

BERYL BAINBRIDGE

CLAP HANDS, HERE COMES CHARLIE

Two weeks before Christmas, Angela Bisson gave Mrs Henderson six tickets for the theatre. Mrs Henderson was Angela Bisson's cleaning lady.

'I wanted to avoid giving you money,' Angela Bisson told her. 'Anybody can give money. Somehow the whole process is so degrading . . . taking it . . . giving it. They're reopening the Empire Theatre for a limited season. I wanted to give you a treat. Something you'll always remember.'

Mrs Henderson said, 'Thank you very much.' She had never, when accepting money, felt degraded.

Her husband, Charles Henderson, asked her how much Angela Bisson had tipped her for Christmas.

Mrs Henderson said not much. 'In fact,' she admitted, 'nothing at all. Not in your actual pounds, shillings and pence. We've got tickets for the theatre instead.'

'What a discerning woman,' cried Charles Henderson. 'It's just what we've always needed.'

'The kiddies will like it,' protested Mrs Henderson. 'It's a pantomime. They've never been to a pantomime.'

Mrs Henderson's son, Alec, said *Peter Pan* wasn't a pantomime. At least not what his mother understood by the word. Of course, there was a fairy-tale element to the story, dealing as it did with Neverland and lost boys, but there was more to it than that. 'It's written on several levels,' he informed her.

'I've been a lost boy all my life,' muttered Charles Henderson, but nobody heard him.

'And I doubt,' said Alec, 'if our Moira's kiddies will make head nor tail of it. It's full of nannies and coal fires burning in the nursery.'

'Don't talk rot,' fumed Charles Henderson. 'They've seen coal fires on television.'

'Shut up, Charlie,' said Alec. His father hated being called Charlie. 'Does it have a principal boy?' asked Mrs Henderson, hopefully.

'Yes and no,' said Alec. 'Not in the sense you mean. Don't expect any singing or any smutty jokes. It's allegorical.'

'God Almighty,' said Charles Henderson.

When Alec had gone out to attend a union meeting, Mrs Henderson told her husband he needn't bother to come to the theatre. She wasn't putting up with him and Alec having a pantomime of their own during the course of the evening and spoiling it for everyone else. She'd ask Mrs Rafferty from the floor above to go in his place.

'By heck,' shouted Charles Henderson, striking his forehead with the back of his hand, 'why didn't I think of that? Perish the thought that our Alec should be the one to be excluded. I'm only the blasted bread-winner.' He knew his wife was just mouthing words.

Mrs Rafferty's answer to such an outlandish invitation was a foregone conclusion. She wouldn't give it a house. Mrs Rafferty hadn't been out of the building for five years, not since she was bashed over the head coming home from Bingo.

All the same, Charles Henderson was irritated. His wife's attitude, and the caustic remarks addressed to him earlier by Alec brought on another attack of indigestion. It was no use going to his bed and lying flat. He knew from experience that it wouldn't help. In the old days, when they had lived in a proper house, he could have stepped out of the back door and perambulated up and down the yard for a few minutes. Had there been anything so exalted as a back door in this hell-hole, going out of it certainly wouldn't improve his health. Not without a parachute. He couldn't even open the window for a breath of air. This high up there was generally a howling gale blowing in from the river - it would suck the Christmas cards clean off the sideboard. It wasn't normal, he thought, to be perpetually on a par with the clouds.

People weren't meant to look out of windows and see nothing but sky, particularly if they weren't looking upwards. God knows how Moira's kiddies managed. They were stuck up in the air over Kirby. When Moira and Alec had been little they'd played in the street - Moira on the front step fiddling with her dolly, Alec on one roller-skate scooting in and out of the lamp-posts. Of course there was no denying that it had been nice at first to own a decent bathroom and have hot water coming out of the tap. After only a few weeks it had become unnecessary to scrub young Alec's neck with his toothbrush; the dirt just floated off on the towel. But there was surely more to life than a

clean neck. Their whole existence, once work was over for the day, was lived as though inside the cabin of an aeroplane. And they weren't going anywhere – there wasn't a landing field in sight. Just stars. Thousands of the things, on clear nights, winking away outside the double glazing. It occurred to Charles Henderson that there were too many of them for comfort or for grandeur. It was quality that counted, not quantity.

At the end of the yard of the terraced house in which he had once lived, there had been an outside toilet. Sitting within the evil-smelling little shed, its door swinging on broken hinges, he had sometimes glimpsed one solitary star hung motionless above the city. It had, he felt, given perspective to his situation, his situation in the wider sense – beyond his temporary perch. He was earthbound, mortal, and a million light-years separated him from that pale diamond burning in the sky. One star was all a man needed.

On the night of the outing to the theatre, a bit of a rumpus took place in the lift. It was occasioned by Moira's lad, Wayne, jabbing at all the control buttons and giving his grandmother a turn.

Alec thumped Wayne across the ear and Charles Henderson flared up. 'There was no cause to do that,' he shouted, though indeed there had been. Wayne was a shocking kiddie for fiddling with things.

'Belt up, Charlie,' ordered Alec.

Alec drove them to the Empire theatre in his car. It wasn't a satisfactory arrangement as far as Charles Henderson was concerned but he had no alternative. The buses came and went as they pleased. He was forced to sit next to Alec because he couldn't stand being parked in the back with the children and neither Moira nor Mrs Henderson felt it was safe in the passenger seat. Not with Alec at the wheel. Every time Alec accelerated going round a corner, Charles Henderson was swung against his son's shoulder.

'Get over, can't you?' cried Alec. 'Stop leaning on me, Charlie.'

When they passed the end of the street in which they had lived a decade ago, Mrs Henderson swivelled in her seat and remarked how changed it was, oh how changed. All those houses knocked down, and for what? Alec said that in his opinion it was good riddance to bad rubbish. The whole area had never been anything but a slum.

'Perhaps you're right, son,' said Mrs Henderson. But she was pandering to him.

Charles Henderson was unwise enough to mention times gone by.

He was talking to his wife. 'Do you remember all the men playing football in the street after work?'

'I do,' she said.

'And using the doorway of the Lune Laundry for a goal-post? It was like living in a village, wasn't it?'

'A village,' hooted Alec. 'With a tobacco warehouse and a brewery in the middle of it? Some village.'

'We hunted foxes in the field behind the public house,' reminisced Charles Henderson. 'And we went fishing in the canal.'

'You did. You were never at home,' said Mrs Henderson, without rancour.

'What field?' scoffed Alec. 'What canal?'

'There was a time,' said Charles Henderson, 'when we snared rabbits every Saturday and had them for Sunday dinner. I tell no lies. You might almost say we lived off the land.'

'Never-Never land, more like,' sneered Alec, and he drove, viciously, the wrong way down a one way street.

When they got to the town centre he made them all get out and stand about in the cold while he manoeuvred the Mini backwards and forwards in the underground car park. He cursed and gesticulated.

'Behave yourself,' shouted Charles Henderson, and he strode in front of the bonnet and made a series of authoritative signals. Alec deliberately drove the car straight at him.

'Did you see what that madman did?' Charles Henderson asked his wife. 'He ran over my foot.'

'You're imagining things,' said Mrs Henderson, but when he looked down he saw quite clearly the tread of the tyre imprinted upon the Cherry Blossom shine of his Sunday left shoe.

When the curtain went up, he was beginning to feel the first twinges of his indigestion coming on again. It wasn't to be wondered at all that swopping of seats because Moira had a tall bloke sitting in front of her, and the kiddies tramping back and forth to the toilet, not to mention the carry-on over parking the car. At least he hadn't got Alec sitting next to him. He found the first act of *Peter Pan* a bit of a mystery. It was very old-fashioned and cosy. He supposed they couldn't get a real dog to play the part. Some of the scenery could do with a lick of paint. He didn't actually laugh out loud when Mr Darling complained that nobody coddled him – oh no, why should they, seeing he was only the bread-winner – but he did grunt sardonically; Mrs Henderson nudged him sharply with her elbow. He couldn't for the life of him make out

who or what Tinkerbell was, beyond being a sort of glow-worm bobbing up and down on the nursery wall, until Wendy had her hair pulled for wanting Peter to kiss her, and then he more or less guessed Tinkerbell was a female. It was a bit suggestive, all that. And at the end of the first scene when they all flew out of the window, something must have gone wrong with the wires because one of the children never got off the ground. They brought the curtain down fast. Wayne was yawning his head off.

During Acts Two and Three, Charles Henderson dozed. He was aware of loud noises and children screaming in a bloodthirsty fashion. He hoped Wayne wasn't having one of his tantrums. It was confusing for him. He was dreaming he was fishing in the canal for tiddlers and a damn big crocodile crawled up the bank with a clock ticking inside it. Then he heard a drum beating and a voice cried out 'To die will be an awfully big adventure.' He woke up then with a start. He had a pain in his arm.

In the interval they retired to the bar, Moira and himself and Alec. Mrs Henderson stayed with the kiddies, to give Moira a break. Alec paid for a round of drinks. 'Are you enjoying it then, Charlie?' he asked.

'It's a bit loud for me,' said Charles Henderson. 'But I see what you mean about it being written on different levels.'

'You do surprise me,' said Alec. 'I could have sworn you slept through most of it.'

Moira said little Tracy was terrified of the crocodile but she loved the doggie.

'Some doggie,' muttered Charles Henderson. 'I could smell the moth balls.'

'But Wayne thinks it's lovely,' said Moira. 'He's really engrossed.'

'I could tell,' Charles Henderson said. 'They must have heard him yawning in Birkenhead.'

'It's one of his signs,' defended Moira. 'Yawning. He always yawns when he's engrossed.' She herself was enjoying it very much, though she hadn't understood at first what Mr Darling was doing dressed up as Captain Hook.

'It's traditional,' Alec told her.

'What are you on about?' asked Charles Henderson. 'That pirate chappie was never Mr Darling.'

'Yes it was, Dad,' said Moira. 'I didn't cotton on myself at first, but it was the same man.'

'I suppose it saves on wages,' Charles Henderson said. Alec explained it was symbolic. The kindly Mr Darling and the brutal Captain Hook were two halves of the same man.

'There wasn't more than a quarter of Mr Darling,' cried Charles Henderson, heatedly. 'That pirate was waving his cutlass about every time I opened my eyes. I can't see the point of it, can you, Moira?'

Moira said nothing, but her mouth drooped at the corners. She was probably thinking about her husband who had run off and left her with two kiddies and a gas bill for twenty-seven quid.

'The point,' said Alec, 'is obvious. Mr Darling longs to murder his offspring.' He was shouting quite loudly. 'Like fathers in real life. They're always out to destroy their children.'

'What's up with you?' asked Mrs Henderson, when her husband had returned to his seat.

'That Alec,' hissed Charles Henderson. 'He talks a load of codswallop. I'd like to throttle him.'

