

OUR NAME IS LEGION

Fourteen stories or splinters of unreality

Jonathan Bowden

TSTC

First Edition
Published September 2011

Printed in Great Britain

Copyright © Jonathan Bowden 2011
All Rights Reserved

Cover design and layout by Daniel Smalley
Cover painting 'Otto Dix Eritrean' by Jonathan Bowden

ISBN 978-0-9565120-3-1



The Spinning Top Club
BM Refine
London
WC1N 3XX

www.jonathanbowden.co.uk

Hyperboria

*The blade of one tendril
Slants in green
So as to tear
The rapture from a mouth
Whose teeth wax unsavoury
In the midst of (serpentine) sacrifice.
Oh yes!*

Dedicated to Dorothy Bowden (1931-1978)



Jonathan Bowden
Photo by Andrea Lioy

CONTENTS

Our Name is Legion	6
Medusa Ventrix	8
Foetal Planet	43
Mephitic Hercules	49
Cycladic Torso	61
Bis' Diet	77
Venus Fly-trap	79
Otto Dix Eritrean	92
Charon's Lock-Jaw	102
Theseus' Minotaur	108
Saturnalian Nocturnes	114
Ouroboros' Worm	155
Still, we are Seven!	163
Straight as an Arrow	167

OUR NAME IS LEGION

A short story

ONE

Our tableaux opens with a disclaimer, but not before various Ghosts have claimed it for themselves. It begins with the impress of Steve Ditko, pursuant to a woman who is running, pell-mell, in the 1600's. This was a variant on Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* – about the Salem witch trials – and it had an after-taste, no doubt, in Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot*. The female came red-haired, her dress sleeves were torn, a full moon subsisted above, and a mob pursued her. In truth, it proved to be six men of different ages and physiques; all of whom wore Puritan or seventeenth century dress. Does one recall Ford Maddox Brown's painting *The Last of England* – where puritans leave Liverpool for the new world... with nary a look back in anger!? In this dialogue of the deaf, these Non-conformists carried torches or lighted briars. These were the brands of unseeing, if you will---. A few of them had purchased severe, stove or pipe-like hats, but the bulk of them run and jumped like good'uns. They were terrified of the witch they chased (you see). And this group passed under some gnarled trees; they certainly applied a 'crutch' to New England's wood – being twisted, spun, resplendent and solitary.

TWO

The lonely scarlet turned at bay, and was addressed by Brother Simon, the erstwhile leader of the band. He wore a dark-blue conical hat, resplendent with a buckle, a black over sheet and matching pantaloons. A white ruff surrounded the entire carapace. He was exultant at his prize. "We have her – by the horns of Belial's toads! Like an omelette, we must bring the beldam to trial immediately". This was met by a cry of acclamation by his merry troupe. Truly, a hunger or the trapeze

artistry of hatred is upon them. Nonetheless, one man amongst the pursuers – Carpenter Edward – stood apart from the rest. Might he be the girl’s secret ally?

THREE

It certainly proved to be so at her ‘trial’ – where Carpenter defended her so stoutly that a matriarchal jury was determined to let her off. She retired into Edward’s proffered arms and a burden of marriage is soon offered, if only to be accepted with alacrity. Later that very same evening, riding a pony and trap over New Hampshire, Scarlet O’Hara is tumbled to the ground by an owl’s intervention. A bird of heresy (and wisdom) in Hieronymous Bosch’s cosmogony... it flitted across Carpenter’s drive and disturbed his fiancée’s leisure. As she lies under his jacket on the ground, he configures how to rescue them both... He will do this (primarily) by flying off on a magic broom-stick. Now Scarlet knows why he defended her so earnestly. He knew that she wasn’t a witch *quod* he is a warlock (a male one). As Scarlet T. screams and cries out, he avers: “My dearest love, whoever said that only females may practise the mystic arts?”

THE END

MEDUSA VENTRIX

ONE TO MIDNIGHT:

Think about tomorrow before you die...

Even though, our tale begins with two French psychiatrists in the nineteenth century, both of them watching an asylum's cell. Slowly, the cube's door opens from the inside, and an august – if ragged – gentleman stands in the entrance. He seems to be an ex-military officer, by rank and deportment, but all insignia has been removed. Likewise, a purple wash of brick sweeps away from a lime-green door numbered Ninety-Eight. The portal swings open and a visiting dignitary is shocked. A future administrator of the hospice, Charcot by name, expostulates: “Monsieur, an inmate has opened his own cubicle. Does he possess a key from the inside? It is most irregular – by any stretch...” The hospital's present comptroller holds up his hand: “Be still, *mon ami*, our visitant shall return to his cell, by virtue of a ghost or spirit who guards him night and day!” “You joke or jest with my agreeable nature”, insisted Charcot. “Not a bit of it”, implemented Jospin, “watch and observe his deliverance from the Gods”. The two men settle down to understand a theatre that life has chosen to enact for them. In its way, it's superior to the *Comedie Francais...*

A SECONDARY DISPERSAL:

As the military man looks around suspiciously – an etheric figure emerges in his line of sight. His actual visage is obscured from the practical men of science who look on – to be sure. Yet this figurine adopts the stiff bearing of a guardsman – possibly a member of Napoleon's Old Guard (a regiment that had its nemesis at Waterloo). For a few brief moments the old soldier sighs and declares in a loud voice... “I admit that I have not caught you sleeping. I shall retire to my cubicle for now... afore attempting to seize the initiative later this afternoon. I am

determined to find you asleep at your post, Monsieur!” With this, the old’un returned to his room in high dudgeon, and in no sense abashed by his madness.

A THIRD SLICE OF BRIE:

Now then, Jospin touches his colleague on the arm and beckons him back to the ward’s office and Pharmacy. This is the area where the hospital’s bureaucracy takes place. It allows them to talk in a way which brooks no interruption. “But what is going on?”, murmured Charcot of the hospitable Jospin. “I will tell you straight”, replied his companion. “The man in question was one of Napoleon’s most able lieutenants during the Peninsula war. He went by the name of General Gaberdine... if you please. He was old school yet fair-minded after his severity’s nature. Do you see? The Iberian campaign was bloody and tortuous as many historians note. May it even – editorially – look forward to those counter-insurgencies of the next century? Who knows? Well, on one occasion Gaberdine addressed his men on the parade ground. A crisp tricolour floated nearby and the men were drawn up like Airfix toy-soldiers. Row upon row of them, in other words, adopted the *kitsch* or fashionability of William Roberts... He’d long since ceased to be a Vorticist by then. Gaberdine told his men of the partisans’ treachery and ruthlessness... i.e., the fact that they would steal up at night, using guerrilla tactics, and that no-one must fall asleep at their post. This applied (especially) to one massive Grenadier called Pouillon who often dozed over his firearm late at night. But he had a large mastiff – of the sort beloved by Conan Doyle’s villains – and the mutt proved to be his eyes and ears as Spanish desperadoes approached.

THE FOURTH DESPATCH AMID UNCERTAINTY:

For, in another dimension of what Colin Wilson called the *Space Vampires*, a man named Jospin approached his master by rote. He happened to be elongated, fastidious, calm even if lean, and

radically blanched. He was also a vampire, you understand? As several guards in military fatigues wore out their leather soles. They escorted him past some neo-classic pillars and related architraves... all of them next to Buddhas made of green jade. Weren't they influenced by the Hellenism that Alexander's conquering armies brought into Asia? Nonetheless, Jospin had to adjust his eyes due to the density of darkness and the whirling of machines. Since, even his infra-red or vampiric sight found it difficult to focus, given the sepulchral glow of this sanctum. All of a sudden, he realised that the man he had come to worship – Doctor Gaberdine – was actually a brain-in-a-box. He is a disembodied entity, in other words, who exists over valvic inconstancy. The entire room or caboodle resembles a secret laboratory of whirring mechanisms, engines, telescopes, electromagnetic cameras, registers of S.I. measurement, and other resources. Welcome, my vampire, to the Cerebration that is Doctor Gaberdine!

A FIFTH PARCEL OF VIOLENCE:

But, way back in the nineteenth century, the slash of a Spanish sabre does for a French mastiff... or allegedly so. And the partisans or terrorists (if you prefer) creep closer over the body of a fallen Gallic grenadier. The attack upon the dog had warned him too late – you see. Yet the tables are about to be dramatically turned, in that the wounded mutt lets out a howl at an appropriate instant. The Spanish sabre has only presented itself as a flesh wound in this instance. A troubadour's moment (this) which allowed the members of Bonaparte's guards to rally their forces, and with repeated musket blasts, they tore through the irregulars' ranks – thence forcing their vanguard back. It later decomposed and frittered away in the moon-light. The French had seen the attack off by the time that dawn broke o'er a neighbouring wood.

ONE SIXTH ITEM OF NEGLIGENCE:

But, back in a rival compass or direction, a vampire is tied to a conic pillar. It had to be a rival version of Jospin who found himself surrounded by cloves of garlic that intertwined with his cloak. Indeed, they followed the indentations of his body so as to enclose him in a vice-like grip... in accord with sorcery and menace. Initially, the male vampire had wondered who was so insane as to imprison him – yet over-time he became habituated to his surroundings... as a mysterious and Romantic figure began to intrude upon him. Were they bound to converse in a *danse macabre* or dance of death – veritably so?

A SEVENTH DALLIANCE WITH TITANS:

Now then, the Spanish onslaught was beaten back, but an injured mastiff was left in their wake. The large dog – suffering from a stab-wound – lay on its side on freshly-turned loam. The men decided, in an *impromptu* manner, that the animal who'd saved them must be rescued in turn... a soldier called for the surgeon-general. 'Matador must be rescued', he averred to several nodded comments.

AN EIGHTH DECISION OVER RIPLEY:

But one presence, amongst many others in memory, emerged from behind a curtain. An oriental rag (this was) – and it didn't prove to be diaphanous, so as to conceal a spherical version of Charcot. He seems to be balding and with a tapering beard, in this particular incarnation. Look again, since another creature, criss-crossed with lines or tapered visions of exchange, makes an appearance. This was a dead man (another mummified zombie or vampire) who took the part of Pouillon above ground, in this nook or cranny. Did not this occasion some hysterical laughter (?), in that Pouillon was supposed to be long since deceased on this plane o' reality. Or suffice it; might it be better to refer to it

as an ossuary... certainly not a keepsake!?! Anyway, Monsieur P. answered one question from Victor Hugo, o'er *The Man Who Laughed*, and he did so hysterically – too much so for good taste.

A NINTH VANGUARD (IN HORSE):

But to return to our other discourse... if we may use the language of Michel Butor and his new school (now old). For the Grenadiers were marshalled on the parade ground by General Gaberdine. He praised them for seeing off the Spaniards (admittedly), but he also upbraided them for being caught out... almost. GG announced (then) to some of his startled officers, in the staff, that any man who fell asleep on guard would go afore a firing squad. This wasn't likely to improve *morale* – come to think of it!

TEN FIENDISH DEVICES:

In our reverse mirror, the creature with criss-crossed lines on his face looks on. These were the inter-play of vampirism or (perchance) they dealt with those responses in Greek tragedy, whether strophe or antistrophe, or the raillery betwixt Clytemnestra and the Chorus. This eventuated in *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, the first variant of the *Oresteia*. Likewise, his laughter waxes bone-chilling, particularly as he indicates to his nemesis an escape... fortuitously from a yacht's explosion. His rival, Jospin, found himself wrapped around a Doric pillar (if you recall) and surrendered to garlic's leaves. Yet his enemy, Pouillon – he of the zig-zags – had been obliterated only to be later brought back by Doctor Gaberdine's surgeons. They had transported him aboard a sturdy Hercules 'copter... one with fixed and British blades (decidedly) that whirred in the sun. Later on, and under a hot, lambent light, medical feverishness ensued... as Pouillon's flesh was wrought over... It was brought back to serve a higher or lower purport (mayhap); even though Pouillon remains oblivious. To be sure: the doctors waged a

labour night and day, under winding-sheets, what with tall oxygen cylinders lying to one side. Truly, Gaberdine's medics moved mysteriously their wonders to perform. And – in truth – they managed to rekindle a spark of life in a corpse... or one whose rites well and truly belonged to death. By Bis[!], our misfit moved the curtain aside so as to display his abandoned flesh. For the helicopter that pulled his body to the sea, prior to decamping to the Philippines, was anchored by heavy landing tackle. Each one of these proved to be bulbous, orange, ‘twice besported’, and filled with helium. Gaberdine's crest – a red or rampant dragon – lurked along this autogyro's side. Whereas Pouillon reached inside his jacket or chest-pocket, so as to reveal a phial of scarlet liquid. It testifies to a bloody admixture (doubtless) with a cork stuck in one end. He holds it – *avec* surprising delicacy – in front of a captive vampirism; one which is tied to a post, garlic-flowered and onion-bedecked, and imprisoning Jospin's *alter ego*. Are we in a nightmare coruscated by Michel Butor (as mentioned earlier)? Or, more accurately, might this indicate Clytemnestra's triumph as Agamemnon walks on the sacred purple? He does so against the Gods' blandishments, at least in terms of a ripe *hubris*. – One that soon finds itself humbled in a blood-spattered bath, minus netting...

A JOKER'S FACE PEERS ON, LIVID, WHITE, PALSIED
(AN ELEVENTH CARD):

Yet, in our primary tale, new facts unfold... For General Gaberdine inspects his troops under a blazing sun – and, *in toto*, they are laid out like a feast for the eyes in Wise's *Introduction to Battle Gaming*. They re-interpret the notion of toy-soldiers or stick-fingers; themselves dipped in boiled eggs... the yolks of which run with so much yellow blood. Doesn't Homer make a similar remark in the *Iliad*? In any event, row upon row of this soldiery lay afore us... and it (most effectively) re-interprets what William Roberts once painted. Since, to be honest, the work in question had jettisoned Vorticism and reared towards Pop art;

whereby *kitsch* supervenes. Doubtless though, the soldiers' arms and legs were higgledy-piggledy, and they faced in several directions at once... even revolving as they did so! *Quod* Roberts presented them as toys; each one of them turning around a central axis or beacon... And, within this deliverance, the limbs moved betwixt mathematical compasses or points on a circle. They also took after certain arithmetical dives; thence producing a mesmerism or an optical effect in which the men kept time with each other. To be sure: this intrusion of '*Hamley's*' or the toy shop might fool some individuals... but not General Gaberdine. By virtue of many pointers – but primarily, a speck of grease on a soldier's carbine and this led him to give our individual extra fatigues. The accompanying sergeant-major commented to himself, under his breath, that Gaberdine ran a tight ship. There was no favouritism here. After all, the trooper so belaboured happened to be his own son, Maurice, who had enlisted in the ranks once the Grand Army invaded Spain. Nor shall Iberia hold him resolutely; given an accompaniment of a yellow and green sky – never mind those clouds or smoke-stacks that billow up from a ferrous ground.

VAMPIRISM CAN NEVER REFLECT ITS OWN MIRROR-IMAGE: [TWELVE]

For, by dint of a bitter vintage, one vampire baits another over the haemoglobin. If you recall – the Undead who exists as a matrix tilted a test-tube of blood afore a rival. It was a case of Pouillon and Jospin calling out to one another – in very different incarnations. As a result, this solidity or red mucous swayed in its tube and moved from one end to the other. Abide with me, now: since a grinning jack-in-apes held a phial in a mitten; and it waxes dangerous over its arrested status. Nor do we suspend ourselves from such a judgement, in that Pouillon is forever askew – what with two misaligned halves of the face. These jostle with each other about misspent gauze... even if the twin sides of his features lack symmetry, a true concord in beauty.

Yet, in truth, his entire demeanour came across as miscued, bent awry, unsovereign, or cast aside with Durer's mark of Cain. By every token, the hair seems to be rat's-tails or lengths of boot-lace; at once crossing a pallid or grey scalp. Whereat – and by no means a contrast to it – the machine-embroidery of so many operations crosses him; and these are open to a lost likeness. They also render a keen appropriateness – given the small pinch (or sliver) of glass which he grips so tightly. Likewise, he is unshaven in this inebriation (somewhat inevitably) and a thin line of teeth drag o'er an under-lip. They score, but not scorbutically, after the fashion of some blades or scissors; the like of which are liable to leave an impress... particularly on cloth, felt, card and paper. To complete the picture (mayhap) his jacket comes across as disarranged, un-replete, misaligned, tieless and altogether Scarecrow-like. (Nor need Pouillon's deportment streak out inappropriately, so as to take after the psychiatric villain in *Batman*). No, as Oscar Wilde might have remarked, clothes maketh the Man... even if it's a tenth-rate doll, stuffed, and made-up from everyday rags. In the case of Pouillon or a vampire, though, any half-finished lustre has to do with Anne Rice's incompleteness. Most assuredly – since the soulless, the blood-mongers of teen pages, are always candy-hacked or half-made; because they lack an inner assurance. Won't they always betoken a corn-dolly – you know, one that's just about to be fired in the corner of an Anglican vestry?!

AN ACTOR, BAUHAUS IN *MASK*, TALKS ABOUT NEW IDENTITIES: [THIRTEEN]

For one item o' blood's spent over others, in relation to its provision. And it's poured down from a test-tube in Pouillon's hand; the latter silvern in Clytemnestra's dawn. Nor do we see haemoglobin slip out too readily from grey flags, or 'neath these boots. Both of Pouillon's mittens are interestingly positioned, in that thumb and forefinger look arch, tokens (now), misremembered, and Madame de Sevigne reminiscent. They relish

the prospect of waste, at least in terms of vampiric Charcot, chomping at the bit. Remember: he's constrained by twin barriers; a steel whip-lash (around the midriff); as well as an imprisonment, a *motif*.

+

ENDLESS RECALL:~

+

For one item of blood's spent o'er others; in relation to its provision or source. And it has to be pouring down from a test-tube in Pouillon's hand; the latter silvern in light of Clytemnestra's dawn. Nor do we see the haemoglobin slip out too readily towards those grey flags 'neath their boots. Both of Pouillon's mittens were interestingly positioned, in that the thumb and forefinger are arch, mere tokens (now), misremembered, and reminiscent of Madame de Sevigne. They relished the prospect of wasting this precious fluid – at least in terms of a vampire like Charcot who chomped at the bit. Remember: he was constrained by two barriers – the first a steel whip-lash (a chain around the midriff); and the second an imprisoning *motif*. This proves to be a garlic retinue – the former compacted or in its cloves, and leafless, so as to trespass on a leech's chest. Charcot, for his part, eyes his nemesis mightily... and a pale gleam came into his orbs... themselves lit up, rather malignantly, by yellow specks amidst the white. A shimmering background supervenes against this, a neo-Classic pillar, and stage-set...

Charcot: "Have a care, Pouillon, you may have been rebuilt; but you'll never escape me. You might be able – intermittently – to pour haemoglobin (as given) on the floor; yet this forgets our real weapon: fear. Haven't you ever understood the Devil's tincture, my friend? Since it waits for us all on dreams' nethermost side, and they scorn mystic flames that're etheric... they can't ignite aught. Why don't you consider a scarecrow's aspect – what with a pumpkin or Jack o' Lantern's head? It scorns all else! We know what you'll find here. *Quod* this strawman's hat is conic or

askew, and it tends to the left by doubling back. Its spine was provided by a wooden pillar – whether ductile, tensile or strong. Whereas the skull seems to be a pumpkin; at once carven into crude markings – whether a face, no matter how toothsome and serrated. Also, these formulations were types of *Art Brut*... and they make out those lineaments of power, fear, (already mentioned), as well as the red of so much corn. Moreover, if a Pumpkin – in a head’s format – loses its ability to entrance... then it will leave behind so much spore.”

Pouillon: “You continue to speak in riddles, Charcot. Truly, you are an asylum leader from another age... but I have a Sphinx-laden adage for you. It comes awry, you see. For, while you speak mysteriously, I continue to drop physiology’s ichor (blood) on the flooring. Listen to me---.”

LET LOOSE IMPUTATIONS O’ DESIRE; IT’S *RIPLEY’S*
BELIEVE IT OR NOT: [FOURTEEN]

Now then, back in the nineteenth century, a mastiff travelled around a French army-camp. It was grizzled, patched-up, workable and sporting heavy bandages. Whilst a sabre (to speak of) had injured the dog severely – it had left an injudicious wound in its side. Moreover, the camp surgeon tended the animal, curled lints around it, and otherwise eased its hurts. Late at night, after the commandant’s orders, the dog travelled around with several of the men. Whether they were alone or together – he would bark (WUFF!) when he detected one of the sentries in a doze. On one occasion, therefore, a grenadier in his bear-skin, red epaulettes and cuffs, blanched front, criss-crossed truss, trousers and boots... began to fall asleep. His eye-lids seem to be puffy and heavy, afore the dog revives him by barking. WUFF(!), sounds out across fields in subdued light, and yet the noise distracts a guard... given its even-song. Again, the creature has a sixth sense – an animalian instinct – about a soldier’s dropping off, so as to wake him. The men certainly appreciate it

– for, given new orders about sleeping on duty, the mastiff was assisting the men to survive. On this very night our watchdog, Cerberus, or a guardian of the gate, is accompanied by an off-duty trooper. He appears to be in a relaxed vintage and smokes a pipe. (It happens to be one of those long, fluted or thin ones from the late eighteenth century. It’s made from white clay). While, in the background, a series of trees arch away – and they were gnarled, oaken, ‘woody’, overgrown or Natural. All in all, the colour scheme matches this feel... and it’s turquoise, ultramarine, “settled”, even mildly sepulchral. For his part, the mutt’s companion laughs at one retort...: “There’s a *good boy*; that’ll keep Pierre awake and alive! Bravo!”

ONE LAPSE IN AEGISTHUS’ LEAVING; A DUAL VAMPIRISM: [FIFTEEN]

Against the odds, Jospin’s foot comes up violently – if only to kick Pouillon full in the face. Momentarily stunned, the other vampire drops the test-tube of blood with which he’d been goading his fellow. Nor may he accompany any teasing with the banter that’d been his wont, since all of Pouillon’s speech is arrested. It trails off or has a *diminuendo* – rather like circling items going down a sink. *Quod* one of the limb’s displayed a rare sureness; and it’s to do with a strange, supple move... right out of Judo, Karate or an Eastern art. Again, Jospin – like many a flibberty-gibbet – is fleet of foot, long in the leg, and bears an uncanny resemblance to a ballet dancer. To be sure: a blow darts or accelerates; and it reverberates on the pillar’s other side. If you recall, Jospin’s attached to this pole; by means of garlic, lavender or spruce. Meanwhile, the pylon – reminiscent of a Zwemmer’s art-plate – stood behind him. It exemplified a Romanesque fortitude; even a hardihood born of struggle. For Jospin was bathed in a blue-cloak with reindeer antlers; much like the lead singer in *Laibach*. Similarly, and slipping away, we note a perfection; and this was an oriental banner on the wall. It delineated a wave with a dragon on it, and its coils were

kaleidoscopic in character. They were modelled on cerulean, opal, light green, red, beryl and other shimmering shades... These are a nacreous oblivion, toad-stool violet, scarlet and fresh mint. Likewise, a few other Eastern artefacts rear up; such as porcelain sculpture, terra cotta, *lapis lazuli*, and a brass cooking-pot. It's shiny in aspect, orange in colour, and of uncertain use. Play it again...

WE NOTE A FURTHER RISING; *MON AMI!*

[SIXTEEN]

Now, the wounds of the guard-dog, Matador, became infected and he died in his sleep... despite a surgeon's efforts. Soon the entire camp reverberated to drums' sounds, and these were carried abroad a military air. By the by, an officer stood limned in a tent's entrance, as the General examined maps on a table. They are light mauve in colour. Whilst the adjutant busily gave him news... and he was silhouetted as well as being surrounded by a brown awning. Needless to say, his body stood in a gap – at once a pale yellow – and it was shiny, button-like and southern. Doesn't the Iberian peninsula share this pellucidity with California? Always about to lose his temper – Gaberdine enquired of his assistant. "Who ordered a funeral ceremony?" "Why, the men are mourning Matador's demise. They consider him to be a military hero – across the line of species. First, he warned them of the partisans' approach; defended them, and then prevented them from dozing off... particularly during twelve hour shifts. This saved many of their lives. For, when we come down to it, the men are conducting a service for Matador. They've draped a tricolour over a coffin; and, to the beat of drums, they lead his body to its last resting place. The ceremony will soon be over---". "WHAT!?", expostulated Gaberdine, "I must put a stop to this; it's an affront to good order and service. Do you hear?" He then raced outside.

CATCHEE MONKEY; *THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST MONSTERS!* [SEVENTEEN]

Again and all, a sudden agony shoots through the vampire [Jospin] and it has to do with a wooden retrieval. Might it speak to a balustrade that's plunged in prior to an exit strategy? This is one which registers understanding through a mistake; given Jospin's entrapment. He was – if you recall – tied to a Doric pillar by both chains and cords; the latter consisting of garlic cloves, no matter how pungently. They reek of an unsteady odour – no matter how violently. And their impact on vampire Jospin can only be guessed at! By way of latitude, the piece of bark is soon removed and turns out to be in Charcot's tender hands. Do you remember – that in this incarnation – he plays the role of a mildly oriental individual, clad in silk, balding, and the servitor of another master, Doctor Gaberdine? He refuses to gloat, however, and his words are more of an admonishment than aught else. We must always bear in mind how he serves another – itself a mere brain-in-a-box, uptight against the perspex. For over the nature of his voice one spies a ceiling – it's delicate, inlaid, well laid out, and smacks of the eighteenth century. It reminds me in particular of a club in Mayfair like the Lansdowne. Nonetheless, the clad back of Jospin (surrounded by garlic flowers) rests afore him... while Pouillon, nursing his injured face and pride, rubs his chin. Any facial expression proves to be rueful in the extreme.

Jospin: “I have warned the two of you before about bickering, vampire on vampire, and much else. Do you hear my lamentation or its shout out in the dawn? Since you've not been brought here for reasons of personalia, illness, trivia, autobiography or much else. No; your sole purpose or teleology involves any usefulness you may have to Doctor Gaberdine. *Comprenez Vous?*”

GANCE'S *NAPOLEON* ON A SPLIT-SCREEN:
[EIGHTEEN]

Immediately, General Gaberdine raced from his tent or cover, so as to stand between the men and the grave. It wasn't especially deep or long; as befitting its status as a dog's resting place. Moreover, the earth had been freshly dug or upturned, and it gave off a sodden reek. For themselves, the soldiers have lined up as a burial party, and all of them had eyes right... Furthermore, a tricolour – equidistant in its bands of colour – held sway upon the eye, and it came divided into red, white and blue. Few remembered, though, that the flag had originally meant constitutional monarchism – as Versailles (white) was captured by Paris. The City went by the two tints of red & blue. Momentarily, the General seems to draw a sword in irritation... yet, in actuality, it's merely a gesture on his part. For, all around these men the ground is choppy, furrowed – not on a level plane – and held in deep shades of brown.

General Gaberdine: “My men, stop this absurd pretence now. You are dealing with a dog's corse – Matador's – not that of a man's. Can you imagine the indignity of burying a comrade soon afterwards? In my opinion, you are desecrating a military ceremony for an animal – not a soldier, a member of the French imperial army. Do you understand my meaning? May I be permitted to make it more obvious? I order you to dump the cadaver in the dug hole or ditch... I refuse to call it a grave, fill it in, and then store the coffin in an appropriate place. Also, I insist that the tricolour be rescued and put back on a flag-pole... where it belongs. After this fandango, comrades, get back to your posts – the Spanish partisans can attack at any time.”

Reluctantly, the men acceded to their commander's wishes... They had no choice, after all.

ONE AUTOGYRO MAKES UP FOR LOST POINTS:
[NINETEEN]

Meanwhile, and in a rival dimension, most of the same characters rehearse their moves. On this occasion, for example, a helicopter from the ‘seventies or ‘eighties (sic) churns the air about underneath its blades. The atmosphere in question was frosty, chilled and specked with snow flakes – many of which were globular or congealed. By a closer inspection, the sliding door of the ‘copter is open... so as to reveal two names in our story. These were Jospin’s distant and much younger cousin, Francois, as well as our first female. Might she be a spawn (or distant grand-child) of van Helsing – as contained in Dracula’s very livery? Whereas her name proved to be Annabel... both of them are pursuing the vampires Jospin and Pouillon with weapons. Make of it what you will...

THE COLOSSUS OF RHODES – REBORN AS A DOG...:
[TWENTY]

Now then, and back in the early nineteenth century, a miraculous event occurs. For the very night of the funeral a mystery takes place; and Matador rises from his burial spot. He or ‘it’ comes surrounded by a blue flame, an etheric mist, and even what some mystics call the *astral light*. It looks at once weird, eerie and authentic. Moreover, the dog’s spirit rises – perpendicularly – from the loam, primarily so as to provide luminance... no matter how spectrally. Doesn’t it glow and gleam in order to indicate an unearthly sprite? Anyway, a bubble or fog billows up ‘neath it as it emerges, and the earth moves away in bare strips. These prove to be elongated, silhouetted, splotched with moss, and attenuated. Similarly, a large tent – topped by a military ensign – lay to one side with pulleys and ropes holding it up. It looms up as a massive bulk on the eastern side of the encampment. Needless to say, a smoking fire billowed up into the night sky – if only to fill the sepulchral dim with a golden haze. Look at this... since the

rest of the wooded enclosure seems vegetative, dense, heavily set, mildly damp and verdant. Again, these copses – after the fashion of Ernst Junger’s *Copse 125* – flit away to the west. Don’t they provide an effective screen for those Spanish partisans who can attack at any time? In the distance a lone grenadier can be seen marching about. His form (and attendant musket) are silhouetted in the late evening’s musk or retort. Whilst, immediately after the dog’s re-appearance, the nearest Old Guardsman was startled. He wore the traditional blue-jacket, red epaulettes, bear skin, white criss-cross and trousers of the breed... yet he soon recovered his poise. *Quod* to a mildly superstitious nature, like most folk, the idea of a true ghost story isn’t that bizarre. He stammered: “Matador, carry on...” as if it was only natural.

A RECKONING WITHOUT A CLASSIC HAMMER;
JOSPIN’S REVENGE: [TWENTY-ONE]

Yet events move on in Doctor Gaberdine’s lair, as Jospin, tied to a pillar, loosens his bonds. Gradually, oh so gradually, one hand is freed and then another – only to allow a chain to fall. The strands of garlic were themselves let go... and soon disappear altogether. A sudden tinkle occurs and these limits are liquidated. Each palm then squirms free – primarily so as to ventilate its fury. All of an instant, Jospin has leapt from his pillar in order to attack Pouillon, the latter vampire going down under his assault. They then writhe about on the floor like two ‘raptors atop an Oriental carpet. It suffuses into reds, blues, greens, gold, clarets and other hues. Isn’t this part of the drama finished off, thereby?

BACK IN NINETEENTH CENTURY SPAIN:
[TWENTY-TWO]

Behold! Our narrative unfolds in clear and unsuspected ways. Since, on many a twilight eve, a spectral dog is seen on Matador’s old route... and its eyes glow in the shadows,

preternaturally. Whilst the rest of its body, furry and matted, appears darksome or other worldly. Isn't its coat of a dark or metallic sheen? Again, the tracks down which the dog bounces are greyish, mulcted, brown to dark green, and subdued. Withal, an occasional tree – sombre in its mass – accompanies the track as Matador moves down it. Whereupon (and with a background sweep) the terrain remains silvern, light blue and eerie in its lunar appeal. Nor can one express it too keenly; given the range of tufts, subdued roots, hillocks (et cetera...) that shimmer in the moonlight. For what can appear more pellucid or revelatory than the boughs – ravished to cerulean – of a wood at night? As we mentioned, Matador was pursuing his rounds and he adopted a trained route... the latter mapped out already. Occasionally, he came across a guardian of the gate, a Grenadier from the Old Guard, who crossed his path. This soldier carried his rifle securely – and he greeted the ghostly dog with a cheery wave. “Hello, Matador” – he trumpeted; “all's well that goes well hereabouts.” The ‘dog’ neither yelped or motioned its head in response. Whereas the Grenadier's tunic took its usual form: blue surcoat, red tufts, white waist-jacket, crossed bands and trousers. The boots were dark brown and well out of sight. “Cheerio”, breathed the soldier as the mastiff trotted on.

ONE MORE VAMPIRIC INTERLUDE:
[TWENTY THREE]

Meanwhile, the fighting between our two vampires continues unabated... and they represent these characters in another dimension. They're repositioned or transliterated. Essentially, Jospin and Charcot engage in mortal conflict, and the gloves have well and truly come off. A Doric pillar (with side flutes) rises up from the back... if only to raise the tone towards orange. Likewise, a dark or black curve slides across the top... to one side of the pole. This time (also) we note the Oriental dragon on the floor – by way of a lush carpet. It patterns away to one side of various figures skimming atop it... while the tints (already

mentioned) were mixed. They embodied scarlet, turquoise, silver rose, brass, gold, cerulean, nacreous pearl and other devices. Whereupon, and cast across the carpet, were string after string of garlic petals. A few chains were seen under the vampires' feet. For – to speak of – Pouillon lay underneath Jospin's lithe frame; the latter lean and cadaverous. He appeared to be stunned or restrained by a claw – much more than a normal hand. Whereas Jospin's back seethes under a cloak; itself a classic blue-black mix from Hammer. Do you see? Given this, the older man of vaguely Eastern cast, moves towards him. He was slightly heavy, truculent, solemn and determined in his tread. Isn't that an unadorned staff (made of wood) which he carries in his left-hand? It's held in an upright position.

A DAY LATER DURING A PENINSULA'S WAR:
[TWENTY FOUR]

Some time later, General Gaberdine entertains one of his officers, Francois, to a drink in his tent. They seem to be enjoying a brief meal with a liqueur thrown in – it adorned the table in a stoppered beaker. Wasn't it made from fired clay and surrounded by a woollen basket? A few food items – a bit of meat and bread – enlivened the trestle. Francois (for his part) had a fork in his hand and Gaberdine, the older man, drew a cup to his lips. He set it down somewhat deliberately next to his gloves. Behind them, and to the side, one sees the boundary and folds of the tent... it subsists as a deep brown. It's certainly coarse in its chosen fabric and a few maps adorn its surface. Likewise, the upper sweep of its roof moves away and it adopts a darkened lilt or skin. Francois, a junior lieutenant, is a young, blonde and well-tailored man... whilst Gaberdine was more grizzled, elderly and silver-haired. He'd adopted a triumphant or early nineteenth century moustache. He begun abruptly (as was his wont): "What's this folly I hear the men talking about Matador – the late and unlamented keeper of the gate, a Cerberus? Apparently, they say they've been *sightings*..." "Yes, my General", replied Francois

hurriedly, “the Grenadiers declare that Matador’s ghost walks the rounds to keep them awake. He even alerts them if anyone’s about to drop off to sleep---”. “Stuff and nonsense(!)”, expostulated the older man.

