if I saw it only as the place where my father had failed. But it is also true I didn't check out another nearby campus even though one of my childhood friends was a student there. The only reason I can come up with for this is that, before I dropped out of high school, I had always believed I was destined to be where he was.

The question of how intellectually active I was at this time seems to be a point to consider. If it were simply a matter of equating this with reading literature, philosophy, history, and so on, then compared to what I did later and for most of my life, little was going on. Only five books come to mind that were read during my stay in Montreal: Homer's *The Odyssey*, Marquis de Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*, Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and James Clavell's *Tai Pan* and *King Rat*.

In reading as in life, I sought diversity and challenge. I could no more rest comfortable with the enjoyable but easy than I could carry on a lot of small talk. Talk that is common and agreeable enough but that, unlike shooting the

shit, is not freewheeling and eager for all sorts of controversial subjects. With no one to help me and no thought of looking for suitable introductions or commentaries, Nietzsche's poetic work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, proved too much for me. The paradoxical utterances largely escaped me because I still followed conventional thinking about the relationship between good and evil. To be sure, I saw few examples in real life of a clear opposition between them. But such examples as there were convinced me that there must be at least an essential difference.

Which brings me to the Marquis de Sade. Put sex and evil together and how bad could it get? There is no question it could get – or at least seem to get – a lot worse than anything I dared to imagine. In reading these incredible recipes for the cruelest and most disgusting forms of debauchery, did I seek justification for my own sexual deviance and animality? Such a question isn't easy to answer because the word justification isn't necessarily simple and straightforward. If it means developing a good conscience about one's libido to the point of turning oneself into a monster, then nothing changed for me after reading Sade. On the other hand, if it means soothing one's conscience over having acted this way or something like this way in the past, I don't doubt it had this justificatory and even therapeutic effect. Dragging around a bad conscience wasn't something I thought even then a worthwhile occupation.

A few other things happened in Montreal that stick out in my memory. But I'm reluctant to go into them because they don't add much to themes already developed. Themes such as my sexual frustration, my violent temper, my foolishness, my tendency to be a loner, my hero-worshipping, and my powers of observation and self-observation. In truth, so much was I the spectator of myself that I often thought it inhibited me in my actions. This was particularly the case when I was socially interacting with people who I didn't know very well. It seemed then that I was hyper-conscious of any false moves, hesitations, exaggerations, cliched expressions, and so on. How much depends on being a good speaker and a good actor! Yet in order to be this, one needs to forgive a good deal in oneself that is false, put-on, show, quackery, deception, and downright dishonesty. Strange to think that, though I found these elements to be morally repellant in myself, I envied those who, like Rameau's nephew, went straight to their objectives without such scruples.

Dry and unpalatable, that is how I often appeared to myself. It seemed to be very difficult to reconcile wanting to be a swashbuckling hero with the desire to develop as some hitherto unknown and unnamed researcher. Fear of

deceiving others sprang largely from my fear of deceiving myself. From my fear that, unlike Rameau's nephew, I wouldn't be able to keep the one from overtaking and consuming the other. So vital did it seem then to avoid falsity and deception that it was often at the cost of being heavy and lugubrious in the midst of light chatter.

My half-year stint as a car jockey came to a messy end. I got into a bitter squabble with one of the regular customers. I had reached a point where keeping the job didn't matter. It was springtime and the road beckoned. Though I loved Montreal, living and working downtown as I was had lost its savour.

- Lethargy -

There were times I didn't really know what I was doing. Painful moments that made me long for and grow nostalgic over a period of my life that had barely ended. A strange and retrograde movement of the spirit where the most recent past would take on the allure of an imagined future. Where what seemed so achingly out of joint would be mitigated by the prospect of restoring to my life a comforting and familiar content. And all this in the context of thinking that life wasn't grand enough or, more properly, that I wasn't grand enough to make it grand. So it was that two steps I took shortly after returning to Winnipeg were two conflicting desires: the one of returning to the life I had just left behind in Montreal and the one of more or less "getting a life." First there was the letter I sent off to the parking lot in Montreal. That I went so far as to ask for my old job back, particularly after I had insulted one of the regular customers, strikes me now as one of those clearly irrational moves I have only made while going through fortunately short periods of spiritual crisis. At the same time I was pulled in another direction when, no longer thinking so highly of my escapades, I sought a way, if not to reform myself in any radical sense, to go beyond them. Clearing up the business of the impaired driving charge wasn't a great move but at least it was a move in a contrary or compensating direction. The police sergeant took a fatherly attitude towards me when I showed up at the station and confessed what I had run away from.

Everywhere there seemed to be small ideas and rushed opinions. The world functioned like a huge clock. Every time someone chimed up about something not directly related to his work, it was less than edifying (except as one more sign of the all too human). Take the police sergeant efficiently doing his job. Another Mr. O'Connor when it came to the matter of expressing his opinion about draft dodgers. For him it was noble that I

should try to go to Vietnam and ignoble for others to avoid doing so. It all boiled down to being patriotic and doing one's duty. Had it been up to him, they would have all been sent back to face the music.

And then, a few days later, I overheard a couple of old men running down young ones. It was clear they equated wearing long hair with a lack of masculinity. To think these dried-up old husks assumed they were in a position to judge about this! I almost had words with them but then thought better of it. It was enough to take in their worn faces to see they would have folded up like weak tents in a wind storm.

Not that I didn't have my own prejudices but, compared to what I heard from others, I thought I was pretty much free of them. The only saving grace was the candour with which they were usually expressed and the hesitations and qualifications that were quick to arise when serious challenges were made. Even the hard-bitten Mr. O'Connor would back off if truly pressed. But most of the time he wasn't pressed and so stayed like the others in his dogmatic slumber. Not that I'm sure that waking him out of it would have been a beneficial thing. It is easy to impugn a person like him but not so easy to know if, without his prejudices, he would still be able to go on.

I'm sure I'll have many more opportunities to talk about prejudice. Both my own and others. But right now I'm concerned with a period of my life that doesn't come back easily. The period just before my father showed up and ushered in a period I have no difficulty remembering. The earlier period may be misty because I was starting to repeat myself. Going up North for short spells, having no clear objectives, drinking in beverage rooms, spending a lot of money and saving little. All of this doesn't have much to recommend it. In a way that never occurred to me until now, my father stepped in and saved me from this blurry repetition. Not that a lot of my youthful aimlessness and debauchery didn't keep on even later. But what changed for me was that I started to see it under a new light. Being close to him over a relatively stable period brought me to a new awareness of my errancy and how it differed from his.

The world of the working class is more raucous and less predictable than any university campus. Yet somehow it manages to hold together. There's an astounding amount of good will going on every day and, as a commodity, it flows as freely as water. What is a noisy beverage room if not, at least nine-tenths of the time, a great commotion of good will? The drinking that goes on warms the spirit, loosens the tongue, and makes everybody seem

interesting and worth talking to. Points of view are exchanged less for the sake of resolving anything than for catching sight of one's own point of view in the other or what might be in his that is worth considering. As much as there may be in this that is foolish and of no account, so there is that which is food for thought.

I was on one of my brief stints up North when my father arrived in Winnipeg. Six years had gone by since he had last seen the family. At his sister's place he met my mother, my brother, and my three sisters. Dressed in a suit and tie and with his face flushed, he played the returned father with enthusiasm. Photos were taken that still show he had put on considerable weight. Through my aunt, my mother had already made it clear to him she wasn't interested in a reconciliation. Still she hadn't wanted to deprive him of his right to see the children.

When I came home and my mother broke the news to me, I reacted gleefully. At this she began to cry because she feared he would somehow interfere with our lives. His arrival had come at a particularly inopportune time for her. A man had come into her life who promised her more security than she had known for several years. At the same time there was little to indicate my father had turned things around for himself. First of all, he didn't seem to think it was out of the ordinary to appear out of nowhere and pick up with a family he hadn't bothered to contact in six years. Secondly, there were many indications he was still a heavy drinker. Thirdly, my oldest sister, after meeting him once, didn't want to have anything more to do with him. And, finally, there was the worrisome matter of my second-oldest sister.

A brilliant child, she had been my father's favourite. I'll never forget him making a pathetic attempt to keep her with him the time just before my mother took us all away. Like the attempt to reconcile with my mother, it was something half-hearted and quickly abandoned. Now she was fifteen and anorexic. She kept a cool enough head but also kept a lot locked up inside.

