

WAITING
FOR THE
MORNING

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(Short Stories)

Mohamed Saïd Raïhani

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CONTENTS

Feast	7
A Pair of Scissors.....	10
Shattered	13
Foggy.....	19
Waiting for the Morning.....	27
Eternity	35
Mouths Agape.....	38
Monsterland	42
Identity.....	46
The Crack	51
A Crow's Talk.....	54
Blue Temptation.....	59
Open, Sesame!.....	62
Guilty for Being Different.....	69
Annex: An Interview with the Author	75



TEXT 1

FEAST

All great deeds and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning.

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Today's date on the wall calendar is framed in red.

There should be a feast today.

I have found out lately that my perception of feast dates is growing duller and duller. I can remember them only by chance when strolling about in the boulevard, where seasonal lights flash playfully, lighting up cafe-customers' faces shaded by worn-out flags and crumpled banners, most letters of which are wiped away.

These are the same feast signs I have been growing old with. The same feast signs which are repeated eternally. Yet I remember that when I was a child, I would never ignore feast dates to this extent. I would not leave any chance for streamers to surprise me. I even would not sleep the night before the feast day; I would stay awake before the wall clock, waiting for the feast to rise so that I can put on my newly bought clothes and rent a bicycle to join my quarter fellows in bike racing and . . . I do not remember how sleep and dream would slyly show me up in my dearest clothes, signed with the

sweetest, happy expressions. On my pullover chest, my comrades would merrily stammer out the catchword: 'like a bird'.

Their joy would invade me. I ran . . . I flew . . . like a bird. I stretched up my little forearms to fly. I imitated the bird right over me, swimming in the blue sky without shaking a wing. It flew far . . . I flew far . . . It flew farther . . . I flew farther . . . But my comrades would always

spoil

my flight

on me, devouring

my armpits and taking delight in making me hysterically kick about. I could never get rid of them before the bird appeared on the faraway blue horizon. It was only at that time that they would set me free to run out, shouting in welcome, clapping their hands in excitement, and singing the refrain that would link everybody to the skies:

Dance, dance, bird.

We are the happiest on earth.

The bird would descend to the level of the long rows of the little houses inclined on one another; the more we sang, the more it danced. Whenever we would stop singing, it would fly up high in the sky again, but it would return again and again whenever there were singing and dancing. It would dance and shake its wings in exchange for songs and promises:

Dance, dance, bird.

We are the happiest on earth.

The bird would fly along to pay us a visit early in the morning of every feast. It would fly around and around in the sky, waiting for us to go out and share with it the celebration, dancing, and singing. But in the course of time, the bird disappeared.

Probably because people around here have grown older and older.

Or because feast birds no longer exist.

Or because the whole story has been, from the beginning, a pure childhood illusion perpetuated by innocent children.

Now I am turning over the damp calendar pages looking for other red numbers of coming feast dates.

I turn the pages over one after the other. Over and over and over again . . .

Nothing.

Today, then, is the ultimate feast.

1994



TEXT 2

A PAIR OF SCISSORS

If I accept you as you are, I will make you worse; however if I treat you as though you are what you are capable of becoming, I will help you become that.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The Advice:

Just lend me your ear; my long experience with illness, surgical operations, and doctors' explanations taught me a great deal on human body secrets. Everybody has an appendix, a useless appendix.

You have to know that if your appendix hurts, you can have it scissored quite easily because it is only an old bodily organ with totally no function at all in our present time.

Listen to me. I really know the secret of your uneasiness and loneliness among us, your beloved clansmen: you stick to appendix-like beliefs, very old kinds of values with no function in our present time.

Will you allow me to help you out of your dilemma?

Can you just open your mind's door to me so that I can give you very practical lessons which will surely make of you the man of the era, the master of your destiny?

Lesson Number One: Subject 'Anger'

1- . . .!

2-Be quiet!

1- . . .

2-Don't you know what you're saying?

1- . . .

2-Look around you!

1- . . .

2-Look how people hide away their faces in their hands shamefully?

1-What have I to do with their embarrassment? I am angry!

2-Choose your anger glossary; that's what you'll have to do.

1-How can I do that? It's anger!

2-You'll have to learn how to do it.

Lesson Number Ten: Subject 'Joy'

1- . . .!

2-Be quiet!

1- . . .

2-What's this excitement?

1-I'm laughing . . .

2-Do you always laugh this way?

1-What's wrong with my laughter?

2-It doesn't suit you . . .

1- . . .

2-Smile!

1-It's stronger than smiling!

2-You'll have to learn how to do it.

Lesson Number One Thousand: Subject 'Certitude'

1- . . . !

2-Be quiet!

1- . . .

2-What's that you're saying?

1-My opinion . . .

2-You're expressing your opinion or declaring your death sentence? Can't you see the kinds of rocks in people's hands?

1- . . .

2-They'll stone you to death . . .

1-Me!

2-Now be brave!

1-What am I to do?

2-Withdraw your opinion before it's too late!

1-I offended nobody . . .

2-Come on! Do it! Quick!

At the End of the Thousand and One Lesson:

1-For heaven's sake, don't leave me all by myself now that I have grown used to been guided and handled . . .

2-Why? You have taken great benefit from the courses and become a sociable person and . . .

1-Please, I no longer know what to want or say or do, nor what to advance or postpone . . .

2-This happens now and then to everybody . . .

1-My sense of error is sharper than any other time. I feel it impossible to exist from now on without somebody to instruct me and guide my life . . .

2-There's no need to worry. I'll always be by your side.

1-And if you happen to be absent?

2-At that time, you just have to keep still . . . till I am back again.



TEXT 3

SHATTERED

Anything, anything would be better than this agony of mind, this creeping pain that gnaws and fumbles and caresses one and never hurts quite enough.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Event: The inspector's imminent visit.

Characters: Master X and those uninterested.

Time: The current school year.

Place: A village school and the surroundings.

The First Week

Master X:

I will play all my cards to win this bet. I am preparing a more suitable atmosphere in my class. Controlling pupils is essential. Their huge number is a real problem, but the state of adolescence which most of them have reached is a much more serious one. Outside the school, however, my relationships

are peaceful with the pupils' parents, my fellow teachers, and the new school administration.

The Headmaster:

Your hands are shivering, sir. You do not seem to be comfortable with the inspector's imminent visit. Yet you need professional marks which may reconcile you with the administration and prove your competence after all these years of warnings, disciplinary measures, and arbitrary transportations from isolated zones of work to newer ones. Personally, I will stand by your side as the new headmaster to help you out of your trouble. Failure is not a law. Failure is a chance to revise one's work means and evaluate one's results. So get ready. Accomplish your documents. Look good. Correct pupils' copybooks. Control your classroom better. Your pupils are adolescents and numerous. Smoothness with them is not in your favour; you will have inspection very soon: your chance of a lifetime . . .

The Second Week

Class Pupils:

- How rough!
- How rude!
- Our schoolmaster has changed a lot!
- Why has he?
- I haven't the slightest idea!
- I can no longer stand going to school.
- Courses have turned nothing but insults and rebukes!
- The slightest movement during the course provokes him.
- I spend all the time stuck on my chair, paying great attention in all my looks and movements to avoid being exposed to violent reaction from his part!

Pupil's Parents:

- This school has grown a detention centre for our children . . .
- Our kids started to desert it because of this schoolmaster's unjustified brutality . . .
- This cannot go on . . .
- We have to act as parents . . .
- We have to organize ourselves first.

The Headmaster:

What is running on those people's minds? Why are they crowding around my administration? They never have been so excited! Whenever I used to invite them to attend the pupils' parents association gatherings, they would hide in their homes. Some of them would even run away for fear of assuming responsibility. Today all of them insist on the necessity of renewing the association secretariat without the least delay.

Master X's Wife:

I do not know how my husband lives all alone in that faraway, isolated village during his workdays. He is getting more and more silent. He has developed a new habit of taking refuge in silence more than he did in talking. I know nothing about his troubles except what I can imagine. Sometimes, I doubt the credibility of what I developed about him as images and feelings, and I feel far, far from him . . .

I cannot stand watching him burning in silence . . .

Master X:

I feel as if I no longer know what I want. That is why I cannot find what to say. Silence suits me better. Sometimes when I look back at my life, my life scares me. I have always been drawn along like an old plough. Some other

times, I imagine myself as an egg rolling in all directions. I imagine myself as a big egg, and I feel stifled under my crust.

The Third Week

Master X:

I have never been as strangled in my dreams as I was yesterday. I had a strange dream: nobody sees me. Invisible. Men and children look through me. As if I was a piece of glass. As if I was nothing. My fellow teachers walk by without noticing me. I call out to them. They turn back. They look through me at things far behind me. They examine it before pulling each other by the sleeve. They go away. Nobody sees me. And I felt merciless loneliness. Wild isolation. Infinite seclusion . . .

Master X's Wife:

He does not utter a word. He does not talk about his troubles. Sometimes, when he no longer can bear his own silence, he stands up as a frightful monster . . . and I feel fear. I melt down from fear when he is possessed by those fits. He breaks dishes, kicks furniture, and throws shoes and sandals at his own photographs nailed to the wall. When he gets tired, he collapses down on the floor. Unbearable! Life with him is pure breaking. My turn is definitely in the way. I have to apply for divorce.

One of the Fellow Teachers:

I cannot bear seeing him so shattered. He paces in all directions and withdraws from them all. His behaviour with his pupils turned out against him. Most of the pupils left school. A quitting pupil informed me that Master X visits personally those who gave up school in their own homes and tries to convince them to return to school to save the schooling rate until after the inspector's visit.

Master X:

The calendar gets rid of its numbers in such a strange speed. Only a few days separate me from the inspector's visit. The class is well-controlled. Regularity rate: 100 per cent. In case the inspector attends the 'guided reading' period, I will present a text outside the school programme. Pupils' response to a non-academic text may help the inspector have a correct idea about the pupils' school level.

Class Pupils:

- The inspector will pay us a visit soon.
- Who told you?
- Our schoolmaster.
- What do we have to do with inspectors?
- We have to be *à la hauteur*.
- And if we weren't?
- Our schoolmaster will be angry.
- He is always angry!

The Last Week

Arraignment:

We, in accordance to the current procedures on the issue herewith and in accordance with Acts 329 and 36 from the Civil Code, order to summon Master X to attend the public session which will take place on d-day, m-month, y-year at the court of law in order to examine the issue indicated herein.

