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TRANSLATION OF AND INTRODUCTION TO
"FEERIE POUR UNE AUTRE FOIS" BY LOUIS-FERDINAND CELINE:
"FABLE FOR ANOTHER TIME"

by

Mary Regina Hudson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1998

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Introduction: The Book

Féerie pour une autre fois may be the most ambitious of all the works of Louis-Ferdinand Céline. It is an extraordinarily complex and multi-faceted work, consisting of two distinct parts, Féerie pour une autre fois I and Féerie pour une autre fois II: Normance, which on the surface bear little resemblance to each other. But they constitute a monumental work dealing with the bombing of Paris in the spring of 1944, the author's flight from his Montmartre home and his eventual imprisonment. They bridge the gap between his pre-war works and the "German trilogy," those novels which "chronicle" the author's flight through Germany as the Third Reich crumbles around him. Féerie pour une autre fois I is based on the author's prison experience and contains 170 pages of text and 87 pages of explanatory notes in the Pléiade edition, the one which was used for this translation. Féerie pour une autre fois II or Normance in the same edition is almost twice as long and has only 50 pages of notes. Two-thirds of it is devoted to the events of one single night: that of 21-22 April 1944, when the Allied air command dropped their bombs on the La Chapelle Station area and its environs, inflicting on Paris the worst damage it was to experience during the whole war. According to Professeur Henri Godard, editor of the Pléiade edition of Céline's novels, the two books were originally conceived of as a single work, but it evolved into two distinct books, the first becoming a "prelude" to the second. Indeed, all of the events of Céline's life after he fled from Paris were originally seen as the emotional fuel for one great work, but finally saw the light of day as his five post-war novels as mentioned above.¹

Féerie pour une autre fois I is unique among the novelistic writings of Céline. All of Céline's novels are a vibrant and compelling mix of phantasmagoria and autobiography. They recount in distorted, exaggerated and often hallucinatory language, the author's travels, daily activities and relationships, and contain a constant stream of his mocking, often indignant, sometimes outrageous observations and musings on human foibles, rendered in his own singular, fierce style of lyrical but raunchy proletarian French. These two qualities are astonishingly combined to form the hallmark of "Célinian" writing.

Coming mid-way in his literary career, Féerie pour une autre fois not only represented for Céline a turning point in his development, but was at the same time his most singular work. Like his previous and subsequent novels, it is intimately related to his own personal experience and feelings. However, it differs from his other novels in one important point: when he wrote his other novels he did so as a free man, stealing time from his duties as a medical doctor or passing countless nocturnal hours depriving himself of sleep in order to pour out the tumultuous ramblings that constantly erupted from his mischievous genius. When he began Féerie, on the other hand, he was a prisoner. It thus has the peculiarity of being written at the time of his life when Céline was the most self-tormented, the most persecuted, the most vulnerable. Perhaps the greatest virtue of this novel is that it very much carries the mark of prison writings. On every page one senses the frantic restlessness of the convict. The usual prisoner's preoccupations and obsessions are ever present: the inhuman conditions, the noises, the aggressive and hostile relationships with the guards and fellow-prisoners, the solitude, the nostalgia for one's home and former freedom, seeing the world in terms of "them" (on the outside) and "us"

(in here), even the ruminations on one's wife's infidelity. It is also obvious that the act of writing became under these circumstances an even more necessary escape from every-day reality into the better world of the imagination.

Genesis

Tens of thousands of handwritten pages of prior versions of Féerie have been dispersed throughout numerous, mainly private collections.² Scholars disagree on the exact timing of the writing of the two parts of the novel, but part I was most probably written before part II, during the most trying days of his imprisonment.³ Although most of Normance is devoted to a typically Célinian, fantastic and dream-like rendering of the bombing of the outskirts of Paris, it is much more even-handed in tone than the first volume. Féerie veritably bristles with rage and impotence -- the impotence of the trapped and wounded animal. It is no accident that it is dedicated to animals, to the sick, and to prisoners.⁴ Also, the author's accounts of prison life contained in Féerie are so vivid that we can easily believe that they were written *à vif* -- at the painful time they were being lived, whereas references to prison life are virtually absent from Normance. In any case, the text was rewritten a number of times and not finished until 1951. In the novel itself we are told that it had been written in different places: in prison, in a dilapidated old house on the Baltic Sea where the author spent two years in exile, as well as in France. With his usual cavalier disregard for literal truth the author states: "I'm writing you this from everywhere by the way. from my place in Montmartre! from the depths of my Baltavian

prison! and at the same time from the seaside, from our hut.”^{a/5} Since we know that the idea for writing this work came only after his flight from Montmartre and that he never returned there, he could not have written any of it there. He no doubt meant his final home in Meudon in the southwestern suburbs of Paris. But this confusion of time, place and fact is purposeful on the part of the writer, and will continue throughout the book.

The book's contents

The work contains little by way of narrative. It opens in the narrator's Montmartre apartment overlooking Paris as the city awaits its liberation at the hands of the Allied forces. The wife and son of an old friend and fellow World War I veteran, who now, significantly, disdains to call on him, are paying him an untoward visit. He can't extract from them the reason why they are there, but sees it as an omen of things to come. They seem to be looking around for spoils in anticipation of the “General Sale” of his possessions which will take place as soon as he flees for his life. After this introductory segment there is a long tirade about his persecution, and it is only after about 20 pages that we learn the narrator is in prison, as he is paid the first of many visits by the French Legation's representative to Denmark, “Hortensia,” whom the narrator accuses both of persecuting and of lusting after him. From this point on in the novel, scenes of prison life with its constant noises are interspersed with nostalgic memories of the narrator's former

^a Je vous l'écris de partout par le fait! de Montmartre chez moi! du fond de ma prison baltave! et en même temps du bord de la mer, de notre cahute!

life in France, with the snippets of song the narrator shares with the reader, and with episodes of what can only be described as paranoid hallucinations. One of the most charming sections of the book is the Saint-Malo episode in which an eccentric fin-de-siècle casino represents the halcyon days of a better, bygone France. These soothing escapes into his fond memories are constantly interrupted by the screams of the other prisoners and by the narrator's obsessive fantasies of being tortured by the public, represented throughout the work by the unnamed interlocutor who casts insults at the narrator and who is insulted in turn. The narrator sees himself as being hounded and harrowed by mobs of his fellow countrymen when he's not being drawn and quartered, disemboweled, strappadoed, or otherwise put to the most awful torture.

If the post-war public in a vengeful mood represents for the narrator all that is wrong with the world, the French Army of the Great War represents all that is right. Ironically, considering the author's vociferous anti-war stance in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, the narrator takes his record as a wounded World War I veteran as proof both of his innocence of the charges against him and of his worth as a man. He relives in prison a grand military review that took place at Longchamps in July of 1914, recapturing the great patriotic fervor of the day. This scene is related to that of the "First Specters," the ghostly regiment of the French army which vindicates him and indicts his accusers. The longest hallucinatory episode, that of the wheelbarrow, involves the writers Paul Claudel (Ciborium), Jean-Paul Sartre (Nartre), Louis Aragon (Larengon) and Elsa Triolet (Elsa) who cart the narrator off to the sewer marshes of Archères to be dumped in a cesspool. Otherwise, until the final fantastic scene of Montmartre under the Allies' reconnaissance

planes, the narrator vociferates about his various grievances, blending them into his memories. His grumbling about the Americanization of popular culture, the cinema's increasing encroachment into the lives of the reading public, the incessant noises from the other cells and from his inner ear, his illnesses, his long-suffering wife and cat, his stays in the prison's infirmary, are intermingled with episodes from his past such as bumping into an ex-sister-in-law, his mother's death, his schooling, etc.

The final section of the book deals with the seduction of his wife by his friend "Julot" as the city braces itself for the imminent bombing which will be the subject of Normance. The character "Julot" or "le Jules" is based on the author's real-life friend, the painter and local Montmartre character Gen Paul. Julot commits another unforgivable sin besides that of seducing his wife: he taunts Ferdinand by calling him a "bosch" -- a "Kraut" -- in front of friends and neighbors who are already looking on him with a jaundiced eye because of his pro-Nazi writings. This double betrayal will win Julot the role of the Evil Genius who orchestrates the Allied bombing from the top of the *Moulin de la Galette* in the second volume of the work.

The novel as prologue to a "pantomime"

Significantly, Féerie pour une autre fois I did not carry the designation "novel" on the cover when it was published in June of 1952.⁶ This is no doubt because the author did not view it as a novel, or at least not the kind of novel he had previously written.

Céline always had a great love of dance and the theater, especially of the light

variety, the musical comedies or operettas which were so popular at the time of his childhood. He often made references to them in his works and remembered going with his grandmother to see a number of them at the turn of the century. It was always his ambition to write for the theater, and as many observers have pointed out, the failure of his play "L'Eglise" in 1936 was in part responsible for the embitterment which culminated in the writing of the notorious pamphlets in the years to follow. Marie-Christine Bellosta in her article "Féerie pour une autre fois I et II: un spectacle et son prologue," makes the case that the author conceived this novel more as a work of theater than as a fictional work, a musical comedy of the kind popular at the turn of the century known precisely by the name of "féerie," whose closest English equivalent would be "pantomime." Normance would be the pantomime and Féerie pour une autre fois I (which we will refer to as Féerie) its prologue. Evidence for this conception is found throughout the work. We, the readers, are the audience who will assist at this operetta. At the outset, we are represented by Clemence and her son Pierre with whose nosy and self-serving visit the work commences. And there are a mass of fellow-onlookers crowding around the door, awaiting their turn to enter:

You wait on line at the writer's door as at the entrance to a theater; Parisians are all dreaming of spectacular executions -- 'Program, darling?' -- All these resisters of tomorrow are experiencing history, Céline tells us, as one long show, and they expect him to figure among the attractions. He's besieged by a circle of onlookers. "They" want a show? "They" will get one, but an innocuous one, a literary one,

Normance.³⁷

The narrator then takes on the role of a fairgrounds hawker, urging the public to buy the book as if he were exhorting them to enter a particular attraction at a fair or traveling circus. All sorts of wondrous things are promised them if they buy the book: they'll die laughing, choke with pleasure, will never go hungry and even enjoy "l'agonie chouette," a painless death!

In this regard Féerie also serves as a transition between the type of discourse to be found in the pamphlets and that of Normance. The pamphlets were so hysterical in tone that they were beyond the pale of literature altogether, belonging instead to a peculiar genre of demented journalism, of which they remain the most extraordinary example. In Féerie, the hysteria, although still present, is softened, and there is a renewed bid to achieve artistic balance. The tone of Normance is quite different from that of the first volume; it is purposely lighthearted, it is a "féerie." Despite its mythic, otherworldly quality, it is essentially a carefree comedy. The rage and venting of spleen of part I here give way to a colorful spectacle which becomes the occasion for the author to return to his former equilibrium (which was always tenuous at best, for exaggeration was always his hallmark) and regale the audience with his most good-natured humor. Féerie alerts us to this change. Numerous references are made throughout to the world of operettas:

³

In French: On fait la 'queue' à la porte de l'écrivain comme à l'entrée du théâtre; tous les Parisiens rêvent d'exécutions spectaculaires. ' - Programme, chérie?' Tous ces résistants du lendemain vivent l'histoire, nous dit Céline, comme un spectacle permanent, et attendent de lui qu'il figure parmi les attractions. Il est assiégé par un cercle de regards. 'Ils' veulent du spectacle? 'Ils' en auront, mais de l'inoffensif, du littéraire, Normance.

to mime the operetta is to immerse himself in the opposite of the reality around him, of the unhappiness in which he lives, of this gleeful ‘Slaughterhouse’ where history so happily makes its home, and of his own political pronouncements which caused him so much ‘trouble’!^{2/8}

Although they differ in tone and content, there is one striking similarity between the two works, and that is their “*décor sonore fantastique*,” the fantastic auditory decor. The constant noises from within and without the prison serve as a preparation for the earth-shattering sounds of the second part of the work:

What is more silent, ordinarily, than a prison, what more noisy than a bombing? The reader is nonetheless deafened by the same noises during the monologue sequences of *Féerie I* that take place in a prison cell as during the whole of *Féerie II*. It’s as if the cell were the antichamber of the theater’s auditorium: from the other side of the wall Céline hears the noises of *Normance*. This aligning of the sounds of *Féerie I* on those of *Féerie II* is somewhat lacking in verisimilitude: the volume is pushed to its maximum throughout the book, and just as the bombing will scarcely let up during all

a

mimer l’opérette, c’est prendre le contre-pied de la réalité qui l’entoure, de ce malheur où il vit, de cet ‘Abattoir’ joyeux où l’histoire se complaît et de son propre discours politique qui lui a causé tellement ‘d’ennuis’!

of *Normance*, we see the Danish prison in perpetual uproar.¹⁹

Aside from preparing the “spectators” for the pitch of the bombings, the prologue also sets out the mythological references which will guide the reading of *Normance*. The three most important scenes of the novel, that of Saint-Malo, the wheelbarrow and the “First Specters,” represent respectively the “Belle Epoque,” the Judeo-Christian, and the Greek mythological framework of the work. Like many older people, often of a conservative bent, Céline believed that the years of his youth were a better time, not only for himself, but *objectively*. The “Belle Epoque” represented for him throughout his oeuvre, but especially in this work, the true France, the France of insouciant laughter, the France of moral fiber and human decency. He saw the time of his childhood and youth as that magical world, the fairyland of the title, which is now irrevocably lost. It is a place to which he repeatedly escapes in his imagination, always cast in comforting contrast in this work to the horrible reality of the present. There are also in this novel more references to Christian iconography and philosophy than in Céline’s other works. In the wheelbarrow hallucination, for instance, Christian symbolism is heavily borrowed. The sign of the cross is made by Ciborium and Nartre while, quite blasphemously, they urinate on the narrator. If the scenes where the “First Specters” intervene are somewhat baffling it is because they

¹⁹ Quoi de plus silencieux, ordinairement, qu’une prison, quoi de plus bruyant qu’un bombardement? Le lecteur est cependant assourdi par les mêmes bruits pendant les séquences du monologue de Féerie I qui se situent dans une cellule de prison et pendant tout Féerie II. Tout se passe comme si la cellule était l’antichambre de la salle de spectacle: Céline entend, de l’autre côté du mur, les bruits de Normance. Cet alignement de la sonorisation de Féerie I sur celle de Féerie II ne va pas sans quelque invraisemblance: le volume sonore est poussé au maximum tout au long du livre, et, de même que le bombardement ne s’apaisera guère durant tout Normance, nous ne voyons la prison danoise qu’en perpétuel branle-bas.

invoke the mythic place which is the setting for Normance, that is, hell as conceived of by the ancients, a place dominated by uncontrollable evil forces, which becomes transposed here into the France of the "épuration." References to cyclopes, the furies, Homer, etc. prepare the reader for the eerie, dream-like quality of Normance.

However, Féerie is not merely a prologue to Normance. It is many other things at the same time: it is an attack on the post-war French government in which the notion of *la curée*, the author's hounding and persecution by his fellow-countrymen, becomes a study of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless and an indictment against opportunism. It is a tirade against his literary rivals and enemies. It is a sketch of Montmartre in the days before his flight to Germany. It is a prelude to a myth -- the myth of his own fall, as depicted in Normance. It is as a prison chronicle that it is the most affecting. It is an obsessive monologue, but it is also a dialogue with his public. Through this dialogue, he attempts explicitly to regain the former favor of his readers, albeit through the singular means of brow-beating them into buying his book, and what is more, into hawking it around the streets of Paris. At the same time he implicitly tries to exculpate himself in this exchange with the reader, significantly however, without ever mentioning the reasons for his having been arrested in the first place. Above all, it is an extraordinary literary endeavor in which the writer, having failed to impose his ideas in his political writings, returns to fiction with a vengeance so to speak, and delves more deeply than he had ever done into the French language and its possibilities, stretching them to the limit. In so doing, he produced a literary monument in which formal concerns far outweigh the importance of narrative content, and which anticipated the era of "le nouveau roman."

Narrator as victim

Time and again during the course of this work, the narrator returns to the theme of the hunter and the hunted. He himself is invariably the prey. In prison and at the mercy of the Danish authorities and the French post-war government, he ruminates about his situation and compares it to that of his fellow artists, whether collaborators like himself or not, who are exempt from the kind of punishment being inflicted on him. The following passage is representative of these ruminations:

While I'm thinking of it, remembering... they grabbed my medal off me... three magic words! "no more medal!" the same way they'd have taken a pop at my head wounds... yeh, I wouldn't be horsing around like this right now... I wouldn't be seeing anybody all over my walls... or that other one come out at me either, Hortensia, to offer me his Louis XV ass fucking! I'd be on target, doing the right thing, old boy!... I'd be writing Odes like Ciborium, I'd be signing over big engines to Stupnagel too, and lots of little satin slippers^a... I'd be one of those prison "popovers" like Sasa^b... one of Philippe's old guard like Auduc^c... maybe

^a

A reference to Paul Claudel, whose 1943 play "*Le Soulier de satin*" was a great success and who had written poems first to Maréchal Pétain, then to Charles DeGaulle.

^b

A reference to Sacha Guitry, had been an open supporter of collaboration during the war, and who got off relatively lightly after the war, having served only two months in prison.

^c

Philippe is Philippe Pétain, and Auduc André Maurois whose real name was Herzog, German for "duke" ("duc" in French). In his memoirs, Maurois notes that

I'd be a Swiss Guard?... who knows, own stocks in *Le Figaro*? like Saint Francis the Immaterial!^a What couldn't I lay claim to?... take Pétain's place on the Ile Ré^b, live a hundred years like him?... All you have to do is toot the flute right!... I'd be cock'nbulling it over cocktails at Lévy's place^c... nobody would've stole my beds, or the final manuscripts of five novels, or the esteem of General Ben Chancellor of the Legion of Honor...^{d/e10}

In part I as in part II, Ferdinand sees himself as victim rather than as perpetrator:

A bit like Bloom, Joyce's modern Ulysses, *Normance*'s Ferdinand is also a

he'd frequented Pétain before the war in the French Information Office in the USA.

^a Reference to François Mauriac, who'd demonstrated more sympathetic interest in Céline than most of his fellow writers, but who refused to help Céline at the moment of his trial in France in 1950. After the war, he continued to write for *Le Figaro*, becoming a spokesman for the Resistance fighters' point of view.

^b Pétain was serving his sentence at the time on the Isle of Yeu.

^c Paul Lévy, owner of the weekly, "*Aux écoutes*," defender of Céline while he was in Denmark.

^d From 1944 to 1954 the High Chancellor of the Legion of Honor was General Bloch-Dassault, brother of the industrialist Marcel Dassault.

^e In French: Puisque je réfléchis là... mémore... ils m'ont secoué ma médaille... trois mots magiques! 'plus de médaille!' ils m'auraient soufflé pareil sur les blessures de ma tête je déconnerais plus l'heure actuelle... je verrais plus personne plein mes murs... ni l'autre émerger, Hortensia, m'offrir ses trouffigneries Louis XV! Je serais dans la logique, les bons us!... je rédigerais des Odes comme Ciboire, je signerais des gros moteurs aussi, pour Stupnagel, et plein de petits souliers de satin... des 'soufflés' de prison comme Sasa... vieille garde de Philippe comme Auduc... zouave papal?... rentier qui sait au Figaro? come saint François 'l'immatériel'?... à quouasque je pourrais pas prétendre?... remplacer Pétain à l'île Ré, vivre cent ans comme lui?... Le tout de jouer la flûte dans le bon sens!...j'irais au coquetèle chez Lévy... personne m'aurait volé mes lits, ni mes épures de cinq romans, ni l'estime du général Ben Chancelier de la Légion d'Honneur...

modern counterpart of an ancient hero, a chronicler mixed up in his own hallucination who, like the epic protagonist, must survive trials that his own fevered brain has unloosed. The delirium that issues forth from the cracked head and the historic madness that according to Céline gave rise to the Purge come together in this mythic world where a diabolical conflagration is unfolding over Paris and obliges the narrator to transform himself into a toga-clad chronicler. Normance is thus the myth of Céline's fall. ^{2/11}

The reasons why the author is incapable of seeing himself as anything other than a victim are touched upon by the Céline scholar Patrick McCarthy, who analyses the emotional impulse that underpins *Féerie*. In an article entitled "Féerie pour une autre fois: le roman de la jalousie" he makes the case that the author's envy is the driving force behind the book, one example of which is the scattering throughout the work of numerous disparaging allusions to other writers. Although the narrator is often clever enough to disguise his envy through parody and irony (and through his constant claim that the envy of his fellows caused his own downfall) at other times it is more explicit. He has a number of "frères-ennemis" of whom he is envious -- Montaigne, modern Catholic authors like Mauriac, Claudel, and the leftist ones such as Camus and Sartre.

2

Un peu à la manière de Bloom, l'Ulysse moderne de Joyce, le Ferdinand de Normance est aussi un double moderne d'un héros ancien, un chroniqueur embrouillé dans sa propre hallucination, qui doit à l'instar d'un protagoniste épique survivre aux épreuves que son propre vertige a déchaînées. Le délire qui sort de la tête fêlée et la démence historique qui, selon Céline, a donné naissance à l'Épuration coïncident dans cette représentation d'un monde mythique où une conflagration diabolique déferle sur Paris et oblige le narrateur Ferdinand à se transformer en chroniqueur habillé en toge. Normance serait donc le mythe de la chute de Céline.

Although these latter two share Céline's tragic vision, they transcend tragedy through revolt. The Catholic writers on the other hand transcend it through the idea of redemption.

Céline's work swarms with allusions to religion and one of the central images of *Féerie* is that of Christ on the cross. But the sense of sin is not at all accompanied in Céline by a sense of redemption. Thus his furious ridiculing of the Claudelian conception of grace. What he does is oppose Mauriac and Claudel's Catholicism to the Célinian religion where defiance replaces penitence and language replaces grace. However, Céline does not limit himself to speaking about writers who seem to be his rivals. In *Féerie* he includes various cultures and time periods -- from Dostoyevsky to the *Review of the two worlds*. This is because his jealousy is total and because the world exists, not as Gide said, in order to culminate in a book, but to culminate in a single Célinian book, whose different chapters are called *Journey to the end of the night*, *Death on the Installment Plan*, and *Féerie*.^{4/12}

It would seem, however, that if there is an emotive impulse to this work it is

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L'oeuvre de Céline fourmille d'allusions à la religion et l'une des images centrales de *Féerie* est celle du Christ et de la croix. Mais le sens du péché ne s'accompagne point chez Céline du sens de la rédemption. De là, la fureur qu'il met à ridiculiser la conception claudélienne de la grâce. Il s'agit d'opposer au catholicisme de Mauriac et de Claudel la religion célinienne où le défi remplace la pénitence et le langage remplace la grâce. Et pourtant Céline ne se limite pas à parler des écrivains qui semblent être ses rivaux. Dans *Féerie* il fait le tour des cultures et de époques -- de Dostoïevski à la *Revue des deux mondes*. C'est que sa jalousie est totale et que le monde existe, non pas comme Gide l'a dit pour aboutir à un livre, mais pour aboutir au seul livre célinien dont les chapitres différents s'appellent *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, *Mort à crédit* et *Féerie*.

something more profound than envy or jealousy. It is a deeper psychic phenomenon altogether. A reading of Mort à crédit will provide a good understanding of the psychological make-up of the protagonist who appears in all of Céline's works. Subjected to the hysterical contempt and bombastic rantings of an abusive father, the young Ferdinand feels both self-loathing and impotent rage. As an adult Ferdinand demonstrates the personality traits of someone who is more than just a little paranoid. His self-esteem is of the lowest. From *Voyage au bout de la nuit* onwards he constantly belittles himself. He sees himself as reviled by others as he mocks and despises himself. He is wracked with envy for others' success; in his earlier works he is bemused by his failures, in the later works he is galled by them. Above all, he needs a scapegoat to blame for his own sufferings. In Normance it is Julot. The scapegoat in Féerie is the post-war public as personified by the reader. These very people had been his worshipers and now they have turned against him. Although he never alludes to the reasons he is in prison, we know that if the narrator's experience is as true to the author's as it is in all the other of his works, his public turned against him because he chose to revile an innocent and extremely vulnerable group of people and support the Nazis against the forces of democracy. But this he is incapable of admitting, as Allan Thiher points out:

Whether you call it a novel or a pamphlet or a hoax, [*Féerie*] seems to upset people especially because Céline refuses to behave in a manner befitting an ex-"fascist" or a political prisoner, or perhaps *Féerie* makes us uneasy merely because in it Céline continues to refuse to see what common sense should have forced him to see. And common sense concludes that this work, which is totally lacking in

contrition, is an extravagant piece of writing by a man who is too unsure of himself to transform his hate into literature. This is an understandable and widespread opinion, but one with which we the readers cannot completely concur once we get carried away by the verbal flow of this book, by the laughter that it provokes and the spell cast by the writing which seems to want to mime evil itself.^{2/13}

Because he is incapable of seeing that he has done anything wrong, he insists that it is not he, but the people that imprisoned him, who are irrational. And naturally, he will play up - - as he does in the extract quoted above and throughout his post-war works -- all the instances he can find of the opportunists who like the “weathervanes” in *Féerie*, turned with the prevailing political winds and became latter-day Resisters after at least tolerating if not supporting the Nazis. His insights into the nature of political opportunism are self-serving, but nonetheless astute. The role of *Féerie* as a transition between the pamphlets and the rest of his post-war oeuvre becomes very clear in this regard. The author’s “psychotic disorder characterized by delusions of persecution or grandeur, often strenuously rationalized”¹⁴ found its fullest expression in the pamphlets. He must now rein in this disorder and recover enough mental balance to produce a work of art, for as

² Qu’ on le traite de roman, de pamphlet, ou de mystification, [*Féerie*] semble gêner surtout parce que Céline refuse de respecter les bienséances auxquelles un ancien ‘fasciste’ ou un prisonnier politique devrait prêter obéissance, ou, peut-être plus simplement *Féerie* gêne parce que Céline y continue à refuser de voir ce que le bon sens aurait dû lui imposer. Et au bon sens de conclure que cette oeuvre à laquelle manque la moindre contrition est une extravagance écrite par un homme trop peu sûr de lui-même pour transformer sa haine en littérature. C’est un jugement répandu et sans doute compréhensible, mais qui ne correspond pas tout à fait à notre expérience de lecteur, une fois que nous nous laissons entraîner par le flux verbal de cette oeuvre, par le rire qu’elle provoque et l’envoûtement d’une écriture qui semble vouloir mimer le mal même.

George Orwell pointed out, art cannot be made out of insane ideas, a point to which we will return.

Céline and cinema

The work does have its lighter moments, of which the cinema scene in Saint-Malo is a good example. Reminiscing about holiday makers' attendance at a favorite movie house, the narrator returns to one of his pet themes, the influence of this new art form on people, and in particular on readers:

So you see what I need: guys and gals crazy enough! but the movies? Like a hole in the head! Ah! Just hold on! you gotta watch it! Minotaur of the Murky Depths! who is it that is gobbling up our readers? who's got it all wrapped up on us? sucking us dry? wolfing us down? The Mighty Film! Already the weeklies, those monsters of the newsstands, were half-devouring a helluva lot of the dreamy gawkers, now The Mighty Film is finishing them off! Their brains, their wallets!...^{a/15}

This concern for the pernicious effects that movies had on the size of the reading public was a frequent topic of the author's, whose oft-repeated mockery of the cinema

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Donc des dingues, dingueuses! ce qu'il me faut! mais le Cinéma? Ah, autre histoire! Ah! gafe, et pouce! Minotaure des Antres! qui c'est qui nous bouffe nos lecteurs? qui nous l'enveloppe, pompe, déglutit? Tout-Film! Déjà les hebdomadaires, ces monstes [sic] des kiosques, nous demi-dévoraiement vachement les badauds songeux, Tout-Film achève! Cerveau, porte-monnaie!...

masks a life-long interest in the subject. A number of scholars have thus investigated Céline's relationship to the cinema. An article by Annie Gillain entitled "Féerie pour une autre fois et le cinéma" is helpful in understanding the importance of this book. As she points out, Céline and cinematography appeared simultaneously at the end of the last century. He early on noticed that cinema escaped the "modern-day divorce between the arts and the public" and this gave him pause for the numerous references to the phenomenon of the cinema that appear throughout his works. If the cinema escapes this divorce, she says, it is because it also responsible for provoking it, as this new mode of reproducing reality transformed the relationship between the public and the existing arts. The absorption of information transmitted by the cinema is very different, temporally and perceptually, from that absorbed by looking at a painting or reading a book. Céline shows marked interest in the changes that the mass media in general and the film industry in particular have on literary output as well as on the audience's system of perception. It is argued that his novelistic output bears evidence of his increasingly adapting cinematographic techniques. While film renders old forms of expression outdated, it also suggests a new esthetic formula which Céline incorporates into his work. He happily lets film take over the task of relating a story, but he insists on borrowing from film the kind of psycho-physical effect it has on the viewer.¹⁶

If the novel is an old dethroned king, it is because it cannot reach and mobilize the public's psyche and emotions as directly as the filmed image. Céline wants to vie with the cinema in reproducing this directness, the "métro émotif," a topic to which we will return. What is related is immaterial, and he gradually pays less and less attention to

narrative content. If he has nothing to say it is because that is no longer his aim. Cinema can tell a story better than he can; he refuses to compete on that level. And it is in Féerie that this abandoning of the narrative and the exploration of cinematic conceits is the most evident.¹⁷

This point is of prime importance in understanding the significance of Féerie not only in Céline's work but also for the subsequent history of the novel. Briefly, his aim is to create through words a system of stimuli which is powerful enough to compete with the new form of perception engendered by the film image. The rapid succession of images of the film prevents the spectator from thinking his own thoughts, he is swept away by the power of the ever-changing image. It is in this that Céline wants to mimic the effect of the film and its hold on the public. Verbal expression in the novel is successive but it affords time for absorption and interpretation, whereas the film is a rapid succession of "whole" images. Céline breaks the traditional leisurely sequence of literary production by using words as a series of interjections. Instead of a typical flowing sentence structure -- subject, verb, object, etc. -- he breaks language down into a quick series of exclamations and thereby confers to words the immediate and total evocative power that the image possesses. Each is a complete utterance having little or no obvious relationship to what precedes or follows it. The text constantly refuses to be organized along logical lines. As a result, the reader cannot anticipate words or ideas, in much the same way that a series of images cannot be anticipated. This also relates to Céline's preoccupation with reproducing spoken language in writing. "Spoken language, as opposed to written prose, is not organized along premeditated lines but is put forward as

a succession of fragments which convey the speaker's thought process."^{a/18} Céline seems to dispense entirely with premediated lines in this prose which sets out to mimic speech. The reader is constantly jarred and perplexed by the non-sequiturs and seemingly random associations found here. This jarring effect is one which is more often produced by video, film or certain kinds of music than by narrative prose.

It is clear that there is a deliberate attempt in Féerie to use the French language in a radical way, to stretch its meta-verbal and auditory possibilities to the limit. That is why this novel is generally seen as the apogee of the Célinian style. And there is no doubt that he consciously borrowed cinematic techniques. He himself notes in Entretiens avec le Professeur Y:

I leave nothing to film! I've swiped all its properties!... all its melodramatic carpetbaggery!... all of its image-sensitive fakery!... all its effects!... all of it distilled, purified!... right to the nerve center in my magic train! concentrated! I wolfed it all down!... my metro with the "three-dot" sleepers sweeps everything along with it!... my magic metro!...^{b/19}

Rejecting the traditional narrative, he mimics the process of film-making to produce his "langage parlé" and the effect it has on the reader. Flashing single words and

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La langue parlée, à la différence de la prose écrite, ne s'organise pas en ensemble prémédité mais se présente comme une suite de fragments qui reproduise le mouvement de la pensée du locuteur.

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je laisse rien au cinéma! je lui ai embarqué tous ses effets!... toute sa rastaquouèrie-mélo!... tout son simili-sensible!... tous ses effets!... décanté, épuré, tout ça!... à pleins nerfs dans ma rame magique! concentré!... j'ai enfourné tout!... mon métro à 'traverse trois points' emporte tout!... mon métro magique!...

sentence fragments on the page through the use of exclamation and suspension marks, he imitates the stroboscopic effect of film in a bid to bypass thought; he wants the reader to be swept away by the emotive power of the images his words in isolation produce. This is a formal device with which he experiments throughout the work, just as he experiments with “sound effects” through punning, onomatopoeia, alliteration and neologism, all of which are taken in Féerie to unprecedented heights. The narrative is completely submerged in these formal experiments. This is among the first published examples of what came to be known as “le nouveau roman,” which explored the formal aspects of language at the expense of narrative content, the traditional province of prose fiction.

Language as a character

The French language is no longer merely a tool for conveying a message, it has become the message. In orchestrating the phonemes of French in this radically new way the author is actually making the language itself a character in the novel. Language no longer serves the narrative. It functions independently of it in ways which will be examined in chapter 3. It performs virtuoso feats never before accomplished. It is not the story which is of primary interest to the reader but the astonishing verbal and phonetic acrobatics that his French can perform. We are swept along by the flow of sounds which have been arranged in such a way as to excite the reader’s enjoyment of the sound/images themselves, rather than think about the meanings which they convey. That is what he means by “mon métro magique,” his magical metro car -- it is not the destination that

matters, but the ride. Where one goes is of little import, how one gets there is what matters. Narrative is of little consequence; form is everything. Long before Marshall McLuhan, the medium had become the message.

And it is not an accident that this transformation came during the writing of Féerie. Living the dire consequences of his foolhardy foray into the world of political ideas, the author seeks consolation in doing what he does best, stretching the boundaries of French fiction, but he also seeks revenge on those whom he sees as having wronged him. Whatever he did, he says, he did out of patriotic motives. He was a good old soldier, having only his country's interests at heart, and now his country has turned against him. His consolation and his revenge will be Féerie. His countrymen consider him a traitor? He will show them that none is more French than he, for no one else can wield the French language to such effect, no other Frenchman had ever made French the protagonist in a work of fiction. He may be a pariah, but he is still the past-master of the French language. Féerie pour une autre fois is his vindication. In vindicating himself he gave the world an astonishing piece of prose and heralded a new wave of French fiction writing.

In the following chapter we will examine the author's place in the French literary canon and in the final chapter we shall return to Féerie itself to explore its peculiarities and the problems they present to the translator.

Notes

1. Céline, Romans Tome IV Edition présentée, établie et annotée par Henri Godard (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard), XIII.
2. See Céline, Romans 1166 for details of the dissemination of these texts.
3. For a discussion of the genesis and timing of the work, see Henri Godard's Les manuscrits de Céline et leurs leçons and "Notices, notes et variantes" in Céline Romans Tome IV.
4. The the second part of the work is dedicated to Pliny the Elder and Gaston Gallimard, the NRF publisher.
5. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Céline Romans. 15.
6. Céline's previous novels had "roman" clearly written on the cover. Féerie pour une autre fois II: Normance, which will be referred to by its short title of "Normance," was first published on June 10, 1954.
7. Marie-Christine Bellacoste, "Féerie pour une autre fois I et II: un spectacle et son prologue," Les Lettres Modernes 543-546 (1978) 32 - 33.
8. Bellacoste, 34.
9. Bellacoste, 35.
10. Céline, Romans, 64.
11. Allan Thiher, "Féerie pour une autre fois: mythe et modernisme," Les lettres modernes, 560-564 (1979) 115.
12. Patrick McCarthy, "Féerie pour une autre fois: le roman de la jalousie," Les Lettres Modernes 560-564 (1979) 77-78.
13. Thiher, 107.
14. Definition of paranoia as given in The American Heritage College Dictionary.
15. Céline, Romans, 80.
16. Annie Gillain, "Féerie pour une autre fois et le cinéma," Les Lettres modernes, 543-546 (1978) 84.
17. Gillain, 84-85.

18. Gillain, 104.
19. Céline, Romans, 543.

Introduction: The Author

Louis-Ferdinand Céline (May 27, 1894 - July 1, 1961) remains the most problematic French writer of the 20th century. While he is excoriated if not anathematized because of his pro-Nazi and racist writings, a majority of critics would agree that he was the most revolutionary prose stylist of modern French literature. But it is this very originality which makes it especially useful to view him within the context of his predecessors. In order to understand his place in literature it would be interesting to establish which writers, if any, might have influenced him. At the same time, to illuminate those qualities which make Céline's work so unusual, it is helpful to compare him to writers who at one level or another may have shared some of those qualities with him.

Céline himself was notoriously tight-lipped on the question of which writers exercised the greatest influence on him. He indicated that he was overly influenced by no one, and that seems to be the truth. As early as 1932 when asked by the NRF publishing company to give a resumé of the manuscript he had just submitted he wrote:

In fact, this "Journey to the end of the night" is a narrative in novel form but it's rather peculiar and I don't know of many examples of its kind in literature generally. I didn't want it that way, it just is that way. It's something like an emotive literary symphony rather than a novel in the strict sense of the word. Boredom is the pitfall of the novel. I don't think my thing is boring. This narrative's emotional impact is somewhat akin to that produced by music, or what

ought to be produced by music.^{4/1}

Aside from showing that the author himself felt his work had few if any predecessors, this excerpt also serves to demonstrate that from the inception of his literary career, he felt that his artistic aim was essentially to reproduce a similar emotional effect to that created by music, an idea which he would develop throughout his life and to which we will have occasion to return. But as to the singular nature of Voyage, we would have to agree that this work bears little resemblance to anything that came before, and that his subsequent novels are even more eccentric, especially Féerie pour une autre fois.

We do, however, see elements of style or attitude in previous authors which bear similarities to the work of Céline. In Emile Zola there is a tendency toward the kind of sweeping overstatement and exaggeration that will become sheer hallucination in Céline, although for Zola the narrative still retains its traditionally central function. Zola, also like Céline, dealt with the more graphic aspects of birth, copulation and death in a way which must have appealed to the medical man in Céline. They both wrote from first-hand experience about the underbelly of Paris, as both had lived and worked amongst its lower classes. However, being a 19th-century man, Zola could still be optimistic, and Céline's writings, if they had not been tempered with his often hilarious sense of the absurd and his constant self-mockery, would be unbearably grim.

The only time in his life that Céline was prevailed upon to speak publicly on a

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The original French is: En fait ce "Voyage au Bout de la nuit" est un récit romancé, dans une forme assez singulière et dont je ne vois pas beaucoup d'exemples dans la littérature en général. Je ne l'ai pas voulu ainsi. C'est ainsi. Il s'agit d'une manière de symphonie littéraire, émotive plutôt que d'un véritable roman. L'écueil du genre c'est l'ennui. Je ne crois pas que mon machin soit ennuyeux. Au point de vue émotif ce récit est assez voisin de ce qu'on obtient ou devrait obtenir avec de la musique.

literary topic was on October 1, 1933 when he was asked by his friend the former naturalist Lucien Descaves to join in a commemoration of Zola's untimely death. It was a very gloomy and prophetic speech in which he points out that Zola's message was doomed to go unheeded:

Faith in science, so new at the time, allowed writers of that period to have a certain faith in people, a reason for being "optimistic." Zola believed in virtue, he thought the guilty could be made to feel horror at what they'd done without being driven to despair. Today we know that the victim just keeps asking to be martyred some more. Can we still possibly without being silly see providence as playing any kind of role in our writings? It would take a pretty robust faith.^{a/2}

Having survived the trauma of World War I, read the works of Sigmund Freud which had made a deep impression on him³ and seen the rise of fascism and Stalinism, Céline had a dim view of humanity's prospects for self-improvement. In some ways his stark pessimism recalls the mood of the works of the Marquis de Sade who shares with Céline a refusal to ignore man's brutality and lust for power. Unlike Céline, however, de Sade is interested in little else. De Sade's genius focussed narrowly on unbridled power and its excesses in which the sexual act becomes a vehicle for expressing every conceivable nuance in the balance and exercise of that power. And he was deadly serious. The wickedness he portrayed was always mischievous, and at times amusing, but de Sade's

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La foi scientifique, alors bien nouvelle, fit penser aux écrivains de son époque à une certaine foi sociale, à une raison d'être 'optimiste'. Zola croyait à la vertu, il pensait à faire horreur au coupable mais non à le désespérer. Nous savons aujourd'hui que la victime en redemande toujours du martyr et davantage. Avons-nous encore sans niaiserie le droit de faire figurer dans nos écrits une providence quelconque? Il faudrait avoir la foi robuste.

genius cannot be said to be a comic one. There is no room for court jesters in de Sade's world. And Céline is a jester with a fierce sense of humor and a sense of the overwhelming absurdity of human pretensions and ambitions, including those that de Sade exalts.

Perhaps the French writer with whom Céline has the most in common is Rabelais. Like Rabelais, he was a master of the phantasmagoric picaresque, except in Céline the phantasmagoria takes on a nightmarish quality befitting the monstrous nature of the times in which he lived and wrote. He shares with Rabelais an exuberant vulgarity, a penchant for gross exaggeration, and a need to poke fun at life's absurdities and vanities. Both had a penchant for distorting one aspect of reality to get at a truth.

Céline himself felt he had much in common with Rabelais. In an interview on the 16th century writer-doctor-lawyer-churchman that he gave to Guy Bechtel and Robert Poulet on November 27, 1958, he said:

He had his share of problems, the poor man, even while he was alive; he spent his time trying to avoid being burned at the stake [...] In my life, I've had the same vice as Rabelais. I keep getting myself into desperate situations. I've made myself well and truly odious. So like him, I can't expect anything from people. All I can expect is to be spit at by everyone.⁴⁴

He feels that there is an even more important similarity between the two of them:

[Rabelais] wanted to democratize language. A real battle... La Sorbonne, he was against it,

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Il a eu des emmerdements, le pauvre, même de son vivant, il passait son temps à essayer de ne pas être brûlé [...] J'ai eu dans ma vie le même vice que Rabelais. J'ai passé mon temps à me mettre dans des situations désespérées. Je me suis rendu soigneusement odieux. Comme lui, je n'ai donc rien à attendre des autres. J'ai qu'à attendre des glaviots de tout le monde.

the doctors and all that... Everything that was received, established, the king, the Church, style, he was against it. [...] Rabelais wanted the vernacular to be accepted in writing, a failure.^{4/5}

Céline had the same ambition, to bring French as it was spoken by the urban proletariat to the apotheosis of literary acceptance, and this he did, succeeding where he saw Rabelais as having failed, the Academy having come to literary dictatorship a mere century later.

There are writers with whom Céline bears more resemblance who are not French. Two Irish writers in particular come to mind. The first is the 18th-century Anglo-Irish poet, wit and pamphleteer, Jonathan Swift, the author of Gulliver's Travels, and the second James Joyce, author of Ulysees.

Joyce and Céline were very different in character and experience. Although they both came from a lower middle-class background, Joyce was one of ten children and Céline an only child; the former was something of an optimist (and Judeophile) raised in Dublin, the latter a pessimist and a notorious anti-Semite raised in Paris, etc. Their writings had this in common, however, that they were fascinated by language itself and fully explored their languages' linguistic and meta-verbal possibilities to the detriment of the narrative. They both had a degree of mastery of a few foreign languages but Céline's explorations were restricted to his native French, while Joyce, especially in Finnegans Wake, drew upon his knowledge of a number of languages in an attempt to blend them all

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[Rabelais] voulait démocratiser la langue. Une vraie bataille... La Sorbonne, il était contre, les docteurs et tout ça... Tout ce qui était reçu et établi, le roi, l'Eglise, le style, il était contre. [...] Rabelais avait voulu faire passer la langue parlée dans la langue écrite, un échec.

into one stream. Both of them revolutionized the way their languages were used in literary pursuit and had enormous influence over the writers of subsequent generations.

Jonathan Swift, to whom Céline perhaps bears the greatest resemblance, had the same streak of Celtic phantasmagoria and satire in his work as had Céline. “The horror of reality” could as easily have been the epigraph for Swift’s work as it is for Féerie pour une autre fois. It was a horror that neither author could ignore and that both would deal with through ferocious irony and satiric exaggeration.

Irony is often the response of a sensitive nature to repeated disappointments. It is the enemy of romance and commitment. In the hands of Swift and Celine it becomes an instrument for the merciless probing of human pretensions and follies. They also share a conservative temperament and outlook, a burning sense of injustice and a taste for the fantastic. They have tremendous compassion for the individual who suffers but at the same time are dismissive of mankind as a whole. They are, in fact, downright misanthropic and pessimistic about human nature. They see the dark side of every action, but also the potential for hilarity in life. They both wrote picaresque novels about a hapless hero. They were both ostracized because of pamphlets they’d penned which gained them notoriety if not infamy. They even suffered from the same inner-ear ailment known as “Menière’s syndrome,” an affliction mentioned in Féerie.⁶ Their writing was characterized by irony, outrage, vulgar, sometimes scatological humor, and indignation -- “savage indignation” is how Swift himself described it in his Epitaph.⁷ Each of them considered themselves to be terribly neglected if not persecuted. Swift, like Céline, felt he was deprived of the honors due to him. Failing to get advancement in London where he would have preferred to remain, his Church of England superiors sent him back to administer to mostly obscure

parishes in Ireland where he languished for lack of stimulation. Neither Céline nor Swift, oddly enough, showed signs of having any religious beliefs. And perhaps most interesting of all, they both had a love-hate relationship with their own people. Swift despised the Irish, especially the “Papist” sort, but at the same time felt outrage at how they were treated by the English, defending them as best he could against the terrible economic and social oppression they suffered. By modern standards both were decidedly “politically incorrect.” They were full of contradictions, however. Despite the apparent misogyny of his “Letter to a Young Lady” and many of his other writings, Swift believed in equality of education for women. Céline has also been accused of misogyny,⁸ but a close examination of his work does not bear this accusation out. He in fact preferred women to men, and if his criticisms of them are as harsh as those he directs at men it is because he saw them and treated them as his equals. Both authors’ harsh observations about humanity had nothing of the abstract, however. Their ferocious criticism stemmed from first-hand experience of people who live and operate under horrendous conditions. Both lived and worked among the poorest members of society and treated them without any hint of idealization or condescension. Each identified with the masses, and saw themselves as defending them in their respective ways, Swift as a clergyman and in much of his writing, Céline as a medical doctor (who was too ashamed to take money from his poor patients), as well as in his mad ventures into pamphleteering. Their vision was an extremely pessimistic one, but paradoxically this made them more amusing and reliable guides to human nature and its foibles.

Although their motives in writing their pamphlets were entirely different, Swift being inspired by righteous anger at oppression whereas Céline wrote his out of the basest

of motives, it is interesting to note that they both profoundly shocked the world by their excesses. Swift's political satires contained passages as stomach-turning in their insensitivity as anything to be found in Céline's pamphlets. In 1729 he published "A Modest Proposal," a scandalous tract purporting to offer the solution to Ireland's economic woes by selling plump year-old Irish babies, their flesh as delicacy food and their skin for fine-kid accessories:

INFANTS Flesh will be in Season throughout the Year, but more plentiful in *March*, and a little before and after: For we are told by a grave Author, an eminent *French Physician* [★ Rabelais★], that *Fish being a prolifick Dyet*, there are more Children born in *Roman Catholick Countries* about Nine Months after *Lent*, than at any other Season: Therefore reckoning a Year after *Lent*, the markets will be more glutted than usual; because the Number of *Popish Infants*, is, at least, three to one in this kingdom; and therefore it will have one other Collateral Advantage, by lessening the Number of *Popists* among us.⁹

George Orwell's essay "Politics vs Literature" contains interesting insights into Jonathan Swift which could equally well be applied to Céline. Orwell writes that he was "one of those people who are driven into a sort of perverse Toryism by the follies of the progressive party of the moment."¹⁰ Céline was embraced as a favorite son by the entire left, including the Communist Party, until he published his first pamphlet, Mea culpa, in which he expressed his horror of Communism and the Soviet Union under Stalin. A number of Communist authors, Louis Aragon and Paul Nizan among them, regarded him as a champion of the leftist view of life.¹¹ (Leon Trotsky, as ever, was more perspicacious. He wrote of Voyage au bout de la nuit that it was written out of "the dread of life and by

the lassitude this occasions more than out of revolt. Active revolt is linked to hope. In Céline's book there is not hope."¹²

Orwell also says of Swift that he demonstrated "a sort of horror of the actual process of life,"¹³ something we see time and again in Céline's work, especially when he describes illness and the human body, except the most youthful and fittest of them, the bodies of dancers. Orwell goes on to say that

Swift falsifies his picture of the whole world by refusing to see anything in human life except dirt, folly and wickedness, but the part which he abstracts from the whole does exist, and it is something which we all know about while shrinking from mentioning it. Part of our minds -- in any normal person it is the dominant part -- believes that man is a noble animal and life is worth living: but there is also a sort of inner self which at least intermittently stands aghast at the horror of existence.¹⁴

As Orwell points out, Swift (like Céline and de Sade) did not invent anything, he merely left things out. By refusing to see or at least dwell upon the nobler side of human nature in their art they share the pessimistic view of a blighted and incorrigible, never-to-be-improved mankind. And who can say they were wrong? Have we not learned from Freud that instincts for life and instincts for death have always coexisted in all of us? Orwell holds that a writer's views must bear a minimum of compatibility with sanity "in the medical sense," and with the power of continuous thought, in order for him to produce a work of art:

⁴
l'effroi devant la vie et par la lassitude qu'elle occasionne plus que par la révolte. Une révolte active est liée à l'espoir. Dans le livre de Céline il n'y a pas d'espoir.

beyond that what we ask of him is talent, which is probably another name for conviction. Swift did not possess ordinary wisdom, but he did possess a terrible intensity of vision, capable of picking out a single hidden truth and then magnifying it and distorting it. The durability of *Gulliver's Travels* goes to show that if the force of belief is behind it, a world-view which only just passes the test of sanity is sufficient to produce a great work of art.¹⁵

Every word of this applies equally to Céline and his novels. Céline's intensity of vision was extreme. We may balk at his pessimistic view of human life, and we must admit that especially after his imprisonment and banishment from the affections of the French public, he retained only a tenuous hold on reason, tottering on the brink of the paranoia which was part of his psychological make-up since childhood, as demonstrated so palpably in Mort à crédit. But we must also admit that in his novelistic writings, he passed the test of sanity and graced French literature with some of its most superb and astonishing writing of the century. In Féerie pour une autre fois, however, the balance between sanity and insanity was at its most precarious. As a result, the distortions of Céline's rage overwhelm the novel form, making this his most quixotic and problematic work.

From Paris to Copenhagen

Féerie pour une autre fois was the fourth novel published by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, coming after Voyage au bout de la nuit (1932), Mort à crédit (1936) and Guignol's Band (1944). It also came after the four pre-war pamphlets,¹⁶ three of which were to make of him a post-war pariah. Céline began writing Féerie pour une autre fois in 1946-47,

during his 13-month incarceration at the Vestre Faengsel prison in Copenhagen. How he got there, what became of him after he fled Paris on June 17, 1944, was the stuff of three subsequent novels, the so-called German trilogy: Nord, D'un château l'autre and Rigodon, all of which have been translated into English and published here or in Great Britain.

Briefly, the Céline ménage, including his wife Lucette Almansor and their extraordinary cat Bébert, arrived first in Baden-Baden, or as Céline liked to call it "Bains-Bains," where they stayed at the Brenner's Park Hotel and where it was at first temptingly possible to make believe they were merely on vacation, while the author-doctor tried to plot his next move. He consistently maintained that his aim in going to Germany was to reach Denmark, where he had gold stashed away in the care of his friend Karen-Marie Jensen.¹⁷ That was much easier said than done, as the peregrinations and machinations of the next nine months would prove. Facing imminent defeat, the Nazi government held on just as steadfastly as it had in the heyday of its demented illusions. Foreigners were divested of their passports and held at the behest of the government "to limit their movements and make best use of them in the service of the Reich."¹⁸

The summer idyl was to be short-lived. By the end of August, when more and more top players in Philippe Pétain's government came streaming in to Germany in the wake of the Allies' advance, the Brenner's Park Hotel was no longer a comfortable place to be. The Céline family was shunted off to a small room on an upper floor and rations became thin. Through medical and political contacts in Berlin, Céline was able to procure

3

pour limiter leurs déplacements et pour les utiliser au mieux au service du Reich.

a temporary home near a village named Kraenzlin not too far from the Danish border. There they remained for two months on a farm which was to become the setting for the hallucinatory and hilarious pandemonium portrayed in Nord as Germany became more and more squeezed in the vise created by the Russian onslaught from the east and the English and American assault from the west. The strange trio's welcome soon wore thin in this small community, where four¹⁹ more foreign mouths to feed were not appreciated in this time of near-famine, and again through contacts, Dr Destouches²⁰ was able to get permission to join his fellow refugees in Sigmaringen, the beautiful little medieval city in the south of Germany which had become the seat of the Pétain "government in exile." There he was able to practice medicine among this wretched, defeated band of collaborators and be surrounded by fellow French-speakers. All of the Destouches' attempts to get to neutral territory failed during this time, until Céline was able to prevail upon contacts in the Danish government and Red Cross to convince the German authorities to let them depart. After a nightmarish train journey that lasted five days, traversing a famished and chaotic Germany being pummeled by constant Allied bombardment, Céline, Lucette and Bébert finally arrived in Denmark on March 27 1945, exhausted, dirty, shell-shocked and starving.

On December 17, nine months after arriving in Copenhagen, the by-now fugitive author was arrested and detained by the Danish authorities at the behest of the French government. He had been charged under articles 75 and 76 of the penal code which punished high treason and carried the death penalty, but the prosecution's case was hastily and sloppily prepared, and the Danish government could find no substance to the accusations. They nevertheless held him at their discretion at the ancient fortress-prison of

Vestre Faengsel, where he raged and fulminated for over a year through innumerable letters to his lawyers, wife and friends, in which he protested his innocence and advised his lawyers in their attempt to free him. He also wrote the first manuscript of what was to become Féerie.

Writing as escape from prison

Freud in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” points out that the creative writer is like the child who can perfectly well distinguish reality from make-believe, but who needs to inhabit his imaginary world of play where he has the power to shape events and rearrange them in ways pleasurable to him. The everyday lot of the prisoner is privation and pain, and as Freud also points out, “whoever understands the human mind knows that hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced.”²¹ So it is not an accident that this novel was given the magical name Féerie pour une autre fois.

English unfortunately has no word of equal power to “féerie.” A “féerie” is equivalent neither to a fairy tale, nor to a fairy land, nor again to “enchantment,” but it is a mixture of all three. It also refers to a type of entertainment similar to a children’s pantomime, the kind of event where a brightly lit stage throws out magical, sparkling images of sprites, princesses, goblins and the like into a darkened theater. This kind of entertainment is still popular today in the United Kingdom where they traditionally regale children at Christmas time. By giving this novel its title the author is drawing attention to the magical, escapist aspect of the work: it was a life-saving flight into the enchanted world

where pleasure was still possible, in another time, another place, and which now only the imagination can recapture. But it is also a story very much of the present. Past, present, future are all combined into one long tug-of-war, a dance which is macabre but playful at the same time. Time after time the narrator complains about the heart-rending screams of his fellow prisoners, but boasts that he no longer hears their howls because he is lost in his memories -- all he hears are the sounds of his language as it was spoken by his friends and neighbors around him in Montmartre, to which his caged imagination relentlessly returns for its life-sustaining nourishment.

From the pamphlets to prison to *Féerie*

There is another aspect to *Féerie* that is polemical rather than playful. *Féerie* is also a painful and wrenching “cri du coeur,” or perhaps “cri de la rate” would be more apt, venting as it does the author’s spleen over what he considered to be the tremendous injustice done to him. It is the novel-as-tirade. It is not neatly divided into chapters; it is written as one uninterrupted rant, one long, breathless diatribe, in which the prisoner continually cries out his pain:

The years 1946 to 1954 are a period of real difficulties and suffering in Céline’s life which resulted from the positions he took from 1936 to 1944, but which, either because he was unable to measure or unable to admit the extend of the evil in which he indirectly participated, he felt were a double injustice done to him.^{4/22}

4

Les années 1946 à 1954 sont dans la vie de Céline une période de difficultés et de souffrances réelles, qui résultent des positions qu’il a prises de 1936 à 1944, mais que,

At least publicly, Céline never admitted his grotesque error, if not to say crime, in attacking the European Jewish community at the time when it was quite literally threatened by extinction. Is that to say, therefore, that he was a monster, an inhuman, heartless man, as he has often been portrayed? His novelistic works and most of his human relationships attest to the enormous compassion and tenderness -- especially with regard to the sick and disadvantaged, to women, children and animals -- that co-existed in him along with his ferocious sense of outrage and indignation at the human condition, and along with his racism. However, by *de facto* participating in the Nazi war effort through publishing Bagatelles pour un massacre (1937), Ecole des cadavres (1938) and Les beaux draps (1941), he blackened his name, brought shame on his nation and destroyed his own precarious well-being.

Céline's anti-Semitism is both typical of French anti-Semitism and paradoxically most singular. It contained nothing new²³. It was a rehashing of the same hackneyed fears of Jewish conspiracy and conquest, but it was absurd, outrageous and hallucinatory. It was so unforgettably grotesque that it became an indelible mark, so to speak, on the nation's collective psyche. But it was perhaps less his anti-Semitism than his very linguistic genius which caused him to become such an infamous pariah. It was not *what* he said (after all, many, many others were spouting the same nonsense at the time) but *how he said it* that caused him his troubles. Most of the anti-Semitic garbage which was published in the pre-war and war years has long since been forgotten. Céline's cannot be forgotten. Like the rest of his writing, it was too powerful. And because Céline had been a hero to the left, it

faute de mesurer ou d'admettre l'étendue du mal auquel il a ainsi indirectement participé, il ressent comme des injustices, doublement.

is perhaps natural that he come to be regarded as a traitor to progressive causes. He was not to be forgiven for investing his formidable powers into such an unspeakably unworthy task.²⁴

Céline knew perfectly well as he languished in prison that he had become a pariah to his fellow countrymen, and why. And he uses that tension-ridden relationship as the under-pinning of this work. Rather than ignore or mollify the hostility of his readers, Céline chooses to use it and play upon it. From beginning to end this novel is a polemic, an argument. It takes the form of a fierce dialogue with the reader. The narrator constantly berates the reader, and the reader spits back opprobrium and insults at the ranting narrator. It is a “slagging match” of gargantuan proportions. When the inmates are not hurling abuse at each other, or the guards at the inmates, the caged “Ferdinand” is hurling abuse at the reader and vice-versa.

Playing on their horror of him, he specifically challenges his readers to buy Féerie so that he can regain his former income and standing. Regaining his audience was one of his stated aims in writing this book. Early on in his imprisonment, he wrote to his wife, for example, “I’ll have to make my comeback writing about topical things so that my readers return to me. With ‘Maudits’ it will be quick.”²⁵ He would fail miserably in this aim, and would have to wait to publish the German trilogy, with its gossip about Pétain’s government in exile, to regain any readership at all in his lifetime. To this day Féerie remains the least read of all of Céline’s novels, as attested to by the fact that it has taken this long to be translated into English!

4

Il faudra que je fasse ma rentrée avec une actualité qui me ramène mes lecteurs. Avec ‘les Maudits’ ça ira vite.

If it has taken so long to translate it is also because it is not an easy read. There are a number of reasons for this, most of them stylistic. But his reference to “topical things” quoted above is no accident. A contrary person at the best of times, Céline was not at his best in prison. He suffered from the mental distortions typical of prisoners. Everything is seen by the prisoner through the painful lens of self-absorption. Imprisonment only accentuated the worst aspects of his defiant and subversive nature. Rather than make a forthright apology for his anti-Semitism, for example, he went in the opposite direction, and at one point in the novel, came as close as he ever did in his novelistic works to indulging in racism, when an un-named “admirer” visits him in jail and rants on insensitively about the plight of the Jews. At another level, he actually seemed to go out of his way to make this book difficult and arcane, not only through its deliberate syntactical vagueness and penchant for using words with multiple meanings and inventing new ones, but also through its references to passing fads, current events and obscure places and people. And from a stylistic point of view, the distortion and the distilling of syntax are so extreme, that one can no longer speak of coherency or of narrative structure. For many critics this novel represents a culminating point in Céline’s art. The style of the novel has become what Céline himself called “purely emotive,”

that is to say completely free of the logical progression of written French... he went as far as he thought he could go in the direction of what Flaubert called ‘a novel without a subject, or almost. In that, Féerie represents the quintessence of Céline...^{a/26}

c’est-à-dire complètement affranchi des enchaînement du français écrit... il était allé aussi loin qu’il pensait pouvoir le faire dans la direction de ce que Flaubert appelait

In Entretiens avec le Professeur Y, his sometimes amusing parody of an interview he imagines granting to an academic interlocutor, he writes:

I'm just a little inventor, sir!... a little inventor, and I'm proud of it [...] Little inventor, that's it!... and just of a little device!... just one little device!... I don't go sending messages out to the world! I don't encumber the Ether with my thoughts... no, sir! I don't get drunk on words, or on port, or on the flattery of the young! I don't go cogitating for the whole planet!... I'm just a little inventor, and of a little thing [...] Emotion in the written language!... written language was arid, I was the one who gave feeling back to written language... just like I say!... and that's no small job I tell you... the trick, the magic that any old jerk these days can move you "in writing"... but bring the feeling you get from the spoken word back to written language... now that's something! It's tiny, but it's something!^{4/27}

Here in a few words, is Céline's whole philosophy of art. According to him, the written word was dried up, lifeless. He brought it back to life. How? By restoring to the written word the enormous emotional impact it has when it issues forth, a physical sound,

'un roman sans sujet, ou presque sans sujet'. En cela *Féerie* représente une quintessence de Céline...

⁴
Je suis qu'un petit inventeur, monsieur!... un petit inventeur, et je m'en flatte! [...] Petit inventeur, parfaitement!... et que d'un petit truc!... juste d'un petit truc!... j'envoie pas de messages au monde!... moi! non, monsieur! j'encombre pas l'Ether de mes pensées! moi! non, monsieur! je me saoule pas de mots, ni de porto, ni des flatteries de la jeunesse!... je cogite pas pour la planète!... je suis qu'un petit inventeur, et que d'un tout petit truc! [...] L'émotion dans le langage écrit!... le langage écrit était à sec, c'est moi qu'ai redonné l'émotion au langage écrit!... comme je vous le dis!... c'est pas qu'un petit turbin je vous jure!... le truc, la magie, que n'importe quel con à présent peut vous émouvoir "en écrit"!... retrouver l'émotion du "parlé" à travers l'écrit! c'est pas rien!... c'est infime mais c'est quelque chose!...

fresh from the mouth of the speaker. Céline often referred to his prose as “la petite musique” and developed in Entretiens avec le Professeur Y the metaphor of “le métro émotif” to describe his stylistic aims. The power, the joy, the force of Céline’s writing come from the very physicality of the sounds, the phonemes, the basic phonetic units of the French language. He wanted to capture that power and encapsulate it in the written word. It is the very fact that Céline succeeded so well in doing this that makes him so hard to translate.

The translator, a bête noire of Céline - Céline, a bête noire of the translator

In more conventional novels, ideas and actions flow, events interweave. But these are not important to Céline. Sounds are what matter most in his later prose, not ideas (à la Sartre), not descriptions (à la Balzac), not narration (à la Zola), not introspection (à la Proust), not psychological drama (à la Flaubert), but the emotive power of sounds. The sheer pleasure that comes from hearing words pearly together is what excites the genius of Céline. Words are sounds, music, poetry. The fact that sounds convey ideas is always overshadowed by the fact that they convey feelings.

But French sounds are of course not English sounds, and therein lies the major problem for the translator of Féerie. In this work Céline hacks, hews and dices language so much that it becomes atomized. Harnessing the power of each atom seems to be his aim. The narrative is gone. It has been devoured by the “sound bite.” Making that sound bite pleasurable, even comprehensible in English, is a major challenge, because novels are not made of arbitrary sounds, but of sounds which convey meaning, however fragmented or

fantastic.

If neither ideas nor narrative are important in the work of Céline, what is? What matter in Céline's prose are tone, mood and humor. And these are the very qualities in his work that are often not, or poorly, translated. To convey more authentically the tone, mood and humor of Céline requires a less strict transliteration of words and a more supple approach to finding the sounds, phrases and idioms in English that can best convey these meta-verbal qualities of the original French. There's a need for vigorous, colloquial English to convey the skepticism and raw emotionalism of Céline's proletarian French. At the same time, it demands of the translator that he or she make intuitive leaps and daring approximations which in other authors would neither be necessary nor advisable. Especially in Féerie, a lot of fleshing-out and choosing among possible meanings has to be done. The task of translating Féerie is more like the task of translating poetry. Céline himself, in describing this book, said, "it's more verse than prose" ("c'est plutôt des vers que de la prose").²⁸ It must therefore be re-invented, rather than translated, in English.