A supper was scheduled . My father was hosting it. My mother and my oldest sister decided not to come. My very thin fifteen-year-old sister and I took the bus to the restaurant.

My flush-faced, genial, overweight, children-loving father! How happy he was to see me! How heartily he clasped my hand, hugged me around the shoulder, and kissed my cheek! With what bounty, good will, and affection he directed us all to a table for a supper that would never be repeated! Little do

I remember of it except the lavish affection he bestowed on my second-oldest sister. It seemed a strange form of cruelty emanating as it did from so much paternal love. Watching the pained, contorted expression on her face when he gave her long lingering kisses on the lips, I couldn't fathom how he could be so blind as not to see it was all too much for her. Six full years had gone by but, to judge by the way he was carrying on, it was no more than six months. His intentions were not dishonourable but there was still something excessive about his affection. He was far too inattentive and overcome by the event to catch a glimpse of what she was all about at the time.

Shortly after the supper was over, my still quite young brother and my two sisters left. My father and I spent the rest of a long evening together. What truths were told that night have been drowned in the river Lethe. I don't suspect he made much of an attempt to give an account of himself. But then again I could be wrong.

It happened and that's all there is to it. I loved your mother and I still love her. I can't give you answers to all your questions. I can't tell you why I let it all go. I can't even tell you why I came here. I've been fucked up for a long time. I get by the best way I can. I don't go in for analysing why it's the way it is. I tried that and there's always somebody missing the point. I am what I am – that's the point. They all want you to be something you're not. Even your mother was like that. "Just go along. Be like everyone else. Why can't you?" That was what she said. Make sure to put on a smiling face even when you've no reason to be smiling. And make sure to kiss ass a bit otherwise you won't get ahead. You'll be left out of the loop. And don't let those minor humiliations get to you. The ones you have to put up with every day. Like the kid fifteen years your junior they hire and put over your head. Yeah, take it all in stride. But then one day I couldn't. I'd taken it for a while and then I couldn't take it anymore. I blew it all right back in their faces. And so then I was out in the cold and no chance of getting back. That's the reason I ended up selling insurance. More of the same. Couldn't put on a happy face every day morning noon and night. Even to save home and family. So there it is. I fucked up and let everything go. But don't think I didn't try to keep it together for you, your mom, and the rest of the kids. It's just I couldn't play the game.

Whatever our rapport was to be later, it was good that night. No doubt the

abundant flow of alcohol played its part. Without feeling the least resentment towards my mother or being aggrieved by anything she had done, I was happy to have this opportunity to renew with my father. I was also excited by the prospect of going to Kingston. Everything was settled while we were still in our cups. Only now does it strike me as being somewhat remiss on his part not to have worried about my schooling.

– Kingston –

I have sometimes the feeling that my path is more rough-strewn, doubtful, heterogeneous, and wayward than it should be. And this despite starting off with the idea that these elements could and would be absorbed into a containing whole. I have been aware of the possibility of straying from my subject in the strictest sense by more or less sticking a lot of feathers in my cap and putting on a gaudy show for myself. And this even when I attempt to dig into what I take to be the most painfully revealing aspects of my life. Of course this slippage or sloppiness in the way I go about telling the truth about truth-telling was anticipated at the beginning when I said that trying not to hide the worst about myself would inevitably be bound up with trying to give the best view of myself. Strange it is to think that, in the very desire to do as well as I can and be faithful to my subject, I could be led into fictionalizing it.

And what would be the principal danger here other than the one of overloading my past life with significance and taking it to be entirely germane to what I'm presently doing? Is it certain that all these little moves and experiences of my youth couldn't have been foregone without radically changing my destiny? *Oh, this destiny that gets so much play only for the reason that no one before has tackled this subject I call truth-telling! And only for the reason that, in order to tackle it, I must look up and down and right and left at the subject of myself!* So with respect to foregoing experiences like I had in Kingston, I know only one thing: they continued and even pushed further a certain errancy in my life that never collapsed into non-education or non-experimentation. Other settings no doubt could have provided the same and, like the Kingston one, eventually brought me around to sublimating this errancy in a more intellectual, artistic, and institutional milieu. Therein lies the arbitrary element that makes it forever uncertain that such and such set of circumstances should be credited with profound and far-reaching implications. Taken as a whole, the two and half years I spent in Kingston perhaps amounted to no more than making absolutely certain I would never follow in the footsteps of my father.

But what was I at this time? Still somebody who did just as he wished and wasn't afraid to loosen familial bonds for some obscure purpose. In this my attitude was analogous – but only in a rough and ironic sense – to Christ's sacrifice. For instead of forging a bond with my father with care and love as preeminent motives, I strengthened only the critical one that was already in place as that part of my character I owed to him. Such a pitiless attitude, essentially a study of what I took to be both me and not me in him, was in operation almost from the beginning. On the long train ride from Winnipeg to Kingston, we drank heavily and discussed many matters. We even came close to not getting back on at one stop. Indeed, we had to run down the tracks for a couple of hundred yards before the train slowed down and came to a halt. *Secret observation number one: my father was terribly out of shape. He could barely run. I was like a deer beside him.*

On the train going out East, I took along a library book that I knew I should have returned. It was about Winston Churchill. Already I had read a great deal about Nazi Germany. Just as I had been amazed by Hitler's rise to power, so was I fascinated by Churchill's personality. A man steeped in party politics and mass propaganda and yet one who still managed to speak like a Shakespearean hero. (*"I've nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat."*)

My father hated Churchill. It was all because of Ireland. I remember we argued on the train about this. I thought Churchill should be credited for winning the war against an evil regime. (*"What is our policy?" I will say: "It is to wage war by sea, land, and air with all our might, and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime."*) My father took the view that Hitler was only interested in uniting Europe. Apparently this made him, along with being the latest proponent of a long-held dream, a world conqueror of no better or worse stamp than others.

Nothing is truly noteworthy here except that my father strayed from orthodox views to such a marked degree that I was both astonished and repulsed. Irritated as well by my apparent inability, a lifelong hangup, to argue with facility and as close to my feelings and convictions as possible. Without having all the necessary arguments and information at my fingertips, I felt that, even if he wasn't entirely wrong on some points, he was still being simplistic and one-sided. *Secret observation number two: He had the courage to go against popular opinion. But for all he had to say about Churchill and Hitler, it smacked of prejudice or politics on the one hand and outrageous offhandedness on the other.*

We arrived in Kingston, deposited our bags in his shabby one-room apartment, and immediately went to a hotel. So well known was he to the staff of the beverage room that, even though it was after-hours, they opened up to us. More drinking and now meeting of new people ensued. My father held me up like a trophy. I was in my element to the extent that this was just a continuation of my drinking up North. It was a kind of Saturnalia before it would come time to put my shoulder to the wheel. It even went so far as to see us start all over again the next morning. *Secret observation number three: The whole business of reconciling with my mother had been a pipe dream.*

I met the man, much younger than my father, who was his boss. He was willing to give me a job on condition I proved myself. Whereas my father did surveying work for the company, I would be a labourer. Unquestionably I found it satisfying that, professionally speaking, my father was above me. Not so heedless to common opinion was I that, had my father been a labourer, it would not have bothered me. To see him as I did later standing at the top of a trench and peering through a transit while I, at the bottom of it, wielded a shovel, gave me one of those few moments I truly looked up to him.

If my father could be critical of Winston Churchill, there was hardly any reason to be surprised about his criticizing ordinary people. The semi-retired owner of the excavating company was a good man but the son-in-law in charge of daily operations was a pompous and condescending fool. The young supervisor who hired me was level and straightforward if terribly ambitious, while a few of the long-time employees acted as if they were supervisors themselves. The woman he saw occasionally had a couple of nice kids but the man she was going to marry was jealous, snappy, insinuating, and vain. And so on. Nothing of the petty, mean, pretentious, or small-minded did he tolerate well. And none of his judgements in this area did he qualify or moderate once he had formed them. *Secret observation number four: he lacked flexibility and openness. It was as if he thought a person could only be viewed from one angle.*

My father's "I am what I am" philosophy seemed to effectively bar him from dwelling on his own case. Living in an ill-kept and sometimes even filthy apartment never produced in him the smallest self-reproach. Ditto for running up his credit, for not paying his electric bill promptly (he didn't have a phone), and for failing to go to work on certain mornings. At the same time, if he did something out of the ordinary that could be called a mistake, he admitted it right away and without equivocation. For example, he told me

about one blooper he had made that cost the company a lot of money. Following his calculations, a line of sewer pipe had been laid at an incorrect depth. A whole day was then spent tearing it out and re-laying it. It was by way of such accounts that I knew my father to be a strangely honest and honourable man.