NO-ONE REFLECTS BADLY IN STOKER’S MIRROR:
[TWENTY FIVE]

By a hand’s streak, Jospin’s vampiric form torpedoed, and it limns along most sheer. Do you recall the boats in Anderson’s *Stingray* as they caper, dive, [dove in American English], somersault or light out? Have they lost the plot here? Nonetheless, Jospin wriggles in the air like an accompanying snake (or lobster), and it eventuates on a greenish ground. This fades away in the direction of a redundant Sunday. Let’s splice it again: since the vampires’ fleet (Kenneth Matheson, Anne Rice, Shaun Hutson, Stephen King, James Herbert and Keri Arthur) all fire back under the teeth. For over a stream-lined force (or example of Marinetti’s diction) Pouillon is disabled. He hits the deck and writhes around on a lush Oriental carpet. Whilst the underside of his body sieves down, as if to fall like a *doppelganger*... a plague. Under this impact a distinct cry is heard, a stave dropped, and an orange curtain closes. Charcot is no more.

OUR NAPOLEONIC ROUND-UP CONTINUES:
[TWENTY SIX]

Now so, General Gaberdine’s fists come down with asperity and force. Immediately, the table reverberates for a moment, and the brandy jar takes a tumble. It was (if you recall) a reinforced bottle, coloured green, and contained (somewhat) in a woollen jacket. A knife is also dislodged at a plate’s side. “Blazes!”, boomed the General, “there are no salient entities, no ghosts, even animal ones, and *I expect more from an officer*. No real dogs eventuate on paths that I meet --- not even spectral ones, do

you hear?” He was almost bellowing now. Moreover, his pink hand – coruscated and uneven – hit pay dirt; it resonated on the table. While we notice – with a certain common interest – the red, ermine and blue-laced sleeve of Gaberdine. In the background there is a sweep of the brownish tent – whether coarse or square – and it helped to hold the entire structure up. His rival officer, Francois, was looking up at him in a mildly exasperated way... although betraying a certain concern. “It’s best to be careful, sir”, he moaned quietly... “the unknown should always enthrall us, even to death.”

ONE SERVANT PERISHES, CHARCOT, IN KOSINSKI’S
GRIP: [TWENTY SEVEN]

[Note: Jerzy Kosinski wrote an account of the *Shoah* in occupied Poland, emotionally true – its evaluation was aesthetic not factual. He lied not about history but the Polish peasants who fought to keep him safe from extermination. The book in question was *Painted Bird*].

In this instance, the character known as Jospin lies across Charcot, the servant, in a vampiric clinch. It was a scene which belabours its origins in a Hammer House of Horror. Also, some broken spectacles lay to the rear – tossed aside and on the carpet. One of the latter’s hands was contained in a vice-like grip; its tendons or nails flexed outwards. A scream supervenes the whole – what with an upturned boot – and Gaberdine’s servant rejoined that nightly throng, out there, in the snow. Is it imaginary?

A NINETEENTH CENTURY ITCH FOR GABERDINE:
[TWENTY EIGHT]

Now then, the two officers walked from their tents into a ravishing sunlight. The clear effulgence heated the air between bivouacs; not to mention the sandy patterns that surround them. A few tent-poles, pillars, guy-ropes, stakes and supports lay

about these men... and either officer had a conical hat in his hand. They were tall in size. Gradually, the grassland stretched out towards the woods... and might some Spanish partisans lurk there? “The unknown or etheric realm, comrade”, guffawed the General, “you’ll be believing in table-turning, Ouija boards, séances and life after death next.” “Possibly, Monsieur; the *Cloud of Unknowing* lurks all around us – it’s just a vestibule of illusion.” “Don’t you mean a veil?”, sneered Gaberdine, “isn’t that what those charlatans Ouspensky, Blavatsky, Summers and Levi all espy, eh?” “Not necessarily, mon General, the men might have seen aught – you can’t entirely deny it. *Mais oui?* “So I’m supposed to take neat the notion that the spirit of a dead mastiff exists?” “Possibly, who can say?”, as he did so his companion, Francois, extended his hands in an open and Gallic gesture.

MORE BRAWLING WITHOUT CHRISTOPHER LEE:
[TWENTY NINE]

In this instance, one particular slipper (at once delicate and blue) lay to the other side of Charcot’s fall from grace. It was over-exposed at the moment. Let it pass: since what fascinates us is Jospin’s figure – despite a torn sleeve; and this vampire’s muscles were stricken, lively, unspent, goaded and chicken-wire (like). They manifested an immense strength down beneath the dead men... as we might say. Likewise, the cloak and cowl reversed (sic) so as to provide a blue-black pageant, one that came admixed with red. Soon it became clear that Pouillon, our zig-zag or Re-animator, was calling Jospin out by way of a bout. Its outcome will soon become providential – oh my yes. Whilst behind Jospin’s strapless boot a pillar rises from an awl – this numbered a silken booth about it. While, underneath its proximity, we see three steps rise up equidistantly. They are yellow-to-brown in a pebbledash embrasure. No matter: since Pouillon, like a Greco-Roman wrestler, strips to the waist prior to his contest. Jospin is amazed by this – given his greater strength

and foreplay. What can this Undead be playing at? Again, one notices the unequal quality of Spielberg's *Duel* – as well as Pouillon's preparedness to meet it. Further, the spiral design (replete with a dragon) circled in its motif... at once emerald, scarlet, ebon tinted, greyish blue, gold, ormolu, beryl, and so much more. Jospin's hands came up – powerfully and claw-like.

NOR DO WE LIKEN OUR PRINCELING RAGE:
[THIRTY]

Back in the nineteenth century, our two officers proceeded through the trees. They are solemn and silent – as well as fixed to an emerald hue: (it's deep, dark and tangible). Various bushes have welded themselves to this solidity, and do we see a yellow blanket surrounding their bases? To be sure: General Gaberdine had his young lieutenant with him (Francois) and he was being instructed in life's facts... over ghosts. "See here", said Gaberdine aggressively, "if a superstitious trooper points out the sprite to you then --- do this! [SWISH!] Your sabre can take care of it---." Moreover, by matching the word to the deed, the General swung his empty blade through the air with aplomb. *Ole!*

PIERPOINT; A MAXIMAL IMPACT: [THIRTY ONE]

A door opens slowly at a vestibule's back; if only to reveal the hurrying shapes of a man and a woman. Both of them are muffled up against the cold and are carrying weapons. Whilst in the foreground (lo and behold!) a deadly joust continues; it enjoins Jospin and Pouillon who fall and billow about the chamber. Chains and garlic strains are long since discarded, as Pouillon's head meets a heavy pillar. It was one of those marbling contraptions; the like of which carries a dire mortar, some delicacy and a sheen. Might it be Persian and topped with ormolu? Who knows? Yet the ferocity causes a lost balance – even a misjudgement. Pouillon's pieced-together skin becomes

evident, even in a subterranean way. Since his jacket slips off in accord with the *melee* – as if to suggest the uncontrollability released. Whilst Jospin’s intent remains bee-like, controlled, Hyper, and rather boarish. It moves with the swiftness of spent silver. Way behind our two protagonists, though, the Oriental rug swirls, carries on – is fitful – and then declines. Whilst some lacquered drawers and a mirror remain towards the chamber’s rear. They take on the following attributes: a candle-stick, a *lapis lazuli* box, a bonsai bush and its curtain.

WE WILL LIMIT THEBES TO SEVEN: [THIRTY TWO]

At nightfall the lieutenant (Francois) strode through the Grenadier’s military camp. The moon was out and it cast a meaningful glow – pale and square – over the woodland, yet all wasn’t over. Various trees limit their boughs (a pale blue) into the darkness... and they remain vivid, looked after, alone or solemn. Now, even the early grassland bore this task, as it disappears from bluish smog. Needless to say, the rocks in the vicinity of Matador’s grave are purple... the colour of demise. All of a sudden, the dog – or its ghost – appears atop the mound - --: at once looking ethereal, see-through, limpid and out of control. A strange glow or bangle surrounds it. “Don’t you see it?”, commanded one of the men to his passing officer. “Not at all!”, smote back Francois as he marched across the field. “My officer in chief, General Gaberdine, instructs me that no such manifestations exist. Therefore, they do not exist! *Et voila*, non-existence, does it please you?”

MORE VAMPIRIC INTERLUDES: [THIRTY THREE]

Still and all, our two new characters, male and female, burst through afore they meet two guards. They are dressed in atomic livery or military fatigues, and they carry sub-machine guns in their mittens. Both of them wore turquoise berets squared slightly to the side. Yet our two protagonists carry a cross-bow and a

luger. Might they not go under the names of Annabel and Maurice? We have met them afore (if only briefly) on an autogyro ride into a snow-storm... Do you understand it, *mes amis*?

NAPOLEON'S WAR CONTINUES WITHOUT RESPITE:
[THIRTY FOUR]

Meanwhile, the overall marshall in charge of the troops has arrived, subordinating Gaberdine to his control. The more senior general wears a cockatrice – almost like Mister Punch – as well as gold braid, brocade, livery, cuffs and a band to his midriff. His trousers are tight and white, in shorn boots, with plenty of fur... and he strides off the turf meaningfully. Several tents lie equidistant to his person – and the tent-poles were symmetrical, fixed, even heavily wired. Let us see: since even the patches work out against a purple sky – the latter illuminated by flares. These were instantaneous flames which rose up from the campfires... about this various Grenadiers stood around. Several tall trees also had lift-off... so as to surround every apex with defeat. Are you losing your mind's plot, dear reader? (-) As the loam shed its skin across the sod; & it was a bedappled rump on the ground. "Are the sentries armed and ready, and awake?", demanded the commanding officer, General Charcot-Jospin. "But, of course", intervened his former mentor, Gaberdine, "you check on the left flank while I do the right; and we must look out for any man (accidentally) who's fallen asleep on duty. It is strictly against military discipline; I've ordered any man who disobeys to be shot... even my own son, Maurice, if necessary."

TWO GUARDS MUST NEVER WALK ALONE:
[THIRTY FIVE]

Momentarily, the male character, Maurice, fires quickly and with devastating speed. The luger (you see) is out of his gloves with a supreme urgency; and one of the guards dashes back as his

machine-gun unloads. He has been probably badly injured and even killed by the blast, as a whiff of cordite travels. The other guard swivels and ducks so as to be in a position to fire. Yet Annabel – who has a delicate scar down her face – moves off with her cross-bow intact... She happens to be hunting vampire Jospin.

MELODRAMA ALWAYS BITES THRICE:
[THIRTY SIX]

On his search in the woods, *per se*, General Gaberdine comes across an eerie sight in the moonlight. It happens to be the non devil-dog, Matador, about whom the men have been speaking. He shimmers – a grey effulgence – amid a lunar conspectus or glow. Its tail seems to be longer than before (what if) and the head one time larger, maybe. Now then, all of the trees behind him rose blue, unseconded, disembarked and as tall as redwoods (nearly). The fainter pattern – of either cerulean or ultramarine – dishes a photocopy or a grainy purview; and it looks to be dishevelled/even alone. Given this, various stalks stand in a black dye or hiss, and they refract via a prism so we can see more easily. Gaberdine – for his part – crept closer and he was rapt with awe, piquancy and unforgiveness. His uniform was well-spent, woollen and saturated in brocade – not to mention decorations. “There he is – Matador – their wretched spectre, bogle or ghost. I’ll show ‘em – one sword thrust through it and all vanity surges forever. It’s just a perfectly ordinary mutt looking a trifle eerie in the moonlight. I’ll bring him down quickly with my sword prior to his barking or yapping – it’ll wake the sentry. AHA! And I want to check on whether he’s snoozing or not – contrary to orders.”

ONE BATTLE ROYAL AT THE CIRCUS:
[THIRTY SEVEN]

One wakes up to find a new tableau... whereby Annabel's cross-bow spies Jospin from the back or *in lieu* of forgiveness. He or 'it' (relatively unknown to the world before now) is throttling Pouillon. We note – here and now – that the latter staggers under an iron-grip; and his skin is a mish-mash --- even a pea-soup. It speaks, most effectively, to those horror films or B-movies from the 'twenties or 'thirties... and these were often camp, unretrieved, horrific and yet banal. (*Inter alia*, they owed much to the modernist movement of German expressionism). Jospin's face looks back at her rigidly; what with that plume of hair which takes after an aristocratic bearing. Do we see it now? For, like in schizophrenic illness many tropes and narratives are held together... and they flow, bubble, cross over, and fertilise. But remember: none of it's real – in reality, it's sadic or satanic 'play'. None of the voices have an external bias at all, do you hear? Since schizophrenia is a psychotic illness whereby neuron receptors, deep in the cortex, have too much information to process... so this slips out and becomes partial. These are then, in the words of the post-feminist author Suzanna Medina, *Chunks of One*, portions of oneself, you concur? This is why the vampire narrative, for example, lacks legitimacy... in terms of characterisation. It flits along as a dream or an effort from Antonin Artaud's Surrealism, never mind his *Theatre of Cruelty*. Enough said... because no whit of self-analysis, method or craft can stop Annabel's bolt-weapon. For her cross-bow continues to target the rear of vampire Jospin.

A DIABOLICAL COLLECTION OF DOLLS:
[THIRTY EIGHT]

Back in the nineteenth century, General Gaberdine approaches with his sword well out – the scabbard is negative. He's now going to slash down on the body of Matador; the latter a light and

ethereal tremor. But the knife meets no resistance – it passes through the body unaided, as if it’s disembodied, not there, or a Ghost [heaven forbid]. Further, the shock to Gaberdine’s resolution – never mind his rationalist beliefs – was sincere and profound. (Note: didn’t revolutionary France, under the Year II and its Ultra-Jacobin phase, impose a Cult of the Supreme Being?) Yet the *Social Contract* is nowhere in evidence, as Gaberdine’s sabre swishes violently in the air, but not in an intended manner. One mustn’t under-estimate the shock here – especially when core beliefs are challenged. “The b-blade”, insisted the old warrior, “it’s meeting no resistance whatsoever... what can be happening?”

Meanwhile, the sky was claret and roundabout in its hue; while the branches overhead adopt a darker nimbus – a distinct briar altogether.

RIPLEY’S NOT FOR LAUGHING – NOT YET:
[THIRTY NINE]

Annabel’s face had no mercy left in its perfection – even the glee of a rotted performance. Since over the right eye (to speak of) one sees a scar; the livid markings of previous encounters. Do they give a register of her internal character? Who can tell? *Quod* the bolt, once drawn, has now been shed in Jospin’s direction... it rips forth and sunders, primarily so as to split a vampire in two – irrespective of any darkened eye-slit. This relates to the darksome socket on her other side (the left) which adorns her face’s nethermost cusp. (This is by virtue of the fact, *inter alia*, that the physiognomy can be read like a book... at least by those who can divine the truth. Broadly speaking, and without facetiousness, the left siding represents the inner man; the right the external front which is put up to the world. No other execration needs to body itself forth). Likewise, Annabel’s exterior radiates a calmness, a ferocity of intent – nay indent – and a desire not to please, given certain circumstances. Can she

be older than her present twenty-five years, by dint of any persuasion? The lips were dry – to be sure – and the one eye in question was pale blue, marble-like, unfulfilled, and lacking in obscenity. To this end, it dignifies a Victorian or Edwardian doll – of the sort which took up residence in a glass-case out Wokingham way. Do you remember it? By any chalk, the cross-bow released its pay-load with a THWONG(!); all of it heading in Jospin’s dispersal. What will he do?

A GHOST’S REVENGE UPON THE LIVING:
[FORTY]

Now then, back in the nineteenth century, General Gaberdine’s sword has passed via an invisible dog. Do ghosts, *Anima* or spirits exist? Whether they do or not, the General has received an almighty jolt to his belief system. Oh my yes: he wobbles over night before this adventure of fortune. To begin with, the good general was shaking like a leaf: what with the left-overs of an ‘occult’ experience. These shocked the movements of his body or frame; thereby causing it to quake, move about, quail, and gyrate accordingly. It was as if a metal soldier [from Britons’ manufacturing] had been belted with a hammer – only then to resonate or shift like a tuning-fork. General Jospin-Charcot, who accompanied him in full regalia, bluntly asked his colleague about whether he was quivering or not. Might he be in the grip of a supernatural essay? Let us remember this – both of these military men were adorned with brocade, lace filigree (male), and the glory of various regiments. All of them were taken from the French Imperial, Napoleonic or heroic period... and, even in terms of *décor*, the surrounding sky lit up to azure. It blunted its effect over these forgotten suns, and the vegetation growing aright seems to be magenta... or inbred as to a dark rage. What will happen next?

DO NOT ALLOW A DROUGHT TO LOOSEN YOUR
TONGUE: [FORTY ONE]

Furthermore, in our vampiric drama with parallel characters, a new century ensues. It seems to deny its possibility of fulfilment by other means. Given this, Jospin has to save himself (even in his unreality) and he does so by use of juxtaposition. All of a sudden, he swivels and engages in a troubadour moment – so as to reverse his position with Pouillon. The latter (our zig-zag man of so many offerings) casts off the burden of his fate... and makes way for the bolt. He found himself shot (good and proper) by the arrow released from Annabel's question... in the manner of the French mediaeval torture. (Conan Doyle once enunciated this in a short story called *The Question*, or some such). Again, and stripped to the waist, Pouillon expires under this gesture as Jospin repositions him... much like a Bishop or a Knight in life's chess-game. The *Anima* or reverse consciousness of the artist comes into play here, and Jospin seems yet more merciless, cold and trans-human. What more can you ask of Anne Rice's fictional Undead?

CROSS-BOW BOLTS FALL FROM THE SKY:
[FORTY TWO]

Yet the nineteenth century will facilitate more relief – the like of which takes off in a new direction. For the two officers --- by dint of a stealthy approach --- have discovered a Grenadier who is asleep. Yes, at last, Gaberdine has within his grasp the prospect of punishment (...) Needless to say, a Grenadier's bear-skin had nodded towards the ground... although not in the form of a giant pumpkin. No sir, his rifle exists before him and the head gradually moved downwards – almost so as to touch the bayonet's tip. His whole uniform is sagging over – doubtless in slumber – and to the consternation of those who look upon the scene. These two [to repeat] were Generals Gaberdine and Jospin-Charcot, commander and supreme commander

respectively. Nor can we escape the fact that a giant tree, covered in moss or growths, and trailing great creepers, provided a rest or under-current for his back. It was immensely thick – this old’un; at least twice as wide as the two officers when taken together, crossways. --- The colour-scheme involved had to be a deep brown – at once lightish in spots, earthen, proud, tufted and stilled.

NO-ONE REFLECTS IN THESE GLASSES!
[FORTY THREE]

“Alone, alone about a dreadful wood,
Of conscious evil
Runs a lost mankind
Dreading to find its Father.”

--- W.H. Auden, *For the Time Being*

By neglect, the spear or bolt has entered into Pouillon’s back; if only to shadow-box his own cleverness... if momentarily. Since this *spear of destiny* had none and it endeavoured to pick up the pieces – even when they were falling apart. Slowly, and by degrees, Pouillon’s corse ‘levitated’ to the ground – at once stuck out, spendthrift, forlorn and tilted over to the side. He certainly appeared to be bankrupt or at his last tether – rather like one of those tramps in Beckett. By default (even) he drifted to the altar – as if to break with narrow gauges of time... these were bound to play out their differences as he slid. Look again at our armies of the night: since Jospin, his oppressor, stands beyond him in Bela Lugosi mode. We also note the gleaming teeth which sharpen for new business, as he confronts Annabel, the assassin, with uncomfortable truths. She has relapsed into a sullen silence or observance... once she realises her mistake. Does it become clear to you?

RAGE, RAGE AGAINST A DYING LIGHT:
[FORTY FOUR]

At last we have the *denouement* – for now Gaberdine has grabbed hold of his son’s arm; what with the supreme commander, General Jospin-Charcot, looking on. Is there some uneasiness in the older man’s stare? Nonetheless, the firm touch of a white glove on the shoulder sounds aft – and isn’t it like a bell, clanging well out to sea, and clashing on the far shore? Moreover, the silken mitten touched the red epaulette – itself next to the dark blue of the tunic. While the furry hat twitched above – so as to keep the head on straight (one supposes). It led off from so many distances at once; especially now that the vegetation crowded in on him. Some of the trees were stark and grim, if vaguely sinister, and had something to do with Elisabeth Frink’s sculptures. (This definitely related to the earlier period – afore her return to horses and dogs). Whereas bushes and surrounding vegetation are rufous, necklace-laced, spare and fuzzy. Furthermore, the gigantic tree – a redwood of these dense elves (against which Maurice had been resting) – squeezed out maliciously. It filled the elder space, primarily so as to substantiate these claims of death. Gaberdine is too restricted --- to speak of --- by his internal fury... at last, at last, you see, he has discovered a Grenadier showing dereliction in his duty. Necessarily, the personal issue rushes through – even if there is a look of sadness and consternation in Marshall Charcot-Jospin’s eyes.

A B-MOVIE REACHES ITS CULMINATION:
[FORTY FIVE]

More guards lie flat out on the ground or weeping behind bellows (themselves imaginary). It definitely lightens the load in terms of an ascending lark; itself prone to see toy-soldiers, in fatigues, lying about a deserted floor. It proves to be yellow in colour and some bullet cases surround their feet. If we look

closely, then many of their brown shoes are bespattered by discards – i.e., shell cases or cartridges; the like of which litter some tables. Yet, with each nine-pin that falls, one becomes more aware of one thing: namely, the artificiality of this screening. Might it be some sort of show-reel or fantasia in a psychiatrist's mind? Only the future can tell us ever more keenly...

THE WANDERING MINSTRELS OF FORTUNE DARE TO
TRESPASS: [FORTY SIX]

Look again, my men, since the implications of Gaberdine's decision-making are beginning to materialise... and various roosters, in all honesty, are clucking aloud. It is less a feeding frenzy than a time of misappliance... a wonderment. Given this, Charcot-Jospin was speaking very gravely... and this involves the possibility of executing a guard found asleep on this tour of duty or Spanish-fly. Such a notion made the Marshall look stern indeed – and he resembles a frieze or wash of orange, black, red and gold. Young Maurice stood between them – while, for his pains, General Gaberdine seems plunged into gloom. At this inhuman moment – in other words – his features become the least decipherable of all. They rear up like stallions, unbeknownst to themselves. His son's features, on the other hand, were bleached white, mulched to straw, all shook up and liable to frustrate things further. Nor do we need to dwell on the relative desperation in his glance. It is merely confirmed by the thickness of the trunk behind him – its largeness, girth, width and corresponding ballast. Nor do we forget the vegetoid or rooted quality of its compass, alive, as it is, to a witness of ages. Nothing else will do.

FUTURE QUARRELS ARE BEST EFFACED IN SUN-LIGHT:
[FORTY SEVEN]

Now then, a voice booms – in a vampire’s league – from behind an enabling curtain. It billows with the clearness of J.G. Ballard’s prose; or might it return to a brain-in-a-box, severed from all other life, that we encountered earlier in this tale? It had to do with the fatality of fortune – even if this moral drought originates from a psychiatrist’s mind-set. Similarly, young Maurice is shocked to hear the voice from aslant the robe; what with its Terence Dix or *Planet of the Daleks* intonation. Do you detect its attempt at over-lordship? Since all three characters – Annabel, the continuing vampire Jospin, as well as Maurice – have all been struck dumb or steadfast by it. They are witness to its serving-dish, born, as it was, by an age of starry wisdom – if served on ice. And, here and now, a pillar rears up behind them; it takes the format of a Doric eatery... Look again, my gentlemen of the feast, since a dialectical brain is revealed to all. Especially now that one limpid curtain, folded over in green, has been cast aside---

WE RETURN TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY:
[FORTY EIGHT]

Again and all, the more minor commander, Gaberdine, is alive to the prospect of his son’s death that very morning. Already he begins to ‘enjoy’ second thoughts – you see. *Quod* he knows that, in a sleep of ages, he did get to see the ghostly dog or its apparition, Matador, close up. Why hadn’t he been prepared to listen to reason (?); even as it unfolded in relation to Unreason. He thinks anon, although, somewhat strangely, his thought processes seem to be subdued this morning. I am loathe to venture into private grief yet here I must. Needless to say, he was sitting – in a muted fashion – outside the flap of his tent in the Spanish sunlight. The very structure of this Napoleonic *bric-a-brac* – with its arabesques and cornices – stands out as a mute

acknowledgement. But of what, entirely? Suddenly, there is a commotion in the corner of the camp – one which occurs against a sky that affects a brilliant orange. Do you fancy it? BANG! Goes the musket – and from that very instant General Gaberdine goes mad... And all the other voices in this tale, including the vampiric motif, originate from such a source. Moreover, the whiff of cordite stretches itself out across the way – so as to cling, at once clearly, to the uniforms of one of his assassins. Weren't they merely reacting to their General's orders which were laid out on a piece of paper the evening before?

+

We then flit, momentarily, to the conversation between present and future psychiatric administrators, Jospin and Charcot, with which our tale commenced. They are looking very seriously at each other as they discuss it (certainly).

+

Nonetheless, in our vampiric relay, the brain-in-a-box, General Gaberdine, has shot out a burning ray – the latter existing with Fire's lividness. Way behind his encased cortex, and rather like a giant water-cooler, subsists a sweep of grates, ducts, tiles, electronic sheets, digital devices and other wares. These have been fashioned so as to create an immobility beam or moment of STASIS – in order for Doctor Gaberdine to duel with Jospin over a vacant throne. That is: the one which calls out to a negative kindred, a lordship over vampires, a species of which there is no recorded existence... Most evidently, this was one of the schizoid fantasies of Gaberdine, a mind diseased. Since, as Charcot was telling Jospin in his crisp cravat, the moment that his son was shot on his orders, General Gaberdine went mad. He has lived or existed at this asylum henceforth, my friend. Nor will he ever really escape – or try to, *mon ami*. The reason – it's quite straightforward in its way – is that the door to his cell was guarded by the ghost of his dead son. This, truly, was what the former military martinet, Gaberdine, actually believes. Nor did this late commander of forces in Spain ever leave the asylum successfully... can't you guess from the tone of my voice? You

see, he never left the corridor where his cell was situated because he didn't find his ghostly Grenadier napping --- believe it or not. Charcot merely clapped his hands together in appreciation of the story.

THE END

FOETAL PLANET

A short story

PART ZERO

The court-martial knew nothing of its dereliction of duty; occurring, as it did, on the last Wednesday of the month at the space centre. The room itself was large and capacious, mounted by cosmic globes and with a polished teak-table down one aisle or side. It chose to speak about its nature in a roundabout way – what with a picture of Saturn (or its moon Titan) on a rival wall. Now and then, or through a window with blinds at the top, a space vehicle could be glimpsed. It slowed down so as to embrace the tarmac or plush lawns laid out at the astral centre... these were accompanied by a gesturing ball, even a pit of correction. Behind these the sky unfolded in delicate shades of blue – no matter how light – and fluffy clouds adorned the heavens. They were laced with a pink shimmer, do you know? In relation to the above – long curtains (of a green wove) made their way to the ground and the table was lightly sprinkled with legal papers. The odd tome propped up its axis – and these went under headings like *Universal Law* or *Solar Navigation*. Moreover, the men involved in the court appear upright, flexional, starchy, and very much there to administer discipline, yet they wish to be fair. A few of them have cigars stuck in their mouths. One individual stood out (from amidst their number) and this was Barrington Moore Junior. He has an immaculate uniform, navigated via green silk, and containing a retinue of medals, hearts and crowns, medallions (of one sort or another) and every military rank. He was an austere, balding man who'd lost much of his hair early on, and he evinced a natural *gravitas*. One of his distinguishing features is a pair of glasses, or *pince-nez*, that possessed a long string.

Moreover, the man that they had put on trial, Templeton-Morriss, was stood in the central well or 'dock'. A man of movie star

looks, certainly in his early 'thirties, this Welsh individual is smartly dressed in a light uniform... the latter aligned to the air police. Needless to say, he wore a number of medallions, sigils or planets around his upper jacket... and these ramified with his black-tie underneath. His hair was brushed back straight, although signs of strain were showing, such as those that create grey hairs. His offence was aborting a space mission too early – and returning home to earth, the mother planet, without completing those explorations. Look at this...

PART ONE

Templeton-Morriss, for his part, was attempting to explain his position – all of which involved going back in time. A nose-cone streaked through the heavens, as this firmament gifted itself to abandonment. The craft is highly reminiscent of *Thunderbirds 3* (or so) and it proves to be trans-linear, steely, plus four, interconnected and sleek. It gusted along without momentum – and its end-point obeys a stanchion, a piece of metal put up over time, even a box-set. A blast of steam serves at its rear, as this 'bird' nears the apex of its discharge. For the unnamed planet – above our adventure or will – is sighted afar off. Likewise, the atmosphere susurrates about; it transposes on nought, and savours of nebulous gases. These act so as to prevent ramifications with the heavens. Tendrils of smoke, ash or space-filter clog the way; and they ripple over the surface like chlorine (abundantly). Thus, each spiral explains its loss, as we notice different densities within the blackness. (Space has many dimensions, if you will). These were the limitations of a Platonic idealism – do you credit it? Anyway, one is free to spot – with or without a telescope – a kaleidoscope of planets, vapour, cosmic dust and rays, asteroids, comets or still-births. Did they have lagoons or ports of entry; as regards an uncompleted J.G. Ballard story? Still, the nebulous above the planet gave off Thanatos' weal; and it spoke of many ideas within ancestral memory. Again, no matter how fuzzy its immensity we note that the

firmament hides its story; it stretches one beaker beyond another's lips. Yet, in all honesty, what serves notice to us is a lit-up flare; the like of which causes a cauldron to billow. May it be cross-ways? Our dart-like spaceship passes through it. Templeton Morriss' craft is about to land on the planet, and some of his men move to their environmental stations.

PART THREE

Once landed on this plane the exploration began and some of the men called up to the captain via an open hatch. He looks down on their heads from above – whilst dressed in a 'fifties vintage suit. Since doesn't this tale have about it a whiff of the 'fifties... and fantasia, thereof? A ladder – steely and upright – has descended to the planet's surface; and the men busy themselves with experimental tasks. Templeton-Morriss gazes down on them from above and (occasionally) he notices some tall, thin stalks. They protrude from the ground. They seem to be cut off midway – and their shadows take after a cave's wondrous resource (albeit turned around). Do you see? This computes with those flashes that turn sideways – often grafting to pink, or adopting intermediate colours. These were grey, pebble-dash, 'one rear dosage in a mirror', and bloodied scarlet. Also, such talk drew attention to the surface; namely, the fact that it's dimpled, raw, calcified, pinkish and gives a pericarp's index. Templeton-Morriss tells his men to continue the hunt (sic) and they move sideways in order to obey. Yet again, an effulgence appears on the orb's skin, and this must be to do with its nascent quality. No-one, including the commander, has decided to name it yet...

PART FOUR

Whilst exploring the planet Morriss and his men come across assemblages of bind-weed – or tough grass. They inundate the surface of this ball, so as to provide it with a feather-dustering or hide. Yes, he and his men make a route through it, so as to avoid

tearing up reddish pigmentation by the roots. Let's say it: the very oddness of this circle gives it a dutifulness; the latter not likely to lead to vengeful thoughts. Perversely, the men appear to be happy here – almost as if it's a home from home. To match it out: such bean-poles lie low (or refuse to); and they come over as tough, flexible, in-bred, flexional and tensile. All in all, though, his men have a reluctance to harm them – never mind make a bonfire of it.

PART FIVE

Occasionally, the men get down on their hands and knees, so as to examine this world's porous foam. On closer inspection, its eiderdown takes after a covering or erasure... this is one that stabilises itself touching, do you see? The extravagance of its contact with your hand causes it to spring back again... rather like a piece of embroidery. Also, a sequence of lines – or measuring rods – festoon the planet. They cover it up gradually; indeed, not one square inch of its surface is without these hatch-wires. And, in truth, they provide a trip-wire over the facts, independent of its skim, and whatever they might be.

+

All of a sudden, they become aware of a rumble in this earth's intestines – or otherwise deep in its guts. None of them evince any fear, but they are rendered wary or uncertain if earthquakes happen to be coming. Likewise, the exploration party – whom Templeton-Morriss sent out – report back that there were more tremors amidships... even though they didn't eventuate in any spills, destruction, or fissures. To be sure, the tightness of the place seems inviolable... at least when looked at one way. While Templeton-Morriss speaks to his men, all of whom are armed for any eventuality, another report shakes this plane's surface. Maybe it takes after a non-metaphorical outburst (?); rather like accounts of Godly vengeance in Aeschylus' *Prometheus*... This was a prose poem if ever there was one. All Templeton-Morriss can do, by way of contrast, is to have his men scour the top-soil

once more, so as to penetrate into the inner mysteries. A few of those stalks – head high if they troubled a man – limn the distance next to their commander’s face, as he gives his orders.

+

Bizarrely, another device from Brian Clemens’ *Thriller* occurs in our story... It has to do with a want of imagination, *au contraire*, as well as a superfluity of things elsewhere, do you see? For a large crater, gap or husk had moved across the tundra during the night, so as to reposition itself next to the space craft. It must have been a good two hundred yards closer in – from where Templeton-Morriss marked its bearings. How can this aperture be described (?) – well, it has to do with a gaping hole, a reverse promontory, or its fixed bias. This can cause it to fall over (occasionally). Might it be laughing at some sort of still-life... no matter how unforgiven? Since this deep gash or surface crater, surrounded by its bitten-off forethought, chewed the cud. It lurked after so many semblances... Also, it led out the markings of many choice offerings – do you understand? This was the case until Templeton-Morriss gave his cry, without explanation, to vacate the planet with all speed. The men, who were used to obeying him instinctively, paused for a moment afore racing up the gang-planks. As mentioned earlier, and in the late twenty-first century, these were steel struts or ladders... in order to vacate any rendezvous. Soon the rocket has blasted off from this rocky orb in the starry gulf, nor did Templeton-Morriss furnish his men with an explanation. All he would repeat – over the intercom again and again – was the phrase ‘we’re returning to earth!’ Not even the first mate (an old colleague) can elicit more of an answer.