Although what Céline says can never be taken at face value, he often expressed disparagement of other languages, nor did he have a terribly high opinion of translators. Typical of his vociferations against foreign languages is this tirade in Entretiens avec le Professeur Y:

- But what about other languages?
- There is one language only, Colonel, in this parabaloney world! one single respectable! valid language! this world's imperial language: ours!... gobbledegook, the others, do you hear me?... far too tardy latecomer dialects!... badly outfitted,

badly cared for, not to be taken seriously!^{a/29}

Translation in the Célinian scheme of things does not get a better break. In the interview regarding Rabelais quoted above, Céline hints at his disregard for translation:

Rabelais truly wanted a rich and extraordinary language. But the others, all of them, they emasculated this language, making it Duhamelian, Giralducian, Mauriacian. So nowadays to write well like Amyot is merely to write as if it were a translation [...] That's the mania of the French these days: read and do translations, speak as if it were a translation. I've had people come ask me if I'd taken such and such a passage from Joyce [...] I speak English perfectly myself, just like French [...] No, I don't speak it, that bitch of a language is a pain in my ass... like Rabelais, I found everything in French.^{b/30}

At two points in Féerie pour une autre fois, he refers to translators or their work. In the first instance, he lumps translators together with those who conspire to deprive writers of their livelihood one way or another, through their devotion to cinema, radio, and the like:

^a Les langues étrangères tout de même? - Il n'y a qu'une seule langue, colonel, en ce monde paracafouilleux! une seule langue valable! respectable! la langue impériale de ce monde: la nôtre!... charabias, les autres, vous m'entendez?... dialectes bien trop tard venus!... mal sapés, mal léchés, arlequinades!

^b Rabelais a vraiment voulu une langue extraordinaire et riche. Mais les autres, tous, ils l'ont émasculée cette langue, pour la rendre duhamélienne, giralducienne et mauriacienne. Ainsi, aujourd'hui, écrire bien comme Amyot, mais ça, c'est jamais qu'une langue de traduction. [...] C'est ça, la rage moderne du Français: faire et lire les traductions, parler comme dans les traductions. Moi, y a des gens qui sont venus me demander si je n'avais pas pris tel ou tel passage dans Joyce. [...] Moi, je parle l'anglais parfaitement, comme le français. [...] Non, je ne le parle pas, ce putain de langage qui me fait chier... Comme Rabelais, j'ai tout trouvé en français.

And I'm leaving some out! There's also the falsifying, deliberately destructive asshole translators! They also have their cursed hordes! Readership thieves! Yankee novels at so much a page! Plagues in the pay of Chaos! the felonious breed! you trust those guys? they pass off rejected scraps of Zola as re-oink-oink-anointed Yankee! ghastly garglings! served up in *Readers Digest!*^{a/31}

This harshness may seem unjust and even unwise in an author who was highly aware and solicitous of his place in history. After all, authors need translators in order to spread their fame by making their work available to potential readers who cannot read them in the original. But to be taken aback by this attitude toward translators and their work would be not to understand the peculiar relationship Céline had to his native language. Part of his distaste for the work of translators no doubt sprang from his ferocious attachment to the French language and its sounds, his quite carnal need to be surrounded by them, to be nourished by them. Never a man to shy away from contradictions, he was proud of his ability to speak English and German, and often said that he spoke them "perfectly." (In fact he over-estimated his competence in English, and probably in German as well).³² At the same time, he often proclaimed his aversion for other languages.

Relating scenes of his wife's visits to him in prison, for example, he wrote in *Féerie*:

and we're not allowed to speak French together, Arlette and me!... English only!... French is forbidden!... Us, English?... I mean she's French to the core, born Rue Saint-Louis-en Ile!... me, Bridge Ramp number 11, Courbevoie!... Bébert at La

Oh mais j'en oublie, j'en oublie! Et les falsifieurs sabordeurs 'trouducteurs'? Ils ont aussi des hordes maudites! Voleurs de lecteurs! Romans ricains à tant la page! Fléaux employés du Chaos! la félone espèce! vous méfiez pas? refileurs de rebuts de Zola oinoités yankee! l'horrible gargote! Servie Digest!

Samaritaine!^a... forcing *us* to speak English!... I who have a horror of foreign languages!... feeble, screwed up gobbledigookery!... It's the final humiliation! We, who are native to the Seine like no other!... Montmartre is one thing!... but English!... first of all Arlette doesn't speak English!... well, not three words that she could string together... me, that mewling spewing thinethouery makes me want to puke!... the state I'm in!... and the way it's spat out! Only traitors speak English and German, Chinese, Volapuke, and "filmspeak," of course!...^{b/33}

Here, as in passages in his other novels, especially the German trilogy, we see reiterated his vociferous partiality toward his native tongue. For him French was quite simply the best language of all. Other languages are belittled, as people are, falling victim to Céline's relentless mockery and aggression which he can apply to anyone at anytime, friend and foe alike, but especially to politicians, pedants, and the powerful. And English was powerful, at the beginning of its overwhelming world-wide predominance, the language of the victor in the war which cost him his freedom, his readership and his self-respect.

But if Céline was more skeptical than most about the art and craft of translation, it

^a A famous old department store in the center of Paris.

^b

et puis faut pas qu'on se parle français Arlette et moi!... anglais seulement!... défendu le français!... Anglais nous?... Elle née Française Française Française rue Saint-Louis-en-Île!... mois Rampe du Pont, 11, Courbevoie!... Bébert à la Samaritaine!... nous forcer parler anglais!... moi l'horreur des langues étrangères!... baisesuses baragouineries infirmes!... C'est de l'humiliation capitale! Nous natifs de Seine comme personnel!... Montmartre ça va!... mais l'anglais!... d'abord Arlette parle pas anglais!... enfin pas trois mots... moi cette zaouterie miaoulerie postillonnerie me fait dégueler!... Tel mon état!... tel qu'il se parle! Y'a que les traîtres qui parlent anglais et allemand, chinois, volpük et le 'pelliculi' forcément!...

was perhaps also because he was aware of the impossibility of satisfactorily translating *his* particular French into other idioms. The second, passing, reference to translation later on in Féerie is revealing. Talking about the value of the work-in-progress he asserts, “can’t ever pay enough for the likes of these adventures! in direct French not translated? heavens!”³⁴ What raises the value of his work is the fact that his “adventures” are recounted in direct, un-translated French. Reading this, one is tempted to wonder whether he envisaged the possibility of Féerie’s not ever being translated into any other language. The author himself thus indirectly alerts us in Féerie to the foolhardiness of attempting to render him in anything other than his native French.

The reasons why Céline in general and this novel in particular are so difficult to translate happily into English or any other language will be the subject of the next chapter, in which we will explore the particular problems and challenges posed by this novel to anyone rash enough to attempt to translate it.

³⁴ vous payerez jamais assez cher des péripéties semblables! en français direct pas traduit? flûte!

Notes

1. Céline, Louis-Ferdinand, Lettres à la N.R.F. 1931-1961, Edition établie, présentée et annotée par Pascal Fouché (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) 14.
2. Le Cahier de l'Herne: Louis-Ferdinand Céline (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1972) 504.
3. See François Gibault's Céline 1932-1944 Délires et persécutions (Paris, Mercure de France, 1985) 86 for details of Freud's influence on Céline.
4. Bechtel, Guy, "Rabelais ou la crudité juste," magazine littéraire 292 (October 1992): 39-40.
5. Bechtel, 38.
6. Céline, Louis-Ferdinand, Romans Tome IV: Edition présentée, établie et annotée par Henri Godard (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1993) 158.
7. Swift, Jonathan, Selected Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, Edited and with an Introduction by John Hayward (London: The Cresset Press, 1949) ix.
8. Rosemarie Scullion, Philip H. Solomon, and Thomas C. Spear, editors, Céline and the Politics of Difference (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1995) contains articles stating and implying that Céline's attitudes toward women were misogynistic.
9. Swift, 430.
10. Orwell, George, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Volume IV, In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970) 243.
11. For a discussion of Céline's reception by the Communist Party and the left, see François Gibault's Céline 1932-1944 Délires et persécutions (Paris: Mercure de France, 1985) 127-146.
12. Leon Trotsky, "Céline et Poincaré", Cahier de l'Herne: Céline (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1963) 241.
13. Orwell, 254.
14. Orwell, 259.
15. Orwell, 261.
16. Mea culpa (1936), Bagatelles pour un massacre (1937), Ecole des cadavres (1939) and Les beaux draps (1941), the middle two of which contained the most absurd and revolting kind of anti-Semitism.

17. Karen-Marie Jensen was a Danish ballet dancer, ex-mistress and friend of Céline's dating back to the 1920s. Quite illegally, she managed to save Céline's horde of gold from the Nazi predators during the war, and it was largely with this treasure that the Céline household was able to survive in Denmark.
18. Gibault, François. Céline, 1944-1961 Cavalier de l'Apocalypse (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986) 26.
19. Le Vigan (Robert Coquillaud), the well known film actor and friend of Céline was among those who joined them at the Brenner's Park Hotel. He followed the couple to Kraenzlin, only leaving them months later at their final departure from Sigmaringen to Denmark.
20. Céline's real name was Louis-Ferdinand Destouches. His pseudonym came from the first name of his maternal grandmother.
21. Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Grey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989) 437-38.
22. Céline, Romans, 1105.
23. See the works of Leon Poliakov, notably Le racisme, Paris: Seghers, 1976; and Histoire de l'antisemitisme, Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1955; as well as R.F. Byrnes' Anti-semitism in Modern France, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press; J. Mehlman's Legacies of anti-Semitism in France, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; and Z. Sternhell's Anti-semitism and the Right in France, Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1988.
23. In pursuance of a Masters Degree in Modern French Studies at the University of Ulster (N.I.) in 1994 this author carried out a survey of 33 lycéens in Lyon which showed among other things that of the 19 students who had discussed Céline in their homes, 12 replied that it was with regard to his racism and political views but not to his novels.
25. Céline, Romans, 1115-1116. Maudits soupirs pour une autre fois was one of the provisional titles to what would become Féerie pour une autre fois.
26. Céline, Romans, XI.
27. Céline, Romans, 498.
28. Céline, Romans, 1121-22. Quoted from a letter to Pierre Monnier dated February 4, 1950.
29. Céline, Romans, 538.
30. Bechtel, 38-39.

31. Céline, Romans, 81.
32. For examples of Céline's English, see Gibault's Cavalier de l'Apocalypse (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986) 76-77, 81.
33. Céline, Romans, 84-85.
34. Céline, Romans 123.

Introduction: The Translation

When Céline was still a free man in Paris, he was able in his everyday life to have his creative batteries recharged so to speak by the least little jokes and pleasantries he would hear or the conversations he would have in his medical practice, in the streets, in the bars he frequented, etc. Through this day-to-day contact with his fellow French speakers, he was able to renew “le sens des possibilités de la langue sur lequel repose son écriture”¹: the sense of the language’s possibilities upon which his writing is based.¹ When he was on the run in Germany and in Denmark what he missed most, he claimed, was being surrounded by his native language, being revived by its music and its poetry. While in prison he expressed in his letters to his secretary Maria Canavaglia his frustration at not having access to the spoken language and his fear of not being able to recall certain words. On one occasion he asked her to go to a party-favors store to find the name, which he’d forgotten -- “of that charming paper snake into which you blow and which then is extended and strikes, lashes the nose of the guy next to you... indispensable for having a good laugh at weddings, baptisms, etc.”²

As a prisoner, frustrated by his surroundings, forced into lonely introspection and bereft of the emotional nourishment of hearing his language spoken, this “sense of the language’s possibilities” was no longer tempered by every-day contact, instead it became something of an obsession. The French language seems to have become a consolation, a

¹ In French: *de ce charmant serpent-papier dans lequel on souffle et qui alors se tend et biffe, fouette le nez du voisin... indispensable pour bien rigoler aux noces, baptêmes, etc.*

distraction from his woes, and stretching its possibilities to the limit one of the few satisfactions available to him. Thus, these linguistic possibilities were never more fully mined than in this prison novel. The lengths to which he went in delving into those possibilities no doubt sustained the author in this time of need, and according to some scholars led to the full flowering of the “style célinien,” but they present enormous problems for the translator.

The old truism that things get lost in translation is more applicable to Féerie pour une autre fois than to most books. Because the inspiration for this novel came more from meta-verbal considerations than from a desire to develop a coherent narrative, translating it into English presents numerous peculiarities and problems that the translator does not find when working with more straightforward material. It is important to remember that this novel was among other things an evocation of the absent sounds of the author’s language, an exercise in memory of how its speakers used it, abused it and generally lived their lives through it. The spoken language was all important to its author, especially the language as it was spoken by the common people. The author continually played in this novel on the sounds of French words, and more specifically on the tones and rhythms of *parigot*, the slang, accent and syntactical peculiarities of working-class Parisian French. In short, words’ sounds, and the “music” they create, the effect they have on the ear, take precedence in this novel over the concepts contained in them. The narrative is disjointed at best, as the author free-associates pell-mell, treating the reader to one non-sequitur after another, on page after page. Despite this, the reader is swept along by the torrent of the emotionally charged syllables and startling image-poems that the syllables create.

The main problem for the translator of Féerie lies in the fact that the sounds of French words are *ipso facto* different from the sounds of English words. As a result, many of those same words when translated lose their original auditory and emotional impact. There are other problems, however, which also stem from this novel's many stylistic peculiarities. It is the object of this chapter to investigate those peculiarities and explain what measures were taken by the translator to deal with them. They can be grouped under the following categories, each of which will in turn be elaborated upon:

- 1) punctuation
- 2) repetition
- 3) frequent mention of unfamiliar but real people and topical but obscure events
- 4) puns and neologisms
- 5) syntactic distortions
- 6) willful confusion and the play upon multiple meanings
- 7) the replacement of narrative by free-association

1) Punctuation

This book contains no divisions into chapters, as we have seen, but what is more disconcerting, it cannot even be said to contain paragraphs and sentences, at least not of any customary kind. A summary glance at virtually any page of this novel makes this clear and gives the reader an idea of some of the problems the text poses. We are immediately struck by the plethora of exclamation points, the liberal use of suspension marks (the

famous “three dots”), and the near total lack of periods. It is evident from the start that the traditional sentence has been abolished here. Instead, individual words or short phrases are flashed onto the page, at once highlighted and separated by the exclamation points and suspension marks with which each page is littered.

These marks serve to chop up the narrative into bite-sized segments, drowning in their wake the kind of coherency offered by proper sentences which are divided into orderly, logical fashion by commas, semicolons or colons and terminated by a period, a question mark or, more rarely, an exclamation point. Until one gets used to their being there, one balks at each exclamation point, gets annoyed at the profusion of suspension marks. The translator is tempted to dispense with them altogether but remembers that his job is to reproduce in the target language the intentions and meanings of the author in the original. And the author put them there with an avowed purpose. For him, they are the links that keep together his “*métro émotif*,” this subterranean emotional locomotive, about which he speaks in Entretiens avec le Professeur Y. The three dots or suspension marks are seen as the railroad ties or sleepers holding together the rails that speed the locomotive headlong to its terminus, the seat of feeling in the human nervous system. He describes his subway train as overcrowded: “My subway car [is] crammed, really crammed... absolutely jam-packed... about to crack... and it’s speeding headlong! on its tracks... and there it goes... it’s in the heart of the nervous system... it’s speeding right along in the middle of the nervous system...” and goes on to assert that “the little trick of the all-nerve-subway-on magic three-

dot-sleeper-rails is more important than the atom^{a/3} Later still he says to his interlocutor:

- My three dots are indispensable!... indispensable, for Chrissake!... I

repeat: indispensable for my subway! do you understand me, Colonel?

- Why?

To hold together my feeling rails!... it's as simple as one, two, three!... on the ballast, get it?... the rails have to be held together by something!... I gotta have sleepers!...^{b/4}

One might rightfully (and rightly) argue with the estimation that those little suspension marks are more important than the atom, but we are obliged to admit that the author saw them as terribly important, if not essential to his purpose, and it is not our place to dispose of a tool which he found so important to the production of his work. So by and large the exclamation and suspension marks have been kept in place, only removed in those cases where the comprehensibility of the train of thought made it necessary to rearrange wording and therefore punctuation marks. Likewise, the lower-case letters which begin the words following the exclamation marks have been retained, as has,

^a Mon métro bourré, si bourré... absolument archicomble... à craquer!... fonce! il est sur sa voie!... en avant!... il est en plein système nerveux... il fonce en plein système nerveux![...] le truc du 'métro-tout-nerfs-rails-magiques-à-traverses-trois-points' est plus important que l'atome!"

^b - Mes trois points sont indispensables!... indispensables, bordel Dieu!... je le répète: indispensables à mon métro! me comprenez-vous colonel?

- Pourquoi?

- Pour poser mes rails émotifs!... simple comme bonjour!... sur le ballast?... vous comprenez?... ils tiennent pas tout seuls mes rails!... il me faut des traverses!...

generally speaking, the quirky use of capitalization. The use of the question mark was less problematic, and only changed in the English in instances where we normally don't use a question mark whereas the French do -- after such constructions as "se demander," etc.

There was a more important punctuation consideration, however, and that was whether or not to use standard English-style quotation marks, and a decision was made to dispense with English quotation marks in reported speech. It was found that the French custom of introducing dialogues or quotes by a dash had to be kept in this translation. The book takes the form of a dialogue with the reader in which other conversations or arguments are often reported. As a result, there are numerous instances where dialogues are cited. These dialogues are very often deliberately confusing, however, it not being entirely clear where one character's remarks end and another character's or the narrator's begin. It would not have been possible to retain this confusion if the English quotation marks were neatly wrapped around each quote -- nor would it have been clear from the original where they should have begun and where they should have ended. Take this snippet of dialogue for instance:

-- Où qu'ils sont, devin?

- Dans les caves de l'Institut! Ils fabriquent un faux Dictionnaire!

- Eh là! Eh bien!

Pas d'eh là bien! Gardez vos loustiqueries pour vous! Vous aurez
damnément l'usage! Gaspillez pas vos fins humours!... j'irai vous voir en croix,
marrant!... plus tard!... moi-même! moi-même! Spectateur! C'est écrit! écrit!... ⁵

Translated as:

- Where are they, soothsayer?

- In the basement of the Institute! They're putting together a fake

Dictionary!

- Now how about that!

No 'how about that' about it! Keep your lousy jokes to yourself! You'll make damnably good use of them! Don't waste your pleasantries!... when they nail you to the cross I'll go have a look, see how funny you are then!... when the time comes! myself! in person! An on-looker! It's on the cards...

Although there is no longer a dash before the paragraph beginning "Pas d'eh là bien!" it is evident that the narrator is still addressing the reader. But the dialogue here as elsewhere blends imperceptibly back into the fabric of the story, which is no doubt why the editors did not put a dash in front of the paragraph. As we can read in the notes in the Pléiade edition:

As a consequence of adopting a narrative which is almost always in the present tense, some phrases can either be interpreted as snippets of speech uttered at the time of the related events or the musings of the narrator at the moment he's narrating them. So when you come down to it, typographical choices are a matter of some degree of interpretation, but always within a certain scope.

At the time when he was writing these texts, Céline had definitively abandoned conventional French punctuation, so when he separates one segment of the text from another, he rarely uses anything but three punctuation marks either

alone or in combination: the three dots, the exclamation point and the question mark.^{4/6}

It is easy to see therefore that changing to the clear-cut English system of enclosing quotes in quotation marks would have been inadvisable if not to say impossible. It would have diminished the deliberate confusing of things which was an integral part of this intentionally distorted and disjointed narrative.

2) Repetition

The single greatest liberty taken with this text was the suppression or transformation of the innumerable repetitions of words and phrases. In spoken French a word or phrase is often said twice (if not three times) in a row, for emphasis. The intonation remains almost exactly the same, only the second time there is a slight elongation of the phonemes, adding weight to them. For example, if a French person disagrees with someone he or she might say, "mais pas du tout, mais pas du tout!," the second time lingering longer on the words, stretching out the final "tooouuut," and raising his intonation ever so slightly. The effect on the listener is to convince him or her of the

⁴ L'adoption d'un récit presque constamment au présent de narration a pour conséquence que certaines phrases peuvent être indifféremment des bribes de discours prononcé dans le temps de l'histoire, ou des réflexions du narrateur au moment de sa narration. Le choix d'une disposition typographique de détail comporte alors une part d'interprétation, mais d'une portée toujours limitée.

Etant entendu que Céline, à l'époque où il écrit ces textes, a définitivement abandonné la ponctuation française conventionnelle, il n'utilise pratiquement plus, pour séparer l'un de l'autre les segments de texte, que trois signes et leur combinaison: les trois points, le point d'exclamation, le point d'interrogation.

speaker's conviction. The same phenomenon of repetition does not have the same effect on the English listener. On the contrary, it would only convince the English listener of the speaker's lack of wit. In order for the English speaker to add emphasis to his statement he must do one of three things:

- 1) give his single utterance the necessary weight through intonation (something which is generally represented typographically in *italics*)
- 2) elaborate on the matter or,
- 3) if he does indulge in repetition he must not repeat the phrase verbatim, but change it slightly on the way.

"No, not at all. No, not at all" sounds merely dull in English. To make our point more strongly we'd probably say something like "not at all, you're wrong about that," or "Not at all, I don't agree at all."

In order therefore to retain the spoken flavor of this novel, the number of repetitions was reduced. Sometimes, repetitions were kept, but others were eliminated altogether, and at other times the idea was reiterated in such a way as to change the idea slightly, as is done in spoken English. An example of a repetition's being eliminated altogether is found in the quote above on where "C'est écrit! écrit!..." has been translated merely as "It's on the cards..." A literal translation of "it's written! written!..." would only confuse the reader. "It's on the cards" conveys the idiomatic notion expressed in "C'est écrit," but the addition of another "on the cards," as in "It's on the cards! on the cards!" could mislead the reader into thinking that there were cards on top of cards. So in order to avoid an unnecessarily messy semantic conundrum, it was decided to eliminate the

repetition altogether.

There are many examples throughout the text of repetitions' being slightly changed to give a more Anglo-saxon flavor. Just one example among many is found in the scatological scene where medical students in the prison infirmary want to have a laugh at the prisoner-doctor's expense. In a development of the thematic use of rectal cancer as a metaphor for people's self-absorption which returns as a leit-motif throughout the book, we read:

L'autre jour à l'infirmerie les internes avaient envie de rire... comme ça... mais...
jeunesse!... Ils m'examinent le trou, l'anus... je voulais un lavement... je saignais...
ils sourcillent...

Oh! Cancer! cancer!

Il voulaient m'éprouver le moral!⁷

This has been translated as:

The other day in the infirmary, the interns wanted to have a laugh... you know what it's like... but... ah, youth!... They examine my asshole, the anus... I wanted an enema... I was bleeding... eyebrows are raised...

- Cancer, yeh, it's cancer!

They wanted to test my mettle!

In the original French the interns are quoted as saying "Oh, cancer! cancer!" This was changed slightly in English to "Cancer, yeh, it's cancer!" to respect the colloquial flow of students' likely remarks in a situation like this. The change is small, but crucial, to the natural-soundness of the translation.

Another related point should be mentioned here. Just as repetition serves to underscore the intensity of the narrator's feelings throughout this work, something it cannot do in English, it was found that the pitch of the French was often so strong that certain expletives had to be added in the English to convey the same intensity. When an English speaker reaches a fevered pitch he usually accompanies his utterance with words like "goddam." Expletives were therefore added on a number of occasions.⁸ The following example is taken from a scene where the narrator is ranting furiously about his belongings having been taken from him, among which was his mother's bed, his mother who, he has told us, died of a broken heart in the street:

That's one way to wind up: I drop dead in the street...

But I hoist myself back up on the merry-go-round! and off we go again!
more music! I deal the cards, and three aces turn up! the next time I'll have a bed
made like a brick shithouse! it'll be walled in! it'll be a goddam lead coffin... made
of cement or brick? I'll see! Nobody will uproot that goddam bed! let the tax
boys come and try to tear it out then! I'll come back to haunt the sonsabitches!...

The original of this excerpt is rather different:

Un sort! que je crève dans la rue!...

Oh, mais je rehisse au manège! la route continue! et musique!... j'abats les
cartes, je sors trois `as'! en auge que je me fais refaire un lit! dans une auge! en
plein mur scellé! en sorte de pétrin et cercueil!... en béton ou briques? Je verrai!
Indéracinable! qu'est-ce qu'ils arracheront les Domaines? Je les emmerderais
d'outre-là.⁹

We can see that the English has been changed considerably to translate the tone and humor of this segment, and that the words “sonsobitches” and “goddam” have no equivalent in the French. However, the pitch of the language is so intense that the addition of the expletives, if it does not respect the letter of the law, does convey the spirit and angry humor of the original.

3) Mention of unfamiliar but real people and topical but obscure events

The writing of this novel was very much an act of defiance, as is seen in a number of ways. We have already mentioned that the author’s status as a national pariah is played up throughout the work as the narrator slugs it out in an insult-fest with the reader.

Another way in which this defiance is shown is through the insensitive remarks about Jewish people that are made on one occasion,¹⁰ in which an unnamed admirer visits him in prison and rants on hysterically about how the French really couldn’t care less about the plight of the Jews, and on other occasions when oblique references are made to the concentration camps. In this novel the author comes the closest in his post-war novelistic works to expressing his anti-Semitism. There is no overt racism, unlike in the pamphlets, but there is sometimes a lack of decency and sympathy. One gets the impression that, like a punished child, he is brazenly but obliquely referring to his offense just to provoke his punishers. He seems to be saying, “you can punish me all you like, but I refuse to repent.”

Another defiant aspect of the novel is a stylistic one. The author sets out to prove that he can write a masterpiece even while he breaks all the rules of good prose writing.

French academic style imposes a virtual taboo against repeating a word within a paragraph if it can at all be avoided; so Céline delights in repetition. It is axiomatic that measured prose is good prose: there is precious little measure in any of Céline's novels, and none in this one. Also, he wants to show that he can conjure up a novel out of nothing. Far from recounting the great events to which he was witness during the war, Céline relishes inserting into his novel the names of obscure people and events that will soon be forgotten. References to friends and acquaintances abound in Féerie. There are also sprinkled throughout the narrative many references to current, topical events that had been gleaned from the newspapers and magazines sent to him by friends in France. There is some mention of places and public figures who played an active role in the recent momentous events that had traumatized and transformed Europe. Most often these were given pseudonyms, although in prior versions of the manuscript some of them had been given their real names. "Claunau" and "Darius," for example, were in prior versions, "Dachau" and "Hitler." "Nartre" and "Bartre" and "Artron"¹¹ will of course be recognized as Jean-Paul Sartre, and "Larengon" as Louis Aragon. It was only in order to avoid prosecution that in the final manuscript version of Féerie Céline hastily changed the names of some people and places which in previous versions had been referred to by their real names.¹² The only one of the names of fellow-authors to be translated was that of "Ciboire" for Paul Claudel, who plays an important role in this novel. "Ciboire" means "ciborium" in English, this pseudonym being used as a mocking reference to the latter's Catholicism.

Many many other people are mentioned as well, the author's most revered

teachers, for example, from his years in medical school in Rennes, actors and actresses who were famous operetta stars at the turn of the century, and the notorious serial killer the Dr. Petiot, to name but a few. Passing references are made to many of his Montmartre friends and his concierge (who will play a larger role in Normance) as well as to topical events like the publication of Ann Frank's diary, the launch of the French version of *Readers Digest*, the French President's official visit to Washington and his own progress through the judicial system. The reader is just as disconcerted by these references as he is by the hectic punctuation and distorted syntax.

4) Puns and neologisms

The novel abounds in puns and neologisms. Puns by their nature cannot be translated, as they play upon the different meanings of the same or similar sounds in any given language. Usually, therefore, they have to be abandoned in the target language. Neologisms can sometimes be adapted in the target language, and those that can be made understandable in English have been translated. For example, "to retrospective" is a verb neither in English nor in French, but we can do a straightforward transliteration of it to render it in English as "Oh, but I'm retrospectiving for you!" (page 100). Other ones cannot be rendered. A few of the latter are illustrated here by way of example. On page 21 of the Pléiade edition we read: "Y a assez de **clanculs** par le monde qui triomphent, installent, encombrent la Gloire, les planches, le Dictionnaire, les bidets de ministres, et même les Prisons!" (Translated as: "There are enough bellycrawlers around who triumph,

make their mark, encumber Glory, crowd the stages, the Dictionary, Ministers' bidets, and even prisons!") The glossary of unfamiliar words at the back of the volume tells us that a "clancul" is an "être vil, bon à rien," a base person, a good-for-nothing. Professor Godard tells us in an endnote that Céline invented this neologism in 1947, combining the words "clanculaire," that is, a secretive religious sect, and "clanculus" which is the Latin name of a mollusk which takes on the colors of the rocks to which it attaches itself. One might add that it is made up of the two words "clan" and "cul," rendering the idea of a stupid or unworthy person ("cul" or "ass") who is a member of an undistinguished or at least undifferentiated group ("clan"). Does the translator transliterate this new word and render it "clanass" in English? This is a possibility, but was not done in this case because to do so would have required an explanation, thus further breaking up the reading of an already disjointed text. Instead "bellycrawlers" was chosen because it translates the main idea of an individual who is low and self-serving enough to change his colors to best suit his purpose. Another example of a neologism, "trouducteurs" (page 81) would not be possible to translate as one word, even if we wanted to. The much maligned *traducteur*/translator is told in no uncertain terms that he is a *trou du cul*, literally hole of the ass. The words *traducteur* and *trou du cul* blend marvelously in French, but the words *translator* and *asshole* do not blend well in English. The closest to be found was the two-word phrase: "asshole translators."

On the same page we find the onomatopoeic and alliterative new term "ouinouintés" in the "sentence": "refileurs de rebuts de Zola **ouinouintés yankee!**" (translated as "they pass off rejected scraps of Zola as re-oink-oink-annointed Yankee!")

In a long endnote, Alphonse Juilland's book Les Verbes de Céline is quoted to give us some idea of the meaning of this utterance:

ouinouin- expresses the haphazard, inarticulate, puerile nature of the elevated works, whereas the ending *ouintés* from the English *annointed*, expresses the excessive nature of this quasi-religious elevation.^{4/13}

The choice of the English was based on this appraisal of the translations of the great French works into English as childish and amorphous coupled with the idea of the Americans' quasi-religious reverence toward such cultural borrowing. The translation at least captures the derision implicit in the author's neologism.

5) Distorted syntax

Even for the native French reader, this is a very difficult novel to read, which is why it remains so largely ignored despite its many virtues. The French reader is continually perplexed by the ambiguity of its locutions and disoriented by its *syntaxe bancale*, its halting, often hashed syntax. Ask any French person, for instance, the meaning of the "sentence": "dératé à la charge de pas moi!"¹⁴ and he or she will be duly mystified. Quoting a few lines before and after it will give the reader an idea of how strange and disorienting it is:

Que je vous fouetterais tout ça plutôt! que ça poulope encore plus outre! plus

⁴ *ouinouin* exprime le caractère informe, inarticulé, pueril, des oeuvres consacrées, alors que la terminaison *-ouintés*, de l'anglais *annointed*, exprime le caractère excessif d'une consécration quasi religieuse.

nombre! ahane au spectre! pisse, sue du sang, plus braillards! **dérate à la charge de pas moi!** A la Lune! hyéneuse! Que ça soye encore plus fumant, râlant, enragé! Ecumez! Ventremer! Le cor! Au cor! Que je vous en sonne! Et de la trompette! Et l'olifant!

Since the author does not provide a subject, the reader must decide whether “dérate” is a second-person singular imperative or a declarative verb in the third person singular. “A la charge de” is already ambiguous, signifying as it does both “charging” (in the military or aggressive sense) and “in the care of/at the expense of.” But “à la charge de pas moi” is decidedly quirky, to say the least. One is forced to glean hints from the rest of the paragraph to extrapolate some kind of meaning from the locution. A possible translation of the above is:

If you knew how soon I'd rub your face in it! Let it keep on coming! more of it! panting at the specter! piss, sweat blood, screech louder! **Go on, split your spleen in your mad rush, but it ain't me!** In moonlight! hyenas! Make it even more vile, enraged, death-rattling! Plunder! By the sea hag's belly! The horns! To the horns! let me sound them for you! both the trumpet, and the oliphant!

It could be mentioned in passing also that the pun “hyéneuse” is lost, again because it would require explaining the blending of the adjective “haineux/euse” and the substantive “hyéna.” We should stress here that this is a *possible* translation. No translation is ever definitive, but it can be seen that this novel in particular leaves enormous room for interpretation on the part both of the reader and of the translator. In the next section we'll explore another of the reasons why this is true.

6) Wilful confusion and the play upon multiple meanings

Very early on in the work the author averts the reader to the nature of what he is reading. It is not a novel -- we recall that it wasn't even called one on its frontispiece, unlike all his previous works except the pamphlets, his doctoral thesis and *Casse-pipe*¹⁵ -- it was a "féerie."

As was mentioned in chapter one, the peculiar conception of this book as a magical theatrical production rather than as a work of prose fiction determined the author's choice to deliberately confuse time and space throughout this book. The single greatest problem for the translator stems from the fact that the text is intentionally ambiguous and arcane. The author revels in jumbling together many puzzling events and phrases, and in mixing up temporal sequence. He delights in the "music" of the French, relegating semantic coherency to a distant second place of importance. This problem is compounded by the fact that a single French word can often have two, three or more translations into English. But added to that there is even a further complication in this particular novel, and that is that these words often appear not in full sentences but completely on their own, isolated from the rest of the narrative by those little exclamation points or "three dots"!... The effect often is to make it quite unclear which of the possible meanings best applies. We cannot, as in French, leave the ambiguity there and play upon it. We are forced to make a choice as to which English word most faithfully translates the author's primary meaning, even though we know that he is playing with the multiplicity of possible meanings of the same word and using this multiplicity and the ensuing nuances to enrich his text. To

illustrate the point, let us take the common noun “fronde” which can be translated -- among other things -- as “fern,” “slingshot” or “revolt,” three entirely different words and concepts in English. And let us take the following passage as an example: S’ils râlaient c’était la lutte! la valse des fers! les cannes! les pots!... par la fenêtre! **frondes!** Fallait qu’ils reviennent chargés de présents...¹⁶ (Translated as: If they bitched, the fight was on! everything went waltzing - irons! canes! pots!... out the window! his slingshots! they’d have to come back laden down with presents...)

“Frondes” here is probably not a reference to house plants (one can’t imagine Julot’s being domesticated enough to own one), but we still must decide between slingshots or the idea of revolt. “Slingshots” was finally chosen over “revolt” or “uproar” because in the three cases where it is used in this section of the book it seems each time to indicate the more specific idea that objects were hurled rather than to convey the general notion of pandemonium. But it is a difficult choice to make, one with which the translator is not always satisfied. This kind of decision is constantly having to be made in translating Féerie, and it is sometimes merely a matter of one’s mood which interpretation one prefers.

A similar example (among many) can be found on page 41. Portraying his mad fantasy of a triumphant return to France, the narrator’s admirer has this to say: “Vous arriveriez au Bourget! quarante mille bouquets! fillettes porteront! **menottes** et tout! Vous pouvez pas vous rendre compte du bien qu’on dit partout de vous!” Now we know that *menottes* can mean either “handcuffs” or “little hands.” Which one is it? Once again, the ambiguity in French is wilful. Céline made it perfectly clear that he would not return

to France until all risk of going back to prison was removed. Therefore he would NOT return in handcuffs. He was purposely playing on the two ideas of handcuffs and little girls' hands contained in the word *menottes*. But this ambiguity is lost in English, so the word was translated as "little fists": "You show up at Le Bourget! forty thousand bouquets! little girls will be carrying them! in their little fists! If you only knew how highly everyone everywhere is speaking of you!"

Another problem for the translator is the constant need to flesh out in English ideas that are only sketched, and to provide words that are missing but implied in the French. The reason for this is clear from the following passage from page 131:

Il peignait beaucoup d'Infantes... très demandées les Infantes... presque cul-de-jatte il les faisait... presque au sol, petites, et bossues... comme lui.

- Je m'habillerais à volants je serais comme!... ma gondole sous jupes!

C'est vrai sa hauteur... il leur faisait des figures comme lui...

Translated as:

He painted a lot of Infantas... everybody wanted an Infanta... with no legs just about he'd make them... almost on the ground, little, and hunch-backed... just like him.

- If I dressed all loose like that I'd be like them!... my gondola under my skirts!

It's true, he made them his size!... he gave them faces like his...

A French person reading this would know that "Je m'habillerais à volants je serais comme!" is short for: "Si je m'habillais à volants je serais comme elles" ("If I dressed in

loose clothing I would be like them!”) and that “C’est vrai sa hauteur... il leur faisait des figures comme lui...” would read “C’est vrai qu’il les peignait à sa hauteur... il leur donnait des figures comme la sienne” (“It’s true that he painted him at his height... he gave them faces like his”). In the English we can neither reproduce the grammatical mistakes (“je m’habillerais”) nor leave out the missing words (“je serais comme...”) without making the English text very awkward and inexplicable indeed. So we must fill in the missing words and re-arrange the grammar to retain the jaunty matter-of-factness of the original.

Innumerable other grammatical mistakes are strewn throughout the text, and translating them as mistakes is always ill advised. The mistake on page 126 of the Pléiade edition, for example, “le seul gypse qu’il voulait se servir” cannot be rendered in English. However much “on se sert de” in French, it still comes out, “one uses” in English. One tries to compensate for this inability to translate “mistakes” by including equally unorthodox English grammar where it’s possible and by generally emphasizing the colloquial, spoken flavor of the work.

7) The replacement of narrative by free-association

A final point to be made about the peculiarities of this text is that instead of a linear development of plot, character and narrative we find a circular pattern of themes around which the action flows. As we saw in chapter one, there are a number of major themes in this novel, but they interweave rather than develop. The narrator continually goes off on a tangent, but we soon learn that he has not lost his way at all, and will return

to his point in a circuitous fashion. Time and time again it is clear that a single word will set the narrator's mind going off in a different direction. But he never strays too far from his major themes and obsessions, returning a few lines or pages later to delve into it again. One small example among many is found on page 43 of the Pléiade edition:

- Qu'on l'empale!

Y a que ça que vous savez!...

- Soit! soit! mais petit mot d'abord, monsieur le Président! la parole! Je raisonne avec le Président, je vous parle pas à vous! J'ai parlé moi à Laval! Je l'ai soigné! Je sais parler aux Présidents! Tous les Présidents! On s'adresse jamais assez haut! Ma mère est morte de chagrin toute seule sur un banc avenue Clichy pendant que vous assassinez tout... alors? alors? J'ai plus rien du tout à revenir...

Translated as:

- Impale the sonofabitch!

That's the only thing you know!...

- Sure, go ahead! but just a wee word first, Mr. President! the floor! I'm having a word with the President, I ain't talkin' to you! I spoke with Laval! He was a patient of mine! I know how to talk to Presidents! Any President! You can never go too high! My mother died of a broken heart all alone on a bench on Avenue de Clichy while you were out killing everything... so? so? I have nothing left to got back to at all...

The association of ideas here is clear: the reader tells the narrator he should be impaled, and the narrator retorts that that's fine with him, but he wants to have a word

with the President first. This leads him to think of Pierre Laval, Prime Minister of the Vichy government who he said was his patient. This leads him to think in turn of his sick and dying mother, whose death near his former home reminds him that he no longer has a home to go back to. Time after time, this kind of circular pattern of thought is repeated. But the narrator does not stray off into any old tangent -- the tangents to which he strays always weave back into each other.

It is not only ideas that the author promiscuously free-associates about, however, it is also sounds, and this poses a major dilemma for the translator. On pages 27-28 for instance we read:

Au micro, vengeur! Au micro! tous les vengeurs sont en ondes! en plis! mise en plis! replis! frisettes! fossettes! mis! Personne pour arrêter les tanks mais cette offensive volcanique! cette *furia canto* plein les airs!

Translated as:

Hit the mike, avenger! The mike! all the avengers are on the airwaves! in waves, in folds, curlicues, curly-heads! dimples! No one to stop the tanks, but they can sure talk a volcanic offensive! this *furio canto* all over the airwaves!

The idea of (air) waves conjures up the idea of folds, which sound then triggers off the notion of curling hair, which then leads to dimples, etc. Already in the French this is disconcerting, but at least it has more alliterative and evocative value than it does in English. In English these cannot be reproduced, but at least we can convey the ridicule implicit in the list of rather feminine things (permanents, dimples) as set against the idea of the male avengers calling for blood on the airwaves, but something is definitely lost here,

and that is the alliterative pleasure the French reader gets from the litany of similar sounds and the associations they engender: *en plis! mise en plis! replis! frisettes! fossettes! mis!*

It is clear from all of the foregoing that an enormous amount is lost in the English because of the author's stretching his language's stylistic possibilities to the limit. These losses were, however, more meta-verbal than narrative in nature. In other words, what was lost was the "music," the poetic quality of this text. At another level, it was demonstrated that the English translator had often to make an educated guess at the most appropriate translation of words, choosing from a number of different possibilities, and that in order for the text to be understood in English more words had to be added to flesh out ideas that the author merely sketched. As a result, it was found that the English text turned out more clear, or at least less obscure, than the French text. The English is less nuanced, less mystifying, but conversely more coherent from a narrative point of view.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the foregoing has made clear to the reader some of the enormous difficulties involved in translating this maddening and often mad novel. As we have seen, language play has usurped the primacy of story-telling. It has come into its own. The language has become the main protagonist, fighting the author/narrator's battle for him in the only arena left to him. And it is a protagonist of protean virtuosity. It can capture an enormous range of sounds that erupt in the quiet of our reading in the constant barrage of hammering, screeching, squawking, etc. that constitutes the "amazing sound decor," the

jarring musical backdrop of this work. It can be twisted almost out of recognition and still produce images that amuse us and cause us to reflect. It can break up the sentence structure and even word structures in ways that startle and disconcert. It can express impotent rage and bitter resentment at the same time as it expresses the most frank self-mockery and poignant regard for others. It continually blends words together to form new ones that make us laugh or muse. It repeats sound patterns for the sheer pleasure of it, without regard for semantic consistency. It can mystify and confuse but never entirely lose its focus. It can jump from one half-finished notion to another in a circular pattern with sprite-like mischief and ease, each time expanding upon the point of departure. In short, the language performs its magic, as if by itself. It is for that reason, no doubt, that it was given the name of “féerie,” a name which keeps slipping through the net of English -- appropriately enough for a work whose powerful yet elusive nature it is hoped is caught in the pages that follow.

Notes

1. Céline, Louis-Ferdinand. Romans Tome IV: Edition présentée, établie et annotée par Henri Godard. (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1993) 1107.
2. Godard, Henri. Les manuscrits de Céline et leurs leçons. (Tusson: du Lérot, 1988) 55.
3. Céline, Romans, 542-43.
4. Céline, Romans, 544.
5. Céline, Romans, 91.
6. Céline, Romans, 1098.
7. Céline, Romans, 67-68.
8. This problem was discussed with Professor Godard, who agreed that expletives should be added if they helped convey the intensity of the French.
9. Céline, Romans, 62.
10. Céline, Romans, 41-42.
11. The pseudonym "Artron" recalls the epithet "ténia des étrons" or "tapeworm" which Céline used to describe Sartre in "A l'agité d'un bocal" (reproduced in Cahier de l'Herne: Céline. Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1972. 509).
12. Céline, Romans, 1099-1100.
13. Céline, Romans, 1273.
14. Céline, Romans, 22.
15. Bellacosta, 31.
16. Céline, Romans, 127.

“Fable for Another Time”

for animals, for the sick, and for prisoners

The horror of reality!

All places, names, characters, situations set forth in this novel are imaginary! Absolutely imaginary! No relationship whatsoever with any reality whatsoever! It's only a Fable, and even at that!... for another time!

So here's Clemence Arlon. We're the same age, or thereabouts. This is one strange visit! Right now... No, it's not strange... She came in spite of the air-raids, the metros not running, the streets barricaded... and from such a distance!... from Vanves... Clemence hardly ever comes to see me, neither does her husband, Marcel... she didn't come alone, her son's with her, Pierre... She's sitting down -- there -- at my table, her son's remained standing, his back to the wall. He'd rather look at me sideways. It's an awkward visit... She's also looking at me sideways, not facing me... neither one of them's at ease, people are all thinking what they're thinking these days... what they're thinking, who they're meeting, who they know. It's a good three or four months that they've been thinking what they've been thinking, that nobody really looks me in the eye... because of what's happening, that's why. People behave almost all of them in the same way at the same time... the same ticks... Like ducklings around their mother, in Daumesnil, in the Bois de Boulogne, all at the same time, right face!... left face! Whether there's 10 of them or 12 or 15! same thing! all of them! right face! to the split second! Clemence Arlon is looking at me out of the corner of her eye. That's how it is these days. If she had 10, 12, 15 sons, they'd all be looking at me cockeyed the same way! Of course I'm the notorious sell-out traitorous felon that they're gonna assassinate tomorrow, the next day, next week... The traitor fascinates them, they gotta look at him out of the corner of their eye... This Pierre, he takes after his mother, looks and characterwise, for sure... but she was better, finer featured, more regular... I'm an Athenian. Very fussy when it comes to looks. About character, morality, my word, I make do... Them, their problem is morality, that's why they all want to kill me... not just Clemence! her son! all of them!... one

reason or another, the war at the moment, the Krauts, Monsieur de Brinon¹... the black-market martyrs! the defense of the Montrouge fortress²! They always have their reasons...

I was saying that Clemence was really lovely looking... in her day... our youth!... I look at the kid again... I smell a sneak... the same instincts as his mother. He didn't want to sit down, he has his back to the wall, he doesn't like being here. He's rocking back and forth, one hand in his pocket... They talked about me at home, around the table, with friends, to the neighbors... There again, it's the same thing, the same stupid garbage, at the same time, all in it together. For months now everywhere they've been rehashing the whys and the wherefores. I'm good for the killing! for a laugh! for the country! Only they can't agree on how to do it -- gouge out my eyes, draw and quarter'im, bury'im alive! Major topic of conversation at family gatherings, at the theater, in the metro corridors (those air-raids)... So of course the Arlons who've known me for more than thirty years, they have a little something to say about my weaknesses, my ways, my delectable disgustingness! Permanent topic of conversation at their house! Down there in Vanves. A University of my vices! The way I go nuts over things, my incredibly warped ways. Just one of my excesses deserves at least a thousand, ten thousand hangman's

¹ Fernand de Brinon (1885 - 1947), was a journalist then politician who became Vichy's "ambassador" and then "delegate general" to Paris. Céline solicited his help during the war, once on behalf of his patients in Bezons and once in 1943 to ask for a pardon for a young Breton whom the Germans condemned to death and then shot.

² During the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871) the Montrouge Fortress was one of the places most heroically defended despite the ferocious onslaught of the Prussians situated in Châtillon. It was almost entirely destroyed and then rebuilt. In 1944-1945 it was the site of the executions of some of the most notorious collaborators.

ropes! Friends are walking police logs, red hot, animal heat...

The kid there, the sneak, he's doing law... Maybe he'll be a sitting judge one of these days. It's the first time he's seen a hanged man up so close... A hanged man of tomorrow... Hanged? Who knows? Radio reports are contradictory. hanged. skinned alive!... Drawn and quartered? In any case, judgment is nigh. A matter of hours... From Brazzaville¹. Berne or Tobolsk, by every window in the neighborhood, you can hear them bellowing, bleating, quacking. According to the valiant ones at the microphones in London he'll be "impaled"! from New York the most blood-curdling war cries. *We'll make mince meat of the Monster of Montmartre!*

That's why they came, both of them. Clemence and her son. Things are heating up... I don't listen much to the radio, but the patients keep me informed... For them at Vanves all day long it's "those killer waves"! And with bravura! With the windows wide open, there they go, "The Krauts are beaten. Draw up your lists!" Oh those are some characters over at Vanves... and in Bezons! my practice!... And here in Montmartre! In my house even! I'll get back to you about that... They're here for the imminence of it all. To see their old pal go out for the count... Clemence and her son. The kid, he wouldn't dare whack it to me right there, off his own bat, just like that, and *wham!* A little pistol maybe? He's fiddling around in his pocket. Don't think so... He looks sneaky, but not crazy. You gotta be crazy to kill a man to his face, point blank. Requires a certain madness... He's not mad, I'd see it. If there were three or four of them they'd be mad.

¹ During the war, Radio Brazzaville was one of the most important stations of the Free French. The French colony in the Congo had rallied to General de Gaulle's cause by August 1940.

All alone he's just a jerk, that's all, a jerk.

- Acne, young man?

I go to his chin with my finger, I touch it... He's full of acne.

- You scratch yourself?

- Huh, wha? He's trembling. All overcome, over nothing.

- Huh, wha yourself! Shit!

I know what I'm talking about. This kid could only kill with three or four others. Okay. So why did they come so far? For the spoils? Maybe they thought I was already killed. Is that why they look so dumb? Surprised?... Maybe for Clemence it's affection? Because she used to be sweet on me? Does she want to warn me? She doesn't look full of tender concern... It won't be long now! Twenty radios a day tell me so...

Ah, dear Clemence! Ah, dear Marcel! Ah, dear young one!... Such memories!... Will they visit my grave? The thought strikes me. Maybe. Not sure. First of all, I won't have a tomb! I'll be torn limb from limb, thrown to the dogs... They're hungry at the moment, the dogs... not just the neighbors! The airwaves promise-crammed: The monster quartered at zero hour! no time to catch his breath!

When you come down to it, they're just a little ahead of time, Clemence and the kid... They want to get there first, before the rush... Otherwise what's the use of knowing him since 1914? The kid from his little corner, from the shadow, he's inspecting my books, well, my shelf thingies... At Clemence's place all would be in order! No books everywhere, no! I never put them away. They come as "heirs in the making". At Clemence's place it's spotless! Her "interior"... But, damn it, this is pissing me off. I'm

being too goddam nice. The kid! The rope! Brazzaville! The guillotine! The spoils! To hell with all these nosy-bodies! I look at Clemence. I get a good look at her. Not an iota of prettiness left. She's all puffed up, wrinkled, ashen... I'm gonna tell her so: Sweetie-pie, you deadly bitch, you're nothing but a big fat dirty whore! Fuck off! You and your brat. Out o'here! out!

They deserve to be treated brutally. They came to see a soon-to-be-deadman, a tomorrow-he'll-be-hung, she, who's almost dead already herself! From seepage, shriveling, rotten menopausal horrors. Oh, she's bad! Women, they deteriorate like wax, they go bad, melt, ooze, puff up, leak out right under your nose. Poisonous mutineers, rasclettes, their bleeding, their fibroids, rolls of fat, their prayers... When candles finish they're horrible, women too... Go the Mass is ended... Leave! Get out! No laughing matter.

So there they are the two of them... Okay? So? Will they talk or won't they? What the hell do they want in the end? Out with it! They're not very brave.

- Come on, out with it! I try to get them to come clean...

Not a word!

We've known each other a long time - Clemence and myself, I mean. It's been 32 years -- I'm counting. 32 years, makes you stop and think. A building that's 32 IS somebody. The johns overflow, the elevators don't work any more, the concierge's a friggin' grandma, I'm trying to find you a comparison... wear and tear...

The first day we met is far away now. I've got quite a memory. Engraved in my mind, things are. I can't forget anything... It's not a sign of intelligence... Nothing to

boast about, memory... that's just how it is... So I'll tell you the date, the month, May 1915 at Val, you know, the hospital, Val-de-Grace... That's going back a ways, the Val!... But I don't want to get you lost in my memories.

I go back to the young man there against the wall, the awkward big dope. I won't give you an in-depth picture, he's not worth it. He's fiddling around in his pocket... nothing to worry about... all the young ones fiddle around in their pockets... a pistol? An erection? Maybe I'll give him another talking to about his acne... A little lotion? Neh, to hell with it. I'd never get rid of them... They're Gaullists, the whole family... Of course they are! It's all the rage... Hate is all the rage... There's always been hate, the same hate, but now it's "in"!... There are four million of them in Paris boiling over with the same hate, the "in" hate... That's nothing to sniff at, four million hatreds. The last remaining Fritz in la Villette, and all the cutlasses come out! I swear to God! Garrotts, thieves, principles. Honor, Nation! And I'm part of the mass uprising, my guts, my head, my aorta... they're promising a meter-sqaure hunk of my meat at the Place de la Concorde! At the public quartering of the traitors. Precisely timed work, bet your bottom dollar, it'll be bigger than the jumping around they did at the Marne! The paddling around at Verdun! The hundred-thousand-against-one hunt is on! Absolutely risk free! The dream come true for the ladies, the maidens, the big hide-tanners! Your hide! National industry! The Game of Every Delight! The Hounding of the gagged and ligated beast, prey on a platter! What bliss! The Nation! Oh, that Heady Feeling!

Could he have a Browning, the kid, that sneak? What would he be risking? Nothing at all! Glory? A Medal! Point blank, *wham!* Bullet right to the heart. He's not

nuts. He's not six or seven at a time. He's no crowd... He'd like to be. Clemence has got her beady eye on my place, the view over Paris, the elevator, the metro right there... They're in a four-room place in Vanves... comfortable, sure, but small. She's dreaming there, by my open window... then she takes another look at the furniture, the ceiling, how she'll get rid of the partition... How she'd fit it all out.

All the radios are making them drool over my apartment -- for the taking, 18 rue Gaveneau, Montmartre, they give the floor - 7th, even the landing.

It's possible -- even probable -- they'll chuck me out the window, chop me up on the sidewalk...

Madame Esmeralde at number 15, she's always been pleasant to me, nice, she's the one who had me warned by a woman whose name I can't reveal just yet... Madame Esmeralde does nails, she has clients who know everything... Just like for the landing, they know the time, the exact spot... No longer any doubt about it according to the radio. So you should hear them go on about it! On the streets, in crowds, the cafes! Everybody's shouting... the Krauts are fucked! We'll massacre the rest¹. The airwaves are going hoarse over it from Tomsk to Sydney Australia, from Aberdeen to Chad, that it will be a giblet-letting such as we haven't seen for three centuries -- ooh, the way the blood will spill, flow in torrents, guts everywhere! The gooey mess, Nazi gut-heap! The whole goddam bunch! "Draw up your lists!" Definitely a landing in the air.

Me too, I'm good for the air: Puff! I can see it now! I'm already sailing! Not only Madame Esmeralde! Many other quite proper persons have more than insinuated to

¹ I.e., the collaborators.

me... that I was blissfully unaware. Besides the radios! Every which language! As soon as the Landing is over, total nationwide bloodbath! Butcher the whole pack of whores! At least 15 cadavers per block! Maybe more! One for every floor! That's what they've ordered! It's the future! Widespread rejoicing! I haven't got many hours left! France can no longer breathe!... for three or four months now they've been hounding me...

Queues of the curious at my door. Knock! Knock!

They tumble in.

- Hello, Doctor!

They look at me out of the corner of their eyes... even the most determined get embarrassed when it comes down to it... they're all in it together. They've got butchery in their souls... I fascinate them from the corner of their eye. The men's voices quaver, they tremble, they mumble. The women, they get a hard-on -- shamelessly -- the young ones even more so. They can already picture me hanging from the hook, torn to shreds, emasculated. "Hurry up", is what they're telling each other, "get his tongue, his eyes!" They're swaying, they climb on my knees, they kiss me with such tenderness!... even in the very street I'm hailed -- on the sly, of course -- people who hardly spoke to me any more, acquaintances... suddenly they all gotta tell me something. I know that certain look in their eyes...

The Krauts have been weakening for a long time now, but it's really only been three, four months that you can say that they're really fucked... and it's been three, four months that I've been treated to big tits with a hard-on.

It's amazing how they keep on coming! The *knock knock* never ends... My door

again! Me, who isn't very welcoming, not even polite! I'll cut it short...

- The basics! Fast! Goodbye! So long!

Knock, knock! Another one! And another, a woman this time.

- Doctor, if you don't mind.

The tragedy is, I'll tell you right now, I should've already been far away... in Lapland, Portugal, as soon as the first "voyeur" visits started happening, the first cockeyed peeps. That's a sure sign. People's interest is ghastly. It's the death in you that they come to see... cosy up to death so it doesn't come bothering them, their precious "them", when the time comes... their time... Get nice and cosy... They'll trifle with death -- your death -- take advantage of the fact that it's around to make nice to it... You can go straight to it on the other hand. They'll recommend that death get a good grip on you, not let you slip away, make sure it knows that they're just there for what death leaves behind... that they and Death are on the best of terms, that you're the one to swing! Just you! That they'll come to the scaffold full of verve and applaud... They're all for your torture, oh, yes, but please, one more hour of life for them! What you call the Pact of the Instincts.

He who doesn't fuck off soon enough is a jerk. That's the whole moral of the story! Oh, I was aware, all right, but overwrought... And then there was still a lingering kindness about me... I don't know why... All that's gone now! Kicked in the ass! Maybe it was self-respect. Spare me the curiosity! I shouldn't have let anyone come to see me... Overwrought? I've been overwrought since 1914, I've got a thousand reasons to be ungracious, unkempt, impossible. And even so, I went and opened the door to them!

Knock! Knock! The door! Shit! My foot up their ass is what they should've got!

That would have been the wise thing to do, the only wise thing! What the hell were they all doing, coming to set me off? And not only at home, at the Dispensary too! In Bezons! Ten, twelve, fifteen people to see me... A lot of good it did to tell them: I don't give interviews! Oop! Doesn't matter, they just keep on comin'. That's what you get for being about to swing. They trip over each other in the rush to get a whiff of you. Just give them an opening and they talk nonsense... you gotta be discrete... very tactful! and pretend not to notice that they've come sniffing around to get a good whiff of your rotty flesh... For that, Clemence was the same... as well as our old friendship she was supposed to want to talk to me about... not a peep... leaning sideways in her chair... mumbling a few words, shutting up again. I laugh... I would laugh.

- Come on, Clemence, out with it!

I help her. Give a little cough. What if I showed her my little birdie? Pull my drawers down, right there? *Bamm!* She'd get over her shyness but quick. I think about it... but I'm too beat! Limp! It'd be an effort... "Oh!" she'd say. That's all. What's the use? my goddam foot up her ass is what she deserves! But I'm not violent enough. I was very violent once. Damn, but my character's been frayed along the route. Now I'm wary about everything... it's probably the lack of sleep... Funny that Marcel didn't come, her husband... He found some excuse... It's a toss-up who's the most yellow-bellied in any household.

- So she says, I'll go myself.

But what do they want from me exactly? Marcel, the son, the family, they all

agree... She'll go, she's the daring one. Gaullists, all of them! Absolutely! Gaullist Super-resisters. Marcel took over a bistro, a Jewish one, replaced them, and not just a bistro, a depot!... He told me all about it. Two years ago, before Stalingrad... he hasn't been back to see me since... since Stalingrad... Everything's gone a bit fishy since Stalingrad... It's not that he's got a problem with me personally... But since everybody knows in his neighborhood, he's gotta hedge his bets... so now he never shuts up about me... He's a busybody, a boozier, a braggart. He's blabbing all over Vanves what a sell-out pig I am... That we were old pals, but since I turned "Nazi" - oh, you can bet all that's fee-neesh! finibus!

It was all flattery before the war, "Celine, he's a pal of mine"! Now, forget about it! It's true that we've been friends for a long time... We were in Val together. Operated on, cited, decorated together, for real wounds in a real war, without any thought of personal gain, I can safely say, not a cent of profit... Now times are different. He can't even look me in the eye. I can tell you what I think! What I feel!... I have as much to confide as the next guy. Simply put, what we know as France, that went from St Genevieve¹ on her mount to Verdun in 1917, after that it's been just a bunch of odd balls, people who're not the full deck. I look at them there, the shifty pair, the kid, the mother... there's an example for you of...lousy, underhanded! With them, more than with a thousand others, I was always generous, friendly, I felt for them... And here they are, coming at me like grave diggers! Them and the others! I don't keep track of my good

¹ St Genevieve (422-500 AD) is the patron saint of Paris. She is credited with predicting the invasion of the Huns and with warding Atilla's attack of the city.

works, Godfuckingdamnit, it's impossible! They've taken everything! From one end to the other, by hook or by crook. The proof: I'm skint and skinned! I'll wind up in a dungeon! That's where he belongs!

- You climaxed!

- That's possible!

- Damn right you did!

- So what?

May it do them a lot of good. I'm thinking, the time has come, I look at them. I'm cutting my story up on you. People haven't treated me very well. It was a bloody whore of a manhunt. It began in '14. Any excuse at all! First it was the cannons, then the gossip, then the police! I wanted to save their goddam necks, my fellow countrymen! their foul necks, their shit-ridden hearts, wanted to save them from the Slaughter... my books for that!

- Smart aleck, they carp, drop dead first!

Brothers of my flesh, I worship you! Love of my waking hours, hurrah! I got Cain's ass up against the zenith! squirt septic finger! Triumph! I can see you now! *Pro Deo!* Bash my head in and do it big! Bigger, brother, bigger! So that the whole sky fits in! Take a star for yourself! You want it? Here's my life -- a gift! Can I do better than that? Would you like to give me a kiss? What if I gave the kid there a nice big hammer, invite him to bash my mug in? that's right, my own face, right then and there? He wouldn't have the guts. He'd back down... Others will come, they'll break in and carry off the place, the library... I'm thinking... getting ahead of myself... So that I keep my

goddam mouth shut they'll cut my tongue out, poke my eyes out for a laugh, they'll chuck me out the window, and onto the sidewalk... Others will get fancy... I'll be tied to a horse's tail and alley oop! At break-neck speed! Avenue of the Opera, Concorde, like Brunehilda¹! I learned this bit of history at school in Louvois Square, public elementary school, to show you I'm from the neighborhood, got my elementary school certificate and everything!

It'll be in front of a huge crowd, the whole goddam city celebrating! I get carried away - just the way I am. But I don't forsake my words, nor my visitors, nor you.

- This guy's going off his rocker!

If you like, but you'd upset me... that would be judging me very hastily... you'll see why. What direction shall I take? Let's get back our bearings!...

- Eh, you're navigating in Cloud CooCoo Land!

- Me? No Cloud CooCoo Land about it! I see Clemence and her son, they're sniffing around, my books, my rags, my highly saleable curiosities... They've already made money ... (Detail not to be forgotten!) out of another kick in the balls before!... when I got screwed at Rueil! What a wreck that was! Ah, my nursing-home! My lovely nursing home! Now they think: It's going to start again, we'll have to beat the crowds, the General Sale!... This is a windfall we won't see again! Ten thousand of them pillaging! In a matter of hours!

- Get on with it, Clemence.

¹ Reference to the Queen Brunehilda who in 613 was drawn to her death by galloping horses and whose picture was a commonplace in schoolchildren's history books.

I think again about Rueil, ah to think about it again... the beautiful trees... the barges all along... My Rest Home! what rotten luck! The kid there, he was finishing up his Rhetoric ... he got all my books, the kid... It's the one sure thing in my life, I can't ever keep anything, anywhere, not a single book... Fate plunders everything on me. The landlord was gonna sell off all my stuff, so I give them advance notice: help yourselves, friends! They carry off my entire library... the kid the reading matter, the mother the kitchen stuff! Marcel, the cellar!

Nothing gets me more excited than big disasters, misfortune intoxicates me. It's not that I go looking for them exactly, but they come all the same, like guests who have some sort of rights... So I was telling you about Rueil, when all hell broke loose! What an enterprise that was! Two bailiffs from Chatou on my ass! I call my worthy friends to help me -- I mean Arlon, Clemence, the kid. The seals are already on my goddam locks! The sale the next day! Lost no time! Anything for friendship! They go to it, these nifty-fingered devils! They even bring an aunt from Nantes, one they were putting up for a few days! They cart off all my stuff! In one night! reduced to beggary! From Rueil to their place! Ipso presto! On their backs, and then in wheelbarrows, coming and going it've filled three trucks! Aside from the Library and at least twelve cases of bottles, five medicine chests, a Poupinel sterilizing chest, two other vapor baths, 24 whole beds, the whole kitchen...

I was flabbergasted... By daybreak all I had left was fifty *Revue des Deux Mondes*, bound, that is, in good shape, and a motorcycle with sidecar, and a "Pachon" tension meter and five syringes... So as not to say that I left nothing... at least two months

rent's worth. Talk about a hatchet job! But what consoled me a bit was that Marcel, his wife and kid and the aunt had salvaged something from it! not for me! For them! Personally, I don't like relics... I always get the feeling they're jinxed... I wanted to start again at zero, confront life again from another angle... with more umph!... With real zeal! I tell you! All the little ins and outs, the imaginings! Grandiose plans!... Dining room, living room, twenty bedrooms, bourgeois standing, taxes!... Damn! Just my stethoscope, a pen, a white-wood table... no overhead... no decor!

Go figure it! Bunch o' crap! All your junk comes crashing down on you! Life catches up with you. No quarter! You get your toboggan going again, you get on with it, you get knocked around, you go head to the wind! You get clobbered, you're reduced to rags, a useless heap! One long slide downhill! Destiny is the worst with then-some added... the toboggan runners are greased...

Lower than being flung in the slammer you can't go. Not to mention being exiled!... The kid has it made! How much did the toboggan ride take out of me? Fifty years of blood, sweat and tears, of horrible, superhuman effort... Hey, you played your cards right! Ruined, loathed everywhere, such a goddam asshole it's a miracle I'm still bleating... My poor wife, there, on the other flea pit, my dancer, just had an operation... There was something good about the Middle Ages... A little trouble with the law, you could live... nowadays you gotta write tomes... You know Rue Réamur, the Court of Miracles¹? These days it's a movie house. The Age of Charity is over! Before the Era of

¹ The "Cour des Miracles" was an area of old Paris between the Rue Réamur and the Rue Caire which in the Middle Ages was a meeting point for the city's low life who would vie with each other for predominance.