Complaint:

We, pupils' parents, lay before Your Excellency's hands this complaint against the person of Master X, who overstepped his pedagogic limits by

allowing himself to humiliate pupils and clubbing them so violently. That is the reason why our children definitely quit school.

By writing to you on this point, we expect from you to take the appropriate measures.

Accept, dear Sir, our real confidence in your decisions.

Inspection Report:

Master X had chosen from outside the school programme a text that he typed on sheets of paper for pupils although the beginning of any school year required commitment to the texts in the official programme.

Master X chose as a title to this text: 'Let us communicate better!'

This text is neither preprogrammed in the monthly repartition nor compatible with this week's pedagogic unity.

Master X was so obviously nervous during the course, leaving a negative impact on the pupils who were obliged to read the text when no one raised his hand to do it.

Master X achieved none of the objectives outlined for the course. I invited him to rationalize his work by specifying the operational objectives and surrendering to the power and methodology of the school programme.

On the relational level, Master X is at odds with the pupils' parents. I invited him to dialogue with them.

In case of following the recommendations he is given, Master X will surely develop his work style and double his work results.



TEXT 4

FOGGY

You don't have to travel around the world to understand that the sky is blue everywhere.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The thick morning fog reduces this mythic square, with all its lively evening spectacles, to a mere blur, cooling down the echo of the spectators' applause and merry comments, dispelling all the traces relating to yesterday's fantastic shows. Only the crow of a cock, which sounds somehow near, defies the fog's blank deafness:

Cocorico!

Cocorico!

The resounding crow between these zinc huts surrounding the square evokes disparate responses from distant cocks. Cocks now are calling each other through this thick, endless fog.

Cocorico!

Cocorico!

The strong crows shake the dewdrops, making them slide slowly down the zinc panels, washing the words scribbled on them:

- drawings of hearts torn with knives
- interdictions of urination
- numbers classified backwards . . .

Fog is all there is.

The crow of the cock grew shriller behind an expression of interdiction: 'No garbage here!'

The final letters of the interdiction swings back inside with a door opening, and an old woman steps out of the hut, gripping from the wings a tremendous cock that shakes her wholly whenever it revolts between her hands. She watches the little morning shadows sweeping the square clean with dry-weed bundles and taking away bricks and scraps of newspapers which the spectators fetch to sit on when the evening's popular shows start.

An old popular song interpreted by a childish voice somewhere near the fountain is waving along through the fog. The feminine child voice sings:

O Jilali! There they are chasing you
O Charming Jilali!
Riding his horse
Supervising his tribe
Revolting against the invaders
There they are chasing you
O Charming Jilali!

The echo flows away, sweet and smooth . . .

A group of men advances through the fog towards the centre of the square and circles around the shortest member of the group: a plump man jingling a bunch of keys with one hand and caressing with the other his

round belly. He draws with his forefinger squares and rectangles in the air, gesticulates with his short forearms, traces on the ground with the point of his right shoe lines and forms.

The old woman, whispering to herself, in an audible voice:

— Who are these men?

The cock revolts so violently in her hands that she nearly falls down. She recovers her balance and leans back against the crackling zinc of the hut. The support behind her is not trustworthy enough. She changes her attitude:

— Perhaps the showmen have claimed electric posts to light their evening pop shows.

The little girls themselves gave up sweeping and watch carefully the workers absorbed in helping the cart driver get rid of the newly come cargo: bricks, cement, sand, iron sticks . . .

One of the little girls asks the old woman:

— What are these men going to do, Granny?

— I don't know, dear ones. We'll soon know when their work is all over.

— Are you going to sacrifice this cock for them?

The squeak of a neighbouring door interrupts the little children's questions. Hardly has the old woman seen another old man stepping out, taking hold of his hand drums, when she burst out calling him:

— Jilali, come here!

The old man took his matchbox out of his pocket, strikes a match, and smells its smoke as he usually does when he wants to concentrate on

something. Jilali livens up and congratulates the old woman. He gets nearer to feel the cock with his hands, weigh it, taking it by the feet:

— It will do you good, a sacrifice on your doorstep!

The little children circle around Jilali, pulling him from the sleeves and urging him to sing:

— Sing us something, Uncle Jilali! Please, do!

— Dear boys and girls, it's morning time. I must go to the railway station. Singing in the morning is reserved to travellers. Do you still mistake the morning programme for the evening one? You shall hear me sing here in the evening. See you later!

He gets rid of them. He takes the knife from the old woman, tests it on his nail, checks its traces, and asks for the cock.

The old woman cannot stand looking at blood. Rather, she finds occupation in pushing away children, shouting out at dogs and cats.

Cats are now on the zinc, watching the blood expressions sprayed on the ground by a sacrificed cock dancing frenetically on the rhythm of the old popular song coming along steadily from the fountain:

O Jilali! There they are chasing you

O Charming Jilali!

Riding his horse

Supervising his tribe

Revolted against the invaders

There they are chasing you

O Charming Jilali!

Jilali withdraws, avoiding blood when the cock jumps forward near him. He looks amazed at an exceptional cock: a cock resisting death to the last drop . . .

Waiting for the cock to calm down, Jilali takes up his hand drums and begins to thrum a song. The old woman watches the cock with her eyes and accompanies the rhythm of the drums with nods of her head:

Can you hear the drums thrumming!
Come along the drums are thrumming!
Tonight, tonight
It'll be a white night
The show will go on until morning light is on . . .

On the ground, the cock rolls about in its own blood, stands up occasionally, resisting fatigue and death, and then slowly falls down before jumping again and again, defying death. It flies, falls, jumps on its feet, runs, runs, runs . . .

The old woman pricks up her ears as if she has found out an unforgivable mistake:

- What have you done, Jilali? The cock's still alive! Resacrifice it! It is going to die illegally. Come on! Put your drums down, I say!

Children run after the cock. They withdraw at its upheaval and crowd around it at its calmness. They pick it up at last. They hustle and jostle to touch its smooth feathers. They carry it: quiet and dead. They hand it to the old woman who has recovered her smile.

Jilali takes benefit of the new smile on the old woman's face.

- So we're welcome to dinner.
- Tonight. I will prepare a couscous plate for every circle.
- Do you know what I'll do if you break your promise? I'll compose an epigram in which you'll be the protagonist.
- Please, don't! Not an epigram! I beg your pardon!

Fog is slowly fading away. The square is now gradually recovering its distinctive features.

Workers are silently absorbed in work.

The old woman to Jilali:

- Don't you find them really strange, these men!
- They care for nobody.
- What do you think they are doing?
- They seem to build something that doesn't concern us.
- If we were concerned, they would have asked us to help them or prepare breakfast for them.
- Can't you see they are building in the middle of the square!
- I am thinking of the evening shows in the square. What a loss!

Workers are now putting the last finishing touches on this cement rectangle built in the heart of the square. They cooperate to plant on top of the rectangle an iron board. High enough. Out of frivolous hands' reach. They make sure that the board is well established. They support it with some strokes of cement and sand mixture. They climb down the ladder, examine the position of the iron board, walk backwards to have a better view of the board, read it, climb up the ladder again to wipe away the scattered cement on it . . .

The iron board is now quite higher and clearer.

The workers gather their clothes and tools and stroll away.

The old woman spurs Jilali:

- Was all this fuss for that nonsense erected down there?
- I think we have to read it, first.

A child volunteers to read the writing on the board for them:

— P-pro-project . . .

The old woman kindly asks him to go away. But the child insists on showing his brilliance at reading. She shouts at him:

— I told you to go away!

Jilali strikes a match. He smells its tiny line of smoke and feels refreshed: a habit which he has developed soon after his retirement from the armed forces, where he had spent his youth between gunpowder and the liberation frenzy.

He approaches the board to read the writings painted on it:

Tourist Complex Project

Bewilderment overwhelms the old man's countenance. He rereads the writings on the board once then twice. He tries to understand it before explaining it to the old woman, who does not stop pricking him on the back.

The little girls on the fountain perturb his concentration by singing:

O Jilali! There they are chasing you

O Charming Jilali!