PART SIX

Back at the court-martial, the wing-commander eyes him more warmly than before. He seems (as well) to be slightly more hesitant – at least in terms of critical judgements, barbs or critiques. Barrington Moore Junior is dressed ornately (as before)

and a large or digital photo of Saturn exists behind him. It especially shows up the famous moon: Titan. Again, Templeton-Morriss, with a burst of enthusiasm he'd not shown before, begged to disagree with his august sentinel. 'I did complete my mission' – he declared with gusto and aplomb. Nothing like a denial will pass his lips; as both he and his commander soak up the shadows. Do the green curtains, heavy with felt, cause the room to be plunged in gloom? 'I did complete my mission', declares the former and perhaps current space-explorer. 'After our return from outer space I named the planet VITA (in Latin) meaning life... And I intimate this most sincerely, wing-commander, because those tufts on its surface were hair, the cross-hatchings took the form of pores, and the gigantic crater was its mouth. I didn't want my men to find out whether the crevasse had teeth or not. Do you observe this? For VITA is truthfully a foetal world; it abuts with renewed life. Let's recognise that the loud thump, oscillation or upstart was an ecosystem's heart beating (most distinctly). It is alive, sir, and, by any reckoning, I did finish my task to discover life in another solar system. 'Not Guilty' was the unanimous verdict of the disciplinary panel; as they followed the lead of the chairman. But the bald wing-commander (Barrington Moore) is no longer to be found numbered amongst the judges. He has already crossed over, in that he went round the smooth-table as quickly as he could to shake hands. Soon both he and Templeton-Morriss were hand-in-glove. 'Well done, my boy!', was what the older man declared.

THE END

MEPHITIC HERCULES

A very short novel

PART ONE

He looked out across the garden and its shrubbery – only to find the desperation of an acknowledged calm. Hadn't they walked the gardens before in an interlude of pleasure? No-one really knows the accuracy of such a pasture – so to say. In kindling, as Straight Robinson looked around the outer fastness of the house, he recalled some known buildings. These were phosphorescent out-reaches of a star-struck mind. Did they really implode without any sense of glory, whatsoever? Likewise, the habiliments of Lymne castle or Saltwood – both down near the Kent coast – came to haunt him. He was in a turret window, looking out towards the sea's vagaries, as he spoke.

PART TWO

One of the farther towers, adrift of this Gormenghast of a property, had strange carvings in the marketing of this filter. Yet the more that he looked at it – the less athletic or appealing the whole edifice turned out to be. For, half way up its particular incline, the voices which co-existed in his mind stopped momentarily. Should he hoist a flag (such as the Jolly Roger) in expectation? One doesn't know. The plaque or *object d'art* was surrounded by four dots or promontories: they linked arms around a circular frame. They certainly realised that they were in an asylum; albeit in terms of its outer skin. Mister Straight continues to examine our pericarp; and it has set down a scorpion within such a dome. Truly, the rock altered and shifted aslant its own salt. In all honesty, though, this man ran in conventional channels. He couldn't work it out (necessarily). But, even then, in relation to a tabloid's grasp of the zodiac – he knew that deep, dark, watery and eldritch offerings were afoot.

PART THREE

He reckons (from an inner perspective) that the asylum's walls crowded in on him – yet, in truth, such tinkering didn't suffice. In actuality, the hospital had no walls or outermost fastenings – i.e., what those on security detail called 'skins'. He stood, alternately, at the corner of a vortex or one of its vertices (so to say). Whilst – temporarily – he came to be surrounded by dry-ice crystals; and these were burnt in the sun to an occluded degree. Let it pass: for such swallows and amazons just make up the numbers. Alternatively, a part of him sat in a chair to one side of the others. Was this individual weeping; or did he, otherwise, have his head in his hands? If so, a couple of lines from Beckett's *End Game (Fin de Partie)* come to mind... particularly when Clov, I think, is moved to tears. One of the other characters responds with the rejoinder, 'then he's living, my man, he's existing.'

PART FOUR

All of a sudden, our main character notices that his wife, Sarah Crankshaw Hooligan, is approaching him across this set. Why does he refer to it as something of an acting stage? Well, it is raised, painted black, and exists as a dais for one thing. Simultaneously with the above, we are influenced by a Brechtian touch – to be fair. How so? By any draft, this has to do with a barren quandary – even an existentialist motif. For, in terms of a mad-house, the less clutter the more able you are to concentrate on essentials. Also, such Shaker staging (at least in terms of furnished puns) leads to a re-awakening. – that's what a team of benevolent experts might wish for, at any rate.

+

His wife, Hooligan, wore black boots, a loose-fitting sweater and had cropped ginger hair. She was no great beauty (he thought absent-mindedly), and she'd taken up smoking again. Yet he

should show a bit of toleration (he mused); it has to be stressful working in here.

PART FIVE

The latticed or concentric nature of the castle came home to him as he stood in a hemi-cycle. Might it be aught of an Occult pentangle? Needless to say, the pendant (in stone) halfway up a turret's wall, continued to catch his eye. Yet, wait a moment, the design or filigree has changed. Nor was it less or more than the sum of its parts in such a maelstrom – let's be serious. Since a shark or (possibly) a pterodactyl's mouth struck out from this vastness, if only to steal without pride.

+

'What do we understand by madness?', he asked his wife in a languid tone. Momentarily, he realised that his voice was less aggressive than before. 'Well', she pondered for a moment, 'there has to be a symptomatic range – a covering of all the bases, as you might say. Nor need we distinguish too much between inherited conditions (generic ills) and those that are caused by environmentalism. Schizoid attacks, paranoia, inverted conspiracies, a-sociality, self-harm, manic depression (or its more straightforward missal) are all that's required.'

+

'Do you really think so? Isn't that all a little too pat, 'medicalised' and under-cooked? What if I were to be wearing a clown-mask, over there, and screaming in agony?'

'What for?', she interrupted.

'Why, this would be to solely delineate a pain's nature.' By the by, he came to realise that he was warming to his theme. Do you dare look?

PART SIX

‘If madness is the *detritus* or fruit of the Gods – then what are we left with? It’s just the hulking preponderance of something that turns up, so as to attack you at the dawn of day. Didn’t Thomas Carlyle, in a Victorian essay dedicated to volcanic ire, talk of peep o’day boys, risen Goths and an Irish sect, the Invincibles? We must do so. My regiment – and it’s just me and you – has to avoid such foot-falls in the dark, whether or not Lady Macbeth’s making them’.

‘As you wish, darling!’, whispered our Sarah.

PART SEVEN

A change of scene or its rotting pier comes to mind – and yet our anti-hero continues his walk round and round. He intends to encourage an unwinding, even a lengthening, of the Self – particularly given the impress of those lightnings. Also, the sky appeared to be a dull green underneath such an issue. Didn’t he alternate his consciousness, somewhat? Likewise, he felt danger to be approaching in the form of a ghoulish skull – a screamer or token, like in one of Francis Bacon’s paintings. Still, the couple perambulated around and took in the scene – what a tranquil vista it seemed. One momentary change then indicated another (though). For, while spying over a wall, they heard a twig snap or crack. Obviously some living creature had put their boot or weight upon it. Most evidently, when you have hit rock bottom... the only way is up or back towards the clouds.

+

All of an instant, they were seized by a deafening or catatonic noise. It hummed – blissfully aware of its penetration – and it ran multiple shadows up and down the wall. A cosmic force (it seemed) ran riot inside of their head’s mantle and, if we are honest, these boundary markers sought to limit Hell’s dexterity. (Although, to my mind, these visitations from the other side left

many elements undecided. Do you concur? Since a plague of vertiginous dots roamed around our couple; and this was more than they could beat off with a golfing umbrella. While the item in question happened to be an enormous rain-sieve; and it stood in the room's corner. Wasn't it blue, green, red and yellow in design?)

PART EIGHT

The attack continued – at least within the sanctity or perimeter of one's mind's eye. (Necessarily so, if we are to forestall those grievances which overtake us). By such a thread, we endeavour to take up a quest for knowledge. Here endeth any sort of a lesson – and yet it is not over. Didn't Elisabeth Lutyens, the architect's daughter, actually write a score for *The Skull*, a Hammer film? It definitely lost its plot over such an atonal style! Nonetheless, at the heart of this design a face or head began to be observed. It chattered, lisped, flipped over backwards and then went barrelling along. (Note: in actuality, it betokened some of the beast people in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. A novel (this was) the like of which has never been bettered in its analysis of vivisection). Given these purple sensations, or intimations of death, a whirligig occurred around this married couple. At the heart of it (or stood on end) we see a crystalline skull – much after the poetic tropes of J.G. Ballard in *The Crystal World*. Likewise, one of these *glace* fruits – when served as Christmas fayre – mushrooms within the mind. And – all things considered – it recognises one of Damien Hirst's skulls. These were craniums, *a la* Gray's *Anatomy*, which came bespangled with the jewels of Heaven – or the Devil's star or dust, depending on your viewpoint. It certainly might be described as heavenly *bling* – to be sure. As to appearance: this monstrosity of absence (or silence) gibbered on. It rattled together and chomped at the bit! Of this, there is no denying. Perhaps a cranial lurch – at once distressed in red or livery – overcame it, like with computerised imagery. In any event, this manifestation of his

own insanity (possibly) hummed around him akin to a bug. Or, betimes, it took on the attribution of a flame-thrower, a helix, a misplaced adventurer; even a tally of Greek Fire. What else do you wish to say?

PART NINE

For, at the heart of its very structure, there lurked a devil – and yet, to be sure, one is also talking about oneself. This has to be the important and salutary item which we take with us. Giger’s fiercesome monster, a personification of madness, then knocked things over, whirled around the room and hurled itself through a window. Quite understandably, everyone looked to see what damage had been done, but, under tight observation, nothing has been disturbed. After it had all passed, a husband and wife continued to examine each other for a long time.

PART TEN

This was how it came about... for the circle of his walks brought him back to where he began. The assault on one reality is over (as it were) and yet he knew that he had to speak with his spouse most urgently.

Straight Robinson: “What is madness really about?”, (trying to keep a peevish tone at bay).

Sarah Hooligan: “There are multiple theories, dearie, all of which pertain to your clutch on reality. Let’s deal with one of the most pregnant or resourceful ones... This luxuriates in the intoxication of mephitic vapours.”

Straight Robinson: “What do you mean? I cannot follow you with ease...”

Sarah Hooligan: “Let’s put it this way – the likes of the philosopher Jacqui Laing-King, for example, attribute it to d(a)emonic possession. This has to do with her post-medieval view of the world.” [Moreover, as the woman spoke to her husband, my listeners, we are free to see two heads. These were naked, shafted to sunlight, under-absorbed, and piled on top of one another. Rather fetishistically, it has to be said, a cover on a Colin Dexter novel had a similar codex. Yet – in spite of all – the cultural reference-point that one seeks is Phrenology. One also has, in one’s inner space or ordering of things, the notification of perfect heads... themselves reminiscent of white porcelain. It refused to be stained blue in colour – with the sole exception of some lettering or metre-graphs. Let’s face it: nothing was really up or lost... save that phrenology pre-dated Freud by a half-century, particularly in relation to the unconscious mind. But, ultimately, these theories were falsified and drifted out to sea alongside other ooze. Nor was this to refuse any facts which lay before you: in that such items ripened on an asylum’s murals.]

Sarah (continued): “Other theorists, such as Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation* or Deleuze in *Anti-Oedipus*, believe the contrary.”

Straight Robinson: “How so?”

Sarah Hooligan: “Well(!), they posit that insanity is a refuge from a cruel or forbidding planet. There was often an anti-capitalist element as well. In the final analysis, they attribute the following cortex or file: they say that *the mad are sane and the sane mad*. Do you sense a tremulousness in the air?”

Straight Robinson: “Not especially ---”.

PART ELEVEN

One notices that the owner of the asylum sat in a chair within a central parapet. Could it be at all reminiscent of a Brechtian or minimalist stage-set (?) – one doesn't entirely know. Nonetheless, various stick-figures, puppets or scarecrows lie around the plinth – despite the fact that he's unimpressed by them. In appearance, however, the asylum's director is undistinguished. He could quite easily be mistaken for the manager of a supermarket, or some such. His hair was slicked back at the sides – with or without Brylcreem – and the skin seemed sallow or unshockable. Perhaps (in all honesty) he has spent too much time underground? For those who are incarcerated in an asylum do feel it to be a likely prison... it happens to be the pressure of institutionalisation. Do you see? The proprietor has begun to speak, nevertheless...

Bellow Soar-Scrape: “Why do we sit here so listlessly, my fellow citizens?”

To which there is a chorus of replies...

Straight Robinson: “It may be quite possibly because they won't give us a chess set, so as to ease the pain of so many gulfs. Likewise, if you can plot the course – or liberate yourself into a charade then you'll embrace the GAME.”

Soar-Scrape: “What infinitude is that? Whichever sport do you seek out?”

Sarah Hooligan: “Why, my masters, the only game worth a candle – when viewed from these heights – has to be LIFE!”

In truth, it masters the effect of what a Hungarian philosopher once called *Homo Ludens* – i.e., man as an exemplary

swordsman or gamester. Herman Hesse had the same idea in *The Glass Bead Game*.

PART TWELVE

A game of chess now unfolds before our veriest eyes, yet it was not the usual one expected from a tournament. The pieces had been lined up on a checkerboard that lay on the floor – in other words, the asylum itself had entered a ludic state. It frisked itself in order to stay alive, if you see what I mean. Straight Robinson – naked to the waist and covered in woad – made leave to cancel an affidavit. He had taken the White pieces so as to impose himself on the game; his wife, Sarah, defended her position manfully. To one side or adjacently, the director of the asylum sung out:~

Bellow Soar-Scrape: “Chess is a game of war that follows on from its own uncertainty. Do you hear? You have to be sane enough to play it (admittedly), but who among you would be mad enough to lose on purpose?” The Proprietor (due to the fact that it was a private asylum) fiddled with a box of snuff. When he’d snorted his fair share, he resumed his puzzle:

“So, as I say, each piece moves with an artistic precision – even if it’s undefined by the inner mind. I ask you, friends and neighbours, would you really want such a manifestation standing over you? I refuse to fear the discrediting of your answer. Anyway, my purpose is keen and clear in its resolve. Each piece – in a wooden or carved set – is a schizoid beam. One might call it a particulate; i.e., an anti-monism: a devout calling to order through multiplicity. One doesn’t have all the facts at one’s finger-tips; yet still... you are doubtlessly familiar with its rig, eh?” (He blew his nose heavily before proceeding). “The King moves one step at a time; the Queen in every possible direction; the Bishop diagonally and the Castle lengthwise-on. Moreover – and as a continuation – the Knight hitches to a dog-leg; while the

pawns constitute their proper station. If the two of you play enough then *all* of your persona will become involved at different levels of consciousness.”

Straight Robinson: “Honourable director, you have failed to tell us what madness is?”

His correspondent: “Perhaps it would be better to approach it from the other end and place sanity afore us. It malts due to the breeding of its own fur. One happens to be a device for avoiding things; the other an avoidance of such events. Listen to me: insanity is a biologically based condition or breakdown. A person hears the voices (or whatever else) and then becomes incapable of functioning.”

Sarah: “Or they learn to live with it?”

Bellow Soar-Scrape: “Most uncomfortably, I have to fend off your lance.”

Meanwhile, those burnished chess-pieces (themselves bright with their own cleansing) tip the balance onto such a tray. They glisten in this up-ended light. The war or battle, *a la* von Clausewitz, continues apace: and, after a considerable period, the number of pieces piled up next to those squares out-numbers those still fighting.

Wife-to-Husband: “My Queen takes your pawn at the board’s edge!”

Straight Robinson: “I fear that it was foretold already.”

Sarah Crankshaw Hooligan: “Given this contingent play, I think that very little can be predicted save existential nullity.”

The asylum director: “Nonsense, my dear, there must always be a reason to go on. It’s a matter of continuing the fight; never mind the difficulties involved. Yet I fully understand the basilisk-like or Medusean insights that you possess. Isn’t this entire era the age of Kali, the destroyer – to make use of pagan or Hindu verities? By any accord, I have a new toy for you this afternoon.”

Sarah: “Whatever is it called?”

Bellow Soar-Scrape: “As in all medical tributaries, it must be named after its founder. Nor may one rest on any proverbial laurels – it’s called a Rorschach test.”

Sarah: “Aha!”

PART THIRTEEN

The solitary female character, Sarah Crankshaw Hooligan, holds up a test-card to the light, so as to begin. Let’s hear it for the game, my beauties! Whilst the carding itself is smeared, running over, falling back on itself and somewhat inescapable. Didn’t the CIA once back abstract expressionism against socialist realism? By any debenture, the main character in our story, Straight Robinson, takes a good look at the deck. His stare – in accordance with this vintage – is hard and ‘straight’. My word, though, for as he gazes, a retinue of the insane gather around him. They are a collection of mugwumps and vaudeville *artistes*, to be sure. Might they not be a vehicle of life’s maimed? Could they long endure under Bernard Malamud’s or Abraham Maslow’s defeat-proneness? These – most unfathomably – were named amongst the defeated and injured. Look again! Since this retinue, crew or Comus Rout seemed (all of a swirl) to embody a taste for gaiety or a mountebank’s preliminary manoeuvres. All told, they numbered a miscast equation – or, ostensibly, a course of hundreds (always on song). Collectively, they happened to be known as *We are one Hundred!* And when grouped in such a

miscellany, why, they reminded one of the stick-men and women culled from L.S. Lowry's vintage. A scenario (this has to be) where anthropomorphism – in paint – reaches the sidewalks of Manchester and Salford.

Again, the in-patient smiled at the paint-daubed card in his hand. Far from being unrecoverable, the image was relatively clear to his mind. He could have tossed it on the floor, even though he wasn't going to... because it limbered towards *Kratos* as an imprint. Certainly, he drunk in a blood-red sky and a metallic scalp – it was his alter ego, *Anima/us* or namesake. He would liberate the one from the other (necessarily so).

At such an instant, this author knew that he will soon be free from this special wardship.

FINIS

CYCLADIC TORSO

ONE

A death-defying plunge needs no circus to restrain it – it merely cascades from a bi-plane at ten thousand feet. A travelling circus – with its big top – might make the difference, but an escape *artiste* doesn't need the expense. Most certainly, large numbers of spectators have gathered under an awning – yet the full panoply of vaudeville wasn't required. They'd come to see the leap of Bromax Life-aid, the escapologist, who'd gathered this stunt to his advantage. Let's not forget – with a crowd of twenty thousand paying ten pounds each – why, less a few costs, his wallet would be two hundred thousand the richer. Bromax, a lithe and gymnastic man, stood on his bi-plane's tail. He was busy talking to some local reporters. They were (alternately) exasperated and enthralled. How could this dare-devil survive such feats? Wasn't there a Marvel comic called *Dare-devil*, besides? In any event, the gossip went around – why didn't he retire? He'd already staged ten of these shows, contained in circus literature, so he must be a millionaire. Why continue, then? Such was the tittle-tattle around this bi-plane as it stood on the grass. The craft had recently bounced along to a negligent stop. His co-pilot, Bromide, a minor figure in his life, already had the rotary-blades fizzing. They move limpidly though the air; each one a hand-saw – possibly reflecting future violence. The rest of the craft – given its modernity – was modelled on ancient forms; and its livery was green and gold. To be honest, it gave off a whiff of Harry Houdini or lesser variants (Doc Madness, et cetera...) and its fuselage was brightly polished. An upside-down V or triangle (in reverse) was painted on its side; thereby, to wax Freudian, indicating the anti-death instinct. Might it be an example of Norman O. Brown's forgotten text, *Life Against Death*, from the nineteen fifties? Few of the crowd, all of whom flocked to see the show, were concerned by such niceties. They were drawn by a more avid stench – that is, an expectation of

demise, constriction, morbidity, or sadism. It always hangs around the thrall of *mass art* – like a freak show or circus of horrors – since it impinges on physiology. An experience such as this goes directly onto the nervous system, in other words, it feeds on neurasthenia... what the Victorians called a nervous exaltation.

TWO

To begin with, Bromax was dressed in a suit which covered him from head-to-toe... yet its colour was a violent red. Its scarlet inevitably drew all eyes to him as he bounced up and down on the tail's wing – especially given a contrast between mauve and emerald. (If you recall, the bi-plane, in a slight nod to the Irish tricolour, was green and gold). It lost itself over this immense surface – and, at times, it was as if the public pavilions weren't there. To be sure, he needed a paying public for business purposes – yet underneath it all, they proved to be heedless... even unnecessary. Since the nature of these jumps was solipsistic; and they revolved upon themselves, psychologically. You see, with his conscious mind, these were commercial enterprises little different from *Zippo's circus*, to be frank. But, in all honesty, deeper resources are at work – these involve the *auto-da-fe*, as depicted in Spanish Mediaeval art. Nor can we say that the Modern sunders such displays, albeit in an attenuated form. *Quod* the hunger for sensation lingers on – most especially in the hearts and minds of the masses. (This is why a *shadow* exists next to the circus and other arts... nor should one bridle at the term 'art'. For, in truth, all of these conceits rely on popular artistry – they are the *low arts*, if you will. One can see this in Russia, for example, where circus is treated with high seriousness. Moreover, its best practioners often end up with state pensions or flats. They elicit the right contention or bribe, you see. Given this, all of the following *formulae* partake of an artistic vision. All of this involves strong men, fortune tellers, acrobats, jugglers, remnants of the troubadours, knife-throwers,

magicians, high-wire performers, animal tamers, clowns (and multiples thereof), mountebanks, contortionists, body *artistes*, escapologists, ring masters, side-show barkers, tent managers and impresarios, fire eaters, Punch and Judy ‘Professors’, stilt walkers or long toms, masters of eloquence and music hall, vaudeville and its alternatives, et cetera... This is best seen in the prospect of their intellectualisation. (It doesn’t matter if we make use of Beckett’s theatre or Brenton’s – and this can involve masks, mock-vaudeville, as well as characters at the Electric cinema, Notting Hill Gate. This relates to Brenton’s treatment of Christie; never mind Beckett’s couple by the sea-side. And they were buried up to their necks in sand. It all subsisted under one title: *Happy Days*).

THREE

A dare-devil leap such as this one needed no introduction outside itself, as Bromax dived down to a certain demise. Or, at the very least, a secret part of his spectatorship hoped for this... maybe it was what the future foretold? Yet, wait a moment, for all of this misses a diabolical gleam in his eye – something which has little to do with the suit that caparisons his body. Did we mention it a while back? Well, it covered his anatomy in a skin-hugging way – what with two horns, plus an imaginary (or suspended) tail. It was his Red-devil outfit (so to say); i.e., what we might call his equivalent of the aeronautics team. As he dived (the American namesake would be ‘dove’) down... various thoughts raced through his heated brain. Yet, even as he parted company with the bi-plane, above the cerulean, his partner, Bromide, steered the craft safely to port.

Bromax Life-aid continued to plummet down amidships – and yet, as he did so, he was aware of various or distant stirrings. These took on the habits of forgotten dreams; where a screeching *coda* of gulls lay up over the summer sun. It burnt deeply into the country’s tundra; if only to turn over the meaning of this baleful

light. All of which occurred against a bright-yellow dawn... one that saw a golden effulgence, even the talent of Zeus. As young Bromax raked away at the leaves, in the extended garden, his aunt rested, under a parasol, in the distance... since the sun beat down with a merciless measure. Do you sense its extravagance here; because the optics of such a fusion were always dissimilar? They reared up between these brittle leaves so as to show up the way home – or maybe this was the origination of his deathly fascination, whether it be here in the garden or no? In the distance – under an ormolu casket – and constantly struck yellow, a sheaf of brambles passed, so as to close up a gap in the vegetation. Between these many strokes – or permanent pastures – stood a scarecrow. Its ragged necklace dilated against the gold; and its pattern came to be fortunated by turn. It consisted of rags, stalks, old clothes, *avant-garde* trimmings, and the findings of a hat: it curved back on itself, conically speaking. What was Bromax's abiding interest in this sentinel? It may soon become apparent...

FOUR

Bromax continued his descent – screaming or laughing – as if to all the world he was completely mad. Gradually, the bi-plane, flown by his colleague Bromide, disappeared into the distance. As he circled again and again, gymnastically, amid the clouds (sic) he knew one thing – and this was the chosen quality of fate. He understood whether he would survive this gamble or not – he sensed it with an inner certainty. Such a thought, a reversal of Greek predestination, made him shudder and laugh in his scarlet costume. He also became more and more aware of his younger self; that is, the one who insisted on watching him from the ground. Yes indeed, this lonesome stranger followed two courses – one of which was contemporary. This involved an unscrupulous photographer who hid, on the tundra, amid the crowds and attendant dandies. They were drawn by the theatre of it – even the nascent thought of Sartre's *No Exit*. (Note: this is to

say that the escapologist, in a factotum's dream, will not escape). Given this recording, he recognised his earlier incarnation – or carnate blossom. An ugly child (this); one who was avid for success, determined to watch a death-scene, and photograph it for the dailies. He intended to sell it to the highest bidder – most assuredly. (This is even as he stood down in the crowd, collected together, and surrounded by banners, streamers, weather balloons, dirigibles, and the fun-of-the-fair...)

+

Yet Bromax's first version, or variant, took on a different course as well. In this simulacrum, the sun still burnt down before a mansion on the south coast... wasn't its name Buda, by any chance? Nonetheless, the scarecrow was lifted onto a mound of its own, amid the lightning, and these thunder-flashes were associated with dolorous rumbles. Didn't a *murder of crows* descend (via the horizon) and across the beetling prospect of so much rain? They lit out afore this lost adventure... and the sky itself became creased under such a maelstrom. Bromax, as a stripling, remembers the birds' descent – even the descant of a crew of rooks. Each one screamed and whooped as it came down out of a sky that was azure and washed, from top-to-toe. The thunder, rain and lightning shouldn't take away from the drama of the scene, however, since what really captures it is the scarecrow. For, in all honesty, this straw-man (tied to a flexible post) lies aslant of his own rigging... and he grips the moon's surface with tendrils of forgotten grace. These are branches that scratch against some forbidding glass – even though the scarecrow's form was slightly horizontal, veering to one side, brackish, broken up and purple (vaguely).

+

Now though, the middle-aged Bromax is approaching the earth's surface with alarming speed... and he mentally prepared himself for what was to come.

FIVE

As in all moments of stress – time seems to stand still, becomes overcast, and the clocks go into reverse... in unlocked or studied closets. Let's see: Bromax had placed his hands together, almost in prayer, as his red-hued body nears the top-soil. By the by, he began to exert a perfect fall – trained in the circus, as he was. And his hands extended over some welcoming ground... wasn't it a trifle watery when one began to consider it afresh? Anyway, some redwoods, spruce, conifers, and other ancient trees surrounded the site... and, wonder of wonders, do we detect an 'idiot' grin on Bromax's features? Could he be about to meet his maker in any way possible? Who knows? But Bromax, even in a moment of pressure, is not immune to the pull of his younger self. Doesn't he stand in front of the gable windows at Buda, down on the Kent coast, looking outwards... and what does he see? Why, it happens to be the downwards cast of these crows – or its murder, depending on your pick. It's also characterised by the sea-storm – as it lashes the mansion's front – above a lowering sky. Surely it looks out to the French coast across from a foaming channel? Do you detect it? Since the lightning forks down, next to a vermilion blazon, while the rain strains the hillock by the sea. All of the manse's windows were open and burning orange – no matter how wide or mullioned in aspect. Similarly, the crows are attracted down to a spindly thing made of straw – that is, a scarecrow, with its claws splayed, and its back to the ocean. It looks to all the world like a rare polkadot – even a grim reminder of the Reaper's business, possibly a sprite or a witch's familiar. In any event, this silhouette seems to suck in rather than exclude the light!

SIX

To finish with his circus plunge, though... it appears from one perspective (at least) that Bromax is saying his prayers. The amphitheatre of his rage has extended, if only by a tiny amount

(you see). Nonetheless, his scarlet suit was about to execute a pirouette, even the semblance of a dive from a board. Immediately, wavelets of water were churned up or tossed about, so as to prevent placidity on the lake's surface. For – Bromax contrived it – that a shimmering glaze of water extended afore him... and this is what he catapulted into. He adopts a perfect four and dives into a cool, sterile, tangential pond; the like of which causes his body to freeze momentarily. (This occurs even given the thermal character of his Red-devil suit). It didn't clog up with icy water – in any event – given the body-hugging nature of its extravagance.

+

Yet, still and all, the scarecrow images from his past continue to stalk him... and they festoon his dreams, even his inner consciousness. For a miscellany of crows continues to streak down, in front of Buda and with thunder's threat in their ears. (Note: ever since Daphne du Maurier's *The Birds*, a Gothic piece, a congerie of fowl waxes sinister.) Eventually, these birdies gather around the scarecrow, whipping, riding and screaming (sic) amidst the rain. It – a watery deluge – continues to lash down, to evacuate, or to render itself still. Moreover, the scarecrow looks on – lifelessly, to be sure, yet with a strange illumination. Might there be a red gleam (as of an iris) in its inner socket (?)... surrounded, as it was, by rind, sacking, and the livery of potato bags. These accompanied the remainder of his kit – such as a battered hat, an empty face, large (almost square) eyes, and the imposition of a new inquisition. Why were the birds so attracted to this wretched specimen (?); no-one could really tell... come to think of it. Maybe it had aught to do with the nasal sots or pheromones of wild-fowl... these, alone, when one considers it, can teach you the meaning of fear. Oh my yes... Given this, Bromax threw himself about in the pool until he realised that he was being pursued – by, of all things, a tele-photo lens. It exists in the sweating palms of our drama's other character, a journalist and photographer by the name of Rex Silver-dust. He was a young man, an apothecary of absence,

wearing a check cap with a matching jacket. He is also kitted out *avec* a woollen scarf – the latter orange in hue. In truth, Silver-dust had to hide his disappointment... for this example of Scot Free (so to say) has saved himself. He'd managed to prove his credentials as an escapologist... that is, a mountebank in Houdini's or Cogliostro's tradition. Do you sense a connexion? Since Rex Silver-dust, our rival *persona* in Aeschylus' drama, had a private trauma to do with birds. In his case, it involved being left alone in a purple out-house or chapel – as the birds came in. Could it have amounted to one of those approximate structures – out Buda way – which've been left there in order to test the waters? To be sure: a broken gap in these trellises or railings – on one side of the chalet – caused it to lilt to the side, and made it capable of letting in the wild birds. They would come – if there was some magical device to summon them – and his iris extended... it knew the limitations of blue. (A similar event, if we remember it, has to do with the whipperwhorls – and their antics – in H.P. Lovecraft's stories of New English deceit.) Slowly, oh-so slowly, the crowd of birds descend on Silver-dust – the object of his grand-mother's wrath, and they peck at him... somewhat mercilessly. The isolation of a child, in such circumstances, can be imagined – and Silver-dust, a talented individual, grew up warped in various ways. Why was he here, anyway (?); if not to capture a performance *artiste's* death-throes... After all, he'd intended his report on this artistry to have been an obituary... replete with photos. The piece could have slewed in either direction (you see); whether towards the normative or the sinister.

+

One only has to think of *La Furas del Baus* (Vermin from the Sewers), a Catalan art *troupe* whose work consisted of 'happenings'. These were a species of negative circus – so to speak. And they are characterised by car crashes, races, mock-crucifixions, and the consumption of offal. It refuses to circumscribe itself, even after the adoption of other identities.

+

Irrespective of this – Silver-dust remembers crouching in the dust, in the studio’s dank under-belly, as the birds mount their attacks... To be fair: the outside of the structure speaks to an artist’s studio – or the possibility of a writer’s hut, even the device which George Bernard Shaw made use of. (It exists as a sort of log-cabin on the margins of his estate – once his fortune had been made.) *Shaw’s Corner*, however, indicates imagination’s limits; since the form was four-sided, peaked as to its roof, studied over, and only open to the elements at a slant. While – if viewed from the other side – the door appears to be more ornate or filigreed. It besports (albeit slightly) a token of regard or intent – even the possibility of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics. Look at this... if you will. Since the doorway revealed an elevated portico, replete with Victorian pedigrees, and various exotic motifs, reminiscent of Beckford’s *Vathek*, crowded in on every side. They sought to shut out the wooden struts beneath them, perchance, so as to limit any story-telling *outside*. All of these narratives occur *in* the mind, by any dexterity, this is the point... whether we wish to disturb those ghosts, down by Buda, and out on the Kent coast.

+

To return to the present tense: Bromax took a long, hard look at his companion afore speaking. Then he said without circumspection: “Don’t be too disappointed, Rex! And do not go and start either – at the very fact (or temerity) which has given me your name. Yes indeed; I have survived – it was fated or in the stars. But don’t worry... if you like, I will give you access to my secret... as to why I can survive these death-leaps. Let’s meet for dinner tonight. We shall rendezvous at a restaurant called *Briganzi’s* in Soho’s Poland Street, London, W1. It has a large Grecian torso outside – in a boudoir of steel-wire... It is almost a combination of modernism, classicism and Soviet realism... I’ll see you later at a table inside the front window at 7.30pm – be there! [The journalist could merely stammer his acknowledgement]. Then this inveterate showman gave the young man a card, it read:

BROMAX LIFE-AID; Escapologist Extraordinaire:
Indestructible?

SEVEN

They met at a popular restaurant later on and were shown to a leading bay. This was next to the windows and overlooked the street. The eatery existed in a highly fashionable part of West London – and Bromax swept away a ‘reservation’ card with the back of his hand. (He managed to rescue the situation, socially speaking, by slipping a ten pound note into one of the waiter’s palms).

+

Yet, still and all, various images from their past continued to haunt both Bromax Life-aid and Rex Silver-hunt. Nearly all of them revolve around one memory... and this relates to a book, out of place amongst others, and contained on a library’s shelves. Might it be one of those black-bound recesses in Buda, up from a pebble beech, on the Kent coast? Hythe was the town where this house became vacant by the sea. While the volume in question is *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Washington Irving. How can this be relevant, you ask? But already, the moment’s gone and Bromax resumes talking about his secret... This is the knack that enables him to coin deathly exploits!

EIGHT

Bromax held up a strange watch in his hand, but it was in no way a wrist-watch. At first sight, it looked like an advanced stop-watch with a gold frontispiece, a chain and multiple dials. Behind Bromax there curve various restaurant lamps – themselves curlicued, golden, ormolu and left over. “This is the secret of my success”, confided Bromax. “And it was bequeathed to me by Giant Falstaff, the *artiste* and escapologist, just before he died. He’d also been an all-in wrestler earlier in his career.”