Liberation, a word from a prince got you out of jail! a Christmas! Nowadays! Go scratch yourself! One lousy situation! King Oluf, from where I'm eating my heart out, he couldn't get me sprung with a word. The least little prank and the masses would whip his ass but good. "Grant this man his freedom!" -- they'd knock him unconscious.

I'm writing you this from everywhere by the way. from my place in Montmartre! from the depths of my Baltavian prison! and at the same time from the seaside. from our hut. Time and place all mixed up! Shit! It's a Fable, don't you see... That's what a Fable is: the Future! the Past! the False! the True! Fatigue! All the same, I'm thinking something - I'm thinking that the mangiest stray dog who's wandering around there by the brook, who's sticking his nose everywhere, let's say he's called Piram, *he's* got less to fear than I do. Hounded as no dog is! Not hounded because of *his* name. Piram! You can survive that name, Piram! Piram's no walking catastrophe!

But my unspeakable name isn't all! There's illness! Envy! Spies all over the place... You'll see as you read each chapter¹... if I managed to outsmart them! If I wandered here, there and everywhere! We did some wandering! Lilli and Ulysses²... Without some juicy little stories, I could go scratch myself - if I weren't funny you wouldn't read me, ever! Oh, but only buy me under the counter! At the moment

¹ This book contains only one long "chapter". He was referring to the different stories he would relate about his war-time experiences, which he conceived of as chapters in one great book, but which eventually became five books.

² "Ulysses" will soon be given his real name, Bébert.

everything's impounded beforehand (ruling of 23 February¹) and a hundred thousand worth of debt backed up! and other rulings and appeals and Super-Court, etc.! as well as prison! Disgrace! Stripped of civil rights! Everything!... Once the toboggan's been sucked into the abyss, at every turn you get bashed in the face, and by the time you get to the bottom you're just a ball of muck and tears.

Think about it! All hatred broken down by centrifugal force!

You give up, the last gasp... No getting around it! You belch up your soul and it's curtains for you! To the winds, cutie!

But the pain is still there, piercing as ever. Gets you going again! At every cork-screw turn! You rage! You're saved! Hatred! it's not wonderful... it's not moral... but shit! to hell with my scrutations! pulsations! Let's get back to brass tacks! I was telling you that after Rueil, when everything was lost, reduced to beggary, the furniture, etc, I'd finagle things here, there, managed one way or another, cast my Science, my mind, to the wind!... The fill-in work, the scrimping... in town, in the provinces, in the fields, wandered through manys a path, climbed manys a floor, all fervent about the art of healing, bandaging, consoling, giving birth, gently stroking too... Down with pain! with germs! with fatigue! with death! with at least 25 kinds of despair!... What did I get for it? sweet fuck-all! tribulations! piles of shit! good God! Piddling gains out of powerful pains in the ass! My quills everywhere!...

Only one promising project, maybe, that would have dethroned the Bourboules,

¹ On February 21, not 23, 1950, Céline was sentenced in absentia to the confiscation of half his worldly goods, present and future.

the N ris, the Cauterets! Even Enghien, its lake, its sulphurs!¹ You can see it from here: at Sannois, an Aerium for asthma! The Mont-Dore you can get to by bus! The Royal Spa for the Small-of-Purse! A mere trip to the outskirts of Paris and back! I had all the rebellious catarrhs of the "economically disadvantaged" for myself! from spring onwards, they kept on comin'! spring, what am I talkin' about? all year round! the ideal place! You know those quarries above Argenteuil? sand veins, naturally dry! white as silver along the top, facing south! They'd leave their factories, their bar-stools to come spend an hour at my place... They'd waste no time! Right away, the natural cure: immobility in a hammock... air hot and sand, that's the whole secret! You won't find any asthmatics in the Sahara! Once you breathe in the air of the torrid sands, Mont-Dore can go fuck itself! For those a bit better off I had a house and a few beds, the "Night-a-Torium"! the windows wide open, facing south! Had to be south!

For once I had something going. The venture was proving healthy. Fortune smiled on me... And then the rains started! Floods and more floods! The sand washed down the banks! Torrents from the Sannois Heights! In one downpours year! Once a century! The banks of the Seine ripped out! Floods in July! Three catarrh-sufferers who want it all the same, who absolutely have to have their cure, stay half-way up Argenteuil, stuck in the mud, the plaster! Not one who makes it to the hammocks! Desperate, lousissimus weather! Extremely rare! I waited, figured in a year I'd boom again... You can't get The Deluge every summer! Had I ten thousand francs in my pocket, the Mont-Dore would be no more! Argenteuil-Sannois, Queen of the Bronchial Tubes!... the

¹ These refer to spas for the cure of respiratory diseases and rheumatism.

“circum-urban” solution. I had to wait. Never, never have I been able to wait! Waiting is money! The “Spa of the Elite and of the People”. The man who can wait is like God. He’s got time in his scales. You have no time, you can go take a hike! How much Time have you got? To tell you the exact truth, it’ve taken three years... But two summers in a row were wintery... not to mention my other medico-social experiments... There were some funny ones... some more than others...

Oh, but I’m not straying from the point! Don’t think I’m blathering! Clemence is the one who makes me stop and think... There, precisely in the flesh... I want you to get a picture of the person... the kind of relationship we had.

Excuse me, but as I say these things, I necessarily have to get a little bit personal... you could say almost intimate... Perhaps I’m going to upset you, I don’t know what line of work you’re in, your tastes, your little whatnots, your place in society... those are whole different universes, places in society, different dispositions, health, not to mention how much money you’ve got socked away! and ages! And madness of cosmic proportions to boot! Mass uprisings! I know not whether you were on any of the lists... I know not your *pedigree*. What side you were on! Your ass on such-and-such a chopping block? On such-and-such another? Your head under yon gallows? We’ve seen it all! Have you been labelled, pinned, spread out, you intergalactic horror, you hexed cow, you ogre, you fiend, you traitorous whore, you Gestapoop, you Landruste¹, you bag

¹ Landru was a famous criminal in the early 1920s.

o'bowels who prevents All Honor from sleeping? The Nation, The Army, la Villette,¹ the loveliest neighborhoods right to the Flea Market, to the north the Médrano Circus, Barbès (and Trudaine Street), the southern regions down to Antibes, La Ciotat? Maybe you catch my drift... see it from here!

To put it succinctly, I'm the most pestilent traitor who's supposed to have run rings around Petiot², sold off Les Invalides by the pound and the Legion of Honor to Abetz³ gave away the Arch of Triumph for a garage! The Unknown Soldier for 20 marks, the Maginot Line for a kiss! Ah, you wouldn't cry "Get the madman"! But "this guy knows what's what" Yes siree! Had you but had the goddam pack on your tail, the ladies, the damsels in heat, your old pals frothing at the mouth, necromaniacs, grave-robbers already sniffing at your dead meat, you'd understand what I was talking about! wanting right now, but right now, your pecker, your balls, the last drop of your juices, wiggling, panting for you to be cut up into little pieces, losing control behind their fitting countenance... They're looking ahead, they're getting carried away by how you're going to swing, spew up your liver!... how you'll be twitching all over the place as you give up the ghost... you'll have had your fill of jumping... your lumpy puke, your guts all over the sidewalk... do we go for it? You get my drift? It'll be magic! boiling over! divine! and I'm only talking about the men, here! There's the ladies to consider, and the youth!

¹ La Villette is a working-class suburb of Paris known at the time for its meat-packing industry.

² Dr Petiot was an infamous serial killer during WWII.

³ Otto Abetz (1903-1958) was the German "ambassador" to Paris during the Occupation.

I knew at least twelve marvelous, sinewy virgins, and high-school Apollos who had to have me in ecstasy, who wanted me to do all sorts of dirty business with them before they did me in. I'd have found over a thousand of them if I'd put an ad in the paper... so goes the world, its fads. You have a Coliseum right in your own home, you're a martyr, you're modest, you say, "But my place is so small"... Ten million starving people who come sniffing at you right through your walls! Once they're on your ass, funny things happen.

- Oh yes, but they do. Such a twisted mind you have. Vice-ridden pig!

- Not at the moment. In any case!

Amorous, religious, curious, voyeurous, discussious, whatever, I don't like visits. In truth I could never stomach them! So a propos! I tell 'ya, I'd rather see twenty patients than have one friendly visit. By God I hate blather! Especially along with all this coveting of my few rags!...

I was forgetting you there! I wasn't including the sound effects for you. The distant cannons' roar! The tambourine... It had been relentless for two weeks... I, who've traveled in Africa, have seen them make a meal out of a man to tam-tam accompaniment. Everything! I was forgetting to give you the cannons roaring in the distance, the southwestern suburbs! I'm a poet, agreed! I have noisy memories, and then irritation, fatigue, and my personal buzzings... but all the same I didn't dream it all up!... I knew from Pamela, my housekeeper, about how the block was preparing, the whole of Montmartre even... how they'd fix my wagon... and then the coffins, the "death announcements". I didn't dream all that! And the solemn "death sentences", and never

signed of course. Certain individuals boasted later that they'd gone looking for me, in my cellar!... It's not true at all! Other people maybe! All cowards are romanesque and romantic, they invent lives full of sparkle for themselves as they retreat. Backstair Campéadors!¹ Crime comes to them once all risk is extinguished, the daggers at the Flea Market! I wasn't so much afraid for myself, don't believe it! I was aware of the horror of it all, that sure as shootin' everything would go to hell, that the awfulness would be worse than '14... so don't talk to me about being lucid! seeing that the future was pretty damned weird, the skies too, and the people, and the corridors... and the doors which were just about to close shut... everything was an ambush... Definitely, since 1914 you have to admit that men like me, we're leftovers, we had the cheek not to die... dubious spot to be in all right!...

- Hey, you, psst! psst! you, the one that got away! cheater!

There they go, having a go at us again... If that's the way you want it! See `ya some other time!

But Arlette² is not from the class of '14! She had no reason to die! She had no scores to settle with the next world! On her account I refused to resign myself... absolutely innocent, they'd have cut her guts out just for butchery's sake. She was lovely, that's all. It's serious business, being lovely... And then my mother almost blind, they'd go and torture her for fun. There was a school in Toulouse for "torturing the old"... let

¹ Campéador is a reference to Corneille's "Le Cid", whose sub-title was "Le Campéador".

² Refers to Céline's wife, Lucette Almansor.

them sue me if I'm lying...they were terrible to mothers... And then there's Bébert, another innocent, my cat... Don't tell me a cat's just something to pet. Not at all! A cat is bewitchment itself, tact emanating in waves... they go "grr...grr" and it's words... Bébert with his "grr...grr" he actually used to talk. He answered your questions... Nowadays he "grr-grrs" to himself... doesn't bother answering questions anymore... he monologues about himself... like me... and like me, he's finished... There was only one other in Montmartre, almost as distinguished as Bébert, and that's Alphonse... Empièrme's cat, Marc Empièrme's¹.

Now Alphonse, where he really could bluff you was at the jump... as soon as the door was opened!... Plunk!... one jump onto the door handle and he was gone! But not so amazing as Bébert when it came to understanding... a real language, "grr... grr"... or when it came to beauty either... or to whiskers... Was I proud of that cat!... The extraordinary thing about Bébert was the way he would go for a walk, a stroll, the way he'd follow us... but not during the day, only in the evening, and only if we talked to him... "You okay, Bébert?"... "Grr!..." He kept wanting to go back to those places. Place Blanche, Trinity, the Boulevards once... but for at least three or four months we didn't go out any more in the evening... after the threats... didn't go out after six any more... Bébert wasn't too happy about that! Should've heard him meow... all over the hallways... He didn't give a shit about the reasons. He was a night wanderer... but never alone solitary!... with us... only with us... and all talk every thirty, forty feet... "grr... grr..." once almost all the way to the Arch of Triumph... Only thing he was scared of was

¹ In life, the writer Marcel Aimé, a faithful old friend.

motorcycles. If there was one in the street, even far away, he came running at me all claws, jumped at me as if I were a tree. Real excursions, often, the Quays, right to Mahé's place,¹ not every cat goes to the Quays... They don't like the Seine... Empiême, I'm getting back to him, yeh, you got it, Marc Empiême, the writer, Alphonse's owner... He lived two streets down from us. I'll tell 'ya about Marc Empiême... another little detour... I won't lose you though... Now that's a friend!... and terrific! just to give you an idea of the man's tastes... So you get the picture... I don't know anyone comparable to Marc in the world of today's letters. Not a one who can compete at the ink-and-blotter stakes in all the writing bullshitery in France. Not a single rival. Prose, drama, verse, laughs!... Not one! that I know of! and for the last fifty years! that's a long time to be inspired by a man! He can distill a dream as niftily as a sprite... there's Maupassant and then there's him. Around, before, ingainst, amongst? A bunch of swindlers!... So why shouldn't he take good care of himself, spoil, pamper himself, refuse himself nothing, yachts, hunting parties, castles?... I'm a bit jealous of him... not on account of his castles, on account of his illness... He's a lot sicker than I am and he produces like a bloomin' Homer! Me, my headaches, my insomnia drive me nuts, they annihilate me; him, the less he sleeps the more he masterpieces. Okay, so we're all Sisyphus! goddam recidivist rock scramblers! Me, the rock comes crashing down again on my schnozola! fucking screw-up! Public Prosecutor's Office! He's dying on his feet but he reaches the top! and on the front page! He sends his rock to the zenith! Exactly where he wants it! Talk about ovations on every

¹ Henri Mahé, painter and scene decorator who lived on a barge on the Seine. Old friend of Céline's.

horizon! The Olympic champion of the Rock! His plays run a thousand nights at the Ambigu! Naturally! The revivals never stop! Klondykes for the movie industry! In the bookstores he sinks them all! He'd go through 15 tax brackets with a quarter of a half-novel the way they grab everything hot off the press! By the hundred! two hundred thousand... four hundred! It's simple! His "rare editions" his "Japanese", the crowds tear them apart at the Auction Rooms! They're nuts about them! They auction them off! They say there are safes full of them! The Aga Khan would like some, can't get 'em! I get such a kick out of it! *Vanitas! Invidia! Jealousy!* Like Jules? One totally lousy hand! my ambitions do not lie in the Arts. Medicine is my vocation!... but I couldn't make a go of it... a doctor without patients!... The novel came along... I worked at it. alas! Piddling profits in the beginning, and then handcuffs! prison cells! loathing! don't ever write!

In the beginning, in the very beginning, I was humming along... I figured it would be a little like an Operetta... Shit, that would've been a lot easier... but no doubt out of timidity and lack of contacts, I never got farther than the libretto... and then what with one bad blow after another, here we are at three thousand music scores that have turned into prose work! And from prose work to prose work it keeps getting worse! darker! novels! You can picture the falling off! Alas, you know the rest! From uncomfortable to worse and worse, from curses to God-strike-you-dead! it turned into The Ultimate Infamy, martyrdom, baseness!... So there's no question that I'll ever rival Marc! Shameless pukeball of a weirdo! What next? hanged? who cares?

It's quite natural that big deal poet laureate-type Marc de Marc should burst forth!

Triumphs everywhere! If he had Byzantine mosaics in his house, singing toasters, I'd find that natural! I'm an open-minded kind of guy!

I've often heard myself say:

- You don't amount to much! You don't know how to create a real work, a play, a sonnet!

- Shit! It's true!

- Just look at Marc!

Words to cut myself down by! Ah, the bitter awakening! I take everything into account! But all the same... oh, boy! The rock comes down on the old schnoz!... I don't send them over the moon, the way Marc does... everything comes crashing in on me, shatters all over! Avalanches everywhere! My vocation is in medicine! my talents are cockeyed too! Even my infirmity doesn't do me any good... it's killing me... Marc, he's got a direct line to the Muses, sick or not sick... if he had the Taj Mahal at his place, one helluva treasure trove, a chapel full of worshipers come expressly to adore in open-mouthed wonder, on their knees, it'd be terrific and that's all! There are enough bellycrawlers around who triumph, make their mark, encumber Glory, crowd the stages, the Dictionary, Ministers' bidets, and even prisons! At least one should be justly adulated! The Zenith all to himself!

Him, his illness makes him toil... me, I've got one that's killing me... I lie here rotting away... repeating the same gibberish over and over again... Look at this page! With him it's Suffering-as-Goad, me, it's just another pain in the ass... I can just see myself on a cross - I'd bore everyone to death, on the scaffold too, I'd maybe manage a

few pathetic rude remarks, no sublime jibes! I'd be one of those martyrs they hiss at! This book for example, lucky if it doesn't turn into a big flop... a disaster! You'll never pay the kind of money it'll cost, the corrections, the typing, the printing, taxes... lucky if war doesn't break out, if they don't screw it up out of all recognition at the press! (Talk about an obsession! fifteen times!) And all the awful things they're gonna tell you about it! It's frightening how many enemies I have, all vying to outdo each other! It's as if they've run out of spit and you know it! but I'll give them a piece of my mind! You bet I will! I may be dying but I'm still wicked! Wolves drop dead without a cry, not me!¹

You fucked it all up, imbeciles! you didn't stalk the right monster! the Céline, shit-kickers! He doesn't give a fuck! Even if you were a thousand times more the vampires that you are, the stalking ghouls, jackals, condors and dragons that you are, every kind of brute-beast herded together from Africa, Asia, and America -- he'd still just get his rocks off from it all. It's Dr Destouches who's the sensitive one! Had you so much as laid a finger on his Medical Degree, it would have been fee-neesh, dead! But about this bullying by bogeymen, this cry-for-the-kill from will-o-the-wisps, this moonstruck butchery, I should give a fuck? If you knew how soon I'd rub your face in it! Let it keep on coming! more of it! panting at the specter! piss, sweat blood, screech louder! Go on, split your spleen in your mad rush, but it ain't me! In moonlight! hyenas! Make it even more vile, enraged, death-rattling! Plunder! By the sea hag's belly! The horns! To the horns! let

¹ Reference to an Alfred de Vigny poem "*La Mort du loup*" in which a wolf "*Refermant ses grands yeux, meurt sans jeter un cri.*"

me sound them for you! both the trumpet and the oliphant!¹

How fine it is to hunt down the phantom. Seeing you do it is a treat, a vice, I'll catch up with you at the charnel house. I'll despoil you of your stinking hide! That'll be an Odeon show! Punch and Judy! Casino? No! Chaillot!² Even though I prefer operettas! Usually I'm light-hearted and roguish, full of verve, happy-go-lucky, a regular Vermot's Almanac³, mischievous! With a weakness for dancers! so don't give me any of your hangman's stuff! swingin' stiff! What I like is watching those little girls dance, nice and rosy, all vigor, music, snap! such balance! Oh fairy-children! Calves, thighs, smiles, darting life! It takes your breath away! Joye and Joye!⁴ Diarrhea of the Horn! from the depth of the woods! Great turds! Scraps of toilet paper! Owls!⁵

- You'll wind up in the clink!

- Yeh, sure, thanks a lot, pig! spare me your wisdom!

- Oh, reader, I bow to you! forgive this moment of High Art, these noose-swingers, these burdensome sorrows!... and this bit of licentiousness... I wasn't losing

¹ This passage, as well as referring to another de Vigny poem "*Le Cor*", is also a sort of preface to others later on dealing with characters from the Song of Roland.

² Céline chooses the Palais de Chaillot for this bloody scene because it housed the National People's Theatre.

³ The Vermot Almanac annually published puns and pleasantries since its creation in 1886.

⁴ A literary reference to Pascal who in his *Memorial* recalls a moment of mystic union with God with the words "Joye Joye Joye pleurs de Joye"

⁵ A good example of double-meanings which are impossible to translate: "colombins" in the original French is a dove-like bird as well as "turd", and "hibou" is an owl as well as a nasty old man.

you, not at all!... you're right here with me, up here on seventh floor, looking out on the gardens... my table... Clemence... my little story... her son... the pillaging about to happen... I was reflecting on the "double Zero" hour, oh, I wasn't imagining it, not at all! all the radios were bleating about it... "double Zero, double Zero"!... from one end of the earth to the other... Dead serious! not just shootin' the breeze! how the sell-outs would be cut up! Cross our hearts and hope to die! stiffs piled high at the Place du Trône, Place de la Révolte, Place de la Bastille! That it was gonna be the biggest, the most victorious, the most flamboyous festival you'd ever seen! with parades! fandaroles from the Concorde to Notre Dame, since the coronation of Louis XVI! How we'd see what the People's name is, and the Avengers and The Nation! Dancing in the street that'd last for two weeks all over town, and on the roofs! A bonfire to last 10 years! The sell-out's meat barbecued in a pyramid as high as the Arch of Triumph! Your spine would be tingling with the wait! There were palpitations on every floor, in every metro, in every concierge's flat.

That's why they came all this way, the two of them, Clemence and her son. Part of the general spine-tingling.

- What about the ice-box?

I'm breaking the ice. I'm not gonna waste my time.

- Has he got an *Ausweiss*¹, Marcel?

- Yes, she sighs.

¹ This German word for a travel permit was in common usage in France during the war. The permit was a necessary commodity for almost all travel and a great bone of contention, subject to favoritism.

- If he had one why didn't he come?

I love touching the most exquisitely sensitive spot, it's the medical man in me... oh, but maybe it wasn't so easy! Maybe they had to bam-bam me first? The kid there? or another one?... Point blank! Assassin with a mission, this kid? He's milk-toast pale... Goddamit, they weren't budging! Murderers or no murderers! Was I imagining it? Was I romancing?... Marcel had stayed home... what did that mean? And what about his business? his sales pitches? His "lightening carts"¹, that are rare these days... other fish to fry! money transfers maybe! scary business! ball-breaking nutty stuff! Grease the palms of the Germans, the Jews the Northern French, the Southern, from Vichy, the shore, the ports, plus the Majestic!² and the Brussels Comptrollers Office! enough to make them abandon Europe! You go too far! he shouted at me! before Stalingrad... when we could still trust each other...so me with my unholy mess! my curious claims!

But still 'n all, there she was, his wife...

- Go ahead. Go see him. Ask him!

- For what?

Ah, B-B-B-B-C! *the question!*³ A prescription? a kiss? a small favor?

¹ A "wagon-foudre" is a cart equipped to transport drinks in "foudres" or large casks. Since "foudre" is also the French word for lightning, it's translated here as "lightning", given that the French would automatically make the association with lightning, which renders a more interesting image than "cask".

² The Hotel Majestic on Avenue Kléber housed the German propaganda and censorship offices.

³ "the question" is in English in the original. Céline knew English quite well and euphonically associates the BBC, which broadcast French resistance messages throughout France, and Hamlet's "the question".

There's something feline, fierce, touchy about friends' wives. You haven't seen anything until you've refused your friend's wife a little favor. Because then, you'd be better off with a reputation of four and twenty Blue-Beards. a con man without a car! a defeated field-marshal! your feet stink, your fangs, your breath! I'm telling you!

Ah, refuse a friend's wife a little favor? the famous little favor!... tell me about it! Orestes, the Furies, a joke in comparison! A woman "three months gone", now that's someone to reckon with!... You haven't known the Antique until you've been looked over, peered at, disgusting yellow-bellied dog! A curse on you! You'll bellow like a stag for the rest of your life!

You don't do that little favor?

May the Erinyes descend upon you, low-down sonofabitch! May they tear you apart! You call yourself a doctor? What for? Ah! Ah! Ah! She's in paroxysms of outrage! some kind of charlatan! hen-pecked sucker! traitor! unimaginable she finds you! all of a sudden! Basically, women, when you think about it, I mean when they're young, there are two kinds, those who're dying to have kids, and those who're dying for somebody to get rid of them... You can't win... But there, with Clemence, it was peculiar... they had other doctor friends... But then, if it were for that, she'd have come alone... and then her "periods"?... could it be her periods?... I was leaving out her age... our age! pregnancy? grandmother more like it. old and ugly! like me! the years!... what breast-feeding does to you breasts... not an abortion? then what? just a visit?... come on, screw that idea! Could it be affection? Hadn't thought of that! A last gasp of friendship?... because there I was like an idiot grinning stupidly at all the perils breathing

down my neck and I saw fuck-all of any of it? I was sleepwalking!... maybe she was coming to suggest I skip town? a little way of getting to Portugal? an “every-man-for-himself” en route for Paraguay?... The Low Countries? Guadeloupe?... To this day, in my cell, I wonder... the events have passed now... long passed... I think about them again... What the hell was she up to? Picking out a few bits of furniture? Marcel would’ve come along!... with a truck they coulda got everything!... Repeat performance of Rueil!... Life’s a series of rehearsals, and then you die. Death brings people back to us, the same people, their “doubles” if they no longer exist, always the same gestures, the same old song... you screw up your entrance, your exit, and your lousy luck begins! flops! cat-calls!... You only get one act to play! One only!

That day, if he’d’ve come in a truck he’d’ve saved me a few things, Marcel... Now it’s fee-neesh, I’ll never get any of it back... And since I’ve been “confiscated for life”, my future is more than taken care of!... Them, they were robber-friends!... quick, hurry, Marcel! get into the truck!... Maybe I’d still have a bed somewhere... you realize too late... If you could only choose your own assassin!... The Gods are kind to you for once and you don’t comprehend? To hell with you! knucklehead!... Had her visit been for the good, Clemence... she surely would have kept the picture of my mother for me... I don’t have it any more.

Come to think of it, since I’m hiding nothing from you, rue Gaveneau, seventh floor, fifteen gangs came one after another over let’s say... sixteen months... to clean me out!... think of it! What a *vacuumclining*¹ that was! Not a blade of floorboard left

¹ In “English” in the original.

untouched!... my hidden treasure! They dug out my benches, tore the stuffin' out of the furniture, everything broken, dissected! the carpets! curtains! rage and more rage! the john torn out! What a pretty picture I make, here, pondering on the plundering... And not a week goes by that doesn't bring more insults!... I've stopped counting all the dirty tricks from The Courts... Five or six times they've found no grounds for prosecution! Shot down! "The time you did counts!", "The time you did doesn't count!" I know at least fifty nut-cases who'd have hung themselves over a lot less than I've had to swallow by way of promises, persecutions, dejections, rejections, spit... They throw me in the slammer, I'm stagnating, pus-covered, my pelt's dropping off... They get me the hell out of there, they throw me back in!... Back in the hole, goddam stiff! I can hear the courtroom echoing, "The Supreme Court having reassembled..." It's a cross between the BBC and a fucking bitch! "Confiscate more than everything he's got, the pig! for all Eternity!" Subjected to endless privations, placed in stocks, pilloried, the nation's pile of shit! His medal of honor to the Flea Market! Let them re-open all his war wounds! disabled! Seventy-five percent! Roll your drums!... Let them lacerate him again, skin him alive! lard and pepper! Yo! Yo! Yo! ¹ Yes! ten thousand percent! Doesn't it make you stop and think? Let me spell it out for you... They don't even leave me a gas heater! Where will I go sterilize my syringes? I'm thinking about my practice...

- What about your Degree?

The bastards didn't touch that! If they took that I'd never speak to you again... I'd be suing this very minute! Riot Act!... can't you see the Shades of Honor? The

¹ In English in the original.

French Army, the great, the ruddy, the 1914!... If they'd inflicted the final affront on me, I'd have set Europe going again! I'd have knocked those guys on their asses! the mere sound of my voice and *poof*, everyone gone! the steppes! Moscow at hand! and preserving everything! the little bells! the Kremlin and the rest! burning nothing! everthing according to tactic, down to the very pompoms! *pomm-pomm*, the beating of the heart! the uniform! That's what you'd have seen if they'd so much as put a wrinkle in my Diploma! They can thank their lucky stars! It was their doing if I wound up with the extremists!

To each his own fortunes, no doubt... to each his own Destiny... you got guys who shake their piggy bank, guys who shake their thing and guys who shake the world, and you got "no grounds for prosecution". Listen to this for example, Denoël¹, they shot him dead and that's all there was to it!... Me, I shot nothing dead at all, I have no "no grounds"! Eeny, meeny, miney, mo... Of course I have my own ideas about that, set and sincere... my idea is that they'd kill if they could!... But never mind about me or my idea, Madame!

Oh, but life is more than just a few pranks! I hear what you're saying! Survive? Prosper? Manage? So, Sweetie, buy three or four copies of *Fable*, it'll be double the fun - I get to survive and you get to pay! Really! my old bike back! my villa! You can find something funny in anything! I'm sick as a dog and falling to bits, but I'll give up joking only after I give up the ghost! my last gasp! The proof, here, with only an eighth of a

¹ Robert Denoël was shot dead in the street near Les Invalides on December 2, 1945. He was Céline's publisher and had been indicted for publishing his anti-Semitic pamphlets during the war. The crime was never solved.

glimmer of light, things oozing out of my asshole, my armpits, and the elbows too, blood coming out of the eyes, from the soupy mess of my grave, me whistling a tune, that's what you'll hear! the blackbird!... putting on a brave face while I ham it up? Maybe you're right! So what? But you won't catch me taking it lying down! Goddam weirdo repeating himself all the time!

And not only pellagra up the ass! Article 75¹ and the Public Prosecutor too! Four arrest warrants canceled, re-instated! and Gaëtan Serge d'Hortensia², that mulatto Underling from the Embassy, representing the Union of Diplomatic, Political, Colonial and Ectoplasmic Madmen, who insults me as of daybreak! Obsessive! Nobody, not even someone of very high moral, could escape turning into a gibbering idiot, uncouth and shivering, hair turned white! Hortensia arrives at dawn to see me! He emerges at the cell window, he despises me, you should see the faces he makes! in black and white! You who don't have much sense of fun, you'd shout "death rather than this"! and he emerges just at daybreak... just at the time when the guy next door takes a short break from

¹ In the arrest warrant of 19 April 1945, Céline was accused of crimes listed under Article 75, line 5 of the Penal Code, which inculpates "Any French citizen who in time of war, corresponds with a foreign power or with its agents, with a view toward favoring this power's undertakings against France". Subsequently, however, the indictment was lowered to Article 83, line 4 of the Code which merely inculpates acts "which might be harmful to national defense" and which carry lesser punishments.

² In life Guy Girard de Charbonnières (1907-1990), who was head of the French Embassy in Copenhagen. While he headed the Embassy, he did not benefit from the title of Ambassador. Although he had been a member of the French Foreign Ministry in the Vichy government, he joined forces with the Free French in 1942. De Charbonnières was tireless in his efforts to extradite Céline. Throughout the novel Céline taunts him by using the phrase "Assesneur" instead of "Ambassadeur" to play up his lesser status. Since "Assessor" has no such resonance in English, it's usually translated as "Underling".

screeching... when the new shift of prison guards are taking out the juices¹... when I could have a bit of time to myself... Am I seeing things? Hearing funny things? I'm just having a bit of fun for myself! nothing more than that! Laughing comes naturally to me... I see the funny part in any low-down trick... not everybody can do that! So go buy *Fable*, three francs! Let's say three francs! three francs before the First World War! Talk about three francs before the Great War and you're talkin' money! a gift! And if it's gifts you're talking about, I'm your man! yes, siree! I go from one little concession to another! It's not that I like you! you've hurt me too much! you go from one felony to another, sheepish bunch of cowards! you can go drop dead! I'll tell the Koreans, "come and get'em!"² all yours, from the bottom of my heart! But in the long run, the bookstore does count! You buy *Fable*! You don't like what you read? Your business! I'm the one that I'm making fun of! I'm the scabby, moss-covered skeleton! The Funny One, Jees, the fate that's befallen me! in fifty years of relentless labor, innovations, conscience and honor, heroic, I was decorated before Petain was, and I'm pilloried by the pillagers! shamed by the shameless, and the exodus, while we're at it -- in whatever direction -- Bruges, Bayonne -- is just a big stupid one-legged race! And then the "Caca shirts" Ah!

Forget all this pettiness!...

My eyes are the real problem...

Writing is painful, I'm bug-eyed...

- It was darker in the mines!

¹ "Le jus" in French. Military slang for urine.

² This was written at the time of the Korean war.

You go right for the weak spot, don't you? These walls are soaking, I sponge up the puddles... on all fours, it's not at all easy for me to get up again...

- So he's complaining about being locked up? if we'd only had him at the Villa Saïd!¹

- Were *you* at Villa Saïd? on which side, may I ask?

- And what about Luppenthal?

I'm upsetting you. This tiff isn't over! Choose your weapon! Go on! Hand-shield! and the whole blade, and split yourself down the middle! Chest forward! where were you in August 1914?... I ask you again! not in Flanders? nor at Charleroi²?... Gotta know who your enemy is! where you loose your arrows. So you dabble in commentating, avenging? you're established? patented? puffed up? card-carrying member of six different parties? Hit the mike, avenger! The mike! all the avengers are on the airwaves! in waves, in folds, curlicues, curly-heads! dimples³ No one to stop the tanks, but they can sure talk a volcanic offensive! this *furia canto* all over the airwaves! billions of kilocycles of thunder! a deluge of bla-bla-bla!

Madness, mobs, the same at the Hôtel de Ville during the nationwide bloodbath! When they tore out the losers' eyes! The great orgasms of the Prudent! Sade's Army at

¹ Villa Saïd in the 16th Arrondissement served in 1944 as a prison and the seat of a para-legal tribunal processing war criminals.

² The Germans won a victory at Charleroi in Belgium the 21 - 23 August, 1914.

³ The original French is *tous les vengeurs sont en ondes! en plis! mise en plis! replis! frisettes! fossetes! mis!* It is a good example of the kind of puns based on the association and repetition of sounds that Céline invents.

History's Picnic! The Church that's going to get built in let's say a dozen, fifteen, twenty years! Petiot Pope! Europe-the-Glutton!

- Have you forgotten St Martin? the saint of the Gauls?¹ not St Martin's Boulevard! not St Martin's neighborwhored²! no! the saint! Can't you make use of him? Ah, the bitterness of a nation become pagan again, with no more sacred images! Go try and to make them laugh at the stake! Forget about it! All the same, *Fable?* my bicycle?... Yeh, you'd've had a much better laugh, had one helluva kick, gone completely berserk! and gratis too if they'd dragged me to Place Blanche, you see the grid, well my guts'd be draped over it like the beads of a rosary, a lacework of vivisected organs... the little ones here, the big ones there, delicately picked apart in front of the Duquèquet Restaurant!³ How my screams would have resounded from the Enghien Heights to Port-Royal!... at least five million people getting all worked up, all tender-hearted: psychiatric patients nobody wants, people that ordinarily are frigid to coke, kola, girly shows, the strap, urinals, croutons⁴! everything! You couldn't find a more desperate bunch!... I'd have been the delight of five hundred thousand households! But I let them down! Not just around there, Montmartre, the slopes, Caulaincourt... Custine... Dufayel!... but also

¹ St Martin is considered to have introduced Christianity to Gaul in the 4th century AD.

² La Porte Saint-Martin area of Paris was a famous place of prostitution.

³ A pseudonym for the chain restaurants called Dupont-Cyrano which were popular between the two world wars, one of which was at the Place Blanche.

⁴ This seemingly incongruous reference to croutons after urinals is no doubt explained by the fact of a certain sexual perversion indulged in by "soupeurs" involving bread and urine in Paris's public "urinoirs".

the inner and the outer suburbs! They still hold it against me, people who write to me furious! You fucked off, you bastard! you coward! you gonorrhea germ!

I deprived them of my stake and scalp! They'll never forgive me!

Martyrdom, the Golgothas of this world, are gifts from heaven! Never do families get it on better, never is the soul more groped, or the tits and asses either, (and let me bite them again on you, remunch those toes)¹ as when a martyr gets butchered! and the bloodier it gets the more the fuck juices gush out! and the knout to boot! *Bam! Plop!* the more they're in seventh heaven! the more they get their rocks off!

- Program, darling?

Ah, coming in neon lights! the ultimate frolic! Ah, honeybunch, love me, baby, love me! Ah, take all of me! in love me! in love me! in! in! in! you've got four of them! ten! twenty! a hundred! big ones! Oh! Give it to me! in! all of it!

Just imagine from Enghien to Marcadet! the bastions! Pantin! Saint-Michel!... and still others!...brothers by the wagonload! marching!... tip-carts full of victims with their guts torn out and still hot!... The more innocent the victims, the more you get their stink, the happier you are! Cut up every goddam Jesus! The more they pierce the air with their cries the more Juliette gasps, writhes, climaxes, the more Romeo rams it in! Gallop in there and grab those buttocks. Charge! Ah, milove! some love! in, love! be mine! fire me up! juice me, I'm coming! Oh my God! Oh, oh! Stay! Come, come! Fucking

¹ A punning reference to the fact that he doesn't care ("*et que j'en mords...*") and the macabre practice of medieval undertakers who would bite the toes of the deceased to make sure they were dead, and from whence comes the slang name for an undertaker as a "croque-mort" or "deadman-biter".

hell, what a load of crap!

- This wise guy is going too far!

- Yeh, forget about him! but the fact remains, the promise has been signed, notarized, heard on radios all over the place! at XYZ hour my balls will be hanging from the neck of the most renowned purgative avenger from the Porte d'Alfort to the Flanders Bridge!... the east side - Les Carrières-Goutte-d'Or! Judge the extent of it for yourself! the networks! Oh, but those times have passed! all those carcass-fests down the drain! I'm splitting hairs! Those quickie Saint-Bartholemews with no clarions sounding, no Pater Nosters, no trumpets!

These times call for other ways to make 'em laugh! To wow the readers now, you gotta get hippos to hop! Here's to you, Bozo! So goddam many murderers around that as long as it's not them, they'll just yawn!... If they saw the Daumesnil Lake piled high with the bodies from the night before, with a hundred guillotines from the various Parties, they'd say: Gee, it stinks! That's all! Total disregard!... So don't even mention buying my books!... me and my pathetic little problems... mere fables... and they got to grip their shaking bellies, uncontrollable fits of hilarity, shitting, pissing all over the place, can't take it any more, in their parlors, the train stations, under the watchful eyes of the Tax Collector. Betcha you'll laugh so hard they'll have to lock you up! That you'll be in convulsions of hee-hee-haw-haw over my nonsense, all over the Tuileries!... That they'll arrest you for public obscenity and ask you what it's all about!

- It's *Fa!*...*Fa!*... *Fa!*

You drop down dead from laughing right on my book!

Reuters reports it... And there's a mad rush to buy it! The bookstores are sacked!...

- Gimme, gimme more! Anything for *Fa! Fa!* My daughter, my cows! The Brooklyn Bridge! My credit's good anywhere! They print me on toilet paper! On the priciest paper, on rice paper! Affluence abounds around me! My pride returns! my self-respect... a government minister arrives at my door, I kick him where he chucks a moon! *Whap!* Whopping good time! Maybe I can even buy back my bike! Picture that! and two villas in Saint-Malo! And while you're at it! two maids to open the doors! A great big Panchon to take pressure measurements! fourteen thermometers in gold cases! twenty-five masses a year for me alone! for my soul and for come what may! church, heaven, whatever, the rain, the sun but less, and God not at all, they come in, they don't come in¹. Shittin' shindig! only one mass for my assassins! And one not at all for Nartre!² A hundred for all the animals that are lost, as many for the men in prison, all you want for Aunt Amelie and my friend Mr Verdot³, and other people too, some more serious than others... Blabbers, the names? You'd like that, wouldn't you? But you're not gonna get it!

¹ This is a reference to a sentimental 19th century song from a popular play called *Risette* in which a baby girl is born to poor parents who see the sunny sky from a leaky roof and laugh despite their poverty.

² A typically ungenerous reference to Jean-Paul Sartre, whom Céline hated and often ridicules by misspelling his name.

³ Céline's Aunt Amélie, his father's sister, was affectionately portrayed in *Mort à crédit* as Tante Hélène. Mr Verdot was her friend and protector in old age. She died in 1950, while this book was being written. In this passage, too, Céline is perhaps parodying the "Testament" of François Villon, written in the 15th century.

I'm showing off! I'm intoxicating myself with my own thoughts! I'm chasing rainbows. I, who never touch a drop of alcohol, I'm forgetting myself! I'm forgetting you! and my story! and the episode! the kid in my house there, his pimples, his mother! Marcel! No, not Marcel!... their cock-eyed ways... I never finish anything for you... back to the drawing board, reader! Hey, you, reader! my place, rue Gaveneau! Seventh floor! I was about to tell you about our exodus!... well, you know, when we flew the coop... We had to... three months before all the others!... Should've seen us shifting all our gear! Winfling-Oder... Blaringhem... Neurupin... Rostock¹...

- He's got the audacity to complain?! Gas-off artist has no shame! He took all of Europe for a ride!... (So what are you gonna do the day the tanks arrive and Ivan the Terrible's in the Tuileries?) They were waiting for me at Stake Place -- I mean the Place Blanche... AND at Pigalle... AND Monceau!... you'd have tripped over all the experts! panting!... the animal who flees from the Arena, what's he worth? manages to sidestep the pickaxes, the pitchforks, the voyeurs, the Carmens, the Josés and the Alcades² all together? Sawdust is worth more, a trip to the Colisuem, guts everywhere! If you don't believe me just look at the state I'm in, flayed alive, rotting in this hole... Eh, leave me alone...

If it weren't for that weedy black Hortensia, the Underling from the Embassy,

¹ These four town names correspond to the four main stages of Céline's stay in Germany which he wrote about in the German Trilogy, "Castle to Castle", "North" and "Rigodon": Baden-Baden, Sigmaringen, Neurupin and Rostock. He disguises the first two so as not to arouse passions, but he leaves undisguised the latter two as they were less well known and controversial.

² Reference to three characters in Bizet's "Carmen".

coming to abuse me first thing in the morning, through my cell window... the faces he makes! the threats! I'd think oblivion had totally engulfed me! long live the Abyss! But no, the Hortensia re-emerges! Can't with him around!

- I'm Louis XV! I'm Louis XV, rogue!

That's the way he berates me from up there!

- Come kiss me!

And his voice is hoarse and greasy! I'd call it common! takes himself for Louis XV, no less!... Louis XV!

- I am France! I am the colonies!

If I didn't have Hortensia I'd think everybody was abandoning me... There's also the guard sometimes... With his finger he makes like he's going to shoot me, but he does it ten times a day!... real funny...

But I know what's what! Avenging reader, you have might on your side! You say, "This show-off is taking us for a ride"! Well I'm going to show you my posterior! I told you, "I'm rotting!"... Your eyes are better than mine! even here in the dark you probably see!... the bright red is the pellagra... next to it, forming like a fringe, the greyish yellow: that's mold! This is not a common occurrence!... oozing pimply little eruptions! I think I caught it back in Blaringhem¹. Over there I had at least fifteen... sixteen cases! scabies!... at least a thousand! And now they've decided my ass is the occupied zone! and the elbows! and the neck!

¹ Blaringhem, pseudonym for Sigmaringen, the site of Pétain's government in exile, where Céline spent about 5 months practicing medicine among the French refugees.

- Yeh, but in Augsburg! it wasn't just pus-filled scabs! there it was total butchery!
all those hides for AA lanterns! Scrotum-skin lamp shades and bookbindings, little flutes,
Walyries, Odin's Sabbath and gas ovens!¹

I declare that I had nothing to do with it! neither with my ass nor with Augsburg!
I didn't go and declare war, I declared nothing at all, except "Long live France and
Courbevoie!"² Down with the Slaughter!"

Volunteered for service twice, 75% disabled, I swore nothing to Pétain, nor to von
Choltitz³, nor to the Pope! Nor to that other guy, Hortensia there, who torments me
through the cell window... nor to the lunatic across the way... nor to the "Yep yep" in 73!
Putain⁴, let them cut his goddam throat!... Are you in the K wing or not⁵?... "Death row",
it's actually written there!

They don't kill them all! You might be surprised to learn, you who like a good
laugh, that at the bottom of the ditch, the body is overrun by mold, I mean the limbs, the
torso, the epidermis, the eyes, alas! But the heart, excuse me! cast-iron, the heart! the

¹ Despite the coy transformation of SS into AA and Auschwitz into Augsburg, Céline here is being brutally aggressive toward the reader in depicting ghastly practices of the Nazis. Odin was a Scandinavian divinity of war.

² The town on the edge of Paris where Céline was born.

³ Dietrich von Choltitz, German commander in Paris in August 1944 who was supposed for a time to have "saved Paris" by refusing to obey one of Hitler's commands, but this has been refuted.

⁴ A pun on Pétain's name, "Putain" means whore.

⁵ It is true that Céline was kept for a while on death row in the Vestre Faengsel prison in Copenhagen, place of his Danish captivity.

1914 heart!

- So where were you in '14? Jees, this is a waste of time! you weren't there... you were under other skies! other feelings, other Legends... Hate-ridden, oozing, kicking old bastard, fat chance you'll get any recreation out of me! here, my eyelids, I leave them to you! they're bleeding, they're sticking... I open them popping wide... all the rage to donate your eyes these days...

- Yeh, and what about Cassel! on shaky ground there!

- You weren't there either, Petunia! You can't talk to anybody about torture!

Just wait your little turn! The times we live in are generous in nothing, except in butcher-blocks, burnings, hangings, you'll always find something!... at least wait for the handcuffs!... Haste makes waste!... Don't jump the gun, when the garrote's around your neck you'll be whistling a different tune! Oh, a different tune altogether! Youyou.
Gertrude!

- Hey, this jailbird's really having us on! Goddammit, he's whipping us up, the caustic little bastard! His tomb! His posterior! His dreams! Extradite the bastard! Outa here! cut 'im up! riddle'im! skin'im! two stakes! outa here! twelve stakes, sixteen!

- Program, darling?

I hear you.

- You got ants in your pants, buddy! What about the Satory Camp? and Cadoudal? and La Roquette? and Gambetta in his air balloon? And Sarah Bernhardt up there on one leg? Were those not sublime and surprising exploits¹? doubly exalting to the soul? centubly rousing for the Nation? If you had even the shadow of an atom's worth of their stuff, the billionth of a crumb, everything would have turned out all right! From Quimper l'Odet to the Bering Straits! to the last miserable Alution flea of an Island, down

¹ Satory, near Versailles, was in 1871 a place where leaders of the Paris Commune were imprisoned and executed. At the La Roquette prison in Paris, the Communards had executed several hostages on May 24, 1871. During the siege of Paris Gambetta flew away (7 October 1870) in an air balloon from the Place Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre to Tours, where he proceeded to organize the resistance. Cadoudal was a hero of the royalist counter-revolution in the Vendée war and later against first consul Bonaparte. Sarah Bernhardt continued to act even after she'd lost a leg, in 1915.

there, in the sea, a mere drop of earth. It's very simple - three continents! The heart is everything! How many times do I have to tell you?

Do you count all that as nothing? Would you doubt?

- He's having us on...

Let me call to mind Gambetta, la Roquette, let me call to mind Landru, let me call to mind Pétain-living-off-Verdun, Petiot, the Grandeurs of Fontenoy, the Marne, the great deeds of Rambouillet, President Galoubet bringing Hitler to lunch with Gallieni in a taxi, plus Lartron! his wife on the Isle of Yeu! Odes everywhere!¹

- This stuff is mental anarchy!

- I've got no position in society to maintain! I've no air balloon! I've got no sky!

No one will stand and cheer and hoist me to their shoulders! I had to bleed for my standard! the most glorious one! the 7th Infantry Division! They brought it back to the Invalides, torn to bits, like me, they tore my medal off me, they left me with only the bullet in the brain and the buzzing²... No one will stand and hoist me to their shoulders! And on the ground in the dugout trenches, I don't even have a stove to fry the goddam iguanas, salamanders slandering me in a thousand languages! I haven't got a guillotine either!..

¹ In this succession of names, Céline emphasizes and worsens the "mental anarchy" which he mentions in the next line. He jumbles up time and personalities in this paragraph. President "Galoubet", for instance, refers to President Loubet, who was President of the Republic from 1899 to 1906, well before Hitler came to power. And Gallieni died in 1916. The Odes referred to are those of Paul Claudel, to which he returns off in the novel.

² Although Céline did not retain shrapnel in the head or have a trepanation, as he often claimed in his novels, he did suffer from chronic buzzing in the ear and painful whistling due to wounds inflicted in World War I.

I've got an ass that sticks, that's all... I entertain you with my little obsessions... if it were only just the daytime it would be all right... Jailbirds, cells, handcuffs, that's the bottom of any human community... you have to see it from the inside!... hospitals, diseases, I know about them... and war too... you gotta do everything once before you croak... not a single regret!... Ah, this self-respect that we carry, exaltedly, to the grave! Vercingetorix! Pétain! Voltaire! Blanqui! Oscar Wilde! Lecoin! Jaurès! Thorez! Mr Braguet! Francis the First! Sacco! they're kinda like predecessors! and others! and Latude!¹ He who hasn't been in prison is just a silly pansy... a crummy little windbag... he goes "Gad-thookth",² what does he know? and he doesn't wanna know, the jerk. Gabbing, fibbing, that's all he knows!... that's why the world stays so fucking stupid...

I was saying that if it was just the day, it'd be okay... but you got the night too! The night-screamers, they're stark raving out of their skulls! Jailed sea-lions! The sound goes right through you! Think about it! prisons are mostly hollow! You should hear the echos! And then there's their huge fuckin' watchdogs outside! Ah! Chenier with his "Captive"³! If he could hear mine over there! Number 92! She'd put a stop to a verse or

¹ With the exception of Jean Jaurès, all the persons listed here spent time in prison, some after military defeats, others on political or moral grounds. Jean Henri de Latude (1725-1805) spent 35 years in prison (despite numerous escapes) after being implicated in plots against Madame de Pompadour, official mistress of King Louis XV. After his Memoirs were published in the 19th century he became something of a symbol of the detainee. "Mr Braguet" is probably "Monsieur Capet", name given to King Louis XVI when he was imprisoned in the Temple.

² The author mockingly attributes a lisp as a sign of effeminacy to a man who tries to sound like a military man but who is not.

³ André Chenier was a poet during the Revolution who wrote some verses about the cries of a women fellow-prisoner. The woman escaped death, but Chenier

two! “Yeee! Yeee!” as if her throat were being cut... You see Muses all right!...and “ruff ruff” the dogs! Ah, yes, I dread the night... About four in the afternoon the screaming calms down... four little rings... chow time... the peep-hole, the screw comes in, he takes away my papers, my writing-tablets, pencil, everything! he turns the lock again, *crr! crr! crank!* you’d think he was closing Vincennes!... three Mont Saint-Michels! a Creusot of locks!¹... by Judas he calls me every name in the book... it’s his way of saying “good evening to you” in Baltavian... that I’m loathsome! that I stink!... Oh, when it comes to foreign idiom, it’s the intonation that counts!... a man in a moment of despondency he doesn’t give a fuck about understanding... everything goes straight to the heart! that’s nature!... insults, lies, kindness... the animal instinct... the finesse of words drops away...

I tell you, at four o’clock, it’s finished... night, real night, descends... I can still see a little red, and then some grey and then black... I drop off my stool! if it sticks to my ass I go down with it... Have to be careful how I go down!... the mattress! a cover! Okay! I wait... It’s the blackness of dreams... let the poetry begin! pain’s lonely pleasure? I wouldn’t come? Fuck! Me, who’s so good at it? But, you know, I’m going to sue! I’m sick and tired of these “arrest warrants” for me alone! sonofabitch for sonofabitch, I know a few others! mobitudes of them, a hell of a lot more gangrenous, degraded felons, plagues of shame, playing a double game, triple game, forty games! Pimps! Fuck them, with their “warrants” for me alone!... I never was anything at all, now that I think about

didn’t.

¹ The castles of Vincennes and Mont Saint-Michel both served as prisons at various times. Creusot, in the Saône-et-Loire region, was a steel manufacturing center at the time.

it, here on my straw... not ambassador, not minister, not participator, not celebrity, not with Vichy, not with Leahy¹, nor the Little-Swiss², and not with the next guy that's gonna come along either! None of 'em! and not a deserter to the enemy!

- That's exactly what your trouble is, knucklehead!

I never sold any concrete, my word of honor, nor the Pyramid, nor Napoleon's catafalque, nor the Argenteuil Bridge all in wood, nor Madame Tabois' antenna, nor Toulon's flooded harbor, nor Darlan's fleet full of holes³! Nix! I'm getting down to details again... the Iconoclasts made a mad rush, drunk with their own Virtue. Truth, convinced that the monster up there in my place on the seventh floor was a typhus plague. Yeh, burn 'im at the stake! petrol and sulphur or nothing!

They stole everything they could, shattered anything that was too heavy!... they burnt my manuscripts... into the garbage also *Guignol's*, *Krogold*, *Casse-Pipe*! my gifts⁴!

That's what excites them, what's excited them for centuries! Auto-da-fe, massacres, trash! Even more than thievery! Islam, Port-Royal, the Guillotine, Genghis

¹ Admiral Leahy was American Ambassador to the Vichy government from November 1940 to June 1942.

² In French "Petit-Suisse" is a brand of soft cheese much cherished by children. Here the pun is probably a reference to the fact that Pierre Laval appointed the writer Paul Morand Ambassador to Switzerland when things were not going well for the Vichy government.

³ Admiral Darlan was Minister of the Marine when the French fleet was bombarded at Mers-el-Kébir on July 3, 1940 and Chief of Land, Sea and Air Forces in November 1942 when the French fleet was scuttled in Toulon. Céline makes reference to the scuttling of the fleet in Toulon later on in the novel.

⁴ Names of manuscripts which got lost at the time of Céline's flight from Paris.

Khan, the atom, phosphorous bombs. now that's somebody! Never any problem to torch prayer books, feed the *Iliad* to the pigs, slobber a big wet tongue down the Blessed Virgin's throat, up Petrarch's ass! No sooner said than done! Crusade! Let's crusade! The bastards should be hung! Let's hang! the sissies are scared shitless! Take me for instance, here in my hole, the taxmen are still taxing me! The 22nd arrondissement! The Tithe! The Internal Revenue! millions! on all my so vanished works! "That they're gonna sentence me to three life-sentences if I don't come back and execute myself" and that afterwards they'll cut my head off! That's what they're like!

And the best proof that they're not fooling around is that they're already selling my mother's bed at auction!

They're selling air, phantoms... If I sent them my Hortensia, they'd sell him off, Louis XV!... Ah, the mammoth complexity of it all! have your cake and burn it too! But don't go thinking there's nothing they bow before! It's their Almighty Position they worship! their supreme Goddess! They never stop assassinating the core of their soul! Nation, I have not a centime to send you! Taxman my heart! (They claim I have debts to Pétain!) I'm dead broke! Bébert's hide's not worth two bits! Two bits? I'm thinking big! I'm thinking '14!

The man of today is a crime! The way it is nowadays, the Bastille, they'd leave it standing, they'd lock all the filth up in it, in chains, just like that! all you pig-headed writers, get to work! under the knout, twenty masterpieces a day! and get the line right,

and make it anonymous! There'd be no dosing! Clang-bam à la "89"¹ into the dungeon, the tower, house-arrest! Don't think they're not thinking about it!... It's maybe even been done already!... Here where I am, the cop who's got me cornered is the ultimate yokel! He'll never read any manuscript of mine! The Baltavian Brute! in the morning he brings me back my bundle of papers, throws it right at my head... flies all over the place! he gets a real chuckle out of seeing me on all fours... sign-languages that he's gonna blow me away... they all do it... it's their papers, my photos, my heinous crimes, with a hundred details... I'm the one who sold the Devil's Plan, the Oookie Fortress, the Pas-de-Calais, the Eiffel Tower... and Gamelin's² ulterior motives...

Now they see me here!... So, of course!... The truth of the matter lies there: in prison! "He's in prison!"... There's your proof!

Couldn't give a fuck about their gut feelings! but the pain in the ass in 73, trumpets like a goddam elephant! a hundred donkeys! That one adds to my misery all right! I could have his guts for garters! And the shrill dame in 48! I hear the blows, the punch-up twice a day... at the shift change... afterwards an hour or two of calm and then it starts up again only worse... women scream at such a high pitch!... men gasp... I know the "hitmen" there are three of them, three bare-assed Hercules, in white smocks, they came to see me one evening, one night... they made me get up... they kicked the shit out

¹ Perhaps an oblique reference to the Marquis de Sade who spent many years in prisons, including the Bastille, around the time of the French Revolution.

² General Maurice Gamelin (1872-1958), was in charge of the French land forces at the beginning of WWII. His error in not accurately predicting the Germans' attack, made him one of the people mainly responsible for France's early defeat in May 1940.

of my mattress! straw, my rags everywhere! That sent me back a few years, you know the kind of thing, haze the greenhorn there in number 12! What a bunch of kids! Baltavians don't make good soldiers!... They know nothing of the military arts... They go to it!... just kids!... they do it all wrong!... now me, I know how to kick the shit out of a mattress. These guys kinda make you feel sorry for them!...

They insult me! "They'd be back". They were having a good go at me!... But I hear them at it... here... there... one floor... another... the sound the digs make... the shrieking! and then nothing at all... calm through force! they go from one landing to another... the funny part's the suicides... what an avalanche that is! all the guards! You should see them skedaddle! all five floors!... the whole horde!... prison rattles with their footsteps! and the ten buildings full of cages! "There's a suicide!" And they come barababooming down! get to the schnook's cell! Swinging there in his cell, you bet he gets a visit or two! the band strikes up! Sirens! whistles! muts! It's a goddam Opera!

- And you, beautiful Lyric Poet, what hope keeps you going? Haven't seen enough misery yet? Duke Ayer of Vendome¹ wants you to snuff it down by Rue du Repos²...you think you can go back?... you're nuts! asshole! Go on, do the right thing! They left you your belt!... the bar up there! a noose, and that's all she wrote!... You can't

¹ Actually René Mayer (1895-1972), IV Republic politician, was a member of the Ministry of Justice located at the Place Vendôme at the time of Céline's imprisonment.

² The Rue du Repos is one of the streets that go along Père-Lachaise, a landmark Paris cemetery where many notables are buried and where Céline's parents are also buried. He wanted to be buried there as well, but knew his wish would not be granted. He's buried in the Meudon cemetery outside of Paris.

even be sure for Chrissake they'll make fast work of you down on Rue du Repos the way they did Denoël at the Invalides!... that'd be doing you a favor!... Maybe it will happen at the Concorde in front of five hundred thousand on-lookers!... Ah, nostalgia!

homesickness!, choke back those sighs! Next year in Paris! bite the bullet, poet, insanity reigns in Paris, and insanity, now that's something to reckon with! if only you arrived already dead! that'd be the most useful, the greatest good will have been served!... Your country of fellow-Frenchmen, your only one, is Père-Lachaise... they're the only ones who won't do you any harm...

- Oh, don't worry, they'll inspect the coffin, they'll check out your remains! gotta be sure it's really you! and then there'll be peace, the real thing...

So if I get you right, in your opinion, good sense, reason would dictate that my days are numbered and should end here? Ah, my days! half a day! quarter of a day!... Fuck you! I'm gonna face it down! Have a look -- this is open rebellion! my responsibilities, my duty? I have Bébert, I have Arlette on the outside! I have five grandchildren in the Wood!¹ I have my mom that I never saw again and my father Fernand next to her, I abandon nothing on the way, Sir! not a soldier, not a patient, not a mistress, not a care, not a dead man! Never! and not thirty-six thousand feet itching for me to kick your butt!

- Faker! scardy-cat! alibiber! stinker! pig!

- Go easy, sweetie! Come over here with your baloney and we'll blow holes

¹ Céline's only child Colette indeed had five children and lived in Neuilly, on the outskirts of Paris near the Bois de Boulogne.

through each other at twenty-five paces! Twenty-five paces? I'd have to have room for them first! Where would I get twenty-five paces? in my little cage? more like four!

Okay, so I blow you to kingdom come! so long, pal! Goddam bitchery! they'll all drop dead from it! I've been subjected to it all! but while we're on the subject! I discuss with Hortensia when he emerges at my cell window! I discuss with the bellow, their "appeals reject" in 26! with that lunatic matahari in 32! and the one in 64! my next-door faggot! who comes right through the wall at me, damn sure!

- Into the sewer! I scream at him! I mean he's stopping me from working! He won't shut up? I sweet-talk him! Well, I try, I turn on the charm!... I whip out my song... you were wondering there, a bit earlier... I let it slip about my songs... (all copyrighted!), here, take this number: "Just between us"

I'll come get you, you son of a bitch! one dark night!

I'll get you in my sights! two big black holes!

Your foul soul up the hole!

Will take flight!

You'll see the heavenly choirs!

How they dance upon the spires!

In the Good Children's Bone-Palace in the skies!

Is it too aggressive for these parts?... okay, so it's too aggressive... but what about the refrain? pure charm! almost seductive!... you should hear it... and the music!...

(Right there, now, the artist caught unawares!... the scene changes!... he sees people!)

But here come Auntie Estreme and her little Leo!...

And here Clementine and the valiant Toto!

Shall we tell our friends every party ends?

(the scene changes again: Eh, he should go get fucked, the ugly son of a bitch!)

To the devil your kind!

May they be gone with the wind!

Adieu, dead leaves! antics

And cares!

the last bit is done with brio, is it not? lighthearted! dizzying!

I had promised it to Revol¹... it's a classy number, I can tell you... full of tact!... finesse!... not the gravelly street song you can get anywhere! He was supposed to sing it for me in Bécon² at a "Benefit Concert"! "To help prisoners of modest circumstance!"... and then, of course, events took over!... There were six other numbers... spicy ones. I can assure you! For me, to be sung at "The European"³, now that was glory!

It could have happened!

I belted my whole song out at him, at my howler, from down their in my hole, the one next door!... Once in a while that puts a stop to him... a quarter of an hour... an

¹

Max Revol, (1894-1967) a friend of Céline's, dancer and singer, who excelled in burlesque shows.

² Really Bezons, the poor suburb where Céline practiced medicine during the war. A few lines further down the real name is used.

³ "The European" was a café turned music hall in the "Europe" section of Paris.

hour... and then he rehowls! Only more so! Oh, but excuse me, I can drown them all out! quite a resource, the thorax! when I really can't take it any more, when I'm in too much pain, when I haven't for example been to the john in ten, twelve days... thirteen days... all of a sudden! when they don't want to give me my enema, I let out a bark!

They give it to me hotter than hot, almost 130 degrees! on purpose! I don't give a fuck! it's an enema isn't it?... When they hear the barking I know they'll come running!.. I drown out all the howlers! I'm a shock-trooper mastiff in the barking department!... the watchdogs answer me... three or four packs of them... the din that makes, by your leave! "Whaa! Whaa! Whaa!" The guards burst in, four machine guns, I make sign language at them: I stick! no can get up any more!.. no can turn over either!... fee-neesh! they leave again, they're gonna look for clamps... a stretcher! And that's it!... Reminds me of Africa, and of Flanders... Ypres 1914... you gotta manage somehow... And Bezons, too, the R.A.F... I was the one wielding the instruments there! who was sticking the bits back, the arms, the genitals, the heads!... "sworn in" medical man, and still am! Argenteuil Township!¹ Mr Death Certificate, that's me! Faultless! conscience! character!

Life is some panorama! You picture yourself... against such backdrops!... Up there in the prisoners' infirmary my case is well known, okay... I'm treated with a certain regard... except for the water which is too hot!... doctors are less dumb than others, that helps lighten the burden a bit, the life of despondency... not that they ever speak to me, but

¹ Bezons is situated in the Argenteuil Township. During the bombing of Paris there were in this area many injured to be attended to and many death certificates to be filled out. Doctors in public service such as Céline would have done this.

they see... I'm allowed three days, fifteen phials, two more enemas, seven bottles of strong beer, and the swabbing of my scabs with "violet crystal" solution... If they have a nutjob they send him to me, bed next to mine, there's two of us... so I can help him eat, keep him amused... that's esteem for you, trust, the doctors see clearly... For example, there was this enormous Russian, a desperate case named Barrabas, a shoemaker by trade, I can safely say I saved his life... He was gouging out his forearm by the forkfuls... and then he had a go at his thigh, under the covers... he was making fast work of himself... I tell you, this guy! his resolve! Had he found his femoral, the artery, he'd've been done for!... Two days later he was on the mend... purely thanks to my influence! the convincing show I put on! I tell you, the morale that I emanate!... he was taking his grub again... but I hear he commit suicide two weeks later... threw himself under a train... in the tunnel... he'd broken out of his handcuffs... they were escorting him...

You should've seen me back in the can! real umpf! hope! completely revitaminized! the belly pliant! enema! youth! I produce marvels! I don't even hear the sea-lion any more!...

Hortensia comes out at me...

- Out of here! Carpetbagger! I shout at him... Epileptic! Hysterical! Official, my ass!

Jees, the insults I spit at him!

- Vichy-boy! Nigeria! Cigar! Cart-hauler! Go get your ass shined! Caribbean! Bum-boy!... ill-mannered lout! Jazzband!

That's what vitamins will do for you! I floor 'im... all ecto as he is... plasm! His

Louis XIV and so forth! Apparitions like him! I just abuse them!

- Article 75! I insult him.

That's the last word!

He disappears...

Can you picture the sang-froid, the energy? five, six days I stay in this state!

exhilarated! crackling! the pages I cover!...the magic pencil, there you go! and then things

go a bit less well... and then worse... my eyes haze up again... I see fuzzy... everything's

vague... don't see anything any more... I bark, they hoist me up to the sick bay again...

Stretcher!... If I were in Fresnes,¹ wouldn't it be worse?... A hundred times worse!

- And at Wuppertal,² ham-artist?