Riding his horse

Supervising his tribe

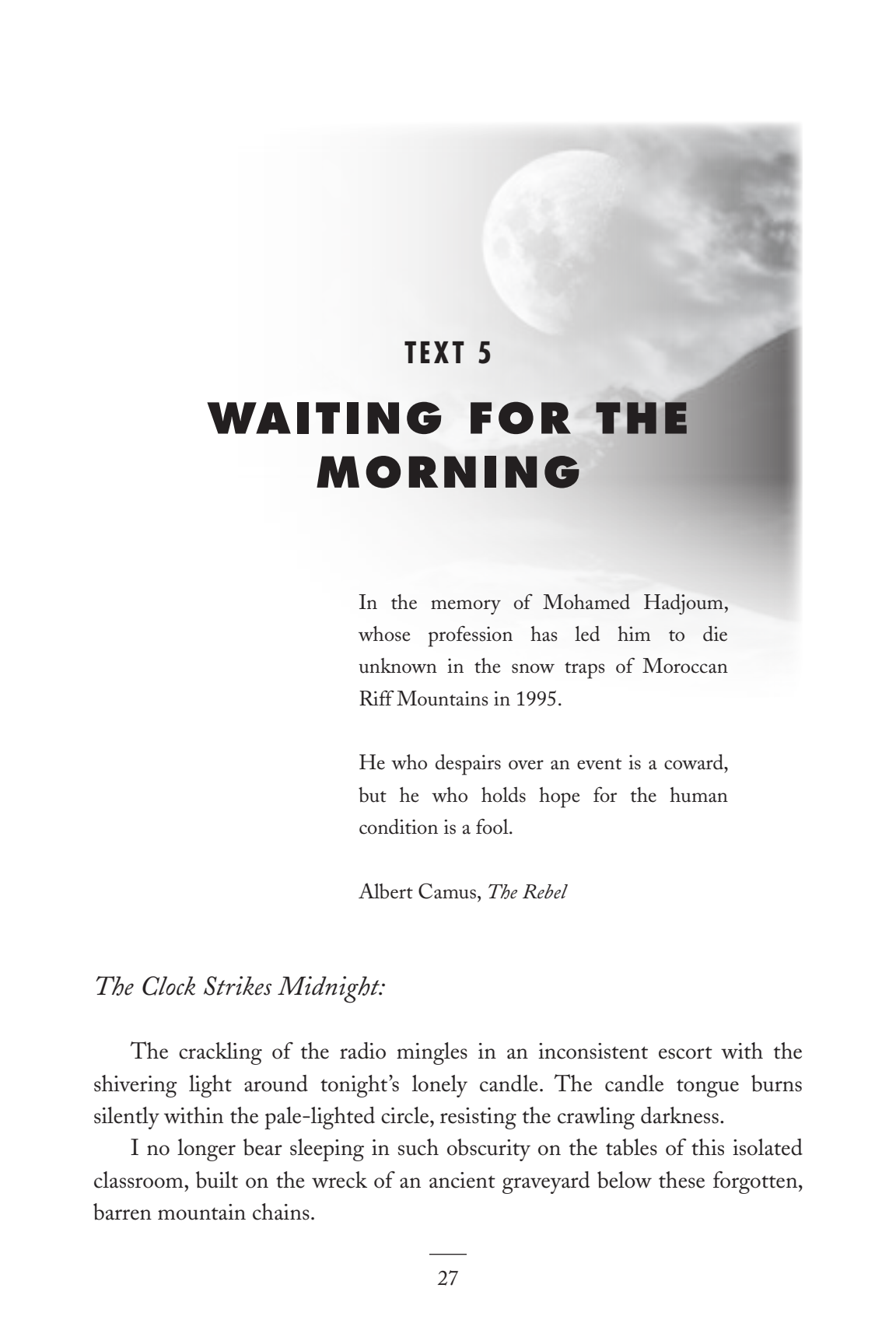
Revolting against the invaders

There they are chasing you

O Charming Jilali!

Fog has now completely faded away. Vision is now clearer, and the sun is brighter than ever. The man puts down his hand drums. He shades his eyes with his hand, stretching his sight to the horizon where land meets the sky from the extreme right to the extreme left, searching for the beginning and the end of the project.

1993



TEXT 5

WAITING FOR THE MORNING

In the memory of Mohamed Hadjoun, whose profession has led him to die unknown in the snow traps of Moroccan Riff Mountains in 1995.

He who despairs over an event is a coward, but he who holds hope for the human condition is a fool.

Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

The Clock Strikes Midnight:

The crackling of the radio mingles in an inconsistent escort with the shivering light around tonight's lonely candle. The candle tongue burns silently within the pale-lighted circle, resisting the crawling darkness.

I no longer bear sleeping in such obscurity on the tables of this isolated classroom, built on the wreck of an ancient graveyard below these forgotten, barren mountain chains.

How I fear these white graves scattered in disorder around me!

I fear that their dwellers should rebel someday against me. I must be bothering them by my living among the dead.

The headmaster presented me this morning his condolences for the loss of my work fellow, Badre Badrawi, and wished me good convalescence. Then he explained to me the administrative difficulty of procuring an alternative schoolmaster to replace my late fellow and shared with me the groups of these school pupils.

The headmaster advised me to be patient and told me openly not to obstruct the natural course of the establishment and attracted my attention to avoid repeating the old catastrophe:

‘Animals around here are very hungry!’

Now I wonder if that jailer who ran away from jail to the surroundings, riding his warder’s bicycle, had heard such an advice; would he have delayed his escape through forest and darkness?

Probably such calculations are useless when freedom is on bet. That may be the reason why he departed, leaving behind his jail fellows, terribly astonished, whispering in the following morning the piece of news: the prison guards found during their pursuit pieces of a torn-out jail uniform discarded about on the shrubs where the warder’s motorcycle wheels kept spinning around near the traces of a human body, which had rolled in blood long before disappearing.

The Clock Strikes Midnight:

The puffs of air coming in through the cracks in the prehistoric walls of the so-called classroom shake playfully my candlelight. I surround the candle with both my palms in an attempt to keep its energy the longest possible. The candle’s teardrops slide down hot and big before freezing on the tray.

As the candle dwindles persistently, I have to spray granules of salt round the candlewick to stop it from thawing. This is my sole candle, and the night

is still long ahead. In fact, night has always been so long. Only it was less difficult before as there we two of us: two schoolmasters.

We used to work alternately in this forlorn classroom planted between these arid mountain chains, educating pupils who never miss their classes except in such occasions as wedding ceremonies, ploughing, rainfall, snowfall, inundation, and funerals . . .

Sometimes, some parent would drop in, covered up in an empty plastic manure sac, in order to solicit the redemption of his children when a fit of rain would catch them at school because trenches and rivers would overflow and accordingly would bar all the winding paths swirling through the endless mountains relating school with their homes.

Bad weather would occasionally grant us an exceptional day off. So we would set the pupils free and shut the classroom door and windows in order to gather warmth for the night. We would arrange the tables in the form of two high beds and stretch our coverlets on them. A cup of mint tea laid next to the pillow before any chat or discussion soon became a third companion. Yet the everlasting winter nights would use up all our topics. So we were addicted to reading prison literature: humans thrown down by helicopters in terrible detention camps and left to the snow. Even when they try to run away, they are captured again and are led back to the place where they are condemned to spend their whole life in.

Stories were repeated on and on. However, we read them all night long. Sometimes we would read the same novel at the same time with one voice. Reading aloud helped us keep away silence and folly. The memory of this classroom testifies that one schoolmaster out of two has been welcomed into the world of folly through this blessed school's door.

Living and working between graves is such a terrible thing! Teaching and raving among people resting forever: dead people in a dead place at a dead time. An absolute silence. With everything around tongueless, voiceless . . . we used to leave the radio on all night long. We would sleep only to the rhythm of its crackles and dream solely to the sounds of its whistles. We learnt, with the stream of nights, how to have the same dream in the same night. We got ourselves ready for the dream before going to bed; we selected a subject in all its meticulous details, and in the dream, all our hopes and

fears unified in the dream of running away from the graveyard to the place where living people are. A dream repeated on and on until we woke up some morning on a new form of seclusion:

The door would not open . . .

We pushed it out with all our force. In vain. We rooted it out of the doorframe:

What whiteness!

The snow was knee-deep. It slid away, drawing an endless doorstep: a blank page wiping away the graves around, the traces of water springs, the deep trenches, and all the paths swirling by the orphan classroom.

The snow remained longer than we had ever expected. Its threat rose inches after inches above the knee. At that time, we began to fear that snow should bury us alive in our classroom while we were running short of food.

Our only hope was to see snow melting away within the twenty-four hours to come. Days, however, passed by all alike: nights without moon and mornings without horizon to separate the whiteness of the earth from the whiteness of the sky.

Some time some day, there loomed in the remote horizon small living shadows crossing all along the whiteness and planting sticks all along the way: those were the village people, and that was their style to make sure of snow depth before advancing. They planted sticks deep in the snow in order to remember the safe way back home. Otherwise, they would themselves fall down in the trenches which the snow had hidden down there as traps for foreigners.

In fact, most of the victims of snowfall time are strangers who do not know the geography of the region. When the snow melts away, they have their graves dug for them near our classroom and are buried without rituals.

The Clock Strikes Midnight:

The candle dwindles continuously. The hot teardrops slide down round and big before freezing on the tray. The candle is burning away without any smell.

I hate strong odours. Even the smell of fresh paint with which the classroom walls are stained stifles me to death, bringing the old burning odour back to my mind's memory.

We were two schoolmasters. We used to wake up early to get our breakfast ready here in this classroom and have it in a hurry on the school tables. Then we would prepare lunch meal and leave it on the camping gas at the back of the classroom.

Afterwards, we would clean the place before pupils come in. We would rearrange the tables and tidy our coverlets up before hiding them under the tables, following the warning of the administration about lodging within classrooms. Actually, if ever the headmaster should stand a six hours' walk to pay us a visit in our world here, he will find us baking in the classroom too.

We used to make our bread with our own hands. Badre would knead the dough inside the classroom, taking shelter from cold and rain while I set three equivalent stones around one of the pits in the classroom, and there it is: a brazier able to lift a pan and bake bread!

After baking, we throw some nails on the remaining embers, seeking prevention from the evils of charcoal on our lives when asleep.

In times of snow and cold, the heat coming out of the brazier would warm up the classroom, making it fit to sleep in before we woke up some winter night on stifling odours and hot colours waving everywhere in the classroom: sparks flying in all directions, flames dancing on the tables, snapping it and swallowing it. Fire tongues licking the walls and blackening the place. Wood crackling, splitting, exploding, falling down in burning embers . . .

The windows collapsed, and the wind invaded the classroom. Fire blazed up. There was no time for thinking. We drenched our coverlets to fight the fiery tongues, striking anywhere. There were fire tongues everywhere poking at us. We struck with all our strengths. Tables and windows, everything

had gone mere big embers. We struck aimlessly. Red colour all around us was fading away. We struck with all our force. We struck, struck, struck till darkness prevailed. At last, darkness!

Waiting for the morning, we sat down outside the classroom door, coughing out our provision of smoke.

In the morning, crows came back to circle above our heads, above the graveyard, to announce a new morning. Then there were pupils coming along to school. They were surprised to find themselves changed into tourists as they would not have class that day. They leaned out of the windows to have a look inside, trying to identify their seats out of the order of the coaled table frameworks.

- There, you used to sit!
- And you behind me there!

The classroom was turned into a pure charcoal mine: roasted vegetables, bare iron sticks of tables—the wood of which was burnt away, coal, coal, coal . . .

We were not ready to spend another night here despite the intimidation stirred up by the pupils' parents who came to congratulate us on our safety and make fun of our internal fear, chewing again the old tales about the atrocity of the forest's wild night animals: starving wolves with sharp looks, sharp claws, sharps fangs . . .

The Clock Strikes Midnight:

The candle has already melted away. There is nothing left of it but teardrops around the candlewick burning out its last energies. The candle is agonizing, and morning is still far ahead.

No one can spend one single night here.

In the past, although we were two, night would defeat us. However, with that conflagration behind, we left the establishment careless of the night and all kinds of threats of the well-informed people among the villagers. We left.