Silver-hunt seems to be unconvinced by this *demarche*, yet Bromax proves to be very convincing. The dial itself consists of five spirals – all of them indicating distinct figures or numbers. These sigils were magical in quality, however, and they limit a death-watch... that is, they illustrate various marks, speeds and avenues. For this device – passed across generations of escapologists – determines the very hour of one's death. It does it in terms of the day, hour, past minute and forgotten instant of the year. By making use of it – therefore – Bromax has managed to escape negativism – i.e., an untimely end via a violent fall or constriction. For these types (certainly) life can begin and end in a captured box. Such events disclose (only) the finitude of H.P. Lovecraft's *The Loved Dead*; and it hints at a claustrophobia raised to the nth power.

+

But other dreams were set off by these associations – particularly the fact that Bromax Life-aid wound the watch afore every stunt... just to prove whether his number had come up.

+

In one moment, the two of them remembered suggestive notes... most of which relate to the house known as Buda on the Kent coast. One apprehends it through salt-spray – and yet, in all honesty, the spirit of Derek Jarman's property down at Dungeness possesses it. To be sure: we walk through death's valley into a new darkness... and the odd opening to the elements pokes up via the roof. Can it be patched up in its magnificence? Anyway, the manse lay open before a lowering sky; and it raised those beams to the heavens out of a red-mist. Most of its accoutrements were Edwardian – even neo-Victorian – and they lavished some forgotten, possibly Rhodesian, days. There were many brown photographs around (for the two of them), showing them in the care of their grand-mother, Ungodly Moose. She stood between them in an old dress and within a frame of rolled-gold. Could Buda really be a freak-house; even an arboretum or an aviary? Who knows? It was open to the elements, dishevelled, unhallowed and refuses to answer back. A

complex webbing (or its distaff) covered over Buda's top... and no light can follow from such an unlikely taper. Various dreams, tropes, sigils and forgotten grandeurs linger on... and these became possessed by a new fear. Can it be the fresh immensity of a skull in the ground? For it had been dug up by rising water-levels propelling it to the surface, nothing more... Also, does anyone remember the birds coming in --- screeching, ravening, screaming, hollering and creating a racket. They descend via an orange rick – and all of it resembles the dark, boiling turquoise of a volcano. It was an Etna in reverse, even though the birds carom down like stalks or, alternately, some indices in a modernist painting by Michaux where the marks are the corroboration of what exists. May this signify aught?

+

Meanwhile, and back in the restaurant, the story is repeated. Bromax talks about the death-watch – or unholy stop-watch – and Silver-hunt is sceptical about it. Might this surfeit of horrors be down to a time-piece in a man's hand?

NINE

Bromax continues to speak about the stop-watch; it was quite clearly one of his prize possessions. And neither man – whether the escapologist or the stripling – can forget other dreams which affront them. These involve waking up at midnight in order to hear the rain coming down outside Buda – it's part-and-parcel of those storms that disfigure the south coast. No-one really vouchsafes for it – not now, at least. Since a reddish light was open, across a louvered roof, and in a new room. Sleep proved impossible once it had been so forcibly removed. Gradually, either of these two men – when they were young – set out to investigate. They closed down their own offertory's path; primarily by topping off the stair's level. Would they close in on the step's bottom: given that the entrance, in its grandeur, speaks to Erich von Stroheim's 'twenties films. It understands the

nature of *class* or distinction, even in an enclosed space like Buda.

+

It is now or never in a restaurant of life-and-death – and Bromax was still discussing his stop-watch... as well as its contribution to Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. (Or, perchance, this illustrates any other circus novels that you might wish to discuss... such as Ray Bradbury's or – in spirit – Edgar Allan Poe's. What about J.G. Ballard's *Vermillion Sands* or Beckett's *Happy Days* as sojourns in popular culture – by making use of brutality and the sinister?)

TEN

Suddenly, a brace of machine-gun bullets cut across the restaurant, hitting Bromax, and causing him to catapult into the air. He crashes down onto the table, drags at its cloth, and disappears underneath it. The violence was completely unexpected... and might it relate, uncertainly, to the reservation that the escapologist had stolen away? Now then, much of the eatery's front had been destroyed, women were screaming, and a police siren sounds in the distance. Also, and despite the fact that chairs were hurled about, Rex Silver-hunt emerges unscathed from this ordeal. He notices whether Bromax Life-aid's fingers are wrapped around his special watch (as well). His bloodied mittens enclose it in a vice-like grip; and the clock seems to have stopped at a particular instant. The journalist strove to investigate... it was his profession, after all.

ELEVEN

Silver-hunt paused slightly, coughed, and picked up the watch – it had definitely stopped at a particular time. But it didn't appear to be broken or smashed as a result of its ordeal. Moreover, the mobsters – two of them – who had fired on Bromax Life-aid realised their mistake... they'd meant to target a rival gangster

who'd reserved the same table. If you recall, Bromax had done his best to alleviate that... now the stop-watch declared 8.35pm, Sunday the 15th of March 1983; the exact moment when Bromax Life-aid, escapologist, slipped off his last skin...

At first Silver-dust, a lustful character, was amazed at the correspondence – yet, gradually, he began to see the possibilities (...) He might be able to replace Bromax Life-aid, by virtue of this dimension-changing alternative. May it be so? He stared avidly at the death-watch in his palm... could this be the source of a worldly fortune, as it had been, initially, for Bromax? Indeed, the keenness with which he looked at the time-piece – his lividness, acuity and watchfulness – made people think he was sympathising with Bromax's plight. In fact, he was dwelling on his own advantage. Yet first, he would have to determine the hour of his own demise... unbeknownst to those around him he cleaned and then clicked the stop-watch into life – and slowly, jerkily, it responded. Around and around the five dials moved, all in relative correspondence to each other, and finally this dialectic ceased. Did it not intone a dance of skeletons – imaginatively – around a set of empty chairs? They were topped with felt and tassels – to be sure. The watch stopped (after a few half-measures) at an indeterminate date: it was a good fifty years off. Rex Silver-dust swallowed and then turned exultant, his fist clasped and unclasped in triumph. Moreover, the stripling's face is exhilarated, proud, unchallenged, fitful, amoral and beyond caring. This was the key to his triumph!

+

All of this relates to a previous dream involving his grandmother... for had she not risen from the earth; a skeleton in an old-fashioned dress? The hair trailed off her skull in a bun – yet remained somehow present o'er the barren cranium. This always resolved itself in the script – or bony affidavit – of a skull. Hadn't she lifted herself from the ground in order to persecute the living by her own effort? The word 'Rex' seems to hang or sibilate on her bony lips... while the hands were elongated,

skeletal, as well as fingering or delving into the sand. Wasn't Buda, the old home-stead, next to a sandy beach which ran alongside a pier on its frontage? Some bath-huts or houses, for swimmers, were also in evidence. Yet Rex (without Bromax) has no real time to scream... since her strength seems inhuman, in that she had burrowed up from the earth, denying the sod's forbidding texture.

+

Events moved quickly now, and Rex Silver-dust promptly re-invented himself as an escapologist or *dare-devil*. He dispensed with the circus elements and modernised the show. Eventually a large grand-stand, with a Ferris wheel behind it, took him up and he successfully stood in a wall of flame, or had piles of fireworks lit underneath him. The audience lapped it up – although some of the stunts were decidedly dangerous and without benefit of Health & Safety. For dress (or accoutrements) he wore an overall body-suit in black... It was rather reminiscent of a racing driver – particularly of motor-cycles. After each successful tourney Rex lives to tell the tale; and yet his eyes began to glow preternaturally. He is clearly getting madder in terms of an inner debility and, occasionally, the old dream of the grand-mother's corse coming up from the earth haunted him. It suggested the bias of a new fulfilment; the likelihood of which carries forth a new charnel house. It crossed its own bows (you see) before the nature of this oblivion... Let's look again! Since she moved up from the loam, so as to cling to a red silhouette amid the black. It all rested on a supposition of absence – even though an infra-red camera might reveal the reality of what went before (...)

+

In one of *The Incredible's* show-times, however, he rammed a flaming-car, containing himself, into a mesh fence. He escaped unscathed as heretofore, and as the stop-watch had predicted. Yet a spark or ingot escaped from the vehicle and damaged the front of the auditorium where a female spectator was sitting... No-one thought about it at the time – certainly not Silver-dust, who had no compassion for his audience whatsoever. Nevertheless, as he

sat in his open Rolls-Royce one day, in a fashionable western district, a man gained revenge on him by throwing a live grenade into his car. There was an almighty explosion; yet Rex remained secure in the belief that he could survive it. Needless to say, he did so in a devastated manner – that is, as an example of Dalton Trumbo’s *Johnny Got his Gun*. Whereby his diction – physiologically – was reduced to that of a head and a partial torso, without limbs or other extremities. He isn’t *The Incredible* (his stage-name) in any sense now; and his skull was completely bandaged... after the affectation of H.G. Wells’ *The Invisible Man*. There happened to be a space only for the eyes, nose and lips... although the chief doctor in the case, when discussing it, referred to the strange stop-watch that had been discovered with the ‘corpse’, albeit one which was “alive”. The stop-watch predicted a date later that day – despite the fact which says that Rex’s demise remains a half-century off. Could it refer to the bewhiskered surgeon (?); or, more precisely, might Rex’s grandmother rise from the dirt to pre-decease him? She may put those bony or skeletal fingers around his neck... and press... and press. Or alternatively, will she pursue him out of Buda and towards the sea, down by the coast, and amid the circling gulls? These cried out with the savagery of nether beasts. After all, she’d been related to both of them over time: Bromax Life-aid and Rex Silver-hunt (depending).

THE END

BIS' DIET
A non-fiction

A castle in Scotland with over a thousand years on the clock boasts more ghosts than you can shake a stick at! The fiefdom in question was Glamis and Shakespeare set *Macbeth* there, together with an over-view and much commentary from Sir Walter Scott.

Ancestrally, the seat had been a furlough for various British monarchs and is at present one of Elisabeth II's berths – her sister, the late Princess Margaret, was born there.

Earl Strathmore, the Queen's cousin, has been in residence and is believed to have spied the Grey Lady – a female apparition of the upper air. When chided by the press Strathmore refused to think about anything bordering on exorcism!

The castle – like all others of its type – has a secret chamber or ventricle. One of the major stories involving this oubliette lies with the Earl of Crawford, an inveterate gambler during the reign of James II. He was passionately addicted to gambling and on one Saturday night he insisted on carousing, with the cards, into the neighbouring Sunday. The other bravos refused. But Crawford dared the Devil himself to come and play lots with him, since he intended to conjure with the cards straight through Early Mass and beyond. A roll of thunder (accompanied by lightning) split the heavens and Lord Bis appeared, so the credulous believe, to gamble endlessly in the secret chamber over Lord Alistair Lindsay's (Crawford's) soul. All of it can turn on a roll of the dice or a spin of the Ace of Diamonds!

Another hoary legend deals with Lady Jane (Glamis), widow of the sixth Thane of Glamis, James V. She was condemned for witchcraft, membership of a dark or heathen circle, and even having designs on the monarch's life. Burnt alive at the gibbet, a

resident – and not in healing – of the secret room, where she boiled up her potions, Lady Jane’s screams merge and meld in with others in the darksome cube: a punishment block, if ever there was one!

Other infractions include the Ogilvy clan, back in feudal days, who were starved to death by enemies in that very example of the Stark Museum... like the one in Soho, London, dedicated to memorialising torture. There is no end to such deceit! Further Glamis apparitions stalk the chapel, its cloisters, walls, windows and ledges... none of them a witness to the light that shines alone. A nameless warrior (possibly from the Highlands) and dressed in full armour is often met in a dusty corridor... Yet Glamis survives as a traditionalist relic, and an *exemplum* of the old Scotland which has been uncorrupted by modernity. It remains a place where the living-dead might linger without fear of molestation. – JB.

VENUS FLY-TRAP

A short story

Characters in the drama:~

Doctor Mordred (a pathologist and botanist); Dr Falicia Fairweather, his female rival in the town.

PART THE FIRST (1)

A lambent moon grows out of a purple crest and, truthfully told, it holds our awe in. For – most certainly – this disc was pitted, rough, slightly deranged and looked for all the world like a bottle-top stuck onto the sky. Even at a distance of many thousands (in terms of miles) this square or moon-disc glares at you. But – down beneath in the pit – Mordred was hard at work in his garden. He is burying a puppet, a manikin or a ventriloquist's dummy (so to say). Do you remember those items or anti-manikins which come alive at night, in accord with Thomas Ligotti's diction? You must recall, also, that Doctor Mordred – whether ancient or decrepit in hue – was not necessarily evil. No sir: since his actions are governed by a different ethos: i.e., that of the timelessness of God's joy. By any warmth or procrastination, he rejected Saint Augustine and the Pelagian infraction. These were ideas (sic) that muted the angelic or the demonic pathways to Man. Indeed, the world or Fate misunderstood Mordred in many respects – for no Manichean was he! He believed, *au contraire*, in the formulae of science, balance and order – that is: the sort of template which Fred Hoyle favoured. Don't those who disprivelege it call it 'scientism'? Nonetheless, Mordred knew which path he had passed down towards Hades – and he understood that the Gods favoured the brave, if not the justified. Had he been just in his deliberations? Yet, wherever the truth lay, he knew something about his naming... since, in related bouts of yore, Mordred had been a minor player at the Round Table. He happened to be a male

witch or warlock; i.e., a practitioner of magic who was married to Morgan La Fey, the Celtic medusa. By any token, he hurried forwards in order to light up his awakening, even though Malory's *Mort d'Arthur* refuses an easy mention of him. All he really did that is malevolent, therefore, was to oppose Arthur's will at the Round Table.

PART THE SECOND (2)

Now then, the moon's refulgent glow set off the garden with a silvern frit, as Mordred continued to dig. His spade entered the soft loam (or dewed grass) and his leather-boots momentarily rested on its cross-bar. What do you think? It is difficult to realise or sum it up, properly speaking! In any event, the soil was soon up-turned and varied puppets were then placed beneath the ground... or its surfaces' plenitude. Give it away: since Mordred's digging began apace, if only to treat the grass more leniently this time. He dug into verdant *soma*, if only to relieve the tension in himself. Up ahead – and by way of some sort of transference – the wind melded into the greenery without the House. And Mordred turned to look at the sun – what we might call, by Heaven's gate, *The Empire of the Sun*. What was happening here – in all reality? Especially when we remember that Mordred is a magician, albeit a secular one – and even a native of Toad land! Could this be an artificiality; or maybe the transference of one mind to another's ken? Mordred dreamed deeply of his betterment; and he even acknowledged the superficiality of the earth – that is, its chthonian mantle. Do you wish to seize such a trajectory? And if so, are we not there (also) with Mordred? He signals the renewal of a heart tremor – if not one gust afore the Fates. Maybe such a life-time can never really be thought of? Gradually, and over time, these vaudeville outlets, puppets, manikins and nerds all disappear. They go down into the oblivion of nothingness. Why should Mordred care (?); since he is at peace with the high gods: themselves those multiplicitous shadows which pass between dimensions. In such a scenario as

this one mad-cap follows another... somewhat unbelievably! Let's follow this integer and look out at the garden: it proves to be ripe, unplucked, forever unbidden, and rather worked-over in terms of its soil. Furthermore, and as J.G. Ballard once declared, it took after what we might call *An Atrocity Exhibition*. Behind him lay the House – and it proved to be a grand vehicle made up of pavilions. These had small frontispieces which worked themselves up into larger cascades; each one bearing upon it doom's impress. Some of the structures were metallic; others softer and more refulgent. Yet Mordred paid no mind to the over-arching beams; what with their filigree and ormolu strictures. They were empanelled together one after another. Do you reckon upon this, my masters? A strange and lambent glow transfixes each casement – all of them seemingly mullioned. They're contained in thick and ovalesque glass. Moreover, the sky above was of a deep turquoise – that is to say, one which finishes off the abandonment of its own story. Ivy, tangle-weed and various creepers all infested these apertures. (Also, and as an aside, the entire garden was lit up with every species imaginable. It proved to be a botanist's delight: with shades of lilac, pink, lemon yellow, scarlet, cerulean and deep black, et cetera...) Nor does Doctor Mordred identify himself with anything beyond this emerald patch – to be sure.

Yet suddenly, and by a fleeting flash, we notice that Mordred isn't alone amongst the shrubbery. Or is he? For, way up above him, strange tendrils emerge in the night-time or just before dawn. They have bark-like trunks which were undulating and yet firm... as well as smaller flowers poking out amidships. Yet, when one thinks of it, what draws the eye to their amplitude is the stamen. (Note: this was the masculine part of a plant's identity). And yet, in fact, it serviced here as the requirement for a Head. You see, these growths or genetically modified crops, *per se*, are alive. They yearn and thrust forward with a mammalian intent. Let it be: in that they configure, at least within their own photosynthesis, the crux of what has happened

before. To what can we attribute this? Ah, wait and see, but whatever else, we can say that these Plant-heads were divas, delinquents, super-sensory clusters [if not cluster bombs] in the making. They had white-to-yellow heads, coal grey eyes, nostrils and long trailing mouths. For an instant (and only that) they thrashed and flailed around Mordred, up in the sky, afore disappearing. Who or what were they, me ducks? Well, I shall tell 'e; they are Mordred's children!

THIRD PART (WITHDRAW RED)

All of a sudden, a distant bell sounded in the house's gloom or its hidden recesses. Mordred turned slowly and gazed back down the garden path – covered over, as it was, with nettles, undergrowth and creepers. To be sure! The dusk was setting in as Mordred departed, and the sky above his skull seemed cerulean... or even darker than that, an ultramarine. (Wasn't this, a very long time ago, the name of an autobiographical novel by Malcolm Lowry?) Let's pay it no heed – since Mordred was an elderly gentleman, well over sixty years of age, at any rate. And he wore funereal black – somewhat like an undertaker, much rather than a botanist. Also, he affected a watch-chain, a dress-shirt with cuffs, some tight lined-trousers (of a deep grey), and a darkish jacket of uncertain cut. His limbs were relatively small (yet perfectly formed) in relation to the rest of his body. Meanwhile, what attracted most observers to Mordred was the issue of the Head! For, in concord with Descartes' principles, Mordred indicated a mind-body split... at least in terms of an *anima*, no matter how reversible. In short, his skull proved to be domed, pyramidal and high-arched. Whilst the pink flesh was relatively young (or un-lined) in terms of its fresh complexion. Underneath a heavily-seated brow, however, the features beetled. And, to a neutral observer, they were doubtless forbidding, trying or mildly terrifying. – Let us try to imagine a portrait of Mordred by de Kooning, for example. This proves to be a scatter-gun approach to the problem – yet nothing can really be done about

it. Particularly when one is assessing a dome, a rectilinear orb, the shape of an Otis, together with a scientist's pores or mouth.

+

Somewhat sullenly, Doctor Mordred tramped into his house by the back-door. He swerved to avoid a conservatory as he did so.

FOURTH PART

Meantime, there was a furtive rustling in this arbour or its fields, and something struggled underground. It gave itself the airs of a roving existence, do you see? Most especially, a rootedness swam to meet its fate (fete?) and all, a fact which had little to do with Simone Weill's concepts. By any token, Mordred's shape flitted like a ghoul or bat, as he crossed over the gap betwixt garden and house. Or – if you might prefer – this was the interface between a house and a *greenhouse*, as it were.

+

Why didn't you foresee such a notion afore it occurred (?); particularly if you are said to possess second sight, like the child in Stephen King's *The Shining*.

+

Look again: slowly, oh-so slowly, the door opened to reveal Doctor Falcia Fairweather, his rival in the small-town where they both lived. She happened to be a tall, raw-boned woman who had survived at least sixty summers. She carried a small black-bag on which the letters MD had been stamped or marbled. She also wore a coif, a stole, a large black-dress, top and coat – as well as a Pompidou hat (redolent of Louis XV's reign). All in all, a part of her rig was more suitable for Ascot than provincial doctoring. Mordred, by virtue of his turn, had put his fingers to his lips, mock-apocalyptically. He looked slightly perplexed, but in no way frightened. His mole-like or crustaceous exterior is observed, as the light plays up and down it. It casts one register of skin (then another) into some form of darkness. Everywhere, and in sundry nooks and places, plants burst forth in abundance. Truly, Mordred's entire life (or hearth) was a temple to the rights

botanic. It registered one thing and then another – in all inevitability.

“Doctor Falcia Fairweather, what a marvellous surprise!”, yodelled the male doctor. He was lying, of course.

FIFTH PART

“Really (!)”, expostulated Fairweather, “don’t think that I’ve come unprepared.” With this assertion she began her rally (there was no question about that). She also prodded Mordred – metaphorically – with a black parasol or umbrella which she carried with her. Yet, in all honesty, she didn’t succeed in touching him at all.

“What am I guilty of?”, he enquired with a meekness that’s quite clearly put on.

“Many things”, interrupted his unannounced guest. “For one matter (above all) you’ve purloined manikins or dolls from the Dolls’ Hospital – as it used to be called in a southern English town. May one call it so by a hint of desperation? And, as well as this, you’ve then buried them in your garden – for what insane or mad-cap purport, I know not. All I comprehend, Doctor Mordred, is that you are unfit to practice medicine. To which end: I have contacted the ethics committee of the BMA (the British Medical Association) in the hope of having you struck off!

“Struck off”, Mordred repeated to himself in a metallic whisper, and the noise seemed to come from under his tongue. Did he render himself snake-like, thereby? But Falcia Fairweather was merely warming to her theme...

SIXTH PART

Mordred thought for a moment, and then remained silent, as he saw the umbrella aimed at him. Yet he soon shrugged it off. “Really, Miss Fairweather”, he remarked jauntily, “you must be prepared to focus your talents elsewhere. I say again, for your interest, that I opposed female entry into the profession [of medicine] and I still do!”

Nonetheless, Mordred’s mind wandered in various mad-cap stages or intrigues – and he saw a personification of the plants under the ground. These were those carnivorous hybrids, a machine-tool unknown to Man, that he was developing beneath the loam. They were laid bare by the Muppets he fed to them... and they existed in some soft ground or lawn. Weren’t they moist and succulent? Then again, he saw them as upright, steel dodge’ums or apprentices. For one gazed, in an asylum, out of a heavily mullioned window. Didn’t he embody the catalepsy of a disused clown? Also, and as an out-rider to the above, no-one suspected the person next to him of having no features. Instead of this, he wore a balaclava, a mask within a mask, rather like a Clive Barker figure who was communing with himself.

SEVENTH PART

Falicia Fairweather was not finished with her indictment, however, and she could also tune into one’s dreams. To bring it to a point – she saw a moon, which was itself a rock in the heavens, holding up the sky or its cerulean after-glow. In her imagination, there were no plants – let alone a variant on John Wyndham’s *Triffids* – in sight. What she observed (instead) is a motley collection of individuals – many of them suffering from acute mental distress. They were in the anxiety or ‘distressed’ section of a psychiatric hospital – something which could well be described as a *sanctuary*. Woe and betide anyone who refuses this sanction, since a group of persons gestured around a pack of

cards. Moreover, their gesticulations proved to be redundant under such a pellucid glow. In any event, Falcia recited her indictment. Perhaps, in a way that was reminiscent of Beckett, it proves to be an attempt to break the silence. Oh yes---!

Doctor Falcia Fairweather: “I have warned you for months, Mordred, about your carryings on!”

Doctor Mordred: “And what might this amount to, my dear?”

Falcia Fairweather: “Please, do not assume a patronising tone, I beg you, Mordred. Such a conclusion or valency is not one that I’m prepared to tolerate.”

EIGHTH PART

Mordred listened to Doctor Falcia Fairweather, but he did so with only half an ear. His listening profile was dissociative (as we might say). But his verbal memory is stirred in an unashamed way. At the beginning, he noted that this matriarch had rapped on the door-frame; at once pushing, pulling, and even prodding with her umbrella. [Note: it happened to be a feminine parasol, dressed in black, as well as being compressible]. Mordred let her talk – in truth; he didn’t mind this *Farewell to Arms*, with or without Hemingway’s diction.

By the by, their positions altered, as he sought out a reclining posture. This was to be had at the heart of a chair-cum-sofa, the like of which resembled a stamen, or the budding interior of so many plants. Isn’t the stamen indicative of maleness, in botanic terms?

By this little time, Doctor Falcia Fairweather was well into her stride: and she laid out a balance-sheet. It consisted (for the most part) of various accusations against Mordred. To cut to the quick: she accused him of falsifying medical certificates, so that he

could bury a large number of Toys in the garden. His thought processes were obscure, she confessed as much: but she wasn't going to let the matter rest.

Mordred looked a tad jaded or tired, yet he wasn't in the least bit weighed down by this onslaught. He sat there, pricking up his ears, and nodding the occasional assent.

One thing to notice is that the pair are completely assailed, on every side, by plants. They were in a teeming living-room, indeed.

NINTH PART

The physical situation of our two combatants has now turned around – and Mordred is on the left; whilst Fairweather points an accusing finger from the right. Finally we see Mordred, alone and indefatigable, and sat on what looks like an enormous pod or ripening jug. He extends his hand, delicately, so as to smell a rare bloom or its perfume. And, as he does so, one becomes aware of organicism – of a Monist doctrine, or the inter-connectedness of all things. (Note: one also spies a parallel, involving a gigantic spider, in Dennis Wheatley's *The Haunting of Toby Jugg*).

TENTH PART

After a while Doctor Mordred began to have his say, albeit in a less hectoring fashion. He started in a low-key and with a pleasant bed-side manner, so to say. Yet his voice became more strident and assertive as he continued. Let's examine the facts (now): since Mordred gradually warms to his theme. He remembered picking up stray ideas (you see) on a grand tour to Europe. Given his great age, this must have happened a long time ago. The sky was a deep orange that mulcted to purple (in his recollection of it). And he remembered some decisive chess matches with Aleister Crowley, then in his pomp of Edwardian

kaos. By any stint, he [Mordred] moved in divers circles in order to mesmerise and bewitch. Any audience available can take it or leave it! He remembered (rather vaguely) that Crowley and Hubbard – the founder of Scientology – had practised magic, even chemistry, in California together years ago. This had set Mordred off on his lonely trail or cat-walk, do you see? *Quod* the middle-aged doctor and botanist began to seek out new and unheralded vistas, all of which had to do with the nutritional ducts of the vegetable kingdom. To seek out and classify those sources of food for plants – this had become his life-time’s ambition. Until, from a key provided by genetically modified crops, he had learnt how to re-synthesise Venus Fly-Traps. They are plants which, if you recall, are part animal (being carnivorous) and part plant *per se*. It was only then that his companion, Doctor Falcia Fairweather, began to intuit what had been going on.

“You see, my dear”, Doctor Mordred announced rather grandly, “my botanic marvels feed on human flesh!”

As he said this, he drew a sword-stick out and slipped the blade from its scabbard.

“Oh, my God; he’s insane!”, murmured Falcia to herself, as her bonnet fell from the back of her head. What am I to do, she thought?

ELEVENTH PART

The scene changes aloft or apace – much like the two swivelling ‘chariots’ in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Up until now – in their ready discourse – Mordred and Fairweather circled each other. They were admittedly wary, but that was all. Now – however – we shift gears completely; as we spy on Mordred’s manse from without... And it appears to be a subdued husk, caught in poster-paint, and existing under a turquoise sky. (Occasionally – due to

thunderous conditions and much iron in the ground, Spain apes this climate). The mansion also besports, amid its towers and extensions, the *schemata* of David Hockney in terms of raw paint. Likewise, in the scenario where Mordred talks about food (i.e., mock-human fayre) and then draws a sword... why, Falcia moves away from him. She inadvertently starts to run into the garden via a side door. Yet, in all honesty, what concerns us here is a type of contagion – if not a colour scheme that’s primary in its impulses. Without realising it, in her fright, Doctor Falcia Fairweather has gambolled straight into Mordred’s garden by mistake.

TWELFTH PART

For, by dint of any purpose, Fairweather had lost her directional sense and ran into the under-brush *tout court*. A streak of azure (or cerulean) then came down and almost clove her in two, metaphorically. A pink wall, containing some serrated bricks, also held her in its nimble vein. And likewise, one is also free to see various garden implements (such as an old-fashioned watering can) about the place. To reveal all in all: a side-door opened slowly – rather like the vampiric scene in F.W. Murnau’s film *Nosferatu* in 1926. Doctor Mordred stood in the moon-light, and he looked very dapper in his Edwardian Sunday-best, while he held aloft a glowing orb. It soon turned out to be a lantern of yesteryear – that is, down to its very fixtures and fittings!

THIRTEENTH PART

By some sort of mistake, Falcia had emerged into the outer garden – itself beyond an arbour filled with every green assortment. It was unbelievable (in its way) and yet virtually all the plants on earth – in one form or another – were crammed into this space. Also, the green fingers of Mordred have waxed livid or procreative... to be able to create such an abundance. At one level, it was almost magical. Mordred appeared – now – in a

magenta'd haze; and he said in a metallic whisper: "It is almost midnight, my dear! It's an auspicious moment, because they blossom in the full moon or under its lambent beam. These are my very children... in truth."

FOURTEENTH PART

She attempted to rise for a moment or two; and yet, all of a sudden or by a craven motion, she found herself all at sea. The moon glinted over Mordred's battlements, but this had little to do with her present calamity. For bind-weed or creepers (of a sullen sort) rise up in order to enclose her... And this constriction (of whatever kind) prevented her from moving or making her escape. In this sense, she resembled a girl in a magician's act at the circus – and, to be sure, Mordred was the male witch, warlock or mage. She then fainted quite away with a resultant moan. "Oooah!" she let out... all of a moment and, quite possibly, in the direst panic. Nonetheless, she did gain a glance or two of Mordred's Venus Fly-Traps. So intent was he on his prey [Falicia] that the good doctor paid scant attention to them. Lower and lower they bobbed in the moon-light; at once lit-up, frugal, tomato-laden, frit, white girt and Vulcan. They were the result of some fungous progeny – to be sure. Immediately, they grabbed hold of Mordred, who screamed hideously as he realised his mistake, and the torch, brazier or lamp fell from his grasp so as to cascade into an inferno beneath his feet. Soon the heat from the burning garden revived Falicia Fairweather, and she managed, in a confused state, to make her way out into the lane which ran circumadjacent to the botanic ruin within.

After the fire, and amid the legal delay which followed, Doctor Falicia Fairweather purchased Mordred's estate and most of the latter's patients moved over to her practice. She hired a *locum* (admittedly) but otherwise bore the workload without complaint. More importantly, she had the garden cemented over and she never returned to it. The memories involved were too painful,

you see. In such a particular, one re-connects with a work of literature like Ian McEwen's *The Cement Garden* – by all accounts. Yet, in all truth, cement cracks and breaks – particularly if a pressure is being applied *from below*. And on the odd, moon-lit evening some very strange weeds come up, faintly bestir themselves, and then sway under a dismal shade. So, in turn, given what has already happened – this may not be THE END!

OTTO DIX ERITREAN

A short fiction

One man leaps out at another – especially when cast in velvet behind the helms. And he looks like a forgotten ogre... a make-weight or something of a counter-shoe salesman. He wore aught of a bowler-hat, an affidavit of indifference, and his suit appeared to be jet-black – even clown-like in its texture. No matter how subdued it is. Do you see? For the remnants of several axe-heads seem to be left in the gloom, and they glistened with expectancy or forgiveness. Why's he bounding out at a more timid colleague; given the impossibility of a genetic inheritance... particularly in thick fog? It leaves one alone to dream effectively; even if the fancies involved take more after nightmares than anything else. Look again: since his shadowy form broke into a rictus, even one of those daubs from Dubuffet. These indicate the loucheness of child art or – more possibly – the dexterity of *outsiders*... all of whom scythe through reality so as to reach the unconscious and 'kill' it directly. This dark form reveals no correlation with devilry, but its very nature strove to escape from good taste. Might we detect an undercurrent that spoke of greed? His companion, a timid little man, leapt in the air... And this was the opposite of a neo-classical sculpture, being manoeuvred into place on a plinth, underneath a deep blue sky. It bespoke a cerulean after-take... never mind, since his colleague had merely sought to frighten him... abreast of such a frieze as this. Momentarily, an off-shoot of this struggle entered his mind, and he observed a clown on a marble plinth. This figure gestured to the other individuals to leave and walk down there. Why did these two narratives, salty though they were, elide into each other? No-one can really tell – except that the mind does not contain completely concealed compartments. Nor can these exist outside of so many time-pieces... or without the prospect of Roman numerals on a sun-dial. It's a force that refuses to exist outside our minds/the moon... After all, ninety per cent of an unimaginative man exists under the top-soil. We are speaking

directly to the top-flap of the mind, here! But to return to our deadly clown... he gestures under a leafy aspen, so as to provide salt (in a bay) to cure all known diseases. And now, many of those who are to be 'saved' move away – in their pork-pie hats and glasses – from such a saviour. It also chooses to disfigure the mystery which haunts such a fog. Do you hear me, witnesses of entreaty?

“Alone, alone about a dreadful wood
Of conscious evil
Runs a lost mankind
Dreading to find its Father.”

--- W.H. Auden, *For the Time Being*

TWO

We know the meaning of what you want to offer us. It leads off against our better judgement! Since one of his colleagues reveals himself to be the clown-killer – but not! It was only a tease or a dare, in order to frighten a fellow worker. All is a sadism of the nerves (you see) where the strong prey upon the weak in a carnivorous tank. No-one can really sense this impassivity in relation to our fate. Nor can we reject the clown's reality; as he stands there, in imagination, next to a bas-relief and a classical set of stairs. These were irretrievable mounts. While other members of the cast – as well as future victims – pass in review and under the remit of this April fool. Is it really a spring month devoted to folly? By any token, a blue-grey mist – glaucous in its remit – was set off against these predators. And they file by – resembling, for all the world, the figures that Otto Dix dealt with in his work... Wasn't this a social realism, laced with cruelty, which depicted Weimar's desperate side? These individuals were sallow, blue-tinged, shadowy and liable to fade into mist... or something that resembles it. By Gad! The clown's previous victims (seven in number) parade before us; and they pass a classic cornice, moving down its remit, so as to dismount. Don't

they provide a leveller in this amphitheatre? Or, to put it another way, these members of Caspar's crowd (sic) are a modern Greek chorus. It is formally secular, Elias Canetti-related, and yet pre-deceased. All will be made clear in a moment; despite this clown having despatched seven victims already into London's fog.