During Act Four Charles Henderson asked his wife for a peppermint. His indigestion was fearsome. Mrs Henderson told him to shush. She too seemed engrossed in the pantomime. Wayne was sitting bolt upright. Charles Henderson tried to concentrate. He heard some words but not others. The lost boys were going back to their Mums, that much he gathered. Somebody called Tiger Lily had come into it. And Indians were beating tom-toms. His heart was beating so loudly that it was a wonder Alec didn't fly off the handle and order him to keep quiet. Wendy had flown off with the boys, jerkily, and Peter was asleep. It was odd how it was all to do with flying. That Tinkerbell person was flashing about among the cloth trees. He had the curious delusion that if he stood up on his seat, he too might soar up into the gallery. It was a daft notion because when he tried to shift his legs they were as heavy as lead. Mrs Darling would be pleased to see the kiddies again. She must have gone through hell. He remembered the time Alec had come home half an hour late from the Cubs – the length of those minutes, the depth of that fear. It didn't matter what his feelings had been towards Alec for the last ten years. He didn't think you were supposed to feel much for grown-up children. He had loved little Alec, now a lost boy, and that was enough.

Something dramatic was happening on stage. Peter had woken up and was having a disjointed conversation with Tinkerbell, something to do with cough mixture and poison. *Tink, you have drunk my medicine . . . it was poisoned and you drank it to save my life . . . Tink dear, are you*

dying? . . . The tiny star that was Tinkerbell began to flicker. Charles Henderson could hear somebody sobbing. He craned sideways to look down the row and was astonished to see that his grandson was wiping at his eyes with the back of his sleeve. Fancy Wayne, a lad who last year had been caught dangling a hamster on a piece of string from a window on the fourteenth floor of the flats, crying about a light going out. Peter Pan was advancing towards the audience, his arms flung wide. *Her voice is so low I can hardly hear what she is saying. She says . . . she says she thinks she could get well again if children believed in faeries. Say quick that you believe. If you believe, clap your hands. Clap your hands and Tinkerbell will live.*

At first the clapping was muted, apologetic. Tinkerbell was reduced to a dying spark quivering on the dusty floorboards of the stage. Charles Henderson's own hands were clasped to his chest. There was a pain inside him as though somebody had slung a hook through his heart. The clapping increased in volume. The feeble Tinkerbell began to glow. She sailed triumphantly up the trunk of a painted tree. She grew so dazzling that Charles Henderson was blinded. She blazed above him in the skies of Never-Never land.

'Help me,' he said, using his last breath.

'Shut up, Charlie,' shouted Mrs Henderson, and she clapped and clapped until the palms of her hands were stinging.

IAN MCEWAN

PSYCHOPOLIS

Mary worked in and part-owned a feminist bookstore in Venice. I met her there lunchtime on my second day in Los Angeles. That same evening we were lovers, and not so long after that, friends. The following Friday I chained her by the foot to my bed for the whole weekend. It was, she explained to me, something she 'has to go into to come out of'. I remember her extracting (later, in a crowded bar) my solemn promise that I would not listen if she demanded to be set free. Anxious to please my new friend, I bought a fine chain and diminutive padlock. With brass screws I secured a steel ring to the wooden base of the bed and all was set. Within hours she was insisting on her freedom, and though a little confused I got out of bed, showered, dressed, put on my carpet slippers and brought her a large frying-pan to urinate in. She tried on a firm, sensible voice.

'Unlock this,' she said. 'I've had enough.' I admit she frightened me. I poured myself a drink and hurried out on to the balcony to watch the sun set. I was not at all excited. I thought to myself, if I unlock the chain she will despise me for being so weak. If I keep her there she might hate me, but at least I will have kept my promise. The pale orange sun dipped into the haze, and I heard her shout to me through the closed bedroom door. I closed my eyes and concentrated on being blameless.

A friend of mine once had analysis with an elderly man, a Freudian with a well-established practice in New York. On one occasion my friend spoke at length about his doubts concerning Freud's theories, their lack of scientific credibility, their cultural particularity and so on. When he had done the analyst smiled genially and replied, 'Look around you!' And indicated with his open palm the comfortable study, the rubber plant and the begonia rex, the book-lined walls and finally, with an inward movement of the wrist which both suggested candour and emphasized the lapels of his tasteful suit, said, 'Do you

ANGELA CARTER

FLESH AND THE MIRROR

It was midnight - I chose my times and set my scenes with the precision of the born artiste. Hadn't I gone eight thousand miles to find a climate with enough anguish and hysteria in it to satisfy me? I had arrived back in Yokohama that evening from a visit to England and nobody met me, although I expected him. So I took the train to Tokyo, half an hour's journey. First, I was angry; but the poignancy of my own situation overcame me and then I was sad. To return to the one you love and find him absent! My heart used to jump like Pavlov's dogs at the prospect of such a treat; I positively salivated at the suggestion of unpleasure, I was sure that *that* was real life. I'm told I always look lonely when I'm alone; that is because, when I was an intolerable adolescent, I learned to sit with my coat collar turned up in a lonely way, so that people would talk to me. And I can't drop the habit even now, though, now, it's only a habit and, I realize, a predatory habit.

It was midnight and I was crying bitterly as I walked under the artificial cherry blossom with which they decorate the lamp standards from April to September. They do that so the pleasure quarters will have the look of a continuous carnival, no matter what ripples of agitation disturb the never-ceasing, endlessly circulating, quiet, gentle, melancholy crowds who throng the wet web of alleys under a false ceiling of umbrellas. All looked as desolate as Mardi Gras. I was searching among a multitude of unknown faces for the face of the one I loved while the warm, thick, heavy rain of summer greased the dark surfaces of the streets until, after a while, they began to gleam like sleek fur of seals just risen from the bottom of the sea.

The crowds lapped round me like waves full of eyes until I felt that I was walking through an ocean whose speechless and gesticulating inhabitants, like those with whom medieval philosophers peopled the countries of the deep, were methodical inversions or mirror images of the dwellers on dry land. And I moved through these expressionist

FLESH AND THE MIRROR

perspectives in my black dress as though I was the creator of all and of myself, too, in a black dress, in love, crying, walking through the city in the third person singular, my own heroine, as though the world stretched out from my eye like spokes from a sensitized hub that galvanized all to life when I looked at it.

I think I know, now, what I was trying to do. I was trying to subdue the city by turning it into a projection of my own growing pains. What solipsistic arrogance! The city, the largest city in the world, the city designed to suit not one of my European expectations, this city presents the foreigner with a mode of life that seems to him to have the enigmatic transparency, the indecipherable clarity, of dream. And it is a dream he could, himself, never have dreamed. The stranger, the foreigner, thinks he is in control; but he has been precipitated into somebody else's dream.

You never know what will happen in Tokyo. Anything can happen.

I had been attracted to the city first because I suspected it contained enormous histrionic resources. I was always rummaging in the dressing-up box of the heart for suitable appearances to adopt in the city. That was the way I maintained my defences for, at that time, I always used to suffer a great deal if I let myself get too close to reality since the definitive world of the everyday with its hard edges and harsh light did not have enough resonance to echo the demands I made upon experience. It was as if I never experienced experience *as* experience. Living never lived up to the expectations I had of it - the Bovary syndrome. I was always imagining other things that could have been happening, instead, and so I always felt cheated, always dissatisfied.

Always dissatisfied, even if, like a perfect heroine, I wandered, weeping, on a forlorn quest for a lost lover through the aromatic labyrinth of alleys. And wasn't I in Asia? Asia! But, even though I lived there, it always seemed far away from me. *It was as if there were glass between me and the world.* But I could see myself perfectly well on the other side of the glass. There I was, walking up and down, eating meals, having conversations, in love, indifferent, and so on. But all the time I was pulling the strings of my own puppet; it was this puppet who was moving about on the other side of the glass. And I eyed the most marvellous adventures with the bored eye of the agent with the cigar watching another audition. I tapped out the ash and asked of events: 'What else can you do?'

So I attempted to rebuild the city according to the blueprint in my imagination as a backdrop to the plays in my puppet theatre, but it

sternly refused to be so rebuilt; I was only imagining it had been so rebuilt. On the night I came back to it, however hard I looked for the one I loved, she could not find him anywhere and the city delivered her into the hands of a perfect stranger who fell into step beside her and asked why she was crying. She went with him to an unambiguous hotel with mirror on the ceiling and lascivious black lace draped round a palpably illicit bed. His eyes were shaped like sequins. All night long, a thin, pale, sickle moon with a single star pendant at its nether tip floated upon the rain that pitter-pattered against the windows and there was a clockwork whirling of cicadas. From time to time, the windbell dangling from the eaves let out an exquisitely mournful tinkle.

None of the lyrical eroticism of this sweet, sad, moon night of summer rain had been within my expectations; I had half expected he would strangle me. My sensibility wilted under the burden of response. My sensibility foundered under the assault on my senses.

My imagination had been pre-empted.

The room was a box of oiled paper full of the echoes of the rain. After the light was out, as we lay together, I could still see the single shape of our embrace in the mirror above me, a marvellously unexpected conjunction cast at random by the enigmatic kaleidoscope of the city. Our pelts were stippled with the fretted shadows of the lace curtains as if our skins were a mysterious uniform provided by the management in order to render all those who made love in that hotel anonymous. The mirror annihilated time, place and person; at the consecration of this house, the mirror had been dedicated to the reflection of chance embraces. Therefore it treated flesh in an exemplary fashion, with charity and indifference.

The mirror distilled the essence of all the encounters of strangers whose perceptions of one another existed only in the medium of the chance embrace, the accidental. During the durationless time we spent making love, we were not ourselves, whoever that might have been, but in some sense the ghosts of ourselves. But the selves we were not, the selves of our own habitual perceptions of ourselves, had a far more insubstantial substance than the reflections we were. The magic mirror presented me with a hitherto unconsidered notion of myself as I. Without any intention of mine, I had been defined by the action reflected in the mirror. I beset me. I was the subject of the sentence written on the mirror. I was not watching it. There was nothing whatsoever beyond the surface of the glass. Nothing kept me from the

fact, the act; I had been precipitated into knowledge of the real conditions of living.

Mirrors are ambiguous things. The bureaucracy of the mirror issues me with a passport to the world; it shows me my appearance. But what use is a passport to an armchair traveller? Women and mirrors are in complicity with one another to evade the action I/she performs that she/I cannot watch, the action with which I break out of the mirror, with which I assume my appearance. But *this* mirror refused to conspire with me; it was like the first mirror I'd ever seen. It reflected the embrace beneath it without the least guile. All it showed was inevitable. But I myself could never have dreamed it.

I saw the flesh and the mirror but I could not come to terms with the sight. My immediate response to it was, to feel I'd acted out of character. The fancy-dress disguise I'd put on to suit the city had betrayed me to a room and a bed and a modification of myself that had no business at all in my life, not in the life I had watched myself performing. Therefore I evaded the mirror. I scrambled out of its arms and sat on the edge of the bed and lit a fresh cigarette from the butt of the old one. The rain beat down. My demonstration of perturbation was perfect in every detail, just like the movies. I applauded it. I was gratified the mirror had not seduced me into behaving in a way I would have felt inappropriate – that is, shuddering and sleeping, as though my infidelity was not of the least importance. I now shook with the disturbing presentiment that he with his sequin eyes who'd been kind to me was an ironic substitute for the other one, the one I loved, as if the arbitrary carnival of the streets had gratuitously offered me this young man to find out if I *could* act out of character and then projected our intersection upon the mirror, as an objective lesson in the nature of things.