Travelling on foot was never a problem. Mainly, on market days when the path swarmed with marketers going to and fro. Apart from market days, the forest was deserted and silent except for occasional frightened birds' shrieks here or there coming out of the high cedars. The long path wined right and left, up and down. The reptiles rustling on both sides of the path would increase our fear. We were racing against sunset. The jamming trees veiled the horizon. Details everywhere in the forest were gradually fading away. Colours blackening. Shades standing erect everywhere, getting bigger. Shades melting in shades to make one only colour: darkness. At last, there came the night.

We could not see farther than our footholds. It was absolutely dark. We would certainly have gone astray if we carried on the trip. Pocket torch was useless in the utter darkness. The fugitive prisoner's wheel was once again brought to spin around in my mind. I could almost hear its buzz somewhere around here. It was utterly dark and the path still long ahead. It was inevitable to stop. There had to be some rest. I collapsed on the ground, leaning my back against a tree trunk, breathing out my fatigue.

My feet were swelling up with heat inside my shoes, and sleep was caressing my eyelids. Sleeping on the ground, in the wilderness by night, was a fatal error. I thought: *sleeping on the branches might be safer from earthly surprises. Of course, it is uncomfortable, but it was only a matter of an ephemeral night.*

I climbed up the tree nearest to my touch and made sure of the solidity of the branches. I called at my friend below the tree to come up and sleep in safety. He refused. He had such a violent sleep. He couldn't sleep calmly. I left him alone. I switched the torch on to light him a circle on the ground to sleep within. He stretched up his white coat, within the torchlit circle, and laid one hand under his head and the other between his thighs. He couldn't sleep with his hands cold. Something in the pockets of his coat made him ill at ease. He sat up to get rid of it. He took a little pocketbook out and handed it to me and lay down again on his white coat.

However, scarcely had his hands warmed up when he tore the whole universe with his shrieks, imploring me for help while I, from over the tree, light with my torch a circle, a stage, an arena inside which twist:

Black and white.

(Snores and calls of help.)

Black and red.

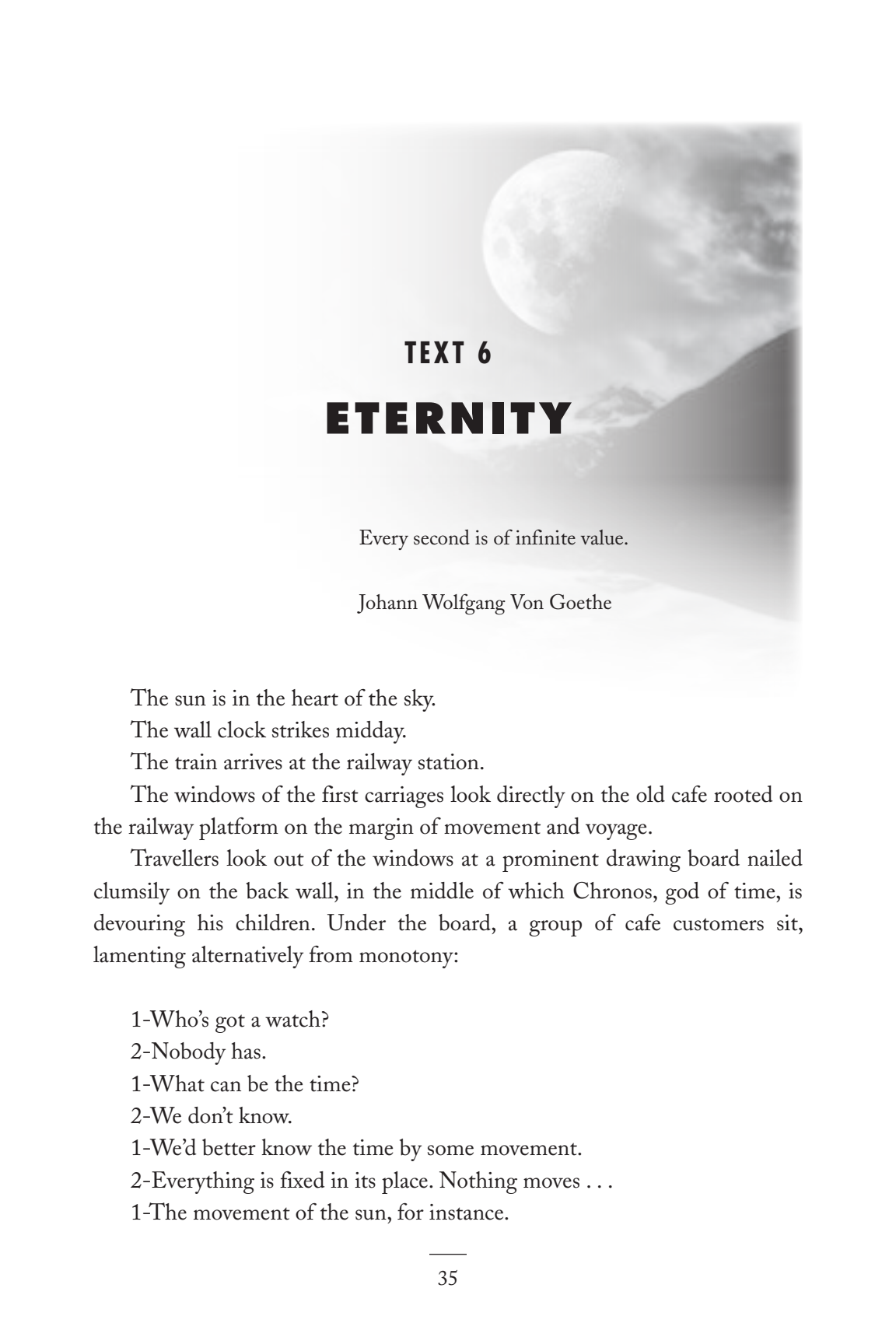
(Snores and moans.)

Black and blood

(Snores and silence.)

From the tree, I watched the live show below: wild blackness devouring a weary friend.

1995



TEXT 6

ETERNITY

Every second is of infinite value.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The sun is in the heart of the sky.

The wall clock strikes midday.

The train arrives at the railway station.

The windows of the first carriages look directly on the old cafe rooted on the railway platform on the margin of movement and voyage.

Travellers look out of the windows at a prominent drawing board nailed clumsily on the back wall, in the middle of which Chronos, god of time, is devouring his children. Under the board, a group of cafe customers sit, lamenting alternatively from monotony:

1-Who's got a watch?

2-Nobody has.

1-What can be the time?

2-We don't know.

1-We'd better know the time by some movement.

2-Everything is fixed in its place. Nothing moves . . .

1-The movement of the sun, for instance.

2-The sun is still in the same place where it has always been.
The sun is in the heart of the sky.
The wall clock strikes midday.
The train arrives at the railway station.

The windows of the first carriages look directly on to an old drawing board inside which a snake twists around itself in a spotted circling shape to devour its own tail. Under the drawing board, two café customers are seated abreast, talking without exchanging a glance:

1-Listen to this song!
2-Mmm!
1-Is this spring?
2-You may be right.
1-When did spring come?
2-I don't know.
1-Even the sun doesn't give an idea.
The sun is in the heart of the sky.
The wall clock strikes midday.
The train arrives at the railway station.

The windows of the first carriages look directly on to childish drawings in the middle of the terrace back wall: entangled circles, clear circles, endless circles under which sits a young man reading a book before his companion interrupts his concentration:

1-What are you reading?
2-A book on the biological clock in living creatures' lives.
1-What kind of clock is it?
2-It's inside living beings. Each body is supplied with hidden clocks that control the times of sleep, hunger . . . that's what the book is about.
1-What about man, has he an internal clock?
2-I don't know.

1-I see no clock outside us. So there can be none inside us . . . look at the sun!

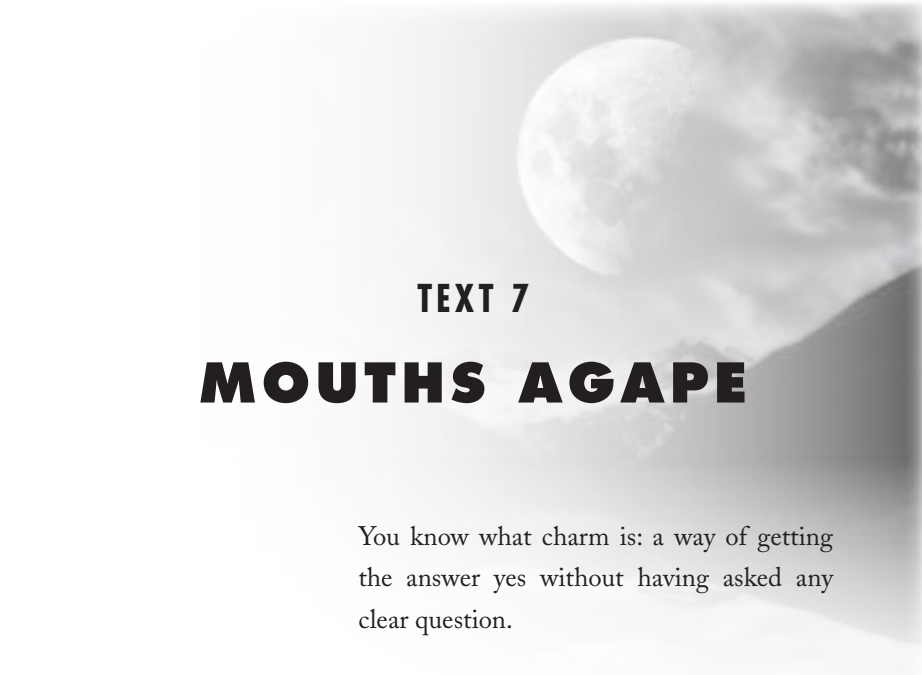
The sun is in the heart of the sky.

The wall clock strikes midday.

The train arrives at the railway station.

The windows of the first carriages look directly on to . . . eternity.

2001



TEXT 7

MOUTHS AGAPE

You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question.

Albert Camus, *La Chute* (*The Fall*)

A General View:

A man, apparently tired, ties up his donkey to a stake and steps along to sit down on a rock over there in the corner of this stable, invoking sleep by contemplating his donkey standing upright there, waiting for nothing. *Erect.*

Looking at his donkey shackled in the far corner of the stable with the number 55 on its muzzle and its face flowing lengthwise with vacant eyes, he feels great sorrow for the donkey's patience and obedience.

Waiting:

The donkey, under his burden, stands up waiting for his master who will give him a mild prick on his posterior and a quick tap on his naked neck, tugging him out.