THREE

The ragging had stopped for a period, primarily because his work colleague, Bob, revealed himself. He believed in a slap-on-the-back masculinity – if only to off-set the possibility of forgiveness. He also found the prospect of multiple murders by a clown to be the height of hilarity. HO! HO!, he bumbled; who can ever be afraid of a man in Zippo's mask... or, more accurately, the criterion of his circus. Do you detect this wisdom? Likewise, a green swathe took off the long or thin quality in his face; thereby to tighten the vocables of those who might escape. Figures come and go (or slip out of consciousness) much like over-arching lamps or trees... Or, perhaps, it resembles those blood vessels – at once pullulating – of a disease... even in its glandular equivalent. For the clown had a female manikin (or store dummy) under his fingers, and this was bound to occupy one who dwelt on death's memory. For, dialectically, in the midst of life its inversion is bound to rear its head. Perhaps it intones an April fool – as the clown's invisible nemesis, his reversal, walks toward him, by the side entrance of one particular asylum... It knew of no other waiting game than the one we expected.

While what did the clown look like? Well, we express ourselves via a mortar-board – perhaps the blanched quality of linseed oil under the skin. In one way, the face is smeared or bleary – as in a modernist extra, and the Billy Smart's features are subdued. It is too unutterably sinister for that. Nevertheless, could Alcestis (the woman who gave up her life for her husband) have aught to teach us here? A sprightly tone survives the smear – or, to be frank,

masters it with green, white, shaven balsam, and any other unctions that seem to be going. Moreover, the lips were full in their dexterity, rubiate or violently red, and finished almost with a woman's perfection. Nor need the asking of such unprotected orbs faze us, since the eyes swivelled in their sockets like pool or snooker balls. They had definitely been fired up one end of the table with a mighty cue – especially (my grandees) if we were to set them against a dun-coloured mack which draped murder's disguise. By precognition, or whatever else, the clown turns at a special moment: in order to initiate us into the Eleusinian mysteries (or something similar). He turns, cadges a slit, and then opens a side-entrance on his personality. No-one can really tell what is to come... yet it represents a Renaissance diagram; possibly with alchemical sigils. Alchemy stood halfway between mysticism and science, and this clown has mastered a troubadour's interpretation of its effects. For a great arcana ensues; whereby the mad broil in their own juices, and are turned over on a trapeze, or possibly some sort of device which is pursuant to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. They twist and turn in such a confined space, albeit when seen by the multitude on every side... and we're aware of an oneiric quality *a la* Hieronymous Bosch. Whereby figures turn and twist, whether agog or afresh, over this beating heart – and often outside the body. In alchemical formulae, the dragon and the lion are often configured – but here, we see a storm-house that is truly alone, writhing, or super-charged. How does the clown – the signification of London's murders – react to this? Why, he opens his arms so as to drink in the day-break, and he refuses to discount Folly, seeing in it, as in the Satyr plays of old, the breaking out of new forms of order. Rest assured!

+

Some policemen now approach our couple from a distance in a way that's fog bedappled. They demand what they are about and seek to exclude them from their houses by prior adventure. Do you sense it? Anyway, this pattern of development soon repeats itself... and the policemen engage in a slice of banter. They soon

ascertain that these clerks live next door to each other, or precisely so, and that one of them, no doubt abusively, is escorting the other one through the mist. The Bobbies (sic) remind them that the clown-killer is about and that they should return home as quickly as possible... and, after a bit of slap-stick, the two men agree to this. They are the timid bank-clerk and his more assertive colleague, Robert D'Arcy Smith, to be sure.

+

Even though, and by dint of some spirit, our time focus shifts to the adventures of the clown. These involve tying a balloon to one of the policeman's heads – and this takes place under a nascent flare. It illuminates everything with a texture which lies between orange and black (to speak of). Again, an administrator waits on the corner of a stool, afore the clown agrees to talk to him. Yet not everything is finished with this – since the trickster's bite is fierce, purblind, terrorised in its silent cinema, and knowing nothing of the Big Top. He was certainly not confined by it – by no means. The clown's scalp looks raw (and even peeled) under this light, as he wheels and stomps – becoming ever more agitated. Not even Michael Moorcock in his pomp could have originated him... At one moment in time – our jester picks up a revolver from a neighbouring bench, prior to juggling with it, playing the fool and engaging in his own version of Celine's *Rigadoon*. We also see his eye close up – the right-sided one this time; and it's blown up, crooked, ill-prepared and bound to end in solace, perhaps the inevitable summit of violence. By any chalk, the gun that he waves about in his hand is soon to go off – to cannon into other things, to slay them, and then to ask for some peace or unforgiveness. At what he fires (perchance) is less significant; and it models itself after one blast from *Joe 90* in order to set things off... It may well begin a new rout or some sort of porcine slaughter amongst the living, although all that the minstrel is doing was executing a wooden-top. This is the simulacrum or glove-puppet of a Policeman; possibly drawn from the storehouse of Punch and Judy. Do you detect this licentiousness? Anyway, a crumpled affidavit – jammed up like a

biscuit-tin – lies sprawled on the floor... and this clown was ready to attend to other duties now.

+

By such a moment, however, our two characters have reached their point of entreaty. They are next to their respective homes or have reached them down a fire-escape... and do we acknowledge the influence of Thomas Ligotti here? Whereupon a mouth – severed at the hip and alone – lies on a side-walk underneath such an extension ladder. It happens to be an exercise in cyberspace (at once imaginary) which takes after Dali – yet remains unresolved. It occurs in his collection known as *Grotesque Theatre* (in Italian). But, by the hour we've resolved this, our characters were in their respective dwellings ---. One set of policemen have already departed from this scene (as well).

FOUR

The two policemen continued into the timid clerk's dwelling – where he received a frosty welcome from his wife. No antics of a restrictive vaudeville may finish us here; at least in terms of judgement. The constables stood together like two pillars – prior to solemnising or giving out the blandishments of Solon. Initially, they were liable to vacate the scene, but now they'd returned to give a warning... no matter how familial it might seem. The wife informed her husband, Willerby Quoche (the timid one) that his cooked dinner was in the ice-box... he could heat it up again if he liked. She, by the by, and irrespective of the clown-killer's risk, was going out to see her mother (his mother-in-law). And the officers' Parthian shot had to do with the fact that such men, travelling in packs, were all armed now. After seven slayings – they had orders to shoot the clown (or any other itinerant stalker) on sight... Should he put in an appearance... oh my yes!

+

But what of the japer (?)... he remained alone, amidst some residual axe-heads, and in his own private asylum. A half-naked

man with a garland around his head (obviously a version of himself) ran through these corridors... he was screaming about seeking egress or escape from this particular tunnel. Now then, lines of energy or force penetrated from the Clown as he wielded this weapon about his head... Various fillets or ergs crackled and radiated from his Being; or one of his several circus costumes. Still, as one axe-head was taken up from its rooted aspects, the man ran down this ventricle. As he does so – the arms and legs pump to a miniature symphony; if only to adorn the pessimism of Sibellius' triumph. Now and again, a purple effulgence surrounds this running man – and it encloses him within an Imperial mantle, prior to a pink envelope ricocheting from him. It provides the silhouette for one stride as against another, and then this moving chieftain, so otherwise fleet of foot, will merge with the clown. To speak clearly about the matter: the mountebank exists in a wide-room, with heavy or mullioned windows, themselves indifferently criss-crossed. Otherwise, the moon is set off as a plateau or an orb in the distance... and it reflects back some ghostly light from out of the ether. Aren't you aware of this aesthetic transference? Since lunatics in a mad-house do howl at the moon – it is the impact of the gravitational tides on their brains, (you see). It impinges on the inside of their skulls – so to say. Likewise, the trickster engages in conversation with another of his incarnations – a man who wears a balaclava helmet all over his head. It surprises itself with the closure of such a magnificence; and his hand was raised as if to ward off individual blows. Might they originate from something like Thor's hammer? In any event, how does our harlequin look now (?); what with his grease-paint, smear, troublous look, red nose and lips... as well as Bollinger's after-take. Still and all, a stringy-tie will not be taken off by the dun-coloured mack which contains him. May it partake of an experimental novel like Alan Burns' *Europe after the Rain*? Two hands still grasp the axe, though, and seek to rend the silence; to cut, slice and battle through metal rivets – even if they're made from blood. Nothing else will do during this period of circumspection... By any link,

those pipes that stretch above – amid these concrete balustrades *à la* le Corbusier – are split and riven. The Axe has an advantage over their construction – if you wish to look at it like that! Similarly, our purple or hunched figure, against a background of violent pink, sought to escape from this tunnel... to run through it and out, if only one were free to caper in the sun-light with its warmth on one's back.

+

Whilst in what passes for reality... Quoche found that he couldn't persuade his wife not to trespass out of doors on this night of all nights, although, secretly, he always enjoyed her exits from their chambers. Take it or leave it: since once the front-door snicked to he began to imagine a thousand 'evils'. Every so often creaks and groans entered his imagination, and, very occasionally, inanimate objects came to dance and strut – alive in the fire-light. He soon realised that his anxiety was causing him to hallucinate. Yes, indeed---. It is then that he hears a voice crying for help outside their front shutters. At first he dismisses it as a trick, a fancy or a false judgement. Yet the wheedling cry persisted with a terrifying insistence. "Help me (!), help me against the clown-murderer..." wafted in from the outside. Where was that police whistle? Then he recognised the truth: he didn't possess such an item. But surely, he was in no danger – since the entire vicinity or its perimeter has been saturated with police. Slowly, and with icy tentacles grasping his spine, our timorous mouse lit some candles, held aloft on a steel-spine, and went out into the foggy street---

+

Back amongst the Clowns: the axe went up and down, writhing, as it did so, within its rooted compass – or something approximating to it. The circus killer also notices the segregated nature of a square; at once ashen, blackened, ochre and covered in red dye. It speaks of those secrets which animate his inner mind – they can't really reconnoitre on the *outside* of a necessary moon. It fills up the block so as to tease a bit – or to reveal the prospect of some automatic writing in blood. Would the

possession of haemoglobin make any sort of a difference? Not really: given that a spherical doodle which depicts a clown's face... aglow in red ink... merely proves a subterfuge for what might go on otherwise.

+

Possibly (and again) the blood-axe scrapes away at the windows; thereby causing themselves to cave in and become lost. This weapon – in the hands of the minstrel – spurts to the side, sundering paint, wood-chip and stray balustrades. While, all of a sudden, the axe was thrown down (metaphorically) at his feet, even though it's fated to reveal all of slaughter's capacity. This circus performer (in his own drama) looked down at it – so as to eye its ascendancy gingerly. Can one detect what he really feels underneath the grease-paint? It may remain (at best) only an unbidden twinkle in one of those eyes...

+

Although, in another vista, Willerby Quoche sneaks out with a candle in his hand in order to confront a vaudeville *artiste*, or, as he prefers, virtually no-one at all... amid the shadows of Wapping's dank waters. These lap up against the fortifications of a lost water-front. Now look at the strangeness of this kit from being way out of kilter.

THE LAST PART OF OUR DRAMA:

As Quoche, in his timidity, creeps forwards there is a sudden snap which originates from the ground... and it sounds, for all the world, like a branch or twig snapping under foot. Could this be a limb that's pregnant with menace – who knows? Since the clown-murderer stands afore him, wearing a mask (as per usual), the office rig or décor of Robert D'Arcy Smith, his work colleague; as well as an axe which he heaves over his head. In the near-distance stand some tall Poplar trees that fade into mist on the Thames' other side. Paradoxically, tremulous Quoche has his life ended when the axe thuds down on his naked skull; if only to snuff out an existence with maximum violence --- there is

no observable sound to any of this, save the swish of the blade, a sickening thud and then a gurgling scream. The murderer makes off just as quickly by fording the bridge above with a desperate leap (with the skill of a vaudeville *artiste*). Yet his escape has been observed by several policemen, plus a CID man, who fire on him repeatedly. Once on the transom or trellis-work, abridged by wooden slats, the clown is hit several times, cries out as the bullets enter his body, and then collapses over the balustrade into the running water. The swiftness of the current means that the body will never be properly found. The CID man turns to Quoche's wife and informs her that her husband – unbelievably so (!) – is now a suspect in the case. An eye-witness swears to the fact that he was wandering around with a candle – no doubt about it! The belligerent wife cannot believe it; he was altogether *too* quiet – yet the silent ones are always the worse, Missus, surely you realise that!? As the party walks across a wooden-bridge (of sighs) they fail to observe another body down river, having come to rest amid some clogged reeds. It lies on the opposite bank with its increasingly skeletal mouth open. Who will bet against the fact that it belongs to 'Bob'; Robert D'Arcy Smith?

THE END

CHARON'S LOCK-JAW

A short story

FIRST PART

The mask of an octogenarian bears upon many fits; or the possibilities of lost absences. This was definitely the case with Desmond Drudgeweight (otherwise known as Silver-smith). For, despite his great age, he looked exultant with the test-tube in his hand. The blue ichor in this capsule had a greenish tinge – glaucous it was – and it frothed and spluttered. It represented (for all the world) a secret serum! While Drudgeweight himself had tufted eye-brows, a bald head (dome-like) and a wrinkled face. Deep crevices pertained to the jaw and other wastes or expectancies; and tufts of hair, themselves unmanaged, clung to elements of his flesh. All of it appears to be rather untenanted... this is the truth, indeed. Although the man's eyes arrest our attention – in that they were the lightest and palest blue. Despite this, the quality of the azure has dimmed due to an ardent pupil, a hardening of the iris and a gradual diminution of colour in the eye-ball (...)

SECOND PART

Our tale commences with an alarm, an ordinary burglar alarm, that's been let off in a commercial laboratory. It leads three policemen to the building and, faced with no answer, they burst into the lab through its relatively flimsy door. It proved to be made from balsa. A redundant SMASH (!) caused them to enter the inner fastness... and some of the equipment contained inside was outlandish (to say the least). One piece consisted of tube after capsule, after pipette, rising to the heavens rather like an enormous barometer... yet clearly for a different purpose. Might it seem disadvantageous to common sense? Likewise, a wheel at the front of this antechamber was able to control the liquid-gas, or whatever else, which lurks inside it. Next to where the device

projects one spies (or the policemen do) a pile of clothes on the floor. They have crumpled in a strange and imperceptible way – almost as if a body had existed in them prior to this *denouement*. In any event, a cry for help came from the freezer where specimens were stored, and the officers realised that somebody was trapped in there. After a few moments, the police had forced the lock and released a man who might otherwise have frozen to death. He was a thick-set individual, although rather sensitive looking, and he possessed lugubrious features. These were mixed, heavy, estranged, slightly sad and distilled. While his eyes took on a mild despondency – they were a deep-brown colour and contained within them, if only partially, all of the pain of the world. The Police allowed a few instants for him to thaw out prior to questioning him; and then they earnestly wished to know why he was in the freezer. Or alternatively, how had he found himself placed there? Who'd locked him in? Was it he himself? Or, contrariwise, has a serious crime – like attempted murder – been affected? We shall see---

+

Yet, in another dimension of Travis Reynolds' mind, one notices the possibility of empty spaces and redundant wires. These had something to do with a trip across the Atlantic many moons ago, a visit to old Europe in order to meet satraps who lived there. One of them was Professor Carl Jung, the interpreter of dreams, and the other was the major 'dark' occultist of the twentieth century, Aleister Crowley. He proved to be snake-like and charming in a rather devilish way. Reynolds remembers challenging him to a game of chess – and during three bouts they drew once, lost to each other, and correspondingly scored a victory. The Book of the Law had long since removed itself from his available trumps (so to say) and one of the things that always strikes us about chess is its aesthetic appeal. This was the beauty of the game – artistically – as a mathematical form, and Crowley and Reynolds stood between each other, a checker board on their right, or within the middle of such pairings. The dialectic involved has to be an alternate pacing, on a squared division, into

black-and-white portions. Can an imaginative mind construe them as the coffins of a new deliverance – particularly in relation to those who are not yet dead? Look at this: the selectivity of fate means that no-one can really surprise those who help to resuscitate the Book of Thoth. If you recall, the jet that pulled Reynolds back to the new world traversed a brilliant sky. For its part, it resembled an abstract expressionist ditty – whereby gold, copper, an absent cerulean, and ormolu all contrived to leave out rolled gold. It paced itself across the horizon – and it did so in relation to a sun that peeped over the clouds. This occasions the return of a fiery disc; the like of which floats on a lake of cumulus. These were never going to die behind a forbidding door, since such an orb exists to light up the Heavens. It tipped open the fire-fly of its observance, and the refulgent abstract of its course betokens one painting too many. Does one of Derek Jarman’s canvases come to mind? Whereupon the livery of gold causes us to question the quality of an abstraction. Maybe – amidst the gold and tungsten – a few bullet-holes remained, otherwise shimmering in the glass *a la* Burroughs? And, by any imaginative chance, there could be several crushed bulbs, electrical bulbs, in this munificence – it hints at the machine-age technology with which we began. But, in this case, it’s more of a hindrance than anything else. Meanwhile, Reynolds’ plane set off back towards Kansas City in the middle of America... and a violent disc of bronze still illumines things by the way. Above all, and amidst a solar effulgence, one notices the monstrous: these were the tendrils of beasts and spray that lit up the firmament. Yet they are only suggested by a comparison with gold-cloth – let alone the golden lotus or bedding of the Gods! Moreover, these faces were indistinct, blurred, hesitant, not folded over, and vaguely reminiscent of de Kooning’s bodies, smeared in paint, from the 1940’s. (These happen to be abstract expressionist works of yesteryear). Needless to say, these items are redolent of Choronzon – of a defeated absence – or of those who were about to die, but who don’t salute you! Look at this: since these disturbed masks must disprivilege Evola’s golden age

for one of bronze, teak and iron. After all, they speak of a bondage to Ensor's masks; and the fact that Desmond Drudgeweight's experiments have taken a turn for the worse (decidedly so...)

THIRD PART

Let's see now! For Desmond Drudgeweight lifted up his hand as if to indicate the progress of their enquiry – since what were these two scientists, he and Travis Reynolds, really after? In truth, they were seeking the *elixir vitae* or a youth serum. Initially, Travis told the story with a blanket wrapped around his shoulders – the police had fished it out of the recesses of the laboratory. As he reminisced, he remembered the early years and the ridicule that their experiments had brought down on them. The laughter of the majority was credulous (indeed), as the two scientists blindly followed their vision... Late at night, though, Travis wondered whether he was doing the right thing... although these moods always came and went within a couple of hours. He often carried his daughter in his arms at such a moment, and the sun-light filled their green drawing-room as he did so. A grand fire-place existed to the left – and a rampart or book-case tilted to one side. (Although, in turn, it consisted of science books; most of them searching for the elixir of life... whether in ancient manuscripts or modern enzymes). In all honesty, it was one bright day in April when they hit upon the serum – both of them whooped for joy and the near senilic, or extremely aged, Drudgeweight held up the test-tube in triumph. It seemed to irradiate the entire world in a dark green-glow. Moreover, Drudgeweight grasped this brew in a wizened fist and his face betokens a greedy, avid, and even condescending avarice. The one saw it as a victory for Mankind against age and death; the other thought only of himself. This soon became a bone of contention between them --- for Drudgeweight gradually belied his purpose with guile. Yet any such front couldn't last for long – as their voices trailed up from the laboratory under the

eaves of this brownstone. As Drudgeweight talked he became more and more mad, distrait, sly and overly complicated. Whilst some fog, ether or stray mist – a deluded compound – escaped from the tube with a gust, maybe of air? Drudgeweight intimated, with many theatrical gestures worthy of *The Phantom of the Opera*, Leroux’s farce, that the elixir was for him alone. Eventually, he would outlive everyone and come to rule mankind instead. They would soon learn the error of the United Nations, or choosing any other body to rule save his will... implacable or otherwise. Around their contestation, however, the big sulphuric acid retorts of the laboratory surrounded them... And these were large beakers, valves, sylvan dredgers, and the tubes which aligned or connected them... one to another. It was then that Drudgeweight insisted on drawing a gun and forcing his rival, Travis, into the freezer where some of the lesser serums had been stored prior to disposal, or later use. It wouldn’t be long afore Reynolds was down on the ground, his teeth-chattering, as he half-froze to death. Might he now toss a coin in order to decide his fate? Any such mint can flash in the sun prior to deliverance – whether it came up heads or tails, trumps or flush. After considering it, though, Travis became aware of the burglar alarm that he might be able to smash, break open and sound off. This must bring – somewhat inevitably – the police to the concealed laboratory. Moreover, as he looked back, the increasingly distraught nature of his daughter’s art-work came to mind. These were doodles or the angry filaments of existence; and they partake of nightmares. Most of them involve dragons, light-feet, rabid dogs (and some such); all of which sought to reduce infinity to the measurable. They often took up a violently red format; what with the thick impasto of so much grief... nearly always cracked and yet impressive. These drawings had to illustrate a candelabra – or perhaps, over aught else, the wooden simulacra of what’s foretold. These were hidden griefs. For I was sure (at this time) that Desmond was in the right, or would prove a benefactor to mankind.

+

Now, I knew otherwise, as he drank the serum down in one swig... rather like the classic scene in *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. Slowly, oh-so slowly the aged and crone-like exterior began to change; as the skin tightened and altered. Soon all pallor – and sense of decay – begins to disappear, as dilapidation lifted and middle-age rears its head. Yet the process of youth has no remit or natural end, and precisely, then, adolescence began to simmer up, and thereafter an ever more youthful bond. Drudgeweight couldn't reverse the process as he started to whimper and grow afraid. Soon he was a child, collapsing in his clothes and searching for some linen that fitted, and then, all thoughts of a stripling past, he became a baby. For a babe crawled about as he shifted southwards to a smaller and smaller pink blob! Soon nothing was left save the pile of clothing which you see before you now... said Travis Reynolds, as he gestured at the policemen. But, underneath the flood-lights of their deliverance, which snapped away and knew no resource, they grew sceptical. They reasoned that Travis had been locked in the freezer too long... Yet, after he'd been released by them and walked the streets of Kansas City alone, Reynolds thought deeply about the matter. Maybe no-one should tamper with life's mysteries in a like manner! In a way, it had ended for the best, but, amidst all doubting and false grieving, where was Desmond Drudgeweight? Surely he wasn't dead – he had merely involuted; he'd perished (sic) through reverse evolution. Where was Desmond Drudgeweight? Let's face it: no student revolutionary, like Scorpio in Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*, would ever take such a slogan up. Where was Desmond Drudgeweight? Gradually, Travis' feet returned towards the green-room, its books and his wife and daughter. Where was Desmond Drudgeweight?

THE END

THESEUS' MINOTAUR

A short story

ONE AND A HALF:

The flying saucers left Mars in a series of convoys, having waited in redundant exile for the opportunity to do so. Each one – a silver disc of plenitude – moved away from its base with a stereotype's new forgiveness... Nor need we dwell unduly on the Mies van der Rohe-type buildings; themselves resembling ice-cream or its fondue (an enrichment). Every flying saucer or UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) existed in a bay or row until it could leave... While, contrary to human propaganda, the Martian atmosphere was balmy in the extreme. Pink ice clouds – remnants of previous glacial periods – suffused the heavens; as each UFO blasted off from its surreptitious place on the red planet. Moreover, the light and transparent breezes on this world facilitated these take-offs, and I (the disc in question) waited at the back of the queue for lift-off. A small landing-bay or facilitator subsists to one side of my portal, just prior to take-off.

TWO AND A QUARTER:

At last my order came through, and I blasted off from the surface of my world. I inhabited a spheroid or disc which was sleek and compact, its sides flooding away towards disorder. And, in all honesty, a small nose-cone had been suppressed or built into the craft's front, in order to suggest the radicalism of an eye. It proved to be orange in colour; and this offset the metallic green of the crafts themselves... All of which adopted the sleek abandonment of my own form. I had to agree that the sky – or firmament – from where I was flying looked beautiful; what with its turquoise tints and bright orange high-lights... in terms of other worlds.

THREE AND A DISTANCE:

My craft soon found itself oscillating above earth... and the blue-and-green suffocation of the 'mother' planet was spread out before all of the Martian boats. What might be the simulacrum of this new world order (?) – why, it could always be an electrocuted man, a new Zeus, who swooned in relation to the blue criterion of current. It swayed from some old valves (or similar equipment) and this resembled the electrical circuitry of the 'fifties... while such dials, prefixes, old transistors and electrodes all wheezed and puffed. They represented the black digits of one contraption too far, if only to count off the days against the target beneath them. This involves the body of a man who, half-naked, swoons in the direction of the blue current: itself a maximisation of the cathode ray oscilloscope. His body approaches that of a perfect hermaphrodite; even though he remains in sapphire's grasp (otherwise). And his very language (we find) is suffused with a silken skein – it identifies itself, in an unqualified way, with Ballard's dulcet prose. Let us continue: since this new Zeus, or partaking elfin, will doubtless move in an elongated fashion. It is subject to the wiles of AC/DC or the fragmentation of the 'cut-up' method – more after Byron Gysin's methodology than William S. Burroughs'. To be fair: this usage of electricity was a martyrdom, an *auto-da-fe*, and something of a sacrifice. It is in no sense a punishment – though – since the act was too willed, etheric, impersonal, and out of the body. For (in all honesty) shall an electronic Zeus be in a fit state to survive a Martian invasion... irrespective of whether he personifies it?

A FOURTH QUARTET *A LA* T.S. ELIOT:

But, in terms of our pirate fleet, the Martian flying saucers still circled the earth's atmosphere prior to egress... and finally they received orders from their lead ships. This involved the prospect of penetrating the stratosphere. Finally, the time emerged and came of age; and it was festooned with a sense of mischief. I (for

one) turned my craft in the Heavens; as my blue hull exists in the firmament above the planet. Finally, I'm given the order to descend – and, like an iota of dust, I seize on a chance to illuminate the night-sky. Do you see? No Milky Way is large or vast enough to contain us. All of a sudden, we swoop down from the sky-point in an exhilarated burst – at last (!) the earth's possibilities exist afore us. Its green lineaments look up at our craft; as we shift gears and move across the horizon... itself resplendent with its pinkish rays, effulgence, light blue-sky and fluffy, white clouds. The whole effect is both etheric and exciting... yet, in all honesty, the terrain into which I burrow exemplifies a roughness, a womb-like territory, together with the edge of a divine sand-pit.

+

Yet still, the personification of our invasion lingers on... as a maximal Zeus, his fingers limned by electricity, adopts a spiritual duct. Its colour has to be Blue. He is completely diaphanous or see-through now; what with the electrodes of this stream radiating from his head. These form the wires of an undelivered ecstasy; as this secular demi-urge opens his arms to electricity. His current function is NOW; is very much of this age (if you will); and a tissue of electrons renders his face Skull-like. Indeed, electrical energy – cast into a deep blue-dome – must always congeal together with phosphorous' bite. It tends towards the helplessness of the skeletal; i.e., the fact that this solution (or anti-crystalline) was bred in the bone... It merely captured its affidavit; and these microns, or tiny discharges, floated like so many fire-flies... so as to capture the resin of what had been forgotten. Do we enclose the nature of its suggestion (?) – no matter how magnificent the travail.

+

Now then, my particular space-craft landed in the zone known as North America... up in Nassau country, the better part of forty miles from New York city. My craft scuds to a halt next to the high-way, and it glows in a phosphorescent or disc-like way. Can we make anything of the blue dye which accompanies its

effulgence? Anyway, it causes the earth to turn molten around it, to churn up and splay, as cars on the free-way twist and spin. They are amazed at the sight, you see! Many of the pedestrians are surprised and cast askance – you understand. They jostle, move ahead, attempt to make peace with one another, and escape from the unheralded sight afore them (...) It is the lightning conductor of so many days, as well as the confirmation of a whole dynasty of science fiction films (and adaptations) in the ‘fifties and early ‘sixties.

+

Nor can we entirely dismiss its personification... that is, the opening of the skeletal hand and palm, so as to unfreeze those electrons. They buzz like bees or electronic chaff; the substance of which causes one to malfunction. This means that one veers suddenly off-line (to use an internet term); and such a process dissolves its lineaments. When these latter are pulsating, again and again, within a blue depth-charge (...)

A FIFTH ACHIEVEMENT:

Finally, and as an after-thought, the lines of the world buzzed with the news that the saucers had landed – in every tongue (or absence of same). Journalists were sent on scavenging expeditions, and, once they had convinced their editors, the early front-pages were devoted to this story. Nothing else sufficed – yet still, one visualised the invasion as an electrocuted man; what with the scales having dropped from his eyes in terms of lightning. A filament of air – or its compression – maximised the space; and each slant or tilt of the face suited its planes... One thing, above everything else, was clear; and this has to be the intensity of the stare or look. It transcended the navy lustre of so much blue (you see); as each line in the affidavit refuses to mirror its effects. Above all else, the electrocuted man (a hermaphrodite) claims to see the future... as he grasps hold of an electronic pad. All of which refuses to register on those microbial dots (or integers); the like of which flood out towards every

corner, so as to facilitate a stilled frenzy, or the gut-wrenching twists of so many appearances. These were tiny mites that our *exemplar* released from his hand; so as to prevent the expansion of a Unilever'd curve. Look you: his skull became lit up – as a portent – and the nimbus of a cranium, within such an enabling flash, prevented everything from breaking out of sorts. Gradually, mankind became relaxed – even tardy – in its treatment of the saucers, particularly as no creatures emerged from them. One by one, all over the world, the sites where they had come to rest were sealed off and the craft examined. (All of this passed off as the Martian scientists had predicted). For, in nearly all cases, the experiments were conducted by different regimes all over the world – yet, in truth, they followed a remarkably similar course. They tested the machines for tensile strength, heat resistance, explosive depth-charge, and many similar services. All in error, humans! A general bafflement or amazement supervenes in most mortal centres... at what could have otherwise been predicted. Then we sense something else – a deeper and more penetrative desire to probe. This will be satisfied (to be sure); yet not in the way that they predict... oh dear me, no! For, all of a sudden and in accordance with a pre-arranged signal, the doors on all of our capsules slid open. The mortals seized their chance to make havoc (or play) with whatever they found in such a receptacle. Yet what caused consternation was the fact that – amid the gloom – nothing became discernible or really apposite. The humans turned on torches, examined every niche and cranny, and yet could not recover from the fact that the saucers were completely empty. They resembled (far too closely) skins or pelts; the kindred of which related one to a metal skein. Was it not mightily foretold? For, in this novella, the humans are relieved when the doors slid open and they were deposited on the tundra once again. Look at this: since once they found themselves outside, on the luscious grass, they thanked heaven and ran off. This (indeed) was the cue to blast off and to find one's release in the shuttle that would take us back to Mars – whether unsteady of any purpose or resolve.

Yet all of this related less to Faculty X – Colin Wilson’s design on a hidden need – than Operation X, our secret *desiderata* to test all of the human’s hidden knowledge and resolve. We need never fear them again – along any lines of collision or possible impact. Since, back on our world, we are free to besport ourselves as we wish – back and forwards, forwards and back. In this instance, green tendrils or fronds, with enabling hooks and claws, move out from the bottom of the saucers and provide us with grazing rights. These ensure that we can stand up and face the day – most evidently, as we jump, sway, twirl and ferret in our natural environment. For what *Homo Sapiens* did not take on board, in their collective arrogance, was the fact that the saucers were not empty, dormant shells devoid of all life. No: they happen to be saturnalian envelopes in every particular. They were the life and soul of one evident party: THE FLYING SAUCERS ARE THE MARTIANS OURSELVES! HA! HA!

THE END

SATURNALIAN NOCTURNES

A Novel

(A Cyborg mystery...)

ONE>>

A moon merged with its outer atmosphere, so as to entrance its circumference in green. This provided an envelope, a distillate and a filament – and the inner surface was mauve. It resembled the outer contusions of the brain; at once looped over, spaced out, cerebral, temporal and hilly. Could this be the disjunction of a new spectre? In any event, this outer planet unfolds into a four-fold dispensation; or (1) a glow, (2) a peripheral skein, (3) the inner tumult and then (4) a purple mass. It might well be some compacted cerulean – surrounded, as it was, by the vapour of unknown eddies. From afar it looks like one of J.G. Ballard's *Drowned World(s)*; what with its compactness, distillate quality, and the feeling of being marooned... on the other side of a watery lagoon.

Meanwhile, and observably from above, other worlds – four in number – show themselves to our witnesses. And they are enclosed by two asteroids which are clean and crisp, as well as a large earth-like planet. It limits its occasional forgiveness through solidity... let alone the way it manages its air.

TWO>>

Beneath two watery moons – both of which stare like severed eye-balls – one detects a blue and an orange tone. Yet my mind is convulsed by the space-station which lay beneath the planet's outcrop. It involves a globular tower (with spinning armatures), both of which moved to the left and right, under a modernist frontage. This consisted of twin-tracks, a medley of concrete, the whiteness of le Corbusier (but not in this light), and sundry

pyramids. These rose up – occasionally sporting military ornaments – and the odd statue that looks back to Epstein, even Donatello (...). A green effulgence (or matting) exists around the roofing, and it demarcates a land-fill that knows not itself. By any leave, a contrast of light and dark emerald alternates – almost stroboscopically – on this field of colour. Whereas the buildings represent a filtered aspect – one Wulf too far – and the inevitability of a precipitate. Perhaps one should imagine a self-created set, crossed with *Thunderbirds*, and tracing its lineage back to Rogers' Lloyd's building. – That will do, necessarily!

THREE>>

Our main character emerges now... and he does so amid an indifferent fire. The purple munificence of a moon screens his approach – and, around his circumference, one detects machinery. It remains dulcet, fore-closed, and reminiscent of Stefan Zweig's chronicles of pre-war, 1912-14. Wasn't this the day before yesterday; the hour which limits a prospect afore it eventuates? For violence always follows on from a wakefulness such as this... in that the cyborg is searching for the builder of this edifice, if not his architect. (These are the creatures who always say that such structures are impregnable... But, in truth, many a bourgeois or skilled tongue is loosened by being described as a 'professional' – let alone if an axe-head, made of titanium, is put in the vicinity). Moreover, the landscape upon which we have to gaze was verdant – or a violently emerald crash. And it seems to have forgotten itself; or (otherwise) to engage in the creation of stick-insects. These are always liable to leave off if left alone! Likewise, our first character – Lonesome II – cuts through a coloured frond; cascading to its prior discharge: and limiting itself. These are the tendrils or wires of so much displacement, and they trail away from his armoured form. A description will have to follow later on – but, in actuality, he is a cyborg; at once metal-fronted, brutal in his arabesques, and not to be sniffed at. Nor can one prevent a prior notification: one that

says... cybernetics is the science of locomotion and control within non-living organisms. That is to say, it all takes place inside alternative, plastic, resinous, metallic and 'alternate' systems.