Up North I had learned to drink deep but not every day. It was therefore natural for me to cut back as soon as I started working. Not so my father. Every evening he went to the La Salle Hotel and drank until closing time. Conversation and company were enjoyable to him but he could also get along without them. Often I would catch him sitting by himself and, with a large pitcher of beer in front of him, quietly drinking himself (while incessantly smoking) into a stupor. Now it was starting to dawn on me what it was to have an alcoholic father. At the same time I was unreasonably surprised and irritated by this. It was as if I thought that, given that I was now living with him and a part of his life, he should have been motivated to cut down on his drinking, that is, to set a better example or even to follow *my* example. In short, to abandon his "I am what I am" philosophy that had already been declared to me by him and sworn to.

Even then I had mixed feelings about this philosophy. On the one hand, it seemed to account for his honesty and dignity. On the other, it seemed to be not much more than an excuse for not doing much or not thinking deeply. Instead of a play and tension between the idealistic and the egoistic, instead of the first never being so self-assured as not to suffer from its impurity or the second never so blind as not to seek to rectify or at least address this matter, there was paralysis, breakdown, and lethargy. Instead of an inner dialogue carrying the world to him and showing it to be his most intimate partner in virtue as well as in vice, there was an overall resignation to or contentment with the moral distance between him and it.

More particularly, to the world most eager to appear successful and respectable. Its cheery order and good industry came at the cost of allowing a hypocritical good will to make inroads, to become entrenched at times, and sometimes even to cover up the subtlest, stealthiest, and most sinister forms of ill will. To this world my father could only relate with moral repugnance and condemnation. Whatever first inspired this revulsion in him is not known to me. Nonetheless I think it would be fair to say it did him honour while at the same time seriously handicapping him. For it rendered him not sufficiently flexible, open, and accommodating for the world towards which he thought himself destined. A world going beyond the working world of his father and therefore precisely the one which he impugned and

discredited. Such a paradoxical state of affairs could only have been the result of some youthful illusion. Some thought of cutting a new path in the professional world and conquering in an area where others had given way and acceded to the demands of circumstance and convention. Some gross self-deception and naivety, in other words, which probably came to an end along with his highest hopes as early as his university days. Forever after he was caught between the working world (which he had at first wanted to surpass) and the one to which he had never properly succeeded. While his heart led him towards the first, his head inclined him towards the second. And without ever being able to bring the two together, he remained scornful of what had not yielded ground to him, of what wouldn't change without changing him.

But little was I inclined at nineteen to analyse these matters. Living in the same single-room apartment as he, I was also too close to him not to be discomfited by his excessive drinking and other bad habits. Still plagued by his psoriasis, he incessantly scratched away at his scaly sores and let the dried pieces of skin fall where they may. As a result, not only was the floor covered with them but so were his bed sheets and clothes. Since he made little effort to clean up these filthy leavings, it was largely left to me. Strange to think he should have accused me of being over-zealous in the matter of cleanliness. Of being too much like my mother. For the truth of the matter is that she excelled me in this as much as I my father. Our home in Chambly was kept so clean and tidy that it would have passed the most rigorous inspection. With such images in my head, I couldn't help but think that my father not only did her an injustice but had lost all sense of the insalubrious state he had fallen into.

Things might have come to a head earlier if I hadn't gotten sick for a week. Bed-ridden by a particularly bad bout of flu, I saw my father act with efficiency and consideration in tending to me. At the same time there was nothing indulgent or emotional in the way he went about it. This more professional than paternal attitude carried over to the job site where he rarely spoke to me. It was as if he didn't want to be accused of having used his influence to get me hired or in preventing me (if such were ever to happen) from being laid off. Such displays of dignity and standoffishness suited well the sober side of his character. His drunken side had other displays that in some sense made a mockery of these. One habit that particularly irritated me was his coming home late and waking me up from a sound sleep. I didn't consider this to be a small matter because I usually had to get up very early. (On the other hand, my father often slept in. The company allowed him such liberties.) Generally what he would do is noisily

get himself a cup of tea. But one night he went so far as to stretch out on his bed and, still fully dressed, fall asleep with the kettle boiling. I got up to turn the element off and then noticed he was still clutching a lit cigarette. Such a degree of carelessness was too much for me. The next time he came in late I wasn't a person to be bandied with.

Though I certainly can't pass breezily over this incident, I don't want to go into a lot of unnecessary detail. Essentially what happened was that my father came in late one night with Bridget, the woman whose two kids he loved and fiancé he despised. When I interfered with their TV-watching (I had been in bed long before they came in), he made a drunken charge at me. Worked up into a white heat, I repelled the attack and then, after having picked him off his feet and thrown him to the floor, proceeded to pummel him about the head. It was a nasty business and I sensed this even while I was doing it. Thinking about it later, I wondered whether I was unconsciously getting back at him for having done something similar to me six years before. But now that I'm much more removed from the incident and can look back over my whole life (and other acts of violence), I doubt this was the case.

The issue of my predilection for violence and its relation to truth-telling shouldn't be ignored any more now than before. Although it certainly got me into situations that most people would disapprove of, I'm not terribly put out by this. For I know well enough that, in the moral and political spheres, most people rely little on personal inquiry (either in the sense of inquiring into themselves or some particular case at hand) and a great deal on common opinion and received ideas. By using this Procrustean bed to trim down complex and varied matters, everybody can pose as an expert and, with limited knowledge at their disposal, warn, admonish, and judge with all the fervour and certitude of an Old Testament prophet.

No, what I must pinpoint is a predilection for violence in the face of any affront to my dignity. Whether this comes from a drunken father in Kingston, a would-be usurper and gigolo in Winnipeg, or a loutish kitchen worker up North matters less to me than the fact that, where my honour is at stake, I have always been prepared to do battle. From the viewpoint that such incidents as I have been involved in were not life-and-death matters, I recognize there was an excessive and sometimes even petty aspect to them. But from the viewpoint that my imagination was not divorced from these proceedings, nothing less than my sense of self was at stake. Nothing less than a willingness to die if honour required it. Of course this doesn't mean that, if I someday faced the ultimate test, I would prove worthy. It only

means that every lesser situation has so far never found me wanting.

What worse affront can there be than someone saying to another: everything I have heard you tell me is false from the ground up? I know that truth-tellers generally don't do this. They generally don't go out of their way to insult one another. In fact, they generally proceed with as much good will and cooperation as rivalry. I know they avoid the personal and treat the conclusions if not the convictions of others as mistakes in need of correction. I know all this and yet, because of how I'm constituted, I cannot help but take offense at it. Indeed, it rises to my gorge that so many people can hoodwink themselves and others with their certainties about what is true and what is false and what is clear and what is not clear. Individually I oftentimes have the greatest admiration and respect for them. But collectively they entwine or circle about me like a powerful, cunning, and often seductive monster. Only by worrying and thwarting this monster can I keep believing I'm a knight on a mission of sorts.

About two weeks after I had moved out of my father's apartment, I ran into him on the street. I was worried that he might still be angry over the incident. But on the contrary, he greeted me warmly and asked me only questions about where I was living. Then he invited me to come with him for a beer. It was in this way that we reconciled and put our relationship on a new footing.

Of all his children, I was the only one he got to know as an adult. His freeing himself to be himself had cost him a great deal. But I don't remember him ever bringing this up or, for that matter, complaining about life in general. He was neither an optimist nor a pessimist but simply took everything in stride. He was neither intellectual nor anti-intellectual but somebody who swung both ways according to his mood.

Approaching him one time as he sat looking out on the waters of Kingston Harbour, I fancied that he was some great artist or writer. His pose was like that of Rodin's statue except that, instead of looking down, he looked into the distance. And instead of supporting his chin, he meditatively puffed on a cigarette. No doubt at that moment I imagined my father to be what I most strongly wished he had been. Certainly I had seen him display enough wisdom, insightfulness, acuity, and tenacity to be so inspired. And also to be chagrined and saddened that he had let so much lie fallow and go to seed.