The donkey is waiting on with no signs of boredom, playing with his ears, raising one, lowering the other, lowering them both, advancing one, withdrawing the other . . .

The Unexpected:

Two young men fall down from the stable wall with two plastic bags showing wooden rectangles inside. They disappear between the donkey's legs. After a while, the first head emerges to make sure there are no human eyes around. Then there emerges the second head. With a light razor stroke, they have the first ear off the donkey's skull. They take a wooden shoe brush out of the plastic bag and put it lengthwise between the donkey's jaws to make it easier to get their hands within and cut off the tongue. There starts the tongue-and-ear reaping: the first young man is reaping northwards and the other one southwards until they meet in the middle of the stable to run away out of the open door with bleeding ear-stuffed bags.

The donkey's master wakes up on his rock: his donkey before him stands with a red breast, a vertical wooden tongue, and two jaws set wide apart to allow blood drops to run straight outside the stable.

He runs out, tracking down the bleeding path to find himself in pursuit of the tongue-and-ear plastic bags before him. He shouts and shouts.

The runaways implore him to retreat:

- Don't be afraid!
- Please, draw back!
- These are for foreign markets, foreign witches!

The man slows down, down, down . . . He stops running, taking in his hands his lower jaw dangling down his chest with saliva dropping sluggishly on his bare forearms.

People crowd around him.

Marginal Chats:

- What's the matter with him?
- He suffers a fit of . . .
- Oh!
- He got nervous, hyper nervous. And when he opened his mouth to shout out something, he remained so . . .
- Let's put keys in his hands . . . Feeling metal in his palms may help him recover his consciousness.
- But he seems to suffer from his mouth!
- Oh, look inside his mouth!
- His tongue is moving, but his voice is hardly audible.
- His donkey in the stable, voiceless too.
- Oh, glory to God! So we can do nothing for him.
- Hey, wait! Don't leave the man like this . . . Let's take him to the hospital.

At the Hospital:

- Nurse: Sit down there, all of you!
- People: His lower jaw will definitely fall on his chest.
- Nurse: That's simple.
- People: Where's the doctor?
- Nurse: He is busy doing a surgical operation. He will care after him when he's back.
- People: Shall the man wait with his mouth so wide open?
- Nurse: All those patients around there in the waiting room suffer from the same crisis. And all of them are waiting with their mouths agape. Human lower jaw can easily deviate and fall down. Yawning with jaws wide stretched or shouting or even laughing can be the cause of the crisis.
- People: That's right, let him wait.

Nurse: Do you have anything to do, you all?

People: No.

Nurse: So you might sit down here all together and wait . . .

2001



TEXT 8

MONSTERLAND

He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*,
'Aphorism 146'

- O brothers! Come and gather around the leader . . .
- O brothers! The leader's speech.
- Quiet, please!

The Leader's Speech:

O people! In your raising idols there abides danger. So take care of their falling down on you. This is my advice to you: take your distance from me and be prudent in your attachment to me. Be ashamed of your belonging to me as I may be for you a deceiver . . .

Excitement:

- What kind of deception is the leader talking about while we are in such a miserable state?

- We have to be ashamed of ourselves . . .
- We still feel fear from monsters . . .
- And think only of what can't provoke them . . .
- Monsters have been extinguished in other peoples' lands long time ago . . .
- Why can't they do the same here? What's the difference?
- That's our responsibility!

The Speech, Once More:

O, people! Where to flee, with the sea behind you and the enemy before you? You have nothing left but truth and endurance. Be brave and defeat this despot who is thrown to you by his fortified town. It is our chance to do it if you allow yourselves to die for a legitimate cause . . . And take into account that if you endure the little difficulty, you will enjoy lifelong pleasures . . . So do not leave me all alone, you have no more chance than I have . . . And keep in mind that I am the first to fulfil what I have invited you to do. And I am going to fight the despot . . . and kill him . . . If I die after him, you are free . . . And if I pass away before coming to him, you should carry on my will and achieve the most important target: conquering this island and killing the despot.

Excitement, Again:

- Long live honour! . . .
- Long live honour! . . .
- O brothers! Come and support the leader in his confrontation with the monster . . .
- Let's support the leader. Let's show him to the monster's cave . . .
- Long live the leader! . . .
- Long live the leader! . . .
- Down with the monster! . . .
- Down with the monster! . . .

Outside the Monster's Cave:

- O brother! Let's get ready for any kind of surprise . . .
- Ready! . . .
- All for honour! . . .
- All! . . .
- All for the leader! . . .
- All! . . .
- Honour or death! . . .
- Honour! . . .
- Let's sing all together:

*If one day a people chooses his way
Fate has absolutely to submit,
Dark night to quit,
And shackles to break away . . .*

- O brothers! Isn't it queer, this silence behind the monster's cave? . . .
- Do you mean that the monster has devoured the leader? . . .
- I resist the idea but can he devour the leader so easily? . . .

Getting Out of the Cave:

- O brothers! The cave door is opening . . .
- O brothers! Let's salute the leader! . . .
- Long live the l . . .
- Who is that one over there adding his handgrip to the leader to salute us? . . .
- Is he the monster? . . .
- Which of them is the monster? . . .
- I don't know but look: they are coming along . . .
- What can they say? . . .
- Be quiet, please! . . .

Speech, Forever:

O people!

Listen, understand, and take benefit from what I will tell you . . .

Time has tamed me, and I need to tame you and teach you something which may be a reference to you . . .

Stop playing with your tongues. Man's death lies between his jaws . . .

O people!

Reforming the corrupt masses is better than reforming the corrupt rulers.

For all these reasons, I see . . .

Silence:

— . . . !

— . . . !

— . . . !

— . . . !

2000



TEXT 9

IDENTITY

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

Oscar Wilde

The police officer hands me my duplicate identity card and keeps looking suspiciously at me, then he mumbles out threateningly:

— Watch out! This is the third duplicate. No more stupidity. Is it clear, man?

Watch out!

Watch out!

Watch out!

Outside the police station, additional magnetic attraction sticks me to the ground, making my pace heavier and heavier.

I take great delight in my weight.

The spray of the square fountain caresses my face as I advance towards the market gate.

The market is always crowded. Customers hustle and bustle in very obvious boredom. The vegetable and sardine sellers, on both sides of the only passageway inside the market, call the jostlers' attention to the goods they have spread on the ground, but they will spare no time to damn their mothers, slapping them on their faces with parsley bundles for turning upside down their bean sacs or scattering their sardine boxes and treading them hysterically down as they hustle along:

Watch out!

Watch out!

Watch out!

A lateral push gets me out of my abstraction and sends me swimming over the half-full bean sacs, rolling in a lake of bean grains, seeking for a foothold among the hustlers.

I feel light now that I am on my feet again.

The drop steals my weight off me.

It is as if I got rid of something or as if I lost it.

I search in my trouser pockets. The front pockets. The back ones. I try searching again and again. My knees shiver . . . the wallet? My knees fail me with every step . . . My card? I examine the faces around me. Everyone is hustling to and fro, back and forth, and no one seems concerned in my dilemma.

Finally, the human flood throws us outside the market, to the other square. The spray of this square fountain showers us all with its spittle.

My knees tremble. The least puff of air alters my hesitating attitude.

I am now without weight, lighter than a feather.

It is as if Mother Earth's magnetic attraction got rid of me, all at once.

With this consternation of mine, I am probably now the laughing stock of my robbers. They may be sipping their cups of coffee somewhere around here in these cafes and making fun of my stupidity.

A friend of mine shows me to the chief thief in charge of the snatching operations in the area: a stylish man wearing a grey suit, sipping his coffee all alone under a sunshade on the terrace of the Beautiful View cafe in front of the market gate.

The chieftain asks me when I finish my story:

— Where were you stolen?

I answer:

— In the market.

However, the chieftain apparently takes great care after details.

— Where? At the entrance? At the exit?

— The exit.

The chieftain leans on my friend and whispers audibly:

— Your friend is unlucky. The exit is not under my control.

Then he turns to me again:

— What was there in your wallet?

— My identity card.

The chieftain remains quiet for a while and says with fake sorrow:

- You are victim of foreign thieves who steal anything from anyone. Some of them specialize only in stealing documents and sell them to smugglers, criminals, and prostitutes.

The chieftain sips his coffee and adds:

- Watch out!

I say nothing.

What is the use of caution now?

The chieftain carries on his advices, and his eyes focus right on the market gate.

- Those who stole your card will chase after you more than ever before in order to get more documents: your passport, chequebook, signature . . . Your card is being sold on public sale somewhere. Whoever buys it will cause you so much trouble because he will be yourself by the force of law with the same name, profession, address, and dates. Documents, my country fellow, make personality. The more documents are complete and coherent, the more personality is real and legal.

Then he turns to me saying:

- Do you remember any of the suspicious faces around you at the exit?

I recapitulate the events and the faces on my memory's screen:

*the hustling, the jostling, the damning,
people's breath inside my shirt collar,
the careless faces flowing by . . .*

The chieftain is waiting for an answer.

I say:

— No.

The chieftain fidgets and declines any more cooperation.

I never know the reason of this awe which submerges me whenever I set foot on the first staircase stepping up to the police station gateway. Even the highly raised flags give me such a fright when the wind shakes them above my head!

I lay my documents down on the police officer's desk:

— These are the new documents for my new identity card, and here is the loss attestation . . .

The policeman turns bewildered:

— Loss of what? Aren't you the one who took this very morning his third identity card duplicate?

He remains gazing at me in amazement, his eyes in mine searching for the ruse that I am weaving for him.

He gazes at me . . .

At last, he pounds at his desk and stands up, astonished:

— Wait, there. I'll go upstairs to consider your case.



TEXT 10

THE CRACK

If I were two-faced, would I be wearing
this one?

Abraham Lincoln

The Building Inhabitants:

- It's cracking open . . .
- It'll collapse sooner or later . . .
- The buzz of any vehicle will shake it and pull it down . . .
- What about the building owner?
- He considers us a mere group of maniacs . . .

The Building Proprietor:

If the split were horizontal, there never would be such a trouble. Unluckily, the split is vertical, digging the building from foundation to rooftop. In fact, at first, I could not understand the ground-floor inhabitants' complaints when they noticed the first split signs. That is the reason why I shouted in their faces:

- The entire world is splitting around you. Can your eyes see nothing else beyond this building?