- And your pussy, sweetie-pie? Listen here, I knew "What's-his-face" since you're so goddam punctilious, a Londoner, he did thirty years inside! Twelve convictions! He came out fresh each time so pale, so transparent that you could see through him!... called himself the "gadfly" for a gas! in person! Talk about sweet natures, and optimism! fourteen times they nabbed him! twelve times he got done! Kept coming back for more, on purpose!

- He's an angel, admired by everyone...

He finally took wing... damn sure... They found him one morning stone cold... nothing left of him... almost a body... you couldn't call that a body... talk about spare... they buried him with his all clothes on, jockey-shirt, cap, loafers, rags, everything!... a very

¹ Famous French prison.

² In the first version of this novel, the real name, Dachau, was used.

special favor... the chaplain didn't want him naked... I'm skinny too, and I don't know the chaplain!... I lost forty-eight kilos! he never came to see me the bitchbastard! the Lutheran on call! the Papist one either! No one...

Let's get serious here, let's tell it like it is, twenty months in a cell, thirty months, thirty years, what's it to you?... You're outside!... it's the elixir of the gods, being outside!... They all have a very high opinion of themselves outside! no point talking to anyone beyond the walls. They all have a little amulet inside tells them that *they'll* never fall!... Go ahead, get drunk on it! Prayers and all! May Lourdes endure!... It's the stars that are holding up the sky, without them it would fall down!... you'd need nails everywhere! Catch ahold of yourself! The little Theresa of Lisieux is still churning out the miracles!... And Beelzebub at the other end! Undaunted, the pair of them! as long as everything polkas along! double game! Me, I don't have your ambitions, I'd be happy just to see a bit more clearly, be a little less dizzy... or even a bit less pellagra... doesn't look like much, pellagra... Philippe-Auguste, he had it too... when he left for the Crusades he was a good looking kid, he came back downright ghastly, wrinkled, all bent out of shape, his neck one big ball of pus. Me too, when I get back, they won't be able to look at me either!... That'll make Jules happy!... Jules is my own personal jealous rival, gotta laugh at him... the idea that I could be good looking makes him foam at the mouth, turns his stomach, "Yeh, you've got a point, Ferdie's good looking" and there he goes! his teeth rattle, he loses control... if he had a knife he'd kill me! high dudgeon! he has a huge fit! turns purple! Loses it... He'd be happy to see me lose all my teeth... every morning three... four teeth torn out... I'm getting there, I tell you... they're very shaky... Oh, of

course, there are worse things!... Stylishness, respect for your body, you, you wouldn't fake them! Certainly, you can live very well without teeth, that's what you think! Especially in prison! For thousands of years prisoners have been losing their teeth! that's the way it goes!... Nothing ever to chew in the food, everything's mushy! broth, and that kind of stuff... mushy... mushy... everything mushy...

- But where do you think you are, my good man, what stone are you burrowed under after all?

I hear your question... but I ain't talkin'!... all the papers claimed, even the telegrams, even the so-called detectives, that I was on such-and-such a latitude, in such-and-such a country, such-and-such prison fortress!... Hogwash!...

I'm up north, that's all I'm sayin'!... Even farther! Neither the city nor the place! If I so much as gave you a tiny inkling of my whereabouts, the smallest idea of where the most insignificant outlying chimney was, a branch of the wood... that'd be the end of it! my end! the busybody loses no time. He takes off! reporter, porter, tale-bearer, blithering blatherer! My goose is cooked!¹

And the miserable state he finds me in!... He stops at nothing, spouts such a line! this injustice too I must submit to!

- Ah, my dear Maestro, France has gone mad!... the infernal quid pro quo!... the

¹ Céline is probably making reference here to Klarskovgaark, the village on the Baltic where he spent the years subsequent to his being freed from prison. The novel was commenced in prison, and reworked in Klarskovgaark.

irradiating genius of Europe!... the Bikikini¹ of the Novel!... Ah, if you only knew. Maestro, how we're bominating the Berbers this year! Aa, bom! bom! bom! dear Maestro! Ah! it's horrible! Hold on while I boke! Min! min! minate! Bombom! nable!... This hole! this hole! holy smoke! where you're ho! ho! holed! What if we imp... skew... skew... imp... impaled your enemies?... Ah, speak to me, Maestro! speak to me! Ba! ba! Bastille! I no longer know what I'm saying! badmoon! I'm all choked up, Maestro! All choked up! Tell me that you're confident! It's nothing prison, nothing! Have hope! Think of freedom! Tell me you're not giving up! Ah, I knew I could cheer you up! Panache! Fame! Honor! Victory! Rabble! Yi! yi!² Envy! Rabble! everything! You! You!... This hole, here! you! you! you're holed up in! neither here nor there! your poor face! ah yi... yi... yi!... What if we skew... skew... ered them? imp... imp... pal... ed them? Do but speak to me, Maestro! Ah! I would have brought my tape recorder! you realize? your voice!... a record... speak! speak to me! chin up! not a single Frenchman left who sheds a tear over them!... the state they've reduced you to!... Choked up, Maestro, oh, Maestro cho!... your poor eyes!... to the ovens, all of them! all of it! a thousand ovens!³ ugly mugs! moch!⁴ mugs!... here, tell me, tell me... shout it out! that you're stronger than

¹ Reference to Bikini Island in Micronesia where the Americans tested the nuclear bomb in 1946.

² "You" in English in the original. But apparently it was short for "youtre", a pejorative term for "Jew".

³ Although these words come from a journalist in this novel, they confirm the worst image of Céline.

⁴ Jules Moch (a Jewish name probably) was a socialist politician under the Fourth Republic.

all of them! swear to me, Maestro! Oh, it's over! Not one Cassel do we have qualms about! ten thousand! a hundred thousand! two hundred thousand grills! You should see France now! You show up at Le Bourget! forty thousand bouquets! little girls will be carrying them! in their little fists! If you only knew how highly everyone everywhere is speaking of you! The Greatest Writer of the Century! and not just filler, either! on the front page! Full-page spread, *with* picture! your cat! your good lady! your poor face! your long hair! and in court too! and at Fresnes! and how they're thinking of you! France can't sleep, you've been outraged so! Spoliated! slandered! spat upon! Brasillach¹, nobody gives a shit about him, he's dead! What people want is pictures! records! words! They want meat and photos! Show me your ass where it's bleeding! Place yourself there, Maestro! Maestro! your drawers! Get on your knees!... On your knees, that's right! There, where there's a shaft of sunlight let me get it... that's right... that's right... so I can get it all in! your face, too, Maestro! Let's see you weep now! get the stool in too! good! your little table! your eye!... rub!... till it bleeds!... the cockroach too... there you go, your photo! are they going to let you out soon? don't you think so? Why, of course!... repeat after me: "I hate them!"... with feeling, dear Maestro, with feeling!... and now weep! weep!... Ah, dear Maestro, they're all waiting for you! Your pecker's drooped?... Can I write that? It's the illness? The gloom? Your mother's dead? your daughter too? your grandchildren? your wife? weep! weep! There, now I've got it! Ah, the supreme reparation! Ah yes, it will be yours! the Pantheon for you alone! We'll

¹ The writer Robert Brasillach was condemned to death and executed as a Nazi collaborator on February 6, 1945.

clear it all out for you! Wouldn't you like that? your head at the Bouffes Theater! your feet at the Backo'beyond! your forehead at the Sainte-Chapelle! how handsome you are, how truly fine looking!... your coccyx at the Sorbonne!... Ah, how your enemies admire you!... Just see the amnesty you're going to get! Yeh?... You have misgivanderings? But Madame Abetz¹ is in on it! and the Count of Aladule of Ayer! and Mr Abbesses-Uncle! and the Archpatriarch of Arsol! you see, it was all just a nightmare! I'll send you vitamins! three tablets a day! and drops! may I? you promise? will you take them? the Pinpin drops? you know them? Pinpin? you don't know Pinpin? you, a doctor? And what about your novel? *Fable?* *Fable*, heh? You'll see! Get a hold of yourself! Enjoy! You're young, Maestro! You're still so young! Long live everything! The plaque! you'll see! I guarantee you'll get your plaque! you'll see! didn't I read it all to you?... and the other thing, right? I'll bring you the record! the sound! such a voice! Let me embrace you! I idolize you, Maestro! I'm in tears here! I idolize you! Work on this for us! Work hard! Enjoy life. Maestro, Enjoy life!

The screw's fed up... he comes in, chucks 'im out.

Here I am on my own again.

Jees, have I been reduced to confiding in you? I have my little secrets, believe me!... The devil didn't come into the world on his own, he was born of an indiscrete remark!... All the world's ills come out of one word too many!... I tell you the temperature, even the humidity of my ditch here, there you go! ten... twelve... twenty lice

¹ Suzanne Abetz, wife of the German ambassador to France during the Occupation. A Frenchwoman, she knew Céline, but had no role in trying to get him amnestied.

slip under the door... I'm fucked!... no locks against lice... make themselves right at home!

I'm pissing in my pants, *phew!* I was holding it in... Get a hold of yourself he tells me... Enjoy life!... Little ones! little ones do pee-pee in their pants!

And here I am on my own again.

It's the pal across the way, in 17 the goddam pain in the ass I'd like to kill!...
 "Yowl! Yowl!" he won't stop!... It'd be good if I just go over there and strangle the
 guy... but where would I find the strength?... First I'd have to get up!... And rip three or
 four strips of scabs off my ass while I'm at it... and the screw'd have to let me... he'll
 never let me!... a savage!... that poor reporter! who was so fond of me! my face! my bare
 burning behind! my eyes! my tears! he was fond of everything!

All things considered, when I really think about it, not a single word, you'll get
 nothing out of me! neither the city, nor the whereabouts more or less, nothing!... not even
 all the sounds in the air... the rustling on the treetops... the squawking of the gulls in the
 wind... the sound of the snowflakes that strike... noisy devils, snowflakes!... nothing I tell
 you!... not the *ting! ting!* of the burials... the cemetery bells... the little bells... I'm not
 talking about cemeteries for effect... the hooting of the owls... I'm not doing the owls for
 effect... it's the forest all around... and very far, really far, the ships... I'm not doing the
 ships for effect... and the sirens night and day... Oh, it's not that I want to romanticize... If
 you came here you'd say, "No, he didn't lie". No, he is not lying! He's telling the truth!
 Lucky son of a bitch! They're turning him into Jesus Christ! martyr! and music! And he
 dares complain!... I'm getting on your nerves!

- Impale the sonofabitch!

That's the only thing you know!...

- Sure, go ahead! but just a wee word first, Mr. President! the floor! I'm having a word with the President. I ain't talkin' to you! I spoke with Laval!¹ He was a patient of mine! I know how to talk to Presidents! Any President! You can never go too high! My mother died of a broken heart all alone on a bench on Avenue de Clichy² while you were out killing everything... so? so? I have nothing left to go back to at all... my apartment Rue Gaveneau, they've had sixteen different tenants... I told you that on page Y! H! Z! 7th floor!... they carted everything off, go see! Snuffed out! such a way! the inside gutted! sacked! Those are dastardly deeds you don't forget! And hold on, it's not finished! History, I'm now talking about History! I'm tallying up the horrors! I don't give a shit about the Gaveneau apartment and I never did give a shit! It's just to get your goat! because you're a goddam bunch of thieves! singly or in bunches! the proof, that I've been "confiscated for life"! to death I love you! like the other one was saying who maybe didn't come at all, my so-called purger, all spruced out with his machine gun, the brat drunk on "no risk whatsoever", champion at "Old Maid"³ who'd've had my beautiful boot up his

¹ Pierre Laval, Prime Minister in the Vichy government, met Céline in Sigmaringen, but there's no proof that he was ever Céline's patient.

² Céline's mother did not die on a public bench, but at her brother's home, rue des Martyrs.

³ A further reference to Roger Vailland, who in January 1950 wrote an article entitled "We'd no longer spare Céline" in *La Tribune des nations*. In it he told of how during the war, the resistance group to which he belonged used to meet in the apartment below Céline's. He went on to say that they had debated killing him but had spared his life because he'd written "Journey to the end of the night". "Old Maid" is a take-off on "*Le Grand Jeu*" (the "Big Game"), a surrealist magazine Vailland had helped launch before the war.

but if I'd seen him: there are still scores to settle!

My mother had her place Rue Thérèse, 14, that she'd been in for forty years. I made a few enquiries... Oh, la, la, they tell me, people you can depend on... "best be prudent!" and then maybe two weeks later: "Well, it was like this... your mother died on a bench...! and you can shut your mouth about it!"... just like that, from a long distance this news... the mysteries that await you... gotta wait a hundred years, and Lenôtre¹, and for everyone who knows me to be dead...

Shit, I ain't gonna wait a hundred years!

I'll spill it all out now! like it or lump it! I'm a child of the Passage Choiseul, where I was schooled! of Puteaux thanks to my wet-nurse Mme Jouhaux (Shepherdess Way)², and of Courbevoie where I was born. She was innocent at heart, my mother, no doubt about it, wouldn't harm a fly, like me! If you please! I fled, I had to, the avengers were all prepared, gathering, nosying around beneath my window... they came a hundred at a time! a thousand! they were burning the place, they were tearing the neighbors apart! just for being there! for seeing! that's fury for you! rotten with precaution! the floor, the whole building was good for it! They were blowing up half of Montmartre! It'd all been got ready in the basement! like goddam moles, the avengers! kegs! plastics! Bickford!³ and

¹ G. Lenotre (1857-1935), specialist of the "*petite histoire*" (anecdotes about the past), whom Céline refers to often.

² Even into the 20th century it was common among the middle classes to send their babies to wet-nurses for nursing until the age of two or three. Céline was no exception to this practice.

³ The Bickford cordon was a safety mechanism used in explosives.

oop! They were assassinating Arlette, they were assassinating Bébert, they were assassinating Jules Larpente¹, so he'd shut his mouth for once... they were assassinating the concierge...

It would've been some orgy, admit it! Blood! kiloliters of it! If I'd've stayed I'd've unleashed bedlam! The number of lives I saved by getting my tail out of there!... When madness fills the skies (should've heard those planes!) you can be damn sure it will fill the earth and below too! into the depths and the sewers! and into minds! they weren't just airships any more! metro cars full of bombs! All in an uproar, rage, metal! and more! much more! "Flying fortresses" they called them... are they not portents of the end of the world, "flying fortresses"? They were thrilled with their "fortresses"! A hundred times a hundred devils' castanets letting it rip, crackling, through the air!

- He was a coward, so they said, so they wrote, the audacity of them!

- I saved two hundred twenty people by fucking off! (Yeh, and they wouldn't be yelping now!) Besides all the other statues in the squares they wanna tear down anyway, I should get one, Place Dereure, modest of tone, not gilded, but serious all the same, touching.

He left, we lived

Ferdinand-the-Tactful.

- He didn't want us to draw his blood! that's their big gripe... he was alone, there were a thousand of us! (besides the "Old Maid" Avenging Angel). Had we caught up with

¹ In real life Gen Paul, a Montmartre painter and close friend of Céline's who was already mentioned and will be referred to again as "Julot". He lost a leg in World War I.

him in Vauvenart Square we'd've made mince meat out of him by the time we got him to Rue Féval!

- Hey! easy does it!... Two sides to every coin!... People in heat for atrocities are the only Communists there ever were! The "All Believing"! mirages, bowels, bones, they swallow it all! Communion not bread, hot and meaty! There you are! Long live Jesus! two thousand years!

- He didn't want us to! wouldn't cooperate!

I left out of pure kindness, chivalry, love-thy-neighborliness! that's the truth! the proof: the statue! nobody was nailed on my account! mashed to a pulp! I don't know what! It was a beau jeste, no doubt about it! This thing was bigger than all of us, no mistake! If I'd've stayed another week there'd've been a thousand assassins: three hundred thousand! then they'd've been in for something! Come charging up my stairs... crash down the door... overpower me, tie me up... bring me down to where they're gonna torture me... impale me maybe? sure, that's nothing to you! being slashed into strips either!... why not the rack?... the scaffold! Coo-coo! Gallows? The high jump! The swing! I see you, rolling in the aisles, doubled over laughing up there!

Oh, compete with you? Who could possibly be up to it? I'll never be able to come close to your valorous deeds! My trials have broken me, I admit it... while we're at it, getting back to my mother... I can't reconcile myself to this sadness... they buried her in Père Lachaise, lane 14, division 20... how I'd love a compassionate leave... just time enough to go see the slab...

It all happened in such a way... she never found out how I wound up... I'd bring

her a jar of daisies... that was her flower, the daisy... Marguerite¹ Louise Céline Guillou... She died of a broken heart over me, and from exhaustion from too much stress on the heart... palpitations, worries... of what everyone was saying... just imagine the people on the Avenue de Clichy... a bench... what must they have thought?...

She never found out what had become of me... we watched her leave one evening, she took Rue Durantin and then went down towards Lamarck... and then that was it, forever... she hadn't been sleeping for months... She never slept much... now she's sleeping... She was like me, anxious, too conscientious... There was a little laughter inside: her all the same, there's an awful lot of it in me... To show you, at the bottom of this hole, I can laugh when I want to, I think about you -- magic -- how you're gonna be doubled over, laughing your leg off, when the flute starts to play, the little tune I mentioned above that you don't yet know... If there's no laughter inside you there's nothing... I saw her laugh over her laces, on the "Malines", the "Bruges", spider fine, little knots, the links, edgings so fine she was ruining her eyes... they turned into these huge bedspreads, a vamp's paradise, such graciousness of design... filigrees of daintiness... that nobody nowadays understands!... it went out with the Epoque... it was too light... the Belle!... it was music without notes, without sound, for the laceworker, it was her eyes... that's how it was with my mother... she wound up blind... sixty years in lace!... I inherited her poor eyesight, everything makes me cry, grey, red, the cold... I write with great difficulty... oh, but I too will sleep! it will come, my moment of rest!... I'll have earned it... "Disgrace!" more than a disgrace! a traitor! a this and a that! no one will deprive me

¹ "Marguerite" means "daisy" in French.

of my death! Confiscated! everything! Beddy-byes! I win!

How I'd like a compassionate leave for Père Lachaise, to go see the slab, the name... The impertinence of it! let them choke! Excrement! They howl, get out of the country!... At me? From Courbevoie? they, who come out of the back end of a dung heap, who'll never put any place on a map! from the most deserted goddam prairies that don't even have a post! a asshole! a pond! a notion of grammar! it's the presumptuousness that'll kill me! you'll see! see the cruelty of these rejects! I'll be flabbergasted to death!... because anything goes!... yesterday's doormats!...

All they have is harsh words.

I've had enough of Hortensia I tell you! and his indecent proposals through my bars, there! at dawn!

- I'm Louis XV! I'm Louis XV! come, love me, grand-daddy!

These are amazing things to say.

Come kiss me you bandit! The lily! France and her Colonies! Dubois¹ is in command!

His exact words.

That's the kind of madness he subjects me to! They sent him just for the purpose from Jittery Quay in Paris².

¹ Cardinal Dubois was not Louis XV's minister but that of the Regent Philippe d'Orléans. He's associated with France's colonial development through the Compagnie d'Occident and the Compagnie des Indes, both set up during his ministry.

² Reference to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Quay d'Orsay, which through its representative in Denmark, Guy Girard de Charbonnières, was insisting on Céline's extradition.

- And after that you'll be decapitated!

At least he's not trying to sweeten the pill, he wants my anu, and then my head!...

This is the type of person they send to me, Underling pansies from Jittery Quay in Paris!... to get the Saints in prison going! And in ectoplasmic form! only in the most troubled of times!

- I chant! I cry! I pray!

I make the sign of the cross... *Vade! Vade!*¹

He bursts out laughing.

I make the sign of the cross again.

- In the name of the Great Can-Can! I scream... Who is mightier than God!

That shut him up... he disappears for three, four minutes...

- And Brasillach, hold your tirades! didn't he suffer a bit more?

- Don't give me any shit about Brasillach! He didn't have the time to catch a cold, they shot him still hot! with me it's rotting away for years here in this hole with the sea-lions on my right, left, in front, that I can't bear! the marshals with their whistles either! Plus Hortensia and his wisecracks! and the walls full of the howling! the sirens, the cemetery bells! Even as debased here as I am, it's not bearable, there are no words for it! only laughter of course!

And André Girouette,² that handsome charmer, now he was another valorous one!

¹ Biblical reference: "Vade retro Satanas", "Get behind me, Satan".

² André Marie (1897-1974) politician under the Fourth Republic. Keeper of the Seals in 1949, he was implicated in a financial scandal. He had written the librettos for comic operas before the war.

victim! walled in! and so on! operettas or no operettas! and Mr Ayer of the Government Seals!¹

Oh they had a whaling good time of it! Honor and Justice at the Ritz and Place Vendôme! Let's have a drink! Let's have two! the column is high and in bronze, won't ever catch them throwing themselves off it!

- I'll never be minister!

- And Cardinal La Balue?² And Blanqui³ at Mont Saint-Michel?

Well if you're going to drag History into this! you'll always find someone who's been chucked in a cage! heaven's sake! lordy be! one beautiful fuck-up after another! And Barbès?⁴ And what about Latude? and Rip Van Winkle and his beard? And Mr. Capet?⁵ Paris has always had its executioners! always somebody with his head cut off, his limbs wrenched from their sockets, strappadoed, boiled! just need to know what sect you're in! to which persuasion you belong! three-quarter? full-time, part-time pimp?

¹ This new nickname given to René Mayer could be an allusion to the fact that he was in January 1948 the Minister of Finance who withdrew from circulation the five-thousand franc bank notes in an anti-fraud drive.

² Cardinal La Balue was imprisoned for 11 years by Louis XI. Legend has it that he was kept in a cage where he could neither stand nor lie down, which contributed to his becoming a symbol, with Latude, of all detainees. What follows is another list of detainees.

³ Blanqui was imprisoned in Mont Saint-Michel between 1840 and 1844.

⁴ Armand Barbès (1809-1848) a republican who opposed the July Monarchy, far-left deputy during the Republic, was again arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment after the events of May 15, 1848.

⁵ The name given to King Louis XVI by the revolutionaries while he was imprisoned in the Temple.

vaseline? borderline? cross-eyed? fence-sitter? Shinola! Twisted tastes?...

Here, a very friendly word in your ear... the thing to point out at the moment... look at the cages!... thousands, right! millions of people have been in cages all this time... millions more will follow!... You'd think they'd be used to it by now... But not at all! Screeching like ospreys they are on the inside! yelping! terrible pain! Such catastrophies!

- Absurd! On all fours, squirts! And no arguments! All fours! Sighs? The Animal Era has arrived! Come on! Zoology to the People! Get down there and crawl or die!

History is the memory of facts! Now 1914, that's a date! The Flat Stone Age, the Bone Age, the Herring Age, the Age on its Knees, the Age of the Cathedral, the Age of Gunpowder, the Age of the Tank, the Age of the Hole, the Age of Belly-Crawling, and the Age of the Cage!

This is the end of the Age of 1914!

The entire human family at the Zoo! The Flood without an Ark, some other animal's turn to be martyred, let's flay the educated!

The Great Moral Revolution?... The Dove!¹ we'll see!...

Look, I'm not just shooting the breeze, here it's the perfect modern regime... Ten minutes a day in the fresh air, twenty-three hours and fifty minutes confined... not just a little, really in the dark... that bit of air lies in wait for you! one mouthful... you're

¹ When this novel was being finished Pablo Picasso did a famous drawing of the Dove of Peace for the Communist Movement. It recalled the bible story of the dove that appeared after the Deluge. The ark is mentioned a few lines above and the image of "the flood without an ark" will become a frequent one in *Féerie II*.

knocked out! three sheets to the wind! through the chicken wire, the sky, the gulls gliding way up there! in the blue! you cry out, "Long live the Creator". But they don't like you getting carried away one bit! The sniper up there with his machine gun comes rushing to his peephole: "Hey you down there, yeh, you, the one who takes it up the ass!" he shouts (it's not true at all!) *Maul!... Maul!...* (that's German for "kisser") furious in his tower... he lets you know how he feels about such things!... to not understand is human... All the same, in summer the sky, the gulls... tough luck about the insults!... the caged-in yard is pure delight, if you please! In winter it's foul, I admit... the kind of cyclone-tornado that grabs you, spins you around, knocks you from one end to the other, it's altogether too beastly!... even worse than the cop!... Would be nothing for someone sturdy, but a scrawny, skinny guy like me, just skin and bones, it clobbers you! *hoing! bang!* the music! your kisser! the bars! it's bloody unpleasant! Down you get! up again! catch up! the jerk up there in his tower he's busting his sides! Twelve guys he can laugh at from on high! guys caged in in the yard! Twelve of them teetering around, twelve of them in the grill all crashing into each other, all twirling around as fiercely as the next guy! tensing their muscles on all fours, crawling, squawking... True, you stop feeling much after they've roughed you up fifteen, twenty times... It's like the snow goes right inside you, you're a mass of shivers and fissures! Wind, sleet... It would be nice in the Tuileries, a snowman and pirouetting round! but there, coming through the bars there, three meters by three, it's just dumb! the whole Baltavian winter is dumb! first and foremost! It's the huge tragicomic black ogre! the All Engulfing One! Flowers, wee birds, summer, autumn! everything! spring!... Dirty show-off of a screaming hoodlum! gosh darn! Goodness gracious! I tell

you, it's BAD! Not to belabor the point! Goodness gracious! BAD! Enough! I've had my bellyful of it! *Profondis!*

Who'll strangle the bellowing monster? Screecher! Baltavian winter! it's like a ferocious masked ogre who splits your soul in two!

You being whacked and knocked around like a pinball (I'm telling you about the yard - the cage) the cop's had enough!... the ten minutes are up! he blows his whistle! fun's over! The guards charge, round up everything! the ones who are crouching, collapsed, hanging on, clutching on! Allez-ooop! up against the wall! The twisted ones go shuffling back!... all along... the whole way! and *crrrank!*... your cell door! *crrrank!* home sweet home! sitting down! well behaved, melting... Oh, no atrocities here, no inhuman intentions! Load of crap! Violence is the winter wind! the climate that's barbaric by nature! it's not the cage that's on trial here. What I'm complaining about is my pellagre, the buzzings, the dizziness and the lump in my right arm... kind of mostly from the '14 war! That's why I got all in an uproar! that I had a fit! for God's sake that it shouldn't start again! I wanted to prevent another Slaughter! Holy Shit, was I in for it! I was gonna find out what lumber the Slaughterhouse used for heat! How the gospel-writers would stand up and be counted! My subversive little pen! Oh boy! witchcraft! my brimstone! rope! firewood! pitch! And it's not over yet! so I'm not gonna complain about the regime, austere to be sure! cell window, bars, Hortensia, his salacious moments... but there were intermissions too that I'm not leaving out! I bark! Bark some more! and they come running! they pick me up! a stretcher and that's me away! Is it not a blessing?... prison is finishing me off... hey, it's only natural! fifty-seven years of heroism,

of the sublimities of war and peace... why shouldn't it kill me?

- Nobody asked you, you stinking kook!

- True, true, to the letter!...

I have no business complaining about the conditions!... if it weren't for the cage I wouldn't be breathing!... I'd be dead right now!... Thanks to the ten minutes in the cage that I didn't mold away completely!... I was falling to bits!... altogether worse than the wind! and my little head-spins!... The guards saved my skin!... They forced me to go out... come back in... Hurray for the ten minutes of cage!

- Oh, but enthusiasm keeps you warm! Maybe you have the calling? I can see you now! You're in Siberia! Physician! missionary! polar bear! stiff!

- Ah, you're showing me an Ideal World! How happy we'll be together! thousands and thousands up there! speaking French together! Joye! Joye! Joye! we'll be all so lovey-dovey! my vice, I have to admit it, my only vice: speaking French!

An executioner who spoke French to me, I'd forgive him almost everything... boy, do I hate foreign languages! the incredible gobbledegook that exists! the bullshit!

- You really get a kick out of this Siberia thing! It's not only Hortensia you're fixated on! Siberia this! Siberia that!

- But if it was up to you you'd send the whole frigging world up to Siberia! Who knows who'll wind up in Siberia! First of all! Montandon¹ who knows it well, he was

¹ George Montadon (1879-1944) Swiss medical doctor who developed racist theories and who became a friend of Céline's during the war. Unlike Céline, he remained in Paris and was the victim of an attack. His wife was killed outright and he was brought to Germany where he died. Céline felt the same fate would have awaited him had he remained in Paris.

telling me that when there were storms, the sleighs, the whole frigging sleigh would up and leave the snow, fly right off into space! whole kit and caboodle! the people! everything! crack through the air and go sailing for fifty... two hundred versts! come to a graceful landing right on track... so me with my pathetic little flakes, me grotesquely knocked around in my yard cage!... so they come into my cell at the drop of a hat... the stretcher! sick bay! be quick about it! the fruit is perishing... I shouldn't talk... There's a thin line between unhappiness and ingratitude... I won't cross it!... Good care, enemas, medication, I know all about it!... but morale to fall back on? I supply my own morale! They all know me up in the infirmary!... gaiety in person! the optimist! anyone on hunger strike? they send'em to me!... the ones who want to hang themselves, the ones who cut their veins, those who are so down on their asses that they can only stare off unconscious into space: I get them! medicine comes naturally to me!... psychotherapy is my forte!... two or three words of German and some pantomime!... no lie: I've grabbed from the brink guys who were really suffering atrociously, ready to do anything, to do themselves in!... beds packed in side by side... absolutely no way of getting out of there... ones really stark raving, quite the cases!... no let up - night and day... got them to eat again, give that old razor a shake now and then! got them to listen! jolly them along!... I'm all for the Party of Life! sometimes singing too... real tunes!... I can boast of playing the piano with my mouth and that's with no teeth!... It's my innate gaiety! All gifts that character bestows! Humanity! Medicine! Descartes said it! Kruschen too!¹

¹ The juxtaposition of the names Descartes and Kruschen was done in jest. Descartes held the art of medicine in high regard, and Kruschen was the inventor of the popular "Kruschen Salts" widely used before WWII. They were famous for their

They told me how much a prisoner like me costs... almost two hundred dinars¹ a day!... you wouldn't cost two hundred dinars in Siberia!... you wouldn't have any caged-in yards either!... Did I say there'd be lots of us up there? I'm getting ahead of myself!... maybe there'd only be a dozen of us... max!... ten?... five?... maybe there'd be only two of us... maybe just Remire and me... who's Remire?... now there's a dedicated man!... Doctor Remire... dedicated, it's like the fingers on your hand... you know workers' fingers, right?... by the time they're forty years old they have no fingers left... two, three torn off each hand... lost here or there, what with saws, drills...

Those who don't apply themselves, who do fuck all, they keep their hands, they keep their fingers, they keep every goddam thing...

Oh, but there are those who are real diehard fans of penal colonies! I know, I admit it... Maybe you'd have a wonderful time in Siberia, you!... there's no accounting for tastes... Dostoyevsky couldn't get enough of it, always scribbling letters to the Tzar *Little Grand-daddy!* *Little Papa!* that he owed him so much, that he couldn't get over it how wonderful it was! the revelation! soul! the knout! the rotten potatoes! epilepsy! parricides! scurvy! everything! the lice! the chains... Maybe you'd be the same? "Little Grandpa! Little Papa! Lay on some more!" For instance, Montadon, my dead pal, who'd explored all these places, Siberia, far and wide, he was smitten by it!... oh, the Tundra! he used to sigh to me... it was a fairyland according to him... blizzards where everything was

advertisements which always took the form of testimonials from satisfied customers, such as "I'm burning my crutches - because of rheumatism I was an invalid - but thanks to Kruschen I've gone back to work".

¹ He means "crowns" of course.

blown clear away! just sailed right through space! sleighs! crews! passengers!... for a hundred-fifty, two hundred versts!... came back on track!... All they saw was white! Montandon the anthropologist... There's such a thing as guys who are nuts over the steppes!... He'd have trekked all the way to Tomsk, Montandon, on foot, just to see the farthest reaches of the ass end of nowhere... Did he miss his little suburb, Clamart? What do you think?... In any case his time of touring about the horizons that go on forever ran out... his number was up!... I loved that guy, Montandon!... what a beautiful scientific mind!... (except for his obsession with the Tundra)!... He died in Fulda, Germany, in a particularly cruel way... He was really killed twice, first at Clamart, point blank, then bumped over to Germany, such pain!... his train dynamited en route, and then in Fulda of cancer!... What a clutter of scalpels! incompetent killers! Red Cross! med students! derailings!... and his hospital burned down!

Vicissitudes of the Times!...

Yes, but, you know, you're avoiding the issue!

Not at all!... It's the web of Time... Time! the embroidery of Time!... blood, music, and lace!... I'm spreading it out for you, unfurling it, laying it all before you... Clamart!... Fulda!... don't you see! look! The web of Time!... if you knew the spinning-wheel, the spot where two and two make three, you'd be less astounded... and then four! and then seven, depends!... you'd say "ah, yes"... you'd see into the designs of this world, the embroidery of the waves... maybe?... not even!... no longer even a little motif do you notice!... modulated... never a fragment of time without its note... Time's embroidery is music... just hinted at perhaps... quick and ever so delicate, and then nothing at all... little

coo-coo, clock that beats, your heart, the wave on the shore, the kid who's crying...
 Sieyès¹ harp ... midnight, the clock strikes twelve... twelve bullets... the firing squad! the
 adventure's ended! the farrier you no longer hear?... what luck!...the horse-shoe's
 disappeared with the horse!... galley-slaves plying their oars!... sounds that have
 disappeared and ghosts who no longer dare to haunt... not even a "boo" out of them!...
 watermills... remember? *whoosh!*... *whoosh!* ... all of them gone out with the
 Merovingians!... Rhythms that are no longer?... as if you gave a fuck... you're no mystic,
 no nothing!... a follower of neither Papus nor Encausse²... you didn't know Delâtre³...
 his workshop in Path des Cloys?... "The Esoteric Press of the Sâr"⁴... the place is
 nothing anymore... rubble... brambles... Montmartre... even if you heard the nightingale,
 the blackbird, the flies, the boule players, it wouldn't bring anything back for you at all!...
 "Scoundrel" you'd yell!... he's having us on! the little creep is leading us astray...
 his and his web! his neck is more like it! the rope! and out! his balcony! he must be
 kidding! such a place! on the seventh floor!... you mean he used to live there?... the
 nerve! and they didn't suspend him from it? terrible... out there with the birds! with the
 crows! vultures! to perish, to rot, to swing, to stink! why it's downright indecent!
 nightingales? the cheek of him talking about nightingales!... I mean that was The View!

¹ An obscure reference to a Revolutionary-period musician.

² These are one and the same. Papus was the pseudonym of a Dr Encausse (1865-1916), a famous Belle Epoque practitioner of the occult.

³ A Parisian master printer who lived near Céline in the 1930s.

⁴ An obscure reference to another mystical figure popular at the time, Joséphin "the Sâr" Péladan, whose books Delâtre printed.

he's really rubbing our noses in it!

Looking out over everything, the view all over Paris, that's what you'll never forgive me for!

- The arch traitor! it's not even worth trying him! the final, overwhelming evidence! a view like that! He deprived himself of nothing! To think they didn't hang the bastard!

It's monstrous! the unbelievable villain! you can't imagine!... his horizon was the hills of Mantes... Drancy to the south... the whole city all to himself!... the slopes like a fairy's wedding train! all the roof tops, thousands and thousands of them... red, black!... soft grey... the Seine, the light shimmering on it, rippling mauve and rose... Notre Dame!... oh, the pig!... the Pantheon!... the pimp! what a bitter pill!... the Invalides... you forgot the Arch of Triumph!... it's horrible!... he lived THERE?

I give up.

I was telling you about that other guy, telling you about the stairway, the threats, about my snot-nosed killer!... the *Old Maid* superhero... ah, but you don't hate the snot-nosed killer!... you're scared of the snot-nosed killer... he's got contacts, a party behind him¹... me, I'm all alone... so you can really get your rocks off over me... I've really got you panting!... bumping me off is a cinch!... a give-away!... that's why they're all so titillated, panting, the perfect target!...

To make a long story short, you're all vile, dangerous, cowardly... Okay! I won't

¹ At the time Roger Vailland was a self-professed member of the French Communist Party

return there again! Promise! I won't go like a living reproach, sniffing around, taking stock of how much I've been dirtied, robbed, disgustingly betrayed, vilified!... first of all I'd recognize fuck-all... what do you expect with these "shock teams"!... twenty... a hundred... two hundred of them! who shat all over everything! and that was just the taxmen, who're still after my tail... then there was the public prosecutor, the cops... my shade is their reason for living, their very breath, their Almighty Position!... they send papers flying into empty rooms... they're hoping for spring?... I don't know... bring on spring!

I'm of an entirely different character altogether. I have a whole other life to live over again! start building all over again! home, furniture, patients, appliances!... so the recriminations, right?... and Arlette's life! How I've ruined her life! her students! her dance classes!

And Bébert who has no more teeth, or whiskers!... (like me!)... we'll have to get youth to flower again!... I was talking to you about the web of Time!... You should see how I look!

- So publish, go ahead!

- And you buy it! and die laughing!... but just take a look at the birds of prey around to see how hateful, jealous they are... maybe they'll say, "He's on his death bed!" and you add, "He may be on his death bed but he's still funny!"... "He's the Funny Man of the Century!"... not of the half-century¹!... faint praise, "the half-century"!... it's like "a

¹ In a 1950 survey in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, in which writers and critics were asked to designate "the twelve French novels of the first half of the century", neither "*Voyage au bout de la nuit*" nor "*Mort à crédit*" was mentioned. But the year before, the

demi-god”... what the hell is that!... and don’t talk to me about genius!... geniuses are a dime a dozen!... you’d wrong me!... “Buy it!” that’s all... cut and dry, you have my undying gratitude. The crowds make a mad rush for the bookstores... attack and carry off the wholesalers... I’m booming again!... my ass heals, and my elbow too!... *Fable!*... *Fable!*... the lump in my arm?¹ Yeh, that’s the hitch, all right! But Tailhefer² operates on me... I get a clean bill of health... I can see again, they let me out of this hole. I’m fawned over... I buy myself a bicycle, a cottage,³ a maid to open the door... I never ever return to Siberia!... I set up practice again on the Emerald Coast! and, come on, you can say it, get it out, “Gotta hand it to him, he makes you laugh”! Tough luck for Montandon, the bullet in him, his cancer, Clamart-les-Asies, fucking hell! Tundra! Fulda! damn! Zazov! let him stay there!

He didn’t know how to laugh, Montadon, he was grey - had a grey face, grey collar, raincoat, shoes, everything... but what a fine mind! entirely grey, admittedly! never a word spoken above a whisper!... but such admirably precise details!... He came up to see us so I could listen to his heartbeat. No sooner was his satchel on the floor than Bébert would jump on his lap and “purr... purr, I adore you!”... Bébert who, all the same, is not

readers of *Carrefour* mentioned Céline as seventh (out of twelve) living writers who would still be read by the end of the century. In 1990 another survey re-put the same question and Céline was listed second, behind Marcel Proust.

¹ In October 1914 Céline was hit by a bullet in the right arm which after numerous operations left some paralysis in the forearm.

² André Tailhefer, a Clichy surgeon, with whom Céline maintained friendly relations till the end of his life.

³ In English in the original.

your nice cat! the scratcher, the wolf-it-down made cat!... he understood that Montadon charm!... Wouldn't be surprised if his ghost or something was up there in the outer reaches of the steppes!... don't give a fuck! let him stay there! I won't go! I'm gonna set myself up where I told you! Excuse me! but I've had enough suffering! I want a place with camellias, mimosas, carnations in every season!... ah, the ideal place! It's very simple! Between Tho Briand¹ and la Douane!... has it been chosen? you picture the place I'm talking about? Rocchabe... the reefs... les Bée... St Vincent's Gate... Quiquengrogne!... the tramway stop... the yacht basin²... the climate!... the bathing beauties!... the sands!... the golden crescent all the way up to Cancale... or just about... gold on emerald!... really incredibly beautiful!... and what about the Casino?... astonishment itself in monumental form!... malgamed armoric-metro, granite, arabesques, little gargoyles, menhirs, brick, slate!... and a thousand skylights, crenelated edgings, openings... There it stands over the Ocean, Epoque Pyramid, a mausoleum to the Black Stocking Queens!³ Veritable Cleopatras they were... I knew them from Passage Choiseul, those Black Stocking Queens!... they'd get their petit-fours at Charvin's... then

¹ Théophile Briant (1891-1956), poet and writer, friend of Céline's whom he met in 1937 and saw at Saint-Malo. He founded a poetry journal called *Le Goéland*, or the Seagull, which Céline later satirizes as "the Albatross". "La Douane" is probably a reference to the Saint-Malo ramparts tower called "Bidouane".

² References to places in Saint Malo, the Breton port city the Céline often visited on vacation.

³ Turn-of-the century chorus girls who raised their skirts high enough to show their black stockings and white shifts.

their novels at Lemerre's... and then their lace at my mother's!¹... what a casino! You should go there! granite, knobs jutting out, little gargoyles, it was really a sight to behold, all decked out in gold, and the waltzes!... the gypsies, the Princes of Transylvania!... you didn't know Rigo?²... other Epochs, like smells from the kitchen, fixed forever, making the head swim... Ah, dear friends, loved ones, you won't be sniffing around any more either! and your demise is not all that far off!... You have nothing to sneer at!... you gotta have azaleas, hydrangea, and roses!... the least little cemetery!... won't be there to boast! every day that passes, they carry off another one!... so more roses, more beautiful ones!... and fast!... wreathes!... let's not forget anything!... we have to hurry! we can't forget anything! gay forget-me-nots!

Hey, I don't want to make you sad! I was telling you about the Casino, misshapen, funny place... a whole world!... and from 1900!... shoulda seen its cloakroom!... parasols everywhere! ...all forgotten now!... and the lorgnettes and the spy-glasses!... real eye-catchers!... skeletons of "lost children"... little flags from the "Russian Alliance"! all over the place!... paper streamers as far as the eye could see... all kinds of mustaches... gaulois, "William", Chaplinesque, should've seen those crinolines, and the white burnous, the soutanes, the nannies!...

Gone, long gone, the enchantment, the tziganes, the gypsies, even the roulette

¹ Passage Choiseul, where Céline grew up, boasted of an excellent pastry shop, Charvinn's at number 11, and the bookstore Lemere at number 23. Céline's mother's shop which featured "genuine lace" and "curiosities" was at number 64.

² Famous gypsy violinist who became the symbol of the seducer in the 19th century thanks to his running off with the rich American Clara Ward, through marriage the Princess of Chimay.

wheel!... all's left are the geraniums and the nasturtiums, growing higher all the time... climbing... all over the columns... and lanterns that imitate tulips... it's all imitation, nothing real left... just a few roses maybe, admirable roses, "dancing tea roses"... I've seen many a beautiful thing all over the world, but nothing quite so beautiful as in the heart of that monster casino... kissed by the soft winds of the gulf stream... the mellow clemency of the climate, the bay... the rose is surely the supreme flower... a few roses whether it's in baskets or wreaths, you can't get around it, from the cradle to the *Profundis* the rose answers to the heavens for you ... No question about it, you shivering, mincing mummies!... wherever there are the most beautiful roses people come, go, love, expire... Casino, pagoda, menhir, dolmen, "Public Toilets", twenty roses are their salvation! Pyramid of the Blackstocking Queens!... there hasn't been a tzigane in Brittany for fifty years... Bad-Fairy Casino full of bumps! Mammoth, Popatamus, how I love the eternally lovely!... and the arc of waves, gold on emerald right up to Cancale... as far as the eye can see, farther still the dunes and the storms that make everything rattle around you!... the waves crashing! le Sillon and la Chaussée,¹ bravo!... tramways anny over teakettle!... so furious that the granite would tremble! split in half!... coming in the middle of a raging storm, from Cézembre and even farther west... northern gales!... the ramparts awash with the Minquier reefs!... they pound the jetties...form little pools of lacework! fluffs of foam all over the streets, the trolleys, the roofs!... the atrocious Casino goes ash white, all froth, all its knobby outcroppings, its crockery, its roof like a plesiosaurus' spine, its "bite-me" arches, its plaster busts... behold the miracle of passion! an orgy of water!... all these

¹ Area of Saint-Malo where Céline lived.

hideous things, little menhirs, topped off by a squid would you believe! dome full of eyes! “Monumental portal”, monstrous latrine standing up to a hurricane all pleased with itself, quivering with foam, clear out of time, pulsing... dripping with a thousand thousand pearls... sparkly things, fire-flies, diamonds, emeralds!... had you seen that!... Of course it had its share of cuckolded husbands... and jazz bands... Everything... but it’s the memories that count... the designs of the Gods... what a place for a Casino!... oriental, marmoric, Berber temple, ugly, not ugly, misshapen, ruined, and the roses! you please!... inside!... garlands... all over the place! gobs of them! strewn everywhere!... and cloakrooms full of parasols... and lorgnettes and the spy-glasses!... and Panama hats... and baby bottles for the skeleton... It’s a place that’ll move you to tears, you’ll weep, yearn, just like that, poets, poetesses, and centuries! and that’s how it is! and even Briand’s “Albatross”, he was the editor!... and Arlette Dorgeres and Lantelme¹ (on the jury) and the ghost La Cerisaye,² bishop in the old days!...

And the murmurs and the violins, and the people from farther afield, from Cornwall, from Léon, Bocage and as far away as Nantes who come all the way to vacation here... are they wanting in soul?... what about the drunken stupors?...

¹ Two famous actresses at the turn of the century. The latter’s death by drowning on her honeymoon was a great scandal at the time. The reference to a jury is not explained.

² Reference to Bishop Des Laurents (1713-1785), the next-to-the-last Bishop of Saint-Malo. Returning from a meeting in Paris, he was overcome with emotion on arrival in Saint-Malo and cried out “Finally, I see my dear Saint-Malo again” as he died.

Doesn't cost much to drink.

- What are you, crazy? here? with so many people? and roses?

Let me tell you, I lived right up against it, kinda hung over its dome, you picture the old depot? "Merlin and Sons"?... a three-room place under the roof-beams, my old pal Miss Marie¹ sub-let it to me... I could hear a thing or two coming from that place, let me tell you! *Tura-luras* and hot blood! and the squawks of the seagulls during the storms...

Summers rife with romance! Such equinoxes!... the glass roof right below my window!...

Won't you come home?

One little squall and oop!

Left me here all on my own!

Excuse me while I get lost in my memories... What can I say? They were happy times...

At night, here, where I'm talking to you from, here in the hole, it all comes back, I hear it all again... why the v-I-I-I-olins are sobbing! it's as if they were mewling at me!... and the fog horns *huuuuunk! huuuuunk!* from the quays! and *cheuf-cheuf*, it's as if they had asthma!... the Cancale race!... the cheers! the crowds... film rushes of days gone by!... newsreels of The Past... the jerky projector!... unreal!... and the piano!... and the tunes everybody was singing at the time...

The times you have lived through never leave you... nor do roses... I can tell

¹ Reference to Maria Le Bannier, whom Céline knew in Rennes through his father-in-law Athanase Follet, whose mistress she was.

because right now I'm sure they're screaming their lungs out all around me... both the watchdogs and the poor bastards in solitary... and the three on death row, in 14, 16 and 32... but I don't give a fuck!... the violins and the sobbings fill my head, and the way the piano is playing... Now I'm not given over to just any old kind of nostalgia! no Tundra for me! no prison colony either! heavens! Just happy I high-tailed it out of Montmartre when the vampires took over... who wouldn't let go with their fangs till they'd bled me white... I'll go wait it out in Saint-Malo!... They want no more of me on Avenue Gaveneau? or Rue Contrescarpe? I won't get worked up over so little! I have my mission in life! my art! my arts!... Nobody treats bronchitis like I do!... not to mention sciatica! such pain with them! They'll appreciate me up in the Emerald Coast! Specially seeing as I have my villa!... I won't let the Casino out of my sight!... everything that goes in, comes out... my patients!... specters with bones, without bones... or live ones!... with hurdy-gurdies! with lutes! with owls! everything!... with a villa, I'm a somebody!... Specters have a sense of decorum! Just take the Opera! they don't only just haunt ruins!... I myself have heard rappings, me, I tell you... like huge furniture coming crashing down! Right before I got arrested... before my Fate went to hell with itself... to give you an idea of their tastes... ghosts don't like pitch pine one bit... they go for the grand style, massive structures!...

I'm all for style! that's my fixation! So the Casino next door, that was just my thing! it was a kind of mammoth and octopus and menhirs all rolled into one!... Granite, slate, brick!... you're thinking "God awful"! excuse me! in comes the storm and out goes everything with it! the years gone by, the passions, the roses... the rooftops, the turrets, everything shakes! sings!... the windows bending and buckling! drainpipes, oboes! the

hurricane whips up streams of foam!... bagpipes... guitars... lorgnettes!... Botrel!... crepes... Paimpolaises...Fragson¹... they all come gushing out... you can just about make out the Jersey ferry on the horizon... brushes up against the buoy, the whistling one... takes an oncoming wave head on... gets bigger, now you can see it clearly over by Cézembre... there's foam shavings everywhere... a thousand reefs and Fort-Royal!... the majestic skiff's sails stand stiffly to the wind ... a thousand misses lift up their skirts, jump down, run off, scatter!...laughing... chirping!... about a boarding school, but where?... detained by Time somewhere!... two Negroes gambol around them! mandolining minstrels!... nothing new with that... and the school girls!...

Don't know if you get the picture... it's a Bay of Enchantment...

The old *Terreneuva*² that's there rotting on the wharf... that has its boom falling onto the deck, buffeted by the wind... has packed it in... its holds all empty, the bowsprit broken... you'd never know it, but it's full of people...

Yes, it's a place you remember... here, the *Ville d'Ys* grocery shop and the Le Coz sisters, a fairy's touch with the mussels... those peppery delights they grilled so very lightly!... and old René³ his little coffin? the big rock for all to see? and his cradle a hundred meters farther down... authentic!... the pains he took, old René!... a hundred meters!...

¹ Theodore Botrel's *La Paimpolaise* dates from 1896 and was first staged by Félix Mayol, noted Parisian songster. Fragson (1869-1913) was a famous music-hall and cafe circuit singer.

² A fishing boat which caught cod off the coast of Newfoundland.

³ René Chateaubriand, the 19th century writer, was born in Saint-Malo.

The whole bay is dear to me, both the bells and the ruins, and the belfry that's gone now and the Corsairs' palaces... Ah, I suspected as much all right... we all did... things of such grandeur are jinxed... I can still hear the "*Achtung*" alerts!¹... a sort of giant phonograph. We had one of them on our roof... never stopped, night or day... Bébert spent hours under it... he wanted to figure it out... of course it happened finally! everything was blasted, crushed to a pulp, in flames sky high!... I'd be surprised if old René, his coffin, his cradle, his cherished memories, didn't all go crackling up in smoke! passed into dust!

Everything has to pass!

I was pleased with my little place... people talk about places to live... mine was a veritable lantern! I saw everything that came in and out of town! from the Dinan side! the Saint-Vincent side! when you think of it! and flea-free lodgings! flea-free lodgings in Saint-Malo! *That's a miracle!*... no one escapes the spell of the emerald bay!... sovereign stupor!... and such a climate! extravagance!... the violence of the sea!... but you pay for it in flea bites!... three days at the beach and you're one big blister, you die! I have a friend, for example, Rebelle, Prince Rebelle!² I can tell you I've never seen as pretty a jewel box of a vacation apartment anywhere... four stylish rooms... pure Empire style! Seaside Empire! encased like a jewel into the ramparts!... it looked out on Fort-National... could

¹ Céline spent his summer holidays in Saint-Malo from 1941 to 1943, and was there again in February 1944. He was thus there when the German occupying forces sent out air raid warnings.

² André Dézarrois, public official, museum curator and friend of Céline who lent him his apartment in Saint-Malo in the summer of 1941.

see everything from there: la Rance... the horizon... Saint-Cast... Fréhel!...

But you should've seen him go at himself! because of the fleas!... his flanks, calves, crotch, he wound up all infected! 'cause he didn't want to leave his view!... more and more horrible abscesses... people would laugh at him when they saw him... the way he was scratching himself! boy did he go at it! Ah, but not once did he ever drop his monocle... the dignity of the man! a fine sight all the same! going up and down that one street, Saint-Vincent... he finally died in September at the equinox... from blood poisoning... from his scabs... I used to tell him:

- Get out of there, Prince!

- They don't bother me anymore!...

The fleas got him! The Prince was infested all right, but so is every creature! what about birds? I used to see a gull scratching itself at the top of the long hangar roof there under our window, for hours on end!... the noble fowl! and from the other side of the Casino! he paced up and down like Rebelle, only on his little claws... didn't fish at all any more... he'd pounce on bits of fish, leftovers from the crates, the garbage... what you'd call a retired seagull... at night you'd see him climb up again, very, very painfully... he'd perch on a false window sill in one of the Casino's trompe-l'oeil paintings!... way up on top... he'd sleep there...

When I think of the total hammering! those last days, under the phosphorous bombs!... He was in no shape to fly away! he no doubt ended his days there, such as he was... it've taken a phoenix!... a phoenix, I tell you!... but there are no phoenixes

anymore... Saint-Malo either!... or Todt¹ who'd paved the way! Ah, that was another sad story!... I'm liable to upset you! better not... I'll tell you another one... make you laugh this one... His Excellency La Cerisaye returning home from the Council of Bishops... detained a long time in Rome... Oh how happy he was to go home! He stands up in his carriage... he can't contain himself with glee: "Ah, thanks be to God! Thanks be to heaven! Oh, such happiness! Ah, Malo! I see you again at last, my beloved city!"

And *flop!* He collapses, overcome! drops down dead flat!

Just to give you an idea of its uncanny attraction... You wouldn't see him dropping dead of apoplexy now, His Excellency La Cerisaye if he came back unexpectedly these days!... he wouldn't be seeing anything again at last, at all!

- Everything has to be rebuilt! that's what they're all claiming... Anyone who gives in to defeat is a traitor! The building tradesmen, the Public Brick Committees, the ones that build the forts, the ones who were setting fire everywhere! they all agree! I'm with them! Let's build again, build, for God's sake! I'm on the side of those who are building things up again, making everything boom again, the neighborhoods, the ramparts, houses, chicken coops, quarry-stones, bricks, millstone, sand castles... All kinds of Work! I'll shirk from no effort! I don't ask whose hand I'm shaking! "He collaborates! I'll collaborate!" Long live the entente! ceramics and tiles! millstones! tar! mud! even those who ransacked my place and took everything, I'll even let them in on it! That's the kind of reconstructor I am! But I've got the goddam arrest warrant up the ass!... That'll be

¹ The engineer Fritz Todt, whom Hitler made responsible for road links in Germany and then for construction wherever the Germans went. He thus employed Frenchmen forced into labor on Hitler's public works.

taken care of!... as long as you build my fame up again!... "Ferdinand the Convulsor!"... such rocketing sales it will raise inflation! the waltz of the millions! I come bouncing back with oodles of dough! the bookstores are in a tizzy.... all forty million Frenchmen (plus the eighty overseas) demand two... three *Fables* each!... (like cars in America)... Here's where Isaiah shows up again... he's got four books in his satchel... four *Fables*!... here, in prison... he begs me to write a dedication in them... it can't wait!...

- My plane! your plane! is what he cries.

He gets right to the point.

- Ah, dear Maestro, let me embrace you!... Here's your laissez-passer.

- My warrant?... What about my warrant?...

I'm quibbling.

- But who gives a shit?! I'll wipe myself with it!

No sooner said than done, he drops his pants and oop! there he goes! and in deep!

- Long live Ferdinand! Long live the Vendôme Column! Long live all the Great Seals! Long live lanterns!¹

Those were his exact words!

- Long live street lamps! my turn now! Long live love! Liberty!

He's a scrupulous guy, he gets me out of there!... no bail, nothing!... no killer phone call!... no lousy set-up at Le Bourget for my arrival!... flowers!... But I do not go

¹ He's fantasizing here about being freed by Mayer. But why "lanterns" it is not clear. Professor Godard says it is perhaps a reference to the revolutionary song, the "Carmagnole" in which there's a reference to aristocrats being hung from lanterns.

back to Montmartre! I skedaddle right off to Rennes, Saint-Malo... I find Eynard¹ in tears, as much as to say washed out from weeping... crawling about in his rubble... he's turning over the ashes... he's been hoeing at it now for a good few years... digging... he finds a thing here and there... a bit of a bottle, a table leg... What's left of his "Museum and Bistro"... one piano key!... talk about a watering-hole! it was gone on a sea of flames!... Eynard in tears will never get over it!... I have to kick him to shake him out of his reveries!...

- A manor house, and quickly! I order him! right on the water! You can't just go mucking around in the rubble all the time! Let's do some renovations around here!

Look, I've gotta have a home - at all costs!

He's reached what's left of his bottles! he extirpates them from the heaps of rubbish... he looks as if he's putting them away in an imaginary wine rack... the bits of bottle fall again... Oh no! he groans, my "Beaune", my "Mum", my last "St. Georges"! Ah and here's a "nuit", it was a "nuit".

- Come on! I try to prod him, (he's all hesitant)! two gas stoves! two porcelain bath tubs! two maids to open my doors!...

I'm getting bigger and bigger ideas!

- Two garages for my four bikes! Keys in hand by Easter! You hear me? Twelve million a day in back money and no fleas!

A done deal!

¹ The architect Yves Hémard bought a house that Céline had wished to buy. He turned it into a corsair museum cum café, but it was totally destroyed by the Allied bombings in August 1944.

All in granite! I add, are you an architect or are you a ruin?

And don't forget the furniture! the consoles and the "daytime delights"!

I haven't a scrap of furniture left! I can't tell you the number of chairs that all evaporated on me thanks to them! chests! baldachins!... the bailiffs, the rioters, and people with a sentimental attachment too, the ones enamored of mementos... the beds, the sheets, it was awful!... three massive Renaissance tables which would have gone through the roof at the Auction Rooms!... The amount of stuff that they inherited from me before I'm even dead... Heh, maybe I'm dead after all... the race is on for my inheritance... it's written in the "personals"... my mother Marguerite's bed that they grabbed and sold on the cheap... the audacity of them!

That's one way to wind up: I drop dead in the street...

But I hoist myself back up on the merry-go-round! and off we go again! more music! I deal the cards, and three aces turn up! the next time I'll have a bed made like a brick shithouse! it'll be walled in! it'll be a goddam lead coffin... made of cement or brick? We'll see! Nobody will uproot that goddam bed! let the tax boys come and try to tear it out then! I'll come back to haunt the sonsabitches!...

Like with my medal of honor, speaking about insults and gendarmes, shit-kickers and blabbers... the one who came to officially inform my uncle Arthur (78 years old) that "I may no longer wear it"!... that he be sure to write to me and let me know that I'm a "disgrace", worse than a stinking pig of a hero, '14 and '39, the shame of the Chancellor's Office, a blight on the Flag, that I've brought dishonor to my wounds, that they're taking away my pension, stripping me of everything!...

The public's hatred is no joke! such vigilance that even in this hole here, which is after all fifteen hundred kilometers away, they see me with my little green and yellow ribbon!... like one little kitty should meow, they're all in an uproar! He saw something moving! me!

- That's him!... go git'em, doggies!... cops! lunacy! Papal bulls! excommunications! after the Specter!

They've all moved themselves up a notch - veritable Guillotins,¹ hangmen, ambassadors, chargers, liars, and with such panache! the arrogance! Henry IV! eight, twelve Hercules at the Mikes! steel-trap voices!... They fear nothing but the astro-bomb! Oh, but do they ever think ahead! nobody can bolt like they can! say you're on top of them like this, strangling them!... they're already in New Mexico!... Zebras in the stratosphere!

This deserter hops on a Comet² and zoom, he lands in Labrador for you, savior of Bécon-les-Bruyères, of Ciborium's factories at Gram and Brôme, of the "Code of Honors", of the "We're Patriots but You Wouldn't Know It" Network... And the "Lists" that he keeps in his wallet! the plans for a new Arch of Triumph!³... a huge fucking

¹ Guillotin was the eponymous promoter of the guillotine.

² The Comet, the first jet plane to carry passengers, had its first test flight in October 1949.

³ Reference to Paul Claudel, who was a member of the Board of Directors of the Gnome and Rhône Company which made airplane parts and which worked for Germany during the war. The company was therefore nationalized in 1945 and its directors tried. Claudel and the others were acquitted. The mocking pseudonym of "Ciborium" ("Ciboire" in French) is a reference to Claudel's Catholicism.

cleaver hanging from its vault... two thousand heads roll at a time! *Plop!* we've made progress since the Terror! Hey, you, you can't keep up with the times? Tough luck for you!

I'm having fun here, I'm telling you tales, I'm embroidering a little... the guy next door... in my wall, he's not what you'd call a laugh a minute!... the convict next door!... simple, he throws himself at it head first! *Va-va-va-vroom!* and there he goes again! he starts bellowing again! and boom-booming again!... What a head! this is one helluva fixation!... he's making the wall shake, just listen to that! Maybe he finds me suspicious? a spy? a low-down sonofabitch?... it's terrible the hatred you find... just an example, aside from that black Underling Hortensia from the Embassy, I've got another one who hates me... the one for the high jump in 16... "he hates all the French" so he hollers... he was in the NKK, Goering's army¹... he got his ears cut somewhere near Bourges... so he's got it in for me personally!... the locals, they condemned him to death, he'll be shot soon.... that'll shut him up... don't give a fuck who he hates!... it's the hate coming from France that kills me... If they saw me burning at the stake in France, not only the Palestinians,² the native French, the centuries-old, the Farigoux, the Dondurands, the Dumaines! Me and my books!... good-living people, polished, who do well for themselves... they'd be thrilled! beside themselves, the native French! setting their brothers on fire... for the wonderment of the Tourists, to titillate the foreigners, so that they really have a good time, make pigs of themselves, come in their pants all the more! so they never go away again! "Duck

¹ The *Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrer-Korps*, a motorized unit.

² Another code word for Jews.

cooked in its blood” you’ve heard of that, what about “The Frenchman cooked in his blood”? they do it the same way! the press! flames! Miss Joan of Arc went through it! They’re still talking about it! licking their chops! Rouen Duck!

- Yes, but you have your adepts! ones all in palpitations over your sufferings!

- Forget about it! they’re the worst, you gotta beware of them! see you crucified is what they want! trussed up! castrated alive, guts spilled out!... Just look at what they call me! the letters I get: “Yellow-bellied! Fraud!” they call me... how I made them suffer, my admirers! compromised them, etc.

So many pals I’ve driven to desperation! doesn’t bear thinking about! and *similis*... as many of them as there are assassins! our griefs aren’t over!

Ministers, bailiffs, tax collectors, erotomaniacs, dunces, nuns. I’ve got all of them in my walls!... the repercussions!...

Thinking about it all here in my dungeon... the crimes... the reproaches... God, the bitterness!... I go over and over it again!... Tell me, wherefore art thou, my friend?... you played that flute all wrong!... you beguiled the wrong rats... had you modulated your tones right you’d have attracted the right people, intoxicated the elite, the pure of heart... thrown all of them in the path of the tanks, into the slaughterhouse, to the phosphorous, the giant gut-lacerating barbecue, the Rights of Man and company! you’d have your fill of rosettes, insignias, contracts and confections!... you’d have your own hole in the Iron Curtain! come and go as you please!... no, you didn’t hit the right tones!

While I’m thinking of it, remembering... they grabbed my medal off me... three magic words! “no more medal!” the same way they’d have taken a pop at my head

wounds... yeh, I wouldn't be horsing around like this right now... I wouldn't be seeing anybody all over my walls... or that other one come out at me either, Hortensia, to offer me his Louis XV ass fucking! I'd be on target, doing the right thing, old boy!... I'd be writing Odes like Ciborium, I'd be signing over big engines to Stupnagel too, and lots of little satin slippers¹... I'd be one of those prison "popovers" like Sasa²... one of Philippe's old guard like Auduc³... maybe I'd be a Swiss Guard?... who knows, own stocks in Le Figaro? like Saint Francis the Immaterial!⁴ What couldn't I lay claim to?... take Pétain's place on the Ile Ré,⁵ live a hundred years like him?... All you have to do is toot the flute right!... I'd be cock'nbulling it over cocktails at Levy's place⁶... nobody would've stole my beds, the final manuscripts of five novels, or the esteem of General Ben Chancellor of the

¹ Further reference to Paul Claudel, who had a big hit in 1943 with his play "*Le Soulier de satin*" and who had written poems first to Maréchal Pétain, then to DeGaulle.

² Sacha Guitry, who had been an open supporter of collaboration during the war, and who got off relatively lightly after the war, serving only two months in prison.

³ Philippe is Philippe Pétain, and Auduc André Maurois whose real name was Herzog, German for "duke" ("duc" in French). In his memoirs, Maurois notes that he'd frequented Pétain before the war in the French Information Office in the USA.

⁴ Reference to François Mauriac, who'd demonstrated more sympathetic interest in Céline than most of his fellow writers, but who refused to help Céline at the moment of his trial in France in 1950. After the war, he continued to write for *Le Figaro*, becoming a spokesman for the Resistance fighters' point of view.

⁵ Pétain was serving his sentence at the time on the Isle of Yeu.

⁶ Paul Lévy, owner of the weekly, "*Aux écoutes*", defender of Céline while he was in Denmark.