Therefore I dressed rapidly and ran away as soon as it was light outside, that mysterious, colourless light of dawn when the hooded crows flap out of the temple groves to perch on the telegraph poles, cawing a baleful dawn chorus to the echoing boulevards empty, now, of all the pleasure-seekers. The rain had stopped. It was an overcast morning so hot that I broke out into a sweat at the slightest movement. The bewildering electrographics of the city at night were all switched *weather* off. All the perspectives were pale, gritty grey, the air was full of dust. I never knew such a banal morning.

The morning before the night before, the morning before this oppressive morning, I woke up in the cabin of a boat. All the previous day, as we rounded the coast in bright weather, I dreamed of the

reunion before me, a lovers' meeting refreshed by the three months I'd been gone, returning home due to a death in the family. I will come back as soon as I can - I'll write. Will you meet me at the pier? Of course, of course he will. But he was not at the pier; where was he?

So I went at once to the city and began my desolate tour of the pleasure quarters, looking for him in all the bars he used. He was nowhere to be found. I did not know his address, of course; he moved from rented room to rented room with the agility of the feckless and we had corresponded through accommodation addresses, coffee shops, poste restante, etc. Besides, there had been a displacement of mail reminiscent of the excesses of the nineteenth-century novel, such as it is difficult to believe and could only have been caused by a desperate emotional necessity to cause as much confusion as possible. Both of us prided ourselves on our passionate sensibilities, of course. That was *one* thing we had in common! So, although I thought I was the most romantic spectacle imaginable as I wandered weeping down the alleys, I was in reality at risk - I had fallen through one of the holes life leaves in it; these peculiar holes are the entrances to the counters at which you pay the price of the way you live.

Random chance operates in relation to these existential lacunae; one tumbles down them when, for the time being, due to hunger, despair, sleeplessness, hallucination or those accidental-on-purpose misreadings of train timetables and airline schedules that produce margins of empty time, one is lost. One is at the mercy of events. That is why I like to be a foreigner; I only travel for the insecurity. But I did not know that, then.

I found my self-imposed fate, my beloved, quite early that morning but we quarrelled immediately. We quarrelled the day away assiduously and, when I tried to pull the strings of my self and so take control of the situation, I was astonished to find the situation I wanted was disaster, shipwreck. I saw his face as though it were in ruins, although it was the sight in the world I knew best and, the first time I saw it, had not seemed to me a face I did not know. It had seemed, in some way, to correspond to my idea of my own face. It had seemed a face long known and well remembered, a face that had always been imminent in my consciousness as an idea that now found its first visual expression.

So I suppose I do not know how he really looked and, in fact, I suppose I shall never know, now, for he was plainly an object created in the mode of fantasy. His image was already present somewhere in my head and I was seeking to discover it in actuality, looking at every

face I met in case it was the right face - that is, the face which corresponded to my notion of the unseen face of the one I should love, a face created parthenogenetically by the rage to love which consumed me. So his self, and, by his self, I mean the thing he was to himself, was quite unknown to me. I created him solely in relation to myself, like a work of romantic art, an object corresponding to the ghost inside me. When I'd first loved him, I wanted to take him apart, as a child dismembers a clockwork toy, to comprehend the inscrutable mechanics of its interior. I wanted to see him far more naked than he was with his clothes off. It was easy enough to strip him bare and then I picked up my scalpel and set to work. But, since I was so absolutely in charge of the dissection, I only discovered what I was able to recognize already, from past experience, inside him. If ever I found anything new to me, I steadfastly ignored it. I was so absorbed in this work it never occurred to me to wonder if it hurt him.

In order to create the loved object in this way and to issue it with its certificate of authentication, as beloved, I had also to labour at the idea of myself in love. I watched myself closely for all the signs and, precisely upon cue, here they were! Longing, desire, self-abnegation, etc. I was racked by all the symptoms. Even so, in spite of this fugue of feeling, I had felt nothing but pleasure when the young man who picked me up inserted his sex inside me in the blue-movie bedroom. I only grew guilty later, when I realized I had not felt in the least guilty at the time. And was I in character when I felt guilty or in character when I did not? I was perplexed: I no longer understood the logic of my own performance. My script had been scrambled behind my back. The cameraman was drunk. The director had a *crise de nerfs* and been taken away to a sanatorium. And my co-star had picked himself up off the operating table and painfully cobbled himself together again according to his own design! All this had taken place while I was looking at the mirror.

Imagine my affront.

We quarrelled until night fell and, still quarrelling, found our way to another hotel but this hotel, and this night, was in every respect a parody of the previous night. (That's more like it! Squalor and humiliation! Ah!) Here, there were no lace drapes nor windbells nor moonlight nor any moist whisper of lugubriously seductive rain; this place was bleak, mean and cheerless and the sheets on the mattress they threw down on the floor for us were blotched with dirt although, at first, we did not notice that because it was necessary to pretend the

urgent passion we always used to feel in one another's presence even if we felt it no longer, as if to act out the feeling with sufficient intensity would re-create it by sleight of hand, although our skins (which knew us better than we knew ourselves) told us the period of reciprocation was over. It was a mean room and the windows overlooked a parking lot with a freeway beyond it, so that the paper walls shuddered with the reverberations of the infernal clamour of the traffic. There was a sluggish electric fan with dead flies caught in the spokes and a single strip of neon overhead lit us and everything up with a scarcely tolerable, quite remorseless light. A slatternly woman in a filthy apron brought us glasses of thin, cold, brown tea made from barley and then she shut the door on us. I would not let him kiss me between the thighs because I was afraid he would taste the traces of last night's adventure, a little touch of paranoia in *that* delusion.

I don't know how much guilt had to do with the choice of this décor. But I felt it was perfectly appropriate.

The air was thicker than tea that's stewed on the hob all day and cockroaches were running over the ceiling, I remember. I cried all the first part of the night, I cried until I was exhausted but he turned on his side and slept – he saw through that ruse, though I did not since I did not know that I was lying. But I could not sleep because of the rattling of the walls and the noise of traffic. We had turned off the glaring ^{but} ^{overhead} ^{ventilation} lamp; when I saw a shaft of light fall across his face, I thought: 'Surely it's too early for the dawn.' But it was another person silently sliding open the unlocked door; in this disreputable hotel, anything can happen. I screamed and the intruder vanished. Wakened by a scream, my lover thought I'd gone mad and instantly trapped me in a stranglehold, in case I murdered him.

We were both old enough to have known better, too.

When I turned on the lamp to see what time it was, I noticed, to my surprise, that his features were blurring, like the underwriting on a palimpsest. It wasn't long before we parted. Only a few days. You can't keep *that* pace up for long.

Then the city vanished; it ceased, almost immediately, to be a magic and appalling place. I woke up one morning and found it had become home. Though I still turn up my coat collar in a lonely way and am always looking at myself in mirrors, they're only habits and give no clue at all to my character, whatever that is.

The most difficult performance in the world is, acting naturally, isn't it? Everything else is artful.

The
pob.
of
Charlotte
assumed by
short story

LET ME COUNT THE TIMES

Vernon made love to his wife three and a half times a week, and this was all right.

For some reason, making love always averaged out that way. Normally – though by no means invariably – they made love every second night. On the other hand Vernon had been known to make love to his wife seven nights running; for the next seven nights they would not make love – or perhaps they would once, in which case they would make love the following week only twice but four times the week after that – or perhaps only three times, in which case they would make love four times the next week but only twice the week after that – or perhaps only once. And so on. Vernon didn't know why, but making love always averaged out that way; it seemed invariable. Occasionally – and was it any wonder? – Vernon found himself wishing that the week contained only six days, or as many as eight, to render these calculations (which were always blandly corroborative in spirit) easier to deal with.

It was, without exception, Vernon himself who initiated their conjugal acts. His wife responded every time with the same bashful alacrity. Oral foreplay was by no means unknown between them. On average – and again it always averaged out like this, and again Vernon was always the unsmiling ring master – fellatio was performed by Vernon's wife every third coupling, or 60.8333 times a year, or 1.1698717 times a week. Vernon performed cunnilingus rather less often: every fourth coupling, on average, or 45.625 times a year, or .8774038 times a week. It would also be a mistake to think that this was the extent of their variations. Vernon sodomized his wife twice a year, for instance – on his birthday, which seemed fair enough, but also, ironically (or so *he* thought), on hers. He put it down to the expensive nights out they always had on these occasions, and more particularly to the effects of champagne. Vernon always felt

ROSE TREMAIN

MY WIFE IS A WHITE RUSSIAN

I'm a financier. I have financial assets, world-wide. I'm in nickel and pig-iron and gold and diamonds. I like the sound of all these words. They have an edge, I think. The glitter of saying them sometimes gives me an erection.

I'm saying them now in this French restaurant, where the tablecloths and the table-napkins are blue linen, where they serve sea-food on platters of seaweed and crushed ice. It's noisy at lunch-time. It's May and the sun shines in London, through the open restaurant windows. Opposite me, the two young Australians blink as they wait (so damned courteous, and she has freckles like a child) for me to stutter out my hard-word list, to manipulate tongue and memory so that the sound inside me forms just behind my lips and explodes with extraordinary force above my oysters: *'Diamonds!'*

But then I feel a soft, perfumed dabbing at my face. I turn away from the Australians and there she is. My wife. She is smiling as she wipes me. Her gold bracelets rattle. She is smiling at me. Her lips are astonishing, the colour of claret. I've been wanting to ask her for some time, 'Why are your lips this terrible dark colour these days? Is it a lipstick you put on?'

Still smiling at me, she's talking to the Australians with her odd accent: 'He's able to enjoy the pleasures of life once more, thank God. For a long time afterwards I couldn't take him out. Terrible. We couldn't do one single thing, you know. But now - he enjoys his wine again.'

The dabbing stops. To the nurse I tried to say when I felt a movement begin: 'Teach me how to wipe my arse. I cannot let my wife do this because she doesn't love me. If she loved me, she probably wouldn't mind wiping my arse, and I wouldn't mind her wiping my arse. But she doesn't love me.'

The Australian man is talking now. I let my hand go up and take

hold of my big-bowled wine glass into which the waiter has poured the expensive Chablis my wife likes to drink when she eats fish. Slowly, I guide the glass across the deadweight distance between the table and my mouth. I say 'deadweight' because the spaces between all my limbs and the surfaces of tangible things have become mighty. To walk is to wade in waist-high water. And to lift this wine glass . . . 'Help me, I want to say to her, 'just this once.' Just this once.

'Heck,' says the Australian man, 'we honestly thought he'd made a pretty positive recovery.' His wife, with blue eyes the colour of the napkins, is watching my struggles with the glass. She licks her fine line of a mouth, sensing I suppose, my longing to taste the wine. The nurse used to stand behind me, guiding the feeding-cup in my hand. I never explained to her that the weight of gravity had mysteriously increased. Yet often, as I drank from the feeding-cup, I used to imagine myself prancing on the moon.

'Oh, this is a very positive recovery,' says my wife. 'There's very little he can't do now. He enjoys the ballet, you know, and the opera. People at Covent Garden and the better kind of place are very considerate. We don't go to the cinema because there you have a very inconsiderate type of person. Don't you agree? So riff-raffy. Don't you agree?'