When objections started resounding in the higher floors, I hurried to see skilful master builders who tried to defeat the split with clever tricks. They dealt with it as a long wound and sew it horizontally with iron sticks to stop the split from any further extension. Then they restored the ornaments and graffiti. Yet the split was stronger than any embellishment and reappeared to dig up the remaining upper floors of the building later.

City Architects' Association:

It is inevitable to evacuate the building from its inhabitants and pull it down before it puts an end to their lives and destroy the surrounding habitations. From the very beginning, the construction of this building did not respect the characteristics of the ground on which it is constructed. Furthermore, the building, despite its modern facade, is built illegally on an ancient house. For all these reasons, City Architects' Association declares itself innocent of what may engender from this crisis: *in-no-cent* . . .

The Building Caretaker:

Sir, I have two pieces of news for you: the first may sound bad, but the other surely is good.

As far as the first one is concerned, local newspapers these days can have no concern outside the possible collapse of this building and the catastrophic consequences it may cause . . . the inhabitants have deserted the building and put up tents all around your villa in the suburbs, menacing to go out in a street demonstration supported by City Architects' Association . . .

Concerning the second piece of news, sir, it is about the worldwide-reputed genius of architecture who came to our city to examine a construction project trusted to his foreign company. Therefore, your contacting him, sir, may arrange things positively.

With the Construction Company Manager:

- It's very simple, sir.
- I'd like to hear that, Professor, but how?
- You'll dig five centimetres on the right of the crack and five on the left. Then, you'll fill up the ten-centimetre crack from foundation to rooftop with a crumpled cement-and-paper blend. Afterwards you'll cover up all that with a mixture of cement and sand.
- And by doing so, we will easily get rid of the split?
- The mixture of cement and sand will adhere to the paper within the crack. At that time, garnish your building with whatever ornament you like and paint your walls however you please and have no fear from splits or . . . cracks.
- Can the split disappear in the course of time?
- Absolutely not, the crack will remain inside the wall with the same width and depth, you see, because soil around here is breathing, dear customer.

1994



TEXT 11

A CROW'S TALK

A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that Faith does not prove anything.

Friedrich Nietzsche

On stepping into this farm, a strange feeling will invade you, and you will wonder:

- Have I forgotten any of my painting tools, or is it a mere resentment of oblivion?

You will inspect your bag thoroughly only to find out that everything is all right. Yet the strange feeling will accompany you as long as you pace forwards between the lines of the orange trees standing in two rows at both sides of the farm entrance, drawing out for your eyes a one-way direction.

The strange feeling will possess you, and suddenly there will come out of your memory your grandfathers' tales on old-time peoples who acted badly and were metamorphosed into crows, monkeys, and pigs.

Space of Death:

The farm owner will stand still, right at the end of the path, waiting for you with his hand stretched out for a handshake telling you:

- I learnt yesterday that the Beaux-Arts Academy had delivered its students in artistic missions on several farms in the province . . .

And:

- You are unlucky . . .

When you take no notice of the hint, he will add:

- I, myself, love painting but I prefer still life as it is void of action. Action is suffering. And man, by nature, hates suffering. That's why art has to be beautiful, optimistic, and pleasant . . .

Space of Creation:

You will put up your stand, take your tools out of your paint box in readiness for work, and sit down to arrange colours on the plate.

Will you, then, have a glance at him to see how angry he is! Yet he will fake a smile, saying:

- Please, make yourself at home!

Space of Silence:

Landscape before your eyes will be silent, dead . . . Yet the view seems beautifully balanced and well framed. Trees at both edges of the tableau will serve as a natural frame with that mule stuck in the near background overloaded with burdens. Very far away behind the mule, fetlock-shackled bulls are grazing in the pasture. A farm slave will go as far as the remote

background of the tableau to pick out the strongest bull out of the cattle and draw it along by the horns. The slave and the bull are heading one after the other towards the foreground of the tableau . . .

The bull will follow the slave obediently, not knowing the fate drawn for him around the log erected in the foreground, before you, waiting for the following . . .

Space of Order:

Here, you will hear nothing but order nor will you see anything but obedience.

— What are you waiting for, man? Come on! Do it! . . .

‘At your wishes, sir!’ will the castrator’s answer be, jumping right away on the bull.

That is commonly known here as order, the lord’s. It is an instruction from the highest source in the farm, a Herculean man owning land, bulls, mules, and slaves whom he has inherited strong and castrated from his glorious ancestors.

Yet despite the heavy heritage and the ancestors’ heavy shade, the lord’s innovative attempts in interpretation drove him further to the point of contradicting the ancestry line in an essential point: he occasionally would redeem a slave with the intention of asking God’s forgiveness for his having sinned in Ramadan by making love to one of the women of his harem.

But the majority of the released slaves would come back again and again to this farm, refusing the freedom they have not asked for, yearning nostalgically for their past life of obedience and castration.

Space of Obedience:

The castrator will insert his two fingers deep in the bull’s nostrils to twist his neck easily and throw him like a big corn sac down on the ground. He

will steal the bull's testicles from between his thighs, smear them with grease, and lay them carefully on the log in the middle of the tableau.

The lord will notify the castrator:

- I want a strong bull. A bull that can plough the fields all alone and keep watermills working on his own As for the virile bull, my cows will need him for one short minute in a long year, and then I may borrow him or even rent him.

Space of Noise:

The bull will remain lying around his guillotine, snoring out of vertigo before the wooden bat should split his testicles in two separate halves:

- Aaaaah!

The bull, shackled, will roll about, kick in all directions, scream, shriek, shrill, howl, and bark as if he has never been a bull:

- Aaaaah!

The bull's torment will deserve no interest from the mule stuck in the same old place, overloaded with the same old burdens, grinding corn out of a bag hanging down from around his neck, careless of pain and screams.

Space of Metamorphosis:

You will have a look at the tableau before your eyes to find it after all the violence and chaos that have been taking place nearby, devoid of any action. A mere still life: orange trees on both edges of the board framing the void which was, just a few moments ago, echoing pain and rage. And you will wonder:

- What happened to my painting?

Then you take notice of the paintbrushes on the ground between your feet: broken to pieces, crushed to powder. And you will wonder:

— What happened to my brushes?

Then you remember your hands and you feel them.

Cold! . . .

Are they paralyzed?

Are they another man's?

None of that is of importance. What you will have to know is that metamorphosis is now eating you and that you are undergoing the finishing touches to allow you to join our club History's Metamorphosed. So welcome among us, dear newcomer, in any shape you wish: a walking pig or a flying crow.

1997



TEXT 12

BLUE TEMPTATION

I am no bird and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

He crept in his wheelchair on the building rooftop towards the little child watching the flocks of birds sliding smoothly in the blue sky. He tapped, with his cold palm, on the little warm forearm and whispered:

— You remind me a great deal of your late brother, Abbass*.

The child sighed and asked:

— Was he fond of birds too?

— Not only *fond* of birds, he was simply *mad* about them . . .

The disabled old man remained quiet for a little while and added:

— He used to spend most of his time in the same place where you are standing right now, all alone, watching the blue sky and the dancing birds as they fly higher and higher . . .

As he noticed the little child's interest, he carried on:

— He was maniacally fond of birds. I remember that he asked me, once, about birds' means of communication, and I said that they communicate by singing out their needs and desires. Oh, how he loved the idea! He shouted:

'How wonderful, Daddy, it is to sing out your words instead of saying them plainly!'

Then with more excitement, he asked:

'What about food, Daddy?'

I answered him that birds do not have food problems: they have their nourishment at any time and from any field in the world because the world turns smaller when you fly and quite at hand. That is the reason why birds seem to enjoy a high degree of self-esteem, refusing ready-made nests, building their haunts with their own beaks. Some of them will raise their pride roof the highest possible, refusing to live outside the beautiful seasons of the year, migrating from north of the globe to south of it, in search of good food and a warm sun. Once, Abbass surprised me:

'Can I fly, Daddy?'

I denied because our ancestors had spoilt on us the chance of flying from the very beginning of our existence on Mother Earth. But he would protest energetically:

'What have I to do with my ancestors, Daddy? I am asking about myself . . .'

And I had to rationalize the situation:

'Our ancestors should have had to try flying earlier in time so that they might have acquired wings and transmitted us their ability to fly. But they did not. That is why we are now here on the ground, wingless.'

Yet Abbass would always find solutions to match his rising enthusiasm:

'I'll put feathers on my arms, and I'll fly away.'

I answered that wings cannot be worn. Wings, like facial features, are inherited.

'I won't stay nailed here. I *want* to fly.'

'You *won't*.'

'I *will*.'

I had tried, before him, what he was brooding over. At his age, I myself had tried flying from the edge of this very rooftop, indifferent to the crowd of neighbours down the street below me, spreading sheets from their corners and imploring me not to commit suicide:

'Don't kill yourself! You'll incur God's wrath on you . . .'

'I'm not going to kill myself. I'm going to fly away . . .'

But I threw myself from where you are standing now, and instead of flying, I fell so heavily that the sheets stretched for me were torn, and I collided with the solidity of the ground and had my legs broken. The result is this: I do not fly, I creep . . . *WYSIWYG*, my son: *What You See in me Is What You will surely Get*. Yet Abbass, your late brother, grew fonder of birds' lives and offspring and songs until I found myself once crawling in my wheelchair to look deep down the street, below the building, where my neighbours crowded to bandage the split skull of your late brother who attempted to fly imprudently.

The disabled father withdrew his cold hand off the child's forearm in order to outline the conclusion from this fable. Yet the little child preceded him, with his face always focused on the faraway horizon:

— Don't be afraid, Daddy. I'll follow neither your way nor Abbass's . . .

Then, firmly:

— I *will* fly, Daddy, and I *will* succeed in my try.

* **Abbass Ibn Fernass** : The first man to have tried flying.



TEXT 13

OPEN, SESAME!

A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.

Oscar Wilde

Am I dreaming? . . .

Am I really myself? . . .

Banknotes! . . .

In my pockets, banknotes!

I feel them one after the other. I fold them. I crumple them . . .

A divine gift!

I raise them to the sun, looking for the silver fibre within.

The fibre is there, as thick as a club . . .