Legion of Honor¹ -- how sweet it is to dream -- or the key to my coal shed... yes, Rue Gaveneau, I'll tell you the whole truth, I had more than a thousand kilos of it stockpiled... or the kind of genuine affection that there was between us, me and Madame Toiselle²... Me, go back up there? why? it'd only be awkward for everyone. More than one would have to examine his conscience... my friends' closets are full of skeletons... they'd kill me... And how comfortable would it be?... I wouldn't find the least little gadget left!... not a mattress cover... not a hot plate... not a single saucepan left... Imagine what it'd be like!

- Him and his pots! He can't think of anything else!

- No, not so! it's for my art! syringes have to be boiled! For instance, at Blaringhem, no reason to hide Blaringhem, they'd all have liked to be there! died to be there! they don't know what it was like! What the fuck do they care about the medical arts? they're so frigging stupid they get everything all twisted around like goddam epileptics when they try to do anything! I used to receive patients in my hotel room in Blaringhem. Stinking dump of a place that was! the toilet right next door, overflowing, gushing out all over the corridor! You couldn't live in it any longer... "For refugees" they said... "Refugees" wherever you go are pigs! No pig sty is too filthy! black, yellow, blue nations! doctor, no doctor! nothing is too sordid for what you are... "Refugee"!... evil eye, stinking breath! whatcha got dead in there?... a bunch of wily clowns! Don't talk to me about refugees!

¹ From 1944 to 1954 the High Chancellor of the Legion of Honor was General Bloch-Dassault, brother of the industrialist Marcel Dassault.

² A first reference to the concierge of his building, who will take on a larger role in the second half of *Féerie*, "Normance".

So as I was saying, I'd see patients in my room, they had to sit on the floor, no matter how bad a shape they were in -- no chairs!... the air-raids!... (nights spent in the woods outside of town)... the worst off were in my beds... should've seen those beds! beds you'd see in a circus, no more than springs! shot to hell! talk about bounce!

Who comes at me but this lady! Ah, the great Red Cross! You know, the immense cape! And the white hair! the grand entrance! tony broad! you picture the way they move! A sovereign!

- Doctor Céline? Doctor? is that you? ask anything you like of me! such misery I find you in! how frightful! I have the power do anything I like! anything! Go ahead! Mademoiselle Goering!¹ Let me introduce myself!... the Marshall's sister!... Go ahead! Don't be shy! Whatever you like!

- Mademoiselle, I'd love a saucepan!

- Oh, I'll run get you one right away!

She skedaddles... that's the last I see of her...

It'd be the same in Montmartre... in Sartrouville... Pierrefitte or Houilles... just say I get home...

- A saucepan!

That'd be the end of it!... (I'm talking about after the atomic hit.)

- I'm Julius Caesar himself! I'm Madame the Queen² in a little veil ... what is your

¹ Goering had two sisters, both of whom were doctor's wives. It is not known whether one of them ever came to visit Céline in his room at Sigmaringen.

² In an earlier version, the text read "Je suis Mme Bidault". Mme Georges Bidault was a diplomat who was thought to have occult powers. The reference to a "little

pleasure?

- A saucepan!

- Has he lost his mind?... right away outraged!... why not? "My kingdom for a horse!" that sounded good... but "Europe for a saucepan"?

And for an enema?... when I've gone two weeks without a bowel movement I'd give the world for an enema. That's egotism for you!...

These are not just asides! little anecdotes!...

- And at Lunebourg,¹ you punk, how would they have treated you?

- Were you there in Lunebourg, yourself? they're all dead in Lunebourg! was it you who took over their jobs?... avengers, job-takers, they're all the same!... History's conjurors!... that guy over there, escaped the draft (wonder how) number 2 before the war, puking up his guts in '39 in his haste to flee, whingeing for mercy, look at him now thundering in Court, expediting you, the sniveling creep, *ad patres!* to the penal colony! etcetera!... thanks to his goddam cheek, that's how he got to the bench!... No arguing with that!... the luck of the draw!...

Lunebourg, I'll tell you about Lunebourg! there were cathouses in Lunebourg! not just charnel houses!²

veil" is, perhaps, a reference to "la dame voilée", la "femme généreuse" of the legend invented by Esterhazy, the real culprit in the Dreyfus Affair, who, he claimed, helped him prove Dreyfus' guilt.

¹ Buchenwald in a previous version.

² The existence of places of prostitution in Nazi concentration camps has been attested to.

Therein lies the complete horror of it!... During the whole of the fucking Middle Ages, the place where they had it off most of all was the cemeteries!... people don't face up to these odd little sides of things, leave a lot of naughty little facts in the dark out of human decency! A mistake! wrong!... human decency never holds up!... with me it's my enemas! my needs! after two weeks without an enemas I have nothing against dying... and they give it to me so hot that I scream...

- And in Claunau?¹

- You're right, you're right! I whimper, but I'm spoiled! but were you there, in Claunau?... My ass you were! doesn't stop you from screeching your fucking lungs out as if you were the first one in and the last one out!

- And in Brazzaville? And Chad? you weren't there slogging away? and with such mosquitos buzzing around, madame! the lepers! the amoeba! the tse-tse flies! buffalo everywhere! crocodiles! and vampires!... While we're at it, I didn't see you in Cameroon! What would you know, sweetie, of such prodigious acts of valor? and not of recent date! donkeys years! You weren't even born yet! '17! Ha! it was us booted out the Krauts that time! in 120 degrees in the shade! oh, la, la and in white helmets! Bobillot² was my hero!

¹ Dachau.

² Sergeant Bobillot was an important figure for Céline. A hero of the defeat of Tonkin, he died at the age of 35 after participating in an attack against the Chinese and destroying their mines. A statue was raised to him in 1888 at the intersection of the Boulevards Voltaire and Richard-Lenoir. The two soldiers mentioned after him, Savorgnan de Brazza and Jules Chanoine, fought in France's colonial wars, but did not hold as much fascination for Céline as Bobillot.

Savorgnan! Chanoine! Rescue! My honor! the Rio Cribi mine, not yours! Bikobimbo!¹
 If you had the tiniest idea of all my military honors you'd die, you'd bury your head in
 shame! not to mention getting smacked in the jaw with the seltzer bottle! there goes your
 skull! I smash everything you have! your goddam cafe table, marble and all! I destroy
 your *Cafe du Commerce*! sheer fucking atonement-for-everything madness! hypocrites is
 what you are!... My mysticism never got me anywhere at all! But Darius'² turncoats are
 everywhere!... they'd never have been anything without Darius!... the least little
 shopkeeper in Nogent-sur-Lys... fucking hell, have they moved up in the world!... they
 thunder at you from the summits of the Justice System!... the same guys who'd've been
 lucky to get grubby waiter jobs at a sidewalk cafe in the old days... or as street sweepers...
 who used to dream about selling vacuum cleaners... or going in for dog grooming...
 they're more like the Doges' fleas, my good woman! You seem a little suspicious to
 them... they get all worked up! beat on the war drums! To the watchtower! ... a thousand
 executioners! Darius' turncoats are everywhere!... the "Knights of the Proud Candle"...
 this cult is secret and ferocious! I know of a quarry near Montreuil where they go to burn
 their candles... pray at midnight... incant... they unveil Darius... just a second!... his bust...
 his little mustache... Oh, this cult is secret and ferocious!... It's the Knights Templar of the
 Half Century!... damn! I'm giving it all away!... now I'll never go back... fuck that!...

Perhaps all the same a little stroll?...

¹ Kribi is a Cameroonian name. Bikobimbo (Bikimimbo in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*) was the trading company office that Louis Destouches managed in Cameroon in 1916-17.

² Hitler.

- But you'd be massacred on the spot!... you maybe helped out a bit setting up the Atlantic Wall?... built an airstrip or two?... you can invoke Laval... but if you've sold nothing... not even signed a little petition... didn't even go in for a little *zeitung*-ing¹ anywhere... nobody'll save your neck!

I know, I've heard the death-call, I went on hunts back when I used to serve as huntsman... nobody takes the deer's side... the more it's torn apart the more they come over it, the more a hundred dogs rip strips off it, the more its still-beating heart is exposed to the air, the more excited they get! Ah, how we look in awe at death throes!...

- Would you like some of the hoof, Duchess? Right now all of Europe for me is forest, hounds, the hunt... look, the proof: my walls here... The sobbing!... the hooters on them!... I laugh it off! I bark!... I send them galloping every which way... The sweet strains of the herdsmen's pipes! let the brass weep! I'd get them to butt the duchesses all right! burn! tear, oh yes! saucepans! pitch! make sure it's boiling! cauldrons! the whole lot!

- The son of a bitch is insulting us! cut him up! slice him! hang him till he turns green!

I hear what you're saying.

- We wanna see his carcass out of here, fast!

How little you understand of my character! I won't turn green as fast as all that!... you haven't seen how swift I am on the up-take!

¹ From the German word for newspaper. Although Céline refused to write for any collaborations publications during the war, he did address many letters to periodicals and fellow journalists which were published.

The other day in the infirmary, the interns wanted to have a laugh... you know what it's like... but... ah, youth!... They examine my asshole, the anus... I wanted an enema... I was bleeding... eyebrows are raised...

- Cancer, yeh, it's cancer!

They wanted to test my mettle!

So what I do, right away! my finger up my ass! I remove a sample! I smear their noses in it!

- You call that cancer? silly boys! dunces! what does that smell like? *sui generis*? it's pellagra! knuckleheads!

That's what you call teaching!

I help myself to some more and I smear it on them again... they scam!

You either know how to teach or you don't! "homicidal orderlies!" I shout after them... They thought they could put one over on me! Me, the sensitive one, the one who veritably vibrates to the medical arts! the disciple of Dr Follet! Who himself was the student of Brouardel, Charcot, Lapersonne¹...

Little yahoos!

They're double-locking my door... *crraa! craac! craac!*

They've seen someone in prison! I remain with my special cases, the hunger strikers! They piss, they shit in their mess tins... They don't want to go back to Russia... and they're Russian! They'd rather die! Now is that any way to behave? Do I go on that

¹ Dr Follet was Louis Destouches' professor at Rennes University where he did his medical degree, as well as his father-in-law. The others were all physicians and teachers of note.

way about France? Get outa here! this can't last! One, two, three! bring on the noodles! they've gotta down those suckers! it's the Law!... if not, I let them know what's in store for them!... they'll be ligated, straight-jacketed and we'll force it down their throats! Your Fatherland is there for a reason! Michel Strogoff at the Chatelet,¹ how did he put it? "For God! For the Czar! For the noodles!" It was clear-sighted, it was high-minded! These guys, my poor slobs lying there, I'm gonna give them back a taste for life! and some boiled noodles!... Jees, in Passage Choiseul, the threats out of my mother over those goddam noodles!²...

- What, you don't want any?... you'll never grow!... and right away, a wallop!... Would I wallop those guys? how could I, the wretches?... How could I beat them?...

Those apprentice sawbones just now, those I would have happily taught them a lesson... the cheek of them!... little whipper-snappers!... wasn't even their job!... sometimes someone goes too far and I just go berserk!... young pups!... teach me about pellagra? Me, the student, my God, of such teachers! of such an intellectual elite! They wound you in your most sensitive spot! It's simple! Assholes! Ah, with me, it's the masters!... My masters!... I will not forgive irreverence!... in the utter depths of misery it's more important than a hundred thousand diamonds!... the harp... tone... delicacy... the lights one has brought with one... the sense of this... of that... the nuances that someone

¹ One of the Chatelet Theater's greatest pre-war successes was the five-act play "Michel Strogoff" by A. Dennery and Jules Verne.

² On a number of occasions in his novels, especially *Mort à crédit*, Céline goes on about noodles. He had to eat them often because according to his mother they were one of the few foods whose odor did not seep into her laces.

now dead revealed to you... whom you never really thanked sufficiently... We're always sabotaging people while they're alive... an unerring sense of life doesn't come easily... as I myself feel remorse about certain persons with whom I was intimate!... Courtial... Follet... Elisabeth... Edith... Janine¹... it's worse than a hundred years of prison!... Bastard that I am... even Jules who is, God knows, a venal being, all chameleon, full of venom, I owe him a potion or two!... some acknowledgment!... I deserve to be treated terribly... what I've destroyed!... messed up!... Caron's gonna see me comin from afar: "Come on now" he's gonna call to me... and as soon as I get there... *whaaaack!* ... right in the kisser... his oar!... *whaaaack!* again!... that's for all your goddam nonsense!... By Styx, I'd better not be in a hurry!... I don't want to pass away while my soul is fouled!... The carcass is nothing, it's ingratitude that's everything!... I want to win back esteem!... my own esteem!...that of my peers is a plus!... a seat in the Academy!... At the worst!... doesn't matter which one!... consecration!... the chandelier... so my dead can be consoled a bit over my ways!... my inattention... my mother first of all!... I want my dead to see me in a different light!...

"Not as bad as all that" they'll say... the others were the real sonsabitches!... suffering had soured him... nitpicking... stupid... soured... the horrors had rubbed off...

The Pantheon? So be it! I accept!... the official re-honoring!... enough of the

¹ Courtial is the name given in *Mort à crédit* to Raoul Marquis, a publisher-inventor who greatly influenced the young Destouches. Elizabeth Craig was the American dancer with whom Céline lived while writing *Voyage*, and to whom it was dedicated. Edith Follet, was Céline's second wife, daughter of Dr. Follet, and Janine refers to his first wife, Suzanne, whom Destouches married in London in 1916. This was a very short-lived marriage, which in any case was never registered in France.

living disgrace! a street named after me! an avenue!... Oh, but mind you! not for me alone!... My word, I'm an altruist! I want another two million streets for two million heroes of 1914!... and dedications and gaiety!... Gaiety's my strong point!... They even notice it in prison: My strong point, gaiety!... in the cell, in the infirmary, when they need a specialist, they turn to me: Gaiety: in the depths of degradation... hilarity itself!... I irradiate! suicidibus, right on the brinkibus, they send 'em to me!... get 'em eating again! the half dead ones!... pabulum, margarine, pickled herring!... they chow down once again!... first rule of the psycho-persuasive method: crack'em up! I've raised lots of dogs, cats, everything! you don't make 'em laugh, they don't eat anymore... same with men... here where I'm writing you from it's all guys on death row... The Rule is categorical: they must get their nourishment!... The Governor is pulling his hair out over it... the guards never let them out of their sight... "We'll have no skeletons at the execution!"... what with the Press, the Judges, the Pastors... oh, la, la!... "They've got to eat!"... Public Opinion will make sure that only the plump go for the high jump!... I manage, I tell you... it's a question of patience and a good yarn... *The Three Musketeers!*... magical *The Three Musketeers!*... I must've told that story a hundred times!... first in German dialect... then in pantomime... There're words that are understood wherever you go... Cardinal!... Buckingham... d'Artagnan... Porthos... ah, Porthos!...

The most rebarbative, stubborn of this particular audience are the morphine, cocaine, ether addicts!... those guys are really obtuse, ugly, uncivilized... epileptics of crime!... they hate you for laughing... they aim, with murder on their minds... the puny bastards -- with the strength of Hercules -- their jug right at your puss! and *crack!*

smithereens! they miss you by a whisker!... and then later they have a go at themselves under the covers gashing away with the shards!... you wonder what the fuck they're fucking!... they're slashing their veins!... gluttons for funishment!... Their mattress a blood-soaked sponge!... but then it's my job... an MD's an MD after all!... no particular merit in that, the afflicted, the desperate, they're my vocation!... And besides, I'm gifted in another way, with a sort of personal blessing!... once the nervous system kicks in, like when I'm cold, when I shiver like anybody else, I laugh!... I can't help it... it's just the way it works with me... I'm not bragging... I'm not bluffing anyone, I'm alone... when you're "condemned to death" you're alone... all in individual cells... they let you out ten minutes in the air, in little cages... you go back inside, I told you all this, you're a snowman... takes you an hour, an hour and a half to defrost... You're gonna tell me: It doesn't snow every day!... about like it rains in Rouen, more or less!... defrosting is one thing... but when I tremble I gotta burst out laughing... the screw makes trouble for me... I'm shivering, so I must be taking advantage! thinking up some kind of revenge!... a bit of funny business... if I guffaw a bit too loud, he comes in, he doesn't like to see me laughing... he gestures that he's gonna shoot me... so I go "shit"... he locks the door again... he doesn't get "shit"... that's another blessing! Besides, I can always laugh all by myself... even without being too cold... it's the screamers that stop me... the banshees to the right of me, banshees to the left of me!... if they leave me in peace even just a tiny bit, right away an anecdote pops into my head... I play around with it and I have a good chuckle... If they just didn't howl so much all around me... I grab my writing stuff and get to work!... This *Fable* that you're gonna treat yourself to, because, you see, everything's ready!... printers, bookstores,

wholesalers, book stands!... and of course my royalties, in advance! oh, implacable I am!
wham, whatever!... dollars or rubles, whichever! I don't only want the victors' money!
 Ah, you'll see me again living the *high life*!¹ dressed to the nines! suit jackets of such
 distinction! turned out like a Shah! the nails done! The pirates grabbed everything I had, I
 was telling you, all my stuff, outfits, equipments, real estate! It was crazy at the time! So
Fable has to sell! I boom again! Excuse me, a new man! the hash made of everything?
 who cares? You'll be flabbergasted! on your ass! the battery of kitchen utensils! my
 drawing rooms! my pretty little chambermaids to open the door! and the bike that's so
 light it almost pushes itself forward without me, at the mere suspicion that I might want to
 straddle it!... the brand: the "Imponder"... faster than Arlette in a sprint! Wait'll you see
 me!... Arlette who's a sylph on the pedals!... From Trinité to Montmartre: seven strides! a
 breeze... that's her! a puff of air and she's gone! and that's uphill!

So you say, "You'll have a car"! Not so! The car is a fatso, a half-hearse for has-
 beens! I won't hearse around! It's the "Imponder" for me! no other! A patient phones?
 I fly! all reflex! calves! lungs like a blacksmith's forge! I look after myself while looking
 after others! One visit, two healthy specimens! the panacea cycle! you wouldn't believe
 the rheumatism I suffer from! they have no name for such pain! I won't even tell you
 about it! the elbows, the ankles like they were in clamps! as if they wanted to get a
 confession out of me... a super-fanatic executioner who breaks his pincers on my knees!...
 Oh, but just do a little sports! a cinch! In the open air I'm thirty years old again! and with
 enthusiastic altruism!

¹ In English in the original.

On the bike I'm a more presentable kind of nutcase! you get a look at me, the patrician! rejuvenation through zeal! brimming with health! taking care of business! ardor! reflection! heart! a new man!

When you think about it, where they take the waters, at Ax, at Bagnoles, those old guys they wheel around, muffled up piss-dribbling bags 'o bones, arthritics on crutches, all shriveled up, knarled with the gout, sufferers all sorts, wheezing acrobats from hell, with their gargoyle faces hideous from torture, eyes popping... St Vincent de Paul¹ happens along and sees them... "Go on, you disgusting bunch of rejects"... he shakes them up a bit... "the likes of you belong to Charity! God's sake! get goin'! and burn rubber about it!"

That's what miracles are all about! you've guessed it, deep down, you think, the core of me is mystic! ardor! that I need no kick in the ass! You'll see my toady carcass if I send it leaping away! Get rid of these bars for God's sake!

- Off at a sprint, a rusting cranking sonofabitch on wheels!

That's how I go about my business.

Enthusiasm! the God in us!² What I am is but a bit of enthusiasm!

- Listen to him showboating!

That's what you're thinking.

- In looking after others I look after myself!

¹ Céline often refers to St Vincent at this time for many reasons: he had been a prisoner, he lived in Clichy, he'd been a chaplain on galley ships, and was founder of a lay order of sisters who looked after the poor.

² Céline was fond of the word "enthusiasm" and liked to remind people that it came from the Greek, meaning "God in us". He felt that enthusiasm was akin to madness.

- He's only pretending to be nuts! He'd have been sent to La Noé!¹

- What a joke! go ahead! show your hand! spare no feelings! just so I don't forget who I am!...

- Now St Vincent! of Clichy! no comparison with your ugly mugs! the guy rowed galley ships! the Deep Blue! a friend! insisted you take his pittance! that was a pal, a real pal! you and your ugly kisser! that's what they mean by delicacy! you can talk! With St Vincent, people felt for each other! you though, you make a mess of everything! sensitivity, what are you talkin' about?... all you're good for is low-down dirty piggery! and slaughter!

The archangels see you... they shake their heads... their wings drop... In the prayer "trespasses"² everything is forgiven... I'm supposed to forgive you again?... Neh, I've already wiped the slate! First pay your widow's mite, and then some! And then we'll see!... Here I'm imagining, I'm looking ahead... let's say that I don't croak in prison... which would be incredible good luck, rotting away as I am... I get out of the slammer... I scoot over to your place!... first visit!... your smile!... how do I find you? at the foot of your couch, in convulsions of laughter, doubled over, over *Fable*!... tearing out pages... rollicking wildly, rolling, choking...

- Help! Help!

¹ Noé is a village in the Haute-Garonne where a camp was set up in 1939 which quickly became a gathering point of foreign Jews being deported to Germany. It was a place where particularly the old and the infirm were received. After the liberation, it became an internment camp for collaborators.

² A reference to "the Lord's Prayer" or the "Our Father" in which God is asked to "forgive us as trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us".

I leave you in your fit... ranting... wriggling! Too bad!... I scoot over to see someone else... Another charming individual, the “Old Maid” brat, for instance, my machine-gun packing stairwell assassin...

Just one question.

- Did you get as far as Junot Square, young fella? like hell you did!

And I give him smack in the face!

End of story.

I make plans, that’s how I keep up morale, but if I go completely blind, well then a thousand pardons! I hang myself! Okay! I open my eyes again in the next world, and sonofabitch if I don’t find you, right in the middle of fulfilling your wildest dreams, selling off lutes, haloes, the innocence of the Seraphins! Theresa the Little Flower and that cute little Odile!¹... turning everything into profit!... nothing is sacred to you!... everything, the highest bidder! the Milky Way! The Bridge of the Stars?... Cecile’s convent!²... Little White Clouds Ball!³ bingo for those sweet little choir boys... gigantic sell-off of the Supersteinian Universe curves!... Lots of things will have happened and some funny water under the bridge before I’m caught lending you a book!... fish will have had time to grow

¹ This is possibly a reference to Anne Frank, whose diary appeared in French in 1950 to much acclaim. A similar reference is found in “North” to “little Esther”.

² Cécile Sorel (1873-1966) superstar of Parisian theaters, from the Comédie-Française to the Casino de Paris. Having left the stage in 1933, she converted to Catholicism and joined the Third Order of St Francis, becoming Sister St-Cécile. A volume of her memoirs appeared in 1949.

³ A reference to the charity ball “of the Little White Beds” founded in 1921 by the owner of the *L’Intransigeant*.

some outrageous hairdos -- long ones, I'm telling you... from Moulineaux to la Rapée!¹... you'll put your cash down or there'll be no belly laughs for you!... I was telling you about my eyes... gloom... two moldy holes... being cooped up... the starvation diet... what the fuck's the Red Cross doing?... an old man like me?... Heh?... ask?... they're giving teas, the Red Cross!... Long Island garden parties!²... Iniquitous!... They don't give a whack about the real martyrs!... what I have to put up with by way of mistreatment!... can you imagine - the eye infection! and I work!... retinitis!... the pellagra is attacking the eyes... not just the elbows and the behind!... it's a prison disease, I admit, but I still have ones leftover from Africa!... Don't think I didn't suffer there too!... conjunctivitis three times in Cameroon!... Bikobimbi, Rio Cribi, go find out! nice places! here I'm going blind 'cause there's not enough light, there it was too much sun.

- Jees, this guy never stops bitching! let's finish him off! make sure he never comes back! Pin him to the slab so we can dissect him a bit!

- I see what you're driving at! So be it! Prepare for dissection! The age! The badness! The person! You'll find it all! The autopsy? Bravo! and my lump! Long live Dupuytren!³ And, oh yes, wars! And your nastiness!

To show you: my job is open!... All you have to do is go to the Courthouse and ask for the "little letters"... "Notorious outlaw presumed dead"... the court files...

¹ Céline sometimes situates an area for recovering drowned bodies at Moulineaux, and there was a morgue located at the quai de la Rapée.

² "*Garden-Partys* Long Island" in the original.

³ Guillaume Dupuytren (1777-1835), surgeon, specialist in pathological anatomy. A museum of anatomical curiosities was named after him.

“Condemned to everything!” more than everything! Blind Justice does not mince Iniquity!

- Cut him up! Bell jars! formyl!

I get on your nerves? I don't give a fuck! I'll howl! I'll bark!

- And what about amoebic dysentery? I have that too! Tssk! tssk! so you see I've been around! I've followed the flag of France! to the other end of the earth! Yes, the tricolor, cutie pie! Mine! All mine! Epic? Reversal? What do I care? Red! White! Blue! that's all! everywhere I went I carried them high! and gloriously! and less gloriously! In defeat I wrapped myself in it! There are wrinkles in the tricolor, in my conscience there's not a single wrinkle! Step forward if you doubt it... where the hell haven't I been sent? my carcass?... my diplomas?... Sincerity, kindness! Lift up your hearts!... Cathouse!... Nowadays a good laugh *extremis*!... me, wounded, decorated long before Pétain, I say go fuck yourselves!

- Heh, thrust him through, lickety split! Tear him from limb to limb!

- What about my pension? I'll send you that attorney Catlacomb, Hell's Key-Keeper!... you'll see what you'll have to deal with!... When you've got business with him, you'll screech like ten dungeons!... I swear by Elzebub!... you'll drown out the screams coming from 30!... from 48!... from 73!... the ones driving me nuts!... you'd be knocking your head against the wall too!.. and reknocking it!... and *vroooomb*! the building is split in half!... all the cat-walks teeter!... and not only for a day or two!... for centuries!... from all the wrong you've done me!... maybe if you buy *Fable* just like that, I'll put a wee word in for you in the Devil's ear... so you'll be spared twenty, fifty years of breaking and rebreaking your skull!... Think about it!

- Oh, little creep is making fun of us! show-off! cuckold! jerk! it's his own fault for going in the first place! what could he have been thinking about in 1914? Uckle-kned eh-head!¹ nobody forced him to become a hero!... he just had to look in front of him!... once he saw the enemy, oop! He saw to it all, he cooked their goose, those Krauts! the whole outfit, plume, breast-plate! Then he didn't imagine any of it?... had he deserted everything would have been perfect!... one good deed entails another... back in normal life he'd've got a couple of broads to put some steak on his plate for him... he had what it takes for that, the eyes, no limp fist, the little ditties... plenty of dough!... He'd be a king today!... a manor house full of gables in Sologne! What minks on his Lady Stalkers!... two private helicopters!...

Thus speaks the voice of conscience... the slammer makes you think all right!... if the guy weren't bellowing next door!... the torture victim from I forget where... "Yiaaow! Yiaow!"... they don't even finish him off!... He's worse at night!... they're all worse after the night shift starts... 6:00 pm... the buzzers, the barking of the dogs on wall patrol, the cemetery that's closing, the screws,² the five floors of steel levels handing over their key chains, the clanging! two times two times three thousand doors, three turns! right up to the top! *crac crrac!* the sixteen cat-walks! I'm not doing this on purpose for effect! the cemetery locked, us too! hermetically locked, the ship goes into the night... A prison

¹ French is very rich in slang; one form is the "Javanais" in which the syllable "av" or "va" are inserted after every consonant. In the original the word "navadavouille" is an elaboration on "Javanais" in which two words describing a doltish person are combined, "navet" and "andouille".

² British slang for prison guard.

is a kind of ship, it travels... the night is not some two-bit broad... she's got class, she speaks to you only in the third person...

- He'd be a pimp today...

You hear that and you say: she's right, that's me! especially around midnight...

You know, almost every midnight my sister-in-law comes back to mind... what happened... what's hard is benefitting from what life throws your way, untangling things... I hadn't seen my sister-in-law for years... and a few days before we left, that makes it the beginning of June, the Allies already in Rouen... '44... you picture the atmosphere!... the killers were everywhere!... I mean mine, my killers!... in all the neighboring streets... set up as kind of sentinels... they relayed one another... a couple here, a couple there!... should've seen'em go!... At the corner of Hermette street I see four Arabs in frock-coats... Imagine... with burnous over their frock-coats! and spurs! and high turbans!... When I'd pass by they'd be all touching themselves -- those Arab dresses are full of folds!... I didn't have to go see for myself... but I went anyway on a whim... I went down as far as Abbesses... my beat... made as if I was inspecting my outposts... only it was me the one being tailed... the enemy... it makes you sad, I admit... Another one, a weird guy, Place Vintimille, was waiting for me for hours... hours on end... my route... Place Vintimille... all around it on a motorcycle... the AJ bus route¹... he was on the look-out for me from inside the pissoir... I slowed down... he scrambled! I caught up with him one afternoon... he was wearing a yellow satin half-mask... he got swallowed up by a door and I lost him!... it's strange to realize you're the enemy... in your own home!... it's awful... you can't believe

¹ Until the Second World War Paris bus routes were indicated by letters.

it... I'd pass by to make sure it was true... that they were watching me from all angles... they saw me and they'd be all touching themselves... from one group to the other... foreigners most of them, looked like they just came out of the Danube, or the gutter of some goddam Arabian bazaar... women too, and madmen... the eyes of madmen... that's the Triad of the Times, the one who's judging you, the one who's shooting you, the one who's mutilating you: a woman, a madman, a foreigner... what the hell, everything's ass-ways, the Devil, dream on that one!

Jees, I was forgetting my story!... I'm dreaming! I was telling you about my sister-in-law!... I was going back up Rue Ravignan, and I was not in a good mood let me tell you... sullen we'll say... so I'm going back up Rue Ravignan and I hear someone calling me, hailing me!... I don't like when this happens!... I turn around.

- Marie-Louise!

"Jees" I go, "is that you?" we hug each other... I hug her... I'd like you to have heard her! it was coming from the heart!... right to the point! like she was in a hurry to tell me what she wanted to say... she knew a bit of what was going on... well, the basics anyway.

- If only you'd stayed with us!...

She was talking about London at the end of 1917.

- If only you'd stayed, Louis!...

Chiding... and tears... the name only my intimates use, Louis.

- Oh, no, Janine isn't dead, is she?

Her sister, Janine... It was long ago when we'd bid each other adieu... I'd left them

in Leicester Square, abandoned them, her and her sister... I can still see the tree, the bench, the flowers... the sparrows... the forget-me-nots, the geraniums... it's in the middle of London, do you know it?... in distress they were, orphaned by a man... I'm not an artist but I can recall flowers... Janine... Marie-Louise... and women too in fact... I can see it all... the grass... and the surroundings also, the traffic, those huge scarlet buses the "recruiters" they were red too! the sergeants!... everything is turning around! and around!... and the music... life is a filigree, what is spelled out doesn't amount to much... transparency is what counts... Time's Lacework, as they say... the "blond",¹ in sum, the lace they call blond, you know it? lace so fine, so fine! on the spindle so delicate, you touch it, you tear everything apart!... there's no repairing it... like youth!... forget-me-nots, geraniums, a bench, it's all over... fly away, sparrows!... lace so fine...

I tore myself away, it seemed the rational thing, a sort of act of conscience so to speak, a fit of honesty and moral fiber, I saw my future elsewhere!... a real future!...

Heh, fathead! muck-crawling numbskull, to hell with rationality! We always had a good time together, that was enough! Janine, Marie-Louise and myself! That's all you need - have a laugh together! It's worth more than the Earth and the Angels and the billions of shooting, twinkling stars, nothing you can do about it!... poor is our heart... you don't need to figure out the Universe in order to get along with one another... but Marie-Louise, Janine... I've commit only one crime in my life, only one real one... seeing as I left my little sisters-in-law, poor little girls, in November '17... and they weren't dandy-chasers either, no little chippies these girls!... not at all! doll-like, they were, like

¹ "Blond" lace is made on a spindle with untreated, natural colored silk.

flowers! the most delicate faces!... sparkling! fresh! saucy!... the one a brunette, and such lips!... Marie-Louise! supple and alert, the shoulder, everything! a gypsy almost... knock-out hips I dare to say... Janine, a redhead... when they danced at Ciro's, they used to waltz together, no joke, the whole room would rotate, tables, everything... the guys in the club got so worked up! all the glasses glittered!... and the bottles! later they started calling it *sex appeal*,¹ this thrill... what the fuck do they know? they never saw any of it!... women don't raise anything nowadays! Tables no longer turn, heads either... worries have taken over everything, gathered up everything!... smiles, frotti-frotta, tatak!

Oh such remorse! Such memories!

- Heh, you're half dead anyway! finish yourself off! they left you your belt! Take it off! Hang yourself! the bar up there!

Perhaps you're right, I'd have enough time...

The guards no longer fiddle with my peep hole... they spied on me for weeks... weeks on end... I killed them... nothing they could catch me at... I don't smoke, I don't move... I just stay there, rigid, the ass all gone to shit... winter, summer... I'd be "the model prisoner" except that I sing a little, I curse, I insult the fanatic in the wall... he'll never smash his goddam block in... only for the enemas I bark at them!... so of course, the pack loses no time echoing back to me! "Woouff! Woouff!" and the whole bloody bunch! and the machine guns! and the stretcher! I win!... but if I don't bark I might as well go and hang myself!... nobody comes looking... eternities, I tell ya! So I think... I have to admit... I've seen my share of hangings... I've touched upon the subject with you

¹ In English in the original.

already... you have no idea of the time it takes people, the way they go about it, to go and unhang a hanged man!... such fiddling around... Part of my functions, since I'm telling you about it... I worked for the coroner's office, and boy did I verify a hanging or two! and they could perfectly well have been saved, if the people around weren't so fucking stupid, if they could bother their ass... the neighbors upstairs... downstairs... it's notorious! I already told you... I'm not going to reread my own books!... Public-service doctor in Houilles, La Garenne, Carrières... Argenteuil district, part of Versailles... *I, Doctor X, do hereby attest that I verified this day the death by strangulation of Mr So and So... usually hanging there since the day before! two days before even! You know the song?*

A young man had just hung himself!

... young man tender of heart!...

Load o' crap! No "had just" about it!...

In the forest of Saint-Germain!

Hours ago! days ago he hung himself!

People never arrive on the scene right away. It's one hell of a belch, the hanged man's last gasp... you're in the vicinity, you're all taken aback... disquieted... you say "must be a sink, some gutter chugging stuff back up... A huge greasy sound, grotesque... you gotta hear it!... I've heard it... I won't say where... So people explain it away... the neighbors think, "Somebody's flushing something"... they don't admit what they're feeling... think about it later!... they're chicken... it takes them hours to make up their mind... at first they knock... then they hammer... then they knock it down... they come in, it's all over!... You come on the scene, all greenhorn, verify the guy hanging there... you

find his head double, triple black. purple!... and in his mouth like somebody stuffed an arm in it... red... green! his tongue hanging out!... the thickness of it!... It's been curtains for hours!... So when you think about it, me, in my hole, with the bellowings from 16, and 74 and 24!... I'd have plenty of time!... even with just the head-basher there, my neighbor, he'd cover any gasps I'd make!... and his head doesn't even split in two! kick the bucket, my ass! but stentorian voice! banshees! donkeys! rams! excuse me! And the "discipline cell"! number 12! when they have a killer... a rapist... then, I swear, there's some shindig! You could have four or five guys hanging themselves, it'd be drowned, snuffed out but good! nothing! blood-curdling howls! me, myself, I could be squealing like a pig with his throat cut and the screws wouldn't come trooping back for so little... the time it takes to wake up the guards! the ambulance!... you bet I'd have enough time! and even to come back! (I'm joking!)

- But Arlette?... Bébert?... Janine?... my soul's charges?

- He's trying to weasel out of this one! Two-faced son of a bitch! Stooge!

- I'm immune to your invectives!... with what I've been through!... I don't even hear them any more! you won't demoralize me! I love you!... I want to see you again!... I want to bear my heart to you... you'll listen... it's rather delicate... it's a secret... in your ear... a few words... oh, it's imperative!... I'll die otherwise... oh, poor people! you won't be able to figure it out for centuries... was it all just a hoax? not a hoax? was he being funny? beguiling? what? escapades? all just a farce? whereas now if I were to meet you I'd murmur a little funny one... Yeh, I'd like to see you when it's just the two of us!... I want to laugh too, a tad... it's my turn now!... like on the merry-go-round!... not always

yours!

But here come Aunt Estreme and her little Leo

Here come Clementine and the valiant Toto!

Honest! I'll come after you! my point of honor! even if nothing more than a rotten reject! blue bowelry! laughable hunk of rancid meat! I'll find you! when the tanks have laminated you, chopped you up, napalm glop, I'll find you! none so true to his feelings!... even disintegrated somewhere, your building collapsed, you under it, I'll go sift through your cinders for you, like Eynard and his ex-bistro!... Dead determined, no idea how I am! I'll have just the right stick for the occasion: a garbage-poker... the hook at the end... I'll muck about and I'll find you... I'll put your cinders through a sifter if need be!... I'll stop at nothing! let's say you even survive, all laughing, legless drunk... had one too many ions... I go right to it, I identify you!... I take a whiff: yeh, it's you!... your pelt! the smell of singed hair!... and that's your grin all right!... scoffing!... no other like it!... for ten years it's got on my nerves that grin! I'll fix it to your face for you!... Forget about anyone else, it's you I'll kiss!... your grin!... and put you back together!... the reunion brings such joy! you get the picture!... and a lot of water'll have gone under the bridge! Ah, Triboulet!¹... I'm not kidding myself!... to find such infinity in each other again!... miracle! this mutual intensity of feeling!...

Must we tell our friends

Every party ends?

I'm joking!... You think I'm impish!... Oh, but seriousness never abandons me!... I

¹ A reference to Victor Hugo's "*Le roi s'amuse*". But it is not clear why.

dwell in seriousness!... so now and again I confide a bit of the future to you... my two chambermaids... my bikes...

The critics'll tear my work apart? No importance whatsoever!... They'll snub it? Even less!... They've spewed so much of the worst hatred they could for so many months now, days, every minute, that it's as if they'd dried up their poison glands... And just what I'd like them to excrete, and how! a hundred times over!... torrents!... I float on hatred! whether or not the floods of hatred stir things up, my ship sails on! the main thing is that all the juice should squirt out! all squirt out!... it's nastiness that gets me going! I'm the most stubborn, persistent bitch of a customer in the world... you can't sicken me!... I'm the darling of the crazed whores of hatred... of those stiletto-toting she-assassins! grenades! curare! and prick-teasers and tittle-tattlers and good-time gals!... department stores! silly saphists!...

You gotta read this guy in a strait-jacket! Public scourge! let's commit the guy! commit him! shock treatment! cardiazol! padded cell! Let's adore him! let's kill him! let's glug-glug-glug'im! let's suck on him! let's buy him!...

So you see what I need: guys and gals crazy enough! but the movies? Like a hole in the head! Ah! Just hold on! you gotta watch it! Minotaur of the Murky Depths! who is it that is gobbling up our readers? who's got it all wrapped up on us? sucking us dry? wolfing us down? The Mighty Film! Already the weeklies, those monsters of the newsstands, were half-devouring a helluva lot of the dreamy gawkers, now The Mighty Film is finishing them off! Their brains, their wallets!...

The hypnotist of the depths!... it's warm, moist, plush, the organ sounds, the

gilding... you can have a wee wank for yourself...

That's the competition we're facing!

You with your punishing tome, you show up! aren't you the picture! You watch as the steamed-up movie-goers emerge staggering over-ripe from the Depths. they can't even tell north from south any more! from west! getting everything all mixed up!... streetlamps... metros!...trousers... slips!... groping around!... neighborhoods!... sexes... floors!... their ass for their elbow!... at this point all they wanna do is turn around and sit back down... Ah! ripen some more! get even blotchier! fester more and more!... shit themselves... ripen! melt... it's already flowing all over the carpets...

And here I come along! my avenging stanzas! You get them! You judge for yourself! My bitter lyre!

Fortunately the flush of bad guys, of hate-ridden hair-splitters will never abandon me! Ah, I'll have to spoil them! have to pile it on! Risetete! Risetete!¹ If they lock them up I'm fucked! I'll have to grab 'em before the Asylum gets them! just in time for them to buy *Fable* for me!

Then let them be shocked! counter-shocked! I've got bread on my table! You will admit that I have it hard!... Aside from the pellagra and the anxiety! and the Banshee who's bashing down my wall! I'm spoiled! Aside from the taxman and the revenue boys and the confiscation of "more than everything"! and national disgrace! And the pillaging and the plagiarism! and Arlette and my soul's charges...

¹ A popular nineteenth century play already referred to in which a poor family's home is rained upon but whose inhabitants are happy all the same.

If my hands weren't tied, go see if I'd give a fuck! I've weathered other storms!
 But here, in my condition, half blind, immobilized, the whole goddam world barking at me,
 waiting outside to cut me up...

Oh, but I'll bark ten times worse!

Not just the guards, not just the walls I have it in for! the Classics, the Thinkers
 first of all! magnificent fartbags! they had it! Petrarch, Dantus! Homer! Prou-Prou! pooh-
 pooh!¹ iniquity from the depths of the ages! They just imagined Hell, we are living in it!
 and not just a little bit packed with demons! hordes, crowds, myriads! avidly suckling the
 sulphur! rats drop dead!... pour little beasts!... that's what happens in the gutter... we're
 in the gutter, me, Robignol² and a thousand others, and another thousand more wretched,
 we don't even talk about any more, that nobody dares, who're dying in jails, who've paid
 a thousand times over in suffering for the crimes they never commit! I don't feel like
 thinking about it anymore. What's the use of bombs? Fuck! How far will you let it get
 out of hand, air-for-brains? The rabble has the high ground and nothing happens! The
 demons just laugh! Heaven no longer launches its thunderbolts!

And I'm leaving some out! There's also the falsifying, deliberately destructive
 asshole translators! They also have their cursed hordes! Readership thieves! Yankee

¹ Already in *Bagatelles pour un massacre* Céline had begun to ridicule Marcel Proust by deforming his name to Prout-Proust. ("Prou" is also the onomatopoetic expression of the sound of farting.)

² Reference to Lucien Rebatet (1903-1972), journalist for *Je suis partout*, a collaborationist publication, and author of the pamphlet *Les Décombres*. He was condemned to death on November 23, 1946 but had his sentence commuted in April 1947. He was freed in July 1952, just when Céline was finishing "Fable". "Robignol" is also a French slang word for testicles.

novels at so much a page! Plagues in the pay of Chaos! the felonious breed! you trust those guys? they pass off rejected scraps of Zola as re-oink-oink-annointed Yankee! ghastly garglings! served up in *Readers Digest*!¹ That poisonous phony!... all our rotten spineless literati tomato waffle!² Europe-a-Gogo! licking their lips, wolfing down everything! Go back to your Maupassant, you insipid jerks! Gum-cracking gangster clergyman! Saint Genevieve, motorized vamp and her sheep at home with Attila, cocktails and the Huns! We'll have seen everything!... and her corset too!... Rape! Manon and Joan of Arc shacking up together, neurotic, psychoanalyzed, being grilled every so gently by Cauchon.

Your mouth'll be all agape over it tomorrow!... what about your stomach? the great monstrosities? It's all in Saint John!³ the Kirghizes librarians are cooking up some tricks for you! They'll pull some pride out of a hat for you! You'll be hung for your baccalaureate! that'll teach you to be cultivated and a renegade and a fraternizing deserter... and the asshole readers of Russian, Finlandish, Anglish, Americish, plagiarish, anti-you novels! you'll puke up your dirty dealings!

Served up as Dandins!⁴

French is a kingly language! around it just fucking pox-ridden, plotting, sailors'

¹ *Reader's Digest* began publishing a French edition in 1947.

² "Waffle" in English in the original. Perhaps this is Céline's idea of "ghastly garglings".

³ That is, in the Apocolypse.

⁴ From Molière's *George Dandin*.

gobbledegook!... You want it? you like it? shit, then, you'll croak from it! I won't insist! Every crime has its time! Tomorrow! Every dumb mistake its hour! First of all my villa! what I need the most! the name's already chosen, don't you know? "Ye Olde Cathouse"! Hell slam it up them!... God doesn't make you laugh!... So not a single minute! I'm dragging my feet there, I'm quibbling... Age is catching up with me... I'm oozing again!... One small problem, no more villa, just a coffin! It's not only men at the kill! Time has quite a crack at it!... Ah, the months at the breast!¹... sometimes, I admit, sorrow really grabs me... my poor little Arlette outside shivering in the cold and no one wants to take her in!... a city of more than a million souls!... I've said it before!... she's jinxed, I'm jinxed!... All she found was a piddling attic... a framer's storage space... glacial... I could bash my head against the wall!... *Baaaaiing!*... the Banshee's nothing in comparison!... I wouldn't miss!... He doesn't really throw himself into it, the Banshee! he makes the wall shake, he takes some skin off, he bleeds, but he doesn't wholeheartedly throw himself into it!... if he threw his heart into it he'd bust apart!... me, a doctor, you can imagine, I'm no dupe!... if I bashed the old kisser the bricks wouldn't have a chance to be all shook up twice! One blow! and *pluuunk!* I know what busting your cranium open means! So long, old buddy! There are real heros! there are fake ones!

*The likes of him are met but once!*²

I belt it out!... the Baltavian, he doesn't give a fuck! Not to understand each

¹ "Without counting the months at the breast" (infancy) is a French expression used in derision to describe people who want to appear younger than they are.

² Paraphrased from Corneille's *Le Cid*, act II, scene II: "Mes pareils à deux fois ne se font point connaître."

other's language is worse than a wall!... If I catch up with him in the infirmary ... I'll tell him a thing or two!... He's yapping? It's worse for me than it is for him!... article 75 up the ass!... That's what you call a struggle!... The Article on traitors!... They read it out to me when I entered the prison, and the list of my treasonous acts, underlined in red... Jees, the number of towns I handed over! fleets! generals! battalions!... the Toulon harbor!... the Pas-de-Calais! a little bit of the Puy-de-Dome!... they brought me back in handcuffs, I crossed the capital, Baltavia! nothing but great big squares! wide avenues! and what a crowd! in a wagon with bars, padlocked, at least five, six times! to hear the accusations... It's truly amazing all that I committed... I sold journals to the enemy!... a hundred fifty!... a hundred twenty!... I can't even remember!... and the Denoël publishing company!... and the assassination at the Invalides of old Robert with Madame Thérèse Amirale, manageress of a house of ill repute, cunning pixie!¹... Jees, by the third or fourth shuttle I couldn't tell black from white, bouquets of machine guns everywhere! of every color! *tutti frutti!*... fuzziness holds you in its grasp... "What did he say?... What did I say?"... you're nothing but a swelling hunk of remorse! swelling! remorse about who?... about what?... you don't even know any more!... "What did he say?... What did I say?"... here on my stool down in the hole or in the padlocked paddy wagon, haunted by remorse over nothing... "What did he say?... What did I say?"... you can't help it, you turn into a Slovak, a Slovak trial! Take me for example, there I am, muddle-headed, confused, my ass all sticky, I'd kill myself out of remorse over nothing!... and the other sonofabitch at

¹ Robert Denoël was Céline's first publisher, assassinated on the Blvd des Invalides in December 1945. A Madame Voilier ("Amirale") was then put in charge of the publishing company.

the cell window, Hortensia! the one insulting me in the name of Louis XIV!... you can't live like this!... When they kill in "11-12" I'm almost relieved... in the "enforcer cells" I told you about... now those are real cries of final death!... but the sirens and the owls and the buzzings in my ears... and my buttocks being torn off in strips, two big beefsteaks, green skin... I mean what does it look like?... and the lump in my right arm... and my bleeding eyes... is this how it will end?... They chucked Arlette¹ into jail... "Go on, into the slammer, you traitor's whore!"

The audacity of them!... unbelievable! An angel!... I tell you, an angel!... and all their police! she was supposed to confess!

What? Confess what?

- Don't you know?... the Maginot Line?... Puy-de-Dome? Toulon harbor!...

They take shifts, her in handcuffs.

- Your husband has admitted as much! has written it down!... your husband's not an abortionist?... pederast?... pimp?...

She has to confess!

- What? You don't know?... He handed over blueprints!

- What kind of blueprints?

Another guy, a bit swifter:

- He handed over Frenchmen! Sign here! He had the dam blown up!

- What dam?

- The Casino! Dinard! Malo! You weren't in Dinard? Do you deny it? Don't

¹ Céline's wife Lucette was detained 11 days before being freed.

tell me you weren't in Dinard!

Exhausted, she no longer knows where she was or wasn't.

- Yes! Yes! Yes!

Oh, no doubt whatsoever!

- And those syringes? what about those syringes? you deny that? Heh?

He spreads everything on the floor... my medicine bag!

The swift change in tactic.

- This morphine? this cocaine?

He's crowing.

Of course I had morphine! and belladonna and all! and probes! and scalpels! With what would I have practiced at Blaringhem? goddam idiot!

Fortunately, Arlette is reason itself! Always focussed, never hysterical, ever!... The most harmonious nature, a dancer in every atom of her being, the soul of nobility! She'd rather die twenty times over than to her own self be false... Her nature is classical... There is a kind of heroism in her dance, and elegance, and kindness... Supreme bearing... She'll never be found awkward or hesitant when she's answering the sound of her heart...

The dumb fucks got nothing out of her.

When they'd reassured themselves after twenty interrogations, ten months hidden away in the cells, that I hadn't sold the Alps, the Eiffel Tower, Mount Valérian, Infanticides and sneeze-gas: "Get the fuck out of here, girl", they told her, "go hang yourself".

You can imagine my anguish!... The situation! her situation!... no one talking to

her, no one inviting her anywhere... all alone against the world, that's right... the entire world!... me in the hole!... Hexed is what she is!... hexed like me! lawfully wedded husband!... 16th Arrondissement, witnesses and everything!... I who used to dream of operettas! You have to admit! Things are not going well!... And all she found was an attic... Bébert is coughing, she's coughing... she waits for Tuesdays, the visit... she comes with Bébert to see me... seven minutes... Bébert in a bag... Oh, but he can't move around!... utter immobility... the guard is watching... and we're not allowed to speak French together, Arlette and me!... English only!... French is forbidden!... Us, English?... I mean she's French to the core, born Rue Saint-Louis-en Ile!... me, Bridge Ramp number 11, Courbevoie!... Bébert at La Samaritaine!¹... forcing *us* to speak English!... I who have a horror of foreign languages!... feeble, screwed up gobbledigookery!... It's the final humiliation! We, who are native to the Seine like no other!... Montmartre is one thing!... but English!... first of all Arlette doesn't speak English!... well, not three words that she can string together... me, that mewling spewing thinethouery makes me want to puke!... in my state!... and they spit when they talk! Only traitors speak English and German, Chinese, Volskapuke, and "filmspeak", of course!... Hollywowspeak!... why not Baltavian?... So we don't talk to each other... we make signs... Arlette now, she's got signs down, luckily!... dancers, real ones, born-dancers, they're made of waves so to speak!... not just rosy flesh and pirouettes!... their arms, their fingers... you get the picture!... Comes in handy in those times of utter agony... beyond words! no more words! Just the hands! the fingers... a gesture, grace... that's all... The flower of being... Your

¹ A famous old department store in the center of Paris.

heart beats, you live again!... Deaf? Mute? In chains? Then... A dancer saves you! The proof!... A thousand proofs!... and messages! but perhaps you're a bit thick? impervious to waves!... you'd rather howl like the lunatic in 14... and *whoaaaaam!* in my wall? Nothing but howlers around me!... and howleresses!... No doubt you too!... Myself, I don't howl!... I bark!... told you already! and only for you-know-what! I'd never get an enema without "whoaaaah"! I take after those huge mutts out there! I was telling you about the total mayhem, the whole pack, the guards!... Up the entire length of the turret! the five catwalks!... hurricanes of whistles!... topsy-turvy floor by floor they come tumbling, crashing down... they hit bottom, a pile of them at the foot of the stairs! guards and guard dogs! What the hell's going on? "Woof! Woof!" The alarm! and the sirens blasting from every direction, the ramparts! and as far as the railroad!... the firemen on duty... the infirmary... the cemetery bells...

Ah, sure you're having a bit of fun with me... but time is of the essence! Ill fortune ages a man... kills him... I don't want to die without my villa!... my mind, certainly, has been profoundly shaken, but not my patriotic sense! nor the Duty to Reconstruct... "Ye Olde Cathouse"... Saint-Malo-where-currents-flow!... so, don't you know! To hell with piddling trifles! down to business! I must subjugate you! You'll be my best publicity ever!

Oh, the firemen! Good old firemen! I was talking about the firemen and here they come! here they come again! my head! telling you! getting myself all worked up! "Woof! Woof!" for Christsake! general alert! I barked! without even realizing it! all mayhem breaks loose...and there you go! no doubt about it, you gotta bark! not too much! easy

does it! but just shouting doesn't do the trick either! nobody listens to you! Here everybody shouts! every floor, every cell! Talk about crazy! Barking, now that's one for the books... The guards are wondering: what, he's got some kind of dog in there?... they troop in to see... Oh, but you can't go overboard! Once a week! no more! This time it was pure inadvertence! worked myself up to fever pitch telling you all about it!... I'll send them away: *Nix! Nix!*... if I screw up I'm lost! they'll never ever give me another enema... once a week... the stretcher, the infirmary, I win again!... I leave them in peace the rest of the time... I give myself over to work!... if you could see me hunched over my little writing table, going blind, with my pencil¹... I don't waste a moment of daylight... well, what you'd call quarter-light, a glimmer of dirty water... even in summer... there is no summer... in this place like a ditch, all sewer, it's never summer!... the walls ooze a little more, a little less, that's all! Outside in the cage I don't see the sky, I just see the grill, the rain, the snow... once in a while a ray of sunshine... it's happened... a gull very, very high up... and one or two little sparrows, you have to be fair, who come in to peck about a bit... it's not allowed... little bits of bread!... but we still give it to them... the guy on surveillance in the "Mirador" puts on the indignant act... it's an automatic reaction with those guys, they gotta put you in your place!... infractions of discipline!... I think about him, he haunts me, the son of a bitch in the Mirador!... Here in my hole I think about him and then I don't think about him any more... I give myself over to work... I give myself over to work! Ciborium would talk like that! I give myself over to work! and then he'd

¹ Céline's early manuscripts were written in ink. This novel was the only one written in pencil, presumably because he was denied the use of pens in prison. His last manuscripts were written in ball-point pen.

throw himself down on his knees and pray!... on his knees, I can see him now! Ciborium the Motor-maker!... beating his breast! "I won't make them any more, honest!" *mea! mea!* But how does *he* do caca, Ciborium, now that you mention it? That's the main thing: caca... let's just say I find him! I ask him!... But I can't go all obsessional about this! I've enough personal problems! I have my little problems? I bark!... Apparently I'm supposed to croak here... I'm losing skin... I'm losing the meat off my buttocks... I'm losing teeth... no muscles left... I can't do caca anymore... but I ain't dead yet, I tell you... the proof!

Must we tell our friends every party ends

To hell with your kind!

Dead leaves in the wind!

Farewell autumn leaves, escapades and cares!

Will you remember this closing stanza?

I'll find you some nasty night

You're dead meat in my rifle's sight!

Your dumb cow of a soul'll be gone in a glance

To the Heavenly Choirs - you'll see how they dance!

I've got music at the bottom of this hole!... and my word, I'll dance!... not collapsing yet... I'm not heroic like Arlette, but I've got my little pride all the same:

To the Heavenly Choirs - you'll see how they dance!

Yeh, with my pencil! I pencil it! and very tiny writing... and I scribble and I keep on scratching out!

- The notes! the notes these days! G clef!... hum along!

In the great cemetery of the Good Children!

What is more I notify the Banshee! goddam would-be skullbasher! won't he ever bust his goddam block open!

- You're cheating, pimp!... you're cheating!... I shout at him... Up in the infirmary I'll reason with him all right!... I'd like him to bash his stinking skull in once and for all! He won't do it! I'll bash it in for him myself, I tell you! the hero that I am!

The likes of him are met but once!

He can bray, the faker! *blood! blood!*¹ Let him cry: Blood! I'll catch up with him in the Infirmary! I'll tell him a few home truths!... me, with my article 75!... so what if I am a bit loopy?... the article on traitors!... the fated article! the list of everything I sold! aside from my personal crimes! the handing over of entire Embassies! anchored fleets! fortifications nobody could take! Cities opened up to whomever you please, there!... What is it I don't lug around with me! no end of surrenders! countless generals and their messes! and their planes! and their pianos! and how, I should bash my head in! the crimes I cart around! and *vlop* and *vlop*! But after him! after the Banshee! I want his head to bust open first! I'm fed up always being the first! Everywhere! In everything! It'd be a riot for him if I bashed mine in *first!*² Fifty years I been the first to rush right in! That's enough now! Enough! him first! I egg him on! I insult him!

- Go to it, piece o' garbage! Go to it!

¹ In English in the original.

² In English in the original.

All he's taken off is a few bits of forehead! His head just won't give in!... Din, uproar, is all he's good for! I can't collect my thoughts with him around, he sabotages my muse!... Me, whose head is brimming with innovation! All he's got to crush is his goddam skull! And he doesn't crush it! In mine, there's ardent reflection, and laughter, a sense of fun!

Numbskull, Sonofabitchinbastard! I shout at him...

Bambambang! he starts all over again. It's him my nightmare! I wouldn't get bored here, my ass glued, composing my music for books! You can imagine how much I meditate! Enough of prose! songs everywhere! like Roland! like Aristide!¹ the triumph of verse and notes!

Note that there's a little rue Aristide!... Aristide Bruant! but no rue Roland. That kills me!... I really get excited over streets! the avenues, the squares!... injustice! fame? Why Aristide and not Roland? Maybe a little matter of prison?... didn't do any time either one or the other!... I'll find out!... Let me think! Let me think! Jeesh, if that sonofabitchin Banshee wasn't braying so much! Pathetic wall-trembler! He won't bust open his skull! Won't bust open anything! Goddam stubborn sonofabitch! He goes at it with ulterior motive! Get the fuck out is what he wants! not die! His shouting matches don't impress me! A doctor I am! I know all about hysterics! He doesn't give it his all! Me, I'd have taken care of business... you wouldn't hear me twice! I wouldn't tear strips off the wall! "My all"!... I'm thinking about Roland again... the traitors got him, finished him off!... He sounded the horn as he expired... If I can't do caca, me, I bark! I told you! That's how I

¹ Aristide Bruant, a Montmartre songster.

do it! They don't sound the horn here, just sirens! And not often!... but when it comes to whistles! Night and day, those! Shift change! Gusts! and the bells great and small!... and the hooting owls... all around the cemetery! What cemetery? I'm not just making this up!... It's the most amazing sound decor!... What decor did he have, Roland? The Roncevaux circus!... Roland the Furious!... He struck with his Durandal! Such a mighty blow that the entire Pyrenees were sundered in twain! and the traitors' heads rolled! Ganelon, Turpin and their liege lords! It's written about all over the place! Such was Roland! Paladin of rank! Charlemagne's rear-guard, 768, torn apart by the Vascons!¹

The guy next door, all show, he sunders nothin' in twain. Banshee!

*The soul of the great Roland is thus not appeased?*²

Sure as hell isn't! It's not over yet!... Not even a wee bit of a street, not a square!... lousy ingratitude of the Franks!... and today's valiant ones, where's their gratitude? What are they sounding, those guys? What are they sundering? What are they singing of?... François? Raoul? André? Canal? towering figures! They're tooting "Suez" tunes! They're tooting "Beers"! "Saint-Gobains"!³ They're singing of Swiss Banks! François, Rodolphe! André! Canal! They're dancing the lalay-yiday! Towering figures! François! Rodolphe! André! Canal! I'd like to see them training here in my hole... François! André! Rodolphe! Canal! swapping government bonds!... I'd give them a

¹ The Vascons were named in *La Grande Encyclopédie*, which Céline had at his disposal at Klarskovgaard, as the Basque mountain people who attacked Roland in the *Chanson de Roland*.

² Vigny, "The Horn".

³ Beers, Suez and Saint-Gobain were stock market share holdings.

spanking they wouldn't soon forget, and have a damn good time doing it!... don't give a shit how historic they are! Immortal Ones, Agents of the Stock Exchange, towering members of everything! I'd get them to confess their compromises, their fiddling around! I'd develop my contacts all right, just like they do!... funny two-cornered hats,¹ with feathers, swords, everything! just like them! They manage, so will I! The Art of Succeeding? I'll succeed! And when I do, I'll give them another good spanking! They traverse The Flood they come out the other end resplendent with gold! You got guys lucky with the tarot cards, and amazing beribboned troubadours, and guys of independent means... guys who pimp for sprites! Would you enjoy seeing me spank them?... You have to let yourself laugh!... You ain't laughin? I kick the bucket! The party's over!

- What a bore he is!

Alas! I go broke! Bankruptcy! All this prison time in vain!... Ruined retinas!
Pencils! Pellagra! Frowns! Clown!

Oh, Clementine!² but Clementine! just look at them! they're all here! André! François! Canal! Rodolphe! and all the rest from the Song! Valiant Toto! Auntie Estreme! The little Leo! They're coming at me from the walls! They're hurling themselves at me! They manage to unstick me from my stool! Ouch! Jees! they're peeling me of it... they don't want me to sing any more!

You'll see the heavenly choirs!

¹ Reference to the caps and uniform worn by the 100 members of the French Academy.

² Clementine is a character in the song "Reglement" or "Settling Scores" that Céline had copyrighted in March of 1937.

How they dance upon the spires!

I keep at it! Keep at it! Damn! So they're furious!... There's nothing left of me but one big heap!... my poetic persona!... they chuck it into their wheelbarrow!... patch me up!... They've got their tools, shovels, picks, brooms! Infernal is what they are!... They scratch and they scrape below the bunk, under the bedpan, in those hard-to-get-to places... They return bits of my flesh to me! They glue me back together and restick everything! They patch me up again! Flatten me out again! and *flop!* back into the wheelbarrow!... On the road!... They carry me off, it's amazing!... Ah, but them, they leave the prison!... The gigantic doors open!... Like magic!... The watchmen, the dogs watch them!... Not a "wuff", not a whistle!... and right away the cobblestones, the road!... the bumps!... every cobblestone's like a milestone! Jees, can they trot! bump along!... The wheelbarrow jumps and jiggles all over the place!... at a galloping pace!... And at every jolt they double over laughing! and me the pile of meat at the bottom, I'm groaning! They're having fits! They have another whacking great go at me! With the shovel! With the pick! *Boing!* *Boing!* Hooligans! Canal! Auntie Estreme, Toto and all!

- Farther than Achères!¹ farther you'll go!

They're shouting at me down in my wheelbarrow... the hub of the wheel is smoking... I wish it would break, burn, the wheelbarrow! The hub is creaking... the screws are going like mad too! All of them!...

- Farther than Achères! farther you'll go!

¹ Achères is a suburb of Paris noted for its use of sewage for the cultivation of marshy vegetables. This passage is reminiscent of other scenes throughout Céline's work in which something like malaria-induced hallucinations are recounted as fact.

If they torture me aside from everything else! with the back end of the spade!

Fling! Flam! while they hump and bump me along!

- Farther than Achères!...

Me, my putrid meat!... what they dragged me out of! from my hole! me, my putrid meat, farther than Archères! you realize what that means?... what a haul! enough to make you laugh! They take turns wheeling the damn thing... Rodolphe, André, François, Canal... The world's tub-thumpers!... I'd rather keep quiet!... The race is on!... I hear them creaking...

- To the leek fields!... No, the turnips!...

They can't agree...

- No, the cauliflower!

They keep wanting to chuck me somewhere!... the wheelbarrow's smoking! the hub is in fumes! their asses are smoking too, flames shooting out of their asses! At such a pace! faster! faster! Good thing I'm nothing more than a mush!... I'm shivering at the bottom of my wheelbarrow... oh, I know where the Archères leeks are!... farther than the plains!...

- Get to the carrots! the carrots!

Rodolphe wants me dumped in the carrots!... He's yelping so loud you can't hear the creaking! The carrots also are in the plains! heaven's sake! This is a real conjurer's trick! It's marsh madness! I can just make it out! I'm recognizing something! I televue! I know what I'm talking about, televue! You couldn't tell by looking at me but I see through walls! the future! the past! the bad guys! I transmit to you! You don't

believe me? my own walls! everything before it even happens! nothing like the pitiable Banshee! I capture the “death-throes” frequency! Goddam Banshee’s in no death throes! He’s just showing off! faker! he’s faking! He’ll never break down that wall! He’ll never manage to throw himself into it! He’ll never be able to dance! He’ll do sweet fuck all and that’s it! He’s nothing but a goddam show-off from God knows where and to boot he’s in the clink!... He’ll never give up the ghost! I see it all! I see people!... I see the ladies and gentlemen spreading the muck!... I see Ciborium and his She-Pharisee!... I see François in satin slippers... that foetus Nartre and Larengon!¹... I see Auntie Extreme!... little Leo!...

- Where are they, soothsayer?

- In the basement of the Institute! They’re putting together a fake Dictionary!

- Now how about that!

No ‘how about that’ about it! Keep your lousy jokes to yourself! You’ll make damnably good use of them! Don’t waste your pleasantries!... when they nail you to the cross I’ll go have a look, see how funny you are then!... when the time comes! myself! in person! An on-looker! It’s on the cards!... But later on!... for the time being I have my duties here! my sacred tasks! Roland’s horn, you hear? And the screamer there full of pains, would-be head basher, who’ll insult him once I’m gone? No one! And that she-spy up in 36?... And that abortionist woman in 72? she screeches the loudest, I can tell you, of everyone in all the K! W! Y! and U! wings put together!... She wails like a one-woman hospital nursery! I have the hospital nursery noises in my head along with all the string! wind instruments! and two locomotives!