The Australian wife hasn't listened to a word. The Australian wife puts out a lean freckled arm and I watch it come towards me, astounded as usual these days by the speed with which other people can move parts of their bodies. But the arm, six inches from my hand holding the glass, suddenly stops. 'Don't help him!' snaps my wife. The napkin-blue eyes are lowered. The arm is folded away.

Heads turn in the restaurant. I suppose her voice has carried its inevitable echo round the room where we sit: 'Don't help him! Don't help him!' But now that I have an audience, the glass begins to jolt, the wine splashing up and down the sides of the bowl. I smile. My smile widens as I watch the Chablis begin to slop onto the starched blue cloth. WASTE. She of all people understands the exquisite luxury of waste. Yet she snatches the glass out of my hand and sets it down by her own. She snaps her fingers and a young bean pole of a waiter arrives. He spreads out a fresh blue napkin where I have spilled my wine. My wife smiles her claret smile. She sucks an oyster into her dark mouth.

The Australian man is, I was told, the manager of the Toomin

Valley Nickel Consortium. The wife is, as far as I know, just a wife. I own four-fifths of the Toomin Valley Nickel Consortium. The Australian man is here to discuss expansion, supposedly with me, unaware until he met me this lunch-time that despite the pleasing cadences of the words I'm unable to say Toomin Valley Nickel Consortium. I can say 'nickel'. My tongue lashes around in my throat to form the click that comes in the middle of the word. Then out it spills: *Nickel!* In my mind, oddly enough, the word 'nickel' is the exact greyish-white colour of an oyster. But 'consortium' is too difficult for me. I know my limitations.

My wife is talking again: 'I've always loved the ballet, you see. This is my only happy memory of Russia – the wonderful classical ballet. A little magic. Don't you think? I would never want to be without this kind of magic, would you? Do you have the first-rate ballet companies in Australia? You do? Well, that's good. *Giselle*, of course. That's the best one. Don't you think? The dead girl. Don't you think? Wonderful.'

We met on a pavement. I believe it was in the Avenue Matignon, but it could have been the Avenue Montaigne. I often get these muddled. It was in Paris, anyway. Early summer, as it is now. Chestnut candle blooms blown along the gutters. I waited to get into the taxi she was leaving. But I didn't get into it. I followed her. In a bar, she told me she was very poor; her father drove the taxi I had almost hired. She spoke no English then, only French with a heavy Russian accent. I was just starting to be a financier at that time, but already I was quite rich, rich by her standards – she who had been used to life in post-war Russia. My hotel room was rather grand. She said in her odd French: 'I'll fuck for money.'

I gave her fifty francs. I suppose it wasn't much, not as much as she'd hoped for, a poor rate of exchange for the white, white body that rode astride me, head thrown back, breasts bouncing. She sat at the dressing-table in the hotel room. She smoked my American cigarettes. More than anything, I wanted to brush her gold hair, brush it smooth and hold it against my face. But I didn't ask her if I could do this. I believe I was afraid she would say, 'You can do it for money.'

The thin waiter is clearing away our oyster platters. I've eaten only three of my oysters, yet I let my plate go. She lets it go. She pretends not to notice how slow I've been with the oysters. And my glass of

wine still stands by hers, untasted. Yet she's drinking quite fast. I hear her order a second bottle.

The Australian man says: 'First rate choice, if I may say so. We like Chably.'

I raise my left arm and touch her elbow, nodding at the wine. Without looking at me, she puts my glass down in front of me. The Australian wife stares at it. Neither she nor I dare to touch it.

My wife is explaining to the Australians what they are about to eat, as if they were children: 'I think you will like the turbot very much. *Turbot poché hollandaise*. They cook it very well. And the hollandaise sauce – you know this, of course? Very difficult to achieve, the lightness of this sauce. But here they do it very well. And the scallops in saffron. Again, a very light sauce. Excellent texture. Just a little cream added. And fresh scallops, naturally. We never go to any restaurant where the products are frozen. So I think you will like these dishes very much . . .'

We have separate rooms. Long before my illness, when I began to look (yet hardly to feel) old, she demanded her privacy. This was how she put it: she wanted to be private. The bedroom we used to share and which is now hers is very large. The walls are silk.

She said: 'There's no sense in being rich and being cooped up together in one room.'

Obediently, I moved out. She wouldn't let me have the guest room, which is also big. I have what we call 'the little room', which I always used to think of as a child's room.

I expect in her 'privacy' that she is smiling: 'The child's room is completely right for him. He's a helpless baby.' Yet she's not a private person. She likes to go out four or five nights a week, returning at two or three in the morning, sometimes with friends, and they sit and drink brandy. Sometimes, they play music. Elton John. She has a lover (I don't know his name) who sends her lilies.

I'm trying to remember the Toomin Valley. I believe it's an immense desert of a place, inhabited by no one and nothing except the mining machinery and the Nickel Consortium employees, whose clusters of houses I ordered to be whitewashed to hide the cheap grey building blocks. The windows of the houses are small, to keep out the sun. In the back yards are spindly eucalyptus trees, blown by the scorching winds. I want to ask the Australian wife, did you have freckles before you went to live in the Toomin Valley, and does some

wandering prima ballerina dance *Giselle* on the gritty escarpment above the mine?

My scallops arrive, saffron yellow and orange in the blue and white dish – the colours of a childhood summer. The flesh of a scallop is firm yet soft, the texture of a woman's thigh (when she is young, of course, before the skin hardens and the flesh bags out). A forkful of scallop is immeasurably easier to lift than the glass of wine, and the Australian wife (why don't I know either of their names?) smiles at me approvingly as I lift the succulent parcel of food to my mouth and chew it without dribbling. My wife, too, is watching, ready with the little scented handkerchief, yet talking as she eats, talking of Australia as the second bottle of Chablis arrives and she tastes it hurriedly with a curt nod to the thin waiter. I exist only in the corner of her eye, at its inmost edge, where the vulnerable triangle of red flesh is startling.

'Of course, I've often said to Hubert' (she pronounces my name 'Eieu-ber', trying and failing with what she recognizes as the upper class *h*), 'that it's very unfair to expect people like you to live in some out-of-the-way place. I was brought up in a village, you see, and I know that an out-of-the-way village is so dead. No culture. The same in Toomin, no? Absolutely no culture at all. Everybody dead.'

The Australian wife looks – seemingly for the first time – straight at my wife. 'We're outdoor people.'

I remember now. A river used to flow through the Toomin Valley. Torrential in the rainy season, they said. It dried up in the early 'forties. One or two sparse willows remain, grey testimony to the long-ago existence of water-rich soil. I imagine the young Australian couple, brown as chestnuts, swimming in the Toomin River, resting on its gentle banks with their fingers touching, a little loving nest of bone. There is no river. Yet when they look at each other – almost furtively under my vacant gaze – I recognize the look. The look says: 'These moments with strangers are nothing. Into our private moments together – only there – is crammed all that we ask of life.'

'Yes, we're outdoor folk.' The Australian man is smiling. 'You can play tennis most of the year round at Toomin. I'm president of the tennis club. And we have our own pool now.'

I don't remember these things: tennis-courts and swimming-pools.

'Well, of course, you have the climate for these things.' My wife is signalling our waiter to bring her Perrier water. 'And it's something to

do, isn't it? Perhaps when the new expansions of the company are made, a concert hall could be built for you, or a theatre.'

'A theatre!' The Australian wife's mouth opens to reveal perfect, freshly-peeled teeth and a laugh escapes. She blushes.

My wife's dark lips are puckered into a sneer.

But the Australian man is laughing too – a rich laugh you might easily remember on the other side of the world – and slapping his thigh. 'A theatre! What about that, ay?'

She wanted, she said, as she smoked my American cigarettes, to see *Don Giovanni*. Since leaving Russia with her French mother and her Russian father, no one had ever taken her to the opera. She had seen the posters advertising *Don Giovanni* and had asked her father to buy her a ticket.

He had shouted at her: 'Remember whose child you are! Do you imagine taxi drivers can afford seats at the Opéra?'

'Take me to see *Don Giovanni*,' she said to me, 'and I will fuck for nothing.'

I've never really appreciated the opera. The Don was fat. It was difficult to imagine so many women wanting to lie with this fat man. Yet afterwards, she leant over to me and put her head on my shoulder and wept. Nothing, she told me, had ever moved her so much – nothing in her life had ever touched the core of her being – as this had done, this production of *Don Giovanni*.

'If only,' she said, 'I had money as you have money, then I would go to hear music all the time and see the classical ballet and learn from these what is life.'

The scallops are good. She never learned what is life. I feel emboldened by the food. I put my hand to my glass, heavier than ever now because the waiter has filled it up. The sun shines on my wine and on my hand, blotched (splattered, it seems) with the oddly repulsive stains of old age. For a second, I see my hand and the wine glass as a still-life. But then I lift the glass. The Australian wife lowers her eyes. My wife, for a moment, is silent. I drink. I smile at the Australian wife because I know she wants to applaud.

I'm talking. The words are like stones weighing down my lower jaw. *Nickel*. I'm trying to tell the Australian man that I dream about the nickel mine. In my dreams, the Australian miners drag wooden carts loaded with threepenny bits. I run my hands through the coins as

though through a sack of wheat, and the touch of them is pleasurable and perfect. I also want to say to the Australian man: 'I hope you're happy in your work. When I was in control, I visited all my mines and all my subsidiaries at least once a year. Even in South Africa, I made sure a living wage was paid. I said to the men underground, "I hope you're happy in your work."'

But now I have a manager, a head-manager to manage all the other managers, including this one from the Toomin Valley. I am trundled out in my chair to meet them when they come here to discuss redundancy or expansion. My wife and I give them lunch in a restaurant. They remind me that I still have an empire to rule, if I were capable, if indeed my life had been different since the night of *Don Giovanni*.

When I stopped paying her to sleep with me, her father came to see me. He held his cap in his hands. 'We're hoping for a marriage,' he said. And what more could I have given – what less – to the body I had begun to need? The white and the gold of her, I thought, will ornament my life.

Yet now I never touch her. The white and the gold of her lies only in the lilies they send, the unknown lovers she finds in the night, while I lie in the child's room and dream of the nickel mines. My heart is scorched dry, like the dry hills of the Toomin Valley. I am punished for my need of her while her life stalks my silence; the white of her, the gold of her, the white of Dior, the gold of Cartier. Why did she never love me? In my dreams, too, the answer comes from deep underground: it's the hardness of my words.

SALMAN RUSHDIE

THE PROPHET'S HAIR

Early in 19—, when Srinagar was under the spell of a winter so fierce it could crack men's bones as if they were glass, a young man upon whose cold-pinked skin there lay, like a frost, the unmistakable sheen of wealth was to be seen entering the most wretched and disreputable part of the city, where the houses of wood and corrugated iron seemed perpetually on the verge of losing their balance, and asking in low, grave tones where he might go to engage the services of a dependably professional thief. The young man's name was Atta, and the rogues in that part of town directed him gleefully into ever-darker and less public alleys, until in a yard wet with the blood of a slaughtered chicken he was set upon by two men whose faces he never saw, robbed of the substantial bank-roll which he had insanely brought on his solitary excursion, and beaten within an inch of his life.