Threat is written at the bottom of the banknotes in a highly standard language:

The authors or accomplices of banknote falsification will be punished in accordance with the laws of the acts in force.

There is no margin for doubt: the banknotes are real.

Now that you've become responsible to your family, you've got to buy some clothes for your younger brothers. There's a shop there, just around the corner . . .

Who can be that wretched man thrusting his nose in my ultimate private space? A naked, barefooted beggar hiding his genitals with his hands. Is he an informer? He does know what is really turning in my brain . . . And those people, there in the sit-in, moaning out their sad slogans. Are they dying? Or are they listening to my brain waves too? They are numberless, creeping along. Their complaints echo around the place.

- I am fired.
- I am banned.
- I am . . .

Fear submerges me. The world blackens in my eyes. Blackness. Utter blackness. I feel the barrier before me in search of an outlet. This is a door. A closed door. A wooden one. An iron thing. Rather stony. I knock on the door. No one answers. I call out with all my strength:

- Open, comrade!

Silence is all that can be heard back.

- Open, brother!

Silence is all there is.

- Open, sesame!

Then the world opens!

Then obscurity fades away!

Finally, my eyes can see clearly a man and two children. A shopkeeper and . . . my younger brothers! What a coincidence! My brothers! They are trying on pullovers! Consulting the shopkeeper on colour, length, width . . .

How strange!

They have anticipated me to the shop!

'No, don't be afraid,' interrupts the shopkeeper, tapping at my shoulder.

He continues:

— Don't be afraid. What is happening now is just a kind of mutual understanding.

He bends down on the children and kisses them. Their teeth turn whiter underneath the smile of joy with the festive clothes. I pay for the pullovers. For the first time, I enjoy the pleasure of spending money! The pleasure of responsibility! My brothers kiss me and run away unusually glad. They jump, run, stop, and ask passers-by to read for them the writings on their pullover chests. They echo them gladly. They run again. They spread their little forearms to fly, imitating the flying stork coming from the south, swimming softly in the blue sky, stretching out its long wings, turning right, left, right, left without shaking a wing, flying up, flying down, shaking its wings a bit, relaxing as it slides in the air with its wings always wide spread, flying higher and higher, above grass, above palm trees, above mountains, above the sky, above the sun now growing as white as curd.

I am dying for a glass of curd!

'Curd purges body, mainly when it's sour,' says the waiter to his clientele drowned in their chairs. 'Sugar and sweets are good for throats too,' he adds from behind his grave-like counter. The cafe is all graves . . . white graves . . . graves like tables surrounded with chairs on which customers doze off.

The cafe owner praises his propriety Cafe Living & Dead as he nails a board on the wall before the customers:

The venerated customers are solicited not to smoke or chat for the preservation of the public tranquillity.

This is the most odious offence there ever existed. How can customers be ordered to silence in a space supposed to be the ultimate place left for free speech and free gatherings? It is only now that I can hear the dead protesting

underneath the stone graves. It is only now that I can understand their anxiety.

The cafe owner answers:

— I offend no one. It's your chats that offend my cafe and expose it to real confrontation with the authorities.

The first grave breaks out. Then the second grave. Then the third. The rebellion of the living and the dead is on. All the clientele, all the dead, the fools, the shoeblacks, the prostitutes, the youths hiding their genitals with their university attestations . . . Everyone stands upright, clears his throat, snatches the board off the wall, smashes it to pieces, flings the fragments about, listens to the inspiration, to the heavenly voice, to the hymn of eternity, to poet Abderrahman, El Majdoub's voice. We run after him in chaos. We tread over whoever comes in our way. We join the heavenly poet. We gather round him, drawing with our bodies a circle round him, lengthening our necks to hear the poet reciting aloud:

*I looked deep down at Ksar,
A wretched city echoing silence,
Counting down for the final deliverance
Peeping out of Mount Sarsar . . .*

We feel convulsion devouring us from head to toe.

What a prophecy!

What a view!

We look down to the bottom of Mount Sarsar. We look down to Ksar El Kébir, a city devoid of action and life except for the movements of the frightened hands hurrying to close the windows of their old castles. We look down at River Oued El Makhazine of which transparent waters are growing orange now. Red. Crimson. Blackish . . . The river is filling out. Filling. Filling. The water surface is mounting persistently to the dam brim . . .

Now we are waiting for the ultimate deluge. We count down hysterically for Rodriguez' drowning. We count down for the despot's drowning. We wave about our hands, our shirts, our djellabahs . . .

God is Great!

.

God is Great!

. . . ! *Bang!*

God is Great!

Bang! Bang!

God . . . !

Bang! Bang!

.

Bang! Bang!

I woke up, sweating all over. Very far and ambiguous calls echoed in my memory to the rhythm of the knock on the door:

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

The bang on the door grew harder. I shouted out:

— Hold on!

The noise calmed down for a while. I availed myself of the delay. I yawned. I read the new scribbles on the wall near my bed. I leaned over them and rubbed my eyes open to read:

Work w-w-w-work

Free Speech F-f-f-free Speech

Human Right R-r-r Human Right

The organization of lines and the deconstruction of words remind me of the handwriting lessons in elementary schools. This is my youngest brother's handwriting. He does not trust his memory. That is the reason why he writes down whatever comes to his ears or mind. His only wish is to be a teacher and write all day long on the blackboard. The wavy handwriting reflects his desire to keep on the assumed line on the wall. For me, it is not a secret to see that he made too much effort to write all these words so high. He would like to prove to me that he has really grown up and that the achievement of his wish is only a matter of time.

The knock on the door was back again. I jumped out of bed. I stumbled in my pair of trousers. I controlled myself from falling down. I found myself before the door. I opened it on a man in a professional uniform. I rubbed my eyes: the postman.

The postman handed me a letter, briefly saying:

—Ensured mail. Sign down here, please.

He handed me the register. I scribbled my signature down his forefinger. He withdrew the register and walked away.

I weighed the letter with my hands. It was as heavy as any insured mail that I have recently been receiving. I have developed a special intuition towards insured mail. I can guess its content without any need to open it: it contained nothing but my refused documents in a job contest.

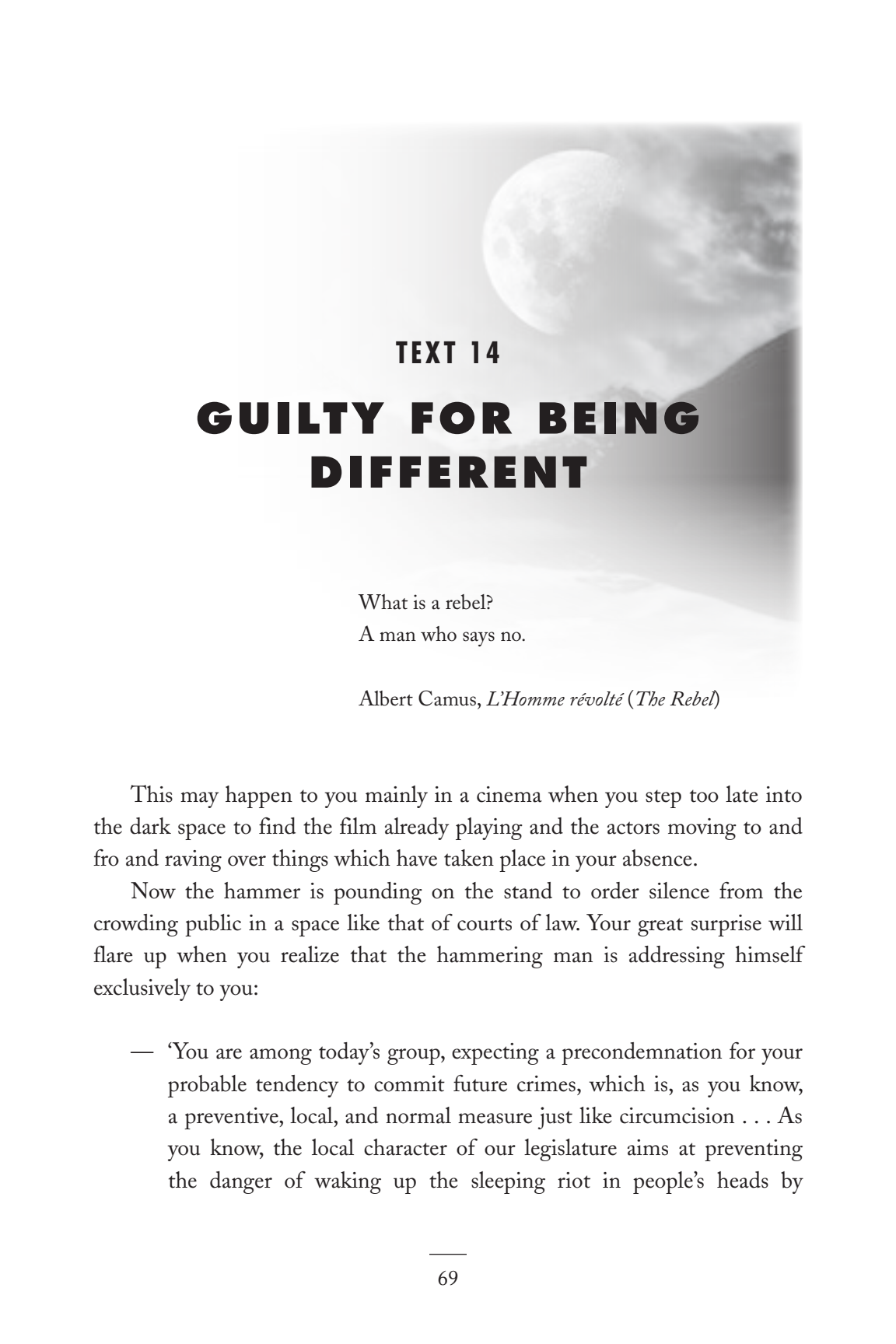
I threw the letter behind. There it was, swimming in the air, bumping the wall, and swirling down to rest at the feet of my youngest brother's handwriting lesson.

The sun was stuck in the middle of the sky. The postman, like a devil, crept away, without any shadow behind, towards the neighbouring doors, loaded with his registers, uniform, and bag. He knocked on the door, waited for the answer, knocked again, examined his registers, searched for ensured mail, and leaned on the door again, calling:

— Open, sesame!