But if Mr. Beach had chanced to come across me during my Kingston days, he might have thought the same about me. Not that I wasn't a hard worker

praised for the difficult and dangerous tasks I was willing to undertake. Not that I was one so abusive of alcohol as to be run down in body or spirit. Not that I didn't keep up a consistent if moderate interest in intellectual pursuits. No, not for any obvious wasting away of myself but for a wasting of time in work and play unbecoming someone who had been at the top of his class. At least so Mr. Beach might have initially been led to assess the matter. He might have even thought there was some danger in my father's influence. But on the other hand, if he had got the chance to know me better, he might have moderated his views. For as much as I was living the life of a debauchee, there was always a deeper current of thought and feeling in me. It was intimately bound up with my being observant of the world and always wanting to learn from it. So much so that even my crudest pleasure-seeking took the form of the hedonistic carried over to the heuristic. In fact, were Mr. Beach to have questioned me deeply in this area, he would have found out there was little in pleasure-seeking truly pleasurable to me unless I felt myself educated by it. Not only was this the case when drinking with my father but every other person I came across. No sentiment was stronger than this one and its nature was such that it wanted to include all other sentiments while ruling over them. As a consequence, I was both cruel and kind, feeling and unfeeling, thoughtful and impulsive, and intractable and accommodating. But what I never proved to be was a pair of blocked ears and eyes, a turned-down brain, and a laggard when opportunity struck.

But some of these opportunities were by no means golden ones. By no means beautiful apples given to me by a goddess to entice and win a princess. Sexual matters plagued me then as they have always plagued me. In constant search of the pure moment of divine pleasure, I suffered a thousand others varying from the abject to the ludicrous. Abetted by alcohol, it was more than once I went to bed with a woman I wouldn't have looked at otherwise. To think I lost my virginity to a forty-year-old who was absolutely repulsive to me! A hard-boiled tough-as-nails woman who was like one I once saw grab a much younger woman by the hair and hurl down a flight of stairs.

The next day I was with a pretty twenty-year-old dancing in the beverage room of an old rundown hotel. The woman whom I had been to bed with the night before was drinking at a table not far away. Above the sound of the loud country music I could hear her bawling out something unpleasant. At the same time I couldn't quite make it out and perhaps didn't want to. But my pretty dancing partner did and said to me in surprise: "Do you hear what that old lady's saying? She's saying '*I'm a virgin! I'm a virgin!*'"

Later I smooched at length with the twenty-year-old and then lost her. It was more or less the pattern of what would happen to me many times later. An initial interest that would cool off dramatically. No greater suffering did I undergo than on these occasions. A young attractive woman was what I coveted most and yet I was stymied by forces I could barely understand. Something about me was definitely out of step with others and yet it was precisely this I couldn't give up. Indeed, I went so far as to place all my faith in it as being the royal road to my heart's desire.

Just as my father had done in his youth, I was guarding the vision of some morally superior self. All my selfish, exploitative, and opportunistic instincts buffeted against this. It was essentially aristocratic in bearing and heroic in stature. Displaced as it was in a non-aristocratic and non-heroic setting, it was my as yet not fully realized self. Sensitive as I long had been to all the lying and deception that goes on in the world, this ideal self is where I unconsciously set up my shrine and privately worshipped. But what was required in this area could not be anything common or conventional. Otherwise I would have been but a courtier or pretender rather than a prince in disguise.

It wouldn't be far wrong to say that, besides work, my main activity in Kingston was trying to have encounters with the opposite sex. Looking back, it seems there were a fair number of them. But at the time it seemed they were few and far between. Clearly predatory in nature, my sexual drive was nonetheless never so strong as to put aside all other compunctions. Whereas some young men can lie to women as easily as they breathe, I had trouble turning off my critical faculties even in the presence of the prettiest and most empty-headed creature. Often the only thing I could do was to say little. And this wasn't a happy alternative because it made me look, as I was only too well aware, dull, unattractive, and foolish.

What more is there to say in this area except that the longest I had a girlfriend was for a week and the rest of the women I knew were brief encounters. It is little wonder then I never came across a princess but only female bodies that excited me. Linked to and led by my own body, all went well for periods of relatively short duration. But for longer periods around these would often swirl an angry, dissatisfied, jealous, or envious devil. At such times I almost wished I could abandon my stricter, more scrupulous, and more serious self. Or, better yet, have a Jekyll-Hyde potion stronger than alcohol. Not so I would have trampled on little girls without the slightest scruple. At least not in the literal sense. But in the metaphorical sense perhaps this is what I wished for. Then I could have been a member of

an elite group who, applying all craft to their trade, go about achieving their ends while scoffing at moralists.

There was one princess I saw only from afar. A young lady whom I looked up to but never dared call up. She was a parachutist like me who made a powerful impression. It was the day of her maiden jump and she was unlucky enough to have a malfunction of her main chute. But with the help of the ground instructor and the radio, she was able to get clear of it, open her reserve, and arrive safely to the ground. A sizeable crowd was at the airport that day and naturally she was the centre of attention. She was only seventeen but, despite her harrowing experience, showed considerable poise. It was then she was told that, if she wished to continue with the sport, she should follow the example of the novice rider who, thrown from his mount, gets back on. Without any hesitation, she told the instructor she was ready to go up a second time. Since I was scheduled to make a jump, it happened that she and I boarded the plane together. When we arrived at the three thousand-foot level, I went out on the first run and she went out on the second. Later I continued to think about these events. I knew I had accomplished something that day by going back to skydiving after a serious injury. But at the same time I felt humbled by what she had done.

Perhaps I had to leave her alone in order to keep her perfect. Perhaps I was simply a coward. The fact is I never called her up or made any advances towards her.

I was certainly not a moral compass always pointing true north in those days any more than I was later. Certain conditions in fact could make the needle waver considerably. Take the case of when I spotted a young woman walking unsteadily down the road. From where I was living then, a converted roadside restaurant, I could see she was lithe and appealing. I quickly jumped into my car and drove out to her. Offering her a lift, I somehow ended up taking her back to my place. Intoxicated but still in control of herself, she was ready to have sex with me. Yet she was not so loose or immoral as not to warn me she had been diagnosed with VD. In light of this, we decided to stretch out on the bed and simply play with ourselves. When I had an erection, she started to masturbate me. Growing impatient with her less than expert technique, I finally took over the job. To my great embarrassment, she then cried out: "What do you need me for?"

So it was. There was no woman I wanted who was either not an untouchable princess or a prostitute. For me this has never been a moral problem to be corrected. It has only been a moral problem I have had to live with. A

problem more similar to having a mental or physical disability than a bad habit. But it was also a problem I habitually refrained from analysing and drawing any conclusions. In this way I could continue to live with the illusion that all my strongest desires, both physical and mental, would one day come together. So too it was the way I could juggle between being a fool and a satyr on the one hand and a sage and a saint on the other.

When I look back on my Kingston days, what strikes me is the heterogeneity of my experiences. Everything from taking in a conference at a local community college and going sailing out on Lake Ontario with a well-off couple to getting into bar fights and tasting the inside of a jail. This drive to experience many different things, although modified in later years, has always been with me. It even went so far in Kingston as to take me down to ground zero at the intellectual level. To poke around, look under a few rocks, and see what forms of life there were. Perhaps no more robust specimen of ignorance did I ever come across than the tough-as-nails waiter in the rundown hotel where I danced that one time with the pretty twenty-year-old. Thirty years old, short of stature, and solidly built, he was definitely not somebody to get on the wrong side of. Yet I managed to do so on more than one occasion and for reasons which, to this day, remain vague. But a couple of things are certain. One is that Kenny had a hair-trigger temper and the other is that he took as gospel whatever anybody told him with a straight face and a confident voice. Such a mind, so oblivious to any principle of verification, moves ahead like a bulldozer. For Kenny, it was not to be denied that Canadian troops had won the Second World War. It was not to be thought that, simply because they had constituted only a small fraction of the Allied forces, they hadn't won every decisive battle. His argument was that his uncle had fought overseas and witnessed everything firsthand.

Kenny had a friend called Carl. Carl was somebody I worked with who had become a friend of mine. Kenny looked up to Carl because Carl was even tougher and more hot-tempered than he was. But Carl was much smarter than Kenny and so kept his cool most of the time. Because Kenny was so devoted to Carl, he was jealous that I was Carl's friend. So one day he picked a fight with me. It was shortly after I had seriously injured myself on my first parachute jump. Although Kenny was well informed about my injury, he was also well informed about some rumour I was planning to kick his butt. Since it never occurred to him I would have had to have been a fool to get in a fight with him or anyone else in the condition I was, he thought little of belting me in the mouth and sending me back to the hospital.