Night fell. His body was carried by anonymous hands to the edge of the lake, whence it was transported by shikara across the water and deposited, torn and bleeding, on the deserted embankment of the canal which led to the gardens of Shalimar. At dawn the next morning a flower-vendor was rowing his boat through water to which the cold of the night had given the cloudy consistency of wild honey when he saw the prone form of young Atta, who was just beginning to stir and moan, and on whose now deathly pale skin the sheen of wealth could still be made out dimly beneath an actual layer of frost. The flower-vendor moored his craft and by stooping over the mouth of the injured man was able to learn the poor fellow's address, which was mumbled through lips which could scarcely move; whereupon, hoping for a large tip, the hawkler rowed Atta home to a large house on the shores of the lake, where a painfully beautiful girl and her equally handsome mother, neither of whom, it was clear from their eyes, had slept a wink from worrying, screamed at the sight of their Atta – who was the elder brother of the beautiful girl – lying motionless amid the funereally

again.' And then I shall sit back and try and look as distinguished as possible."

'I left the country in 1951, when Nicolai still had some way to go with his book; he had about thirty-five strands of narrative, and they all had to be tied off in neat granny knots. We never wrote to one another after I left, because it would have been difficult for him. Instead I wrote to . . . unimportant people. My mother, a few harmless friends. As you know, I haven't ever been back; I haven't heard any news for almost a quarter of a century. But in one of her last letters to me before she died, my mother told me that *The Wedding Cake* had been published with enormous success. She had not read the book – her eyesight was poor and she didn't want to make it worse – but she wrote and told me about it. "And to think," she said, "if you had stayed, my Marian, you might have been the success that Nicolai now is."'

He turned back towards me, and took another swig of wine. He seemed depressed by his story. Then he smiled.

'Actually, if I'd known, I'd have got you to bring me a copy of *The Wedding Cake*,' he said. 'It might have been – what? – good for a laugh.'

'I'm not sure I saw a copy.'

' . . . ? But you told me . . . in the window.'

'No, the book I saw in the window just had a woman's name for a title. *Emanuella, Maria*, something like that; with a picture of a girl in a headscarf.' I asked him the Romanian for wedding-cake; he told me. 'Well, I don't remember that one. But there must have been six or seven other titles by Petrescu and I didn't look at them very carefully. Perhaps it was there.'

Then we both paused, and looked at one another, and held the pause. I could imagine some of what he was thinking.

'Well,' he finally said. 'There you have it. Another piece of evidence for your Romanian theory. Another single bloom. One great ironist – Petrescu.'

'Of course,' I replied quickly, and gave him my most agreeing smile.

EMMA TENNANT

PHILOMELA

Before I married, when we lived in Athens, the bright emptiness of the long days was made bearable by my sister Philomela, who spoke the thoughts I hardly knew I had.

Why permit yourself to be taken off like a slave? We can leave Athens and go and live in the mountains. We will be free. And if we die, anything better than the life that lies ahead of us.

I knew she was right, but I couldn't find the courage to go. The nights are cold in the mountains, and we would almost certainly perish. Tereus came and married me and we went to Thrace in a procession of such magnificence that I knew I would never come back. When my son Itylus was born, I felt as if I had been buried in a soft tomb.

I'll come and live with you, Philomela said. You won't have to wait long.

She never came. I moped, like the birds my children bring back when they go out for a walk. Tereus noticed, but he didn't care. The palace, as it is now, was always full of young men singing, and preparations for war, and the bustle of sandalled feet going aimlessly back and forth on the worn marble. I stayed on my couch, almost pleased that my beauty was going and that I was unable to sleep at night. It was a slow death, but no one who is buried alive dies quickly.

Then one day Tereus said he would go and find my sister. There had been no wars for two years, and the festivities were palling. He was looking older himself; perhaps only bloodshed kept him young; at any rate he wanted to travel, and he liked the idea of doing something gallant and slightly ridiculous. To his delight, everyone laughed when he said he was going to rescue my sister from her monotonous life in Athens.

It was at the height of summer that he set off. When he had gone I went down into the gardens for the first time for years and looked in an interested way at the flowers and the strolling peacocks. My children even smiled at me when I went up to them. I pretended to myself that

my health had changed, that I had been ill for a long time and was now quite naturally better, but I knew that it was really because Philomela was coming that I saw these things in a different way. Her face and her voice kept flowing through me as I paced out the rest of the day, glancing foolishly at the position of the sun in the sky. It was a long journey, and it might be weeks before Tereus brought her back.

Tereus came back one winter day. The air was clear and I could see a huddle of people galloping across the plain. My throat ached, as if I had tried to shout to them across that distance, and my hands kept flying to my neck and pulling at the gold chains I wore. Then I felt I was going to cry, and I sent for Coda to bring me a herb drink that soothes my mind. I even thought for a moment of climbing to the temple. But I restrained myself, in case Philomela should climb the wide steps when I wasn't there to see her. And I wanted to show her the garden we had made, to take her into the house of which I felt suddenly proud.

Tereus' head seemed larger, I remember that. And the young men with him hung back, which they don't usually do – no one ran past me with a quick salute on the way to the courtyard and the refreshing wine. Tereus' head loomed over me like a round polished shield. His tongue moved thickly in his dry lips.

Philomela is dead, he said.

I spent a year in that room. When the sun lurked in the courtyard, beyond the hangings, which it did in the morning early when the slaves were washing the stone-fruited floors, I lifted my goblet of wine and poured it down my throat. All day long I called for more wine – and Coda and Dita brought it with lowered eyes.

I gave birth to another child. Itylus came and sat with me sometimes, but he was learning to go out with his father more. He had a horse of his own. When I asked him about the garden we had made, he was embarrassed and changed the subject. I began to suspect that it was overgrown, or that Tereus had got rid of it altogether. Not that I really cared. The garden had been for Philomela, and she would never come now.

When the new child was beginning to learn how to crawl about on the soft rugs in my room, I got up for the first time and went onto the wide porch that looks over the plain. It was summer, and birds were singing in the thicket of olives. My eyes were tired from crying: they had changed their shape now and slanted down in the corners instead of being round.

I gazed out at all the empty expanses around me. Sky. Earth. Distant mountain. None of them contained anything at all.

I leant back against a pillar and sighed. My back was weak after so long in my room. A slave came up the steps towards me. He stopped, surprised to see me there, and then prostrated himself.

He had something for me: it seemed to be a bundle of cloth. I took it listlessly – a present no doubt from one of the noble women I no longer consented to see. The slave glanced anxiously at me once, and then ran into the house. I opened the bundle, yawning.

A tapestry. My eyes were blurred, and I had to bring it up close to my face to see what scenes were depicted. Chariots in Thrace, I thought at first, and noble warriors under a spiky sun. Then I saw that the chief figure was Tereus himself.

This is amusing, I said aloud. Is Tereus worth this? I looked closer.

In the first scene, Tereus was embracing a woman passionately. Her face was obscured; I smiled. In the second, I saw it. The owner of the face was cringing at Tereus' feet and she was pleading for mercy. Philomela. In the next scene he had advanced on her. He cut out her tongue. In the following scene Philomela, imprisoned in a castle, looked out as Tereus galloped away into the distance. That was all. I looked again. There was no doubt about it. Philomela.

I went to my room and sat holding the tapestry. Tereus' feet sounded in the courtyard outside: I pushed the tapestry under the couch and sat there as I had for so long, doing nothing. But he didn't come in.

So I was able to form my plan. I sent for Coda and Dita. I told them my suspicions and I gave the last of my gold for the search. Somewhere, between here and Athens, Philomela suffered alone. Secretly, men were found and set out on their horses. It was late at night when they left, and my heart beat loudly as I listened to the hooves growing fainter on the plain.

They found her and brought her back. Poor, dumb Philomela. And we all feasted, the smoke from the burning flesh of the animals went up into the sky for hours before we ate, the fountain was fed with wine, Tereus kept laughing and saying he must have made a mistake. He was so frightened he couldn't even find an excuse. So we ate and drank, and the wild boars on our gold cups chased themselves endlessly round as the gold glistened in the light from the torches and the round heads of Tereus' friends shone the same bright colour. Philomela never once looked reproach.

We lay together in my room, and I whispered in her ear. Her eyes could always answer me. And we knew we would avenge ourselves on Tereus.

Philomela lay in the prow of the boat. Her black hair just touched the water. I watched her all the time – for signs of happiness, or discontent, or simply to see what her eyes would say to me. Today she was smiling, and we glided at the rhythm of her breathing over water so clear that the smallest pebbles on the bottom looked as big and white as rocks.

We were there because a war was raging inland. On the shore, brightly coloured as victory, were Tereus' tents. From the beach little wisps of black smoke went up: the slaves were preparing the evening meal.

Tereus comes back from the war tonight. His fingers will pull at roasted meat. His mouth will be red with juice. The singing will start in a dull roar, and torches will be lit on the sand. Dancing figures, giants inside the tents but small in the great expanse outside, will run from every angle to the edge of the sea. Because of the wine, the moon will shine brilliantly.

The four curved paddles of our boat guided us gently back to land. I stepped out, with Philomela in my arms, and set her down on the stones. We both stood for a moment, looking at the tents and the blade of blue which carves out the clumsy shapes of the mountains; but we saw only the evening ahead. It was months since Tereus had gone to the war. We had almost forgotten his face. He had gone, probably, because the embarrassment was too great for him at home – and he hoped, while he was away, that we would forget what he had done. We thought of him as we walked up to the encampment. And without glancing at each other again, we went to lie down until the heat of the day had passed.

The sun lay to one side of the sky and our shadows were long when we left the great tent and went inland to the olive groves. The preparations for the banquet were growing more frantic – and it was only when we were surrounded by bushes of myrtle and thyme that we were able to go on without vomiting on the ground. The smell of burning meat was so strong.

Philomela saw Itylus first. I followed the line of her pointing finger and could just make out, in the gloom where the trees were thicker, a group of boys playing at war. Itylus had a bow and arrow, and was run-

ning importantly from tree to tree calling out commands. As Tereus' son he was obeyed: this had made him arrogant, but charming still; already he had taken on the pompous, exaggerated stride of his father.

Now he sent a shower of arrows over our heads and the other boys ran laughing towards us to retrieve them. They all liked Philomela, and made a pretence of searching in the glade at her feet so she could stroke them and smile. And she did! While my heart beat heavily and slowly, and my legs felt as rooted and shapeless as the lines of trees that marched out to all sides of us.

Itylus!

I had to call him, of course – but if only it could have been Philomela! What do you want?

Anything to have been spared the sound of his voice. As I made no sign of moving, he came reluctantly forward. He knew I had come to spoil his game. It's nearly dark, I said. Your father is coming. We must go back to the tents.

He shrugged, then followed. We went in single file down to the beach.

Tereus will come down the mountain pass as the sun is setting. Taking advantage of the glory; wearing the flaming sky like a cloak he has picked up on the battlefield. Boasting as he tramps through the encampment. Flinging himself down, the exhausted warrior, and waiting for us, my tongueless sister and his wife to shower our praise on him.