FOUR>>

Lonesome II moves deeper into the space-station; and he's definitely searching for aught that's lost. He certainly won't be distracted by Catallus' love poetry in Latin! Now then, a creature emerges from under some ducts, so as to present himself. This enables one to spy him more clearly – what with devil's hooks about the ears, red eyes (two in number and diameter), a platinum nose-cone and a mouth of louvered board. It planes away to an effect of yellow lustre; never mind its cantilevered gait. The after-taste gives us a hint of futurity – possibly the delinquency of absence, and even a minor tincture of *Clockwork Orange*. Let us see: this corse was heavily armoured, robotic, incidental and splaying itself off towards an old episode of *The Avengers*. One also has to notice the superb fitness and athleticism of this prospect; never mind a performance in actuality, an unforgiveness. One recognises, casually and *en passant*, that one of Lonesome's hands passes for a gun. It is patterned over, given to a loss, and refuses to take no for an answer. While the boots were prosthetic, tungsten-laced and bound to disappoint. All of a sudden, Lonesome emerges from any reverie (for a robot) and decides to take a major 'hand' in unfolding events. These are bound to involve – knowing him – the destruction of other life-forms (...)

FIVE>>

One sees (instantaneously) a close-up on his face and upper arms... These were reminiscent of Ensor's paintings – (after a fashion); and they were passed by an impersonal acknowledgement. For his mouth-like grill arrested our attention,

in that it fulfilled two functions at once... none of them measurable. Given this, the sloping tones of the face represent a surd, a replacement, and almost a mathematical configuration. It is a mastery of places (in other words) that transcends itself; and isn't this the nature of modernist art? For even Lucien Freud's paintings – for example – transcend themselves; they seek to aim at a pointer beyond their own apex. Do you see this imaginary intention? Regardless of which – his upper lineaments were encased in steel; i.e., they were non-plussed, sheer, a plane of emeralds, and yet reflected off against their own violence. It remains an inner quality, you understand? One of their most important manifestations, however, was a clear usage: a triumph over trigonometry, never mind any mosaics of metal. Might any imponderable setting (or scape-grace) fall foul of those Bull's-Eyes: themselves a turbid scarlet? Heretofore, the sheer scale waxed blue-to-purple, by way of a derivative pink that found itself to be disregarded. Are we always convinced of an effrontery, here? Since a scarlet tusk protruded from Lonesome's head – albeit at the side and by way of a contingent measure. It is no good (you see), such a nature cannot be encapsulated in mortal terms... it must always leave one aching, if not for more, then an understanding of a man who's encased in metal – and yet in no wise resembles a man. But Lonesome II has detected two guards in the vicinity (possibly on patrol) and he has decided to make his move---

SIX>>

The guards were the prosthetic toys of a mandarin, and they passed in subdued wakefulness. Oh dear me, no! They were limned against a green cascade – such as was contained in a frame of *Doctor Strange* by Steve Ditko, & it froze time in its petrification. Let's look at it again: since those tendrils move spatially, like abstract limbs, despite the mercenaries passing underneath. These figures were not entirely mortal; being quasi-human, rather android, and cybernetic in aspect. They might be

described as trans-human in their appeal; and they strove to be a mixture of animal, vegetable and mineral. Celluloid, various plastics and resins, as well as the odd neural circuit, obviously played a role. In aspect, they were a mixture of blue and pink, masculine and feminine, or *anima* and *animus*... One of them had a flat-head; whereas the other's cranium was vaguely pointed – without being at all cerebral. Both of these Myrmidons were massive, tonsured, muscular and reminiscent (altogether) of those Charles Atlas adverts in the nineteen seventies... They looked around with a beady eye, resembling that of a cast out marble, and both of them carried heavy weapons. These are like double-calibre machine-guns which are held in either fist (...) Their look was grim, purblind, turbid, indiscrete and thuggish – although it is doubtful whether they have ever heard of Kali's worship, irrespective of Colonel Sleaman's account of it.

SEVEN>>

It was then that the cyborg, Lonesome II, made his move; and he's a muscular blur of steel and flesh. His movement fillets its tissue, if not issue – and he zig-zags towards a fate that ends in violence. Do we detect a salutary influence? Since his testosteroneed configuration looks on – via the grill which delimits a mouth, the red eyes, hooks, cape, tendrils and gnarled fists. His arrested captivity is evident – forever so, and the mayhem that follows is all in his keeping. In such moments, violence represents an *aporia*, an absence of forgiveness... almost an instant of stasis between these gaps. The mercenaries had begun to turn, to change, to reformulate their keeping – prior to a new dispensation (...) That's it: *quod* we do not have to agree with Leon Trotsky when he said that war is the engine of revolutionary change... Nonetheless, it alters the reality of those gathered below: even as these androids chunter... at least in their own language. [Note: may it actually be a linguistics; or, more likely, a semiotic: a reversal of the usual energy-flow?]

EIGHT>>

Forsooth, a picture of carnage must surrender to its desire to submit. Can such an explosion really right itself like a children's toy; or a delinquent top? Isn't the name of one's publisher the Spinning Top Club? It's then that a Battle Royal subsists – much after the impact of Wise's *Introduction to Battle-Gaming*. This exemplifies a rich chaos (or *Kaos*) a la Hieronymous Bosch; and the scarlet nature of these dwarves writhe around him, circling, prior to a collective fall. In one respect, it's a myth of Sisyphus; a movement towards the reddish, even one's recognition of writhing forms. These individual soldiers or warriors take after Airfix kits – particularly featuring German soldiery – and they broil after the Chapmans' collage. This installation or sculpture configures a swathe of soldiers in Hell – but why restrict it to them? Surely, many others are denizens of the Pit; and they spin, boil, burn, eviscerate or twirl within a rubiate glow. Even though it remains difficult to distinguish one body (no matter how boiling) from another... as they steam without forgiveness.

NINE>>

Remember: each pile of carrion hints at a reservoir beyond itself... never mind its surcease. Do you detect its closure's brutality? As these figurines criss-cross within a red tabernacle; i.e., a *debacle*, a nemesis or a pyramid of toppling bodies. In one filigree, it denotes an over-hanging effect... whereby Edwardian mountebanks build themselves up, body on body, like a circus performance. Although (one has to admit) that such an alternative Vaudeville can be observed under a red filter... and it's transparent, if viewed, haphazardly, through a glass darkly.

+

Again, the battle which ensues resembles an old school conflict... one that would (in no way) shame the doorway of Valhalla! Yet further, our negative game of chess continues, and the cyborg, Lonesome II, was surrounded by battling forms... all

of them attempting to grapple with him without success. A medley of terrorised bodies is in contestation; the like of which opens the way to a new Purgatory. Should it be at all redemptive? Who knows? Yet the cyborg stands amid this shambles; at once undelivered, Nelson-like, solitary, vanguardist and colossal. He is a man-robot alone – so to say (!); a *creatoid* (of absence) who exists only for the struggle. Was it not a question of one absolute replacing another? Since the other figures (meshed together though they were) are covered in gore, black blood, red rheum and so many other filaments. He receives a blow in the back from an explosion – it was probably a grenade, or stun weapon... and then he returns the privilege by disembowelling the miscreant. Blood and guts, as a result of his spear-hand, spurt all over and certainly inundate one's welcome. Moreover, such a tourney happens to be piled up, misapplied, chthonian, untroubled, Stygian and reminiscent of Greek tragedy. Does the spirit of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides supervene over all? It probably does – this much is true! Yet the barbarity of the action continues for many an hour (or a quarter of an hour, at any rate). It subsists afore all else... in a Cimmerian lottery or carnival – the longitude of which hints at a new Dark Age with the most modern technology available. It must have moved forwards as one of H.G.Wells' forgotten answers – featuring in his text, *The Shape of Things to Come*.

+

Since his steel and metallic form is covered with tissue, rheum, tepid liquid – and other human sprays – yet he remains completely unharmed. It is the mercenaries, guards and Myrmidons who have come off worst. They cavil at one answer; and yet recover alone in order to be plundered at another date. Can we see this express-way (or directional route) through the mayhem; or are we purblind? Never mind: *quod* any hint of slaughter must open itself to a grip of bodies, cast down in grey, and themselves covered in armour... what with blood spurting from every orifice. The odd dagger sticks out inappropriately; as he wields a great broadsword in either fist. It cuts a swathe of

gore – this way and that – that way and this – when set against a curlicue of Ash. It proves to be an amorphous sludge, even contrary to a blood-red sky.

+

Further than this, blows are exchanged in close-up... the latter leading to heads being rocked back (unnecessarily); and knife-blows cascade amid scarlet water... A plenitude of warfare continues, although gradually the pace begins to slacken. Lonesome II, a bounty-hunter by profession, feels that he is earning the three million credits... This amounts to the sum he will be paid when he brings the owner of such a space-station to task: his name is Veritable Time-thing (for the record).

TEN>>

Finally, Lonesome II resembles a gladiator in the arena (of old) and a green-to-yellow glow comes up behind him... It steadies itself as an effulgence, or something that can't really be broken into without an effort. A crushed Myrmidon, perhaps one of the original guards, lies athwart him... and such a corse is crumpled over, covered with black rain, and seemingly asleep (...) What will the cyborg do now? Well, he adopts a mythic pose of triumph – amid the shambles – for a moment, and then proceeds to hunt his quarry: the owner of the station. He was definitely determined to track down Veritable Time-thing (now). Can't the cyborg feel those three million credits (a currency unit) jingling in his palm? (The fact that it's a prosthetic hand makes no difference to the rate of exchange whatever. Isn't this tale a question of mergers and acquisitions?)

ELEVEN>>

Lastly, and in accord with a new criterion, he looked about him with a cyborg's glare. For, truthfully, he moved as a dulcet integer, somewhat irreplaceably, and on green. In this phase – at any rate – he took after an athlete or sportsman, as he skirted

from side to side *in lieu* of massacre. Let's not forget, then, that he had left a shambles behind him: one which reconfigured an orange conspectus. (It took after the ligature of one cyborg – when his head, shoulders and inner corse were held up by another one... possibly a replacement at some future date. Would not one new cyborg be twice as menacing – as well as puffed up, out of quarantine, ennobled and termagant? Any new cyborg – Lonesome III, for instance – is bound to be more forceful, devastating, intrigued and up for a fight. Couldn't he hold the head-and-shoulders of his previous incarnation in gloved hands; so as to reposition the nature of adventure, never mind life and death, in circumstances such as these? To speak of: neither of them resembled a large corse; the like of which nestled up-right or in a zombic fashion. This is especially so if we stop to examine its mildewed front – the latter wise to a light emerald, occasionally dilated by worms, and coming to make up a von Hagens' Plastinate. Weren't these those artistic corpses that enlivened the light with creaking limbs – to speak of!?)

TWELVE>>

Slowly, Lonesome II made his approach into the station's innards. He was waiting for (and apprised of) almost any eventuality. Altogether now, his weapons were not displayed, and yet he stood ready to greet any occurrence. Look at this: a close-up on his jaw becomes apparent, abreast of a blue stripe, and the metallic sheen displays an off-cut... even a new finish. It definitely slopes towards brutality or a Bulldog's filigree; and this basically faces off against the grill, a duct of tension (this). One could say that it finishes the face – or provides some sort of gesture, counter-pane, face-off and intrigue. All in all, the cyborg's particulars were clear and pellucid – almost as if he were moving underwater, after the impress of one of J.G. Ballard's stories. (This certainly mistakes one intrigue for another, and it has to do with his text *The Drowned World*. A panorama (this was) of unblown wash, ultramarine, and the

silvern dexterity of these waters – pulsing – within the estrangement of a dream. This is not to mention the classification of a villain, Strangman, who bobbed up and down amid these lagoons *avec* a skull-like face. Who is to say that he doesn't resemble the Voodoo God of the Dead; Dramabu, whose face is divided into half a man's and half a skeleton's... necessarily so?)

+

Lonesome II looked into a neighbouring chamber – the like of which would contain his future prospects. He stood outside the portal in purple light; while the doorway extended into a yellow vista. It also had a space-station's dispensation; as if someone's opened up space's darkness or alienage, so as to provide an oasis... but not, evidently, of calm. The room or cubicle proves to be a shambles – and it's even more of an abattoir than his recent exploits. These had been left behind him. Vaguely, Lonesome II remembered that his battle with the guards took place on the station's southern side. A large amount of wrecked machinery, including pumps and stray *bric-a-brac*, lay roundabout the cube... and it reeked of a Hyperborean intrigue or war-zone. Some of these spark-plugs (to be sure) were dark blue, greenish, nay glaucous; and welded into one another within a colour arc. Beneath them, and to the side, one spies a range of bodies... There are no surprises here, however, in that these corpses are mercenaries, guards, other officials, and warders of the nether depths. They lie about – higgledy-piggledy – and sporting many wounds, as well as being saturated with red-paint, dye and slack-jaw. At the sign of this spray-painted gore, though, Lonesome II becomes twice as watchful as before (...)

+

It was then that he spotted the space-station's 'master', although we intimate his control only loosely. His name was Veritable Time-thing (so to say) and perhaps it's right to use the past tense. Again, a passage of steam – from a ruptured instrument panel – obscures the view, yet it also masks Lonesome's approach. He tip-toes forwards with a slightly mincing step, prepared all the time to release his weapons. In this instance, the musculature of

Lonesome II becomes apparent; what with the orange breast-plate, blue armour and mighty thews. Also, when viewed from the side, his frontal projection embodies a radio receiver; if not a cathode ray oscilloscope. Certainly, there is a Leyden-jar contraption at work here; or something which hints at one of those Marconi devices of yesteryear... And these were valve-oriented, pre-transistor, and represented something of a box-set. Whereas his target (as a bounty-hunter) is portrayed in the future – at once strung up, majoring in slaughter, semi-naked, and not used to such treatment as this. A menacing figure – by all accounts – exists in the foreground; and yet he was not immediately discernible. The steam or fogginess hides him and (for the moment) he dispenses these mists... primarily as some kind of *active* agent. Do you remember the French Revolution's distinction between passive and active citizens?

THIRTEEN>>

Amid the smoke and steam, Lonesome II detects a torment without end. For two dark hulks loom up in this fog – could it prove to be a nascent abstraction drawn from James Herbert's *The Fog*? Who can tell? Yet one of these silhouettes (but not a nineteenth century one) looks vaguely robotic – instrumental, even iron-age, and torpedo-like. It seems to encode a cranial bone-arch; possibly a set of bones or a skull that's worn *outside the face* (if we can speak in such terms). Certainly, this visage – seen from the side – embodies a tendril; and it remembers (for all the world) one of those prehistoric fishes in a botanic garden, never mind the Natural History Museum. Surely, you remember the institute in South Kensington – the one with the dinosaurs in the loft or upper storey? In any event, these primitive gasses can't understand the other visage (either): and this resembles a man. It's altogether sordid, broken, limpid, sodden, blinded and racked... rather like an old toy. Still, the mist supervenes or floats; and it provides a quagmire; a bell-weather or the soot of

various chimneys. Could it involve the disused plot of an M.R. James story?

+

Now then, the master of this station has been strung up like a helpless victim, with wires slung around his shoulders. These help to keep his frame on the other side of neuter, and Lonesome II approaches now... in order to seize the day! He is aware of the other cyborg's presence, not least his menacing appearance, but refuses to be intimidated by this. In all of the above, one remembers the latter stages of J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*; what with dancing mugwumps, sailors, the stench of seaweed, a decaying lagoon or gantry, and the skull-like visage of Strangman. He looks on – at once blanched, vivid, crepuscular, lunar and refusing to take 'no' for an answer!

+

The station-chief is in a desperate state; but he manages one last gasp. He fights for life, unlike a case in a Shaun Hutson effort, and, in the final analysis, he decides that his assailant is a bounty-hunter, like Lonesome II. He almost shouts the final rejoinder; when he promises to double what the cyborg *hasn't been paid yet* (if you see what I mean).

+

The following scenario then intervenes: the other cyborg fires a gun through the back of his victim's skull, so as to destroy all prospect of life. He does so as an armoured legionary, a Caesar; a desperado of new absences and a redundant troubadour. Although his victim soon splutters his last against such an assault – even though Lonesome II emerges from the shadows in order to register a protest. This has nothing to do with morality (you understand); merely a situation where he's been cheated of a bounty that he rightfully considers to be his. Both of Lonesome's arms are flexed, metallic, heaving and embittered. He moves with the masculine grace (amid metal) of a new Stravinsky. "You have betrayed my lustre!", is all that he can manage. "He was mine. Those credits have gone south when they should be

nestling in this palm”. He shows a steel-shod fist by way of recompense; and it glowers in a prehensile way.

FOURTEEN>>

It was now or never, since the two cyborgs confronted each other within death’s mantle. In all honesty, it is a particular episode in Greek tragedy – with one metal-man, viewed from the side, or in a crepuscular purview. Let’s see: his face was sidereal, reserved, taken to the right, and cleft: it also had the cranium *outside* the head (so to say). This finds itself ornamented by various tendrils – or hair-spray – and these exist one-by-one, or at several times removed. Might they pass for hair on a living dead-man? Whilst the ligature and containments were bluish, rising to purple, and then falling down again: if only to make up the circumference of one death’s-head too far. Moreover, its limbs were prosthetic – inarticulate – falsely rounded and fled off, if not altogether fungible. For the new Cyborg was a medley of old bone, plastic, resinous and porous substances; as well as a robot’s clean limbs. (The imagery of the Cybermen, from a ‘sixties episode of *The Avengers*, comes to mind... what with the license provided by experimental television – at least in its era). And our cyborg ribs to a new articulacy, topped by a head that is several times too big for the corse, and which has just murdered the station-chief... irrespective of the bounty on the latter’s head. Outraged, Lonesome II breaks cover, and his arms are flexed, troublesome, bound to collect dust, and unforsaken. None of this will bring Veritable back, however, and the gun-blast which finished him removed part of his brain... as well as attendant instincts. It was all part of a master plan (to be sure).

FIFTEEN>>

In this scenario, Veritable hangs as a dead puppet in the background... and he splays like purple lotus. Or, to view the same facts from a different angle, he sways in a canopy; even a

dead frond. Do we detect its pleasantries? Since it has something to do with alternative circus, Lisa Minelli's *Cabaret* and the *Grotesque Theatre* which Thomas Ligotti insists on making his own. (After all, the sinister gestures of popular culture are everywhere – if we had the wit to make them out). As we say, Veritable hung like a trapeze *artiste* with the shakes; while afore him the new cyborg, Scimitar V or Lonesome III, stands... and he embodies Robert A. Heinlein and Arno Breker stood together. (Perhaps we ought to intrude an element of Professor Gunter von Hagens' *plastinates* as well). In any event – and just as statuesquely – Lonesome II, the first cyborg, lies to one side. He is still outraged at being cheated of his bounty, yet the ardour has begun to cool.

+

Lonesome II: “You must explain your effrontery to me, O creeper! Why have you continued to steal these currency units from me (?) – so as to prevent them tinkling in my palm. He was mine; but your form intruded in order to stymie my witness.”

Scimitar V: “Do not bother yourself over these perambulations... they have no wit outside our dreams. For one's metaphors are not always what they might be. Don't they end up in the maws of Hell (?) – together with the multiplicity of those mouths, gathered in green, the like of which are worshipped on a bare dais, the latter constructed from finished jade.”

Lonesome II: “But what about my credits?” This phrase was uttered against verdant spray... although the other cyborg seems uninterested, vaguely bored, and even translucent. “I have no time for this; there are others on the list afore thee... and I have little taste for battle at this juncture. Yet, once I have dealt with the next item in my catalogue, I shall be back for you. But now---.”

And with this remark, he teleports elsewhere at blinding speed; what with a susurrations of absence; or the whisper of the planes.

These lead him to separate out the wheat from the chaff, or one set of electrons from another. Contrary to Newtonian physics, and after Will Gregory's *Picard in Space*, one section of life moves towards another, takes it over, and then shifts back. Yet soon, Scimitar V has disappeared; and no crackling atoms are left to gauge his coming. He will not be forgotten, though, because Lonesome II has a tracking beacon in his hand... and it will enable him to spot his nemesis at a million paces. Whilst the tracker 'beeps' in his palm; it has replaced the money which he expected to earn.

SIXTEEN>>

A million miles away, Scimitar V re-materialises in an advanced laboratory. It belongs to an unnamed and faceless industry which we will call the Corporation. Let's examine such a fastness: for the cyborg has come up in the middle of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*... or the lair of the mad scientist, Rowholt, contained therein. He stands on a dais – a pneumatic shuffle – and is surrounded by tubes and wires, never mind the surface ducts of so many entries. These are futuristic (decidedly) and lead off into space... a few steps, almost weightlessly, then exist in relation to his future movements, a steel-shod slipper for a hip replacement. And all the way round the podium one is free to see various lackeys and technicians who run to answer these commands. They have logged in – in a computerised way – all of the testing apparatus, so as to prevent any data slippage. Also, they are arranging test after test, so that not one scintilla of information is wasted from the cyborg's recent sally. [Note: in the science of information, the unit of currency is known as the 'bit' – it's the *bit of information*, if you take my meaning].

In any case, Scimitar stands between two pillars of a dulcet blue; the like of which indicates maximal columns of ice. These surround him on either side – as if to give a code to his rule on earth. While behind him a redundant wash – rather like a tame

Rothko – finishes off this swell abandonment. It lists to one side, only to reveal a drop where the steps should be, and these lead down, imponderably, to those circuit-shoots, or bays, which lurk underneath. Can we make a judgement; or will the pattern of this secret lab pass us by? By any stretch, a scientist in skin-hugging lycra (blue in colour) fiddles with machinery out front, as others rush about, intent on doing the bidding of the organisation they serve. For, rather like Count Maurice de Maeterlinck's *The Life of Bees*, all of them are serving this bureaucracy outside of Max Weber's *iron cage*. It is an example of organicism or a crystalline detachment (almost). Where each one of these units (the scientists) serves the greater wonderment of a divine whole. This stands for an extension (you see); an exercise in *Gestalt*. And, to adopt philosophical language, it is a hypostatisation: a development on and beyond itself. Such a diploma (or envelope) intrigues, supersedes, goes outright, drags up and then transcends... even the possibility of such transcendence.

+

In the forefront of our Horror laboratory, out of Shaun Hutson's witness, stands our major female component, Doctor Falicia Fairweather. (She has starred before in *Venus Fly-Trap*, but this is a different role altogether. It certainly amounts to a more malevolent one...)

+

By any reckoning, our *femme fatale* has re-invented herself anew, especially in the form of a new scientific Medusa. Can there be any post-modern vintage other than this? She relaxes in some skin-tight lycra, coloured a resinous green, which surrounds her almost naked body, and wears an eye-piece or a lens over one orb, but not in a jaunty or piratical manner, and she has an enormous foam or cascade of red-hair that billows down behind her. It certainly covers her shoulders, as she proceeds to examine her creation: the Scimitar cyborg, who is programmed for death and destruction.

Falicia Fairweather: "Have you served its corruption?"

Scimitar V: “Not without the illumination of a false mistress---”.

Falicia Fairweather: “I do not credit your absolution!”

Scimitar V: “But the addition of some humour remains absent.”

Falicia Fairweather: “There is no room for comedy, in the task on which we are now embarked.”

Scimitar V: “But the Greeks believed in a threefold or tripartite division, theatrically speaking. They spoke of three inter-related forms: tragedy (straight), comedy (the slipping of a mask into the archaic), and, finally, the Satyr play; a tragi-comic sprat.”

SEVENTEEN>>

Our new cyborg, Scimitar V, is now examined by a relay of specialists... and one of his hands is removed for testing. It proves to be a massive digit; the kindred of which covers the average head in its span... at least in terms of its diameter. The individual members were blue, ivory, red, cornelian and unstated – even though three yellow bands criss-cross its lower extremities. Do you see? Several red wires (or tendrils) link the glove to its arm... all of which possesses the familiarity of a human body (albeit in a new way). Might it illustrate one of those eighteenth century corses (from Germany) made of glass and redolent of Vaudeville...? These were illustrative devices – reminiscent of the fair – from Germany several centuries back. Although the cyborg’s cynical humour is not appreciated by his creator, Doctor Falicia Fairweather. She looks on (an optical device over one eye) and her lustrous red-hair shapes the screen... wherein she happens to be observed. The woman is a strange mixture of sword-and-sorcery heroine, *femme fatale*, Medusa, scientist and Clytemnestra. Moreover, more than a hint of Circe – a gorgon – and Caryl Churchill’s version of *Thyestes* is hinted at. (This will inevitably appeal over its demotic).

Needless to say, and against a blood-red ground which tapers to orange, the slinky scientist asks Scimitar V how he has fared. He is non-committal, although, prior to disappearing, the cyborg reveals that his rival, Lonesome II, was in attendance. Yet, before she can interrogate him further, his molecular structure begins to fade and dim... As he wheels, crackles, pops and hisses – adjacent to vanishing altogether. Also, and amidst a tinkling star, various lines fade out, merge, scintillate and refuse to coalesce – prior to being transported elsewhere. Falicia Fairweather immediately demands, from the technicians gathered around her, that a tracking beacon be placed on Scimitar V – this will enable them to keep track of him. Likewise, she asks for a board meeting of the Corporation to be held in twelve minutes time... and this shall involve the technology of virtual reality. (It is sometimes referred to, in this context, as *virtuality*). She has asked the leaders of the Corporation to gather, so as to discuss developments in the project known as Scimitar V. An initiative which attempts to rescue the Corporation, or save it from future destruction.

EIGHTEEN>>

The virtual conference room soon comes to order; what with a swirling atmosphere of green and yellow. The appearance of these individuals who are not present involves lasers, parallax, diamonds, and the discrete use of hidden mirrors. The board consists of six members – one of whom is quite clearly an alien (or a member of a rival species). He has a dolichocephalic head (rather like Sherlock Holmes); and it tapers at the back so as to reveal a domed skull. May it bend over its bone arch? And the rest of the Head is possibly greenish, hollowed out, hulk-like and reminiscent (say) of an anthropoid. He wears the habit of a monk around his shoulders and lower down. Whereas other committee members consist of an eccentric Russian general... what with a coif of hair over one side of his face, as well as a moustache and a trimmed beard, together with medals – of one sort or another –

on an olive ground. The entire collection is finished off by some brown-boots which are kicked out of sight. They were under the table. This latter device is a shimmering cascade of blue – and it cut across the room like a glass template. Yet, in truth, it may not actually be there. Whilst one board member has yet to fully materialise; and he is presently headless, discarnate, un beholden and liable to crystallise. Do you see? Three other board members (making six in all) betray a Hippy-like or alternative exterior... Yet, uncertainly, they bring a sinister bent to it; since we are dealing with a creative, amoral and entrepreneurial drive... may it long continue! These bohemian individuals evince an Eastern oddness; or an ‘alternative’ attire... the like of which revolves around the years 1967-73. Yet – in all honesty – no-one can really gainsay the undertone. – One that resembles a skeleton, in the upper air of Breughel’s *Dance of Death*, where a stick-man executes a dead soul. ‘It’ kneels in the dust – what with wheel-like contraptions of torture to the north, or in the distance. A sword exists in the bony hand of this cranial extra.

+

One’s eye is also drawn to Doctor Falicia Fairweather who’s had a quick change of clothes. Her hair has been combed back and fastened with a clasp (so as to control it) and she sports a female business-suit. It consists of a top and skirt, and incarnates the ‘power dressing’ look from the nineteen eighties. The shoulders are padded and – in a provocative way – she may be wearing precious little under this. The final member of the committee is a woman who smokes a black cigarette in a holder... She has what appears to be a sun-wheel or a zodiac painted on her forehead. It will suffice for the present time.

+

Doctor Fairweather addresses the conference on a black ground, and she adjusts the sound with a small device in her hand. One of the hippies soon interrupts her, however, to say that he has a meeting in Peking in an hour, and could she make it short. They don’t possess virtual reality yet so he will have to go in person. When he finished talking the female protagonist gasped: “What

primitives they must be, no virtuality!” (...) As he did so, he lay back in his chair and put both of his hands behind his head... in a sedentary pose. While the woman next to him spoke in a dulcet tone, the smoke trailing in a spiral from her cheroot, and the sun-wheel on her forehead became more and more evident. The whole scenario was suffused with a yellow-and-green translucence – one which shimmered, broke, slanted and merged in. Indeed, virtual reality took a while to get used to... unless one chose to concentrate on Falcia Fairweather. She was as loud as life and in three-dimensions. She explained again that – in the merger and acquisition stakes – over a hundred individuals had been killed, mentally eviscerated, and their instincts absorbed by the cyborg. The desire – on behalf of the faceless Corporation – was to furnish their warrior with as many dangerous psychologies as possible... in the course of which a large number of villains perished. This is highly amoral, but many persons might be found to praise it! For her part, Falcia looked ravishing – as she spoke about cyborgs and death – with her clean skin, green eyes and scarlet tresses. She went on to explain, above a red out-fit and an emerald frame, that the acquisitions were proceeding smoothly... Yet, as one board member interrupted – the endeavour was on schedule but obviously over budget. This is what one had to say! Nonetheless, a growing problem has been noticed with this initiative. A silence then intruded on the board. “What is wrong with it?”, snapped one of its members – hardly able to conceal his irritation. “Well”, replied Falcia, “the cyborg known as Scimitar V has been diverging from our plans. He’s been adopting mockery, wry humour, cynicism and the sardonic – contrary to all commands!” As she outlined this, Falcia Fairweather leant heavily, and rather erotically, on the shimmering desk... it moved like a translucent blue filter in front of her. Her hair streamed behind her, albeit in a controlled way, and the business-jacket moved down slightly, so as to reveal her cleavage. She rested the audio device – a blue-grey instrument that allowed her to communicate with them – on the reflective *patina* of the glass. Yes, he has begun to disobey our instructions,

she insisted, but only in the most general way, and it's as if he's beginning to develop a personality of his own – contrary to all our protocols.

NINETEEN>>

Falicia Fairweather turned to address all the board members at once – and her hair was held in by a clasp. It gushed – strong and red – from out of the stop-gap of this measure. While she continued to hold the communication device (grey-and-blue) in one hand. Did she swing it around like a weapon? “As I mentioned afore”, she insisted, “the Scimitar cyborg has developed a strand of black humour – highly inappropriate in the circumstances – and he now multi-tasks”. “Meaning?”, queried one of the board. “Well!”, she replied, “he’s developed a mind of his own – to the extent that Wyndham Lewis’ sections, *Holocausts* and *Swagger-Sex*, in *Tarr*, are now redundant. Since he chooses the commands which he wishes to obey; rather than responding, involuntarily, to our demands. This caused a pensive reaction among one of the committee members (...) He was a very elderly man; replete with wrinkles and an extensive epidermis. With a look of resignation, he removed his glasses and insisted that the Corporation had sunk billions of credits (a currency unit) into this project, and now its chief architect, Doctor Fairweather, has told them it wasn’t working. But this isn’t so – she insisted; the cyborg, known as Scimitar, was acquiring the instincts of some of the most dangerous individuals in the universe. All that she required – to keep things on track – was a larger budget, more resources, and a bigger back-up staff. Reluctantly, and after a brief consultation on the board, this was acceded to. Yet why is the Corporation going to these extraordinary lengths? Well, perhaps one of the reasons was the pre-cognitive data, the like of which – at the pre-rational level – picked up an unknown menace to the organisation, that could later demolish it, and against which they had to take action. The result is the Scimitar cyborg, a creature – of pronounced

deadliness – designed to defend the Corporation against any threat, perceived or actual. As the committee members dispersed – each to their appointed tasks – Falcia Fairweather pressed a button and this causes each virtual reality to fracture. It broke apart, de-limited, and split into various spheroids... and these – like divine soap-suds – floated off into the distance. They surrounded her example as they did so; and each distillate (or bubble) betrays its translucence. It is (immediately) a mixture of green and yellow... the one melding into the other; and becoming transfixed, thereby, in ever beckoning pools of light. Do you see?

+

Also, and at another level, we note a transposition of this experience – and it has to do with a great mound or maw. This consists of a multiplicity of mouths – the like of which writhe, amidst multiple gnashers, to survey the scene. Do we sense its amphitheatre? It exists in a light or temporal zone; the kindred of which seems to be dark, servile, sepulchral, dis-ignited and liable to break off.

+

Meanwhile, on another world, Scimitar V was about to emerge on a rival cliff-top. He had come to ‘absorb’ the instincts of a large barbarian, multiple armed, and going under the name of Behemoth (Spendthrift). Didn’t Thomas Hobbes write a lesser text called *Behemoth*?

TWENTY>>

Oh my yes! This glowed at the heart of a silent universe – amid the fog and mistiness of the ether. For the world onto which they were to emerge revolved at the heart of its solar system. The scene which we wish to survey took the following form... in that it existed at the centre of a crater. This was full of red Volcanic ash, and, as one’s eyes adjusted to the light, we can make out various figures (...) The sky above is rubiate; while the inner fastness looked orange and the inset ring of stones appears to be

green. In all honesty, the rocks reflect back on themselves with a lambent gleam – each one of them representing a different colour. These were blue, emerald, red dye, purple, pink and orange by turn. Do you wish to detect their lustre? Against this, some black crags exist to the side – and they served to limit the projection of what went on. Now and then a strange reptile – or something of an amphibian – scrambles over the necessary scree. Could it be an iguana that had escaped from the pages of J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*? At the epi-centre one detects a giant known as Behemoth (Spendthrift). He was blue-green (or glaucous) in colour; what with jewelled growths on either shoulder... and he possessed four arms, each of them highly muscled. A pony-tail on the crown of his head adds an incongruous touch. Whereas other features include a spiralled belt, consisting of buckles, as well as a fur doublet... the nature of which provides a backing mantle or screen. It certainly strives to achieve an effect – together with a large broad-sword and a green loin-clout. He also wears a scabbard that passes down one muscular leg towards his boot... and the stones underneath his feet are pink, turquoise, magenta and deep blue (but not cerulean). A purple rock over-hangs this vista; when set against a bright green and yet darkening sky. What occasions our interest, however, is his captive whom Behemoth is tormenting (effectively). This was a female seer or prophetess – a testamentor or reader of the future; i.e., one that we must call a Precog: one who is precognitive. She wears a limpid bikini – of practised white – whereas her skin is dark pink, decidedly so. Like Behemoth, she exemplifies an alien element – together with the fact that she has four arms as well. Although her form was slinky, Barbie-doll like, unconstrained, and not easily forgotten once viewed. This is what we have to face up to... Whilst Behemoth alternates between politeness, the grand manner, a certain gallantry and brutality. He slaps his charge and then demands a consultation upon his future. Whereas she reminds him – by way of reproof – that she cannot predict the future on demand, only in an innocent-minded way. This was irrespective

of threats or financial inducements ---. So intent is Behemoth on his charge that he (effectively) forgets to watch his back. For Scimitar V teleports in on a rival menhir, or one of those geologic formations that towers into the air as a sliver of rock. This summons up a reminiscence of the Grand Canyon – if not the grand manner. And, in truth, close-ups feed on Behemoth’s face: and his eyes squint, red in their sockets, when allied *avec* a deep-blue texture on the screen. Furthermore, an orange stream of air moves behind them – often contrasting with rock of a similar hue. This cascades down-hill – prior to Scimitar’s arrival; against which Behemoth’s head was reflected: and it came across as ultramarine, inflected with red, and surrounded by gold.