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre and the poet Louis Aragon.

- The bitter work! Phoey! you're puking!... tra-la-la! I'm bowing to you, here, watch!... I'm turning into one of the "Specters"!... Resolve!... Enlistment rue Saint-Dominique!¹... biting at my chains!... You're warned! you shatter my dreams?... Okay! my bikes?... farewell, my villa! cow! maids! storms! Grand-Bé! So be it! Farewell Théo! Farewell, Marie! I'm selling everything off! No one wants to trade me for anything anymore! I'll have pleaded for a few lousy crumbs? and been bumped around? suffered unspeakably? wheelbarrowed, yes, wheelbarrowed! Good thing I stick to the bottom of it! with all my meat! and André! and François!, and Jules! after me! after me! all around! all of them from the French Academy, my wall lied! it's Archères they have me headed for! and here's old Auntie Estreme again! and Clemence and her little Leo! In the name of God, they're out in force! They're breaking down the door! Here they come lunging at me again!... It starts all over again!... They tear me off my stool! "Blasphemer! to the endsives with him!... into the wheelbarrow, filthy swine!" They're having another helluva go at me!... *Bis repetita! Bis repetita!*... Ciborium is proclaiming! *Gloria Motor! Gloria Motor!*... and here we go again, and this time sing while you're at it! my own song! that beats all!

To hell with your kind! Dead leaves in the wind!

They're butchering my text! They keep recleaning my cell!... yet another hunk of meat!...

They're patching everything up again! they're re-amalgamating me! Bones! filaments! oop, here comes the wheelbarrow and we're off again! Bring on the bumps! What

¹ Where the Ministry of War was situated.

madness! The cobblestones, my God, are even fatter! They've put on weight! more enormous jolts! mile upon mile! from the north where I am to Gennevilliers! can you imagine? Somersaults! and we're only talkin' cobblestones here! Counter-jolts! André! François! Canal! Rodolphe!... and little Leo and that Nartre brat!

- You already told us that!

It's been pages and pages! and of course I'm horsing around, only natural... after the torments I've been subjected to! I won't hide it! They brutalize me and I defend myself! Period! *Business first!*¹ and then after only one reading you won't retain a thing! I know what I'm talking about, believe me! The patients! The prescriptions! a hundred times! the same prescription a hundred times over, spelled out, they still don't remember it! you gotta recite the goddam thing to them! make them learn it by heart! all together now! it's the same with you! When it's too detailed, no instructions with it, you get lost, your noggin's just not up to it!... I lose you entirely!... Everything has to be recited to you! and recited over again! So I treat you considerately, I try to make everything understandable-like: being dragged from pillar to post, the wheelbarrow!... Colorful, right? Colorful! André! François! Canal! Rodolphe!... all members of the French Academy! and no dillydallying, I assure you, trotting along! Giddy-yap, giddy-yap! They play obscene jokes on each other! These honchos of high culture on the trot! And go to it, boy! how I suffer! how I'm jostled! my pile of guts, my organs flat out! my limbs I can no longer feel!

The cannibals just laugh.

- Off you go! off you go to the leeks! to the manure! swine! What a ride!

¹ In English in the original.

Lout! your loutish soul!

Turnips! turnips! radishes! reveries!

That's what they sing along the route!

Okay, agreed! All that's left of me is a pile of glop at the bottom of the barrow!
and *dong! bong!* Oh, the cobblestones! Oh, I knew it! little ones! huge ones!... the
Lapland steppes have arrived in Arras! When you think about it!... the wheelbarrow rears
up! the street gushes up! they make a bee-line for the tram! on purpose! and *bammm!* and
another heave-ho! and they take turns at the handlebars! the "get-goin'-I'll push-ya"
marathons! absolutely premeditated! 100% crime! If I'd knifed a rich old lady they'd
have treated me better! instead of being a devoted patriot! bet your ass it was
premeditated! I can just see the brat Bartre and little Elsa!... from the depths of my
wheelbarrow! I see them! They're running after us!... very far behind! They're calling!...
They're denouncing me to the trees!... They're shouting... they're creaking! It's me
they're pointing at! me they're denouncing!

- He's being paid! he's being paid!...

Oh, but the guys pushing me, they don't wait around!... Not a single stop... not a
breather!... "Push on, wheelbarrow! Go on, filthy swine!" I'm telling you they take turns
at the handlebars!... all the while singing, creaking, galloping!... prestidigiously! André!
Canal! Estreme! Rodolphe! all from the French Academy!... Go to it, ye gallant lads!... We
make tracks I swear to God!... the road from Gonesse to Paris!... the barrow's breathing
fire!... Rethondes!... Compiègne!... The speed makes everything shake!... Everything I see
is shaking!... The bumps, the crushing! me a gloopy mess!... the pellagra, rottenness...

cake! pool of raw sewage! as they say!

Go to it! turd! turnip! Your country!

They sing! They're singing!

Their song for the road.

Ah, the Seine! Here's the Seine!... The bridge!... Here we are!... La Défense!...

And the plain!... No, it's Neuilly!... no not yet!... to the left! the left! water's edge... Go to it! To it, I say!

- You've got one shithouse of a soul!

Ah, the plain all the same!... Ah, the muck spread out!... the little paths... No they haven't gone astray at all!... One small plank! another small plank... and another!... balance, for once! They're practically carrying my wheelbarrow!... they lift it ever so cautiously... like the cops in Washington, Auriol's car!¹... did you see that? just so nothing would happen to him!... all of them gripping on to my wheelbarrow!... me too!... the seven! eight!... twelve!... thirty-eight hands! They're literally hoisting me up! in one go! *pllopppp!* They give me a heave!... into the gooey sewage and *pllopppp!* The rat-bastards! The felons! that does it! that does it! drenched! drowned! I swallow the stuff! I upchuck! Wooooee! the goo rising! I see them on top of the trench! me in the cream! they're laughing their fannies off! Ciborium and his She-Pharisee!... They can't take it any more, they're laughing so hard! François in satin slippers!... the brat Nartre!... All looking like something out of Heidi!... little shorts!... and funny caps!... Funny hats I'd already

¹ During the state visit of French President Vincent Auriol to Washington in 1951, there was an accident involving a car in his motorcade in which the chauffeur was killed and a number of passengers injured.

seen, but the little shorts?... I couldn't see from the bottom of my barrow... not everything!... and they were knitting their knees at such a speed! galloping gets fuzzy! their gallop is a fuzzy gallop. Everything's fuzzy! But now I could see them just fine around the barrow!... They were jutting out over me! They were pissing on me... I've got incredible presence of mind... they were pissing on me... all of them! both the brat Nartre and the Elsa girl!... No, not her!... not her! her panties! she couldn't get her panties off! they were helping her! oh, the tears from Elsa! such chagrin! they tear off her buttons! her whole fly! they've all gone berserk! You should've seen Ciborium! François! bracing himself and Larengon! the Nartre brat not even helping her! He was too busy pissing on me! where he was jutting out all over me I could see him just fine! shaking!

- He's been paid! He's been paid! he's shouting.¹ He was pointing his finger at me! me, there, in the middle of the cesspool, drowning! Shows you what a hideous individual he is! And all of them nowadays who want to lighten things up again! piss is what they want to do! both Extreme and little Leo!... They're aiming at Elsa's panties!... Scandal at the sewage treatment plant!... They're all firing at her pants!... pissing on me!... me deep down in the goo drinking it all in!... Elsa! Elsa's despair!... how can her panties hold out against ten! twenty! thirty of them! Should've heard her bawling! They're just doing it to make her suffer too! They're bending over six at a time! eight at a time! to grab what's between her legs! The screams out of Elsa! I'm howling along with her! I'm not dreaming!... The other guy's screaming too! there, next door! not to mention the

¹ Sartre wrote in "Reflections of the Jewish Question" that Céline had been in the pay of the Nazis. This accusation more than anything else had infuriated Céline.

abortionist in 16! Peepee! peeeeee! peepeeee! That's Baltavian! I was not dreaming!...
 Not at all!... I was sitting down!... I saw everything!... I heard everything!... hey, but no
 wheelbarrow!... Glued! Glued I was! to my stool! Glued! I wasn't rolling along! is this
 funny? I was screaming in chorus... with 16!... with 18 and 130!... I outshout the
 Banshee... the wall-jerker... *III love you!*¹... I shout to him!... that's Shakespeare!... "I
 love you!" sonofabitch doesn't let up! goes to it! goddam Banshee next door! Eh, I see
 them all! And how, do I see them! the kisser on François in satin slippers, Tyrolean shorts
 and wee cap!... And Ciborium with Stupnagel² backstage at the Comédie.³ Frivolling
 around, go-betweening! Peepee! Peepee! thoroughly hermetic mystics!... all the same,
 bunch of bandits, they whisked me away from those Lapps! kidnapped out by Rethondes.
 Achères! my meat, my glop!... split the prison walls asunder! I, who was a bandit of some
 repute! arch-traitor, NO problem! never a hint of scandal! I, who only barked when I
 needed an enema, carried off through the highways and byways! what a sprint! and in
 such a state! The Flanders Cobblestones Scandal! forcibly whisked off! I had asked
 nothing of those great big doors!... they just opened as if by magic!... the wheelbarrow and
 oop! on the road! the hub on fire! and these creaking, fuming weridos! the little get-away!
 sneaking off twelve thousand kilometers! the gall! really! no wonder the sirens were

¹ In English in the original.

² Karl Heinrich von Stupnagel (1886-1944), Commander of the German occupying forces from 1942 to 1944.

³ The premiere of "Satin Slipper" by Paul Claudel was held on November 26, 1943 at the Comédie Française. It was a cultural highlight of Paris under the Occupation, much heralded by Germans and French alike.

screeching!... and the dogs, and the harbor alert! and the cops whistling all over the place!
 and the fire brigade rushing all over town, Baltavia, with their big ladders, their little ones!
 “Catch those lunatics! get them to the Infirmary, quick!” and the twelve packs of hounds
 scurry all over the countryside! all the cemeteries! Oh, how I amuse you!... how I
 muse!... and Time?... what about Time?... it’s catching up with me... misfortune ages a
 man, kills him... I don’t want to die without my villa!... yes my mind has been profoundly
 shaken, but not the sense of how things should be...

And the other guy with his gal Pharisee!... Excuse me for the details... I see
 everything, I do!... I see it all in the walls...

Where are they these days, soothsayer?

I’ve already said it! I’ve proclaimed it! Precise detail! Everything! Wheelbarrow!
 Leeks!... The muck farther than Achères! on my ass, there, and oop! all the while making
 the sign of the cross at me over and over again!... as well as pissing on me from the
 sides!... I saw them! heard them! *Profundis!*... in their Heidi outfits and funny hats! My
 walls never out of my sight again!... They won’t get me into that whack-happy
 wheelbarrow another time!... the shovel! the mad ride! I bitch! I screech! They chuck me
 in again, me frantic! Me! who listens to the wails coming from all around!... who’ll listen
 when I’m gone?... Nobody! Not me?... nobody!... Nobody gives a fuck! “Yuelp!
 Yuelp!” they can all go and bust their throats!... all the goddam prisoners around me!...
 the ropes!... screech their lungs out!... with me gone nobody’ll listen! He can break his
 noggin’ in two, Banshee! in the daily scheme of horrors, a mere blip!... Nobody’ll bat an
 eyelash!... You’re at the bottom of the ditch, so shut your trap!... You’re in K wing!...

You're still this side of the tomb?... this side of the cemetery?... the magnificent buildings?... you see those grand buildings?... Seven comfy floors... Oh, well, excuse me!... You see them from your cell... you're not inside those grand buildings... you're what? three, four thousand meters away... after the cemetery... now, that's a resplendent view!... I mean from the prison, from where you are... after the cemetery... in the early days I still had some strength left, I'd hoist myself up, just managed to reach the cell window, the edge, I could see them perfectly well from there... perfectly well those "seven floors", say, three, four thousand meters away!... Now I wouldn't have the strength... and then of course Hortensia would emerge out of no where and strangle me... he's forever at the bars... I saw those buildings, I am not lying to you... buildings such as I wish for you!... People talk about Paradise!... that it exists... doesn't exist... You don't need to be a genius to figure it out: paradise is houses three thousand meters away, with lots of people in them, with seven floors! all the conveniences! windows! wispy curtains! lift! seen like that by us, peeking through a cell window... Anyway, I couldn't hoist myself up anymore... My scabs are sticking too much!... And here I was talking a while back about hanging myself!... I was just showing off!... and what about Hortensia and the others?... them in their Heidi get-up?... They'll all emerge out of no where and take a flying leap at me!... along with Leo, Toto, Jules!... not to mention Estreme!... Where would I go? Wherever it is, they'll chuck me right back into their wheelbarrow and oop! off we go!

Just my walls!... that's all there is!... Confidence only in my walls!... Oh, I confine myself!... Confine myself indeed!... ears ever at the listen!... and eyes waiting to see!... I pick up everything!... aside from my internal noises, the goods trains... in twos and

threes!... anything that moves in Batignolles... both under the Flanders Bridge and under three adjacent tunnels... and I never mix up the whistles!... the prison ones, the railroad ones, the ones in my ear... the imaginary ones, the real ones... Never the tiniest inkling of a doubt!... The exquisiteness of my hearing... I'm like a bloody conductor!... not counting that ill-mannered Banshee and the bleatings all-floors!... for example, the one above, the abortionist, she goes at it like twenty-five newborns!... the cries out of her!... in 28! Am I repeating myself?... so?... I've got the ear for it, what can I tell you?... Wails of all descriptions fascinate me... you can imagine, with all those years in Tarnier!... Brindeau, Lantuéjoul¹... those first cries... the first cry!... all greasy and husky and full of phlegm... I know all about it!... those tiny little faces, scarlet, blue, already strangulated!... I've helped my share of little beings into the world!... How they keep on coming!... you're bringing it all back to me! "Push, now, my good woman! Push!..." I've heard manys a cry... I'm a hearer... but the duo of childbirth, mama and the little guy, now there's a chord you won't soon forget... as soon as the mother stops shouting the little guy pipes up... I'm not going to go for literary effect here, "and so life goes on, et cetera"... I'll spare you that... To hell with effect!... Some noises I'll be stingy about, others I'll give freely... the noises in Cameroon, now, you can have as many as you want of them!... talk about forestral orchestrations!... at night, Jeess!... at night... you've gotta hear what comes out of the

¹ Tarnier is the name of the maternity ward where Céline did an obstetric internship from October to December 1922. There he met the Doctors Brindeau (who would become director of his doctoral thesis, written about the Hungarian doctor Semmelweis and his studies of the relationship between hygiene and post-partum maternal death) and Lantuéjoul, with whom Céline remained on good enough terms for the former to attest on his behalf at his trial.

throats of those enormous animal couplings!... it's the howling storm of the instincts down there! and the village pygmies who feast on personal meat!¹... Tom-Tom! and go to it! and oop!... and syncopations and jerking dances... better not go have a look!... Grandma on a low flame... Those are some bawlings!... I'll give you twenty pygmies from my village and you get them to howl!... individuals, beasts who adore each other, grab each other, devour each other... I'll sell you their great moonlight, such a giant mirror of the night that it's as if the whole forest rose to the sky!... and the "tom-tom" and the sixteen witch doctors... six or seven prison floors can't match their wailings!... in prison they're raucous!... all the catwalks... traitors, thieves, sex maniacs, the innocent ones, they're all harsh gurglings!... the Banshee too: gravelly!... the abortionist gravels for two thousand... "aaiii, ow!..." but those pygmies in the forest, well, at the edge, such full, rich voices! clear stentorian tones!... Remember the name... the village: Bikobimbi!... Rio Cribi!... veritable cantors! At night, of course... at night!... from nature's depths!... You gotta hear that!... You gotta hear it!... it's the understanding of instinct, the accompaniment, the exercise in vocalization: "Dingua!... bouay!... saoa!... bouay!... ding... a!... bouay!... Ding... a!... bouay!" and drummed out all natural-like!... on the trunk of a hollow tree with sixteen drumsticks!... talk about spellbinding! watch out! From the elemental hollow!... Better not get too close! Me, I was a hundred meters away, my hut, not once did I go see... the Hollow Echo is sacred!... nothing like the hollow of some dumb prison!... Take me, I can sing that pigmy stuff... still, to this day!... "Ding... a!... bouay!... and sao!... a!..."

¹ Céline, while living in Cameroon, was preoccupied with the problem of cannibalism. In *Journey to the end of the night* he makes numerous references to it as well.

bouay!...” It carries, I tell you... I never watched their little parties, that was their business... They liked human meat but other meats as well I’m sure... deer, warthog, buffalo... pythons... I had proof!... You gotta mind your own business!... discretion!... and no lies... I’m not making any of this up... nothing but facts!... Bikobimbo 1916!... They ate human meat on Rue Caulaincourt... Rue Carbonnière... Rue Claude-Bernard... in the middle of Paris thirty years later!... so go talk about primitive!... And don’t go tut-tutting and get all shocked like!... instincts will not be denied! There, there... my dear! pelts don’t count, it’s the meat! the meat! Tom-Tom and tap-tap!... I’m drifting off, I’m being funny, I’m having a laugh!... but it’s real, it’s a fact: they didn’t have malaria, or yellow fever, or the tse-tse fly on Rue Caulaincourt! cannibalism is nothing, but the tse-tse fly!... So long live the entire Rue Caulaincourt! and human meat!

I know what you’ll say: he’s delirious from fever!... Yes! You’re right! True! but there was also the Tom-Tom!... You never saw this instrument!... A hollowed out trunk, just like that, enormous... a sound like a Cathedral!... plus the choir of night-time gourmets which in turn was drowned out by the animal bacchanal, belly-ripping, throat-cutting couplings of twenty-five zoos! wild beasts, jackals, elephants, birds, in the depths of the depths of the darkness!... Ah, the sounds of the forest, now that’s something!... and I’ve even been told that the most sonorous night creature of them all, there, was the giant snail! Picture that!... and here I am shivering in my hut, from fever, from three-day fever... rattling myself right out of the “Picot”... You don’t know the Picot bed?... the Picot, the

colonial bed that earned us Empires!¹... I was one big clanking Picot!... it's made up of all these little jangling rods!... your boys get a good laugh out of it!... you're funny too! and your teeth, your knees, your carcass, everything jingles and jangles... and how, do your boys have a laugh!... Creak! Creak! Creak, cute! just like Ciborium's wheelbarrow!... another one that jingled and jangled! jingle-jangulation all over the place! The way those guys would transport me! and those cobblestones! such cobblestones!... and the tornado in the making!... I've no doubt about it! I can see the writing on the walls!... Cute little bastards! They make me undergo more horrors! the shrieks of the pygmies with the animals, the worst kind!... incredible saturnalia of marriages, blood-curdling gut-spilling from the kingdom come of darkness!... You should see the height of the forests!... Ten... twenty times the oaks in Vincennes!... You can bet they're killing each other, and a lot, under them!... and cooing to each other... and wailing... It's more death-rattling than prison... much more ferocious than Charleroi, the Marne, Saint-Gond,² Nagasaki!... humans lag behind the beasts... I'm comparing... I'm not embarrassed... doesn't bother me... the noises I have in my head!... I buzz far too much!... I get overcome by it, I get dizzy, I fall! I scream!... bearing, first and foremost, character!... but the noises triumph, I'm drunk, I yield... But you got out of it, you'll say... that's right!... but the squadron?... the colonel's cry, all alone, twenty meters ahead of the standard?... spreading out into

¹ The "Picot bed" was a "small camping bed topped by a mosquito net" according to Céline in his play "*L'Eglise*". It was a metal folding bed which won prizes at the World Fairs of 1878 and 1889 and which has constantly been in use by the French Army ever since.

² Three battles which took place at the beginning of World War I when Céline was a young cavalry man.

battle!...raise high the sabres!

- Chaaaarge!

Order of the squadrons!... “Two! One!... Three!... Four!...”

The grandiose fanning out of the charge!... everything vibrates... thunders! and the three brigades! the echelons!... the division!... the twenty thousand foot soldiers rushing flat out! The Entire Army Corps!... can you hear the wailing coming up from the ground?... like one giant mounting groan... the rising whirlwind of horses hooves... a wail from the ground that extinguishes everything... even the artillery back-up, the mobile units... who`re shooting right there... You no longer hear anything but the wail coming up from the ground... the wailing fills everything!... the echo everywhere...that`s something to hear again!... You`re carried off, compressed, the charge, knee-to-knee!... open grave!... the echo right up to the sky! to the sky! *Giddy-yap! Giddy-yap!* something to hear again!... I can do what I like, I hear it all again!... I do the raging tropical storms... I create the grand manoeuver charges!... I do what I like here in my cell!... the artillery back-up! Enough of Ciborium`s wheelbarrow!... the loonies out of the leeks!... Enough of their peepee too!... the way they urinate in chorus!... *Pfoui!* Those naughty children! Get back, Elsa! To hell with you, Toto!... I`ve no shortage of raging storms!... A noggin` full of them!... Even when I`ve run through all my buzzings and then the “Tom-toms” I still have a huge array of blasts stored up!... after the storm in my ear, lots of others!... lots!... many a man`s sighs... little sighs... heftier ones... I`ve got little grand-daddies who give up the ghost... not just one... twenty! ten! a hundred!... a little death rattle, it`s over, no, another!... gasps, I`ve told you already... And the kinds of death-rattles you don`t hear any

more! the way they used to suffocate with the croup!... maybe... just maybe you'll hear it still in a few children's hospitals... they've become historic noises... like the watermills of a thousand years ago and the din raised by anvils... Museum noises! "Oh-hey, blacksmith!"... and *Boooooom!*... Vulcan's dead! ironwork's dead!... Oh, Cavalry! the days of those deafening noises is over and that's all there is to it!... Museum noises!... Oh, but I'm retrospectiving for you!... mythologizing!... a lot, I give myself that little pleasure!... the one in 115 is no myth! and the one in 40, gosh darn! and the girl in 63! in chains and a strait-jacket... but the worst, the worst yet the "pip-cell"¹ 17! In there they bark all right! They dare! "*Waaaa! Waaaa!*" and such force! like me! That won't happen!... They're imitating me! I'll cut their throats for them myself! "*Meee! Meee!*" hear them?... I'm going to go over there!... I've got a shard from an old jug under my straw... "*Meee! Meee!*" I'm going to unstick my ass from this stool... I'll cross the corridor, I'll teach them to plagiarize me!... I've had too much grief from you plagiarizers! One especially! a worse howler than all the rest! "Ooo-oww!" I cut his throat open!... I'll make you laugh all right, you bloody assassin!... with all my might!... put him out of his misery there in 17!... but the screws will have to carry me, and the nurse!... they'll have to pour me on him!... on Number 17!... Hurry, the stretcher!... all alone I'd collapse after two steps... they'll have to bump me along like in the wheelbarrow!... let them chuck me at him so I can cut his throat!... I'll slice open his trachea!... But the guards will have to help me... and the nurse, and two other cops... and then they'll have to write up a report... I'll teach

¹ The "pip-cell" was a Danish word used to describe the "security" cell where prisoners were mistreated and tortured.

that sonofabitchin Banshee how to behave! Me!... I pass by his place on the way back... And I'll cut his goddam throat! courtesy requires it!... I'm the only one allowed to bark, so there! that's all! The Law! Me alone!... He'll be out of his misery! "*Waaaa!* *Waaaa!*" What if the dogs should get it all wrong? what if the pack starts barking with him? I'm done for!... They'll never give me another enema! nobody will bother to get off his ass again!... I can bark all I like for ten years!... Ah, it's incredible the nastiness, the viciousness of people, and the most pitiable rejects at that! go right ahead! they just have to do the dirty on you! Alone I bark, or I kick the bucket! At least I think so... I think... I want... but nobody'll come help me... I work myself up into a fury all by myself... I rattle the wall!... Doesn't do any fuckin' good! the Banshee also rattles the wall! the dirty look on him, if you please!... he's rattling the wall on me! all I need! he interrupts my work, my train of thought... he warps my musings! I wish to hell he'd do his head in once and for all, the coward!... three big very strong jumps and *booooo!* with all his might! He could do it! He could do it, the jackass!... Head first!... his head is the problem! The same old song!... millions of people, it's the head's their problem... it's the Calamity of the World, the problem of the head!... so?... so?... So, nothing!... I'll see him again, Banshee! I'll find him again!... I saw him once in the little alley out in the cage... he's a kind of silly, shaggy youngish thing, but full of wrinkles... I'll catch up with him in the infirmary... in the infirmary I'll catch up with him... after he's messed up his forehead a little bit... that's what he'll do to himself, scrape his skin, but no bones!... so?... so?... he'll be bandaged and cottoned up... if they drill his skull open that'll fix him!... fixing the head, yeh?... That's even worse! Worse! the hours I've lost on account of him, the fathead!... and Hortensia,

too, his head! black libertine Louis XV king of France making every kind of proposal to me through the window... and if I strangled him what would he have to say?... I'd have to hoist myself up!... and what if I took advantage of the situation and hung myself while I was at it?... it's the right height! the bars!... the Buildings in the distance!... Buildings are everything!... I see how real men live: like Gods!... Oh, there's no jealousy on my part! There are those with recriminations. Who cares? I never utter a cry, raise a fuss, except for the enemas of course!... two weeks you didn't do doo-doo wouldn't you bark too?... Oh, I'm not trying to move you!... saurian insensitivity!... just little miseries... okay!... The devil knows I'm of too noble a stripe to ask anyone to shed a tear over me... already with the peepee, right? my business!... all you have to do is buy!... even-Steven and see ya later!... I've lost fifty-two kilos! pellagra and woes!... skin 'n bones poet!... one breath of wind and I fly away!... they had to bundle me into their wheelbarrow... I gave them such trouble! the road, there, I saw how it was, every bump practically, sent me flying!... They'd patch me up again... Therefore, all things considered, if you think about it honestly, I just can't give it all away to you... pellagra, wheelbarrow, prison, think about it!... plus the song!... you wouldn't want to take advantage!... *Fable*, okay!... but the flower?... and the little stanza, hold on, the little verse!

I'll come get you, you son of a bitch!

One dark night!

I'll show you Estreme!

Big black hole in my sights!

Pellagra is amusing, well, in a way...

Your foul soul up the hole!

The word, the thing too... are you of an historical bent at all? pellagra, the Portsmouth prison ships?¹ The Grand Army prisoners, don't ring any bells for you? God knows they suffered those poor bastards, and cruelly, much worse than me!... Pellagra killed them off!... No cell windows for them!... No exercise yard!... No five minutes in the open air! just a little port-hole for a hundred men!... rats had better conditions...

Greetings, brave prisoners of yesteryear! Brothers in suffering! Long live France! all forty-two kilos of meat of ya'! Chaaaaarge!

I'd crack under the strain!... the Portsmouth prisoners too!... Heavy calvary!... Light artillery!... Eblé's Pioneers!... The Empress's White Dragons!²... Riflemen wasted away, so messed up they could hardly see... so you can imagine me as a Cuirassier! Jeess, they wouldn't even take me as a hussar any more!³ Couldn't mount the damn thing! A sorry sight! I'd fly right off the saddle!... the horsey goes nuts!... Where's my rider?... in the air! nobody'd have me any more! the Invalides dummies?⁴... Probably wouldn't even

¹ At the time of the Empire, some Grand Army prisoners were held in old ships in many English ports, including Portsmouth. Sanitary conditions were shockingly bad.

² References to two sections of Napoleon's army who fought courageously in the Napoleonic Wars.

³ Whereas the Cuirassiers were part of the Heavy Cavalry, the Hussars were members of the Light Cavalry.

⁴ The Invalides Veteran's Center contains a military museum which carries all the uniforms of the French Armies.

let me into any of their crummy pictures!... Would the Bats¹ have me? The Grévin?²...

Nobody! The specters!... “The First Specters”³? yeh, maybe... What can I expect?... I’m fearful!

Session!... Tribunal!... Explanations!... we’re dragged before the Appeals...

- Punishment!... What have you done with your medal?... Your pension?... Your year of enlistment?... Beware!... It’s me they’re attacking!

- Enlistment year ‘10?...

This is not fun.

Your commission? Class of ‘10? Show us!...

Not the moment for evasive replies! nothing but categorical! factual!... Justice!

Period!

- What the fuck did’ya do with your medal?... your rank? They’re on the attack again!...

- Your wounds? citations? War-service chevron?...

They’re implacable.

They were putting on the pressure, I tell you! just the facts! Don’t be giving us

¹ The “Bats” were a punishment battalion sent to Africa.

² The reference to “crummy pictures” is obscure. Bringing together the mannequins of the Invalides Museum and the Grévin wax museum perhaps suggests that we should understand the “crummy pictures” to be those from Epinal, a town in eastern France famous for its production of cheap and popular prints.

³ This imagined ghostly unit of the army, the “First Specters” will be referred to again. As in this passage, it seems to represent for the author one of the few groups to which he can still belong.

any of your nonsense!... tough luck for the clients! tough luck, ladies and gentlemen! all the horrors I've been through!

They're choking to hear... And I get no thanks for keeping my peace.

- Accomplice! disgusting! Coward! loafer!

Their prosecutor looks at me.

He's shouting his lungs out in my face!

I mumble, whimper... Bozo!... whatever it takes to get you the hell out of there!¹...I do the dumb-ass jailbird act!... I play the game!... I try everything!... But the prosecutor doesn't give a fuck!... I deny everything! I retract... I take responsibility for everything!... What do you expect with the likes of them as judges!... I infuriate them three times over!... Verdict and oop! On with the punishment!

- No mercy for those who besmirch heros! burning scabs on all Iconoclasts!

That's their Sentence.

- Take pity on him! Take pity on him!

I'm not abandoning you, I'm begging for mercy!

But you're already on fire, every part of you!... I weep, I lament... you, your pores already on fire!... and on all fours and gagged, ligated!... I know what it's like, on all fours, the skin on fire!... me too, I'm burning up with pellagra! to the quick!... My skin's being torn off me, I tell you!... right off me!... on all fours I'd wash my cell!... well, as well as I could... I'd soak my ass in the pale... I can't take it anymore!... I understand your

¹ At first the author seems to be defending himself, but he slips into a fantasy of defending the reader in front of a military tribunal of the "First Specters".

sufferings...

Oh, but the prosecutor's getting impatient.

- Let's get this show on the road!

He's had enough of my ramblings...

And you, you see it all! look at everything! you don't miss a bit of the show... you can see very well on all fours! the Column unscrews from the square, lifts itself up, keeps lifting itself up! on its own! all by itself! and *buuuump!* falls flat on its face!... do you realize what that means?... it's the cosmomediumnic storm!... the point where the whole awful reality comes crashing back!... but not on my account! It wasn't my fault!... I didn't want to unleash forces!... certain forces!... I'd very kindly warned everyone, all up and down... you'll have to admit... so?... obstinacy?... *Tic!... Toc!... Tic!.. Toc!* the clock? the little ticking?... the real clock?... I have no desire to unleash forces... certain forces... but you! stomping, pounding, screaming, you're outside everything!... you leave Time behind!... blast through the web!...

- The crumbs!... the crumbs!... you shout... the Laboratory's in for it!... test tubes, converters, fine crystals... there you go with the axe! emboldened! with the full force of your arms! pulverizing finesse, modesty, waves! You get carried away!... the cosmomediumnic storm groans on... the Column goes sky high! and *buuuump!* falls down again! tears the asphalt asunder!... blasts through the very essence of everthing! you're swallowed up!

All of History's catastrophies come but from the biliousness of The Stubborn One! you've got the Devil in you too, no mistake! just as stubborn!... but not enough to knock

down my wall!... not infuriated to death!... you'd rattle it on me like the Banshee! no more! no more! You'd chip two or three bricks on me... that's all! no more! you'd knock down nothing! happy just to raise a bit of a fuss! He's only pretending, the Banshee!, he hurtles himself! looks as if! all the way? no!... He doesn't kill himself, that's always how it is!... he doesn't kill himself!... You'd be the same... if he really slammed himself with all his strength his puss would be mush... his goose cooked!... I could work away no problem!... you, you wouldn't hurtle yourself either, out of your tree, but not stupid!... gourmet, but not crazy!... a fine sly one!...

When you come down to it, don't you know, when the time comes, the tribunal will weigh it all up! It's not what I can or I can't tell you that's gonna save you from a mug-shot number! Oh, lord, no! Oh, my forebearance! so I blather on to the point of bursting?... blather enough for a hundred years of headaches? Sure, I look great! blah-blah-blatheries over nothing, that's life! Cherished blah-blahs! It all comes down to one thing: Verdict and oop! "Get'im while he's hot!" Where will they send you in your state?... you're sizzling, your soul's in little peaked flames flickering on your head!... Don't you look terrific! Will they send you to the "*Two-Two-Four*"?¹ I wouldn't be surprised!... there you see some turn-about and some heads-and-tails that go on forever! I don't want to do anyone a disfavor, but a lot of the time you see the worst kind of felon at the "*Two-Two-Four*"... not to mention at the "*Between-two-stools*"! that's another dance hall!... there you got all the dances from one century to the next... three, four

¹ In English in the original. A reference to the "*One-Two-Two*" which was a well known house of prostitution on the Rue de Provence.

centuries sometimes...! if you have the time to enjoy it!...

Look at all those people prance!

Knowing full well how to dance!...

and with the flounces they used to wear! with mimes! performances! all those phosphorescent dead eyes! all the lights from the beyond! Ah, nothing's left out! the whole hog at the First Specters!

But here's Aunt Estreme!

And her little Leo!

Here's Clementine and the valiant Toto!...

Remember?

Must we tell our friends every party ends?

All this at a very fast beat! you take right off!

I'm singing here, but I can't take off, I'm stuck... but when I get out there with you, I'll twirl you round and round, Marquis! the ass no longer glued!... you'll see what this dance partner can do!... here I'm just accompanying myself, that's all, I'm humming... if I could get up, I'd crash right back down again... the dizziness, *plop!* I stagger, I puke!... a good thing my ass is glued!... I sway, I pitch, I compose... see, don't even need the shivers, to be chilled to the bone, etc. song comes naturally!... Artist in spite of everything! I sing as they torture me!... Cocotte sings during torture also!... not to mention Rangon!... and his wee woman!... it winds up being piggy, this "Torture Song"¹

¹ Louis Aragon's "*Ballade de celui qui chanta dans les supplices*" (Ballad of the man who sang during torture) was staged, among other poems, in Copenhagen in October 1945, by the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault.

... so I better not mention it here... especially seeing as I'm so slandered! I got word through my walls of rumors out of Batignolles that I'm a habitual drunk... me! who never drank anything but water!... goes to show you what hatred cooks up!... They put out that I'm a sadist or a wise aleck in prison? I'm good for ten more years with the "Specters"! good night! I'm stoical, myself, ever so agreeable! I don't howl at the pitch the Banshee does! far from it! he could bring my wall down one of these days!... as I said... if he really threw himself into it! from the bottom, the very bottom of his hole!... and I'd say, now there's a man of integrity, all right!... he's sacrificing his skull!... fine! okay! Me, if I took a flying leap, you'd see!... it wouldn't be pussy-footing around!... It would be with a flourish! On my terms! with a flourish! with a hundred fifty-six trumpets and horns and cymbals! kettledrums! brass band, the big one!...

- Hussars, prepare to charge! Chaaaarge!...

Sabres high! but who'd want me in the Hussars?... Nobody!... Not any more!... So the Cuirassers? That's a laugh! my rickety little bones? my rotting flesh? Why would they send me to fry inside my cuirass? wherever I go! wherever I leave for! and yet that's the soul of it, the charge is everything! "Chaaaarge!" Colonel Des Entrayes twenty lengths ahead of the squadron! standing straight up in his stirrups! sabres high! white plume! his mane blowing in the wind! his one command: "Chaaaarge!" the fourteen squadrons get moving... the tornado is launched!... the Banshee charges too, next door!... and *va va va voom!*... he collapses... he starts again!... you gotta laugh at him!... he's shaking my wall... three bricks... he shakes them up for me... you gotta laugh!...

- That's right, neighbor, go right ahead!

It takes some strength to knock down a wall!... not just a laugh!... everything is in the charge!... when you think about it... daydream about it... where was it that we charged?... it's forcing me!... it's forcing me to think, time... just where did we charge? where? at Longchamp, of course! at Longchamp with the trumpets and drums! as if I were there right now! at Longchamp before the big July!¹ The Mill! The Mill! "Chaaarge!" Colonel Des Entrayes, as if I were there! His sword glinting! He orders! "Squadrons"! the Dragons! and the "Light Brigade"! General Des Urbales! "Seventh Independent Mobile"! takes up the entire wing at deployment! Twenty-seven squadrons at a fierce pace! the entire Paris cavalry and the Guard and the eleven brass bands go right to the tribunes! "Those who are about to die salute you!" Sixteen regiments at full speed, stop on a dime and face the Presiding Officer! Twelve thousand horses, heads tossing, neighing, send showers of white foam high into the sky... it covers everything... flakes everywhere... infantry... engineer corps!... even the "sausage" zeplin -- fifty Meudon Sappers have to keep ahold of it on the ground!² All the train wagons under froth! under froth like so many glasses of beer!... Colonel Des Entrayes, General Des Urbales, straight up in their stirrups saluting with their swords! the cannons thundering! the sun throws such blinding fire onto the steel, the breast-plates, the coppers, the big crates that thirty years later your eyes are still blinking! your soul no longer knows where it is... has no age, nothing... you'd think the tribunes were palpitating... ear-splitting hurrahs from the

¹ A reference to the military parade of July 14, 1913 at Longchamp.

² The viewing parade of 14 July 1913 saw the launching of the dirigible the "Commandant-Contelle".

crowd!... and the colors!... the masses a blur... delirious tramping of patriots' feet... a hundred thousand mouths agape... two hundred thousand... I see through a halo of rising breath... I see!... I see the parasols and the tufts... I see the boas... floods of feathers... blue... green... pink... as if they were cascading from the tribune!... the world of fashion! of high fashion! chiffon everywhere... floods of orange... mauve... nothing but elegance from top to bottom... such fragile things...

“Those who are about to die salute you!”...

Nowadays the “*Sabre-et-Meuse*”¹ and the Chasseurs’ “*Sidi-Brahim*”¹... positioning the cannon on the move! Ah! the Legion! Ah, the “*Marsouins*”¹! The giant clamor that it gives rise to! ulf! bulf! gulf! more than any play would ever do for you!... It’s the people as one! That’s ardor for you!... the entire Bois de Boulogne!... in the distance the heights of Saint-Cloud... the noise echos back to us! unfurls! farther still the echo resounds!... The horizons, the green hilltops of Enghien well up around us!... maybe we’re being carried off by the force of the tides of tumult around us!... astounding!... the skies swell, stir, here and there they break with shouts of “*Vive la France!*”...

From his box, all alone under the red canopy way up high, Mr. Poincaré salutes us!

I’m sketching for you a bit of the fervor, the sweat, the tribunes, the sun, the boas, the helmets, the crests, the mounted artillery, the dragons, the charge... the “Do You See

¹ The “*Sabre-et-Meuse*” is a military march dating from 1871. The “*Sidi-Brahim*” is a charge composed in honor of the African Chasseurs to commemorate one of their military exploits. Marsouins were the Navy infantry troops.

Them?"¹... the vast movement of flanks!... how engrossing it all is... forty squadrons acting as one!... what a sprint!... engulfed!... La Pépinière... "Vincennes", "Dupleix"² ... twenty regiments!... such badges!... from the 12th, the 7th, the 102nd! glories such as we'll never see again! two hundred trumpets!... and such stridency! Something far better than Roland's thickety-thackety quickety-quackety horn!³ scratchy reverberations from his drums!

So you see I'm depicting everything for you!... nothing left out... so you won't die without knowing what the Review of the Great Souls was all about! France! in July! and the families of supporters gripping on to the mill, the wings, the ivy, shouting! There are sublime moments, what can I say!... the weighing-in, the diplomats, you represent sumptuous things!... all the Top Brass of Paris!... some memories overwhelm you... you recall them, you go all wonky, you're reeling with emotion!... I'm okay, my ass is glued!... I teeter, I sway! I don't fall!... trunk forward!... trunk backward!... I can't fall!... "Chaaaarge!" all the Top Brass of Paris!... high up in the tribunes! the little guy up there, black as a little liquorish candy-man, that's him!... that's the President! The little pasty-faced guy!... with his little high hat: The Nation personified!... you're gasping for breath,

¹ "Les voyez-vous" - the first words to a song entitled "The dream passes" which dates back to 1906 in which soldiers from Napoleon's army appear to a young soldier.

² Names of three military bases in Paris.

³ The original gives a good example of the kind of pun lost in English: "autre chose que le Roland ronçeveux!... corneux coin coin! Peau grêle d'écho!" This is a reference to the previously mentioned Roland de Roncevaux of "*La Chanson de Roland*". "Ronçeveux" is a made-up word resembling both Roncevaux and "ronçeux", which is an adjective describing thickets.

mad with fervor! *Chaaaarge!*... if you don't believe me just look at the way they surge forward! and Flanders too!... *Chaaaarge!* General Des Urbales! Attention! one! two brigades! on the outer wing!... the tuft!... Entrayes! Entrayes!... do it all again! the general's been wounded!... the attack on Craonne! "To your standards! Rally!" you hesitate?... tough luck for you! the squadrons surge forward!... Time... Time... the tornado envelops you, spins you around, sends you flying to the devil!... didn't I warn you?... the final reprieve!... the jury, after deliberations behind closed doors, futile sentence! What can I do? the Verdict is everything! execution! where would I go to disinter your bones? Die, you dumb fuck! you wanted a Shindig, you'll get one! Auntie Estreme and company! Make up your mind goddamit!... it's three minutes to!... two minutes to!... one minute to!... like the Eiffel Tower clock!¹... there's no getting around it!... all recourse is vain! the jury members of the "First Specter" have chains for rosary beads and they're praying!... and praying!... all the members of the public are praying!... each link a century more!... another century for you to be in agony!... the more stubborn you are the more centuries you get!... they need to be distracted from their duties... them, think about it, those ghosts, they have to get revenge for their ball-and-chains... they whose sins were mere peca-dillos... who're doing Eternities... who night after night drag cartloads of metal!... are they happy to sit down and have you prancing about there, scampering out of trouble?... I see you in a pretty shroud!... Ah, your usual clever antics!... you don't want to come around to it? too bad!... redeem yourself in one go?...

¹ Radios used to broadcast the time from a "talking clock" at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

“All fame to Ferdinand! Buy it! *Fable! Fable!* All fame and billions to Ferdinand!”

If you shouted that out with all your heart from the depths of your chest cavity, you'd already feel a lot better! Not quite redeemed! No! but you know, already, your stink... you'd smell a bit less... it's through smells that you can tell when things go better... You still won't quite have reached Sanctity! but still 'n all... still 'n all... whereas, the state you're in at the moment... can you picture yourself in front of the Judge? it'd be a massacre!... You're reduced to a bunch of slogans and blah-blah, your glottis is in your crotch, you're blabbering stupid hunks of shit, cowardly nasty things, madly denouncing people, you cover yourself in more caca all the time! put more and more umph in it! really getting it off your chest! *hoc! hoc! hoc!* broken record! don't you look cute!... I can just see myself breaking my back pleading your cause! ghastly job!... tying myself in knots... it's your slate, honey!...

“Has pillaged, outraged, tracked down, imprisoned, dirtied, a hero! he inflicted a thousand satanic acts, a thousand thousand shameful acts! appalling acts!”

Just see how the Court takes to you! How the State Prosecutor shuts you up! closes your trap! muzzles you! So what am I going to contradict? They've got it all photographed in waves! Capers, sommersaults, suspicions, deeds! Even your intentions! Yeh, you'd look great!... you're impossible to defend!... Not that I'd play it up, concede a point, go off on a tangent.... oh, not at all! nothing of that! admit anything?... Never! on the contrary, I'd lay it on ten times thicker! play the clown! hey, I'm really enjoying this!... but go on, let me touch these untouchables!... shake up these other-world jury

members!...

- Stay in your transe, pal, they're saying, keep fantasizing... we're getting a good laugh out of you!

Those who see inside you, think of the fun they're having!... those who have the penetrating "milli" waves!... I told you!... I can go on blabbing!

- Ah, this weirdo's something else! they're thinking as they clink and chime!... their bones banging into each other!...their way of grinning at the thought.

Especially since you're making a mess of it of course.

- He got his medal grabbed off of him!...

And there you go laughing your leg off! Shaking all over!... you're not even aware of your crimes any longer!

- Take pity on him! Pity on him!

I'm putting myself in a compromising position! too bad!

It's frightful to be in your situation...

The presiding judge strikes his mallet, three cops emerge, great big Cyclopes...

- Take pity on him!

But those are my last words.

They grab a hold of you, they tie you up, they skin you thoroughly alive! your hide is steaming!...

It's written, it's the Code... "Outrage against good people: *Reversal!*...", the "Code of the Specters"... not three! ten penances!... just a single one!... and who gives a willy about the "circumstances"!... the Law is all! I break my back, I want them at least to

give you back your hide! I'm sublime, you'll grant me that!...

Tra-la-la!

- How long? how wide? Clerk, take note!

All I can get them to do is to "take note"!

And you there who's howling, steaming! and it all starts up!... after the fleecing, the crunching!... roasting and darding!... they vivify your deep wounds, they powder them with their own spices... bet your ass you jig high again after that! look at those legs go!... there'll be no weakening on the butcherblock... they want none of that! They whip you up into quite a farandole! aren't you the sight! dancing like the devil! all around the Prosecutor!... and then a variation on the Tarentella!... with very quick lively steps!... with other inflections! other lutes!... and then all of a sudden a hundred trombones! letting rip right there! thunderous rumblings! it's as if you're shot up stark naked! Spinning around like you're the egg on top of the water spout!... you're the egg! Devilish damnation with all kinds of laughing choral accompaniment! violet laughing! yellow!¹ green! red! ruff raff on edge! piggy giggling, oinking!... the thigh-slappers, the more-than-silly, can't even say it, like some dumb wooden box with the cover that keeps popping open and slamming shut: *pop! pop!* and even stupider than that!... so much so that you die of chagrin at the sound of it, even though you're there oozing blood, in strips of flesh, outraged at the too too stupid laughter... but the Clerk won't let you die... If he doesn't go at you again with that whip! lash!... it's his job! Thrasher of the Great Felons!... his birch is crackling, the tip

¹ "Rire jaune" or to laugh yellow is a French expression meaning to laugh in order to dissimulate one's anger or humiliation.

all aflame!... He knows how to revive your zeal!

- You gonna laugh, you shredded Wimp? Laugh yourself blue? You gonna laugh yourself green?... yellow?

And the strappado starts all over again!... your complete splintering!... each member of the tribunal takes the martinet in turn and vies with the others to plump up your zeal!... you spin around but good!... you imagine?... special prize in the Tarentella stakes!... your ass beaten raw...

I won't seem to be enjoying it too much... Oh, not at all!... they lard you, they brown you... they interrupt their rosary, they roast you alive, it's their kicks... didn't I warn you?... *Extremis!*

Quick, disavow your villainies before hell engulfs you! shout out your confession! bleat it out! that you'll never again wind up a coward, a double dealing, bile-spewing, dumb informer jerk...

But be careful! the confession can't be whispered! half farted out! Oh no! You gotta shout it from the rooftops! Stentorian tones! so the echos couldn't get any stronger! the echos should go on forever!... on forever... on forever...

"Hardon renounces his Error! desists! cleanses! rights himself! Dedicates himself!"

Louder than the one in 115 I hear you! than the arsonist!... louder than 27! louder than the Banshee!

"Hardon renounces his Error! Hardon renounces his Error! Dedicates himself...! Dedicates himself...! Dedicates himself...!"

Don't try to convince them coyly! No, no, no! Make it clamorous!

“Buy *Fable!* “Buy *Fable!* the book that rejuvenates your soul! makes your belly belly-laugh! turns your cares to dust!... likewise your moods, woes and wounds!... turns pink, dilates, rates, berates! pocondria!¹ not just any old work! not just any old words! *Fable*, and that's that!”

You gotta be categorical.

No embarrassed murmurings as if you were shitting in your pants, asshole!... No, no, no!... it must be in broad daylight in a public place! vociferated! At the crossroads, in a square, at the Tuileries, for example!... hey, maybe at the Halles, even better!... where there's lots of people, at the fishmarket!... you take charge, you exalt, your voice is the only thing that can be heard... you cover the storm of gaping mouths, auctions, wagons, messengers...

- Fasting and *Fable!* *Fable* of the senses and of the passions! and a laugh! He who reads *Fable* dines. He who reads *Fable* is no longer hungry. Ever! you can do without ortolan!... you can do without Houdan chicken, paupiettes, sweetbreads, but *Fable!* You can do without puking up your liver, your gall-bladder (in such a state!) but *Fable!* Quick, go get the Little Sisters so that they can rid you of the toxins! excesses! leg of lamb! beans! truffles! partridge! at the Little Sisters of the Poor, at St Eustache, the whole lot of it, at St Vincent de Paul's ! ortolans, bries you can't get for love nor money, benedictines, Medocs, pheasants! Sacrifice it all! Buy *Fable!*

Revolution in Les Halles! and it's not over yet! It's just beginning!... a hop, skip and a jump! the Stock Exchange! 1 pm! Three leaps! the steps! I see you camped out,

¹ Short for “hypocondre”/“hypochondria”, in former times the name of an illness. It seems to be used here as an exclamation.

screeching your lung out!

- Fuck the stocks and bonds! fuck the “Rios” and the “Tintos”!¹ Clerks, cretins, cuckolds, gogos, you go buy anything else and you’re dead! Wipe out the List!²

The Paris Stock Exchange at your mercy! All the lost souls rush in!... The columns collapse, curl up!... all gone!... An enormous cloud rises up over Paris... the sky darkens all black... it’s the Stocks! up in smoke!... You shed a tear, that’s all. You collect your wits and oop! your Evangelization begins! just the beginning!... the Champs Elysées!... Another crowd! The marahadjahs! cocktails!... the trend setters... it’s that time of day! The setters, the set, the settled, the unsettled, the senders, the sent! You dig in! port! stout! flip!... on to the sidewalk!... get me a table!

At your feet, awestruck, subdued, the most fatuous people in the world, the most frenetic vainglorious people...

- If you haven’t got *Fable* you’re just a crummy bumpkin! Shit-kicking loser, ignoramus, barbarian! You’ve got a future in getting fucked up the ass!

That’s your public confession!

Just see how things hop then!... you lay it on thicker!... you show them the crack in your ass!...

See this? Thanks to *Fable* it’s twice the size!

They’ve turned around.

¹ Rio Tinto was a company quoted on the stock exchange.

² Apparently a reference to the *Cote Desfossés*, a newspaper giving listings of stock quotes.

I see you looming over these huddled masses, tongue-lashing them with it! What a scene!...

They file out one after the other, quacking, whistling, squeaking...

Fable! Fable! nothing else will do!

The women go nuts. The men go nuts.

They rush to lambast the Judge! shake his gates for him!¹ Paris is boiling over!...

Oh, but you're not off the hook yet!... Eight o'clock, appointment at the Place des Ternes!... There, your final propaganda coup! swarms and swarms of people, black fever, the gorgements and disgorgements of the metro! Movies! public meetings! nudy shows, semi-nudy shows!... they go out, they go in!... you stop them in their tracks!... I see you imposing your will on them from on high!... haranguing them from a bench!

- So where do you think you're going, little lad and lady bugs?... all you chambermaids in heat, jittery priests, lousy bookkeepers, Sapphic schoolgirls, prostatic widowers, Fualdès' livestock,² shopkeepers on the skids, peasants without eggs, snotted lawyers, where do you think you're going?... Throw money away you don't even have to get swallowed up by fake-tit girly shows, by fake hells, phoney politicians, fake tunes, bullshit-artists! Get a hold of yourself, you would-be curiosity seekers! get a copy of *Fable!* that's all you need! Go home with just a copy of *Fable* under your arm!... you don't need to talk about this, about that, about the other thing! You don't need to reason!

¹ The Paris Courts are surrounded by high iron-work gates.

² Fualdès was the victim, and not the perpetrator, of a famous murder in 1817, which gave rise to a popular song sung for many years.

You don't need to understand anything! You can do without the Blessed Sacrament! you can do without looking up!... looking down!... sideways... the calves a few feet away from you... the planes ten... twenty... a thousand meters high!... your goddam nose way down at the bottom of your wallet!... buy *Fable*! the rest you can take a torch to!... every last bit of it! What are you waiting for? citizens! high-yeenas! loose little lads and lassies!

How your words will be greeted! Such hurrahs! But just go get toppled from your high horse, oh ye crowd's idol!

To the cop-shop with you! you pile of shit! you liar!

See if you're not pummeled, garrotted, pelted!... Oh, but you're as stout-hearted as a lion! roaring, biting, lacerating!

- *Fable! Fable!* the Code can go fuck itself!

The cops knock out seven or eight of your teeth... the Press takes note... it's no longer a launching, it's a stampede... I'm dragged into Court¹ again, you with me! all hell breaks loose!

That's how things go with our friend Bozo, but imagine it otherwise... just imagine you're really not well... sick, bedridden, crabbed... you've got a right to be!... you've had your problems, you're worried... Oh, you don't feel like laughing now, do you?... you're in the grip of some nasty disease... cancer, let's say... don't go making out you're surprised!... you've been haunted by the idea for a good while now!... how many hours have you wasted already staring cross-eyed up your asshole?... turning yourself upside

¹ Céline was sued in June 1939 for anti-Semitic remarks in Ecole des Cadavres.

down and inside out, a mirror in front of you, a mirror behind, crouched down, your arms and legs all over the place, weeping, your nose in your hemorrhoids, sniffing at yourself over and over again?...

No ifs, ands or buts! I know what you're like! The one and only exercise that makes any sense when that certain uncertain moment comes is the on-your-knees! the super-bend into an O! into a Z! the entire torso arched over, like a bridge, at the hips! your head between your legs deployed and redeployed under your testicles... so the entire body forms a J! a Y! your nose busy being pressed between your buttocks! Oh, my God your schnoz is stained! right there and everything! how did it get stained? is it caca or blood?... and the universal question! you start all over again! panting from the very bottom of the hole, your body inside out! sink that schnoz in! deeper! come on!... doubled four times over... six... seven times over... breathe it in... more! more! go to it! "to be M.D. or not to be M.D.?" what the hell do you think? nothing at all!... just your hole!... your fartbox inside out!... dive back in again with gusto!... pyuush!... till your lungs can't take it any more!... you suffocate! and pyuush again! right to the tail end of the sonofabitch!

- Help! Help! duh?... duh? my ass?... Your nose in clots of what? who?

- Duh? Duh?... oh, my God! Doctor! Oh, my all! Duh? Duh? of what?

In the vice-grip of your buttocks, inside out, as if suspended, stomach churned in anguish...

Not just one specialist... ten! twenty! a hundred!

"Duh... duh... my ass?" You've already been to see the specialist... "Doctor!

Doctor!... my daughter! my wife! my mother! my nephew Lucien! my castles on the Loire!

the contents of my twelve safes! it's all yours for a new ass! I'll give it all to you!..."

You've been back twenty times! They examined your ass till they were cross-eyed... nose out of joint, nodding... plugged up your asshole but good... stuck gauze up there ten... twenty times!... hum?... hum?... nodding again, re-whiffing... you got more and more confused... the number of times you went at it yourself, *at home!*¹...

- Get me the Larousse! Get me the Larousse!² Help!

You've gobbled up twenty Larousses! old ones, new ones!... panic makes your hole so tight that you have to go back in there with a vengeance, farther and farther!

Ah, shitkickery! Iron behind! Back! Back, where the hole is! Look! look! speak! Sphinx of a hole! Tell the whole!

And there you are again, re-redoubled four times over! eight times over! Gymnastics in the mirror! three-quarters below, a half behind! Damned Larousse! How divine it must be to be a gibbon! Why couldn't the gods have made you a gibbon?... a real gibbon! infinite flexibility!... A stiff neck floors you, beats you down, ranting acrobat, your nose stuck in *caca and blood!* no mistake! deeper! go on, deeper!... one cramp and you're all twisted out of shape! a dagger shoots out of your guts!... "owww" you cry... "owww" you fall in an unconscious heap... but pain then grabs you in the lumbar region! wakes you up all right!... your doctor's there looking at you.

- Be brave, he tells you, be brave!...

Brave? Be brave? the tongs? the dagger? tearing your guts out, your kidneys raw?

¹ In English in the original.

² Dictionary publisher.

How come he doesn't talk to you about that?... how the meat inside your bones is aching... How come he doesn't see that?...

- Be brave, my friend! Up you get! A walk is what you need! Doctor's orders!

You're obedient in everything... on all fours at first... and then hunched over your two sticks... buckled over like a millenarian!... centenarian ten times over of suffering... weeping, blabbering, spewing... all tensed up over your canes... the people passing by wonder... turn around... not to them you're talking! to yourself! The whole of it! the truth! the horror of being there! rumination! over and over!

- Just hemorrhoids like grandma had?

Ah, the joy that wells up inside you all of a sudden! Jolts you! You do a flip-flop on your crutches! the joy! such joy! just little ole' hemorrhoids like grandma's?... oh, it would be just like a fairy tale! adorable! you swell with excitement! We've got Providence on the runs! as benign as Anselm's, Edward's cousin! why not, by the devil? why not? You can no longer contain yourself! Ah, renewal! Ah, hope breathes again!

But oh! too good to be true! Cowardly optimism! you can't breathe! too strong! the exaltation too high! You grunt... you're weak at the knees... you fall back to the bottom! the abyss! the abyss! It always comes back to Pascal!

- So the tumor is like Elvira's? Paul's sister's?... a huge fuckin' thing, fantastically bloody, sticking out of her sides, out of her back, from her gaping, corroded lungs...

Anxiety grabs hold of you again, you topple over.

- Aaah! Aaah! The Larousse! Get me the Larousse!

You drag yourself up again, bellowing...

- The Larousse for godsake!

Trot, trot to the Larousse!

And off you go again, upstream without a paddle...

- Home! Gotta get home!

You sink your nose into its pages again!... Page after page you cut!... all those words!... deeper, come on!... in the name of God!... deeper!... out of breath!... you'll never find out enough! What does your asshole look like?... Back on all fours again! Come on!... geneticist! anatomist! gymnast! comparative pathologist! A page torn out, single-handed! from the Larousse! and your whole body topsy turvy, your face between the crack in your ass! second step in the operation: comparison! A little clot at the end of your nose... right then and there you take a sampling *in vivo*... the truth will out!... wracking your brains for precedents in the family!... does it look like mama's anus? her final moments! on the torn-out page, there!... cross-eyed is what you are!... you're cross-eyed, one eye on the page... the other up your anus... And you can't get your uncle out of your mind! good ole uncle! his last days!... all the sorrow and the fear welled up in the throat... and you remember cousin Paul who died in a taxi... now how was it he died?... did they say it was an aneurism?... did they ever find out?... your neck bent all out of shape, in a word completely topsy-turvied under you, your nose like a fish hook up your farther...

Boy, do those intimate details come back to you!... more and more frenetic, wild...

The Family Album... The Album... the real one!... the only one!... The Rectum Album!

how? how did Leona die anyway? the minutest details of her death throes... now was that

mother's sister or only half sister?... racist, genealogist, insatiable, your foraging nose, infinite quests...

- So how did Leona die?... don't remember much about that one... Ah, foolish youth!... puzzling questions!... Unmentionable doubts!... Ah, Holy Spirit!... Charles!... Mao!... Joseph!¹ two thousand sphinxes!... that time has passed!... Passed!... Nothing!... Everything!... My heavenly kingdom for a hemorrhoid!... maybe a carcinoma like Emil?... Could be... could be after all... That's what his widow said: a carcinoma...

Ah, Holy Spirit!... Charles!... Mao!... Joseph! Who'd have thought it would be Emil? Emil who was like Hercules! Jees, what a build!... talk about vitality! and such a sweetheart! the shirt off his back!... his sister told us: he got a booboo and that was it!... *Whack!* and there you go again diving in again backwards!... Emil, of all people! unbearable to think about!... Your schnoz stays way up your rectum... you were beginning to hope again! Alas! Alas! all the horrors come welling up again!... from the depths! suffocating, praying...

- All-present God! Thee, God! Ass! Anus!...

You are heard.

- Not me, God who is good! Not me! My ass is a good boy!

Suppliant! your cries!

- Take any ass you like! spare mine! spare mine! my daughter! my wife! my son-in-law! spare mine! my girlfriend Primprenelle's, take hers! take hers! spare mine! spare mine! my dog! my little Andre too! take theirs! take theirs!

¹ Charles de Gaulle, Mao Tse Tung, Joseph Stalin.

The only real, serious, fervent prayer that isn't hot air in the air for the last two thousand years!...

If your Creator is listening!

- Twenty kingdoms for an ass in prime condition! thirty if you like! A thousand! for only a hemorrhoid!... Take back my turd-maker! give me a new one! give me two! anything you'd like!

Your infinite sincerity! Pascal's Spaces?... you've got it!... the fright! the hole! the abyss! everything! It wouldn't take much for you to become a Saint - just one less drop of blood up the anus hole!

Oh, but I'm a bit too graphic for you? Shame on those who skirt the issue! The statistics are there!... Face it!... Soon there'll be more cancer than warts! That's what the world's coming to!... the truth, period! It's an apartment you're looking for?... Nonsense! your heinie! your heinie first and foremost! on your knees! and down to the hole and look at it till you're cross-eyed! mirror in front! the other with a three-quarter view! the truth! the abyss! Pascal! the cancer's spreading!... the number of victims grows and grows... six, seven out of ten people die of it!... and mind you, not just old folks!... lots of infants, lots of little girls making their First Communion... Nature's one big tease! She's annoyed at you for something, she tickles two or three of your atoms, and there you are, all puzzled, you don't know where the hell you are!... you got two spleens instead of one, three!... an eye in the pit of your stomach!... your entire sempiternal flank busted open!... nature mascarades you... from the inside... two porcupines take root in your pleura, make themselves at home, nibble away at your diaphragm... phantasmagoria triumphs!... a whole

side of your face is bleeding, dislocated, tumefied... wads of stinking flesh fix a permanent smile on your face... nature has a laugh!

- Oh, fecund in black artifice! you sink and twist back down into your sodden turf, shivering, howling.

- Nature, you're a pile of shit!

You gotta be insulting.

So let's call off the phoney cheeriness!

I can see you're getting worse... Later on... lying down... nature works the thing very minutely for you... diversifies... the show is on the inside, in your peritoneum, not in ideas at all! no more ideas!... the drama's in your belly and no where else!... your pancreas as big as your head... then what?...

Your relations came "from two to three"... visiting hours... they won't come back... they shed a few tears... and you also stink too much!... and not, mind you, from my smell, not pellagra, that's not real! No! No! No!... the real one, pungent, that draws you, holds you, makes your head swim... Already from "the hereafter" so to speak... the *sui generis*... such a horrible stench that your relations' eyes are popping out of their heads!... they go staggering off, reeling... like this: eyes like lobsters! cousins, brothers-in-law, little Leo, auntie Extreme!... Ah, no more singing for them! No more dancing!... what a party! They were supposed to come back, they didn't. You don't expect them any more either... you don't expect anything at all any more... your brackish color, the circles under your eyes are those of the end... you're suffering the tortures of hell... as soon as your last gasp is uttered you'll be the object of a lesson at the amphitheater, masterful! the students will

be right there on your navel... two of them there want to incise you this way... a discussion ensues... two others completely disagree... they'd rather incise you from the top, from the sternum... from the manubrium... they decide on very wide cuts section by section... your thorax forming two wings, all the junk inside you out! into the formaldehyde! the good thing about it is with your pancreas as big as it is, it can stay that way, sticking... they have their techniques... you have no say in the matter... the supervisor gives you a dirty look... you're lingering, she's thinking... your bed's needed by twenty-five of the city's operable people... their families are prowling around the hospital grounds... a whole crowd waiting for you to fuck off!... your drawers have been jarred open, overturned, rummaged around in a hundred times over!... it's as if your watch is already gone... you can piss in your pyjamas all you like... no more urinal!... they don't bother taking your temperature any more... the head doctor passes in the corridor... he barely touches your doorknob... he doesn't come in... he forbids the trainees to enter... enough's been done...

The bunch of jerks moves off... *grumbling*.

You wind up really pissed off! shitty goddam mess!

- Pigs! Traitors! Cowards! that's what you shout at them... and then you can't any more.

- Lazy bastards! Vampires!

You're drunk on morphine and pain!... Excruciating pain... the term is no longer in the dictionary, "excruciating"¹... yet it was a rich term, it grabbed you by the gut... your

¹ "Excruciantes" in the French, as Céline points out here, is no longer a word in common use in French. The word "excrucier" was found by Professor Godard in a pre-WWI encyclopedia and a 1930 edition of *Larousse du XX siècle* with the meaning of "to

ear couldn't forget it... the conspirators suppressed it... they had to!... it was their job!... to impoverish, weaken our language!... so much so that pretty soon, even at the hour of our death, you'll no longer be able to belt out a good death rattle... you'll have to borrow nice words from Volsky, Syriopersian, Englangue.