Then there was that fellow I met one time in the La Salle Hotel who railed

against discrimination and prejudice. He bent my ear for half-an-hour telling me how blacks and natives were the best of people and how much it angered him to see the way they were treated. Although sounding a bit cliched and over-emphatic, he at least didn't contradict himself until it came time to say something about the Chinese. Kingston was full of Chinese restaurants and it made me wince sometimes to see how the staff were treated. Yet my friend in the La Salle Hotel, so concerned about the plight of the Negro down South and the plight of the Indian up North, came out with "*But those damned Chinese!*" to express how he felt about those in Kingston.

One thing I couldn't understand was my father's infatuation with detective magazines. His apartment was littered with them. Their glossy covers invariably depicted a murdered woman with her clothes in disarray. I don't remember ever questioning him about it but I do remember peeking through a few of them. But the thought of a steady diet of them was as repulsive to me as the thought of always eating junk food. Apart from the mind-numbing sameness of them was the barely disguised pornographic content. Pornography has always symbolized for me the failure of a not inconsiderable segment of the male sex to get all it wanted. Although I was most definitely part of this segment, I wasn't prepared to put a sign on my head and let everyone know it. I wasn't even prepared to let it be evident to myself. Yet here was my father, someone who had once been married to a flesh-and-blood woman, someone who had once been so good-looking as to make me envious, no longer concerned to hide the fact that he needed fantasies of women rendered inert and incommunicative.

I allowed myself a few pin-ups after I moved out of my father's place. Beautiful voluptuous women with come-on looks. Earthly goddesses who, in my fantasies, would have been to me as so many Venuses. In opposition to my father's fantasy then was the one of the wholly active female who would have overwhelmed and taken charge of me. Wouldn't it be the irony of ironies if the same woman spawned both fantasies? On the one hand, the mother who came to me as a goddess when I was still an infant. On the other, the wife who became very active precisely at the time my father was sinking and losing, in a manner of speaking, his manhood.

So far as I can remember, only once did my father physically threaten my mother. I was very young and very afraid. I don't have any memory of my parents noticing my fear but, since I was barely more than an infant, this doesn't mean too much. It is likely my father consciously refrained from ever repeating the incident.

Over and over again both in literature and life I have been struck by the intermingling of the good and the bad. To separate these two in any conclusive way seemed to me a hopeless task. Perhaps it was for this reason I stayed away from philosophy for so long. Certainly I read none in Kingston or at least nothing philosophical in the strict sense. I have difficulty remembering exactly what I did read but I suspect that, among other things, a few novels were digested. After all, this was something I had developed a taste for in childhood. I remember having received *Treasure Island* as a gift one Christmas in Chambly and, God only knows, the character of Long John Silver intrigued me. In Kingston I came across a similar character who was also a fascinating mix of the best and worst impulses.

His name was Carl and, the first time I laid eyes on him, he had just started working for the excavation company. Tall and sturdily built, his thick shoulders and powerful arms drew attention away from the bit of flab starting to collect about his waist. Along with these traits were his long hair, regular features, alert eyes, and biker's moustache. Working alongside him, I noticed he had a tattoo on his arm. It was a devil's head underneath of which was written *One-percenters*. I questioned him about it and, in the most unassuming voice, he told me it was an insignia representing his membership in a motorcycle club. The logo expressed the members' view of themselves as a sort of visible minority.

I soon learned that Carl was no longer an active member of this club that in fact was a gang of bikers. From the ages of twenty to twenty-five, he had been the president of the Kingston chapter of the Satan's Choice Motorcycle Club and then, to avoid further scrapes with the law and spending time in jail, he quit. For the past four years he had lived his life in the humbler but more respectable way of grinding out a living. But his early days as an outlaw were not forgotten by the powers-that-be. A year or so later, after I had gotten to know him much better, he revealed to me, and with the only trace of anguish I had ever detected in him, how a request that he and his wife had made to adopt a child had been turned down.

But it wasn't long before I found out that the easy-going ex-biker who half-heartedly went about his work had another side to him. On a late Friday afternoon, after putting in our shift, I went with Carl to one of his favourite haunts. No sooner did we enter the beverage room of the rundown hotel and get to a table than I felt as if I were with another person. As if I were with the prince of thieves who everyone knew, everyone admired, and everyone had a good word for. "Hi, Carl!" "Hi, Carl!" "Hi, Carl!" "How ya doin', Carl?" "What'll it be, Carl?" "Say, Carl, how ya keepin'?" To everyone who spoke to

him, Carl had the right answer. It was either witty or bawdy or serious or straight or sarcastic or angry but never dull. Truly I was amazed to see the energy he expended in his leisure time because it was almost in inverse proportion to what he expended at work. But even more surprising was the force of his personality. It would take me a while to realize that these downtown bars and beverage rooms were Carl's fiefdom where all paid homage to him.

Generally speaking, Carl's manner was jovial, boisterous, and friendly. So much so that I was little prepared for a brief incident that, despite its relative insignificance, was one of the most concentrated moments of violence I have ever witnessed. In fact it happened so fast it was over before I knew it. Someone at a nearby table, an older man, said something to Carl that was either deprecating or dismissive. To this day I'm not sure what it was. But what I do know is that, without warning, Carl suddenly leaped up, bounded over to the seated man, and, without the slightest hesitation, gave him a hard cuff across the face. With his hand still poised in the air and ready to strike again, he listened stone-faced while the older man babbled out an apology.

For a year and a half I saw Carl regularly both on and off the job. It wasn't that I was his sidekick but I always joined him whenever I spotted him. He took enough of a liking to me to invite me to his place a number of times. When he bought a house in the country not far from where I was living, I would sometimes drop by and, when he wasn't there, even spend an hour or so talking with his wife. She was a psychiatric nurse who worked at a local hospital and, in contrast to Carl, never went out. Though she must have known that Carl was a womanizer, she never breathed a word about it to me. Nor was there anything to indicate that, despite his violent temper, Carl was abusive towards her. Only once did I see him get angry in the house and the result, if shocking, was only a glass thrown against the wall. Instinctively Carl held back from lashing out at friends and favourites. I witnessed this myself when he became angry with me a couple of times. The worst incident took place on the job site. We had gotten into some argument and, in a fit of anger, he had cocked his arm back as if he were ready to hit me. It was then he told me that, had I met him five years earlier, we not only wouldn't have been friends but the outcome of our dispute would have been much different.

Carl had spent several months in solitary confinement and I think that, so much had he been disturbed by this experience, it put him on the path of reform. In other circumstances or settings he might have stayed outside the

law and even grown more dangerous than he was. But from what I saw of him, his natural bent was less towards the unscrupulous and underhanded than towards the roguish and wild.

Soon after he got his motorcycle licence back, Carl bought a motorcycle and booted around town with one of his long-time friends who was a foreman with the excavation company and had helped to get Carl hired on. Ronnie was also very much his own man and so he and Carl treated each other with a good deal of respect. Yet they rarely drank together and the reason for this, I suspect, is that Ronnie didn't like being put in the shade. With his long, prematurely grey hair, his biker's moustache, his extraordinary strength, and his herculean build, Ronnie wasn't someone who normally lacked attention. Yet so powerful was Carl's personality that, when he was in his own milieu, no one could resist it or take centre stage away from him.

Women no less than men were attracted to Carl and yet, on certain occasions, he could deal very roughly with them. His ability to call down someone and humiliate them in public was probably the cruelest thing about him. Detecting where his victim's weakness lay, he would then go about broadcasting it and making it the source of general amusement. For some reason he did this with a young lady whose sexual orientation was rumoured to be less than certain. At first she hotly denied this but, when Carl kept ridiculing her in front of all including her friends, she finally stopped defending herself and hurried off. Sometime later she came back and stole up to Carl while his back was turned. Kneeling down, she thrust her arm through his legs, reached upwards, and grabbed him by the genitals. Everyone of course thought this was terribly amusing.