+

Scimitar remains unfazed, however.

+

It was then that Scimitar V threw himself on Behemoth; and he cascaded from above – while passing via the air like a human torpedo. [– If the word *human* can be used in the context of these cyborgs; who are a medley of flesh, information technology, electro-neural cells and transistors (...)] Yet Behemoth is not entirely caught unawares ---.

TWENTY-ONE>>

For the cyborg manoeuvres into an attack mode; whereby he is airborne at the crucial moment. His leap was an impressive sight; at once oracular, o’er-leaping and unbeholden: as he hurtled like an athlete in Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia*. One of his hands is a claw, an armature and something of a weapon: and it reached out so as to conceal. Might it resemble a prosthesis – or some sort of false limb, with or without a hook? Whilst the hand in question seems to be sleek, naked, unornamental and liable to ruthlessness. Despite this, one detects the spur from which he leaps, and this veers into the night-time --- if only by dint of a parallax vision. It adopts the form of a promontory (no matter how crudely) and Lonesome III jumps from it. Wasn’t the

Corporation's name for him Scimitar V? Whereas the barbarian's head swivels slightly to the right, in that he senses the possibility of attack... and is determined to avoid 'victim' status. His Head contains fierce mandibles, an abundant helmet or armour, and a heavily tabulated front... underneath which his features consist of blue fur. All in all, his looks were icy, in-drawn, bear-like, hirsute and yet wary – it incarnates a barbaric principle; yet remains an unfriendly 'bear'. For, realising that an attack is imminent, he doubles back on himself, so that the cyborg sails over his head and lands on his back. Do you see? The instincts of this barbarian are very fine indeed, and this is why the robot-warrior has come forward in time, so as to claim them. Soon Behemoth has his fingers around the cyborg's neck, and the two of them wrestle with each other... prior to any sort of a resolution. Yet the cyborg is by no means defenceless – he fires a blast from his hand, and this causes the barbarian to disappear under a mountain-top. It cascades to the side and then hurtles downwards... thence sundering the air with a mighty roar. The collapsing cliff takes the format of great rocks; themselves well-rounded, brown, purple, reddish and grey. These billiard-balls are by no means smooth – and, in their roughened exteriors, they festoon down... so as to cover Behemoth. He is (momentarily) inundated and subsumed by this rock-slide – even though it was man-made and not accidental. A vapour-trail was left afterwards... as a fog or mist travels in the air: it seizes upon every opportunity to surprise itself. The drizzle is purple, bluish, steaming and vacant; as it rises above us in various tendrils. It adopts a kaleidoscope of many colours; the like of which parades afore you and fills up the air. Throughout all of this, though, one sees the sinister form of Lonesome III (Scimitar V) rising up, as he walks in tandem with the smoke. It pauses around him with nary a pall; if only to facilitate order out of smog... or some type of chaos. Yes indeed; the fire's temperature was forever lost – and the cyborg's body waxes blue, a deep metal, and some sort of philandering agent. What can one say? Since the truculence and robotic character (imprimatur) of his Form stands out for all

to see. Momentarily, our prophetess, Cassandra, is bemused – and she wonders whether the hulk in the mist is actually her tormentor, Behemoth. Who knows? And yet she soon realises her mistake – in that her features, as she makes this call, are full of entreaty. One could hardly describe them as love-lorn, but they do evince a loving or care-worn manner. That is to say: she exhibits the prospect of pity – nay, self-pity – as something that should be looked up to. What about it? *Quod* her loving look seems tremulous, wilfully considered, and hopeful (endlessly so). And the looming cyborg does nothing to dispel her grief, or yearning, primarily by making leave to fire. Although his intention (at this extremity) is generous, in that he intends to release her from bondage. What favour can she bestow on him in return (?); it's merely the one which intimates the future – namely, that the blue barbarian shall boomerang. Indeed, she expects his coming at any instant – and, if she was to factor forwards, then she sees both 'cyborgs' wrestling at a future date. Even though, in her case, she is wracked by the energy of the blasts – as the cyborg frees her from those bonds. He does so by blasting them to the side; as she shudders next to the rock in terms of their impact. Thud (!), Whoop(!), Whoom(!) is what occurs – as she dangles by a thread – her life the gift of a malevolent cyborg. Do you see it? Since, once she is free, he stands behind her in a blooming and menacing way... but why do we configure it thus? Because his background entreaty can be withering, steadfast, and one that refuses moral indifference. Viewed from one perspective, Scimitar V is a ferocious engine of destruction... yet, looked at from another view-point, he is protective, right-toned and enabling. Could he be a Guardian angel in a misdirected way (?); one that approaches the divine from the Left – i.e., via a diabolic side. Yes, that's right – it's amazing how one can alter a creature's moral direction... depending on how the same talents, for destruction and death, may be used in order to protect. The hand that deals in pain is also the one which salves (you see). This was what we always have to remember!

+

Yet, amid this furlough, the Barbarian known as Behemoth rises from the tundra – and he does so under a reflexive moon. This enables him to push aside various rocks, achieve stability, and move them out of the way. These boulders cause him to stumble; to break-dance and falter... yet, in truth, he keeps coming on (...) after such a period or in like manner. His blue thews, massive hands and head, as well as a heavy musculature become evident... as he moves an escarpment prior to toppling it. Don't forget that he has (effectively) shifted a mountain in order to return to the fray. Nor have his other senses been dormant: in that he recognises, almost immediately, those conversations between the seer and her avenger. Who could have picked out Scimitar V as a champion? Might he be considered to be an enabler? It is an interesting reversal of roles – an exercise in sympathy, albeit in an attenuated way. The Scimitar cyborg ushers his heroine back... so that she remains safe from the ensuing fray: (another kindly gesture – one notices). Behemoth was apprised of it too; and he intimates, via a blood-stained snout, that she will suffer for this indiscretion. Most especially – given her parsimony in telling his fortune earlier (by all that's Holy!) As he says this, his features are smeared, blue, reflexive: and heavy, more somnolent. They incarnate the idea that nothing can pass this surrender to aggression: particularly when it thinks about itself in this way. Do you credit it? Cassandra looks away with annoyance, a peevish disregard, as well as the expectation of future pain. She is all too aware of Behemoth's methods... and didn't the left-wing economist, Fritz Neumann, delineate a picture of Nazi economics called *Behemoth*? By any regard, the shaggy barbarian looms over the cyborg; and, immediately, his two other arms rip out of his torso. This was to disengage the pistol at his hip – as well as providing him with a chance to slap the cyborg's face. This happens with a reverberating welter; the likelihood of which stings amid a sharpening orange. One also notices the parley or such an exchange: given the ochre light and its steady purpose, as it suffuses the Heavens roundabout. These

begin with a lighter texture – nearer the ground – only to become darker and heavier – as one approximates to the heavens. [Note: this is the very opposite of the Shintoist notion in *manga* or Japanese comics. This intimates the idea that the more heroic you are – the lighter, the more ethereal, the closer to the Gods: the more exalted. Also, the younger (often preternaturally) one can pretend to be. Reverse-wise, the villains in this Shintoist method – were always heavier, more lugubrious, closer to the earth; and more *material* (unutterably so).] They are attracted towards the soil – in accordance, perhaps, with what Thomas Pynchon called *Gravity's Rainbow*. Is one free to view it in any other way---?].

+

Still and all, Scimitar V's head is rocked back under the blow's propulsion. Although one recognises that he was a true warrior: one who came only equipped for battle... as testified to by the weaponry; the multiplicity in his fists. This – if we recall – relates to the multi-purposiveness of his hands. For, rather like Swiss army-knives, they evince a great number of tool-kits: guns, axes, halberts, double-headed blades, hammers and Scimitars... hence his name (one supposes)! They are highly mobile.

TWENTY-TWO>>

The cyborg then acted ruthlessly, and he produced a knife from out of his hand. It snicked into place without a word, and all of this occurred next to an orange background... a silvern disc, this must have been, where a light tangerine mellows to a dark red behind Scimitar V. Despite the fact (this was) that a pile of rocks exist aslant them... they begin with a pink and then adopt a purple hue. Then, in one blaze of violent motion, he hacks off one of Behemoth's hands – with maximum brutality; and one of his blue tendrils swishes to the floor. And this occurs next to a rain-storm of orange-and-yellow; even the swirling nature of so much electric rain. For a moment the ferocity of Behemoth is reversed; and he staggers to the side – digitless – amid blue dye. He was, to all intents and purposes, a vision in cerulean; at once

multiple-handed, graven, semi-articulate, goggling and aghast. Do you see? Nor is this the final indignity which is inflicted on Behemoth... in that more is to come. For, amid a red vista of volcanic rocks, a yellow sky beats down on a rocky promontory and 'neath a green sun. Whilst the tundra beneath his feet is black, held aloft, swaying with retrieved motion, and forever to be trodden on. The two figures themselves are limned in blue – the one a massive and bulbous shape; the other a sleek and vicious integer. Don't you notice them dancing in a different version of Sir Arthur Bliss' *Checkmate*? In this scenario, Behemoth is stabbed through the breast-plate with a poniard; the latter raging to an entreaty. Needless to say, in this scene the cyborg finishes off his quarry... And the knife-arm flips over Behemoth who careers backwards... and this is almost in a somersault, a flotsam or river-boat, or an escape from unwholesomeness! The barbarian wonders why (?) – what is it all for? Why has he been killed or despatched by this entity from another world? Given the fact, above all niceties, that he'd been the king of this coinage, veritably so. At least this measures one reality against another... prior to the advent of Scimitar V or Lonesome III on this distracted world!

+

Nevertheless, the corpse of Behemoth expires in a sodden manner – or in a way that's subdued, bloodied, cataleptic, and overdone. Still, Behemoth wishes to ask those cardinal questions: the ones which impinge on the why and wherefores of existence. Do you detect its limitless graces? Even now a strange silence supervenes over all (...) It is then that Behemoth expires – uneasily and in an ungracious way. The barbarian seems to be lying on orange-to-brown rocks; what with the dust of ages surrounding their keep. Likewise, various other rock piles hem him in; and these were a dull blue in tint – when circled by variously pink radials. Moreover, blue and white tendrils move away from these spots... and they provide the burning sky with a welcome break. Was the atmosphere on fire (?) – possibly not... and yet it adopted a formulation which is a pale yellow rising to

orange, then darkening with red, and almost becoming scarlet at the beam's top. Several asteroids, spheroids or moons subsist in the heavens – they are perfectly proportioned and yet unearthly, the one as against the other. Doubtless, Behemoth's finality occurs when Scimitar V blows off the back of his skull and absorbs his instincts... This takes place in relation to a nascent scream; as the blue barbarian's head is reversed. There was a final cry as his instincts are 'assimilated' by one's assailant. All of which exists against a background of yellow merging into dark green. Nor can this escape a tungsten horizon which glimmers overhead; itself a forgotten witness' repo – never mind some purple rocks. While, in closing, Scimitar V's head was covered in gore, splendour, various innards, forgotten graces and battle's spume. He is satisfied with his work – given that there are only two names left on his assassination list. The next one happens to be Lonesome II whom he's already met on several occasions.

+

In recompense, the fantasy figure known as Cassandra – the seer who can tell the future – makes leave to depart. She has been freed from her bonds now. And this subsists amid a swirling pink; the limits of which light up the firmament. They do so with a new pitch. These tendrils are magnificent spume – now that the cyborg has shot away her bonds. Scimitar V, who's increasingly addicted to black humour, asks why there is no grateful kiss for him... And yet Cassandra rises vertically into the sky – so as to make off, after her ordeal, in a circular manner. She has risen – telepathically – in a vertical way, so as to provide a mystical end to the business. Beneath her evaporating form one detects the pink streaks of an enabling sky... as she gradually disappears against a redoubt of sandy rock. Do you detect this reluctant outline?

Cassandra: "I cannot endorse your methods, Scimitar V, but I thank you for my life. Given the depredations of the late Behemoth – this is no idle boast, to think of!"

+

“I feel that we shall meet again, Lonesome II!”

But Scimitar V is momentarily disconcerted by this: “Lonesome II? I’m afraid that as a woman who reads the future – you’re way out of kilter!”

As he enunciates this, the cyborg begins to teleport away on one of those transportation beams. In all honesty, his form melds into a happenstance; at one star-struck, sinister, antler’d, electronically finished, and not liable to seek manumission. He is also surrounded by the circular effulgence of the beam – as it tracks him prior to lifting off. A suction-like sound – SHTAK(!) – accompanies his lift-off. Whilst half of his anatomy (minus the cranial head) was arched in some electronic rain. All of which eventuates prior to his escape from a red tableau – in terms of the sky – as well as a white one, given the streaming clouds which accompany it. While the cliffs behind an escaping cyborg wax ochre, turquoise, magenta and golden spied – to be sure.

TWENTY-THREE>>

All is quiet for a moment under a tungsten flame – and it provides a brief instalment. This proves to be a sliver or a token articulation; and the clouds are fluffy, white-streaked and unafraid. Of what – one may ask? Yet the rocks (roundabout) were a dark purple; rising to a light red above its filter. Now then, the sky which exists aloft was bright, golden in its molten infusion, and liable to be blocked – cross-wise – with clouds. Yet this tranquillity is partly mythological – and not just in terms of J.G. Ballard’s fiction. Oh my yes; since, after a brief rumble, a beam came down and smote the ground... it resembled a fire-ball. It coruscated, hit the turf running, burst asunder and left a trace (...) Some lightning sparks then fell out, fizzled around and died into silence – rather like Russell Kirk’s ghost stories. A green and white pall of dust was thrown up underneath its point

of impact, and a sound reverberated around. It put up the shock and awe of a type of onomatopoeia: KA-BOOM! is how it went. Meanwhile, a delta of crags surrounded this basin... and the foremost rocks were themselves divots in black. Could they be the silhouettes of so many fortunes? Likewise, a mantle of brown rock (light to heavy) circled this plateau – whilst this was off-set by a range of pink hillocks in the background. Above them some diagonal clouds moved aslant – rather similar to a bishop moving in chess. Similarly, this horizontal cumulus was broken up by blue suns, moons or other terrestrial objects (...) It is quite clear that this explosion was an attack: the result of a laser-beam fired by Lonesome II. He has missed by a few fractional seconds; the kindred of which are not liable to wait. Forsooth: Lonesome II stands, with an enormous gun, in a neighbouring dimension. “I avoided him – but not by much, eh comrades?” And, in this scenario, Lonesome II stood foursquare with a large weapon – its calibre was grey. Whilst the device looked massive, dexterous, Apocalyptic, and post-scientific. Nor do we fail to see it with any surprise; given its eruption and size. Moreover, Lonesome II is wearing a brown mack and some denim trousers; partly to conceal his metallic appearance, so to say. Whereas his head remains unchanged – what with its sunken eyes, grilled teeth, horns,chutzpah and abiding tungsten. Behind him a green haze or mantle swabs up, and it takes the form of a retreating water-colour or a labile tint. This, in turn, suffuses – via some mauve – into a dark or ebon register, nearly black. While an orange, yellow and reddish smoke trails from the gun-barrel. (As it was lighter than air it rose to the top of this particular frame). Yet, immediately athwart our cyborg, one sees a brightly illuminated planet: it was dark orange in the centre while shading into a lighter emulsion on the outside. An almost identical orb lies off to the left – immediately adjacent to the cyborg’s head. He may have missed with his Parthian shot – yet his adversary (Scimitar V) might well be gone but he’s certainly not forgotten. Since our tracking cyborg possesses a beacon in the palm of his hand... And, when unclasped, it reveals a device that has zeroed in on

Scimitar's departure... it will follow him back to his destination. What can this be? It appears to be a few years hence in the twenty-first century: such as 2020, for example. Now then, Lonesome II determined to follow his one-time assailant to the end of the earth.

TWENTY FOUR>>

Meanwhile, the Scimitar cyborg reappears on earth in the near-future... and he did so in a glass-tube. Or what seemed to be one (...) in that the tubing might well be an invisible sheath; an incalculations. Suffice it to say: the gorgeous red-head, Falicia Fairweather, stared on... but not necessarily in rapture. Since Scimitar V's rebellious behaviour increasingly concerned her – as it had done the Corporation's board at an earlier date. Never mind: *quod* the hurly-burly around him was green-to-blue; as well as billowing up like silver spume. An onomatopoeiac sound accompanied his return and – in all honesty – it was something like sizzling bacon: SSSZZZTTT! Fairweather shook her head violently, as if to say *he must answer for this indiscipline*. Yet the secret laboratory in which this takes place is yellow bound... albeit with orange and red surrounds. These resemble varied sprockets, dials, radials, levers, plungers and pulleys. While underneath Scimitar V one sees those steel girders or steps – isolated in space – and hanging inviolately. It was as if they existed over to one side, and in suspended animation. Uneasily – and as if each step cost him an effort – Scimitar moved forwards. His steps were jerky, unfazed, unformatted, and needing to be corrected by another discourse. He strides across a walkway which showers down to a green brogue; what with a silver sheen existing throughout. Various wires (themselves wound into bundles) festoon either side of these walkways. And behind him there are a large number of steel jambs – the latter finished off by a purple square. This exists in the far corner. Falicia demands that the cyborg reports to sick-bay for a full check-up, prior to any other missions. Yet he regards this as a waste of time and

wishes to strike out (immediately) against the next target. What do we say to this? It also leaves a large number of tungsten filaments – as well as orange to yellow lights – blinking away to one side. The cyborg refuses to pay them any heed (...) Moreover, as he moves and dusts himself off, his steel steams, glimmers, rasps and lets out the odd noise (involuntarily). He almost embodies a large steam-engine that's cooling (on its own) after heavy use! Scimitar V does not actually stagger, but his limbs are spasmodically lifted, 'set all at sea', disjointed and misaligned. Could the cyborg be testing them prior to future action? Yet, as he moves, one is aware of heavy pellets of vapour that rise akin – to what? Clearly, in comparison to the robot-woman in *Metropolis*, this robot is much more autonomous. Perhaps he has 'absorbed' far too many intuitions (and taken into himself far too wide a variety of victims). Maybe the Corporation should have stuck to a more finite number? They have been too logical (as is their wont); too precise, technological and rational. Not everything can be thought out beforehand – and an absence of artistic intuition can belabour the most august projects. Yet this reverie, concerned with artificial intelligence, is soon interrupted in a violent way. As, after a few involuntary alarms, a shuddering begins to occur at the side of the lab. It relates to an unexplained surge in power in one part of the laboratory – yet, once all is said and done, a confrontation between Falicia and Scimitar has still to take place. To begin again---

TWENTY-FIVE>>

The cyborg resembles some prehistoric creature – as he casts aside a shoulder-pad. This cascades to the polished floor amid some blue rinse or dye – the latter enabling the laboratory to reach the sick-bay. One of the Corporation's scientists stands near by, dressed in a green suit, and ready to inspect the cyborg at a moment's notice. Whilst a light blue or azure spray halts the discharge – it is only punctured by a grey computer-screen. (This takes the form of a square). Meantime, Doctor Falicia

Fairweather looks down, over a taff-rail, and in the cyborg's direction. She represents – for all the world – a version of Richardson's *Clarissa*, in lycra, and with a great deal of red-hair. A lens or investigation device nestles over one eye – somewhat engagingly. It gives her a piratical look all round (...) She is anxious that the metal-man reports for a full check-up... After all, the Corporation has sunk billions into his Research and Development, so it is beholden to her to make sure that he functions efficiently. Whereas Scimitar V behaves with increasing truculence – almost as if he's breaking out of the Corporation's control. His face betrays a legion of absence; at once being armoured, helmeted, blood-tinged, defended, and reminiscent (altogether) of the Guard or goal-keeper in hockey. (This is independent of whether the game was played on ice or grass). Whilst his face embodies something of a dial (depending); as well as a robotic integer. It seems sleek, untroubled, furious, turbid and unsoft. Do we detect a tinge of blood which moves down his face (?); the latter crimson was encouraged by Behemoth in their contest on another world. Still, the visage in question (if we might return to it) is armorial, knightly, not bereft, ribbed and hygienic – especially in its formulation.

+

All of a sudden, one of the operatives warns Doctor Falcia of a power surge in the upper decks. This warning had already been given once before – and it came from roof level. Yet it was only now that all Hell broke loose – it slipped off, most readily, the chain of its distaff days. An enormous crash occurred, and tinkling shards of glass cascaded all around the laboratory's spectrum. These were lightly filtered and coloured yellow, green and occasionally orange. In the middle of this scenario, though, plunged the figure of Lonesome II... he had been searching for Scimitar V all along, in order to exact vengeance over the three million credits. (– The sum of money that he had lost when a space-station's boss had been wrenched from his grasp. He had not forgotten – and was not prepared to forgive – this insult to his bounty). At the heart of a glass cascade, however, Lonesome II

waxes orange-and-red, in excruciating detail, as he swarms and roars. He also wears a brown mack – somewhat incongruously – around his upper body. Might this provide a mantle or shroud, so as to furnish a vampiric leap? Likewise, he carries two vast weapons – the first a sort of bazooka (a carry-on); the latter an advanced ray-gun which can be held in either fist. (Lonesome II, sensing Scimitar’s ferocity, had obviously come well prepared). Whilst an extensive window – with seven partitions – existed to one side of him. It was prepared to cast down a range of glass filaments – all of them black and running in parallel. They took up half of the laboratory’s wall-space – particularly along its leftwards slant. Likewise, various grey tumbrels existed in front of it: and these levelled off against the blue-to-green wires, tubes and ducts that cascaded on. These provided the lab’s guts or innards – so to say! While various operatives began to run around the technical area, or its periphery, and they registered an alarum... the fact that an enemy has entered the sanctum. Whereas Doctor Falicia Fairweather – for her part – was quite a picture (...) And she stood, on a raised dais, in the corner of the laboratory in skin-hugging lycra, graven to green. She still wore the eye-piece – and the shock of red-hair caused her to stand out from the other male operatives.

+

On landing, adjacent to a grey bay, Lonesome II fired his shorter weapon repeatedly. This proves to be a ray-gun (with the capacity to stun) and it hit Scimitar V full in the face... He keeled over under the impact of this surge; if only to collapse prior to coming back with redoubled glory. Nothing could more earnestly recapture the gore of *Macbeth*!

TWENTY-SIX>>

Doctor Falicia, pouting and with her breasts half out, orders the Corporation’s security teams to the laboratory. She asks them to report on the double – given the severity of the breach. Do you hear? Whilst down below – in the bowels of the lab – Lonesome

II stands above Scimitar V with a feeling of triumph. He is dressed in his brown mack, a sort of vestigial wrap, and he points the cannon directly at his rival's head. His whole gesture suggests the following words, yes? "I have the drop on you now, Scimitar. You may have cheated me of the credits, but not of this satisfaction... yes?" In any event, the Scimitar cyborg asks him not to struggle – it will only cause him pain and unnecessary suffering. At first, Lonesome II believes this to be one of Scimitar's dark jokes – namely, his treacly or acidic wit. Where had he picked up this Ulster-Scots diction; i.e., an intimation of gallows humour? And yet once he has righted himself for *The Final Conflict* we note his features once again. These were purblind, bloodied, unretrieved, expectant, savage and ready for anything. Do you see? He then, against a cascade of light blue, hurls himself at his rival cyborg: if only to knock him down or over. They carom towards the centre of the laboratory via numerous valves, ducts, compressors and conveyer-belts. Lonesome II cries out – and he's momentarily non-plussed by the strength and agility of his rival. A large metallic fist (in the form of a hammer) crashes into Lonesome's mid-riff... and they fall down amid more machinery. A swirling azure surrounds them (so to say) and the security teams have turned up by now. They consist of armed men – most of them tonsured – and in lycra suits. All of 'em carry weapons (of one sort or another) and yet they wait in order to get a clean 'hit' at their man. – As the two cyborgs roll over and over, so as to attempt to gain the upper hand in this battle to the death. For most of them understand that one of these two cyborgs will not rise (afloat or askance) from this redoubt.

+

Again, if we might follow on, the two of them crash on amid a splintering garb – as the security team parts. Might it be like the Red Sea? By any token, a rabble or rout – in green – subsists down in this bay; and it occurs in the corner of the laboratory. One warrior fires at Lonesome's trailing foot and slightly catches it – yet this hardly matters in the scheme of things. Let's look

again: since even Doctor Falicia Fairweather is caught up in this tabernacle. She watches on... as the Myrmidons are crushed, bloodied, pulped and covered in spray. May it be an example of John Cowper Powys' *The Brazen Head*; but not in the way he meant? Any road: various scientists stand back as the two cyborgs fight it out. While their supremacism (sic) looks like a Mediaeval tournament – the latter fast-forwarded to futurity. It rages, cascades, lilt, trammels and refuses to remain undefeated... As Scimitar V and Lonesome II occasionally converse during their bout; this is certainly what happens. The violence between them is continuous, however, and it roils, brawls, suffocates, aches, submerges and creates havoc. Whomsoever cried amok (!) and let loose *the dogs of war* spoke truly. Who will win this particular exchange – Scimitar V or Lonesome II?

TWENTY-SEVEN>>

A battle Royal commences between the two cyborgs – and Scimitar V commends Lonesome II over his courage. Or would it be more accurate to call it the bravado of a berserker? For Scimitar's hand (a knife) badly injures Lonesome's insides; and these trail down upon the floor in a red gush. All of which subsists against a yellow-to-green backdrop (initially); and this later morphs into a grey stream... the latter admixed with what can be called *blue rain*. Nor do we remain heedless in relation to what is coming. For – with one desperate lunge – Lonesome II shoves a blade through Scimitar's electronics... and this penetrates his insides, shooting out of his other side at a later date (...) The sliver infiltrates amid a range of fire – electrical sapphire – and the prospect of no recovery whatsoever. Moreover, the figures around our warring cyborgs wait in a pink effulgence – and these betray the outline or perimeter of the human. Look again: since the respective hands, claws, weapons, hooks and griefs of the two cyborgs continue to challenge each other. An onomatopoeic SMASH! intervenes to describe this – as

Lonesome II's weapon is forced downwards, away from his body, by Scimitar V. As soon as this occurs, the latter shows his strength by springing upwards from one hand... This was in order to remove half of Lonesome II's head... and a disc marauds away, crashing so as to achieve some relief. Can this eventuate in any other way? *Quod* Lonesome's visage is now discombobulated, spendthrift, waiting for more war, not liable to defend itself and out of sorts. It resembles (for all the world) a snap-shot, or half-tone, of Alexander Dumas' *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Yet the portrait is effectively unfinished; in that he lies on the ground bereft of pain – even half adrift. His form is down, waiting in the mist, severely done over, non-replete, and ungathered in. Somewhat wearisomely, Scimitar approaches with a menacing mien – if only to cut off the remaining half of Lonesome's head. He does this with an enormous broadsword – or, in turn, one of those weapons which is contained in his hands. Afore (by contrast) he absorbs the other metal-man's 'instincts' by taking a part of his electrical circuitry into himself. It is then that something unforeseen occurs... and Lonesome's electrics cause a convulsion in Scimitar. He was surrounded by a yellow halo, staggers back, and is off-set by a refulgent cloud of blue... A cumulus of sapphire (or a reek) moves around him, so as to illuminate a field of destruction... Whilst the red-bedappled body of Lonesome II is a corse; it happens to be unlively, finished off, crimson, beheaded and with liquid gushing from its neck. When – in the foreground – Falcia Fairweather, dressed in green lycra, and with red-hair aswirl, demands to know what is happening. She screams distractedly, almost orgasmically, for what might be going on to reveal itself... And she was answered by a technician. He sits nearby, festooned in blue, and with a lap-top on his knees. He explains that the Corporation is losing control of Scimitar V... and, in effect, he is becoming his last victim: Lonesome II. Has Lonesome II re-formed as Lonesome III? To be frank, even in death, Lonesome II is replacing Scimitar V, the one was becoming the other. Perhaps it's the most effective form of revenge on offer for one cyborg in relation to another.

Scimitar V, for his part, wrestles with the dilemma... and, at one moment, he holds up his hand in order to inspect his gauntlets. This can be held up as a claw of much repute! (Now then, the entire scenario resembles a scene in Truman Capote's *Music for Chameleons* where a murderer raises his fingers, a black hand, metaphorically, so as to show a river flowing behind them. It illustrates the ending of so many points of view – prior to their reconstitution in another guise.) Nevertheless, the smoke of ages congeals around Scimitar's eye – and he even starts talking, to himself, in a way that's reminiscent of Lonesome II. A bluish tendril of gas rises from his pitch – so as to congeal the possibility of a purple eye (...) Suddenly the cyborg makes an electronic noise such as KZZZTTT! And it illustrates its desire to teleport away so as to find the last prey or name on the list – of those to be absorbed. In Lonesome II's diction, Scimitar V declares to Falcia Fairweather that he intends to return... and after a moment he begins to disappear. She urges the technicians to stop him, but it is far too late for that.

+

Against a background of red, the pulchritudinous Falcia Fairweather begins to change her attire. She pouts, removes the eye-device, and is slinky in her skin-tight outfit – much like the heroine in *The Avengers* from fifty years back. Similarly, she undresses into a bikini (resplendent with the colophon of the Corporation) in order to pursue her creation through the time-loop... thigh-high boots and a restraining loot complete the picture. Yet Falcia is enough of a scientist (still) to ask the following question of one of her technicians. He has to check a spool on one of his tape-machines so as to render a coherent answer.

“Who is the cyborg's last target?”

The reply comes almost straightaway.

“A Machiavellian politician from the last century.”

“His name?”

“Tony Blair.”

THE END

OUROBOROS' WORM
A play for film

Cast of Characters:

Frederico Borghese Gaati

Suzy Borghese Gaati

Cazana

Judge Bernadotte

Two Old Men

A Sybil or Crone

An Old Woman

A Proletarian

Various Men, the Gambasta brothers and Silo, a rabble

Scene: Sicily.

Time: The Nineteen Twenties.

ACT ONE; SCENE ONE:

A space fills its enactment deep in the woods... and a combination of the cast are thus entwined. We note Cazana and Suzy Borghese Gaati, who wait, provocatively dressed, for the appearance of their sire.

Cazana: "May he yet come amongst us?"

Suzy: "In blessings of both;

He will deliberate upon a pyre –

If only to bleed

(necessarily)

And free us all of sovereignty.

Hold!

What appears from yonder twigs?"

Frederico rises up at the back of this 'set'. His eyes are spaced under a mask; itself a traditional wooden one which reeks of leather. It covers half of his frame. His arms are splayed. Frederico: "I have returned, replenished and desirous of your reports."

Cazana and Suzy both humbly bow to their Master.

ACT ONE; SCENE TWO:

Frederico walks in the woods or possibly down an avenue of trees. It may well be an adaptation of Robert A. Heinlein's notion of a sky tunnel. Nonetheless, an elderly couple, both wearing masks, hide from him amongst the boughs. This is only a brief incident.

Old Man: "Is it him?"

Old Woman: "To be certain of it – it is Frederico. He must be the one; the brother of the W----."

Old Man (hissing): "Be quiet, woman, it's best to keep silent in this mist of ages. After all, you know what a temper young Frederico has---".

ACT ONE; SCENE THREE:

Frederico Borghese Gaati approaches an old crone or Sybil. She can be played by a female actor, a masked observer, and even a dummy.

Frederico: "Hail to thee, mother of our stars! *Bon Journo*, olden, where is my beautiful sister at this hour of our need and distress?"

The Sybil or Crone: "I wear a new mask for Hecate, youngster. You seek to draw water from the wrong well at this time of day."

Frederico: "By thunder, what do you mean, crone?! Speak clearly now – for danger hungers after every particle."

The Sybil [with unquestioned glee and good humour]:

"She besports herself
As a nymphomaniac rare;
All dressed up
And with every place to go:
Such as those olden ruins/
Classical in their vintage
Which exist at the Town's apex –
They are Etruscan, you know."

Frederico: "You are suggesting – insinuating –
That she goes with men there:
In turn, large numbers of them;
Living until daybreak
In terms of one comfort's crumb."

Sybil: "I do more than that, Frederico.
I name them for both
Your benefit and steel;
Do you understand me?"

Frederico: "Name them, Sybil,
Without pity or a licensed harbinger."

Sybil: "I do so with pleasure;
My son and heir in misfortune.
They are (respectively)
The Gambasta brothers and their cousin, Silo."

Frederico: "Where---?"

Sybil: “That’s easy, at the Cinzano bar or taverna in town.”

Frederico: “The main square will be alight with a purple effluvium – goodnight, Sybil!”

Sybil: “My child, do not dare to dream...”

ACT ONE; SCENE FOUR:

Frederico walked through the woods at an angry pace – but, all the time, he was dreaming about the past. We then accompany him on a series of flash-backs.

The first deals with him throwing a man, a dummy, down a moss-laden hillock. The individual, a fellow actor, lies at the bottom of the dell, his limbs splayed. Are we indifferent to the fact that two figures step out of him on either side? Could they be his positive (guardian) or negative angels? One is Frederico; the other a creature in a wooden head-mask. It embraces his body’s uppermost parts.

+

Still and all, a Guy Fawkes burns away (symbolically) at the heart of the wood. It is a metaphor for coming sacrifices – to be sure!

ACT ONE; SCENE FIVE:

Frederico is back in the dream of his trial for homicide – at least in terms of one of his sister’s *paramours*. Hadn’t she been a teenager at the time? The Judge, Bernadotte, is finishing a brief summation.

Judge Bernadotte: “Hearken to my judgement, all ye who have ears to hear! Frederico Borghese Gaati, you have been found guilty of murder in the first degree – without mitigating

circumstances. Have you anything to say before sentence is passed?”

Frederico: “Yes, your honour, I have much to declare. But I will not spare your blushes or your time. I would speak to you of Sicilian tradition, of *Omerta* or silence, of the honour-bound nature of the family, of a right for the brother to protect his sister, I---”

Judge Bernadotte: “Quiet, my captive, we have heard enough on this day of drizzle. Take him down from the dock, men, and cock your rifles. You know how dangerous this man can be.”

Suddenly there is a commotion at the back of the court-house. Suzy Borghese Gaati has turned up in order to witness these events, and she cries out as an aside:

Suzy: “No, no, Frederico; it is unjust; they cannot treat you in this way, my brother. [Then in a high-pitched yelp]. “I shall never forget you---”.