The postman looked me persistently in the eyes. His features resisted a strong smile that he could not control any further. The smile overwhelmed him, and he set it free.

1991



TEXT 14

GUILTY FOR BEING DIFFERENT

What is a rebel?
A man who says no.

Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*)

This may happen to you mainly in a cinema when you step too late into the dark space to find the film already playing and the actors moving to and fro and raving over things which have taken place in your absence.

Now the hammer is pounding on the stand to order silence from the crowding public in a space like that of courts of law. Your great surprise will flare up when you realize that the hammering man is addressing himself exclusively to you:

- ‘You are among today’s group, expecting a precondemnation for your probable tendency to commit future crimes, which is, as you know, a preventive, local, and normal measure just like circumcision . . . As you know, the local character of our legislature aims at preventing the danger of waking up the sleeping riot in people’s heads by

precondemning them so that everyone should be aware of the limits of his roles.'

Suddenly, you realize that you are both the film and the darkness which melt the public's individualities into one receiver:

—'Let the eyewitnesses come up to the witness box and give their evidence, please!'

The Astrologer's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

Would Your Excellency kindly have a look at the main lines on the suspect's palm? Will you have the kindness to look at the head line? It starts outside the lifeline and goes so terribly downwards, predicting a future resurrection of a criminal tendency which has been so far under control.

Moreover, the convict will lead such a long life as the lifeline on his palm is too long, too clear, and without the slightest break. Will Your Excellency have the goodness to imagine a human on whose palm there is no trace of a heart line: an absolute coldness, an utter weirdness.

Additionally, the suspect's first name shows very clearly his astrological sign. It is the zodiac of notorious criminals. The characteristics of this zodiac births are the following: ambiguity, obstinacy, and inclination to wild loneliness.

The Father's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

The suspect is my son. However, our relationship has never been as natural as the one enjoyed by other fathers with their sons. He hates me from his early childhood. He considers me a wall standing against his freedom at home. That is the main reason why he shuts himself in a room where walls

are stained with entangled colours and meaningless lines hiding in some parts under animal posters scissored out of multicoloured magazines.

The Childhood Friend's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

The suspect was a primary schoolfellow of mine. I can remember that he was the only pupil in the classroom to wear a white blouse opposing the official school blouse colour: black. He also would obstinately refuse copying down the writing or drawing models which the primary schoolteacher used to outline on the blackboard, and that is why his marks were always drawn out for him out of the bottom of the marking scale.

The Optician's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

Let us make things clear to Your Excellency. White colour, which the suspect is crazy about, is not a simple colour as it may seem. Its signification is greater. White is the result of *resistance* performed by *mass* to keep away the light rays shed on it. White, Excellency, is the colour of *resistance*, the colour of *refusal*, and when a man selects a particular colour, he chooses a visual language to express his own feelings and desires. The present suspect is introducing himself to us through the colour of *resistance*.

The Traffic Police Officer's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

The suspect is a common face to me. I can see him every day passing by. He is always that lonely and quiet silhouette when walking by, indifferent to whatever around him, focusing on his internal rhythm: two-four-two-four, which is the initial breathing exercise in a spiritual sport, the aim of which is to enable man to master himself and control the world . . .

The Municipal Library Officer's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

I have brought with me to put at Your Excellency's command a list of books which the suspect has borrowed from the municipal library shelves during this month. In the first week of the month, he has read a book on philosophy and another on religion. In the second week, a book on science and another one on mythology. In the third week, a collection of poems and some political documents . . .

I have tried to imagine a human who can read in the same time prophets and atheists, despots and outcasts, poems and pamphlets . . . I have tried and tried, but I could imagine nothing.

The Boss's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

As far as I am concerned, neither his breathing nor his calmness can deceive me . . . That is why I am constantly refusing his application to work in my company. The letters of the words in all his applications are complete without crosses and with a dominant, inky trait filled with exaggerated self-confidence. Yet the letters lack the necessary roundness and flexibility: they are mere triangles and squares with sharp angles reflecting his inflexible character. However, his care after letter writing shows his fear to lose control over things which may unveil him. Surely he is hiding something mischievous, but what this thing is, that is the evidence I cannot give to Your Excellency.

The Photographer's Witness:

I swear to tell nothing but truth.

In all the photos which I have taken for him, Your Excellency will find the same decor: a bed and a small table surrounded by walls stained with colours, lines, and photos of wolves in different sizes devouring bleeding sheep. A wolf here and a wolf there . . . He considers himself a lonely, wild

wolf. That is the key that I can hand to Your Excellency to have access to the virtual urges of his devouring sociability in herd life.

The Condemnation:

In accordance with the eyewitnesses' declaration and following the laws of the acts in force . . . And . . . the suspect, among today's group, is supposed guilty by instinct and is precondemned for life with a stay of execution. The session is over.

1996

Moroccan Writer Mohamed Saïd Raïhani:

Translation Is a Bridge between World's Peoples and Their Cultures

Interviewed by

Rebekah Thibadeau, Shaniel Wright, and Tiffany St. John

Question: When translating stories, do you ever find yourself at a loss for words?

Answer: I think that one should distinguish between an encyclopaedic translator who is always ready to translate anything in any field in any time and a literary translator who is either a writer or a critic or a good reader of literary works and who specializes in translating the literary field in which he feels at home . . .

As far as I am concerned, I am a prose writer. I write in fields of novel, short story, and short-short story. And when it comes to translation, I translate the texts and works belonging to these very literary genres without the least feeling of being surfing away to loss.

Question: Do you feel that, when you translate stories, it takes away from its cultural origins?

Answer: When converting a text into another language, many contexts are being equally converted along on many planes: socially, politically,

culturally, and religiously . . . shaping what I call ‘the spirit of the text’ or ‘the power of the text’ which, if well handled, preserves the text from being rooted out of its original cultural and literary soil.

Question: Does the message of your stories change once they have been translated?

Answer: I am the translator of my own texts. That may sound funny, but the reasons that I have long kept for myself can make it now acceptable.

When translating other writers’ texts into other languages, I surely have to adopt a strict methodology in converting the power and glossary of the text subject of translation into the other language in the other culture. When translating other writers’ texts, fidelity to the text is more than priority, more than sanctity . . .

However, on translating my own works, I opt for a quite different approach as I find it a gold opportunity to add, remove, rectify, and rewrite what, following the norms in use, I can never have the right to do once the original text is published and handed over to the reader.

Question: Why not just leave the stories to be told in their original Arabic language? What is your reason for translating them?

Answer: Translation has many vital functions that if properly invested, good results are expected. For clarification needs, I can enumerate some of them.

Translation contributes to converging cultures, establishing dialogue between civilizations, and defeating chauvinism. It is one of the chief

values of coexistence and convergence as it is an effective weapon against egocentrism. The more languages converge, the more cultures get nearer to each other.

Another important goal targeted by translation throughout the centuries is to give a positive image of oneself in times of glory as Japan, USA, and Europe do now by exporting their cultures or images to the world in all languages.

Even on the individual plane, translation can be a mirror reflecting the image of the self in other peoples' languages. I can set an example here with German poet and philosopher Wolfgang Goethe, author of *Faust*, who was greatly surprised at reading the English version of his book, identifying newer visions that he himself has overlooked in the source language of his own book.

Moreover, translation makes it possible for a literary work to reach away to a living language in a sort of cultural rescue, by depositing one's cultural productions in the banks of history in times of collapse, as happened with Averroes, greatest Moroccan philosopher whose entire works written in Arabic were burnt in the Middle Ages. Only the Hebraic versions of his works survived and were retranslated into Arabic and other languages with the following centuries. Without the Hebraic copies of his philosophy, Averroes's works would have been lost forever.

Question: In the short story 'Love on the Beach', it starts off by saying: "Temperature inside her chest exceeds that in mid-August". If temperature is used to signify that her love is 'flaming' for this guy, why did you choose to use this word?

Answer: Sometimes, fidelity to the original text wins over any other choice.

Question: Did you write the story ‘Blue Temptations’ originally in English? If not, why did you decide to use the word ‘haunts’ on page 30 to describe how birds build up their own nests? Why didn’t you use a different word like ‘homes’ or ‘nests’?

Answer: Fictive text titles are the chief key to understand the text itself, grasp its structure, and identify its mechanisms. Therefore, when translating text titles, it is highly recommended to be careful as any misuse may redirect the whole text into newer horizons of reception.

‘Blue Temptation’ is the title of the English version of the short story. In the original Arab text, the title is ‘Frustrated Birds’ Land’. To reassure the reader, that was the only modification in the text.

The text deals with a central yearning for freedom through three narrative leaps in three attempts to fly high up in the sky: the first jump is that of obedience to the established order with the crippled father as a prototype; the second jump is that of recklessness with the late brother as a model; and the third jump is that of flight and freedom which is postponed to the end of the text as a definite decision expressed in ‘direct speech’, uniting the voices of the speaking character within the text with the meditating reader outside it:

‘I will fly, Daddy, and I will succeed in my try.’

‘Blue Temptation’ may be regarded as an allegory. Hence, words are assumed to be chosen carefully. As far as habitation is concerned, the word ‘home’ is commonly used for humans; ‘nest’ nearly restricted to birds, whereas ‘haunt’ remains open to all species and valid for all uses.

* Okoro, Diké, ed., *Speaking for the Generations: An Anthology of Contemporary African Short Stories* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2010), p.159



Mohamed Saïd Raïhani

Author of:

- *The Singularity Will* (A Semiotic Study on First Names, 2001)
- *Waiting for the Morning* (Short Stories, 2003)
- *The Season of Migration to Anywhere* (Short Stories, 2006)
- *The Three Keys: An Anthology of Moroccan New Short Story* (in three volumes: 2006, 2007, 2008)
- *The History of Manipulating Professional Contests in Morocco* (Syndical Manifestos, 2009)
- *Death of the Author* (Short Stories, 2010)
- *Letters to the Minister of Education in Morocco* (2nd volume of *The History of Manipulating Professional Contests in Morocco*, 2011)
- *A Dialogue between Two Generations* (Short Stories, 2011. A collection of short stories co-authored with Driss Seghir)
- *The Enemy of the Sun: The Clown Who Turned Out to Be a Monster* (Novel, 2012)
- *Behind Every Great Man, There Are Dwarfs* (Short Stories, 2012)
- *No to Violence* (Short Stories, 2013)