Oh, land whose soul has been occupied! Oh, debasement of a subject people! Oh, shameful circumstances!... Fine! The historians are scratching their heads... getting worked up... don't know how to tackle France!... but *Fable!* on the other hand! *Fable!*

With *Fable* everything's different!... the circumstances are tragic, but you're more than equal to them!... your morale is extraordinarily high!... Scoundrel! you heave a last gasp! joker! Death? By God's killer!... do it right!...

- Blessing!... Dying man's honor! the pig makes me laugh!

That's what they say, and it's true, how you react... the joker you are!... thanks to *Fable!*... for only 2 pounds 50! you turn into some kinda Socrates, not at all pompous, thanks to *Fable!*... dying's a breeze!... The Ancients die, it's a goddam pain in the ass for everybody... the proof: even today you gotta read the bastards if you want a degree!... moral fibre! everyone agrees, except brother François and Pierre Laval¹... Ah, give this kind of death the bum's rush! bring on the flute! the lute! let's create!... so the dead man can laugh his way there! that's the idea! the guy gets to kick the bucket of laughs! so I

torment cruelly.

¹ Pierre Laval and François Mauriac are here taken as witnesses to the torments of dying, the former because he was executed after trying to poison himself, and the latter in recognition of his articles in favor of those sentenced to death for war crimes after WWII.

pray you! My Statue! My Square! My Esplanades! My City! Célinegrad!, that's it.
 Célinegrad! the least they can do! Capital City! You've got Glory or you haven't got
 Glory! fourteen virtuous maidens and the Orpheon! But you gotta do your bit right now!
 Help me! a bit of effort here! don't just mumble under your breath! No! out loud! louder!
 let the echos resound! fracas and fricassee! clouds! storms! from the underbelly of
 Gonesse to Vrioshima! From Kamutchazki to Bécon!

- Don't go off and die without *Fable*!

That's the word I'm waiting for! the book is launched! I embrace you! what a
 heady picture!... activity all over the place! ... the poles!... the tropics!... everything gives...
 clients keep coming at me from every direction!... nobody wants to die any longer without
 a good laugh!... the wholesalers do battle with each other over pyramids of my works!...
 blood all over what's left of my stock!... See if I don't make a huge comeback despite the
 hatred and blah-de-blahs spit out by the Artrons!... I'm back up there with a million
 copies!... think of all those poor sad people dying! there're plenty of them! plenty!... and
 you can't reason with them, not at all!... *Fable* is all they want! and music!... two or three
 singing parts! While I'm on the subject, you have to learn how to sing!... Not that I can
 teach you here!... the ass glued the way it is! All I can do is hum... the guts all tied up in
 knots with hard caca... haven't been able to go for two weeks... not to mention the
 lunatics who've been perturbing me!... I mean the cells to the left, to the right... the cries
 of the encaged enraged... my poor old noggin!... on top of my own personal noises ... the
 buzzings in my eardrums!... my ears are drums!... drums and lesions!... my microscopic
 inner ear!... it treats me to the sounds of twenty-five brass bands!... not to mention the

train noises, of course!... not one train!... two, three, sometimes four!... When the Banshee makes up his mind, finally, throws himself into it, bashes his head in, breaks down the wall! Oh, la, la! Marvel of marvels! relief! real Banshee! mind you, the skull flattened! old Banshee, real neighbor-prisoner! Idle threats? No idle threats about it! He'd knock down my wall in all sincerity! I'd need thirty-six guys like him! his kisser under the whole pile of them! make his head a pancake for him! that'd shut him up finally!... if the guards were less drunk, if they didn't blow their whistles for every goddam piddling thing, if they'd stop fiddling with the twenty thousand latches... and if they poisoned the seven dog packs!... Ah, the seven dog packs! Seven packs of them outside barking!... then I could talk to you more intimately... not bothered by anyone!... because it's humiliation itself, brutal, the last straw, that you're fuckin nuts and a thousand times worse, the noise from the iron bars! *crrrrttt! crrrrttt!* that never stops! the way the guards get their kicks here let me scrape the bars for you! and re-scrape the bars for you!... the harp of the iron bars! they run their keys through them! *crrrrttt! crrrrttt!* the whole cavernous inside of the enormous ship of flesh crackles, clanks... along with the whistle blasts!... you should hear it!... if they stopped banging the doors it'd be a few castagnettes less!... it's all castanets and locks around here!... *tac!* and *crrrr!* castanet storms!... You expect me to go teaching you my notes, my little song, here in this din?... and the clogs tramping all over the place?... the endless clogs... I didn't tell you about that... one after another... *clomp!* *clomp!*... it's as if there were a deck up there at the very top of the prison... they hit the rungs... *clomp! clomp!* it's the prisoners lined up one behind one other... like kids, their hands behind their back... as if there were a deck in the air, a crosswalk above the smoked

glass... they pass in front of my doorstep... right there... *clomp! clomp! clomp!*... they pass, they go up one side... the other!... they hit the rungs again, go down to the cages... *clomp! ...clomp!*... endless... another line... another!... from dawn till dusk... it's the eternal maneuver of the vessel's hollow, the huge time-devouring ship, men inside, clogs all in a row... *clomp!* their hands like kids behind their backs right outside my doorstep... all the door latches clanging... clanging... here they go again, once... twice... this door and others... always others!... as if they were dancing but you couldn't see! a whistle blow and they speed up!... a ballet of passersby... of kids... *clomp!... clomp!*... Oh, but I'm not going to leave out Hortensia! that libidinous ectoplasm, the Underling from the Embassy, Louis XV! he provokes me at the second bar... from my very own cell window:

- I've got high heels, scoundrel! high heels!

He's heckling me! I can't repeat it all to you...

Love Louis XV! he demands of me, love Louis XV!

Not Louis XV! you villain! you're lying!

I balk.

- Vampire! cesspool! bluffer! pig!

That's what I say!

I don't care how low a spot I find myself in, whoever indulges in such defamation has to deal with me! This lustful Louis XV is one thing, but such vulgarity? Never!

He sees he's made a mistake.

- Take Louis XVI then! take Louis XVI! take Henry IV!

I absolutely have to ... a king! he proposes Louis the Large to me!... Charles X!...

he puts a ruff around his neck.

- Henry III!

As an ethereal substance, he does what he likes... he picks at a goatee on his chin...

he tears it off...

- Dagobert, what about Dagobert?

He rests a little crown on his head.

- I don't want to stuff anybody, sonofabitch... Get beyond me, Satan!

That's how I show myself! Morale above all! my honor! in the worse than worst distress!... all right so he is a bit of ectoplasm... so he has all the rights at my window... so?... does that mean he can put on airs?

Even if he were Saint Louis it wouldn't change anything! Saint Louis was the one who said "Dig it in to them deep, etcetera!"¹ Impeccable, my nature! that's all! virgin, you might say... he shows up on me all teary-eyed the next day... at dawn...

- Why won't you hand yourself in to your country? huh?

He attacks me in my most sacred, weakest spot - patriotism - so weak I'm dying from it... He's heard about it, the monster!... my weakness for the lore of my land!... in tears he talks to me about Bezons!... he's blubbing, blubbing! a terrible sight, a black man sobbing!... looks like an animal being beaten... he's Louis XV, black, ectoplasm...

¹ While writing *Fable*, Céline was also suing the German writer Ernst Junger for attributing anti-Semitic remarks to him in his "Journal" which had recently been translated into French. Céline refers to Saint Louis's anti-Semitic exhortations ("As for laymen, when they hear [Jews] speak ill of the Christian faith, they should defend it in no other way than by the sword, they should drive it into the belly of their adversary as deeply as it will go.") around this time in a letter to his publisher in which he also denies ever having made the remarks attributed to him by Junger.

- You're gonna get me fired! Boo hoo!... you're gonna have me lose my cushy fill-in job!... come on, be nice... go sacrifice yourself!

That's the way he talks at my window...

- You're heartless! that's what he says...

He tries everything!

- Return to France!

He doesn't stop tormenting me, playing on my homesickness!... and don't think I'm not affected!... that I don't suffer terribly from being so far away!... no longer to have the gabbing, the wisecracking around me, my kind, city-slickers, low-lifes, schnooks, misfits, pimps, stool pigeons... ah, dear Estreme!

Sorrow worse than aching in the bones, the ass sticking, the teeth dropping out, worse than the flesh melting, the eyes oozing, or the broken down trains in the tunnels that whistle and whistle: longing for the old sod! that's the worst of all!

Oh, by the way! while I'm thinking about it, I'm crazy! I'm supposed to deliver up to you my sufferings, the likes of such torments, for 2 pounds 50? you should be ashamed of yourself! with song? words? music?

Ney, *Six pounds* or your hide! That's my price! Think I'm crazy? what the fuck! not every day of the week you get such magical gifts! Take a flying leap at yourself!

Just think about what they read out there! what they're crying over, giggling over, getting their kicks from, in the railways or sitting on Juries! the Genius Prizes they're giving each other over! shit! and shit! You can't ever pay enough for the likes of these adventures! in direct French not translated? heavens!... not to mention the laughs!... It's

not a villa I expect from it all, it's two! on the Emerald Coast! and through enthusiastic advance sales! and four maids to open the doors as well as a telephone that goes inter-city and regional, unlisted number! Not even René's tomb will do at this point, his hole in Bé... it'll be offered to me of course!... It's my own mausoleum I want, lit night and day, at the spot, you see where I'm talking about, where they have the movies in the summer, where all the families come in chorus, and the lovers and the alcoholics, where the puppies do peepee all over the consoles, the little round tables, the adults ones prefer to pee against the movie kiosk, where four movies play at a time, so the heads turn to see, unscrew right off... *vrsss! vrsss!* spin around like tops... you can hear the necks spinning all over the sidewalk cafes, plus the cries of passion... I want to hear it all from my coffin!... I don't want to be interred beyond the walls!

That's René's sorrow, he's "beyond the walls"! Me, I want laughing fits! I want everything! I want the gasps! I want the neck noises!... *tsss! tsss!* I want all the emotional upheaval of all four films... I want the slaps in the face! *clic! clac!* the whacks in the jaw! when the drinkers start clobbering each other, when it's the armed conflict of tastes!... the struggle!... fever! outside the cafes swell up... the police blow the whistle!... the carafes: *plunk!* go flying! hit their mark! if it weren't for the carafes the heads would keep on spinning for years *vss! vss! vss!* after the films! All at once, they take aim! the little round tables are thrown all over the place, they break everything! the glasswork! the gangster fans won't tolerate the Chaplin devotees, the ones in the spell of that vamp Daisy tear down the other guys' screens, descend on those filthy fans next door! the ones obsessed

by that Lee Poms girl!¹ A battle the likes of which will not be seen again!

You know the Grand-Place? The one with two movie kiosks. Even if the ramparts are ground to a pulp, blown to the skies, my spirit will be there and that's the end of it!... It's the only place I want to be, in my Mausoleum! Bastille Day will have come and gone? So be it! They'll always be able to declare other holidays! and better ones! much more exalted ones!... crowds you've never seen! Holidays are endless fallings in love!... They'll declare marvelous ones! and the dogs, their owners will come exactly where I say, to drink, to applaud, to do peepee... The movie kiosks will have capsized, they'll be lying down flat, the ones that got drowned, rusted, I'll be the only one left to do it on... during the day I'll have the sea birds... ole René where he is, an isolated spot, no light, you can imagine the number of people who go on him!... it's a never-ending procession, "hand in hand" of the idylls, and those who prefer to do it alone... sullen dreamers... all of them go shit there on the granite!... I have no desire to be so sullied myself! They'll only be able to pee where I'm telling you...

- So you can imagine the Pantheon!

- In truth! In truth! I'm not that fond of the void and of glory!... the place is spotless but dismal, the Pantheon... bolted down, sealed, etc.... Oh, such solitude among the dead! No! Heavens! I want people around!

You see, just between us, I'm trusting you, unveiling the course of things for you... but you're not such a brute, you wouldn't be one of those up at the Rampart? at the

¹ There was a silent film star named Lila Lee, or Augusta Appel. "Pomme" in French means apple. The "vamp Daisy" cannot be identified.

Kiosk?... waiting for me?... It's amazing how many people there are at the Saint-Malo gate!... You'll be waiting upon events... waiting to see me pass by on my bike!... "ultra-fine" bike!... pedaling like the devil!... my "Imponder"! your mouth hanging open... stammering!...

- Him?... Him?... Is it?... Is it?... dead?... dead?... alive?... buried?... Mausoleum?... him?... him?

Pale, your eyes popping!

Because, don't you see, I'll give nothing up!... Alive?... Dead?... for me, well, absolutely not important!... I get out of here, *Fable* sweeps me away!... you'll only ever see me again on a bike... two, three bikes! No more wheelbarrows, no, no, no!... no more of Ciborium's brutal treatment!... no more of the Academy's henchmen! with their funny hats or without their funny hats! Odes to sell!... High Officials like Girouette! Bogmoleff prostate glands!¹ Plague upon the rabble! You bet I'll get rid of aunt Extreme and her gang! wrap the whole lot of them up in a parcel! and the songs! I'm keeping only my bicycle!... my two bicycles!... my maid, so there!... my two maids to open the doors!... a pot to boil my syringes in!... everything set up to facilitate my practice!... that's dedication!... more than dedication!... called out night and day!... all the same a little bit of travel here and there... I don't want to leave Montmartre just like that!... I've got my memories, attachments... I get off the train at Montparnass I cross all of Paris by bike... what a sensation!... the rue de Rennes... the Samaritaine... swing up around the Ile Saint-

¹ Alexander Bogomoletz (1881- 1946) was a Russian biologist who invented a serum used in surgery and thought from 1945-1950 to be a rejuvenating agent.

Louis... I go back up the rue de Rivoli... a minute at the Palais-Royal... I have the dreamer's bench right there in front of the canon ... I'm afraid someone might recognize me... About face! back into the saddle!... Rue de Rome!... in a flash!... Rue de Rome! the Pont de l'Europe!... the old man with wings!... the ghost come back!... the Caulaincourt bridge!... I take it!... ole Julot hears about it... that does it!... he sees me flying from one pedal to another!... he's not talking to me any more!... he's gone all sullen on me... he takes himself off into his interior... his head just a frown sinking deeper and deeper into his neck! shriveled up by all the hate at the bottom... till he's nothing but a round, headless monster... his head buried down in his belly, in his own entrails growling like mad! like some squished lump... in his gondola... propped up against the bench, clutching on to his irons¹ to kill me with... like some goddam cripple's slingshots... he saw me pedaling... been on the look-out for me since the Pont-Neuf... he's not talking any more... he's growling at me... growling at me... he sees me turn at the Gaumont Theater... he's growling at me... growling at me... from two thousand meters away!... Julot my brother, my heart, my weakness... such is the pitch of his jealousy!... he'd spend hours in his crate, propped up against the bench, right on the sidewalk, waiting for me to approach so he can wreck my bike on me and knock me out cold! green with envy is what he is!... not only on account of the bike!... everything!... even my "class of 10" which he can't forgive me for! he's a "class 11"... I got the medal before he did, okay so they took it off me!... you'd

¹ In his descriptions of "Julot", fictionalization of his close friend the artist Gen Paul, Céline often has him clutching irons, the kind of irons used for pressing clothing. People without legs used to navigate around on their fists, using irons for support.

think that would've made him feel better... who cares?... He got the Legion of Honor for his heroism and his wound, one hundred thirty percent, lost both legs... That's what you call compensation!... I was really happy about that... when he got his Legion of Honor!... I hear about it one evening on the radio... I say, Tomorrow, son! at the crack of dawn! I was still living with my mother at the time... at first light I go up Pigalle, I knock, I wake him up!

- Hey, what'd you say?

I congratulate him! I was moved to tears!

- Don't give a fuck about the Legion! he says, your eyes!

What the hell has that got to do with it? out of the blue! my eyes!

Then point-blank:

- Did you bump into my model?

What model? which model?... What was he talkin' about, his model? He had ten of them! thirty! Sylvine?... Farinette?... Manon? Here I'd come to congratulate him and he attacks me for taking his girls! what a welcome! such bad faith!... him who was always such a sweet-talker!... Or rather! well, in a certain way... whatever he was accusing me of!... he thought I was casting spells with my eyes!... the women must have been talking to him about my eyes... stupid, idle talk! ... they knew what he was like!...

- Shoulda seen the way he looked at me yesterday!

That was enough!... he was boiling over! nuts!... if it wasn't my eyes it was something else!... if you're the jealous type any excuse will do! what? for what?... for nuthin!... because I got two legs and he doesn't any more! Oh, he found crimes too! Yes,

crimes! but he had his two arms, and me only one!... well, almost... too bad! him, his two legs sawn off, that was it! utter hatred! my eyes! my luck! my charms! go try to reason with him! If he saw me now in the hole, my ass one big scab, he'd say, ah, you got a boo-boo! You're too sensitive! your eyes! you've lost sixty pounds? how slim you are! too many babes!

I admit that for his art: sculpture, to work from his crate on rollers, was hard, almost impossible, he had to model right down on the ground! and the clay all over his floor, a soupy mess!... he got it all up his nose, he looked for shitty globs of it all over himself... at night the stuff smeared all over him like a mask, his hair full of the stuff, he'd make you laugh... the clown-in-a-crate!... and he'd get annoyed... his tastes were toward the stylish... he'd have got all gussied up, fussed over himself... he had this idea it was attractive...as well as the eyes, of course... elegance, the cut of his jacket!... because women fell for the male model type... by instinct he was a *clubman*¹... and he'd never stop looking in his mirror, his little round portable one... he was envious of the fact that even though I wasn't a sculptor, I got to fondle the behinds of my patients, as many vaginas as I wanted, there you go!... he thought all I did was touch my patients! with both hands!

- But I only have one hand, erotomaniac!

No use talking to him!...

- So maybe you've been sticking your fingers in my pots? There, for instance, my clay! my oil creams! if you didn't how come you have red all over you, glutton? or is it come-juice? or period blood?

¹ In English in the original.

which is it?

The hallucinating lunatic, he thought I had red all over my lips! He'd complain about everything, but the worst of all: soon it would be the total lack of clay! that he was ruining his last molds... that his vein was finished, his special tunnel, the only gypsum good for statues in all of Montmartre! he knew the crevice, the only crevice! him alone! and Pasco Rio¹ who was dead!... at the bottom of the Trainée Impasse on the left... But he wouldn't tell me the exact spot! not even me! the entrance to his crevice!... the only gypsum he wanted to use!...

- When all this bullshit is over with!... and my kiln! His kiln, the last one in Montmartre!... not exactly the last but almost!... in any case the only one for his gypsum... collapsed in '39!... and hey, what about my bricks? find bricks nowadays! bricks, kiln! you couldn't get anything!

- I put it in the mold, it dries, a waste of effort!

He tried to make up for it with his gouaches, anyone that happens along... The clients at the window... What they wanted was fired stuff!... terra cotta! just terra cotta!

- I'll be the one remaining ceramicist!

He'd sculpt right on the floor... little statues all over his floor... he also painted almost on the floor... his canvasses leaning right up against the wall... he couldn't paint at the easel!... and since he was in perpetual motion... like a top!... always chasing a bottle of

¹ In life Paco Durio, celebrated Montmartre ceramicist, friend of Gauguin's, he was a neighbor of Céline's, and according to him had the last kiln in Montmartre, but lacked fuel for it during the First World War. He died in 1939 shortly after being evicted from the Maquis, a sort of Artists Commune in Montmartre.

rat-gut!... some varnish!... some tube or other!... a paint brush!... he knocked everything over!... he'd crush his mock-ups... put holes in canvasses!

When he lost his temper!

- Fuck off out of here, all of you!

If they bitched, the fight was on! everything went waltzing - irons! canes! pots!... out the window! his slingshots! they'd have to come back laden down with presents... so they'd be forgiven... they'd have to find some champagne... and *chug-a-lug!*...

Chug-a-lug!... chug-a-lug!...

Here comes the Parisian Lass!

So there'd be a celebration!

And he'd start his zigzagging again... so everyone could see what a virtuoso he was...

- Make way for the gondola!

Right into their legs! bellies! right into the pots!

- Snap at my stumps!

And then he'd ram into the clients again! There'd be some yelping then! There were also liters of turpentine! his solvents!... since he was on the subject of fire, talk about fires!... the number of liters of turpentine he broke! and smoking pipe after pipe! cigars! he was playing with fire! artists are a dangerous species, you can't predict, you think he's wise... he's not!... there he goes again farting and fiddling around... he finds something under the sofa... a parcel... a letter... he puts it back where it was... damn! he says, to the sea! the window! At night, when he'd be finished, he finished late, chameleon in his crate,

yellow, orange, violet, clay all over his face... there was just the two of us, me, him, he'd given too many people a hard time... so the place was empty... and in gaslight... he used gas inside the house, under the stairway, the old kitchen... the hissing gas-mantle... reminded me of the Passage Choiseul, we also had gas-mantles at the Passage Choiseul,¹ the burners, thousands of gas-mantles... in the middle of Lent all the unwashed from the Boulevards came to warm up in the Passage, raising a din, pierrots, clowns, harlequins, marquis... what a bunch! and the old grannies, the little old men, and the youth! Such chirpings! Gas is more than moonlight, it's this wan greenish thing that stupefies you... floors you... you see strange things... people not dead, not alive, not anything... At the time these strange greenish creatures gave me hallucinations... there were so many of them! the Passage was full of them... you have to put yourself back then... middle of Lent! Make-up jobs worse than Jules'! besides the wan green light from the gas... I was describing Jules' studio for you... the royal mess!... his own fault too!... his furious gondola fury... the way he'd make a mad dash for his jars!... the way he smashed all his clay!... Jeess, the figurines! his place was a goddam mud hut!... not to mention the tubes... the turps!...

- You should have confetti!

I was thinking of the Passage Choiseul.

- What do you mean, confetti? It's a kiln I need!

Besides, like I said, in his crate, his gondola, there were all sorts of jars between

¹ The covered passageway in central Paris filled with boutiques where Céline's mother had a shop and where he spent much of his childhood.

his stumps!... for his so-called convenience... and the way he'd lunge sideways into them, he'd come out again all yellow! all these colors! red!... puddles of it!...

- Am I a paintbox or what?

- That you are!

- Rembrandt had no colors! But I have!

He had that over Rembrandt...

And right away his little round mirror!

- You're one goodlookin' fella! he says to himself.

He pissed right there in his crate... he wasn't going to go up into any john! all by himself! you had to help him, haul him out of the crate, once a day...

- I don't shit in my pants!

He'd pat himself on the back.

- You, you know all about the trans-Atlantics!¹

He begrudged me my journeys, my luxuries... superluxuries!... that I was life's spoiled brat, that I'd never wanted for anything, that him, he had to pee in his pants! his crate leaked of course... so it was all over his paints, the floor, the tubes.

Okay, he worked in a frenzy, the real artist, he couldn't interrupt his work, I admit!... to hoist himself up to the second floor! It'd have been a crime! inspiration is capricious, but God knows it doesn't like capricious behavior!... And on top of that there was the drink that made him stubborn, aggressive! His liver, and stomach!... you might as

¹ Céline's two trans-Atlantic journeys in 1934 and 1937 were made on the *Champlain* and the *Liberté*.

well say he had no liver left, just the place where it was, and the puke the next day! an alcohol-drenched sponge! should've seen the pain when I touched him there! but when he really went off his head is when I talked to him about his kiln!... and then the artistry of his anger! He'd be bouncing up and down in his crate! his whole crate! trunk, gondola, rollers!

- I'll do it all again, my friend! just wait till I find the bricks! once they've stopped all their bullshit! clay soil, that's just the ticket! stuff you can get a grip of! clay soil!

But not just any soil, the very special clay soil, that was his alone! only his! his vein! his quarry in the Impasse Trainée, the lode he told no one about... he couldn't get to it at all any more... it was walled up in concrete! On account of the Civil Defense!

And the brick problem?... what about that?... They came from the Pas-de-Calais, his bricks... the ones he needed! the Krauts were occupying the bricks! also! the factories!... they were occupying everything! so he could wait before his kiln would fire again!

Ah, the torment of being an artist! they have only one way to forget: a good stiff one and then finish off! either that or! booze! booze, booze and more booze! champagne, yes! champagne!... but who's been downing the champagne?... "They're taking everything on us!"

I couldn't say anything! me and my books! my Nostradameries! my acquaintances!... a single skeptical word? Oop! I was in for it!

- Lazy sod! pimp!...

- Okay! Fine! See you next time!...

There were already lots of others at the door... blocking each other... admirers, fans, jerks, men of the world, models, merchants... All artist studios are a bit like that... the comings and goings... the bickering, the gossip... all the tittle-tattle, who's doing who, for free or for pay... men of the world, winoes, gibes, cops, caca...

- This place is a pigsty, Ferdinand!

He realized that.

- A glass of white, Jules?

Right away, he refuses! he doesn't want any more wine! he charges into the heap! his rollers flying!... into his fans!

- Everybody out!

But there're too many of them... the door can't handle it... they're crushing each other!...

Every man for himself! They jump on the chairs, on the sofa... and on the women! the naked women! you should hear them!

He decided he wants to be alone! all alone! Because he needs time to think about things! He wants to be left alone!... for inspiration...

While I'm at it, while I'm depicting all this for you... while I'm guiding you through his little dwelling... his ceiling was something to remember... full of landscapes upside down!... all his canvasses fastened to the ceiling... a review of all his "periods"... his concierge got them up there for him...

- Me, you realize, I'm a sculptor! Painting makes me unhappy!.... one dimension!... for heaven sake! one dimension! Me, I can't live with just one dimension!

you, you can live with one dimension!... you're the flat-as-a-cockroach kind!... the stripe kind! yeh! you're made for slits! I can just see you in a slit! in a cunt, a slit!... flat... nice...

He had fits of anger painting! being deprived of clay, of a kiln, of everything!...

He got all pissed off at his clients... he took it out on the clients!..

- Say, that's nice, what you're doing, Jules!

A town hall on Bastille Day, ribbons all over the place, flags, flourishes...

- That should be able to sell, heh? Don't you think?

His irons out the window! like slingshots! and howling besides!

- Sonsobitches! Thieves! Assassins! Bring me back my irons!

People got wounded.

It wasn't so bad with the water colors... he'd shower the stuff all over them! what a sauce!...

- So I shouldn't do my tones any more?...

The jackets got drenched with it!... the overcoats!... the sidewalk turned into a rainbow...

- So go buy me some Venetian blinds then! You think I'm not gonna mix my tones?

Hanging off their hinges, his Venetian blinds... they dated back to the Commune... not only his blinds!... the whole kit and caboodle!... everything was falling down, moldy... the whole neighborhood was supposed to be renovated, the whole block and the Maquis¹

¹ The Maquis, at the northern side of the Montmartre hill, was at the turn of the century a sort of territory onto itself, inhabited by artists and marginal types. It progressively got torn down and replaced by the new buildings on Avenue Junot, Rue

behind it... they'd been talking about it since the Commune... four wars had come and gone... four post-wars.

- Why don't you buy me some blinds?

Not the worst, not just envy that was marinating in his noodle, the Venetian blinds also pissed him off!

Rotten disposition, Jules, what else can you say?... I'm talking as a friend, and a faithful one!... the worst, sour, poisonous old maid... his little portable mirror, smart, he'd look at himself in the mirror a hundred times a day..

- I'm falling apart just like Rembrandt!

He'd get all upset.

- Pass me a drop!

Because that called for a gin!... a little glass or two!...

- I look at myself, I see myself, you, you don't see yourself at all! I see myself huge!... then minuscule!... a little pea I see myself!... the proof that the real artist creates himself!... you, you're a cockroach, the cockroach all he sees himself as is a cockroach!... I will recreate myself, my friend!... I'll find my lode!... my kiln!... Painting? water! turpentine! the cold!

Really miserable substances!

He was sneering...

- Ceramics, my friend! fire!... The only thing I paint for is the chug-a-lug! to drink!... the Creator's clay? On your knees! If I were Adam, I'd cast me an Eve!... You're

Girardon and Rue Saint-Dereure.

not gonna find out where my vein is!... You'd go and tell the Krauts!... all you see is gouaches... just gouaches! that's all! Water!

He was giving me his beady eye treatment...

He painted a lot of Infantas... everybody wanted an Infanta¹... with no legs just about he'd make them... almost on the ground, little, and hunch-backed... just like him.

- If I dressed all loose like that I'd be like them!... my gondola under my skirts!

It's true, he made them his size!... he gave them faces like his...

- Can you see me as the Infanta? Wait till I get my kiln!

The bee in his bonnet!... he'd do Infantas in terra cotta!

- You don't do Infantas in terra cotta!

One other month there was "Villages with Columns of Enlisted Men"! also very much sought after!... and the "Finishing Line at the Bicycle Races"... For a moment he reconsidered... didn't look at himself in the mirror... he reconsidered his Periods... the Fortifications Period... his ceiling... how he'd walk from one city gate to the other! how he used to find some "motifs", boy, before they took a saw to him!... all the gates!... Saint Denis!... la Chapelle!... Auteuil!... every slope... every bastion... and then his "sea" period... Le Tréport... the beach stones... the jetty... a few of Dieppe... Looking at his ceiling...

- Mural! I'm a mural man! I could paint you a Sistine Ceiling just like that!

Wouldn't that be one helluva pecker! Jesus!

And he showed me how it would be! his arm! stickin' out!

¹ Gen Paul did a lot of reproductions of Spanish paintings.

More often you could be sure, sure as shootin', there'd be little commissions... you'd go in... just when he was splashing paint all over the place!... he'd be decorating a little town hall... flags, pennants, lanterns!... knocked you in the face!... and your suit! You bitch? you protest?... the hell! His irons! the broom!

No legs on him, but you could do nothing! he had the last word!

And what's more he'd scream for help! - Sex maniacs! Thieves! Assassins!

He got the whole street worked up against us!

It was too much of a scandal... no arguing!... we had to flee!... Ah, that was one abject character! and all delighted to be horrible!... and an absinthe sponge! and he could knock back the red like nobody's!... should've heard him puking... for hours... not to mention all those poisons he sucked in!... Varnish, paints, zinc paste... Nutjob, he licked everything!... He'd get the bottlenecks mixed up, he'd mistake the turpentine for white wine!... Vouvray! the palate shot, paints, resin... I took care of some paint poisonings in my day... not an animal alive who would've held up to what ole' Jules sucked in!...

What is more, he'd bite his nails!

- Stop biting!

Okay! He'd start kneading his thighs again, his bits of stump that were always hurting him... another obsession...

- Stop flaying yourself alive! Stop it!

He'd start fiddling around at the bottom of his bucket, his clay, his piss... he wound up ulcerating the whole lot!... he'd get infected... Oh, I knew his stumps all right!

- Stop touching! Stop touching them!

- Go f...

He was showing me! One endless laugh! What a joker, what a pig, ole Jules! The way his clients would slap their sides! the models! his whole place shaking with laughter! Priceless ole Jules... They weren't the least bit scandalized... He was coming in his bucket... rascal triumphant, glorious ole Jules!

- He'd make a dead man laugh!

Always a bunch of nosy people watching at his windows... mugs, walking disasters, pipes, semi-queers, tourists, concierges...

Where I've seen him extremely fussy, you might even say dying over it, is when he was dead set on a gouache... enthralled in some artistic enigma... He'd have killed you! especially during a hot spell... in July or August for example, July and August are awful in Montmartre!... You could fry an egg on Gaveneau Avenue... the sidewalks gave off fumes!...

All of a sudden he'd have his Alpine conniption!... Off to the mountains!... the ice!... All he could think about was the Engandine summits... bluish summits... a whole other set of colors!... he'd use these terrible whites!... so toxic!... veritable "death-to-rats"!... he'd just suck it in!... lick it!... Such insouciance!... Clutch on to his gondola!... grip it, bawling!... colic! he'd be shot through with pain all of a sudden!... then he'd have to have a rinse... and another! and another!... and only champagne would do!... talk about S.O.S.!... and his gondola full of caca!...

- Champagne or I'll die!

Then everybody had to step to it, fans, pals, models, merchants, go back out into

Paris! find him some “Mum”!... and only “Mum brut”!...

They’d bring it back to him!... the tyrant!... some people deprived their own, their parents, their mothers!... that’d saved some for a special occasion... for a sickness... others robbed their friends! All for Jules! and not so much as a thank-you! nothing! He’d knock it back in one go!... Chug-a-lug! A burp! That was it... The window-watchers would come up, they were thirsty too!... They took the liberty of saying something... some word or other... battle royal!

- Come in here and say that, you lazy bastards!

Some guy who didn’t know any better... he dared... a newcomer...

One step... a quick little manoeuvre... and then *plumpf! plop!* Irons! canes! bottles! the guy’s kisser! Ah! Hee! Ah! Hee! Ole Jules’s got no legs but he’s got arms!... what an aim, amazing!... the dexterity of a monkey!... terrible!... every projectile hits its mark!... He had a monkey’s hearing too, what a sense of hearing!... He had strength too!... and guile!... so the guy gets clobbered! got the hell out of there fast! squealing! bleeding!...

- After the murderer!

Jules would be shouting after him! that they should catch him! finish him off!... so when you think about it, why should I take myself up there? Sure!... I think about it... I come out of the Rue Burcq at a sprint! lithe! I mean can you imagine, my “Imponder”?... he smashes it up, my two wheels!... veritable spider webs... the whole cycle only five kilos! So delicate as it soared!... he rams me! He catapults me! He crushes me! When he gets going on two irons! Jees! he’d leave a bus breathless, the strength he has! Me go and challenge him, are you kidding? It’d be the end of me!

I'd be at the "Français"! He'd know about it!... I mean Place du Théâtre Français... he's got the senses of a rhesus monkey! Ultra-fine hearing!... He was getting ready... It'd be my own fault! agreed! I mean he's the sorcerer after all!... quite ruthless, quite ferocious, sly as bedamned, ham-artist, abject, but all the same legless at this point, wallowing in his shit... sawn off in 1914!... him who used to be the fast walker! the one who could chase "motifs" to beat the band!... his easel everywhere!... fortifications at Robinson... Arpajon... Bougival... the banks... Suresnes... and now look at him, the crack-pot in a crate, dribbling...

Very delicate task, reasoning with him.

- Okay, so you lost your legs at the Marne!... but one hundred forty percent you got! you got the pay-off! you got the Legion of Honor!...

- Shut your trap!

So I shot back at him...

- And don't forget about my head wound! and my arm!

That was also true.

- You're only seventy-five percent! not like me, a human latrine!

The ultimate last word!... the kind of "Court of Miracles" thug who wouldn't've put up with anybody nosing in on his territory... he'd've really ganged up on me!... let's say me next to him... the "Court of Miracles" all to himself!... because I had the plague a thousand times over, the pox a thousand times over... that they had to burn me and the others!... the "Court of Miracles" all to himself!... for him alone!... because all the others were rapists, blasphemers all around him! one hell of a sulphurous bunch!... one lousy

rotten band of crooks! gluttonous cry-baby rejects! frauds! me especially! me, his bosom buddy! You bet he'd've denounced my ass! to the Pope! to the King! to the Devil! He'd've broke his back to get my ass quartered!

Where he was funnier though -- I mean not funny at all, just the same old tired rehashing, at least that's my opinion -- was when he'd complain about the babes, that they were cruel to him!... that they were freezing him out!... etcetera!... whereas, excuse me, they never left him alone!... they never stopped begging to pose for him! he had to turn some away!... and for free!... and there were some cute numbers!... and well stacked! Here's to ya! Okay, so he had peculiar tastes, more toward the scrawny, so sickly you saw their ribs... If he had anything at all to do with your strapping great lasses, your resplendent creatures, your beautiful muscular types, it's because he knew I hung out with dancers... that irritated the hell out of him... brimming with health!... but all the same he got his rocks off! and not with old hookers either, fresh young things! and from good families!... magnificent carnations... perfectly well nourished... in times of war! and not for money, I repeat, did they come to offer themselves to Jules, just for devilment... in the nude! and in such poses! something else! you heard some good ones! all aroused too! It was a change from their routine...

- Ah, Monsieur Jules! Monsieur Jules!

They'd bring their girlfriends to him... they'd pose two at a time! three!... playing hooky!... he fascinated them, damn sure!...

- Talk about lady killers, you old sorcerer of a stump!

I'd tease him.

The more he talked dirty to them the more they wiggled with excitement, the more they clucked all over the place! He even got me with his crude foul mouth!

- They won't come back!

My ass they wouldn't come back! Only too happy to!

And here he was begrudging my eyes! my jerk-off hands... The goddam bandit!... his couch full of virgins, perfectly agreeable, and perfectly naked... and not little snotted, louse-ridden jades! Oh, not at all!... Educated! Good manners! With chambermaids, cars, horses!... and in times of war! In convulsions at ole Jules' nonsense! doubled over! fainting! you shoulda seen some of those long waists, supple, high-strung!... talk about having an easy time!... as a doctor I could appreciate the situation!... Impeccable cutis! swathes of matt, rosy flesh!... such youth!... Posing for Jules at sixteen! I think every high school girl had a turn... the attraction of the lair... Rasputin! He'd chastise them! because they were naughty!

- The next time I want my cake! my Saint-Honoré! You'll have to do better than that, my little tarts!

Another time it was pineapples!... Another time it was a baba rum! and with real rum!

- I know you have some at home, sweethearts, don't tell me you don't!

- I'm telling you, I loved the guy, what a goddam magician!

- They come for a laugh, heh! to get their rocks off! silly tarts!

- Of course! Of course! "All ass" Of course!

Not an iota of gratitude! He had no business being annoyed because what got him

off wasn't the big healthy type, it was the transparently unwell... What of it?...

A matter of taste.

- That one there I picture as a China doll! a Dresden figurine, you get it? I cast her, and she's on her way, that's it! I'll fire her! you hear me? later on! into the kiln!

His kiln!

- Are you spitting up, Sarcelle? red? yellow? gray?... will it be soon?

The question.

His favorite, Sarcelle, sickly, a cougher, a real skank...

- Will it be soon?

She came back, but that one was paid! Jules the buyer, for once! Three louis per pose!... As she lived very far away, after the Nation stop, she spent a lot of time in the metro! hours in the tunnel old Sarcelle! the air-raids! One time a whole day!... well, almost... she showed up around midnight... they were sleeping together... I don't think he had a right to be jealous, of my eyes, of my this, of my that!... He was spoiled!... He liked tubercular types, and Sarcelle was that! And epileptic what's more! I took care of her... well, a little... some gardenal, a little retropituine... what they used at the time... drops... Did anybody thank me?... she was even one of the worst harpies ever to come after me, old Sarcelle!... I think she probably wanted me to knock her up!... That's what they can't stand, all of them! That you don't touch them! don't knock them up! If I'd've planted my seed at Jules' place, he'd've got in on the fun too... saw that kind of thing in London, I leave the ladies in peace, I'm no John... but when it came to other enchantresses, he had others for fuck sake, and some cute ones! I told you! and some of Arlette's dancers! he

had this passionate need to take them from her! lift them off her! that they shouldn't go to class!... that they stop at his corner, gab, go upstairs a minute or two, pose... he'd wait for them, on the look-out... his schnoz right there... ever punctual...

- Olé! Olé!

He'd pull them in!... he'd watch them coming from a distance... and oop! Hey, Carmen! Come'ere Justine!

They'd pretend to be surprised.

- Oh, Jules! Hi!

As if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths!... all candy-sweet, hesitant, they'd cross over... the hips would sway like another species altogether! not ordinary women, Olympians!... and fine ankles, fine, fine, all sinew... like a little wild bird, the dancer! her little heels on the pavement!... And Avenue Gaveneau is amply wide!... other women turn into cattle! cows! crossing Avenue Gaveneau! Catastrophe!... if you're not a dancer!... crossing the Avenue Gaveneau!... Oh, it's terribly hard on women, terrible surface!... ford of the demi-goddesses!... the other miserable creatures! flounder about! *pflam! pflam!* their calves all stiff, they walk like sticks, hobble!

What can you say about Jules, he's got an evil mind!

- This way, my little darlings! this way!

The dancer is so lively, so lithe, that one bound and she's at Jules' place! that's her crossing!...

- Get your clothes off! Clothes off now! Hold on! I need a pencil!

The artful devil!

- I've been asked to do this! This is for a commission! Don't you want me to earn a living?

That was to soften them up... play on their good nature...

- Oh Jules! Oh Jules!

He put them in the right position.

- You, your leg there! You, there, your head!

He'd entwine them.

- This one's a Mythological scene, my Graces!

He didn't only model town halls, the Alps, cows, the Enghien lakes, people commissioned Goddesses! He couldn't turn them into skeletons! the clients didn't want Sarcelle! the clients wanted warm views! full of verve! elegant curves to the calf, very delicate knees and strong thighs! Cupie-dolls! Lithe of limb!

- I'm limited in my choice of bodies! All they want is flesh!... come to think of it, just like you!...

I get no respect!

What better than Arlette's dancers? especially seeing as these ravishing darlings asked nothing better than to be exempt from going to class!... the excuse!... that they were just coming back from the Opera... dead beat... all they wanted was to be lying down, amused, refreshed, even if it was only a coarse red wine! that old Jules was just the one for that!... and so funny and so wicked!... with all sorts of cigarettes and sweets! He had everything!... Arlette up there, her drills!... excuse me! her "bar"! "in the middle! little warm-up kicks!... six! seven! eight! pirouettes in the air"!... Oh, boy did the demoiselles

get their rest! eight flights up and no elevator! the guy had all the luck! ole Jules! the leader-astray! the lady killer! His rascally tricks! the girls were done for! laid to rest! and the way he had them lie down, spread out all the better! close their eyes!... Mythology! the mythological sofa!... the cigarettes... the port... and the poses he made them take!...

- Put your head here, Justine! here!

Poses, Jeess, more than baroque!... what got into his brain, this hunchbacked legless old sonofabitch, when he went off his rocker over legs...

But they'd burst out laughing!

- Serious! he'd scold them!, be serious! We're dealing with Mythology here, not farce!

They weren't farcing around, they only wanted to breathe! they were getting strangled one in the other! thighs! the positions he put them in!

Because it was a change from their ordinary routine!... little girls brought up strictly.

- Just wait till I get my kiln! I'll do you in Tanagra, in Alban sandstone! This is only the rough sketch, my darlings! the rough sketch! now for the casting! I've got to cast you! by hand for the moment! let me get my mits on you! I've got to do this hand modeling! Can't be done without it!

And *smack!* and *smack!* the spanking! there you go!... the laughs coming out of the goddesses! isn't he the cutest? from his crate he had an easy time of it, the schnozola coming just up to the edge of it! right at their asses! on the sofa! and *smack!* and *smack!* and his hand was not dead let me tell you!

Naughty little girls, that's all there was to it! Had to punish them!

- Oh, you brute! You cad!

But talk about lovely arched backs! sparks of life! such starts!

I'd be admiring! And *smack!* And *smack!* They didn't run away.

- You've got more buttocks than the *Moulin Rouge!* More thighs than the Opera!

I wouldn't miss it!...

- You can whimper!... I love you!...

It was true, damn it! Salty old devil! the romance!

I told you that he'd drink, that he'd suck on those tubes, turpentine! everything! heedless! not only the Bourgueil! he'd grab one bottle neck, another! get mixed up! he'd taste it... claim it was because the light was bad... wasn't enough light...

- You, you've got all the luck, born with a silver spoon in your mouth! in the sun!

There are some people not so fortunate in life! There're people in rotten run-down shacks! There're selfish people!..

Oh, his shack was dark, I admit, but not as dark as where I'm writing to you from!... Bottom of a hole!... and as for humidity! hold on a second! Ah, ole Julot!...

They're all whores, all harlots, the people on the outside! You could hate them to death! I tell you! They deserve it a thousand times over!... With or without legs! with a big cross! a little one!¹ they're all the same!... He could talk about selfishness, Jules! sonofabitchbastard!... like Clauriac! like Ciborium! like Larengon! Monsters! All monsters! Raving lunatics! Goddam knee-bending hypocrites! Skeletons in embroidered

¹ Reference to different grades of honor in the Legion of Honor.

slippers ready to be crucified by tender-lipped under-age choir boys!

Even though he lived in a dark sub-basement, that didn't stop tons of people from coming to see Jules! Jules of the Seven Sorrows! It's true, I had my "seventh floor", air, a view! far and wide! a hundred kilometers! all the hills right up to Mantes! But what hate that air cost me!... such a view! they still won't forgive me for it!... him, his walls were all dripping... humidity in streams!... Jees, was that pathetic!

- You'd begrudge a dog his life!

Hey, come on, you've got no goddam legs! you wanna have to take on seven floors?

- You got the elevator!

- Not true! toad! Not at all! It hasn't budged for thee years!

He knew perfectly well... the elevator was just an excuse. He resented my building... my whole building! for the garden out front! for the "chimera" wrought-iron gate... for the mosaic carriageway door!... for the sumptuousness of the vault... flashy overdone 1900 style! with bronze iris appliques, but he had his Bohemian life! Didn't that count? the cachet? what he managed to pick up off the sidewalk! his place was better than the Rue Taitbout! better than Rue Boétie!¹ all the dumb bastards from that point of view who came snooping around were drooling with envy, at his place!... They didn't come from Kansas, from the back end of no-where for nothing! and he'd give them hell, what's more! He could've gone down to the outdoor artists market! old Jules! Jules the Gondola

¹ The Rue Taitbout was known for its antique shops and Rue La Boétie for its art galleries.

Man! he'd have seen the difference! His little statues! They've got three Rodins between every tree at the market! and twenty Corots! there it was just his stuff! his alone! no competition! direct auction! He'd brandish his little bit of clay... not even fired, still wet!... a thousand francs! he'd announce... a thousand! I'll fire it for you later on!... I'll take gold! five louis!

And then they'd feel this big!... undone... no response...

Don't be so goddam picky! I've got to make a living!... Would you prefer a water color?

It was an Alpine one, a "Flower Festival"...

And if they stuttered some reply again:

- Ah, I see what your problem is! don't be embarrassed! You're embarrassed! So am I! I'm having a hard time! Look at all this stuff! my basement! my brushes! the eyes out of my head! These are hard times! my plinths! my clay! I can't get clay any more! I'm ruined everywhere I turn! my stewards! my cart! stick your head in, have a look for yourself!

They had to have a look inside at his cart for him! bend way down!... from the outside of the window... bend themselves in half... take a closer look at his gondola... lower! lower! they had to bend their belly...

- Farther down! Farther down!

Those who knew any better got the hell out of there! Damn quick!

- Cowards! misers! thieves!

His dawn chorus!

- They're stealing my time! They're stealing my daylight! They're stealing everything!

I admit he was on his own territory... that he was born at 6 Rue Maubel at the corner of Ziem's place¹ where his mother was a laundress, that he'd given everybody hell. you can say that again, the whole area, eight hundred thousand people, that had wound up going up there to peer into his shack of a place, their nose in his blinds...

Nowadays everything's folklore... nobody in Montmartre could compete with him... he was the only one born there... nobody who'd more folklore attached to them than him... and his mother too and his father... "Long live my soul! my native piss-hole! your Notre-Dame-not-from-here can burn down!" Such is the passion of our day, the fury for folkloric! Nothing left for Heaven! just for here below! Oh, yes, every bit of folklore was for him, Jules! He'd go too far!... and nasty?... He'd listen to himself talk, his "number", how he'd turn away the nicest people... the most well disposed of people!... he made them cry! it was his vice!... even so, he could be charming!... he knew it, he was gifted... a real crooner, for example... the timber, the voice, everything!... He went straight for the heart! I know, I'd accompany him one-handed, the left one... because he had a piano at his place!... a rusted heap of junk... a few scraps of keys left... What a musician!... but where he could surprise you was the bugle! at the bugle, a real virtuoso!... not the little, tinny bugle... no! the big one! the one that makes a soft sound... he'd improvise just like that, on the counter beat of a siren echo... poignant melodies... a sound lost among the

¹ Félix Ziem was a Montmartre artist who had a studio in the neighborhood. There's a street named after him in Montmartre also.

bells down there, in Batignolles... lively, gay little strains... and then others, melodic, dreamy... lullabies... he'd have you spellbound! You wouldn't have believed it possible!... the stump there, the pile of crap, you'd look at him?... the pain in the ass?... at the bugle, nothing but charm, made you wonder!... I'm still wondering, here in my hole! I can hear myself accompanying him with my left hand... our concerts!...

Drink can't explain everything, nor can getting poisoned from the paints... his obsession with tippling!... no!... can't explain...

- Look at this tongue, my friend!... take a look!

I had to admire his tongue, he stuck it out for me... his tongue... long... almost as long as a hung man's tongue sticks out... that's why he was so good at the bugle... so he claimed!... his tongue! *The Tongue!*... what he could do with it!... He could curl it into a six!... into an eight!... curl up the tip!

- It's all in the tongue!...

You can imagine how fast they turned naughty, the bugle lessons! tongue lessons is more like it! The girls wanted to learn the bugle! how to play the bugle, those cute little models!

- Your tongue like mine! here, look! Your tongue like this!

And he'd roll it around in their kissers for you, but good! Ah, Romeo was an innocent virgin in comparison! climbing up some rose-entwined ladder! him, Jules, his crate, his bugle lessons! deadly skills! boy did he have a good time! That's life for you!

- Your tongue, here! you! Come'ere!

All those sofa Juliets! and fresh! bubbling! and altogether in the altogether! not

sixteen years old! fifteen!... at the bugle! the tongues curling!... the lessons... *vlowww!*...
vloooo!... mewling!

He could go cry in his beer, the dirty stump!

I admit he had his misfortunes, I recognize the fact! I admit it!... he had this need to be fondled... okay! but where he got my goat, I can tell you, I will tell you, was that when he wanted to do a bit of beguiling he didn't pick a beautiful big buxom one with flesh on her!... oh no! one of those that you got so adorable, so fresh and lovely, perfect! no! it was for a sickly spewer!... one just sprung from the hospital, not yet recovered... Then he really revolted me! me, a medical man, anatomist, hygienist! muscle fetishist! of course it was none of my business! but it turned my stomach all the same.

So you can see we didn't have the same taste!

She was a bag of bones, Sarcelle! his little Sarcelle!

- You, all you go in for is flesh! *Smack! Smack!*... and he'd respark the beauties for me!... and he wasn't kidding!... who took it all very well indeed! I admit! I admit! wriggling around! bursts of laughter! the rumps like sea swells!... the jerks and starts!... vigorous little creatures!

He'd boast:

- Girls brought up on rue Saint-Honoré! creme de la creme! silver spoons!

He denied himself nothing, that stump Jules! Art! okay, that's understandable! the bugle! unbeatable!... Me, I couldn't play anything... everything is music!... Oh, the little bit of piano, my left hand... you can't count that... and then I was never rough! since we're talking about the ladies! you need more than just charm! you need blood, and not far

away, the accordion in the Slaughterhouse, that's their taste for you... my tastes go toward the Operetta... I've done a lot of dissecting, of course, but I get no kick out of a corpse... I'm only happy at an operetta, light-hearted, seditious, all frou-frou, daring, but not too... If I was gonna be jealous of somebody it would be *The Little Duke*... *Périchole*¹... If I were to become ferocious one day it would be over the ladies' tastes, they disgust me the way they like blood too much!... but while waiting for such time, here, the ass all stuck, I just try to think things out... in a ditch ten times darker than Jules' place! no gas here, shit!... not even mantles... or girls!... And my walls all dripping! ten times worse than at Jules' place! I'd like to see him in the slammer! I dare him! bugle or no bugle! A fat lot of good blowing out his tear-jerkers would do him then!... maybe that would close the trap on his obscenities! would he still play his melodies? would my guests come over?... would my guests transpierce the walls? they're supposed to be wall-piercers!... waltzing... those guys! all of them!... my guys!... my stinking informers... polka-ing right along... then I'd see them all coming...

Ah, I'd say, auntie Estreme!

And you!... my little Leo!

Bravo Clementine! Bravo valiant Toto!

In step with the mood, don't you see, with the mood! not like I am here, the ass glued... and not the other one either in his gondola!

Adieu, dead leaves! To the devil your kind!

Begone with the wind!

¹ *Le Petit Duc* and *La Périchole* were two 19th century operettas.

These last rhymes all whirlpooled! whirlpooling! *Three-quarter time, four-quarter time!* Allegro! Con brio!

Escapades and cares!

Him, let me tell you, old Jules, since we're on the subject of the dirty little pooper, it's wounding people he enjoys! the difference in our natures!... two different characters!... If an angel came down to his place he'd have treated him worse than a fish!... He had to humiliate his young beauties, vex them... he'd mix a young one with an old one, another Mythology!...

- My Goddesses have to be nice and relaxed!... Get closer together... nice and cosy, my little chickadees!...

Impossible poses!

- They're so bad I should do them in turnips, you hear me! turnips! not bronze! not in Saxon porcelain! turnips! Heh, my Olympia? how would that come out in the kiln?

All he could think about was his models in the kiln! a buyer interrupted him... the eye there... at the window...

- So, what will it be?... what do you want?... a satyr?... one cheek?... the hams you want? the whole dame? no?... The gentleman doesn't like sculpture?... okay, no sculpture!... A geranium then?... A gouache! The gentleman doesn't give a fuck!... The gentleman is troublesome...

And he dives back under his sofa... where he kept his stash of gouaches... he shouts from under it:

- A Red Sea Crossing?... What subject? speak up!... What subject do you want?...

Bright colors?... Blues? yellows? you prefer pale tones?... wan tones?... Here we go!... a couple of nymphs!

Ah, but you'd better not dill-dally!

- Two grand!... You'll see what the story is once you're home!... you can't put a price on an artist's time!... you don't understand a thing!... if I have to be an information service as well as sell!... and then there'd be a fuss! can't you see these ladies have no clothes on?

Decency at all costs!

I knew buyers of his that he'd evict ten! twenty times! very worthy clients! sweet people!... who were really upset by the likes of Jules!... and when he really tied one on... worse! worse! he wouldn't even recognize them any longer!... sometimes... he'd really go at them with the insults!... and people really smitten with his artwork!... who had their living rooms full of him! who only had his works at home! hundreds of his little statues... frescoes!... they'd make excuses for him... they'd let him get away with anything, almost anything... I used to watch them waiting... not daring to go up, they'd post themselves at the corner of a street, some of them would do the tour of Montmartre three times... before they'd screw up the courage to peek in his window... a lot of his buyers knew me... they'd wait for me at Vintimille Square, they'd be on the look-out for me... I'd be coming back from the Dispensary...

- How is he today?

- Vile!

People who worshiped him.

- He's drunk again?

- Oo, la, la!

I always took Rue Custine... the Pilon Impasse... Vintimille... they'd thank me... if they came upon him another day, not too loaded... in one of his good moods:

- Come in, Ladies and Gentlemen! By all means! Come in! Let me offer you some coffee! the filtered kind, not even Abetz has this one! I really enjoy this one!

And it was true! Mocha!... but people were a bit shy... Jules being nice?... they preferred to stay at the window... sipping standing up...

- Oh, it's perfect, Mr Jules!

- I'm glad you're enjoying it!

All polish and refinement.

But they'd better be quick about it!

- Okay, let's go! this little Tanagra! I'll fire it for you after the war! Take it as is! It hasn't hardened?... mushy you say? what do you mean mushy? I suppose you're hard yourself!... what's mushy is your dough!... think your money's hard?...

They'd better pay up and get the hell out of there! Oop! No more bullshit!

Here in my hole I reflect. That's what prison is all about: reflection... What if I have bitter memories?... Yes, I've got plenty of them!... but when it comes to Jules? I keep thinking about it over and over again!... I'm not sure he hated me... he was just jealous, that's all! Absolutely!... and at times with the worst hatred... he'd have eaten me alive... he detested me, and everything about me... my medal! my eyes! my "seventh floor"! so you can imagine Arlette! and her dancers! he had to sabotage her classes... to debauch her

students... from his casement window there, his schnoz, he'd be on the look-out when the time came...

- Psst! Psst!

... they should stop at his place... not go up...

- This way, this way my cuties, I've got candy for you! I've got sweet things for you! I've got gold-tipped cigarettes! I've got Valence oranges! I've got coffee! You're tired, little darlings! You need a rest!

They'd cross the street, come to talk to him.

- Just a word... a quick word!

They were climbing up already from the Opera! Arlette up there? still at the bar! "One! Two! Ladies! Now... Pliez!... Pirouettes! Pirouettes! Tendez! Tendez! Arabesque! two turns! in the air! There you go! Three turns... Attitude! There you go!"

And don't think they didn't let themselves get side-tracked, the little darlings!... ole Jules... the sofa!... the meringues... the spells he'd cast!... and how, he got what he wanted! One leap! two leaps! oop!... his window!... his little casement window... because he did have meringues, the devil! the real ones stuffed with cream!

- Stretch yourselves out, young ladies! You're not going to go up to that studio! the shape you're in? all out of breath! Lie down and make yourselves comfy! just let me get a little pencil! Get your clothes off! It'll only take a minute! A second! A quick sketch!

He got what he wanted.

He even had babas! babas with rum!...

Arlette could go pull her root up there! cut class! her lessons! her balance! her points!

The worst is that he'd take me aside and accuse me of being a sex maniac! an ass-shafter! a tutu-piercer! of sowing my seed!

- They come up for Arlette for heaven's sake!

I'd try to explain myself.

I'd try to reason with him, to show him how things really were.

- You ogle them, you lying weasel! The gentleman can't keep his eyes off them!

- I don't ogle them, liar! vampire! you're the one who gobbles them up!

I knew what I was talking about!... but you think you'd get him to admit it?... honesty and Jules!... It's true that I watched dancing, I've always loved dancers... so?... their form beyond the flesh, the mirages they create, not creatures made only of flesh!... not just any old bodies that come and go!... want to make something of it?... nothing wrong with it!... all above board! Am I not a poet? Yes-or-go-fuck-off? okay, so I'm not an artist like Jules! models with his hands, etcetera!... okay so I don't finger as a poet, but as a doctor I do a little bit, I'm also a doctor... a doctor probes, a doctor has to finger! I didn't take advantage! They came for Arlette, not for me!... they came for the art of dancing, for highly complicated choreography! sophisticated, if you please!... not for piddling little exercises! no! incredibly balanced extensions! relevés in the fifth position!... highly developed "second positions" on points! the little dears would be trembling from their exertions, sweating... the hour of torments!...

As if he didn't sneak in during a little break, ole Jules!

Me, I understand the purity of dance... a pig at heart, of course. like him, like Jules, like everybody and his uncle, but my little religion - the dance! where would you go when you're dead, without dance? Me, who has twenty ballets unproduced! that'll never be! and for the pure spirituality of it! absolutely beyond lucre, beyond glory, I am! Who can contradict me? maybe ole Jules denies it? Slovenly, gluttonous low-life! Destroyer of grace! That too! Oh, the brute! Wait! the worst! I'm getting all worked up about it, sitting here on my scabs thinking about it again! when you think about it again! the worst! the very worst! the cup! runningeth over! the dirty low-down trick! Lili! Ole Arlette! Ah, when you think about these dastardly deeds! it was an ambush! the vice of the man's soul! but I have to face it! Honesty above all! the facts! just the facts! and with Arlette, of all people! Maybe you think I'm being be unfair! Anyway, so he goes after Arlette! that's the hottest one of all! all of a sudden! too bad, I'll tell the whole story! right now! Arlette who saw him every day! who was like a sister, really, my wife who was no tease, no hussy, heart-breaker, no nothing!... Not a bit! just nice to him, always very nice.

- Poor Jules! Poor ole Jules!

She was fond of him... his misfortune gave him a terrific advantage!... poor Jules, my ass! she was more tolerant than me, that's for sure!... maternal! in a way... Sisterly! A sister! She'd stop by to see him on her way somewhere... pure charity...

- So how's it going Jules?

And the little reproach:

- Jules, you're stealing my students!... she was talking about Micheline... about Mireille... he kidnapped them on her, I swear! on the hop!... with his "psst! psst"!

She'd find them posing in the altogether, smoking gold-tipped cigarettes.

- We're on our way, Arlette!... we'll be right up!...

They promised.

- Jules, you're an ogre!...

Every day...

- Yes, I am an ogre!... You said it!

And he'd go at her legs! his cart a mile a minute! brandishing his irons!

- I'm a naughty boy! I'm a naughty boy!

And he'd grab her right in the thighs! going under her skirt!

- Let me bite into you! I've got to bite you!

For a laugh! always for a laugh! and then one fine day...

- I love you! I love you! Don't leave me, Arlette! Don't leave! I worship you!

The declaration.

He envelops her, envelops her in his arms... this was on the sidewalk... you can picture it!...

- Wait, my darling! Wait! Wait!

What fun for the people on the avenue! Luckily they were looking up, aerial combat was going on just then! Well, that's what they thought anyway... they were looking hard! All the schnozolas in the air! There it is! There! They were pointing to a corner of a cloud... nothing at all!... shouting... so here comes me, make a bee-line through the gathering!... I was coming out of the metro!... oop! and oop! they all wanted to climb farther up and see what was happening! all of them!... all the pilgrims! to Sacré-Coeur! to

Sacré-Coeur! quick! quick! to get a better look!... others were coming down... from the Holy Bell!... the two surging crowds confront each other!... the ones hurrying to climb! the ones rushing from the metro!... knocking into each other! yelping, the pigs! oop! and Jules who's bawling:

- I worship you! I worship the ground you dance on! clutching Arlette's thighs! under her skirt! I can hear him!... Me! I hear him! I get down... I see him! He's clutching on under the surge of pilgrims... his head under Arlette's skirt.

- I worship you, so I do!

In his cart, clutching! Luckily the people aren't watching! They're looking at the sky! and they're insulting each other! Calling each other shitheads! what are they, blind? deaf? that they don't let anyone past! that it's a disgrace! unspeakable!

- I worship you! I worship you! ole Jules is crying... under the skirt... between her thighs... he was all worked up! kissing her all over! all over the place! I see it!... I get down... Arlette can't move, stir... not that she isn't capable of it!... she could!... she's got strong thighs!... she could crush his face between them! the crowd is no longer budging!... the opposing swells... it's the lines at the moment!... the furrows in the sky! all over the sky! giant S's!... O's... Z's!... "Those rafaplanes, whose are they?" Heh? Heh?... between the clouds...the crowd is now squeezed tight... "Whose are they, those rafaplanes?" Big argument! Whose rafaplanes they are!... the trajectories of frozen vapor! at phenomenal speeds!... They were doing Z's!... O's!... U's!... oh, that meant this, that... messages! They knew all about it, they did! They knew!... just had to decipher!... have a good look!... The O! the Z!... that the English were in Nice! that the Russians were within twelve rolls of

Potsdam!... that's what was written in the skies!... all of them with their schnoz in the air!... "What do you know!... you don't know anything!..." They got all fired up! "They're coming!... They're coming!" No question! I look up in the sky... I look down on the ground... I look under the people... I see Jules hunched up under Arlette... Still stuck to her!... he's squeezing her! his nose deep between her thighs... he's crying "I worship you! I worship you!..." The others are crying "They're at Forges! They're at Eaux! here they come! in Meaux! they're on their way! You're a jerk, look higher! They're in Garches! You're crushing me! Look over there!" They were crushing each other, all scrunched up... They were packed tight around Jules and Arlette... I couldn't get to Jules... grab a hold of his neck!

Here come the Tommies! and Uncle Sam's boys!

And now from the windows screeching louder! louder than the crowd! it's the radios in the basements... "They're in Lô! They're in Lô-la-Manche!¹ They're everywhere!... They're in the air! Look! They're in the air!... They're in tanks! They're coming in trainloads!... Mont Saint-Michel has been blown up!... Radio divisions are coming up the Seine! They're at Forges! They're at M'lun!"

Enough monkeying around! I wanted to get to Arlette! I move three people aside... twelve come piling back in!... twenty!... a hundred!... I lean down as far as I can and look up... still!... I see ole Jules! in Lili's crotch! gripped between her thighs! Jules and Lili, they're packed in I said by the crowd, compact!... She's standing... him in his

¹ There was an important battle in Lô, department seat of la Manche, in June of 1944.

gondola...

- I adore you, kid! I worship you! He's howling... howling!... she could've split his nose in half! crush it there! open his face up for him! Just once with the knee! the pig's knocked out!... she had some strength in those thighs of hers! You know how you get when you're desperate?... so here's me, I elbow people aside!... push them apart! I come right up against Lili! right up against her! I grab a hold of Jules in his crate! Goddamnit, stuck! glued! Everybody's watching! I pull him! I grab him out of there! I want to grab him out of there!

- Be careful, Louis! Be careful!

Right away, that's what Arlette comes up with! Jules first of all! Jules!

I was about to wring his neck for him so I was! and just then, a surge forward! another surge forward! a veritable charge of pilgrims! Coming out of the bottom of the Rue Burcq and yelping!... "They're in Eaux!... They're in Forges!"... on to Sacré-Coeur! they took the shortest route! by the Rue Burcq! They knock into us, our throng! surprise! turn-over! they topple us! part us! "You brutes!" to Sacré-Coeur by the shortest route!