Before I met Carl, I had certainly come across people who could by turns be both cruel and kind. My boyhood friend in Chambly was of this stamp. So was my uncle. So were a few others. But none that I met before Carl exhibited this same trait to such a marked degree. Unquestionably he derived pleasure from inflicting pain as much as he derived satisfaction from being generous and magnanimous. From playing practical jokes of the most vicious sort to refraining from taking away the prize that was in his power to take. Yes, Carl was the same fellow who thought it was funny to damage my car (actually, both he and Ronnie thought it was funny to paint swastikas on an old Volkswagen I had) and beneath him to take away the one girl I had. Yet he must have been tempted to and not without reason. It wasn't just that Dorothy was attractive and a cute oddity with her fractured English in Kingston. It was that by nature she was friendly to the point of being flirtatious.

When I first laid eyes on her, I was driving around Montreal rather aimlessly. Then I spotted her (*happy day!*) standing by the curb trying to hitch a ride. I picked her up and, after not much more than a short conversation in French (made delicious by our mutual lack of fluency), she decided to come to Kingston with me. We went to the house where she was temporarily residing, collected her few belongings, and headed out west on the highway. It seemed to me during the drive back that I had finally achieved my heart's desire. With her head resting on my lap, I pondered the delicate matter of what I was going to do with her. Since I was living at the time in a private home, there was no question of taking her there. It was clear to me that I would have to find a bigger place and as quickly as possible. To avoid being embarrassed by the situation, I gave her to understand that I was in the process of moving. Using this expedient, I had no difficulty convincing her to come with me to a motel. We spent the night together and, even though she herself was more than willing, I couldn't make love to her. It was one of those painful moments when the fantasy bubble bursts.

The next day I found an apartment for us on the outskirts of Kingston and moved her and all my other possessions into it. Yes, Dorothy was a woman to possess and, as I would soon find out, also a woman to be *dispossessed of*. Not much more than five feet tall, she was pretty without being beautiful. But her body certainly wasn't something to leave most men indifferent. More than this, however, was her manner. It was lively, flirtatious, and exciting. Although she was only eighteen, she proved to have as much prowess in bed as her astrological chart – one of the few possessions she had brought from Montreal – had intimated. (It gave different positions for all the signs of the zodiac.) She was also a woman who could unsettle me tremendously. A woman who could stroke my leg under a table in a nightclub and at the same time strike up a conversation with perfect strangers. More precisely, two tough-looking but well-dressed gentlemen whom she had happened to overhear speaking French. Two gangster types who followed us out of the club later and trailed us in their car for several miles.

Probably in every way but physically I was a mismatch for her. Somebody older, more experienced, and at the same time less serious would have suited her better. This is not simply a thought that comes to me now but what she herself told me. She even went so far as to mention Carl to give me a better idea of the type she had in mind. Somebody whom she probably thought wasn't inclined to lose his temper as often as I did. But, truth to tell, there was never much of an opportunity for Carl to make a move on her. He only met her a couple of times and it was never in one of his haunts. But when she came to Kingston a second time, the situation was different. I

didn't then simply take her to fashionable nightclubs. It is for this reason I now think he did me more honour and showed me more respect than I could have ever suspected at the time.

Of course what I'm putting down here is largely a matter of speculation. It could very well be that Dorothy didn't appeal to him. It could very well be that the reason he didn't make more of an effort to engage her in conversation the first time was simply because he didn't speak French. But this no longer mattered the second time she was in town. It all came about with the call I got from her one evening. Several months had gone by and I was far from thinking she still had me in mind. Now I was listening to her talking pleasantly away and not only telling me she wanted to see me again, but doing so in English.

Despite Carl's seeming disinterest in Dorothy, two incidents stick out in my memory that make me think he refrained from doing the worst he was capable of. The first of these incidents was quite minor and, looked at apart from the second, doesn't seem to amount to much. I had taken Dorothy to the dance hall where, like similar downtown establishments, Carl entertained and held court at whatever table he was sitting. Despite her way of dressing that made her look better suited to a more upscale place, Dorothy fitted in quite well and gave every reason to think she liked the clamour, the congeniality, and the country music. Never was she sweeter to me than on these occasions and more inclined to be the perfect companion. Along with our drinking was our dancing and, since Carl enjoyed doing both, it was natural for him to hit the dance floor with her. The strange remark he came out with later was in this context and yet, at the time, it seemed to come out of nowhere. A remark he seemed to address as much to Dorothy as to me. A vulgar sexist remark that yet did me honour. He addressed it to me or to Dorothy or perhaps to himself. He said "*Dames are a dime a dozen but a friend's a friend.*"

I pretty much lost Dorothy the second time as I did the first. By way of arguing and not giving in. By way of not seeming to have a conciliatory bone in my body. All the disputes were of a petty nature. When she announced finally she wanted to clear out and go back to Montreal, I made no effort to change her mind. Rather it was with as much indifference as I could muster that I took her to the train station and left her there. The last image I had of her was of her gaily chatting away with the clerk in the ticket office.

Like other immoralists, I don't think it requires great strength of character to denounce a passion one isn't capable of or to refrain from acts totally

contrary to one's nature. The most that can be said is that such widespread practises have a social value that tends to attribute to these moralists more virtue than, if they thoroughly examined themselves, they would take credit for. It is the collective voice of society that both prescribes this value and, by investing each and every member with its weight and authority, makes morality less a matter of struggling against uncertainty than practised observation.

The second incident came as a great shock to me. It happened some time after Dorothy had gone back to Montreal. In the Grand Hotel which was anything but grand the scene unfolded. It was something to wonder at when the young couple wandered in one day. So out of place did they look that they seemed better suited to a high school prom than a rough downtown bar. The exact sequence of events escapes me but I do remember that Carl was soon seated at their table. I myself continued to drink with some regular customers all of whom were of course his friends. But every so often I would peer over at them to see what was going on. The first thing I noticed was that, contrary to his usual way of behaving or at least with those he considered friends, Carl had engaged the girl in conversation while totally ignoring the boy. Seeing him sitting there looking so forlorn, I couldn't help but put myself in his shoes. But the greatest shock and surprise was yet to come. Looking over at the table some time later, I saw that Carl was no longer simply talking to the girl. In fact he couldn't talk to her because he was too busy kissing her. Long passionate kisses on the mouth over and over again without letup while the boy simply sat there like a whipped dog. It wasn't a scene I wanted to watch to the end. Cutting out early, I went back home. I don't remember much else about this incident except that I never questioned Carl about it.

It was Nietzsche who said that every philosopher is someone who has his morality in tow. As much as I'm a philosopher when I look over and examine all that has most strongly influenced and impressed me, I do the same by focussing on my predilection for the extraordinary and heroic. Yet I have never been interested in turning this predilection into a means by which to pass these off as simple phenomena that would give themselves over either to awe and admiration or to fear and contempt. An important part of my task must be to counter this common tendency not only in the world but in philosophy.

So, from a certain perspective, Carl could simply be written off as a petty despot who decided for himself when to act nobly or ignobly. I would be hard put to refute this charge and yet, having observed him up close, I would also

find it to be facile. After all, not only was he raised in a foster home but in a rough working-class environment. He was someone, in short, who had an upbringing far different from mine. Yet for all this, I could see the outline of my own character in him. I too could be kind and cruel, noble and ignoble, honourable and dishonourable. To condemn him would be like condemning myself.

Apart from this, his character and personality penetrated into my psyche more deeply than most. I think the reason for this is that not only did he reveal to me the boundaries of my own character, but also the frontier I wasn't prepared to cross. As much as I envied Carl's adroitness and audacity, I felt repelled by the crudest and most unfeeling part of his nature. For what I had always desired most from life was not some world to dominate but the largest possible world to explore and marvel at. Or if I ever did desire the first, it was hopelessly tied up with the task of trying to dominate myself.

A vague and uncertain task, to be sure. An attempt to reach into myself as deeply as I could while trying to open up this same self to as many different experiences as possible. Yet always with an imperious hold as quick to detect fault lines as veins of ore. One of these veins was my capacity to stand my ground or even push ahead while suffering from a case of bad nerves or worse. Making thirty-two parachute jumps after being seriously injured was one example. Standing my ground against Kenny, Carl's ferocious friend, was another. Mastering my claustrophobia while crawling down a twenty-inch pipe buried underground was yet another. Overcoming my fears at such times always gave me great satisfaction. The feeling of liberation I experienced solidified in me the sense of being a hero. I, like Martin Luther, would one day be able to say "*I must take my stand; I can do no other.*" So it went in my imagination and so my actual life seemed to bear out. They were two parallel lines vastly closer to meeting than the ones tracing out my erotic dreams and my infrequent and often disillusioning encounters with the opposite sex.