On the pretext of showing him a big sea animal that had been caught in the nets that morning, we took Itylus into the cave at the other end of the beach. It was dark there, with a rancid smell: the colour of the air was the same deep grey all the way up to the roof of the cave and the rocks were thin and sharp like the teeth of a rotting fish. The children made piles of the fragile sea anemones and we crunched them under foot as we walked, the shells the faint pink-blue of an earlobe. Philomela and I stood silently by as Itylus, with controlled excitement, examined the monster.

A great eye lay in a network of tentacles. The confused limbs, sprawled now on the stale sand at the back of the cave, had evidently put up a fight – here and there they had been hacked by men's hands and were crushed like a reed that someone has tried to break off and then abandoned. Perhaps because of the eye, which seemed, wherever we stood, to be watching us, we were afraid to go too near. Only Itylus, to show his courage and manhood, picked up a piece of

driftwood and advanced on it cautiously. It was dead since morning; but the glare of the black pupil in the pool of white suggested hidden power and energy. In our minds, we saw it rise and attack. The limbs, although twisted and battered, had a feeble strength. We felt them crush our ribs and wind themselves round our necks.

We lifted a boulder and came up on Itylus from behind. He fell without a sound. Philomela's eyes spoke terror. I was the only one to cry out.

The sound I made was flung back by the walls of the cave in anger and contempt. It took a long time to die, lingering in a whimper in the wet stone.

The eye still watched us as we lifted the body of Itylus and crept to the mouth of the cave with it. I looked out first. The sun was setting, the sky was red. I could see nothing of the black mountains, but a contingent of men, torches lit in preparation for the sudden descent of night, were moving like fiery beetles from the beach to the foothills. Tereus must be on his way down, then.

How quick and how slow our dragging on the great pot from its hiding place in the entrance of the cave, our pyre of dry wood, the heating of the water. But when we looked out at the sea, we saw his floating hair. And the sand in the red glow from the sinking sun was the colour of his poor boiling flesh. How slow!

Years and years will pass, and these minutes will still be longer than them all. Every hour will be made up out of them. And we will be standing by the staring eye in the back of the cave and Tereus will be coming down the hill and we will be standing at the mouth of the cave and looking out at the sea to shift the time. How quickly the years will pass!

When the meat was ready we drained the water away until there was only a little at the bottom of the pot. We had tried to find fresh water – there was an old well just above the beach – but seawater had seeped in. Tiny limpets and shreds of sour weed clung to the flesh. We threw in herbs and animal fat. Philomela made a dough with her agile fingers, which she used for speaking now, holding them up and flashing combinations of numbers when she had to make it clear what she wanted. I watched her hands as she laid the fine crust over the pot. We built up the fire, and waited.

It was a fine banquet. I sat at Tereus' side, my eyes down, my face flushed with pride for him. Philomela, as always on these occasions, was a ghost, a shadow that fell only occasionally across his face if he

should look round and see her. I was his wife; and I celebrated his victories with him.

The men shouted and sang. When the moon rose, some of them ran drunkenly to the entrance to the tent, and gazed up at it as if it had appeared for the first time. Like Tereus, I laughed indulgently at them. Like Tereus, I applauded when the captive slave girls danced, their bodies greased and jewels shining between their eyes. With Tereus I rose and walked to the great table where the wine and food was laid out. On the glistening fig leaves, grapes and pomegranates stood in mounds. Great sides of roasted ox were garlanded with fast-wilting flowers.

The pie was brought in. Tereus sat down like a child and ate. When he had eaten a few mouthfuls, he nodded his approval. He offered some to his favourites, and they swaggered forward, holding out their hands. Then he turned to me.

Eat! – he said. You have done well.

I shook my head. Black, dizzy sickness. Inside me an ill-tempered sea rolled violently. I had to look up. Eyes looked back at me with a mixture of curiosity and dislike. Where is Philomela?

But her eyes had gone. And I half fell, as all the eyes there in that room merged together and one eye, lidless, staring shone out at me. Tereus, the juice from the pie dribbling down his chin, pulled me back on the seat beside him with astonishment. He thrust a tender morsel in my face. Eat! he said laughing. What's the matter with you?

Philomela came forward from the back of the tent. Because she was dumb the men were afraid of her, and they fell back easily enough to let her through. I felt Tereus wince.

Take that woman away! he muttered. But his voice lacked conviction: like the others, he was afraid of her. She had become, in the camp, like the priestess of an oracle without a voice. She was the unconscious avenger of every sin. If only Tereus knew the barbarity she had suffered, the others guessed at it.

She reached my side and took my hand so I could rise with new strength. Except for distant shouting outside, her silence had spread. The eyes looked at us now with fear and unease. They were waiting: waiting for me to speak.

I turned to Tereus.

It is for you to eat your son Itylus, I said. You destroyed us long ago. (How slow! Tereus' long years of exile and grief. How quickly the years will pass.)

KAZUO ISHIGURO

A FAMILY SUPPER

Fugu is a fish caught off the Pacific shores of Japan. The fish has held a special significance for me ever since my mother died through eating one. The poison resides in the sexual glands of the fish, inside two fragile bags. When preparing the fish, these bags must be removed with caution, for any clumsiness will result in the poison leaking into the veins. Regrettably, it is not easy to tell whether or not this operation has been carried out successfully. The proof is, as it were, in the eating.

Fugu poisoning is hideously painful and almost always fatal. If the fish has been eaten during the evening, the victim is usually overtaken by pain during his sleep. He rolls about in agony for a few hours and is dead by morning. The fish became extremely popular in Japan after the war. Until stricter regulations were imposed, it was all the rage to perform the hazardous gutting operation in one's own kitchen, then to invite neighbours and friends round for the feast.

At the time of my mother's death, I was living in California. My relationship with my parents had become somewhat strained around that period, and consequently I did not learn of the circumstances surrounding her death until I returned to Tokyo two years later. Apparently, my mother had always refused to eat fugu, but on this particular occasion she had made an exception, having been invited by an old schoolfriend whom she was anxious not to offend. It was my father who supplied me with the details as we drove from the airport to his house in the Kamakura district. When we finally arrived, it was nearing the end of a sunny autumn day.

'Did you eat on the plane?' my father asked. We were sitting on the tatami floor of his tea-room.

'They gave me a light snack.'

'You must be hungry. We'll eat as soon as Kikuko arrives.'

My father was a formidable-looking man with a large stony jaw and furious black eyebrows. I think now in retrospect that he much

resembled Chou En-lai, although he would not have cherished such a comparison, being particularly proud of the pure samurai blood that ran in the family. His general presence was not one which encouraged relaxed conversation; neither were things helped much by his odd way of stating each remark as if it were the concluding one. In fact, as I sat opposite him that afternoon, a boyhood memory came back to me of the time he had struck me several times around the head for 'chattering like an old woman'. Inevitably, our conversation since my arrival at the airport had been punctuated by long pauses.

'I'm sorry to hear about the firm,' I said when neither of us had spoken for some time. He nodded gravely.

'In fact the story didn't end there,' he said. 'After the firm's collapse, Watanabe killed himself. He didn't wish to live with the disgrace.'

'I see.'

'We were partners for seventeen years. A man of principle and honour. I respected him very much.'

'Will you go into business again?' I asked.

'I am - in retirement. I'm too old to involve myself in new ventures now. Business these days has become so different. Dealing with foreigners. Doing things their way. I don't understand how we've come to this. Neither did Watanabe.' He sighed. 'A fine man. A man of principle.'

The tea-room looked out over the garden. From where I sat I could make out the ancient well which as a child I had believed haunted. It was just visible now through the thick foliage. The sun had sunk low and much of the garden had fallen into shadow.

'I'm glad in any case that you've decided to come back,' my father said. 'More than a short visit, I hope.'

'I'm not sure what my plans will be.'

'I for one am prepared to forget the past. Your mother too was always ready to welcome you back - upset as she was by your behaviour.'

'I appreciate your sympathy. As I say, I'm not sure what my plans are.'

'I've come to believe now that there were no evil intentions in your mind,' my father continued. 'You were swayed by certain - influences. Like so many others.'

'Perhaps we should forget it, as you suggest.'

'As you will. More tea?'

Just then a girl's voice came echoing through the house.
'At last.' My father rose to his feet. 'Kikuko has arrived.'

Despite our difference in years, my sister and I had always been close. Seeing me again seemed to make her excessively excited and for a while she did nothing but giggle nervously. But she calmed down somewhat when my father started to question her about Osaka and her university. She answered him with short formal replies. She in turn asked me a few questions, but she seemed inhibited by the fear that her questions might lead to awkward topics. After a while, the conversation had become even sparser than prior to Kikuko's arrival. Then my father stood up, saying: 'I must attend to the supper. Please excuse me for being burdened down by such matters. Kikuko will look after you.'

My sister relaxed quite visibly once he had left the room. Within a few minutes, she was chatting freely about her friends in Osaka and about her classes at university. Then quite suddenly she decided we should walk in the garden and went striding out onto the veranda. We put on some straw sandals that had been left along the veranda rail and stepped out into the garden. The daylight had almost gone.

'I've been dying for a smoke for the last half-hour,' she said, lighting a cigarette.

'Then why didn't you smoke?'

She made a furtive gesture back towards the house, then grinned mischievously.

'Oh I see,' I said.

'Guess what? I've got a boyfriend now.'

'Oh yes?'

'Except I'm wondering what to do. I haven't made up my mind yet.'

'Quite understandable.'

'You see, he's making plans to go to America. He wants me to go with him as soon as I finish studying.'

'I see. And you want to go to America?'

'If we go, we're going to hitch-hike.' Kikuko waved a thumb in front of my face. 'People say it's dangerous, but I've done it in Osaka and it's fine.'

'I see. So what is it you're unsure about?'

We were following a narrow path that wound through the shrubs and finished by the old well. As we walked, Kikuko persisted in taking unnecessarily theatrical puffs on her cigarette.

'Well. I've got lots of friends now in Osaka. I like it there. I'm not

sure I want to leave them all behind just yet. And Suichi - I like him, but I'm not sure I want to spend so much time with him. Do you understand?'

'Oh perfectly.'

She grinned again, then skipped on ahead of me until she had reached the well. 'Do you remember,' she said, as I came walking up to her, 'how you used to say this well was haunted?'

'Yes, I remember.'

We both peered over the side.

'Mother always told me it was the old woman from the vegetable store you'd seen that night,' she said. 'But I never believed her and never came out here alone.'

'Mother used to tell me that too. She even told me once the old woman had confessed to being the ghost. Apparently she'd been taking a short cut through our garden. I imagine she had some trouble clambering over these walls.'

Kikuko gave a giggle. She then turned her back to the well, casting her gaze about the garden.

'Mother never really blamed you, you know,' she said, in a new voice. I remained silent. 'She always used to say to me how it was their fault, hers and Father's, for not bringing you up correctly. She used to tell me how much more careful they'd been with me, and that's why I was so good.' She looked up and the mischievous grin had returned to her face. 'Poor Mother,' she said.

'Yes. Poor Mother.'

'Are you going back to California?'

'I don't know. I'll have to see.'