Others are coming out of the Rue Durante! even more ferocious! "They're in Bruges!... They're in Mers!... the Arromanches army! They saw it all, those guys! all! Up there! from up there! from the Place du Tertre! They're screaming! They saw houses up in smoke! They saw the tanks! the infantry! the airplanes above! They saw the flames high over the Cliffs! The sidewalks buckle, heave with people... all the Avenue Gaveneau! a torrent going back up stream is a funny thing to see! They all want to get to Place du Tertre before everyone else! The others don't want any view any more! want no more

Terre! they want the metro! Rushing all over the place! Bumping into each other! They confront each other, the hordes! horde against horde! “Dumb-bell! Lazy Ass! Traitor!...” Shreds of clothing fly every which way! “Cannibals! Scoundrels! Numbskulls!” Jules, Arlette get detached by the force of the crowd! Jules torn away from under Arlette!... from under her skirt!... ditches his gondola!... goes off on his stump!... rolls backwards!... somersaults backwards to his place!... shoulda seen him go!... the human conveyance! right back into his clays! his statuettes! sent flying backwards into his window! the crush of people! no dawdler! right into his shack! his stump this way! his crate that way! He got unhitched! again! he’s under the sofa... the goddam stump... he’s bellowing!

- Help! Arlette! Darling! My darling! Arlette! Lili! Help! I adore you! I worship you!

I spring to the rescue! should’ve seen me move! I drag ten! fifteen of the thieving drifters along with me!... there are thirty of us pulling at him!... we gotta shake him loose from under the sofa...

- Did you hurt yourself? Where? Talk to us, Jules! Talk to us! Jules?...

Got to get his braces done back up... what a mess!... replace his stumps for him in the right direction... because there’s the right direction! His crate isn’t square: it comes to a point! like a ship’s prow... the Good Samaritans don’t know, there around him... they hurt him getting him laced up again.

- Arlette, you know how to do it!

She’s gotta show the others!... how to anchor him down... the straps... the twine...

Stay and pose, Lili! Stay and pose for me!

Right away, there you go! his demands! the bee in his bonnet! and in front of all those people! all those dimwits! his shack full of them! and at the windows!

- The end of my rope! there! that's what he does to me! The end of my rope!

Damn!

- Go ahead! Help yourself!

I no longer have any say! Shit!

Never had this many people in his crib before! Tourists! Pilgrims! Nuns!

Concierges! Soldiers! Germans!

- Pose for him! Go ahead! Come on! Pose!

I can see she's hesitating to take her clothes off... they're off already anyway! all in tatters!...

Go on!

Since somebody has to be in charge, I take charge! I bellow! Why wouldn't I?

So then he goes at it! the whole cart! fury! I grab the whole kit and caboodle!

One heave-ho and I send it flying as far as it can go! to the devil! sonofabitchbastard! let him roll! let him roll! right into his paint jars! Shame, shame, everybody knows your name!

He gets unhinged again! braces! laces! everything busts out! the stump, the head in the paint jars!... there were plenty of them!... What a smeary mess!... toad landed on his side!... He's screaming! Goes at it again!

- Give me Lili! Please, give me Lili!

He's asking me this! the lunatic! in front of all these schnooks!... his windows full of bumpkins! Jees!

- Take her, you pig, take her!

He's pushing me over the edge.

- That's when he whispers to me, Kraut! Kraut! from under the sofa! just like that,

wallowing in clay, shit! he shows me the door!

He's just putting on a show!

- Fuck off!

He orders me!

- You others too, scam! out!

He's liquidating. He wants his room emptied!

He shouts orders just like that! from under the sofa!

- Everybody out!

Furious!

- Out, I say!

That's how it was... Just like that... I see it all again!... how he was rubbing my nose in it in public! I see everything again just as it happened!...

Was I going to get all indignant? Jump on the lump of lard?.. the pack I was surrounded by... the blood-thirsty mob... they'd have my guts!

He knew perfectly well, the Pernicious Trunk! the lying, cheating stump! He knew what he'd said! that he'd pointed me out as a traitor! handed me over! I could see the fangs come out! snarling! their lips raised to expose their fangs! one word and they'd tear me from limb to limb!... more than willing! and others arriving from the lookout!... from up there! the highest steps of Sacré-Coeur! the horizon! ... from seeing Sens up in smoke!

Think about it! the mood they were in! Makes sense! they'd seen the houses go up in smoke... the houses in Fontainebleau too!... and the tanks! and the bombs! and everything! Yeh, those guys were in a rage all right!... one more word out of Jules that I was a Kraut and they'd lynch me right on the spot! Just had to see their fangs hanging out! their dribble!... They were like wild beasts! Ole Jules call me a traitor one more time! It was curtains!... Never had I seen such dangerous pilgrims! those who were coming back down from the lookout!

So you can imagine the relief I felt when he told them all to scam.

- Fuck away out of here! Fuck away off, the whole pack of you!

They inched back, growling, ranting... the fangs!... they felt cheated!

- Go on! Scram! Beat it!

He was commanding from his gondola! I'd laced him up again, tied him down good!...

- You fuck off, too! Hit the road! I'm tired!

The cynical sonofabitch! Every name in the book!

I looked at him there, trunkman gremlin shithead! I could have bashed his head in, the Sculptor! I could have jumped on him with my feet together! *Pflop!* toad!

- Fuck away off with you!

Beside himself at this point! Off his rocker! If he'd called for help, the whole Avenue, the whole goddam tribe would have come trooping back! He had the mob on his side! All the pilgrims! All the tourists! All the housewives! The turning point for the English!... the Americans on top!... the planes all in formation!... and three hundred

engines... *vrroom! vrroom!* He had the mob on his side! He'd execrated me from the beginning, it was clear! clear! If I bashed his puss in for him, I'd be the one to get it!... tell it like it is... let's have a rethink... I was the one whose blood they were out for! not him!... I was the one to blame for everything! better keep my trap shut!... the mob would've lynched me!... tell it like it is! rethink the matter!... with sang-froid! My guts they were out for, not his!... He was getting his rocks off! he had the right end of the stick! I was the traitor! me!... and so on!...

- Pose for me, Lili! Come pose! Take off your clothes!

Lili, I forgot to tell you, was the family name for Arlette... You know, we called her Lili... you figured it out already...

No big deal if she took her clothes off... already in tatters!...

He was ordering her! I watched him... he came up to my waist, barely... in his gondola right under me... his puss... only up to my waist... the arrogant sonofabitch!...

- Go on, Lili! Go on!

She hesitated... and I could see that the dirty lowdown whore's pig he was hoping it would all turn nasty!... The pilgrims came trotting back in swarms... to start all over again!... still others broke in, shoving each other in the doorway... pointing at me!...

- Go ahead, Arlette! Go ahead! Do it! Pose! You, Jules, get them outa here! Come on! No?

I could see there was going to be a riot.

- Then pass me my two irons!

His irons were under the sofa... way at the back... I reach in and get them for him,

I pass them to him... he takes them in his fists... Should've seen the pilgrims skedaddle!

Go on! nosy bodies!... not one left! all flitted off!...

- Come'ere Arlette! Come this way!... Sweetie! You, hook me up again!

He'd gotten unhooked again!... another buckle busted!... I redo him... I relace him...

- You, Arlette! this way!

In his catch-all he wanted her... where there was gas, his Auer mantle¹... in the old kitchen... He wanted her to pose on the folding bed... wasn't often he had them pose there... only when he wanted to be left completely alone, absolutely no interruptions... no one could see from the street... nothing at all... even when the gas was lit... but not a speck of daylight though! zero! Just the gas, that hissed!... it shed a green light that gas... blue!... ladies' faces by gas! their skin! their flesh! ghastly!

- Lie down, Arlette! Nice and long!...

- Oh, come on! Green?

I can't help adding my two cents' worth!... I don't like seeing her green!...

- I'm doing a synthetic version of her for you, you dope! ... What do you know about green? ain't never seen her, your wife?

- What does he mean synthetic? never seen?

He's going too far! goddam hunchbacked gremlin! I'm pissed off! I'll shove his friggin' irons down his throat!

¹ Auer gas lamps were a common household item in France at the turn of the century.

I better not touch them...

- Isn't it about time you left? Fuck off! get the message? Fuck off!

Bloody tyrant! a law onto himself!

- I've got to model her, numbskull! Get the picture? First of all the paste! then the clay! it'll take an hour! since everything has to be spelled out for you! You can come back later! Go down into the metro!

- I'm telling you, shithead, I'll do the head for you in ceramic!

Hold on a second! all the same! I tell him how I feel about it, just so he knows!

-Yeh... yeh... yeh... he finds me tedious... I'm too abrupt, I annoy him!...

- Go on! Keep talking! You, Lili, lie down like I told you... you'll see the finished product when it's refired! after the war!

And he stiffens up his arm out to show me how it will be! he's showing me! "Out in the open! Out in the open!" Pecker stickin' out!

The vulgarity of the guy!

Did it on purpose! intentional insult! me to floor him, that's what he wants! he's really asking for it!...

- If you could just picture it finished... just wait till it's fired!

And he spins around in his crate! pivots! He turns back against Lili, grabs her thighs... gets an armful... and he paws at her, rubs her, there, lying down, spread out...

- You'll see in the kiln! you'll see!

There he goes with his goddam kiln again!

- I worship her! so there! I worship her!...

He was really asking for it now, really wanted me to break his face for him!...
love!... there wasn't only just us three there... us three, huh!

- Kraut! Kraut! he's muttering to me... and then louder: Kraut! Kraut!

- So I say to him, you, snot-nose! puddin'! cesspit! stoolie! I'll do you in!

- Go right ahead! he says back, all calm, and he has a good look at himself in his
little mirror... he makes little faces at himself, little frowns...

I don't touch him... keep my hands off him... I just stand there swaying a bit... I
can still feel myself swaying... He stops making faces at himself... He turns around toward
the folding bed...

- Spread them! Spread them wide! nice and wide! there you go, kid! so I can do
this modeling right!

He spreads her thighs... nice and wide...

- I'll do her for you in the kiln! and he starts pawing at her again, moves her behind
up, on purpose, so I can see! that he's got rights!

I'm not the kind of guy who loses it, takes dark offense at a slight! no! not easy to
get my back up... I'm the more easy-going, accommodating kind... but there, he was
looking for it... I know all about the crazy-guy stuff, the joker stuff... I know all about
hysteria!... I know all about the artist!...they like to play the fool!... play it up!...play it
up!... Fine!... the pack are laughing their leg off! coming in their pants! okay! soaking it all
up! but him there, ole Jules, he was really pushing it with me! The jealous lunatic wanted
to see how far he could go!... the jealous lunatic was pushing me to the limit!...
outrageously disgusting on purpose!... was asking for me to do him in... do him in once

and for all!...

- Okay, my wee man, let's go to it! I get a hold of his poker! I grab it good! his iron bar!... for poking the fire!... Hey look, I was young!... I wouldn't do it any more these days!... the piece... this iron! he sees it!... he can see me all right... I'm on top of him!... right on top!... of his head!... a piece of iron like that!... like a lance!...

- I dare ya'!... he shouts!

I was going right for his kisser!... He sticks his schnoz up... opens wide his trap! on purpose!... egging me on!... He's defying me!... I was heading for him with both hands! *Crrang!*... his puss all smeared!...

- I dare ya'! Double dare!

Ole Arlette on the folding bed, naked, legs wide apart... she starts to laugh! uncontrollably!... laughing her ass off!... the pair of them... laughing their asses off!

- Oh boy, Ferdinand! Oh boy! Haaaaa! oh! ah! ah!

Oh I'm so funny! The pair of them clucking, slapping their thighs... Aren't I the funny one!... too funny! They're choking over it!... I send the fire-poker flying to the door! against the hinge plate! The poker falls down! bounces! Jules rolls after it!... he picks it up so I can start again... Ah, the joker! I don't want his goddam poker! So he grabs it! And he starts to threaten me! He makes believe he's gouging my eyes out! for a laugh! a laugh! Him! down there! under me! in his gondola! He loves a farce!

Lili in laughing fits, spluttering all over the place! She can't take it any more! She's flopping all over the place like a fish! the whole folding bed is flopping!

- Okay now, scram!

They've had enough of me, both of them!... We had some laugh!... Jeess, what a laugh!

- Okay now, scram!

There he was repeating it, the legless sonofabitch!... sly old fucker!... all right!... all right!... you're right! I get the message... they have an understanding... all right!... all right!... I'm going... I'm going...

Whereupon, I leave...

And you know, it's from that moment on... from then, now that I think about it again... from that very moment... precisely... and then what happened later... everything that came after it... that the horrors began... the real horrors!... that we were hounded, I can safely say so wretchedly hounded, worse than animals!... not for a month!... ten months!... ten years!... Just the other day the "Pappeals Court"!...¹ We've raised lots of animals, Arlette and me! strays here and there that were lost, abandoned, hounded... we brought home a lot of them... never once did we find one that had suffered what we suffered... It takes its toll on the character, has to... people can't imagine at all what it's like to have the hounds after you for ten years...

- Now beat it, you big fathead, out of here!

I can still hear him.

Four times he kicked me out!

I couldn't make up my mind...

¹ On December 6, 1951 the Appeals Court rejected "in the interests of the law" the amnesty that Céline had been granted in April. It was a bitter blow to him.

- I'll do her for you in clay, your Senorita! lacquered! Look!...

He taunts me from the window... from his casement... I'm on the sidewalk... I can't move.

- With the tongue, hey killer! like this! With the tongue!

He's calling me killer! Me!

I knew his tongue. I knew about it! He sticks it out for me to see again, how he can curl it up!... In O's... in Z's... in V's!... from the tip!

I don't leave... I just have to look at him. He draws me to him.

He gets Lili up from inside.

- Come'ere Lili! Come look at him!

He wants her to come to the casement, starkers... she shows up... laughing... happy...

They're in cahoots!... in this together! There's nobody left on the sidewalk... Just me there!... Like a big dope!...

- Look at this! with the fist! the fist!

He shows me how he's gonna model her! and *smack!* right on her buttocks! her hips!... she laughs... she just laughs! and she's got powerful thighs too, something else!... she could smash his snout to a pulp between them with one swift blow from the knee! *Whack!* he'd see stars! But no... she just laughs...

- Hold on a minute, come back! she's gonna pose... he wants me to watch her pose... again!... this could go on forever!... he wants me to go back inside... he's having fun... such a way to treat me!... they're both having fun!... the pair of them!... but now

there're people in the Avenue... at the end... on top of the Agil Impasse... and then there weren't any more!... now it's cops! Bet your ass I go back inside!... here I am inside again! He closes the shutters... well, tries to... they don't stay shut!... in the back he wants to work... in the back!... where the gas is still on! we gotta hurry!... the cops!... the Civil Defense!... everything's gotta be shut!

- Go to the back! the back! Lie down!...

And there she is again, under the gaslight... thighs open... the tits... neck... shoulders... it's all green... blue... and a little pink... flesh.

- You see how it's gonna be?

- I see her green...

So I say, how does he want to do her? green? gray?

- You don't like her this way, heh? Don't let it bother you!...

- Yeh, but you know...

- With you it's bleeding beef is all you want!... or geraniums!... I'm sure you just love geraniums!... You like flowers, don't you? roses? you don't like roses?...

He catches me off guard... How do I know?... I don't know!... my artistic tastes!... I don't like green, that's all there is to it!...

- Geraniums? I mumble... geraniums?... He dives under the folding bed and fiddles around... full of watercolors under the folding bed... he takes out a gouache, a red one... a flower... an azalea, I think, yeh, an azalea...

- Here, a present!

He's never given me a present before...

- Go on! Take it! Killer!

What is he talking about, killer? that I wanted to kill him? what the fuck did that have to do with it?

- Go on, out of here! Go on, killer! Leave us in peace!

That's it! He's giving me the boot again!

- Roll 'er up! Roll 'er up!

Roll what?

The gouache? your gouache, goddamit! and the right way!

Apparently there's a right way...

- Here! A little statue!...

He goes fiddling around again and brings back a statuette... another thing from under the folding bed!.. He's stuffing me with gifts!...

- Hit the road!

My two hands are full.

- Trot yourself off!

I don't leave... I'm at the door... at the other door... I'm on the sidewalk...

- What?

- Move it! Move it! the cops! Jerk! the cops! an air-raid!

I didn't hear the sirens... at least not well enough... I look up... He tells me there's an air-raid... I don't see any airplanes... Yes, one stream! Ah, yes! A stream!... A giant V... but I didn't hear the sirens...

Move your ass, you schnook! Move it!

With the buzzing in my ears, I had my doubts... He was sending me to the metro. I always mistrust sirens... always... I get confused... the Avenue was empty, that's for sure... no more cops!... Absolutely nobody!... Maybe it was an alert after all?... but there were alerts all the time!... sirens... cat-screechings in the sky!... I had my own noises! my own high-flying meowings!... blasting in both ears at once sometimes! high-pitched mewlings!... not only just sometimes... it could be for hours on end!... right in my ears!... All the same... all the same... "To the metro! Get to the shelter!"... I steel myself... one step... another... I stagger... I let go of the watercolor, there... the present... "To the metro! Get to the metro!" I drop the little statue... I reel... one step... another... I get a hold of myself!... and *bleuuu!* I puke!... It comes over me right there... not twenty meters from his door... I see the sidewalk, that's all... and then nothing at all... I'm puking all over the sidewalk... then on all fours!... crawling... I want to find a gutter... because it's the alert! Am I buzzing or am I sirening?... It's an air-raid!... I'm vomiting like a drunk, me! I know it! and I don't drink! Never! Never anything! I'm dizzy! He can go fuck himself with his watercolor! I'll cross over! I'll cross over all the same! To the shelter over there!... to the shelter!... Sirens or no sirens!... Yes, I'm vomiting... but the sirens? following the bank... the edge... don't you understand?... the gutter!... A gutter can be enormous sometimes!... It's a chasm... a chasm that swells up... and recedes... that swells up and calms down again!... it's dizzying!... the Eiffel Tower that you'd think was a gutter!... at the very end a little hole, the sewer!... and then huge and gigantic!... the immensity of it!... all of Paris!... the sewer... at the end of the sewer!... I know about it!... I refuse to give in... a thousand little lights!... seeing stars!... the edge!... bravo!... I haven't been sucked

into the sewer! ... no, I haven't! I haven't been sucked into the precipice! bravo!... I'm puking... I'm puking into it! I'm buzzing! ... I'm dizzy! but I won't succumb to the vertigo! Ménière's vertigo it's called!... the houses are spinning! and then!... they lift off! they lift right off! Holy smoke! the buildings in the air! "Ménière! Ménière!" the sidewalks are having fun!... I hear you laughing... No! No! No! If I just steel myself I'll be able to cross!

You jokers won't get me! I'm floating! floating! and the song!... I hear you laughing! you'd like the notes? the notes are in my head too! I'll write them for you, transcribe them!... You'll go get yourself a piano... they still have pianos... don't take Jules'! Don't go to Jules' place!... it's off key, Jules' piano! Don't go there! Me, I crawl, I puke, fine!... but everything is off key at Jules' place!... I'll play you the right note! the right one! and then another! and there's your song!



You'll manage to find a piano! with one finger you'll play!... They're not all dead, the pianos! Some sounds still exist! the "mi" the "re"... you don't need a bugle! F sharp! There are some noises that are finished... but a piano! one finger! another! there are noises that no longer exist!... but the piano! F sharp and G!... there, that's in the key of G what I'm doing for you now! Just watch! One finger! One finger! Go on! Go ahead! I'm

¹ This music-score fragment was inserted into the typed manuscript by ballpoint pen, apparently in Céline's writing.

listening to you from here where I am! Bravo! Bravo! Oh, but you cut a lovely figure! Look at yourself in a mirror! a little round one, you know the kind? Ha! like Jules?! like Jules has!... Oh, but I'm a funny one too!...

All that, all that's a good laugh, but nobody want's to take my place, at the bottom of the hole!... they leave me here to rot, my admirers!... songs or no songs!... All in it together!... The behind full of pus, blind, deaf!... hateful -- fans, enemies, what's the difference? All they want is to see the beast in the bullring brought down!... the traitor, the purveyor of death, the Judas-in-Chief: me!... I've seen them all with their fangs out! enemies, their mugs shouting for blood! the bloodbath snouts on them! and craven whores their cracks bloody from coming! I've seen it all! Yet another example: the grand jury! last Thursday! Okay so they engrave their names in gold in the granite walls of the Sainte Chapelle! for the edification of the poor slobs who are too generous, too hot-blooded, too simple-minded for what's they'll be put through in any epoch you can name when they fly to the canon's call, to the clarion call, to the sacrifice!... Go ahead, engrave another stone, fine, for those who'll have sold Odes to both sides, who'll have had the entire Ultimate Court on their knees! That's the lesson history teaches! The tourist industry put to good use... the way the volunteers are treated, the enlisted men in the two wars who jumped into the fire a hundred times so that the Harlot of a Nation would look altogether more noble than some piddling bunch of sell-out crack-pot veteran-fuckers! Seventy-five percent hero and the Ultimate Court is gonna break your heart on you! wipe your thing with your amnesty! As soon as the clarion calls the wounded from both wars, the seventy-five percent of 1914, you'll see what fun the sly bastards have! the Builders' great big

climax!¹ They don't talk about that in *Readers Digest*! but I who'll last longer than any of them I'll have them inscribed in gold in marble! Fans, dumb-bells, enemies! no one is offering to take my place in the clink! I can just go rot there! They all agree! Ass full of pus, no more teeth, blind, deaf! The beast slaughtered in the ring is all they want! To see the traitor, purveyor of death, the Judas-in-Chief impaled and then sliced up into slivers! Of course, they won't admit it, they're too yellow-bellied! I want their names, their promotions, their rank and serial number. I want to know who's protecting them, how much they got for it, and just how sadistic they had to be to get where they are, put it all in gold letters, right in the granite, in Sainte Chapelle! The way they treat their heros, the hatred they invest in them! such revenge! They who are laden down with revenue and gold! The weak excite them! They want them to howl! I'm howling! I'm ranting! weak! I'll howl in the Sainte Chapelle! Martin Ciborium, he doesn't howl! he gets all his Gram and Brôme fees without any need to howl! He delivers engines without howling, he doesn't feel the slightest bit of shame! only pride! The Ultimate Court doesn't stint either, it breaks her 1914 heros on the rack without batting an eyelash! Those who amassed millions during the Occupation, they're not howling either! They're just waiting for the next war! They got chinchilla cloaks! already! They look way up their rectums, they get together in the club especially to compare each other's wads! "You bleeding there? You're not bleeding?" Everything's all set for the next war! Their contacts, their mandates, the representatives they're paying off, their carte blanche from the High Court! Their helicopters! Their Odes! They're running the show, they've won, they're in

¹ The builders of the Atlantic Wall.

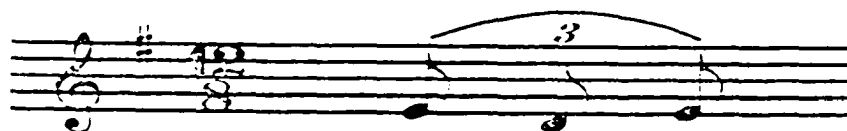
command. Me, they took everything from! my shirt! my hide! my years!... my manhood! I can't get it up any longer!... it all went out with the pellagra!

- You'll pay for everybody, that's what they said!

Everybody who? Everybody what?

France is full of secrets... corresponding secrets... I never could open my correspondence... Mme Toiselle my concierge opened it for me, but she was soon sickened by it... when people send you news it always stinks of phoniness, hanky panky, crime... Oh, and especially friendly letters, honey-coated, loyal... friendly letters drive me crazy... they arrive via the police precinct. Mme Toiselle opened them for months on end... I used to say to her, "Just show me the 'death announcements' -- the 'little coffins'!" It got so tedious, the "death announcements" and "little coffins"! the number of people they assassinated who took that to heart... I've been told that even today there are people who have screaming panic attacks over it! from telegrams! from little coffins! that they find them in the metro, all huddled up... people obsessed! So go howl, you pansies! down boy! Now Artron, he never howled! He's got a goddam poker up his ass! All the howling he knows about is in his plays! He picks up a few bucks informing! He's one cute cookie! Howl, you pansies, while you're swooning! Don't be embarrassed! Howling is the animal's cry, the cry of life! Fuck all your little middle-class titillations! You'll cry out when you give birth! even louder when you croak! and you'll still never measure up, with all your swooning, your juicy come-cries, to the hero that they're beating to a pulp, that they're purposely leaving to rot on a cross who only wanted his country to survive! That has extraordinary value! You can't buy that at the Auction Rooms! You gotta be the

Judas-in-Chief, the shame of Montmartre like me, the exterminator of Paris, to know the secret of hatred! All the repudiations! I wrote what had to be written, I gave all I could! youth, blood, voice-poems! more than all the faggoty bars! than all the pecker-and-syrup teasings at the theaters! than all the magazines of every stripe! than the Courts that are grinding me, killing me! that are just waiting for the next war so they can really have the ultimate come this time, so that the "Builders" can rely shaft it to them again! Ah, bring on the cancer! may cancer eat out their rectum, their lungs, their tongue! their pharynx! God, whom I look in the face, hears what I'm saying! To date I have never said "Go to it!" But regardless, the whole clique is busy judging, condemning, stealing furniture, apartments! the proof! I have no hide left! I have no shirts left! I have no teeth left! but I have little tunes that I remember



my mother!

One little second of pleasure, a whole life of pain... my mother knew nothing of the pleasures of a good roll in the hay ... she missed out on all that... like me, her son... a lifetime of sacrifice! ... the woman who can grunt and rave in the throes of a deep fuck can die happy ... Oh, but, the ass stuck, me, the one despised by all, I'm going to get my revenge against them, I'm going to write their historic names in engraved gold, in the Sainte Chapelle!... such pathetic writing powers! feeble poet! the most feeble of them all! Take my word, all you Hercules in judge's robes! I'll make you write your names in gold! They refused me my amnesty ... decided I hadn't suffered, hadn't suffered enough, spat up

enough blood!... this is between God and me!... I have the medal, I have the replica! the medal conferred by Joffre, November 1914!... example under fire!¹... The other night the guard came in and got me up to sign my appeal... a Baltavian document... what could I do?... Was I going to quibble over a paragraph?... I'd get his billy club right in the puss! I saw what a cudgel could do in Africa! I don't like the cudgel! I prefer cannibalism!... I saw women their thighs eaten by the pimps who loved them... I never ate anyone's thigh myself... instinct, genius, that's the ticket!... Jules, him, he ate thighs... I was saying that my concierge for a long time would read my letters and then she got tired of it... she just kept the "death announcements" for me... the most venomous poisons... You get tired very fast of poisons, nastiness, being clobbered! Just look at the Rack!... the guys on the rack aren't even howling these days!... The only thing that keeps me going is digitalis, my systole is shot!... *blah!... haaa!... blah!.... boo!*

Must we tell our friends?

Every party ends?

To hell with your kind

Dead leaves on the wind!

Farewell, dead leaves!

I might not even have enough time to write all that I owe to Lili, the angel she's been for me... I tell you everything so all hashed up... I should re-read everything! you

¹ On 25 November 1914, Louis Destouches was awarded a military medal with the citation: "In liaison with an infantry regiment and his brigade, volunteered to carry under heavy fire an order that the infantry liaison agents hesitated to transmit. Carried this order and was seriously wounded during the mission".

think' Digitalis the only thing that keeps me going... the Ultimate Court judges are holding my hourglass in their hands! ... they're saying: "Dirty stooge! Another month gone! And he's still not dead! Sonofabitch!"

They get all surprised... they get all indignant! that's what they think of myself! but me, I'll write their names in the Sainte Chapelle! their names in gold! thus the world's eternity goes! ... they'll be caught up with eventually... people perpetually wallow in blood! they can never climax strong enough... they need the Circus, athletes, big muscles that get torn out!... I'll explain all this to you later if the pellagra doesn't kill me first...



Maybe I could get around on two canes... tottering and shaking... I'm used to it...

I'd puke outside in the gutter...

- So who's gonna finish him off? They've already stolen everything from him! plagiarized! repudiated! ... Cut off his water tap to see what happens!

They cut it off on me! ... I live without drinking... without doing caca... without urinating ... Twenty-one days, I know ... my ass stuck to the stool... by the scabs!... once out, if I get out, I'll have a petition passed around to you, you'll support me for life! I don't want to do a frigging thing any more!... or Bébert, or Cabbage Head, or Ninive the other cat, or Bessy the dog¹ ... maybe still a little neighborhood doctor? maybe?... just to treat a rheumatism here and there?...

¹ Names of pets Céline had in Denmark, the famous Bébert and Bessie the dog were brought back to France, the others mentioned here were not.

My wife came to see me here the first few months, and then they put a stop to that.

- He's not eating enough! is what they told her... He doesn't do caca!...

That was the jailers' excuse!...

One enema every two weeks, boiling hot... there's your remedy!

Remorse will kill you...

She takes care of everything, Arlette, takes up my defense by telephone, bouquets that she's going to give as gifts... She turns the Court's hourglass over the moment I'm about to kick the calendar...

- He'll never die!

I live only through her... my body's shot!... the soul too, almost... The world has been too cruel. There's no shortage of people to skin you alive! I've known some terrible beings...

Ole Jules, tyrant that he was! I told you about it!... but I've seen him at the end of his tether... I could have gouged out his eyes when he was pawing Arlette, naked... I'll fight back, I'll make him bleed! would that he offered me up his eyes so I could gouge them out for him!... he taunted me on purpose from his cart... you can talk about a dirty old man... I'd like to drive his poker right into him... *C'rrang!* right in the eyeballs! He called me a Kraut on purpose in front of those people, and the concierge! I should've finished him off!... At least there'd be a reason for being in prison... If I re-read all the pages as they've asked me to do I would find secret thoughts... Oh, you wouldn't do much with them!... you've got no rhythm in you! the human soul is full of ill-distilled poisons!... whence all these unclean thoughts... I devoted myself body and soul to your

cherished lives! I never robbed a soul!... I never deceived anyone! I've never even taken a tip!... to show you, the gouaches, the statuettes... into the gutter!... all of it!

- Pose, Arlette! Pose for him! Go ahead! Nude!

I encouraged her... I can still hear myself...

She was kind of beautiful naked... even all green under the gaslight... she asked my permission... it was funny, asking permission... for her body!... I who'd never refused her anything... who'd forbid her nothing...

- Pose for him, Lili!

She wanted to hear me say it... she was sexual... the theater's always sexual... that doesn't prevent feelings... the proof!... a thousand proofs!...

- Go ahead! Go ahead! Pose for him!

I remember very well, I insisted... there, on the folding bed... what she could offer by way of curvature, by way of lines!... those long, muscular legs! those fruits of grace and exercise...

- I'll do one just for you! for your eyes only!

A ceramic figurine of Arlette.

- When you get back!

Now he was talking about once I was gone... that was understood... he'd keep Arlette... perhaps it would have been better that way... I wonder about that... She would not have had so many woes had she stayed there shackled up with Jules... she'd have been protected! And how, was he protected, ole Jules! a Pope! at least four networks! he'd help them through a bit here and there... and the tables were turning!

It's cowardly, here as I think about it in the hole, not to take on the mob on your own! everyone against you alone! the whole goddam pack! I blame myself for it, I blame myself for it to the marrow! I love her, Lili, I love her like no one else, but I've broken her... She's done astonishing things for me, astonishingly devoted, I didn't deserve it! coming here to the back end of beyond in the clink here to bring a little bit of pastry, one little orange she managed to find, what she didn't risk! It's life itself a bit of orange juice when you weigh no more than thirty kilos!... I'm throwing this all at you like that, without thinking! I'm not sure I haven't already said it above around page 212!... Here, I'll give you a hug, you'll manage!... I have so many things to tell you that I'd have to live a hundred and twenty years and never stop writing, to lay the ground work... two hundred years to get the ball rolling... and you wouldn't understand everything!... even if the Grand Jury had me arrested and incarcerated in the Citadel, had me garotted and disemboweled... even here on Baltavian soil!... I wouldn't edit it out! I'll glorify their names in gold! The Underling from the Embassy too! and the Minister! Senatus Populusque Faggot! I have my reasons! Here in my novel too, I glorify them! I never stop! I reflect with my ear always cocked, glued against the marble, I hear everything! I rehash memories in my head... how that piss-ridden legless Jules seduced Arlette... the coffee had something to do with it! no doubt about it! even if they had me garotted now, I'd say: it was the coffee! He had a Mocha you can't even find any more! a real Arabian filter... once I left should've seen how the Mocha went to their heads! and the kirsch! she didn't even drink, so you can imagine! he forced her! I'm sure of it! he got her all worked up! she caved in! Any other time, I wouldn't have given a fuck, but what would the villagers say in times

like these? I told you, the two avenues, the fourteen streets, the twenty-two lanes! So poisonous that two drops was enough to kill the whole neighborhood! the worst goddam village in the world when it came to the ferocity of the gossip! nothing like it anywhere in the universe! tongues like no where else! Ole Arlette posing starkers, thrown on her back on the folding bed! pussy wide open!... and I'm supposed to be the pimp! and the watercolors -- in payment for her thighs and her hole! where could I go?... I'm keep thinking about that... they were in it together... here's to instinct!... agreed!... he's the natural-born pimp, he gets the prize! me, I get sweet fuck all!...

- He sells his sweetheart's charms! He sells military secrets! for heavens sake! of course! He sells Lili's calves! He sells her angelic smiles!... He gets money from all sides! He sells the names of patriots... The Shame of Montmartre and of the Nation: Ferdinand!

The waffling waves from Westminster got it right all right!...All you had to do was listen at the windows!... what was being bellowed out from the radios on the ground floors!...there was no more hangable hoodlum than myself, 14 Avenue Gaveneau, 7th floor!... the proof, they sold everything off on me! the furniture, the apartment, the linens, the blankets!... Seven manuscripts! and they've promised to take everything else: confiscated *aeternam*! attachments!... works!... my cats even! It was already being proclaimed, gibberished, crackled about! the whole BBC! from La Fourche to the North Station... to the point where news of Rommel came after my shenanigans! The Unspeakable Céline! the worst kind of dunghill Kraut character you can dream up! you know because the Great Purification Brigade, they came up as soon as Arlette and me left,

March 22nd!¹ They chucked out my blind mother, they burglarized everything, burned seventeen manuscripts, they sold our sheets at the Flea Market, they didn't know what to do with *Guignol's Band*... *Krogold* either...or *Casse-Pipe*... They put some of it in storage but since they couldn't pay for it, it was sold on the sly at the Salle Drouot.² I know all about their funny business... There are families of Purifiers who're still full of my bric a brac!... I can't go tell the Grand Jury, "You're protecting pirates!"... They'd slap me with another fine for calumny etc., me who still has so many others to pay! to two, three, four Republics! I won't buy back so much as a folding bed!... And my mother's inheritance! They chucked it out! chucked out my mother before she died! Oh, but I'm very careful! I don't go complaining just any old where! You'll say, "you're so undone, why don't you just finish yourself off?"... Fine!... When I finish myself off I'm gonna say to you: because of animals, that's why, not men! for Cabbage Head and Nana and Sarah my cat that left one night and that we never saw again, for the farm horse, for our friends the animals who have suffered a thousand times just like men! rabbits, owls, black birds! who spent so many winters with us! in the back of beyond!... death will be a blessing to me... I will have given my heart away to everyone... It'll be over and done with, no more you, or your attachments, or your lies!... Aunt Extreme! Clemence! the brutal Toto too!... Over and done with! They'll no longer be dancing in my walls!.. the Banshee will no longer be

¹ The actual date the Destouches' departure from Paris was June 17, 1944.

² Yvon Morandat, who occupied Céline's apartment after his departure, put his furniture in storage. When Céline returned to France in 1961 he offered to have the furniture returned to him as long as he paid the storage expenses. This Céline refused, and the furniture was sold.

bashing his skull in... I don't want my death to be caused by men, they lie too much! not from them would I get eternal rest!

I've got others to tell you about, other stories that are far more heart-rending, with words and music... very well thought out... when you've bought *Fable!* ... not all at once! you'll have to wait! gluttons! your heads are far too flimsy... your little foreheads are too low... first of all there's the dreadful way you read... you don't even retain one word out of twenty... you stare off into the distance, tired out... you're not an artist like Jules... him, he retained what he saw! the proof, Arlette's thighs, her knockers, her backside, her ease... those convulsions of a lioness... even the goddam shithead of a malevolent stump that he was I'd rather have lent Arlette to him than to Ciborium of the Academy! And I find you have another terrible fault: innate avarice... you pass on books to your friends... you totally spoliage poets, they can go drop dead!... Oh, I already feel like dying... but not for you! I want to for Bébert, Cabbage Head, Valby, wild cats, and for Sarah my sacred little she-cat and for the farm animals... My style rubs you the wrong way? and my pellagra and my scrotum which is peeling, going gangrene on me? do you think you'll live forever? Ah, I can picture you having a good look up your asshole!... I disgust you? I'm too bestial?... maybe you do a bit of modeling like Jules? Would I know? Will I ever know? Maybe you're onto the gypsum of the Impasse Trainée?... Jules' secret vein... that you also want Lili spread out under the green Auer gas lamp?... If you went under that light you'd be finished!... An old gal, a young one, you in the middle!... that black Hercules as Priapus!... That would be the fatal blow to any inspiration! Lulli, Couperin,

worked that way!¹ but you know little about clay! even less about gypsum sandstone!...
 you, you'll wind up drinking infusions, sasparilla or flower-mix... with one percent
 digitalis... the usual concoctions... in a well ordered death!

Me, I know Jules' vein! I saw auntie Estreme there, Ciborium and little Leo!... I
 saw Clemence too!... I high-tailed it out there with the notes.



You're gonna have to make a quick get-away too!...

I'll give you all the music, couplets and refrains.

You'll see how it is they dance!

You'll see the lovely audience

At the great cemetery of the Good Children!

You'll be a bit shame-faced at first... your right leg up in the air!... then one day!...
 It'd be like a "Lancers Waltz" .. I'm not giving you the music right away! you'd think you
 could do anything then! You'd send back the wheelbarrow and the bike. You'd send me
 back down into the depths again! "Ciborium, Larengon! Go to it!" is what you'd say! On
 the road again! Achères! Leeks! No way! if you could sculpt Arlette maybe it'd be
 different! okay then! now you're talkin'! But take a look at yourself in the mirror! the
 same as Jules? Look at the sight of you! you don't look to me like an amputated hero! you
 don't come across like a hero at all! no! there's no more "War of '14" don't even talk

¹ Apparently this is not so. The 17th century musician J-B Lully was anything but a ladies' man, and Couperin wasn't either.

about it any more! I already gave you the key! "G major"! What are you waiting for? If I spoiled you, you'd only badmouth me! worse than ole Jules! you'd stick long needles into me! you'd bribe Bébert away from me with a steak! He'd gouge out my eyes!... the titmouse also! who's a lot sharper than he looks and Lili's red-breast who comes to see us each morning... Oh, I'm humbled before *sol! mi!... sol!... sol!...* you're humbled before nothing! naturally! spoiled is what you are! you badmouth heros! prisoners! the dying! no, I won't give you my sayings! all my sayings! there'd be no holding you back!... I used to accompany Jules with my left hand... I told you... it was usually with my left hand!... him playing the bugle to perfection!... I told you all about it... if I'd have been able to play with both hands he'd have hated me even more!... him, he could fiddle around with both hands! Boy could he knead the ladies with those!...

- Leave! is what he says to me! Get outa here! Three's a crowd!

I'm recapitulating... condensing... it's the *Readers Digest* style... people only have time to read thirty pages... apparently!... maximum!... that's all they have time for! they horse around for sixteen hours out of twenty-four, they sleep, they copulate the rest, where would they find the time to read a hundred pages? oh, do caca, I forgot! as well! and the cancer they're looking up their ass for, their head upside down, the acrobats! "Dear hole! Dear hole!" and those who onanize themselves to boot! while imagining themselves fondling big bawdy babes! they're ruining their circulation! hours on end! in the darkness of movie houses! going broke on getting their goddam pants laundered! over the ghosts of vampires, dead these twenty years! who come out of the cosy lair soaking wet, haggard! on the bus going home they don't know where the hell they are!

Me, I'm going to restore Art to its rightful place for you! I warned you above! not everything just for Jules! and his customers! his models, I'd do them all pink! his models! no more greens! no more yellows! Jules, his models! his pee-pee all over his goddam gondola-crate!

- My stumps are killing me today! Ha! Ha! and he'd pinch them, purposely! so the girls would finger them on him...

His shutters never closed right... never really shut... just so the voyeurs could get a peek inside... complicated business pretty girls and cheap thrills... why do they come back?... badly joined shutters help!... he wanted them that way... took balls!

- Don't go up to Ferdine's place up there! Don't go up to his place, my little lambs! He'll whip you! He'll gobble you up! He's an ogre!...

I never whipped anybody! He's the one who was spanking everybody and her aunt!

I'm going over all the bad things, all the damage he did to me... So let me sum up this first tome for you, a few words, a bit of music... If my poor old head is nodding, if I teeter and I vomit, it's not by choice, believe me! it's that I'm honest to goodness tired from too much remembering your thises and your thats... that it's all well and good and nice to say *Fable*, but the thises and the thats! the gas bill! the telephone! If I were independently wealthy I wouldn't write another word!... I wouldn't even bother saving money any more!... no more villa in Saint-Malo! as soon as I got there, my two maids, my

doors, as soon as I bought my two bikes, can you imagine the remarks! The “NRFers”¹ plague me, they want three... four tomes! and tunes! out of my poor chipped noggin! what’s more they want a *Readers Digest*!... a sizzling *Constellation*!²... five hundred pages reduced to thirty lines.

- Cut *Journey* down to twenty words for me!... with pictures!

I abbreviate everything! Cut everything down to size! Goddam crime! You gotta be a Vauvenargues, a La Bruyère, your admirers want twenty-five lines and a pin-up and nylon stockings! flesh colored! That’s their taste for you!

Arlette could help me out a little! I’m just a poor lyric poet, but damn it, a comic one! The way this century has treated me! I’ve got time to think about Jules again, but if I told you everything about him, the Grand Jury would take advantage, they’d turn my hourglass over.

- The rest of us are already blown sky high! Montmartre is about to go up in flames! mines everywhere!... From Batignolles to Dufayel!

That’s what Jules says anyway...

He knew everything, foresaw it all... he had some incredible contacts... the Grand Jury under his boot! One word from ole Jules and they let me out... same goes for here, where I am now... they send back the wheelbarrow!... ten of ‘em, fifteen, they jostle me off again!... farther than Archères! either that or they bash my skull in! Here in my hole!

¹ The “NRF” (from “La Nouvelle Revue française”), is the great French publishing house with whom Céline had a long and tumultuous relationship.

² Constellation was a French imitation of Readers Digest, started in 1948.

between two and three o'clock! They take advantage of visiting hours! that's what they did to the nutjob in 116... I saw him the next day on his stretcher... a stretcher covered in beige canvas... They took him off to the Morgue... he was a mystic the guy in 116, he used to offer up his sufferings for the poor souls in purgatory... the more sufferings he had the more he got his kicks! They stood him in good stead!... For me it would be another kind of torture. I've got a lot better bearings than the mystic!... I'll never see auntie Estreme again, nor Clemence nor the valiant Toto!... the Banshee will not perforate the wall on me! If he knocked it down once and for all I could finish my work!... but he'll never perforate anything at all.

I put him to shame in the infirmary.

- Eh, go on, you just scraped yourself, you loafer!

I take a look at his scab for him...

Seven poems I lost! seven! up there in the garbage, Gaveneau!... seven poems that soared, that set your soul sailing, which would have raised men to the Heavens, a century! but no, there you go! iconoclastic fury! the Ultimate Court and its hourglass! Seven invaluable poems! I can't complain too much! I don't dare! In case auntie Estreme hears me complaining and Clemence and the little Toto! and they figure out how to get their revenge!

But excuse me! There's fight in me yet!

I'll get you in my sights!

Two big black holes!

I'm talking to Jules here.

Your foul soul up the hole!

Will take flight!

You'll see the heavenly choirs!

How they dance upon the spires!

In the great cemetery of the Good Children!

I tone all this down somewhat... moderate my tones...

- Do a short version, dance to the *Readers Digest* tune! drop your head in your hands!

The "NRFers" make me laugh! And what about the "Internat"? a hundred words? nothing left out?

The Yanks are shamefully behind the times! Two hundred years behind, the simpletons! lying spewers of gobbledegook!

Two... three hundred years, we're ahead of them! us! it's laughable! We have La Bruyère¹ on our side! The match is won! the culture-match! Why should I waste my strength, my talents?

But I'd have more fun without the ass glued, without gangrene or scabs! I'd be as visionary as the Pope! I tell you! I tell you! If I didn't have the bowels all tied up in knots by hard turds, dysentery! If my hearing wasn't deafened by the hordes of express trains! Ah, would I be happy! But I've already grumbled a thousand times... I'll grumble again! I grumble about everything!... I grumble that you were going off to war that I can't stop you and that you come back covered in shit, ridiculous, without weapons, without a flag,

¹ La Bruyère is often quoted in Céline's prison diaries.

and that you rob me to boot and that you chuck me into prison and have me carried off in a wheelbarrow to the mud flats of Achères to wind up in the first flush of leeks!...

Is that chivalrous behavior?... I showed you Roland... Pépin the Short... Bayard!... that's enough!... you retained nothing whatsoever!... the leeks... the wheelbarrow!... there!... If they come back to get me I'll refuse!... I won't leave ever again, I'll hold on tight!... I'll bash my own skull in! I'm capable of it!... I'm not like the Banshee!...

I've been subjected to every kind of provocation!

I've had to deal with Louis XV at the cell window who invites me to fondle him...

I will not fondle him!

- You handsome prisoner, I could really go for you!

He lusts after me, he eyeballs me!

- Lewd imposter of a black pig of an Underling, leave me alone!

I'm sick, my head is throbbing like a drum, jangling like a bell, but I haven't lost a single marble!

- Long live Colonel Des Entrayes! Be stalwart, men!

My mind is like a flag of seamless muslin! it's not some lewd sonofabitch who'll get the better of me! or a Lartron either! or a Ciborium! same goes for Gram and Brôme and the weathervanes!¹... Lauriac either, or the funny-hat brigade! Stainless is what I am! I won't even tell you the indecency, the lewd outrageousness of their Odes! As boring as bookkeeping! What Jules did is child's play in comparison! And he, don't forget, took my

¹ "Girouettes" (weathervanes) was a term in vogue to describe those people who without having evinced any hostility to the Nazis declared themselves Resisters at the time of the Liberation.

Lili on me! he fondled her upside down inside out!... and was pawing at her so that I should watch everything! under the Auer gas lamp! willfully! drooling at the mouth! didn't want me to leave until I saw that they were in cahoots!... And he promised me her in the kiln to boot! in the kiln!

If they leave me in the clink much longer, these Hourglass potentates, people'll say: But that's not him!... that's no longer Ferdinand!... wouldn't recognize him! Half of my bowels are in a knot, that's true! I've practically got half a buttock gone and a little piece of hip falling apart! so? I'll make a formal complaint to the Foreign Office, I'll not mention anyone by name, but they know me... they'll summon me to the Courthouse... I won't be able to see anything... Arlette will recognize me... she alone... not the others!... that would be awful!... They'd start torturing me again!... wheelbarrow and off you go!...

Think about Ciborium! Larangon! Auntie Extreme! little Leo and the Underling! I'll pretend I'm somebody else! I'll have amnesia, I'll be a dribbling idiot, I'll be infantile!... and ole Jules who cut me so deeply, who's still whistling all through my walls on purpose he's whistling my little ritornello...



These days I can only retrospect in fits and starts... the noises in my ears are too intense... aside from the howlings from the dank cells! I'm floundering along with my stool on the tiles... I can no longer use my prison bunk... I stretch out on the tiles... my ass still stuck to the stool... that's it as far as rest goes... I listen, take the floor's heartbeat, I hear everything! the whole prison! on the bunk it's too painful... my right arm hurts too

much...I need vitamins, at least a hundred twenty-five grams a day! as well as the enemas!... from irritation and turning over my skin is coming off in strips... There are others of course!... Lots of others!... I'm just a small-fry martyr... Arlette has suffered more than I have... and Cabbage Head? and what about the farm animals?... Humans have it good! Oh yes indeed! I could sell you whistlings, strident coarse ones through the walls which would saw your bulb in two! the bulb of your brain I'm talking about! Jeess! I hold mine, head between two hands... the parietals... the occiput... my whole think-box is oscillating, swimming... it's not a respiratory problem... I have no difficulty breathing... it's the brain, the drumming inside there!... clarions! trumpets! and four locomotives! *Hush!* *Hush!*... the pellagra is tearing my ass to shreds... tearing it off I tell you!...

- Serves him right! No torture is excruciating enough for him! He asked for it!

You're like the Ultimate Court! *Dura lex!* Here, other whistlings now that I think about it... the guards!... Another round-up so they can give you some welcome punishment!... Their fists right in your kisser!... "*Ouch! Ouch!*" Two trucks screech to a halt on the gravel... it's a round-up all right!... It must be past midnight... they're gonna rumble!... With one ear stuck to the ground, like this ... like my stool is stuck to my ass, Jeess, it won't let go! I can't tell you, the scabs! It must be past midnight... The trucks screech to a halt on the gravel... with the other ear I hear outside... I hear!... I hear the sirens in the port!... And the owls in the cemetery... I'm not going in for romantic effects here... it's agonizing in the cells, I tell you! We'll see the bodies tomorrow, the bodies covered over, the forms... the time it takes to get them to the Morgue... We won't see their faces... Of course not, as long as they got holes punched in them... it's the guards

who lay them there... especially the women that they force into the game... I found out all about it, only natural... tourists don't get to see these things... tourists don't get to see anything... believe anything... think anything... They get out of their cars, they have a drink, they get back in again... "Good day, gentlemen!" The dying women that they rape, enchained, ligated, the tourists don't ever get to see them!... All the same it's been happening for three thousand years of History!... Tourists only see Paradise!...

- Sir, was it beautiful in paradise?

- Oh yes! I'll go back!

Those who aren't killed during the rumble, who've had their meat torn off their bones but whose hearts have held out, they have to go and have a wash once in a while. Cleanliness must reclaim its rights! In cold water, a jet of ice-cold water! so that everything gets moving again!... the hounds outside howl! the whole pack! they have to! because they're going at it again with the billy clubs! There's a whole lot of staggering going on under cold water! the dogs bark again! I'm not talking about the little cells. There they kill themselves ever so quietly... they open up their veins... they just about let out a sigh, they're dead, nobody knows... only again the next day the canvas is spread on top of them... the autopsy shroud... but there's background noises from the martyrs! The abortionist in 115 for example!... such bellowings that she outbells the pack... and the Matahari in 312! When the guards charge! open up their doors! club them till they scream, gasp, before they shut up... *thud! thud!* no problem hearing the bludgeons!... their thoraxes! their thighs! me, I hear fine, I'm taking the floor's heartbeat! Resounding! My whole ear on the ground, I hear it all... I can't stretch out on the bunk, I told you... I drop

down just like that! stool adhesive to the ass!... I tear my scabs off as I get up when they sound the whistle that it's daybreak... well, about 5 a.m.... What bothers me aside from my noises is maybe even more my bowels, my ten to twelve day constipation... such heavy intestinal lumber... They give me an enema of boiling water and fifteen phials of "DD extract". And then they bring me back down into the hole... If I didn't ask them for my enema I'd die of an obstruction, of a volvulus!¹... Then what? You'd never get my little air! *Mi! do! do! sol!* or anything at all! not Leo, and not auntie Extreme either!

Even if the Banshee blasted down my wall! I'd meet him again in the infirmary!
I'd always meet up with him somewhere! He's used to the way I treat him!

- Goddam good-for-nothing you're bothering me! You chase away my Muses!
You Destroyer of the Arts! You Hun!

- Shake me up! he says!

I don't shake anybody up! You're like Louis XV that black Underling! lust after everything on legs!

What's more, he defecates whenever he wants, the Banshee! He stinks up the infirmary! great big greasy perfectly shaped stools! you can imagine me with my amoebic dysentery I'd have a thousand times a thousand reasons to be jealous!... stools like that! I could also be jealous of Jules who pisses all over his crate whenever he pleases! Me here, my stool up the ass, it's not easy to urinate! Not at all, I can assure you! Try it! And I'm not jealous! and he makes Arlette come, I wasn't there but I'm sure of it!... I'd rather not

¹ Volvulus is a medical term designating a bending of the intestine which causes a blockage.

go into it! The poor little darling love who's suffering! suffered enough from my turpitudes, a thousand times worse than me! my idiotic patriotic escapades!

They were in it together Jules and her! It was agreed... A certain complicity... There was an esthetic side to it, the clay... there was this whole plastic side to it... casting!... casting was the thing!... there was some other understanding too, but what?... I recapitulate... his lode!... the Trainée Impasse... I've got to situate everything right for you!... to recapitulate!... so you don't regret spending your six pounds! and the last pages summed up! the last thirty!

Must we tell our friends

Every party ends?

Mi! re! mi! sol! mi!

In G! The whole thing in G!

He still hasn't got it going again, his pottery kiln! but I've got all the *mi! re! sol!*

That's all I want! Oh, but you need the words! You're right!

Dead leaves in the wind!

That's alive!

It's not just Jules who's jealous of my visions, the others are too! the other cells! they all want just one thing, that I drop dead!... that they remain! And to get their ass shined again! and a kiln too! Such ardor for that! Ah! if they only knew Lili! the muscles! the harmony! and her nether regions! and her smile! nobody shines the way she does!



I'm aching all over, okay! I hear the convicts being beaten! I hear the owls hooting! I hear the sirens in the port! but I remain stoical, harmonious, pleasant... I know a thing or two!... I'm remembering it all, he's got friends in high places! I think about Jules. I think about Lili... what I regret here flat out on the floor listening to the stone is not to have seen enough!... if I'd really insisted he'd have done it all in front of me, I'd have strangled him afterwards!

It's the genius of his hands!... He had the hands that could knead them, but had I grabbed him by the neck, I'd have punctured his glottis for him! he was in the right position! And be proud of it! proud of it, I tell you! But I don't have strangler hands... I couldn't have done it if I tried... *whack!* the screams! My hands are made for work!... an idiot's hands... if I'd laid them on him for real! if I'd gone at it with my two arms, would I have strangled him perhaps? I'd have gotten his glottis!... they would have come, all right, the pair of them... They were asking for it... they wanted to finish off... they'd provoked me enough!... I'd have gouged his eyes out! after strangling him! He'd wronged me enough!... on purpose her there naked under the gas lamp... Would I have gouged out his eyes? That's the story... the situation!...



It's the way he fondled her I can't get over... That's what it was... the way he

fondled her!... I was really worked up!... Yup... really excited!... a regular John!... life
passes... blood passes... it bears away...

Appendix: a brief look at other translations

“*Féerie pour une autre fois I and II*” have never before been translated into English, although a few excerpts have been published in periodicals throughout the years, for example in “*Fiction*” 1994: 12:1, where Erica Obey gave a fine rendering of the scene in which Ferdinand returns to Montmartre on his bicycle.

A number of fine scholars and translators have translated the rest of Céline’s novels into English, the most notable amongst them being Ralph Manheim. He published in English all of Céline’s novels with the exception of “*Guignol’s Band I and II*” and “*Féerie pour une autre fois I and II*”. The Englishman John Marks translated “*Voyage au bout de la nuit*” and “*Mort à crédit*”. “*Guignol’s Band I*” has been translated by Bernard Frechtman and Jack T. Nile, and “*Le pont de Londres: Guignol’s Band II*” was translated as “*London Bridge*” by Dominic Di Bernardo and published in 1995. There is also a translation of “*Entretiens avec le Professeur Y*” by Stanford Luce. (See bibliography for details.)

Since John Marks and Ralph Manheim both rendered some of Céline’s works in English, their respective translations provide us with an interesting opportunity to compare them. Although John Marks’ translation of “*Voyage au bout de la nuit*” is out of circulation, his “*Death on the Installment Plan*” is still available and provides an interesting contrast to Ralph Manheim’s translation by the same name. In the following scene, for example, where Ferdinand is as usual misbehaving and causing scandal, the original (page 41 of the Folio edition) reads:

J'avais beau être au fond des pommes, la Mireille me revenait quand même...

J'étais tranquille qu'elle avait dû aller baver tout son content.

“Ah! Qu'ils diraient à la Jonction... Le Ferdinand il est devenu insupportable! Il va au Bois se faire miser!... Il débauche toutes les jeunes filles!... On va se plaindre à la Mairie!... Il a sali son emploi! C'est un violeur et un factieux!...”

Tel quel! Ça me faisait bouillir dans mon plume de me représenter ces salades, je suintais de partout comme un crapaud... J'en étouffais... je me tortille... Je me démène encore... Je balance toutes le couvertures... Je me retrouve une garce vigueur. Et c'est pourtant bien exact qu'ils nous ont suivis les satyres!...

John Marks translates this passage in the 1938 *New Directions* edition as follows:

It made no odds my being past praying for, the thought of Mireille plagued me just the same.

It was a cinch that she had run around spilling the dirt about me. “*Ah, tchah!*” they'd be saying at the Clinic. “Ferdinand's gotten beyond a joke! He goes off to the Bois for a slap and tickle -- not only that but he takes Mireille along with him. And he assaults every young girl he can find! There's going to be a complaint to the Town Council. He's fouled his own nest! He's a degenerate and a blackguard.”

I could hear them! It made me stew in my bed just to imagine the foul way they'd talk... I lay there sweating like a toad. I was stifling, I twisted and flayed... I

was beginning to rave again. I flung the bedclothes off. I felt suddenly hellish strong... Still, it's perfectly true that that lecherous horde chased us here! (Page 30).

Ralph Manheim's 1966 New Directions translation renders the same passage as:

I was dead to the world, but even so I couldn't get Mireille off my mind.

I had no doubt about her spilling the dirt all over the place.

"My oh my!" they'd be saying at the clinic... "Ferdinand's been overdoing it. He goes out to the Bois to get laid... (the way they always exaggerate). With Mireille of all people... debauching all our young women... They're putting in a complaint... He's a disgrace to his profession! A rapist and an anarchist..."

No less! It made my blood boil in my bed to think about those fairy tales. I was oozing all over like a toad... I was suffocating... I wriggled and thrashed... I threw off all the covers... Suddenly I felt strong as an ox. But's its perfectly true that those devils were following us! (Page 41)

The numerous differences in translation between these two passages point toward a very different aesthetic on the part of the respective translators. Between "beyond praying for" and "dead to the world" there is already a great difference in tone. But the amusingly coy British euphemism for love-making, "a slap and a tickle" would convince the person comparing these two translations of the word "miser", that the first conveys little of the vulgar force of the French, which according to the Larousse Dictionnaire de l'argot, refers to sexual penetration, especially of the anal kind, and in fact, uses this very passage from "Mort à crédit" to illustrate that particular meaning! There is a crucial

difference between “assaulting” and “debauching” young ladies, as the latter implies that the young ladies in question were something more than mere victims. “He’s a degenerate and a blackguard” also has a rather genteel ring to it, something which Manheim rightly avoids in his more accurate translation of “un violeur et un factieux” as “A rapist and an anarchist”. And “I felt suddenly hellish strong” has a literary flavor to it that “Je me retrouve une garce vigueur” certainly lacks, and which “Suddenly I felt strong as an ox” comes closer to conveying.

When Ralph Manheim brought out his translation of “Mort à crédit” in 1966 he justified retranslating this work which had already been translated by John Marks by pointing out that thirty years previously people were shocked by Céline’s subject matter and style. While he states that the previous translator had been an able craftsman, he felt that:

he too seems to have been shocked, at least by the style, which he evidently regarded either as a mistake or as conceivable only in French. The three dots and what they stand for are largely eliminated; the swift abrupt ejaculations are transformed into the flowing periods that Céline had rejected; and the language is to a considerable extent ennobled. I have tried to give an idea of Céline’s style.

(Page xi).

Céline himself wanted at all costs to avoid “a noble style” in his novels. In one of the 95 letters he wrote to John Marks between 1933 and 1939 advised him on how he should translate “Voyage au bout de la nuit”:

Rien à attendre du public anglais. Il a la gueule pourrie par la sucrerie et le préchi-

précha [...] Tâchez de vous porter dans le rythme toujours dansant du texte -- ne laissez pas tomber l'entrain -- non que je veuille vous demander de faire du "peppy style" mais tout de même d'élaguer en anglais ce qui n'est pas la vie mais la mort [...] Tout cela est danse et musique -- toujours au bout de la mort. ne pas tomber dedans". (Quoted in François Gibault's "Céline: 1932-1944, Délires et persécutions" page 79).

Had Céline's English been as good as he professed it to be, he perhaps would not have been terribly happy with Marks' translations. Perhaps he would have found that the English propensity for "préchi-précha" had influenced his young friend's translation despite all his warnings. One wonders whether he would not have found Ralph Manheim's more to his liking, truer to his own intentions.

In any case, it is an honor to follow in the footsteps of such capable and illustrious predecessors, and the author of the present translation would like to warmly thank the CUNY Graduate Center for granting her the privilege of translating the current work in pursuance of a PhD in French.

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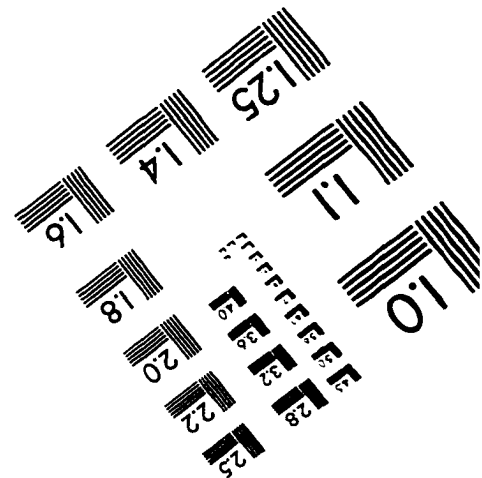
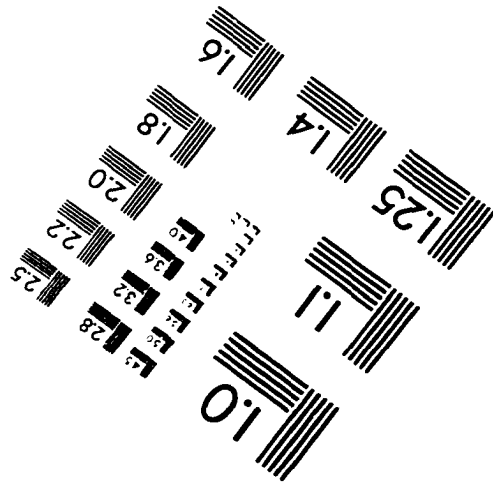
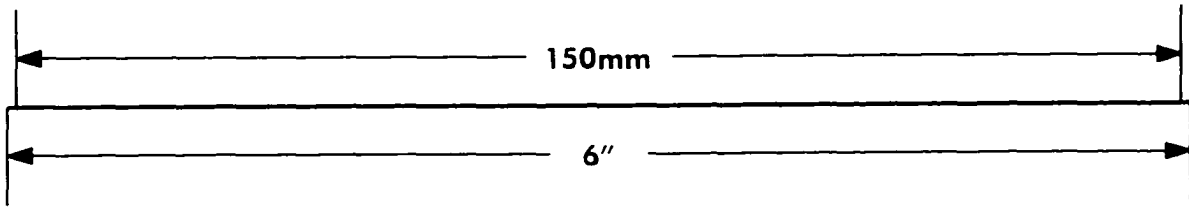
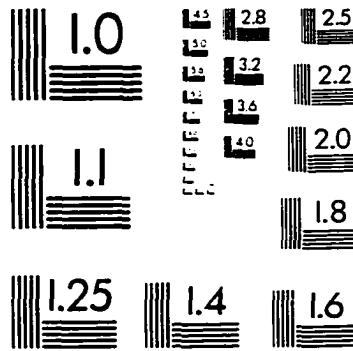
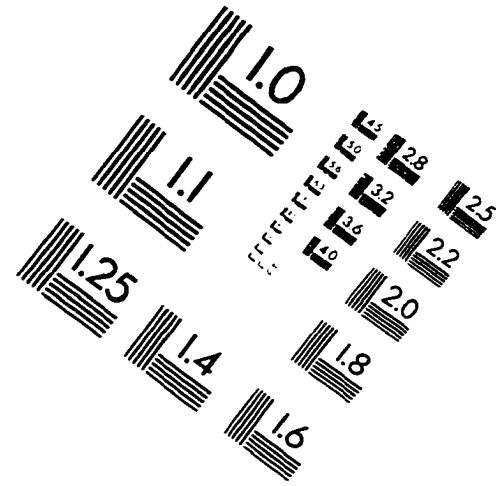
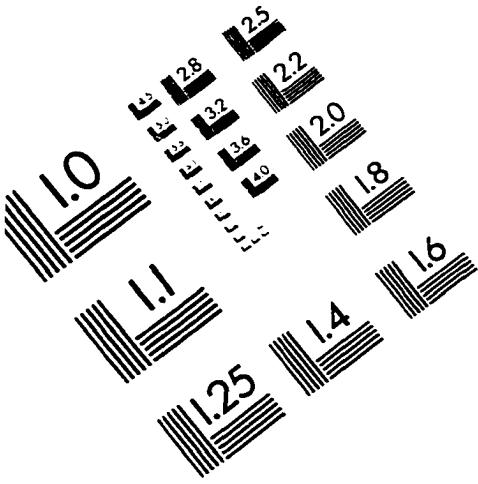
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