It was in Kingston that I first took a stab at writing. What I came out with is only to be mentioned for the reason that, even then, I was drawn to writing about myself. After I had finished it, I made some copies and gave them to a few people in the Grand Hotel (including – it amazes me now to think of it – the barely literate Kenny). Since I had worked in Carl as a minor character in this mediocre account of my first parachute jump (which included how I botched it), it probably went down better than otherwise. Except with one fellow who, though I hadn't given him a copy (he was somebody who, when

being informed of what I was doing in the Grand Hotel, made some critical remarks before finding out that I, the author, was sitting not far from him), thought this whole literary effort was out of place. Although I tried to counter his criticism, I had the sinking feeling he was right.

It was probably as much out of place as trying to straighten Kenny out about the Second World War. Or to get Carl interested in a book that, though it was rather lowbrow, I thought to be informative about sex. What prompted me to be so foolish as to think I could bring them into my world? Or was I simply trying to see if I could extend my world into theirs? If so, the bar critic's remark in the Grand Hotel brought home to me that these efforts could be read as pathetic displays of middle-class pride and presumption. Clearly I had been moving through their world and adapting to their ways while giving out signals I wasn't to be taken for one of them.

I could bring up a number of other incidents to show I was more interested in going to a school of straight talk in Kingston than learning to be a thoroughly respectable citizen. On the job and elsewhere, I was never forced to curry favour, to deal in half-truths, to feign a good will or mask its contrary. I never had to be the kind of person who says something like: "Don't get angry, get even!" Never were plots and stratagems a part of my life. Yet no more does it seem possible to argue for the moral superiority of this direction than the other one. There are no scales to measure and compare all the hypocrisy and deception to be found along one path and all the meanness and violence along the other.

Strange to think that this school of straight talk would one day lead me to think that truth-telling in its generality can be anything but straight. During the Kingston period and for some time after, I tended to view all discussion as arising out of a given context that could conclusively settle this or that. As the case with the vast majority of people, I thought that whatever elements happened to elude this context were largely unimportant. So it seemed to be for virtually all matters I came across and, since I didn't study philosophy, I had no reason to doubt this state of affairs. Nor to doubt that all opposite things were essentially different and, in most cases, wholly pure and apart from each other. Truth and falsehood were no more crossed than a dream and the real world. Carrying this doctrine into the realm of sex, I couldn't conceive of a continuum between male and female any more than between earth and water. Any other way of looking at things seemed like anarchy, overthrow, mayhem, nonsense. The thought that human beings might be writing all their history on water and building all their castles in the air was not to be taken seriously.

My taking leave of Kingston was not something I had long planned out. On the contrary, it was all settled in a couple of weeks. Again it was spring and again the road beckoned. But more than this was my growing awareness that I had exhausted the Kingston world. It was one that had more in common with the reputation the city had for its penitentiaries than for its prestigious university. Like Kipling's young hero in *Captains Courageous*, I had come to this rougher world from another and found I could make my way in it. Yet if Carl and Ronnie were captains of sorts in this world, their lives and careers were more of the ports than the high seas. Something then was falling short of bringing life to the full screen of my imagination. Something still beckoned that resembled sailing on the high seas and going where others had not dared to venture.

- A Slow Change of Direction -

After leaving Kingston and coming back home, a more regulated errancy started to come into my life. An often strained and grotesque balancing act between being true to myself and moderating my behaviour. Perhaps the clearest indication of the second was abruptly cutting back on my drinking and of the first doing so without fuss or difficulty. But of course something is always left out when I credit to myself these Prince Harry-like growths. For as true as they may be, it gives no indication of an often uncertain and sometimes floundering persona that, though not visible to the world, was more than well acquainted with the private chambers of my mind.

Various events (written in italics) that illustrate what I claim in this section or else contradict it in the manner of truth-telling

Things unfolded thus. As a student at Red River Community College, I heard tell of a speech competition. I decided to enter it for no other reason, I think, than to be a bit of a showboat. As preparation, I wrote a long windy satirical review of a movie that was then playing in theatres all around the world. Not satisfied with this treatment of a topical matter, I tried to capitalize on, for the sake of humour, a current rage for shocking people and, at the same time, putting oneself briefly in the public eye. It was called streaking and involved running nude and at top speed across a field or stage at various sporting events and spectacles. However, lacking the confidence to do all of this (or even pretend to do some of it) at a gathering of a few hundred people, I resorted to downing a few ounces of hard liquor shortly before showtime. Then, wearing a bathrobe and taking my turn with other speech makers, I did well enough (though I flubbed the ending and didn't do anything shocking) to get the laughs I wanted. A couple of days after this,

my second oldest sister's boyfriend challenged me on my reasons for doing it. What he said was sufficiently provocative that it aroused in me a stern and threatening response to which he maintained an absolute silence.

What moves must I next make to show the moves of yesteryear as being on the road to greatness while sometimes being vain, foolish, dubious, violent, and debased? What would be the consequences of not doing so, of covering over their messiness, of underplaying the less attractive side of all my striving? Wouldn't it be the usual thing of portraying the relatively well turned out life as having nothing in common with what sometimes leads to the criminal and even monstrous? Wouldn't it be to absolve errancy as I have characterized it or characterized my life with it of any complicity in folly, in the anti-social, in ruthless ambition, or any combination of these? How am I to understand my life as having used and yet in some sense *gone by* these elements (as practises or fixations or, for that matter, pathologies) if I don't address them as part of my subject?

There were a couple of other incidents that happened not too long after my Kingston days and were more violent and less justifiable (at least in their level of violence) than my squaring off with my second oldest sister's boyfriend. One was at our karate club's Christmas party. It involved a racial slur and a fight in a parking lot. Something to do with a black guy I was drinking with and then taking it upon myself to repair the injury. The other was up North and, although the fellow I got into a fight with was a complete fool, I myself got worked up into a white heat over nothing more than his refusal to listen to good sense and agree with me on some historical point.⁴

Yet it makes no sense to go the other way and exaggerate the foolishness of the angry young man pose. In some ways it was merely a role I was trying out and a bit of theatre I put on at odd times. It was never accompanied with visions of hurting someone seriously and, indeed, I could no more think of myself making a treacherous move than I could imagine willingly jumping off a precipice.

I seemed to have this thing about being treacherous towards my sisters though. It was the youngest one I fancied after Kingston and, of course, no longer did I have the excuse of being a mere thirteen or fourteen-year-old. She lay sleeping on the sofa one evening with her bare legs under the covers. I crept up and started feeling her. Suddenly she woke up, pulled sharply at the disturbed blanket, and, without a word, turned away from me.

There is no question I started putting some order into my life. It was nothing dramatic in the beginning but it eventually led to my going back to school and doing well. Indeed, I struggled to get the best marks in the class and even went so far as to apply to get into a two-year professional program. But I bailed out when I saw that it would have no more led to the fulfilment of my highest hope than staying in Kingston.

Indeed, it wasn't the best start in Winnipeg when I got into that accident. I had lost my licence in Kingston for impaired driving and now, after having smacked into a little Volkswagen and sent it spinning, I had some fast talking to do. Unfortunately the driver of the other car turned out to be an off-duty police officer. I was arrested and later had to go to court. It was humiliating and not something I wanted to repeat.

And certainly getting some stability in my work life didn't hurt matters. A small family-owned company whose owners ended up treating me like a member of the family! How will I ever know what this simple fact meant in terms of making me responsive to the good will and humanity of others? Here I found two fatherly types who didn't seem to resent (as my father had) having to deal with the world. In their simple society I found a fairness and friendship that I can almost say was without fault. And when, as a doctoral student many years later, I got word that one of them had died, I was more overcome by emotion than when, several years before, I had got word of my father's death.