ACT ONE; SCENE SIX:

A long shot of a scarecrow or a Guy burning slowly in the woods supervenes. It is a threnody or a *dance* motif in relation to the previous films, such as *Venus Fly-Trap* or *Grand Guignol*.

ACT TWO; SCENE ONE:

Frederico approaches the taverna and is accosted by a middle-aged man. He wears a cap slightly askew on his head... and goes on to recognise him instantly, despite a weather-beaten exterior.

Stray man: “Frederico, eh?! How goes it; long time no see, my man: you have returned to Sicily at last!”

Frederico remains silent throughout. He incarnates a brooding and invasive presence – much as if he’s a character in Greek tragedy.

Stray man (again): “Frederico, I’ve been thinking. I knew your father well... it’s a third of a century back, you know? I’m a bit short, do you understand? You couldn’t spare an old buddy a few liras, eh? What do you say?”

Frederico: “Out of my way – you indelicate swine!”

He then enters the Taverna with a gruff demeanour and a dismissive wave of his hand.

ACT TWO; SCENE TWO:

Our main character steps into the bar. It is stifling and hot. He notices a knot of men hanging around near the liquor. They look bored or disconsolate... a slatternly girl, a waitress called Cazana, moves across to greet him.

Cazana: “*Bon Journo*, is there anything that you desire?”

Frederico: “No, just a bottle of wine and then a man’s privacy—”.

Cazana: “As you like –
Still sensuality will
Break out on this lunatic night;
The latter bursting in full blood:
In terms of those snakes –
That twist themselves
Around columns of jade and silver (...)
+
Do you see?
The eroticism of our awakening;
It doffs its cap to no amount of arousal –

Always indifferent;
Or spoiled by the nature of its sin.”

Frederico gazes on in rapt attention and, by dint of this, he actually succumbs to a vision. He sees double or (perchance) views life via the Fourth Dimension. For Suzy (in his imagination) dances around the men in the Taverna. She pirouettes aslant him, masking his depths or temper, as she shamelessly and provocatively leaps for all to see. It is like a version of Wilde’s *Salome*, but much more heterosexual in its bearing and impact. Soon the bar is stilled and empty of her presence.

ACT TWO; SCENE THREE:

Frederico goes berserk, but he is not in the Taverna. He was deep in the woods late at night and, as he moves heavily through the undergrowth, he lashes around him like a mad dog. He may or may not have a weapon with him *vis-à-vis* a billy-club, or what not. Suddenly, Suzy is with him and they dance the Tarantella together; one, two, three, four; around and around --- forever and ever.

Frederico: “They are dead, baby sister. Gore is on my hands; it rests easy before a conscience which knows nothing but blushes.”

Suzy Borghese Gaati: “We are Vampires together, Frederico, you and I. There was a sickness after you left and it bestrew a trail of affliction, new life, and a conquest of Death. Look at me, my brother, am I not magnificent?”

In one bound Frederico lifts up his sister in one gigantic leap. He carries her up towards the classical monument, or set of Etruscan ruins, to the north of the town. And the two of them embrace thereafter --- no longer, this time, as brother and sister; if they

ever were of one blood, one tone, one species, one family (as demarcated). Everything was rapt in a new attention or its thrall.

+

After all, aren't horror films negative love stories?

+

The two characters say "I love you!" with the moon at their backs. It causes the pillars, crenellations and bulk limestone to adopt peculiar shapes. But what of the future? They look down to see the scarecrow or Guy, covered in flames, and falling in on itself. They are alone; they are anti-heroic; they are heroic; they happen to be the weirdest couple on the planet. The last thing that Suzy says (before the credit sequence) is:

"We are immortal. The Judge shall die, the Sybil will fade into dust. But we won't perish. On that, Fredrico, you have my promise..."

The film ends with their dancing superimposed upon a cascade of fire and sparks---

THE END

STILL, WE ARE SEVEN!

A story

ONE

The plane moved across its usual flight-path, if only to taxi next to the dirigible it pursued. The Zeppelin had long been spotted by the young captain, and at this moment, up in the firmament, he was determined to make his mark. For he would establish his name by capturing it and bringing it down to earth. The Zeppelin – for its part – seemed to be long and sleek in the sun-light. Wasn't it an envelope of panic or observance? Shall we stop to consider it in any other way? Now then, the land passed away underneath it – what with valleys, river-basins, hills, dells, woodland, arable pasture and the occasional mountain in the background. Yes indeed, the air-balloon had banked steeply – in the blazing sun – and it was making for a billowing cloud-scape. Might this shiny (and usually unobservable craft) be trying to make its escape? It could not move very quickly – this much was true; yet it can shift with surprising ease high up in the atmosphere. It slanted into a deep bank of cumulus; at once woolly, fluffy and willowing. Yet the young captain revved his machine, prior to ascending behind the dirigible, as it began to disappear. As he was carrying out this manoeuvre, he dwelt on the honour and prestige he might gain by 'capturing' it. True: it was hardly an enemy combatant, but such a feat would draw the attention of his superiors, and even beckoned towards a promotion. (Leastways, this was how he configured it in his own mind). Nonetheless, a strange thing happened as he crossed a dimensional barrier... in that his pursuit of the dirigible had been at night. But now, once he was in the cloud, it proved to be as bright as day. The luminosity completely filled the craft's cockpit and befuddled the pilot, as he sat busily at the controls. What may await him on the other side of this dimensional limit? Once on the cumulus' alternate sweep, the dirigible came to a rest and its crew climbed down from a rope-ladder to the ground. They

were quiet clearly content for the pilot to bring down his craft, and then sweep down to join them on the side of the field. Captain Volher decided to do so – the Zeppelin had no weapons on board, and was obviously no threat to him. His handsome plane soon came to a stop next to the air-strip, but at several removes from it. Immediately, Volher brought up his craft and climbed out of the cock-pit. He drew his Luger – but just as a precaution. A mildly elderly commander, of his own nationality, met him and requested that he put the weapon down. Pistols and bullets would have no effect here – at any rate. The officer informed him that they were in Paradise, or a version of it, and that occasionally the new, faster planes can pass through the dimensional leap. This meant that the small idyllic community was becoming larger... although only infinitesimally. Once inside this commune there was no need to leave it – few had any desire to... and, in any event, it proved impossible to go. Do you credit it? Vohler found himself startled by the calm assurance of the man. It is then that he begins to look around at the perfect greenery and botanic glory of this paradise. Luscious plants (with accompanying birds) broke out on every side, and he decided to stay, involuntarily. Yet, underneath it all, Vohler was burning with a desire to get away, escape, return the dirigible to Germany, and claim a reward. He did not care whether this took the form of promotion, a financial reckoning, or just a commendation. It would certainly get him noticed. Later that evening he accepted an invitation to dine in the elderly officer's house... it proved to be a magnificent manse, well-apportioned in every way, and it was there that he found himself introduced to his daughter. Her name is Jocasta and she happened to be blonde and beautiful (indescribably so). Vohler felt a mixture of love and desire for her, and he also wished to obtain her knowledge in order to seize the dirigible. Still he dreamt of a triumphant return to contemporary Germany. She – for her part – introduced him to the main thoroughfare in this hamlet; an ideal walk down a hillock – rather like Pincent's Hill in Berkshire. It came surrounded on every side by tall boughs, oaks, bushes bursting

with fruit, small water-falls, horse chest-nut trees and a wide profusion of butter-flies. For example, the Purple Emperor was much in evidence! Minus himself he counted seven people in the hamlet altogether. Yet still he dreamt of making his name and capturing the dirigible. Ambition – to a man such as Vohler – literally ate away at him, so there was no room for any competing emotion. Even the love he began to experience for the officer’s daughter, Jocasta, could not outweigh it. In this respect, his lust for fame is ripe, all-consuming, and a veritable passion. One thing he did notice – as he talked to a few of the other Airmen – was the place’s timelessness. No-one in it seemed to grow a day older, to be fair. Yet now began the moment when he sought to take control of the dirigible – and Jocasta, his love, would lead him to it. At least she would be in a position to do so... for, in a casual conversation, it emerged that she knew how to pilot it. Surely she could teach him – he mused – and once in command of this knowledge – he would be able to make his escape. For, it was quite clear that only the dirigible, no other craft, might transgress the dimensional loop between this paradise and the outer world. Jocasta assured him that the major problem with handling the Zeppelin was allowing for wind-drift, and adjusting the controls accordingly. They were decidedly simple. Later that night Vohler, an experienced pilot, made his escape and he crept from the house of Jocasta’s father... only to essay the air-ship. He climbed aboard, cast off, and ignored Jocasta’s pleas from the ground... She had been awakened (almost imperceptibly) and followed Vohler out, but her pleas for him to return fell on deaf ears. The captain piloted the craft via ‘the hole in the air’ and had soon disappeared into the time-zone of contemporary Germany. All of an instant, then, flash-lights lit up the dirigible over Berlin and various air-craft were scrambled to intercept it. He was soon ushered into the office of the air commandant for the Berlin sector to explain himself. He recounted the whole amazing story, and even this officer vaguely remembered the name of Jocasta’s father... he had been a famous flyer *in the previous war*, between 1914 & ’18. Vohler,

for his part, argued that he had brought back an expensive piece of military equipment, but his commander insisted that it was only an antique. Likewise, when Vohler asked – none too tentatively – about a promotion, given his initiative in this matter, the commandant asked him gruffly to look in the mirror. Initially, Vohler was angered by this – but then he turned to a sheet of glass in the office annexe. Now it's his turn to be dumb-founded, since the face that stares back at him is wrinkly and aged. At last he knew the secret of that other Paradise, as well as why no-one would leave it! He had betrayed their trust yet Nature (or its converse) had had the last laugh. Surely he must have aged sixty years (or more) in his final passage back across the dimensional limit. Yet, still, on the other side he knew that there WERE SEVEN!

FINIS

STRAIGHT AS AN ARROW

A play for film

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: Basildon Lancaster; his wife Fervent Dominique; Odd Billy-O (a psychopath); a female Psychiatrist

ACT ONE

Basildon Lancaster:

“We followed an oblivion northwards
In the hope of a new charade
Only to fathom a cottage redundant
To our jaded Southern lips.”

Fervent Dominique:

“Its beauty spreads before us
Like a severed human eye.”

Basildon Lancaster knocks aggressively on the door.

“After interminable delays o’ whimsy
A scuffling sound protrudes
Behold! A Northern trog
Matted over with hair and fists
Stands afore us...”

+

“My dear chap, we’re here to purchase your house.”

Odd Billy-O: “Ohh-Ahh!”

Soon they are inside the cottage facing each other.

Basildon Lancaster:

“How much warrants a drift of cash?”

Odd Billy-O (speaking in Northern dialect):

“This be right grand –
As happens
Like mather used ta say:
Get thee in from gibble and put wood in hole.
I’ll be back while Friday.
Doest thou follow me ken, thee know?”

Basildon Lancaster: “I regret to acknowledge... I do.”

Odd-Billy-O: “Reckon on this... lord o’ manor
I won’t be lettin’ place go for less’n nine hundred
Straight up – and no mistake.
What’s thee reckon ta that, ah?”

Basildon Lancaster:
“You drive a hard bargain, dungster.
I remain unenfeebled in my wit.”

Fervent Dominique:
“O Basildon... let’s purchase a delightful muse.
It perfumes the air with a soldered brand.”

Odd Billy-O:
“Hell’s bells a’gibbering.
It not be much I’m asking, thee knows...”

Basildon Lancaster let’s an expensive cigarette’s smoke drift
about on the Northern air.

Basildon Lancaster: “I stand indifferent to regional *patois* –
It dwells on detail like a stake through the tongue.”

He draws his wife’s face up to his.

“We must reject nominalism!”

Odd Billy-O: “I be requirin’ bed-n-board, me ducks.
For thy information
I’ll be livin’ over stables –
Plus five bob for tobacco, don’t thee know?”

Fervent Dominique: “Darling, all it requires is a mother of all
make-overs.”

Basildon Lancaster: “Billy-O’s visage disturbs me.
Ugliness plots at Lombroso’s gift.
It characterises a mark of Cain.
Or a hostage to delinquency in terms of the soul.”

The Psychiatrist (voice over):
“Yet his innermost thoughts turned tail.
Surely he profited from a freak’s turmoil?
We’ll take the house (he says) –
Fervent desires it;
Billy-O also sand-papers company
When I’m away on business in the capital.”

Basildon Lancaster and Odd Billy-O shake hands over the deal.

ACT TWO

Odd Billy-O lies alone on a pallet in a hotel bed-room. It is
indescribably shabby all around. Rather bizarrely, he happens to
be dressed in Basildon Lancaster’s clothes.

Basildon Lancaster speaks Billy-O’s lines.

“Nightmares pitch me into phantasmagoria.
I note its red eye amid a skeleton’s embrace:
Don’t I lie here (?) –
Pinned to this mat near Euston station
In a squalid dump.”

+

“I must avoid a dream’s iron-lung;
If not to mount a horse with see-through ribs
Tripod in hand.”

ACT THREE

Basildon Lancaster is in an asylum talking to the psychiatrist.

Basildon Lancaster:

“Once incarcerated, O loony doctor, has my wife altered her approach?”

The Psychiatrist: “Imprescriptibly, you are correct, *monsieur*.
No change afflicts an offerant in this mad-house.
And a stroboscope performs a jest in relief –
No deeper witness solicits envy over our kin.”

Basildon Lancaster:

“I understand, doctor who.
I stare into the future and gaze upon an electric foetus;
It collides with so much blue rain.”

The Psychiatrist and Lancaster, in tandem, visit Fervent Dominique in her cell.

Basildon Lancaster: “Fervent, O Dominique?”

Fervent Dominique is either trussed up, wears protective asylum gloves or pads (to prevent self-harm), and looks highly disturbed.

Fervent Dominique: “I refuse to answer.
I open my arms wide to foreclose indecision.
A concrete or abstract wall rears afore me.
One blank television screen lies to my left.”

Basildon Lancaster:

“Might her catalepsy be adduced to electric shocks?”

The Psychiatrist: “Possibly---“.

Basildon Lancaster: “I refuse to countenance their surcease.”

ACT FOUR

[Note: Basildon Lancaster and Odd Billy-O, the trog, are interchangeable. Likewise, the Psychiatrist uses an educated version of Dung Beetle’s northern diction].

All three characters – Basildon Lancaster, Odd Billy-O and Fervent Dominique – are back in the cottage.

Basildon Lancaster:

“I must leave you in the lee of so many Marines;

Listen to me, darling –

Does a wheel-chair not tinkle in the night (?)

It’s Billy-O...”

Fervent Dominique’s face appears – yet it happens to be the psychiatrist’s voice.

The Psychiatrist:

“Our Northern Trog travels on.

Reckoning over a fist

And carrying grief into restless periods o’ concrete.”

Odd Billy-O:

“I drift along now

A’keep of flame:

He stares about him in the darkness

WHERE ARE YOU, SWINE?

I don't need or require thee
No-one partakes of a spastic cake;
It travels on towards ultra-sound..."

The Psychiatrist (voice over):

"Heed silence's splendid void, my children!
As he speeds via a sensory deprivation chamber
Seeking a ride, push or absence."

His chair trundles down various passages, spare of aught save le Corbusier's disregard. All of a sudden, some stairs come into view (most sheer). Billy-O, in his conveyance, is heading towards them. Basildon Lancaster and Fervent Dominique are seen to push his wheel-chair down the stairs.

Odd Billy-O: "NNNNNNNOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Basildon Lancaster: "A seat takes off without bridges
To reach a goal on Sunday's intrigues
Thence to crash, splinter, break and be riven..."

+

Don't you see its swivelling wheel –
Spinning decisively –
In its clamp;
As if to recoil from a sound?"

Billy-O lies at the stair's bottom in a crumpled heap. Might it be a heap? His corse doesn't move. Yet two figures emerge from his body or are superimposed on top of it. These were Basildon Lancaster and the Devil – the latter wears a mask.

ACT FIVE

A telephone rings repeatedly in the Yorkshire cottage.

Fervent Dominique: "Yes?"

Basildon Lancaster: “Hello, darling, it’s me!
I’ve been called away to London on business.
It won’t be for long (though);
Merely a wanton hour.

+

Billy-O shall be company for you while I’m away.”

She puts the ‘phone down tentatively, but in the distance Billy-O stares on. Our dungster or caretaker is momentarily unseen. He looks huge, massive, threatening, avaricious, psychopathic and incredibly violent.

ACT SIX

Our four characters – or a Dance of Death – are back in the asylum. A large, spacious or airy window lies behind them. Basildon Lancaster wears a balaclava helmet, Billy-O entertains a tribal or clown mask, and Fervent Dominique’s hair is spiky, electrocuted or punk-like. The Psychiatrist sports a white coat.

Basildon Lancaster:

“The gates of Hell have opened for closure’s maw.
They disclose the witness of these blue squares...
Or let out the moon from its trivial *apercu*
And correct those dictions that pluck out an eye.”

Billy-O:

“I gaze into a room with glass at my back
What do I understand?
A raving of cataleptic retards, (it is);
Merely solvent to forgotten witnesses...
For they rot if only to die.
Rest easy!”

Fervent Dominique wanders provocatively towards a chair on which a medical-shirt was draped. It appears to be a straight-

jacket of yesteryear. There is a close-up of the Psychiatrist's face that fills the screen.

The Psychiatrist:

“A conversation with any of them proves impolitic;
It's dead, buried or unassuaged – can you tell?
For no-one will expand on this joke-mirror anymore.
+
They are all completely mad!”

ACT SEVEN

Our heroine, Fervent Dominique, stands in front of a mirror wearing a straight-jacket. She seems to be like a turkey-cock waiting for Christmas. In the background a vague and imprecise tapping can be heard. TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP; it goes on. One factor remains noticeable; in that this woman hasn't got any shoes. Fervent looks directly ahead, glassy eyed.

Fervent Dominique (voice over):

“Madness dislocates mental ribbing.
And I stand here with my hair on fire;
It illuminates Hades' circle –
Even in its circumvention.
+
Do you see?

A banging protrudes from a nearby cell. It accelerates due to the matching wear of a cup. For Billy-O, whose features are encased in a tribal mask, is pounding away in an adjoining cell with a metallic mug. Bang! Bang! Bang!, goes his incessant Morse.

Billy-O continues to speak with Basildon Lancaster's diction.

“Do not despair, my love...
We shall soon be together

You and I –
If only to defeat a St. Valentine’s Day massacre!
I love you, Dominique, I love you...
For betimes we shall set our escape in motion.

+

Can you hear me, Fervent,
Dost thou acknowledge my mania?”

ACT EIGHT

Meanwhile, the madhouse has been transformed into a nursery or play-room. A tapestry of teddy-bears adorns our murals, and a pink envelope filters all else. It takes the form of a Sense-U-Round video.

Fervent Dominique (moving stealthily):

“I contract the rules of a servant
As, thus enabled, I spin:
Look at the knife held high
Or esteemed via bronze’s grief.”

She holds up a drawn samurai sword. It has left its scabbard only to filter away any available light. Whilst – down below – Billy-O lies on a crumpled divan. Might it embody the prospect of a widow’s cot?

Fervent Dominique (voice over):

“I approach any motivation poniard out
Or crazed fist-to-fist:
Let it fly prior to Adam’s rapture.

+

Must I detect mutation (?)
Even a Man’s desire to mate with Demons,
In accordance *avec* the King James’ *Bible*.

The Psychiatrist and Basildon Lancaster burst into the room, or (quite possibly) they emerge from behind a curtain. Both of them expostulate together.

“NO! NO! NO! Sister of emptiness or tracery –
Seek not such a disembowelment
Even a visceral dance:
Since an imprisoned origami of tongues
Cannot release a triangular outpost;
The latter eyeless in Gaza
Or headless on Attis’ rocks.”

Fervent Dominique (in a veritable scream):
“Behold! You’ve refused to assess an eye-removing
Machine in Bond’s *Lear*:
And Marxism suits its contradictions ill.
It crashes into History’s wall.
No recovery seems possible.”

Basildon Lancaster picks up Fervent Dominique over one shoulder and carries her from the room. She struggles all the while. The Psychiatrist follows them out carrying the blade.

ACT NINE

We are watching another cubicle in the same hospital. It must be some time later. Fervent Dominique happens to be trussed up in a surgical shirt or madman’s rest. Should we refer to it as an iron-maiden? It takes the ‘sprint’ out of a mad-woman’s straight-jacket... at any rate.

Fervent Dominique: “I stare at bricks of uncertain strength.
Nothing exists anymore...
It’s a sad carnival where no masks are worn.
+
Could the beating behind a screen

Or an ornate Persian tapestry
Belong to a copper-head?
One can call it North America's most poisonous snake (you see).
Doubtlessly, it wore – for a head –
The perfect Grecian face made from gold:
And it enlivened an Oscar's index;
So as to hint at erotic perfection aslant a cover.
'Come', it said;
Using the timeless indent of a Python's knowledge
In an Adamic grasp."

A television happens to be blaring in the cube's recesses. It depicts Odd Billy-O, dressed in Basildon Lancaster's clothes, and in his right mind. Won't he be clear to use the Southerner's diction throughout? Fervent Dominique is also present, at once *compos mentis* or wearing a provocative dress... possibly a little black number or a pencil one. The atmosphere of the TV programme is one of those Latino soap operas – it's deliberately O.T.T. (over the top).

Basildon Lancaster/Billy-O: "It won't do, Fervent."

Fervent Dominique: "Why? What? Wherefore?"

Basildon Lancaster/Billy-O: "Our love can no longer prosper."

Fervent Dominique: "After the effects of whichever earthquake..."

Basildon Lancaster/Billy-O: "No, you misunderstand me, darling."

Fervent Dominique: "How so? Nothing may come out of nihilist vapour. Isn't this Lear's diction all round?"

Basildon Lancaster/Billy-O: “Our relations have been forbidden or condemned.”

Fervent Dominique: “Who rashly faults our roadshow? By what right do they speak (?); so as to forestall our fun-fair, tambourine, side-show barker and freaks. Answer me!”

Basildon Lancaster/Billy-O: “It’s the Psychiatrist.”

Fervent sweeps away on her heel and breaks into a run down various corridors. Her male companion (Billy-O/Basildon) follows on in a desultory fashion. Finally, the television snicks off and Fervent is left staring at an asylum’s walls. She continues to wear the padded-jacket so adduced.

ACT TEN

Within the mental hospital’s walls a conversation ensues in a corridor. It takes place between Basildon Lancaster and the Psychiatrist.

Basildon Lancaster:

“My professional colleague –
I see the loss of so many dividends;
They belabour a point o’ witness
And rear up like a scorpion, in taxidermic
Thrall, injected by Prussic acid.”

The Psychiatrist:

“I understand it fitfully, Mister Lancaster,
But why not look at it anew?
For a classic head, Olympian in its sheen,
Rises as a Ganymede atop an ornate silk.
+
Might it root a comparison in a constrictor’s awe;
No matter how gestural or crushing (?):

And what's Zeus-like above waxes reptilian below.”

Basildon Lancaster:

“Unless I was to decapitate a crown
Perfected in Praxiteles' lineaments;
Only to writhe 'neath an ornamental rug
In the death throes of an agony
That speaks to a Third Brain...
Even a Boa's sinuousness athwart a carpet
Can one doubt Billy-O's saurian bill?
Show him to me, doctor---”.

By way of summation, a strip or peep-hole is opened at a cell's rear. Basildon Lancaster looks inside – if only to see Billy-O or Dung Beetle trussed up, masked, tied to a seat and in receipt of electric shocks.

Basildon Lancaster:

“Excellent! Increase a reprobate's voltage.
The hand which stays its punishment knows little of Divine
Love.
Repeat after me: I am the Lord's flail!
Wrath's children must be freed to bleed a skeleton...
It pre-exists us in a Plexi-glass case.”

The Psychiatrist:

“I understand you.
Doctor Alexander Kennedy's experiments took a similar
Vintage
In the Second War.
These were behaviourist *impedimenta*
Or exercises in rats-in-mazes.”

Basildon Lancaster:

“I concur.
A sensory deprivation chamber was used

Together with goggles, hooding, restrictions on vision,
Night-sights, anxiety, de-sensitisation gloves
As well as amphetamines like Thyroxin –
Injected right into the brain –
So as to increase a principle:
‘the absolute destruction of personality’.”

The Psychiatrist:

“It deconditions the actual
In order to facilitate slippage
Wanton excess
Or a spasmodic existentialism.
Do you see?
It reverses Sartre’s axiom superficially”.

Basildon Lancaster:

“Yet keeps the Stalinism?”

The Psychiatrist:

“Most definitely, existentialism is *not* a humanism.”

He slams the peek-a-boo shut and wanders down a corridor into the distance. Momentarily, Basildon Lancaster steps out of a side-door and enters a garden where he stares at the trees.

ACT ELEVEN

To be sure, Basildon Lancaster appears behind his wife in the asylum. She is trussed up and faces off against a concrete wall. Might it be a basalt mural instead? He announces his presence gesturally, like Sir Henry Irving, or an actor on the stage. Whereas her hair remains frazzled, pinned, electrocuted or aghast.

Basildon Lancaster: “Hello, darling – it’s me, Basildon!”

There is no response from Fervent Dominique who prefers to stare into the distance. A vacant expression crosses her face.

Basildon Lancaster: “Fervent?”

A silent interval prevails during which no chit-chat was gleaned.

Basildon Lancaster:

“I see a finely moulded head
Severe in its beauty
Patterned to this last;
One that kindles a human calm.

It accords a spasm of warmth to a snake’s
Lividness.

Can you quieten the ichor which flows through its veins (?);
Twisting this way and that,
So as to measure its verve.

Again, a square-like mouth
<carvren to a mask>

Opens or falls sheer:
And it evinces a sound
After musical spheres or the ringing of hand-held bells.
+

It’s me, Fervent, your Basildon has returned.
I know that we speak at cross-purposes –
One to one –
But let me enliven the pyramid of my desire.
Here...”

He announces with a flourish...

“I’ve brought you a box of chocolates.
Don’t you know that the lady loves *Milk Tray*?”

Fervent Dominique (in a hollow voice):

“Aaaahhhh! It’s the sweetest moat of candy without Acidity.
Yet I thank you, (indeed), husband of mine.
HA! HA! HA! HA! HEE! HEE! HEE!”

She then retreats into an hysterical peal of laughter. It continues in a gulping, wheezing, stertorous or high-pitched whine. Basildon Lancaster turns around, the chocolate box held limply at his side, and he makes off for an exit. Fervent Dominique slides down an adjoining wall like a badly behaved (if malevolent) child. Her falsetto laughter follows him out. Outside on the balcony or stairwell, he folds himself over and weeps. The Psychiatrist approaches (lop-sidedly) from a Bishop’s diagonal in an imaginary game of chess.

“Mister Lancaster?”, she asks sympathetically.

ACT TWELVE

An imaginary scene occurs now. It relates to the cottage on those Yorkshire moors – yet transfigures this set at one and the same time. Basildon Lancaster sits on a throne and his spouse, Fervent Dominique, wrestles with two attendants. They prove to be Billy-O and the Psychiatrist.

Fervent Dominique: “Where is our son, Basildon? What have you done with him?”

Basildon Lancaster: “Calm yourself, my dear”, (he states commodiously or in a soothing way).”

+

“Don’t you receive an image?

A classic mask – in gold or puce – over the way;

Rounded in the perfection of ormolu’s

Insistence.

Listen to this!

A mouth, reminiscent of a toy's duct, falls open.

It limits its prospect and resembles a bay

in *Thunderbirds* #2.

It releases a sonorous roil

Via campanology's fate

Such a sibilant whisper reeks of its own heat.

Let it rip down Occultism's veil and pronounce one word:

'COME!'

It crepitates upon a mosaic floor---

By dint of a minimalist quaver or semi-tone.

May its auric architecture recall Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*?"

Fervent Dominique:

"You continue to speak in riddles

After a sphinx's manufacture.

No radiation does any good

If its nimbus hides in a Persian rug's lee..."

Basildon Lancaster: "I will say this only once:

Hearken to my meaning, dear wife!

A father decides, alone, the direction of his spawn:

And such off-spring leaps between dimensions.

Are they not blue doors, headed by ancient Greek sigils

Or surrounded by sparks?"

The Psychiatrist (voice over):

"Do you read the parallel indication of these bars? Since the harpy's fiery features – with her hair red or agog – flails around a piece. Basildon Lancaster's visage is seen to the right *avec* Fervent behind. Moreover, one eye – in the form of a marble in a doll's slit – looks slyly out. The whole effect proves to be lugubrious, slow, somnolent, turbid and forewarned."

Fervent Dominique: "I shall not forget this!"

In the next instant, a vision of interest supervenes. Does it conjure up (no matter how vaguely) one of William Roberts' stiff vortices? No matter... *quod*, in a Roman Polanski freeze-frame, the man's heavy fist and shoulder are seen to the right. His gauntlet seems massive, armorial, bolted-on and ready for aught. Could it signify the clash of halbert on buckler? Necessarily so, given that the woman's face was to the left. She looked up at him earnestly – hair flowing!

Fervent Dominique: "I ask you once again to place our son before Majesty's trap-door..."

Basildon Lancaster: "Have a care---."

Fervent struggles ferociously with her two guards or psychiatric nurses. These were Billy-O and the female Psychiatrist.

Basildon Lancaster: "Get her out of my sight, the both of you!"

Her twin (if unwanted) chaperones then bodily pick her up and carry her away. She continues to sway and wrestle with them during this.

Fervent Dominique: "I warn you, Basildon. A mother's prerogative in such matters is always over-riding!"

By the end of their altercation, Basildon Lancaster happens to be speaking in an educated version of northern English.

Basildon Lancaster: "Begone with the scapegrace! She must be exiled from a presence's actuality. Do you hear me? No wickerman can be burnt without the faggots to light it. Such flesh as this must be peeling behind its mask... the skin is orange in colour. I shall be free of such expectations."

He rises from his throne-like chair in a stiff or awkward thrall. Who would deny the reality of their great quell, in the Macbeths' apedom? Yes, indeed! For it embodies the ferocity of Bret Easton Ellis' *Imperial Bedrooms*, albeit in reverse.

ACT THIRTEEN

Basildon Lancaster kneels on a portico or ledge... and looks out. Beyond his crouching form lies a scene of devastation. He takes it in at one bound.

Basildon Lancaster:

“A mad-house is decimated by a
Picture o’ odds
Ripe to a portent, it is...
+
Has Billy-O led to rapine (?)
Or a splicing of those dyes
Afore they are fixed;
Let it be spotted anew –
But who is here?
Announce yourself, Missy.”

By chance, the female psychiatrist stands behind him in a soldier's uniform. She wears a flak jacket and fatigues.

The Psychiatrist: “Hail to thee, Basildon!
I bring with me the joy of a child
Spent from the Satanic
But grieving from ages past –
Or want of a sacrifice:
Do you see?”

Momentarily, Basildon Lancaster stands afore her. His visage – seen sloping to the fore – makes out a massiveness, a lugubriousness. Leave it now...

Basildon Lancaster: “What have you come to report?”

The Psychiatrist: “A child’s arrival when split from an egg.”

Basildon Lancaster: “Show me the lustre of some flesh that’s known nothing but darkness.”

The mental doctor opens some swaddling, at once pink or white, to reveal a babe. In fact, it’s a child’s doll that’s pinkish in colour. What could it be?

Basildon Lancaster and the child together: “We are the product of uncertain loins. Maybe Billy-O and Fervent Dominique have given birth without congress? Like Zeus’ daughter, Athena, she came out fully formed, in armour, via the Head. Heed it!”

ACT FOURTEEN (Last Act)

We are given to viewing the asylum for the criminally insane (Broadmoor) from the outside. It exists in a functional or modernist block in an urban wasteland. The whole thing has a feeling of the nineteen seventies about it. A flicker of flame issues from various gas-jets in front of the building.

Billy-O is torturing the Psychiatrist with electric shocks or ECT (electro-convulsive therapy). She is naked to the waist and screams repeatedly – while her face is lit up with the roundness of a green lens or flare.

Billy-O: “Where are they both hiding (?);

By a remit of Purple

I must have sovereignty

Over questions and answers;

The payment of dirt bills its own way

In accordance with prudence,

Bullion and waste;

Answer me!”

The Psychiatrist:

“No-one can doubt the pain of retrieval.

+

Basildon Lancaster and his spouse, Fervent Dominique,
Are in a house in the woods---
It spies upon your cottage.”

Billy-O: “Excellent, my child!

You are free to go;

Or as a bird in a Victorian brass cage

Liable to flutter

By way of liberty’s trespass or wing.”

Some time later on, and at dusk’s ready advent, Billy-O approaches the cottage from the side. He is carrying a fire-arm in his left hand. The bright lights from a casement in the small wooden shack gleam on. Basildon and Fervent open a door inside their abode... only to see Billy-O sitting opposite them.

Billy-O: “Where dwells your daughter, the Psychiatrist, in these haunts?”

Basildon Lancaster: “She wanders outside in the woods
Soon to return by virtue of a harbinger.”

Billy-O: “We shall await her avowal or dissonance.”

The Psychiatrist is seen walking towards the house, but then she stops, turns and runs when she hears her ‘parents’ singing. Billy-O, revelling in a mad-cap role, encourages their session.

Billy-O: “High-ho, sing up, me Beauties, by my old Bessy, give me a tune from the music-hall’s lantern;

Don’t you know that none escape from Vaudeville’s grasp (?)

Louder, I say, my loves;
Louder;
Sing up (!), sing up (!) at a break of day.”

The Psychiatrist (voice over):
“Why are they mouthing like a choir?”

Thus forewarned, the girl runs away into the woods. She is very provocatively dressed – albeit with a short skirt, leggings, neckerchief, as well as a tight ‘masculine’ or dress-jacket; and a lot of cleavage’s displayed. In one scenario or pageant, Billy-O shoots the denizens of the cottage – Basildon Lancaster and Fervent Dominique – dead. In another or following variant, they are both alive as he vacates the hermitage. See to it!

Billy-O chases the Psychiatrist through the woods, but she out-manoeuvres him, hides behind a tree, and releases a trap. This must be a heavy or rubber tyre that hangs from a branch. She runs diagonally across it, in a clearing, at a time when he blunders into it and ‘rests’ caught. Look at this, why don’t you? For the psychopath holds a gun in one mitten, yet is trussed around the neck or chops, even necklaced by the tyre.

As a final reckoning, the vampish Psychiatrist stands in a mincing or cat-walk manner behind Billy-O. It all takes place in a forest clearing.

THE CREDITS ROLL ON