'What happened to - to her? To Vicki?'

'That's all finished with,' I said. 'There's nothing much left for me now in California.'

'Do you think I ought to go there?'

'Why not? I don't know. You'll probably like it.' I glanced towards the house. 'Perhaps we'd better go in soon. Father might need a hand with the supper.'

But my sister was once more peering down into the well. 'I can't see any ghosts,' she said. Her voice echoed a little.

'Is Father very upset about his firm collapsing?'

'Don't know. You can never tell with Father.' Then suddenly she straightened up and turned to me. 'Did he tell you about old Watanabe? What he did?'

'I heard he committed suicide.'

'Well, that wasn't all. He took his whole family with him. His wife and his two little girls.'

'Oh yes?'

'Those two beautiful little girls. He turned on the gas while they were all asleep. Then he cut his stomach with a meat knife.'

'Yes, Father was just telling me how Watanabe was a man of principle.'

'Sick.' My sister turned back to the well.

'Careful. You'll fall right in.'

'I can't see any ghost,' she said. 'You were lying to me all that time.'

'But I never said it lived down the well.'

'Where is it, then?'

We both looked around at the trees and shrubs. The light in the garden had grown very dim. Eventually I pointed to a small clearing some ten yards away.

'Just there I saw it. Just there.'

We stared at the spot.

'What did it look like?'

'I couldn't see very well. It was dark.'

'But you must have seen something.'

'It was an old woman. She was just standing there, watching me.' We kept staring at the spot as if mesmerized.

'She was wearing a white kimono,' I said. 'Some of her hair had come undone. It was blowing around a little.'

Kikuko pushed her elbow against my arm. 'Oh be quiet. You're trying to frighten me all over again.' She trod on the remains of her cigarette, then for a brief moment stood regarding it with a perplexed expression. She kicked some pine needles over it, then once more displayed her grin. 'Let's see if supper's ready,' she said.

We found my father in the kitchen. He gave us a quick glance, then carried on with what he was doing.

'Father's become quite a chef since he's had to manage on his own,' Kikuko said with a laugh. He turned and looked at my sister coldly.

'Hardly a skill I'm proud of,' he said. 'Kikuko, come here and help.'

For some moments my sister did not move. Then she stepped forward and took an apron hanging from a drawer.

'Just these vegetables need cooking now,' he said to her. 'The rest just needs watching.' Then he looked up and regarded me strangely

for some seconds. 'I expect you want to look around the house,' he said eventually. He put down the chopsticks he had been holding. 'It's a long time since you've seen it.'

As we left the kitchen I glanced back towards Kikuko, but her back was turned.

'She's a good girl,' my father said quietly.

I followed my father from room to room. I had forgotten how large the house was. A panel would slide open and another room would appear. But the rooms were all startlingly empty. In one of the rooms the lights did not come on, and we stared at the stark walls and tatami in the pale light that came from the windows.

'This house is too large for a man to live in alone,' my father said. 'I don't have much use for most of these rooms now.'

But eventually my father opened the door to a room packed full of books and papers. There were flowers in vases and pictures on the walls. Then I noticed something on a low table in the corner of the room. I came nearer and saw it was a plastic model of a battleship, the kind constructed by children. It had been placed on some newspaper; scattered around it were assorted pieces of grey plastic.

My father gave a laugh. He came up to the table and picked up the model.

'Since the firm folded,' he said, 'I have a little more time on my hands.' He laughed again, rather strangely. For a moment his face looked almost gentle. 'A little more time.'

'That seems odd,' I said. 'You were always so busy.'

'Too busy perhaps.' He looked at me with a small smile. 'Perhaps I should have been a more attentive father.'

I laughed. He went on contemplating his battleship. Then he looked up. 'I hadn't meant to tell you this, but perhaps it's best that I do. It's my belief that your mother's death was no accident. She had many worries. And some disappointments.'

We both gazed at the plastic battleship.

'Surely,' I said eventually, 'my mother didn't expect me to live here for ever.'

'Obviously you don't see. You don't see how it is for some parents. Not only must they lose their children, they must lose them to things they don't understand.' He spun the battleship in his fingers. 'These little gunboats here could have been better glued, don't you think?'

'Perhaps. I think it looks fine.'

'During the war I spent some time on a ship rather like this. But my

ambition was always the air force. I figured it like this. If your ship was struck by the enemy, all you could do was struggle in the water hoping for a lifeline. But in an aeroplane – well – there was always the final weapon.' He put the model back onto the table. 'I don't suppose you believe in war.'

'Not particularly.'

He cast an eye around the room. 'Supper should be ready by now,' he said. 'You must be hungry.'

Supper was waiting in a dimly lit room next to the kitchen. The only source of light was a big lantern that hung over the table, casting the rest of the room into shadow. We bowed to each other before starting the meal.

There was little conversation. When I made some polite comment about the food, Kikuko giggled a little. Her earlier nervousness seemed to have returned to her. My father did not speak for several minutes. Finally he said:

'It must feel strange for you, being back in Japan.'

'Yes, it is a little strange.'

'Already, perhaps, you regret leaving America.'

'A little. Not so much. I didn't leave behind much. Just some empty rooms.'

'I see.'

I glanced across the table. My father's face looked stony and forbidding in the half-light. We ate on in silence.

Then my eye caught something at the back of the room. At first I continued eating, then my hands became still. The others noticed and looked at me. I went on gazing into the darkness past my father's shoulder.

'Who is that? In that photograph there?'

'Which photograph?' My father turned slightly, trying to follow my gaze.

'The lowest one. The old woman in the white kimono.'

My father put down his chopsticks. He looked first at the photograph, then at me.

'Your mother.' His voice had become very hard. 'Can't you recognize your own mother?'

'My mother. You see, it's dark. I can't see it very well.'

No one spoke for a few seconds, then Kikuko rose to her feet. She took the photograph down from the wall, came back to the table and gave it to me.

'She looks a lot older,' I said.

'It was taken shortly before her death,' said my father.

'It was the dark. I couldn't see very well.'

I looked up and noticed my father holding out a hand. I gave him the photograph. He looked at it intently, then held it towards Kikuko. Obediently, my sister rose to her feet once more and returned the picture to the wall.

There was a large pot left unopened at the centre of the table. When Kikuko had seated herself again, my father reached forward and lifted the lid. A cloud of steam rose up and curled towards the lantern. He pushed the pot a little towards me.

'You must be hungry,' he said. One side of his face had fallen into shadow.

'Thank you.' I reached forward with my chopsticks. The steam was almost scalding. 'What is it?'

'Fish.'

'It smells very good.'

In amidst soup were strips of fish that had curled almost into balls. I picked one out and brought it to my bowl.

'Help yourself. There's plenty.'

'Thank you.' I took a little more, then pushed the pot towards my father. I watched him take several pieces to his bowl. Then we both watched as Kikuko served herself.

My father bowed slightly. 'You must be hungry,' he said again. He took some fish to his mouth and started to eat. Then I too chose a piece and put it in my mouth. It felt soft, quite fleshy against my tongue.

'Very good,' I said. 'What is it?'

'Just fish.'

'It's very good.'

The three of us ate on in silence. Several minutes went by.

'Some more?'

'Is there enough?'

'There's plenty for all of us.' My father lifted the lid and once more steam rose up. We all reached forward and helped ourselves.

'Here,' I said to my father, 'you have this last piece.'

'Thank you.'

When we had finished the meal, my father stretched out his arms and yawned with an air of satisfaction. 'Kikuko,' he said. 'Prepare a pot of tea, please.'

My sister looked at him, then left the room without comment. My father stood up.

'Let's retire to the other room. It's rather warm in here.'

I got to my feet and followed him into the tea-room. The large sliding windows had been left open, bringing in a breeze from the garden. For a while we sat in silence.

'Father,' I said, finally.

'Yes?'

'Kikuko tells me Watanabe-San took his whole family with him.'

My father lowered his eyes and nodded. For some moments he seemed deep in thought. 'Watanabe was very devoted to his work,' he said at last. 'The collapse of the firm was a great blow to him. I fear it must have weakened his judgement.'

'You think what he did - it was a mistake?'

'Why, of course. Do you see it otherwise?'

'No, no. Of course not.'

'There are other things besides work.'

'Yes.'

We fell silent again. The sound of locusts came in from the garden. I looked out into the darkness. The well was no longer visible.

'What do you think you will do now?' my father asked. 'Will you stay in Japan for a while?'

'To be honest, I hadn't thought that far ahead.'

'If you wish to stay here, I mean here in this house, you would be very welcome. That is, if you don't mind living with an old man.'

'Thank you. I'll have to think about it.'

I gazed out once more into the darkness.

'But of course,' said my father, 'this house is so dreary now. You'll no doubt return to America before long.'

'Perhaps. I don't know yet.'

'No doubt you will.'

For some time my father seemed to be studying the back of his hands. Then he looked up and sighed.

'Kikuko is due to complete her studies next spring,' he said.

'Perhaps she will want to come home then. She's a good girl.'

'Perhaps she will.'

'Things will improve then.'

'Yes, I'm sure they will.'

We fell silent once more, waiting for Kikuko to bring the tea.

STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Structural anthropology is psychoanalysis on a basis broader than the individual. Both techniques seek to discover the workings of the human mind by examining its unconscious productions, but while psychoanalysis studies patterns inside a single skull, awake or asleep, structural anthropology concentrates on the communal dream that is ritual behaviour. Then, too, psychoanalysis confines itself by and large to its own culture, while anthropology operates by preference at a distance conducive to objectivity, among tribes whose conscious carapace offers relatively little resistance to the anthropologist's scientific tools. But these are self-imposed limits, and a degree of overlap is common enough; though based in Vienna, Freud felt free to discuss the mental workings of his contemporary, Woodrow Wilson, distant in space, of his European neighbour, Leonardo da Vinci, distant in time, and of course of Oedipus, at a considerable remove of both time and space. In the same way, the techniques of structural anthropology pioneered by Lévi-Strauss can uncover much that is startling in our own culture, if applied with care and thoroughness.

But let us pass from introduction to example. Nurses in a provincial hospital recently took charge of a man who had been bizarrely punished by his wife for infidelity. She had returned unexpectedly to the family home, and could hear him misbehaving. He was engaged in sexual congress that was both noisy and enthusiastic, characteristics which had been missing for some time from his dealings with his wife. She herself made no noise, let herself out of the flat, and returned at her usual time. She cooked a fine dinner, taking care to grind up some sleeping-pills and include them in the mashed potatoes. Her husband retired early to bed, pleading tiredness, and a little later on she stripped him as he slept, and stuck his hand to his penis with Super Glue.

The doctors and nurses faced the problem of separating manual and

EDMUND SPENSER *from Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*

[Nature's Reply to Mutabilitie]

Then since within this wide great *Universe*
 Nothing doth firme and permanent appeare,
 But all things tost and turned by transverse:
 What then should let, but I aloft should reare
 My Trophee, and from all, the triumph beare?
 Now judge then (ô thou greatest goddesse trew!)
 According as thy selfe doest see and heare,
 And unto me addoom that is my dew;
 That is the rule of all, all being rul'd by you.