With Gerd and Roman I got along famously right from the start. With Horst it was another matter. Whereas the first two spent their day in work clothes directing things on the job, the latter spent his day in a business suit seeing customers. Whereas the first two spoke freely, openly, and with much good humour, the third kept a certain reserve only broken by subtle and sardonic remarks. Although I never got into the least altercation with him or ever was given reason to distrust him, I nonetheless felt uneasy in his presence. Certainly he smiled enough, was always friendly, and could even be flattering on occasion. Yet long was I past the age not to be aware that these traits could easily be counterfeited. It was a situation that, like many situations, goes on for some time without changing its colours. At the least significant level, it remained nothing more than observing the diamond ring on Horst's finger and the lack of one on Gerd's or Roman's. But then came the day that triggered certain developments. It started with a phone call I got from Horst while I was working up North. Very briefly he told me he had dissolved his partnership with Gerd and Roman and started up a new company. He needed a foreman and so his reason for calling me. Later I

met with him and more or less accepted his offer. But very soon I paid a visit to both Gerd and Roman to make sure they had no objections to it. Then, only a day or two later, I received another call from Horst and, in a stern voice, he forbade me to have anything more to do with his brothers. Without hesitation I told him that what I did off the job was my own affair. He persisted in the matter and so I dissolved both our conversation and our agreement in a most abrupt and impolite way.

It must have been talking to the Lohre brothers that helped propel me towards planning my European trip. What a different state of mind had come upon me after a year of so back in Winnipeg! For just as had been the case when I returned from Montreal, I returned from Kingston initially suffering from a sense of having no direction. It was sometimes so acute that being back with my family gave me no pleasure. It even led me to repeat the pathetic gesture of contacting a former employer to get my job back.

How can I give a shape to this strange malaise except by saying that I often felt that my true home was some place where I had already been or was yet to go? And that when the latter seemed particularly obscure or blocked off, then the former would loom up as a nostalgia for former haunts and ways of living? So much so that, at the time of returning to Winnipeg from Kingston, it was as if Carl and Ronnie and even Kenny had become members of a family closer to me than my flesh-and-blood one.

Again, how is it that the most human or even humane sometimes comes to us from afar? Or that we ourselves can feel more at ease with strangers than members of our own family? When I was a child in Chambly, I sat at the same table every day with other children whose frame of reference was largely the same as mine. A common mother and father, a common house and home, a common school, a common number of other things. My identification with my family then was intense and seemingly without flaw. So much so that it continued to resound in me as the natural state even after it had long changed. Perhaps behind my somewhat premature or precocious nostalgia was the recognition, however reluctant, that the process of turning the foreign into the familiar is also the process of turning the familiar into the foreign. Education in the broadest sense takes us very early to different intellectual, emotional, and imaginative lands. There too we find a home and in some sense a more powerful and abiding one than all others.

My brother was sixteen and already in advance of me on at least one front. Tremendously outgoing and personable, he had no difficulty with the

opposite sex. It was a new experience for me to meet him as an equal and sometimes a superior.

My oldest sister was twenty and had already acquired a lot of poise. A tall statuesque blonde who regularly dated young men moving up in the world, she was full of social grace and with an ability to talk intelligently and candidly on many matters.

My second oldest sister was eighteen and a rival to me in her intelligence. Had she been a stronger person, I would have feared her as one to surpass me.

My third oldest sister was fourteen and, perhaps because she was still developing, didn't impress me as much as the other two.

It was my youngest sister I fancied after Kingston and, of course, no longer did I have the excuse of being a mere thirteen or fourteen-year-old. She lay sleeping on the sofa one evening with her bare legs under the covers. I crept up and started feeling her. Suddenly she woke up, pulled sharply at the disturbed blanket, and, without a word, turned away from me.

And as for my father, well, that has always been a complicated business. As complicated for me as it was for my brother to have a relationship with my mother. The long and short of it is that he was never again to be a regular presence in my life.

Before I returned to Winnipeg from Kingston, my father had gone to Ireland. Then, some time later, I received a letter from him telling me he was in good health but penniless. Then, a year or so after, he popped up in Winnipeg unannounced. During his brief stay, I met with him on a few occasions. While these encounters were agreeable enough, it was somewhat strange and unsettling to come across him in these changed circumstances. How could I ever understand what he was up to or what he was about? This person who, in middle age, had hitchhiked across Canada to get to Winnipeg and then, after only a few months working up North, went to a country where, although being born there, he had no relatives he cared about or cared about him? Who would then come back for a third and final visit to his hometown and not seem troubled by the fact that his children had all become strangers?

What remains to be said of this period except that I planned skilfully and at length for my great adventure? I who had never made an attempt to save up

money now did so without difficulty. The rest can be summed up by saying I was absolutely fit in mind and body some two years after having left Kingston.

First I picked up the young man. He was about thirty and on his way to the West Coast. With a friendly air and a hippie-like but mature look about him, he told me that he and a number of other people from the Toronto area – men, women, and children – had planned and set up a commune somewhere in the British Columbia wilderness. We had a chance to talk at length before I spotted two attractive girls hitchhiking on the highway. Stopping the car with haste and excitement, I perhaps experienced as much sexual pleasure when they pulled open the car doors as I would have if they had pulled my clothes off. Little do I remember of what we talked about from that point on except that it was carried on in an amicable enough way. With this and some sixteen hours of driving still ahead of us before we arrived in Winnipeg, I eventually ended up with one of the girls in the backseat while the guy heading for the West Coast took over the wheel. At about the same time I had purchased some liquor and, in the back seat with this girl, began to drink. I can only think now I soon got loaded but without upsetting anyone or any disorder. And yet it was also without the desirable effect of seeing others, particularly the one beside me, follow me in my debauchery. No, this girl as well as the other one (not to mention the driver) must have kept a clear head all the way to Winnipeg. At any rate, when they finally got out to continue hitchhiking, I drove away from them alone in my car with the distinct feeling I was an out-and-out failure.

*

1 I remember it as follows: "There is no security except that within."

2 One incident sticks out in my mind. It happened not too long ago at a private language school where I was teaching English to a group of bright young ambitious people who, though they were training to be diplomats, were not the most respectful students I have ever had. The incident in question took place at a Halloween party held by this same school and in a government building where the school was set up temporarily and operating on a contractual basis. It was on this occasion – the occasion of the Halloween party – I made a ridiculous attempt to impress a twenty-two-year-old woman who was one of my students and who, if I'm not mistaken, had been flirting with me. (What a beautiful yet tormenting child she was! Only a poem could do her justice which, as it happens, did get written.*) In any event, after some initial reservations about this quasi-office event, I ended up dressing up and trying to look sexy for the young sorceress – and so she was aptly dressed – by going as a biker with bandanna, extra-tight jeans, and cowboy boots. Later I couldn't help but be disgusted with myself for, first of all, going along with this latest effort by the school to please its clientele. (In such circumstances, I always got the feeling that I was risking my personal if not my professional dignity by some obsequious act.) Secondly, for doing so in a way that made me resemble that hapless middle-aged professor in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.

***Marie-Eve**

She prefers to be called Marie,
this sweet cantankerous – what shall I call her? –
this child-woman of twenty-two
who sits in my English class (a francophone student)
and who can smile so sweetly at me
or scowl like the devil when she's in a bad mood,
when she's in a blue funk, which happens quite often,
and which makes her very bitchy and hard to deal with.

She prefers to be called Marie,
and be reminded of the Holy Mother
(I suspect) and not the mother of all mankind
who was the first to have truck with the Devil and who,
with her *own* power of seduction
(with her power, that is, over a weak Adam),
brought sin into the old pre-feminist "faith-of our-fathers
-and-our-fathers-fathers" world.

She prefers to be called Marie,
this ambitious, hard, and tight-bodied creature,
this brilliant young woman whose terribly quick mind
and whose terribly quick lacerating tongue
make me stand in awe of her "great" ambition,
which is to tame this tongue for diplomatic work in overseas lands,
and thereby effectively remove the paradox now afflicting her,
combining adolescent unruliness and fierce independence of spirit
with the attempt to follow a strict government path
and straighten herself out like an arrow.

She prefers to be called Marie,
But "Marie-Eve" sounds fine to my ears.
I suppose I'm in love with the play of forces which I see in her
and which her true name evokes in a mythical way.
It doesn't hurt to see as well that she has freckles on her nose
and that her face is as fresh as an Irish rose.
O Youth, flutter your wings as long as you can
and let us older ones be thankful for it!

3 After quitting my uncle over a wage dispute, I went to work for another horse owner. Like my uncle had done when I was still a shy and introverted adolescent, he tried to chew me out on at least one occasion. He was an old man pleasant enough most of the time and certainly had a right to get angry with me when I unwittingly endangered one of his horses. However, his tone was too indignant to suit me and so, with my newfound assertiveness always ready to flare up, I gave back to him everything in good measure.

4 More accurately, this ignorant but not-so-dumb kitchen worker refused to believe me when I told him about the Norman invasion and how French had been the official language of England for two hundred years.