So having ended, silence long ensewed,
 Ne *Nature* to or fro spake for a space,
 But with firme eyes affixt, the ground still viewed.
 Meanwhile, all creatures, looking in her face,
 Expecting th'end of this so doubtfull case,
 Did hang in long suspense what would ensue,
 To whether side should fall the soveraigne place:
 At length, she looking up with chearefull view,
 The silence brake, and gave her doome in speeches few.

I well consider all that ye have sayd,
 And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
 And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
 They are not changed from their first estate;
 But by their change their being doe dilate:
 And turning to themselves at length againe,
 Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:
 Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne;
 But they raigne over change, and doe their states maintaine.

Cease therefore daughter further to aspire,
 And thee content thus to be rul'd by me:
 For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire;
 But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
 And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see.

So was the *Titaness* put downe and whist,
 And *Jove* confirm'd in his imperiall see.
 Then was that whole assembly quite dismiss'd,
 And *Natur*'s selfe did vanish, whither no man wist.

The VIII Canto, unperfite

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,
 Of *Mutability*, and well it way:
 Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
 Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,
 In all things else she beares the greatest sway.
 Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
 And love of things so vaine to cast away;
 Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
 Short *Time* shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
 Of that same time when no more *Change* shall be,
 But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd
 Upon the pillours of Eternity,
 That is contrayr to *Mutabilitie*:
 For, all that moveth, doth in *Change* delight:
 But thenceforth all shall rest eternally
 With Him that is the God of Sabbath hight:
 O that great Sabbath God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight.

§ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *from Sonnets*

18

Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
 Rough windes do shake the darling buds of Maie,
 And Sommers lease hath all too short a date:
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
 And every faire from faire some-time declines,
 By chance, or natures changing course untrim'd:

Nor shall death brag thou wandr'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

55

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of Princes shall out-live this powrefull rime,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Then unswept stone, besmeer'd with sluttish time.
When wastefull warre shall *Statues* over-turne,
And broiles roote out the worke of masonry,
Nor *Mars* his sword, nor warres quick fire shall burne
The living record of your memory.
Gainst death, and all oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth, your praise shall stil finde roome,
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That weare this world out to the ending doome.
So til the judgement that your selfe arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers eies.

60

Like as the waves make towards the pibled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end,
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toile all forwards do contend.
Nativity once in the maine of light,
Crawles to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses gainst his glory fight,
And time that gave, doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfixe the florish set on youth,
And delves the paralels in beauties brow,
Feedes on the rarities of natures truth,
And nothing stands but for his sieth to mow.
And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand
Praising thy worth, despite his cruell hand.

66

Tyr'd with all these for restfull death I cry,
As to behold desert a begger borne,
And needie Nothing trimd in jollitie,
And purest faith unhappily forsworne,
And gilded honor shamefully misplast,
And maiden vertue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And arte made tung-tide by authoritie,
And Folly (Doctor-like) controuling skill,
And simple-Truth miscalde Simplicitie,
And captive-good attending Captaine ill.
Tyr'd with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that to dye, I leave my love alone.

73

That time of yeere thou maist in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none, or few doe hange
Upon those boughes which shake against the could,
Bare ruin'd quiers, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twi-light of such day,
As after Sun-set fadeth in the West,
Which by and by blacke night doth take away,
Deaths second selfe that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lye,
As the death bed, whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nurrisht by.
This thou percev'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

When love, with one another so
 Interanimates two soules,
 That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
 Defects of lonelinesse controules.
 Wee then, who are this new soule, know,
 Of what we are compos'd, and made,
 For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
 Are soules, whom no change can invade.
 But O alas, so long, so farre
 Our bodies why doe wee forbear?
 They're ours, though they're not wee, Wee are
 Th'intelligences, they the sphere.
 We owe them thanks, because they thus,
 Did us, to us, at first convey,
 Yelded their forces, sense, to us,
 Nor are drosse to us, but allay.
 On man heavens influence workes not so,
 But that it first imprints the ayre,
 Soe soule into the soule may flow,
 Though it to body first repaire.
 As our blood labours to beget
 Spirits, as like soules as it can,
 Because such fingers need to knit
 That subtle knot, which makes us man:
 So must pure lovers soules descend
 T'affections, and to faculties,
 Which sense may reach and apprehend,
 Else a great Prince in prison lies.
 To our bodies turne wee then, that so
 Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
 Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
 But yet the body is his booke.
 And if some lover, such as wee,
 Have heard this dialogue of one,
 Let him still marke us, he shall see
 Small change, when we're to bodies gone.

(1633)

§ JOHN DONNE *from Holy Sonnets*

VII

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
 Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
 From death, you numberlesse infinities
 Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,
 All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
 All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
 Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,
 Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.
 But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
 For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
 'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
 When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,
 Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
 As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

X

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
 Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
 For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
 Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee;
 From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
 Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
 And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
 Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
 Thou'art slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
 And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
 And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
 And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
 One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
 And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

Ye see your state wi' theirs compar'd,
 And shudder at the niffer,
 But cast a moment's fair regard
 What makes the mighty differ;
 Discount what scant occasion gave,
 That purity ye pride in,
 And (what 's aft mair than a' the lave)
 Your better art o' hiding.

25 Think, when your castigated pulse
 Gies now and then a wallop,
 What ragings must his veins convulse,
 That still eternal gallop:
 Wi' wind and tide fair i' your tail,
 Right on ye scud your sea-way;
 But, in the teeth o' baith to sail,
 It makes an unco leeway.

30 See Social-life and Glee sit down,
 All joyous and unthinking,
 Till, quite transmugrify'd, they're grown
 Debauchery and Drinking:
 O would they stay to calculate
 Th' eternal consequences;
 Or your more dreaded h-ll to state,
 D-mnation of expenses!

40 Ye high, exalted, virtuous Dames,
 Ty'd up in godly laces,
 Before ye gie poor *Frailty* names,
 Suppose a change o' cases;
 A dear-lov'd lad, convenience snug,
 A treacherous inclination –
 But, let me whisper i' your lug,
 Ye're aiblins nae temptation.

50 Then gently scan your brother Man,
 Still gentler sister Woman;
 Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
 To step aside is human:

18 *niffer* exchange; 23 *lave* rest; 32 *unco* strange; 48 *aiblins* perhaps; 51 *a kennin* a little

55 One point must still be greatly dark,
 The moving *Why* they do it;
 And just as lamely can ye mark,
 How far perhaps they rue it.

60 Who made the heart, 'tis *He* alone
 Decidedly can try us,
 He knows each chord its various tone,
 Each spring its various bias:
 Then at the balance let's be mute,
 We never can adjust it;
 What 's *done* we partly may compute,
 But know not what 's *resisted*.

WILLIAM BLAKE from Songs of Innocence

Holy Thursday

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
 The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
 Grey headed beards walkd before with wands as white as snow
 Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town
 Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
 The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
 Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
 Or like harmonious thunders the seats of heaven among
 Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
 Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

CHARLOTTE SMITH Sonnet. Written in the Church-yard at Middleton in Sussex

Pressed by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
 While the loud equinox its power combines,
 The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
 But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.

The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
 Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed,
 Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
 And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
 With shells and seaweed mingled, on the shore
 Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
 But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring element no more:
 While I am doomed – by life's long storm oppressed,
 To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

ELIZABETH HANDS On an Unsociable Family

O what a strange parcel of creatures are we,
 Scarce ever to quarrel, or even agree;
 We all are alone, though at home altogether,
 Except to the fire constrained by the weather;
 Then one says, 'Tis cold,' which we all of us know,
 And with unanimity answer, 'Tis so':
 With shrugs and with shivers all look at the fire,
 And shuffle ourselves and our chairs a bit nigher;
 Then quickly, preceded by silence profound,
 A yawn epidemical catches around:
 Like social companions we never fall out,
 Nor ever care what one another's about;
 To comfort each other is never our plan,
 For to please ourselves, truly, is more than we can.

ROBERT BURNS Tam o' Shanter. A Tale

Of Brownie and of Bogillie full is this buke.

GAWIN DOUGLAS.

When chapman billies leave the street,
 And drouthy neebors, neebors meet,
 As market-days are wearing late,
 An' folk begin to tak the gate;

1 *chapman billies* pedlars; 2 *drouthy* thirsty; 4 *gate* road;

5 While we sit bousing at the nappy,
 And getting fou and unco happy,
 We think na on the lang Scots miles,
 The mosses, waters, slaps, and styles,
 That lie between us and our hame,
 Whare sits our sulky sullen dame,
 Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
 Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.
 10 This truth fand honest *Tam o' Shanter*,
 As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,
 (Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
 For honest men and bonny lasses.)
 15 O *Tam*! hadst thou but been sae wise,
 As ta'en thy ain wife *Kate*'s advice!
 She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
 A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
 20 That frae November till October,
 Ae market-day thou was nae sober;
 That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
 Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
 25 That every naig was ca'd a shoe on,
 The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
 That at the L – d's house, even on Sunday,
 Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.
 She prophesied that late or soon,
 30 Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
 Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
 By *Alloway*'s auld haunted kirk.
 Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
 To think how many counsels sweet,
 35 How many lengthen'd sage advices,
 The husband frae the wife despises!
 But to our tale: Ae market-night,
Tam had got planted unco right;
 Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
 40 Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
 And at his elbow, Souter *Johnny*,
 His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;

5 *nappy* ale; 6 *fou* drunk; 8 *slaps* gaps in walls; 19 *skellum* good-for-nothings;
 20 *blellum* windbag; 23 *melder* meal-grinding; 24 *siller* silver; 25 *naig* horse;
 ca'd driven; 33 *gars me greet* makes me weep; 38 *unco* uncommonly; 39 *bleezing*
 talking loudly; 40 *reaming swats* foaming ale; 41 *Souter* cobbler;

I told my love I told my love
 I told her all my heart
 Trembling cold in ghastly fears
 Ah she doth depart

Soon as she was gone from me
 A traveller came by
 Silently invisibly
 He took her with a sigh

(1863)

Introduction

Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past, & Future sees
 Whose ears have heard,
 The Holy Word,
 That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul
 And weeping in the evening dew:
 That might controll,
 The starry pole;
 And fallen fallen light renew!

O Earth O Earth return!
 Arise from out the dewy grass;
 Night is worn,
 And the morn
 Rises from the slumberous mass.

Turn away no more:
 Why wilt thou turn away
 The starry floor
 The watry shore
 Is giv'n thee till the break of day.

The Clod and the Pebble

Love seeketh not Itself to please,
 Nor for itself hath any care;
 But for another gives its ease,
 And builds a Heaven in Hells despair.

So sang a little Clod of Clay,
 Trodden with the cattles feet:
 But a Pebble of the brook,
 Warbled out these metres meet.

Love seeketh only Self to please,
 To bind another to its delight;
 Joys in anothers loss of ease,
 And builds a Hell in Heavens despite.

The Sick Rose

O Rose thou art sick.
 The invisible worm,
 That flies in the night
 In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
 Of crimson joy:
 And his dark secret love
 Does thy life destroy.

The Tyger

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
 In the forests of the night:
 What immortal hand or eye,
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Ah! Sun-Flower

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun:
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the travellers journey is done.

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:
Arise from their graves and aspire,
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

The Garden of Love

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh,
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse