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The War to End War

by CHARLES L. MEE

I. The Treaty of Versailles

(The lights go out suddenly with a terrific explosion and a flash of light. Sirens. Explosions. Whistles. Explosive flashes of light. Machine guns. Bottle rockets. Flares. Tons of shattering glass. Dense fog. An operatic aria is heard, or several long, lamenting high notes held by a singer. This all goes on for a very long time. A sickening green light gradually pervades the theatre.

As the fog clears, imperceptibly at first, we hear Satie playing a Nocturne.

A dozen ornate nineteenth century chairs are scattered helter skelter around the stage, and ice buckets with champagne in them, and, at center, a table covered with green baize, not much larger than a card table, with crystal, and a deck of cards.

Gradually, as the fog lifts during this next scene, we see that the entire rear wall is a vast shattered mirror in several large, elaborate, gold-gilt frames-as though a mosaic of broken shards of glass. It is an old mirror, dulled and smoky and incompletely silvered.

To one side is a headless tailor's dummy. Elsewhere, a urinal.

Nicolson enters, dressed in morning coat, carrying an umbrella. He sits in one of the chairs, crosses his legs, listens to the Satie Nocturne. This time of listening amounts to a musical interlude. Near the end of the Satie piece, he speaks.)

NICOLSON

We generally meet at ten, there are secretaries behind...

PROUST VOICEOVER

(whispering)

Mais non, mais non, vous allez trop vite. Recommencez.

NICOLSON

(after a moment, slowly, exactly.)

The dominant note is: black and white. Heavy black suits, white cuffs and paper. Crucial to get something right I suppose. (He takes a glass of champagne from the nearby table.)

PROUST VOICEOVER

Precisez, mon cher, precisez. . .

NICOLSON

Relieved by blue and khaki.

PROUST VOICEOVER

Vous prenez la voiture de la Delegation. Vous descendez au Quai d'Orsay. Vous montez l'escalier. Vous entrez dans la Salle. Et alors?

NICOLSON

(sighs, hesitates, resumes)

The only other colors would be the scarlet damask of the Quai d'Orsay curtains, green baize. . .

PROUST VOICEOVER

Precisez, mon cher, precisez. . .

NICOLSON

pink blotting pads, innumerable gilt of little chairs.

(Silence)

For smells you would have petrol, typewriting ribbons, French polish, central heating, a touch of violet hair wash.

(Silence)

The tactile motifs would be tracing paper, silk, the leather handle of a weighted pouch of papers, the foot-feel of very thick carpets alternating with parquet floors...

(Silence)

What would be the point? What quite had been the point? Of course, there were matters of substance: the structure of the Old World; old empires crumbling; new ones reaching for the spoils; former colonies squirming to stay free; the old order of the Congress of Vienna coming apart, well, and for that matter, Newtonian physics as well, traditional painting, the notion of God, none of it in such good repair really, whether as cause or effect, and then the endless disputes. Matters of honor. Or of interest. Altercations. The assigning of blame. The study of causes. Although, who could say? In time one became more inclined to see systemic features-the eternal business of those who had the power and those who wanted it. One had entered a logic trap. One needed an epiphany to escape. One became a sleepwalker, like all the others.

(A cello solo.)

PROUST VOICEOVER

Precisez, mon cher, precisez...

NICOLSON

Yes, well: we met. The stretch of muscle caught by leaning constantly over very large maps, the brittle feel of a cane chair seat which had been occupied for hours. These things seemed to matter a great deal. That sort of thing. A sense of hopelessness. Of dread. Of knowing one had no intention of doing anything real.

(Projected through the partly silvered mirror, from the rear, a pencil-thin red line is slowly drawn. It takes several minutes for the line to be completed, and, at the end, it is labelled with its date 78 B.C. During the next twenty minutes, line after red line is slowly drawn, and each one labelled with its date-the ever-changing borders of Germany for the past 2000 years.)

PROUST VOICEOVER

N'allez pas trop vite.

NICOLSON

A group of little men at the end of a vast table: maps, interpreters, secretaries, and row upon row of empty gilt chairs. The great red curtains are drawn, scarlet and enclosing against the twilight sinking gently upon the Seine...

PROUST VOICEOVER

(almost entirely inaudible now)

Precisez...

NICOLSON

Tea, brioches, macaroons, the tea-urn guttering in the draught. Reassuring rituals. Messieurs, nous avons donc examine la frontiere entre Csepany et Saros Patag.... Il resulte que la jonction du chemin de fer Miskovec-Kaschau avec la ligne St. Peter-Losoncz doit etre attribuee...Ah, these interminable struggles...the infinite langour of the minister slowly uncrossing his knees, the crackle of Rolls Royces on the gravel of the courtyard...Wir wissen das die Gewalt der deutschen. Waffen begrochen ist. Wir kennen die Macht des Hasses, die uns hier...

(As he speaks, Clemenceau enters, helped in by an African in a burnoose and an Asian in a chef's hat. Clemenceau wears grey gloves, holds one hand to his heart, where he has been shot, and is bleeding. He sits, finally, after a long entrance, with the elaborate assistance of the African and the Asian, exhausted, and coughs, his lungs filled with blood.)

At the end one walked over the fields. At Verdun the shallow graves were being washed out by the rain. Feet stuck up out of the ground, and helmets with skulls in them rose up out of the mud. At Belleau Wood one saw great crater holes, splintered trees, shards of farmhouses through the white mist, shrapnel embedded in the woods, and nothing else, no grass, nothing, only a fine powder covering all, and there, amidst the wilderness of shell holes, one was in danger of getting lost; there was no sign of direction. What few ruins there were reminded one

of antiquity. Indeed from Rheims all the way to Soissons one had the impression of having passed out of the modern world back into a vanished civilization.

(Wilson enters. He wears pince-nez, high starched collar, is sick and weak, has difficulty breathing, is helped in by the dead soldier, who wears white gloves, has a white bandage around his head, perhaps carries a bouquet of flowers, and is white-faced. A long entrance, till Wilson is helped to lie down on a chaise.)

Here there was utter desolation, dead trenches, white chalky parapets, barbed wire, and silence. No living thing, no bird, no animal broke the silence. Death white this landscape was, death white. And when I returned to my hotel and gave my clothes to the chambermaid to have them cleaned, I remarked to her that the white mud would be hard to get out, that it was the dust of Verdun. And she took the clothes reverently and with a tone I shall never forget she said, "Yes, that is very precious dust, sir."

(Enormously sad music fills the theatre. A dreamy stillness on stage. Clemenceau coughs. Nicolson sits silently, in thought. All turn to see that Brockdorff-Rantzau has just entered. He is escorted by Wittgenstein, dressed in prison stripes. He holds hat in hand, has rimless eyeglasses, duelling scar on cheek. Wittgenstein helps Brockdorff-Rantzau to a chair, steps back. Brockdorff-Rantzau sits silently throughout, hat and briefcase in his lap. Shriveled. Gradually, during the course of the scene, everyone except Brockdorff—Rantzau will end up holding a champagne glass and drinking from it. Gradually, too, during the course of the scene, several trapdoors will open in the stage, and bodies will rise up out of their graves and ascend to heaven—very slowly; the ascensions will take the whole of this first section to complete. Shortly after the bodies have begun to ascend, and equally slowly, four lucite boxes will begin to descend. Eventually, they will descend onto, and cover, Clemenceau, Wilson, Nicolson, and Brockdorff-Rantzau like the box in which Eichmann sat for his trial.)

WILSON

(He speaks deliberately, pausing often to allow time for his words to be heard.)

Well. I'm the sort of person, I must admit, who likes the same sweater, for instance, the same automobile ride, the same woman. In fact, nothing pleases me more than taking an automobile ride along a familiar route wearing the sweater I wore in my Princeton days. Think of it. You know. Poetry. The same passages from the same books. Old college songs. The good things, the simple pleasures I suppose. We might all agree. Nothing extravagant. When I take a vacation I go to the same place every time, the lake country in England, and ride my bicycle over the hills. I'm fond of England, Europe generally. Europe as a whole. Exceptions here and there, of course, who wouldn't have? But on the whole, you know. And even so, one must admit, sometimes, of the possibility of the new.

CLEMENCEAU

(to Wittgenstein)

Here. You're a man interested in language.

WITTGENSTEIN

Yes...

CLEMENCEAU

Of course you are. Now, where do you suppose the word bugger comes from?

WITTGENSTEIN

Well...

CLEMENCEAU

You wouldn't know. Of course you wouldn't know, but take a guess. You couldn't guess. All right, then, I'll tell you. Bulgaria! It comes from Bulgaria, where all they did, so I've been told, was bugger each other for three or four centuries. It was their religion, they said. They thought the world such a horrible place that they refused to bring more children into it. Did you know that? And so they buggered each other for centuries! What do you think, was this an admirable thing to do? These German hordes bugger you up the backside and fuck you in the

mouth at the same time, bash your skull in when they've finished, and tell you it's their religion. That's how I understand the story. Nice people.

(Coughs)

Some people are like this. Take it as a given, that's all. Next thing you know they're at your front and your back. That's how it is with these people. Part of the splendid variety of human nature. I make no moral judgment. But I've never seen a good German, you can be sure of that-outside a concert hall.

(Coughs)

Bad enough when you get two of them together. Everything is more than doubled. It's always geometric with these bastards. Think of Beethoven.

(Coughs)

DEAD SOLDIER

When the politicians think even the rats have to vomit.

CLEMENCEAU

I spoke to Billy Hughes last night. I said to him, all right Billy, if we give you fellows the mandate for New Guinea, will you give your word the natives will have access to the missionaries? Oh, yes, I would indeed, sir, he said, for there are many days when these poor devils do not get half enough missionaries to eat!

(Laughs and coughs)

Not half enough missionaries to eat! There's a rich story if you let it fill your mind!

(Coughs)

Every man a bloody axe in his hand, eh?

"ORIENTAL"

Every act is a pistol shot!

DEAD SOLDIER

It's the worst bastards that rise to the top in this world.

WILSON

Well, let's hope not!

CLEMENCEAU

A woman came to me the other day, English woman, nice woman, wanted to do something, she said, wanted to work in the hospitals. OK I said. Good enough. Gave her a job taking care of the Montenegrins, and what do you suppose she found? Next to this one fellow's bed, a leather bag, big leather bag. She opened it up, and there inside this fine English woman found sixty human noses. Not fake noses. Real human noses. Nice fellows these Montenegrins. Of course one wishes there weren't any Montenegrins in the world!

WILSON

And even so. . .

CLEMENCEAU

I've had a gut full of niceties, I can tell you that.

WILSON

Yet, nonetheless. . .

CLEMENCEAU

Now you see it: the English sent their missionaries on ahead; the Americans send their liberals.

ORIENTAL

Man knows no more about life than the stink mushroom does, when you come down to it.

WITTGENSTEIN

I wouldn't know. I don't read the papers.

CLEMENCEAU

(addressing Brokdorff-Rantzau, shouting)

When I was a boy, what do you think my father did? In Nantes. Took me one day to the reading room, where people came to read and gossip, old people, people who had seen the Revolution and Napoleon. Over there, he said, do you see that fellow over there? An old friend of Marat. Marat! That's how close we are to those days. Well, sure, I wasn't very clear who this Marat was or what he had done, but Marat was a tremendous name. All that blood, you know, the Revolution,

Charlotte Corday, the bathtub full of blood. I had great respect for that old cocker who had known Marat. You can't escape history. It holds you in its fist. Here's this fellow who goes back to 1789! Then there was the year of the Paris Commune: 1870. When the Germans came onto French soil. I was there. That's how far back I myself go. 1870! Extraordinary when you think of it. The past reaches over the years to keep its grip on you. These Americans! Think they can simply step to another planet! Who wouldn't want to? Does a man like to be held eternally by the scruff of the neck?

(To Nicolson)

And then some of these fellows want something, don't they? You wouldn't know, of course, but what do you think? No, really, you don't know. To be sure, you don't think! And so you see nothing! You express your anguish, you speak of ideals, you lament the loss, but in truth, given the chance, you wouldn't do a thing about it. You'd express your compassion, hand out a few bits of charity, even bribes, but you wouldn't change a thing when it came down to it, you'd pick up your gun to keep hold of what you've got. Because there's something you want as well! You've got it in your fist. Or got some poor bastard to hold it for you so you can rail against him while he keeps a safe hold on it for you. I've had a gut full of hypocrites as well, I can tell you. And then we have to sit here and listen to your misgivings! I believe in saints. I am not a man entirely without belief. I should have been a saint myself, I have a talent for it, a taste for it, a longing for it but instead I've spent my life among men like you.

(He ends in a paroxysm of coughing, which continues for a few minutes through the following dialogue.)

DEAD SOLDIER

We motored out to Fontaine-aux-Charmes yesterday, with Riddell and Balfour. Extraordinary place. The ravines. Old helmets. Rusted firearms. Old boots.

WILSON

Is this relevant?

DEAD SOLDIER

Back where the lines had been drawn over the maps and charts nothing could resist the forward progress of the generals' pencils: no bogs, no gas. No stink of blood and latrine to spoil the odor of optimism.

WILSON

Is this going to be relevant?

DEAD SOLDIER

No punctured stomachs of dead men to release that distinctive odor. No sounds of snoring and groans from men whose helmets had been blown off their heads, helmets splashed with brain.

WILSON

I think we know all this.

DEAD SOLDIER

Legs blown up against their backs.

NICOLSON

I think we could move along to another topic now.

DEAD SOLDIER

No men going mad from lack of air.

WILSON

No point in stirring up old hatreds.

CLEMENCEAU

Let him go on! These are Frenchmen he speaks of!

DEAD SOLDIER

At Grurie Wood, I hear, a Captain Juge, standing upright on his parapet, revolver in his hand, cheering on his men, fell, wounded, rose to his feet again, calling to his men, stand your ground, stand your ground, stand your ground and be brave, and then, wounded once again, fell again and got up once more, firing point blank at the enemy, who shot him again. Two companies came to his aid, and they came under attack, too, this time from the rear, and when they ran out of

ammunition, they retreated through the trenches a yard at a time, fighting hand to hand, building barricades behind them as they went, until at last, they fought off the Germans with their bayonets and the butt ends of their rifles, and the captain called out "forward!" and nobody replied, and he rose to his feet one more time and called out: you bloody cowards! are you leaving me to go on alone then? And his platoon sergeant, lying in the trench with a broken shoulder, answered back to him: Not cowards, Sir! Willing enough. But all fucking dead!

CLEMENCEAU

(weeping)

God bless them! God bless these boys!

NICOLSON

Clearly these are Englishmen he speaks of, not French.

WILSON

Yes, well, nonetheless...

NICOLSON

This is nothing new.

WILSON

My father used to say: emotion is not a political passion.

NICOLSON

One doesn't want to have one's reason swayed by such things.

DEAD SOLDIER

And then one hears of the riots for shoes.

WITTGENSTEIN

People in the streets.

DEAD SOLDIERS

Bodies, too.

WITTGENSTEIN

The need for more police.

WILSON

There is a certain natural terror, of course, of things coming up from the bottom.

AFRICAN

As in feces, I suppose.

DEAD SOLDIER

Or Africans.

WITTGENSTEIN

Vomit.

NICOLSON

Australians, for that matter.

ORIENTAL

The dark side.

WITTGENSTEIN

One hears about it in mythology.

WILSON

One need not go into it.

NICOLSON

It is a natural reaction, really. Until these people are ready. As in bad news, or passions, certain hatreds, rages, the demons of old, evil forces, psychological sorts of things, you know, all these things, not bad to keep down, until the conscious mind is quite ready to cope with it, you know.

AFRICAN

Given time, one supposes.

DEAD SOLDIER

If ever.

AFRICAN

There's the trick.

NICOLSON

Or else, very well, then, certainly you can turn it loose. Winnie, you know, thinks we ought simply to turn the armies around and sick them on the Bolshies. Keep the Germans in place, there's his idea, keep them armed, turn them around, join them together with the British and the Americans, and keep right on marching to Moscow! How would you like that, then?

WITTGENSTEIN

Not a wholly bad idea.

NICOLSON

But really, what right have you?

AFRICAN

In former times, statesmen never spoke of rights.

NICOLSON

In former times they spoke of nothing else.

WITTGENSTEIN

In former times, statesmen went around looking quite solemn, but that's a thing of the past I think. These days even soldiers and sailors are seen smiling.

DEAD SOLDIER

This is the age of the smile, I think.

WILSON

Of course, one would like to make it good.

NICOLSON

One doesn't like to feel as though one is simply thrown into the middle of a riot in a parrot house.

WITTGENSTEIN

One doesn't like to improvise with the world.

NICOLSON

One doesn't like to think one chooses a king for Albania simply because he dresses in kilts like the Scots.

AFRICAN

Although, personally, I should rather be the Duke of Atholl than King of Albania.

NICOLSON

Or that one will simply be feeding missionaries to the cannibals.

WILSON

Or that we sent these boys to die in vain.

NICOLSON

Or that one can't even number the pages.

AFRICAN

I don't quite take your point.

WILSON

It seems one could get on with it. Surely reasonable men could agree.

CLEMENCEAU

I think of my old friend Baber, of India. Had a pile of heads brought to him every morning. And when the pile was smaller than usual, he would say: "It's pretty small, this pile. My men are getting slack."

BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU

Of course, one doesn't want to leave one's children. One tries as best one can to sort it out, but the mind is a finite thing. We are wise enough to know that our anti-dogmatism is as exclusivist as a bureaucrat that we are not free yet shout freedom, if you see what I mean. A harsh necessity without discipline or morality and we spit on humanity. We are circus directors whistling amid the winds of carnivals convents bawdy houses theatres realities sentiments restaurants, if nothing is lost in the translation. Imagine! That one might learn nothing from such an appalling misadventure!

Well, we know the earth is not a fresh air resort. Nature does not run along the little thread on which reason would like to see it run. We can of course insure our house against fire our cash register against burglary or our daughter against devirgination but heaven looks nevertheless down into the bottomless pots of our home countries and extracts the sweat of fear from our foreheads. From out of every plank seat a black claw grabs us by the backside. Like water off the duck's back so love runs off the human bacon. In loneliness man rides down the Styx on his chamber pot. Water fire earth air have been gnawed at by man. No hallelujah can help him. There is no further mention that man the measure of all things gets away with a black eye. Einstein gives man a good drubbing and sends him home. Gives him a good drubbing and sends him home!

With staring eyes and mug hanging wide open this landscape roars through the void, only a handful of snuff remains of the sphinx the olympus and Louis XV, the golden rule and other valuable rules have vanished without leaving a trace, a chairleg clings sea-sick with madness to a torture stake. People have not yet succeeded in unveiling the world through reason! A great deal in the new doctrine does not fit together like a meander in patent leather shoes who goes walking on the arm of a somnambulist box of sardines through the sooty hortus deliciarum, if you see what I mean. Einstein does not want to cover up the asphodel meadows. Einstein's poems have nothing to do with modern alarm clocks. Before them reason takes its tail between its legs and goes philandering somewhere else. Yes yes yes the earth is not a valley of tears in the breast pocket!

(Silence)

AFRICAN

Are they at an impasse then?

ORIENTAL

And yet life goes on.

AFRICAN

You see what's come of it.

WITTGENSTEIN

Indeed, the cows sit on top of telegraph poles.

(The dialogue moves with dizzying speed.)

DEAD SOLDIER

Tornadoes whirl around in my mouth.

WITTGENSTEIN

If such a thing is possible.

DEAD SOLDIER

Hurricanes.

WITTGENSTEIN

If such a thing is possible.

DEAD SOLDIER

Yes.

WITTGENSTEIN

Bring color to my lips.

DEAD SOLDIER

The marvellous is always beautiful.

AFRICAN

Anything marvellous is beautiful.

DEAD SOLDIER

In fact, only the marvellous is beautiful.

WITTGENSTEIN

Well said, I thought, even though one is of course bored by speeches.
And then one speculates: did he speak well? Did he speak well enough?
Will it be a remembered speech? Could it have been improved? Did he
believe it himself?

AFRICAN

Doesn't his wife look like hell in orchids?

WITTGENSTEIN

Impressions count.

AFRICAN

The power of words.

WITTGENSTEIN

And pictures.

ORIENTAL

The logic of death.

DEAD SOLDIER

Rather than the cold. The lack of food.

WITTGENSTEIN

Of animal fats, primarily.

DEAD SOLDIER

The sallow complexions.

NICOLSON

Well, make no mistake: civilization requires a little repression. But is the present arrangement such a dreadful thing? Let us imagine, for example, that everyone were suddenly able to afford the same shoes and restaurants, then how would they distinguish themselves from one another? By degrees of intelligence perhaps. Is this any more fair? Indeed, it may be far more desperate. For one can never change the brains one is born with, but one can always change the amount of money in one's bank account. I don't say it always happens, no. But when you consider how really pernicious it could become. Or consider a theocracy, where those who are the purest of heart are at the top. And everyone's heart is presumably subject to investigation to see just how

pure it is. Only in heaven is there no repression. Or in hell. Here on earth, we repress one another all the time, and I for one favor it! If one were to say, let A equal a bit of repression, then let B equal death, then, if not A then B you see what I mean.

WITTGENSTEIN

Or, on the otherhand, if A then B.

NICOLSON

How's that?

WITTGENSTEIN

Equally logical.

NICOLSON

It's a different syllogism.

WITTGENSTEIN

It may be.

NICOLSON

Not my syllogism.

WITTGENSTEIN

But, do you like it?

AFRICAN

I like it.

WITTGENSTEIN

One tries to be reasonable.

AFRICAN

There is a train of thought. A sort of logic.

ORIENTAL

That has its own elegance.

WITTGENSTEIN

And momentum, often times.

AFRICAN

It will reach its conclusion.

WITTGENSTEIN

And where does it lead?

DEAD SOLDIER

On the other hand, one might say: if the conclusion is absurd, then the process of reasoning is faulty.

AFRICAN

That would be something else.

DEAD SOLDIER

Another way of saying it.

AFRICAN

Or another way of saying something else.

WITTGENSTEIN

Well, one goes to logical conclusions.

AFRICAN

If one can.

WITTGENSTEIN

So one fears.

AFRICAN

And yet, if you want to get down to earth, do you have gold faucets?

WITTGENSTEIN

What's that?

AFRICAN

In your bathroom. Here.

WITTGENSTEIN

I suppose I do, yes.

AFRICAN

Aren't you afraid for them?

WITTGENSTEIN

How's that?

AFRICAN

Aren't you afraid the servants might get them?

NICOLSON

I should think the faucets are bolted in.

AFRICAN

Are they?

NICOLSON

Well, I'm not a plumber, but I should think one bolts them in, somehow.

AFRICAN

My commode has disappeared.

NICOLSON

The commode is disappearing all over Europe, I think.

WILSON

There are too many committees.

CLEMENCEAU

Indeed.

(Silence)

I didn't know.

WITTGENSTEIN

And the dinners.

NICOLSON

The opera with Paderewski.

WILSON

I had a vision of myself this morning: I saw myself under a white sheet; with just my feet sticking out at the bottom, as though I were a body.

CLEMENCEAU

Dead.

WILSON

Yes. I thought: what have I done?

CLEMENCEAU

What did you mean to do?

WILSON

One hopes to do something! And then one finds that time has passed!

NICOLSON

Sometimes one has the feeling one has simply outlived one's time. All sorts of things have been set loose, after all. And why not? These Burmese chaps, for instance. Arabians. It won't be easy to get them back in the bottle, will it?

DEAD SOLDIER

Women.

WITTGENSTEIN

In what context?

DEAD SOLDIER

Let loose.

WITTGENSTEIN

Really?

DEAD SOLDIER

You don't think so?

WITTGENSTEIN

Oh, quite possibly. Sexuality of all kinds, really, I suppose.

DEAD SOLDIER

What do you like in a woman?

WITTGENSTEIN

I hadn't thought about it, really.

DEAD SOLDIER

I like a woman who cries out and sings.

WITTGENSTEIN

Yes. Indeed.

DEAD SOLDIER

I like a slippery woman.

WITTGENSTEIN

Oh, to be sure.

DEAD SOLDIER

I like a woman like a tuba.

WITTGENSTEIN

Ah-ha, yes.

ORIENTAL

I like a woman with a small boy.

DEAD SOLDIER

I like a woman big with child.

WITTGENSTEIN

I like a woman who's not afraid to jump from a hot air balloon.

NICOLSON

I like a woman's buttocks in a mirror.

(All look at him.)

DEAD SOLDIER

Really?

WITTGENSTEIN

And all these throat germs, you know. There are throat germs everywhere. And assassinations as well.

AFRICAN

Perhaps it's not all bad then, when you come to think of it.

NICOLSON

At dinner at the countess's the other night, there were a hundred guests, and a tenor sang in the courtyard below: dirges and laments, all unspeakably moving. Everyone cried. I did myself. And then the countess announced that some people would have to die. Well, the effect was quite extraordinary. Some of the guests ran from the dining room. Balfour took one of the servant's bicycles and rode away. And then a Montenegrin chap took a butcher's knife and held it to the countess's throat and announced to everyone that she was dead. But the countess got very angry at that and refused to be dead. And then everyone was quite put out with her: after all, hadn't she set the rules?

Although one can become too overwrought about these things, I find. Think about it, you know: for all we know there have been other quite advanced civilizations on earth before, possibly more advanced even than our own. If they flourished before the ice age, for instance, there is no reason to think they would have left a trace behind. By now even their pottery would be dust. If we vanish, for instance, in fifteen or twenty thousand years there will be no physical evidence left at all of our ever having been here: we have nothing that lasts nearly as long as red pottery.

CLEMENCEAU

Is there at least some entertainment?

(A dancer runs in at full speed, stops as though caught suddenly in the headlights of a car, frozen, frightened. The "music" that accompanies her is composed of occasional abrupt sounds of breaking glass, rifle fire, machine guns, collapsing buildings, and so forth. She wears long, flowing Greek robes. She moves through various postures, freezing in each one, then whirling to the next. The politicians watch, as though at a concert performance. Occasional bursts of applause come over the loudspeakers. At the end the dancer turns and runs out at full speed.

The "music" continues.

Clemenceau, Wilson, and Nicolson descend through trapdoors, and their boxes rise quickly into the flies. Brockdorff-Rantzau remains on stage, and his box rises quickly into the flies. He sits silently.)

II. Dada

(An explosion of popular 1920's German music.

A rusted steel wall is slowly lowered to cover the shattered mirror.

It can be said that THE PLAY begins here-a large choreographed piece, played against the dialogue, with the dialogue serving as music or setting for the choreography of actors running, throwing one another into the steel wall, and so forth. What has come up to now can be considered the prologue; what follows this section can be considered the epilogue.

A man runs in circles, round and round, occasionally tripping, looking around to see what has tripped him, continuing to run, finally tripping and falling repeatedly.)

VOICEOVER

Ah yes Sonya, they all take the celluloid doll for a changeling and shout:
God Save the King!

(Canned laughter)

The whole Monist club is gathered on the steamship Meyerbeer. But only the pilot has any conception of high C

(Canned laughter)

I pull the anatomical atlas out of my toe a serious study begins. Have you seen the fish that have been standing in front of the opera in cutaways for the last two days and nights?

(Canned laughter. Catcalls, whistles, sirens.)

Ah ah ye great devils-ah ah ye keepers of the bees and commandants. With a bow wow wow with a boe woe woe who today does not know what our Father Homer wrote I hold my peace and war in my toga but today I'll take a cherry flip

(Canned laughter. Sounds of airplane engines starting. Wittgenstein comes out very slowly and solemnly, slowly and ceremoniously strips naked, then turns his backside to the audience, moons them for a while, and then finally makes his buttocks jump up and down as though in time to music.)

Today nobody knows whether he was tomorrow. They beat time with a coffin lid. And fuck the politicians

(Canned laughter)

I say fuck the politicians.

(Canned laughter)

I say fuck the politicians.

(Canned laughter)

If you get my meaning.

(Uproarious canned laughter)

If only somebody had the nerve to rip the tail feathers out of the trolley car it's a great age.

(Canned laughter.)

I say, if this is political philosophy, give me a chocolate egg cream.

(Hilarious canned laughter. More airplane engines. Other engines. The sounds of heavy equipment. Garage doors opening. Clanking. While this Voiceover continues with the dialogue below, another is added to it, that of Kurt Schwitters, so that we hear two voices over the loudspeakers at once. Schwitters is calm, but insistent.

Continuing throughout: the sounds of cowbells, farting, pot covers banging, rattles, whistles, crashing glasses, a wailing woman, a moaning woman crying for help or sympathy, hiccups, a yodelling woman, canned laughter.)

SCHWITTERS

Take gigantic surfaces, conceived as infinite, cloak them in color, shift them menacingly. Let points burst like stars among them. Let a line rush by. Take a dentist's drill, a meat grinder, a cartrack scraper, take buses and pleasure cars, bicycles, tandems and their tires. Make locomotives crash into one another. Explode steam boilers. Take petticoats and other kindred articles, shoes and false hair, also ice skates and throw them into place where they belong. Take man-traps, automatic pistols, infernal machines, the tinfoil and the funnel. Inner tubes are highly recommended. Even people can be used. People can even be tied to backdrops. Now marry the oilcloth to the home owner's loan association, bring the lamp cleaner together with the marriage between Anna Blume and A-natural, concert pitch. Give the globe to the surface to gobble up and you cause a cracked angle to be destroyed by the beam of a 22-thousand candle power arc lamp. Make a human walk on his hands and wear a hat on her feet. Organs backstage sing and say:

"Futt, futt." The sewing machine rattles along in the lead. A man in the wings says, "Bah!" Drums and flutes flash death and a streetcar conductor's whistle gleams bright. A melody of violins shimmers pure and virgin-tender. A soft rustling. Even the sewing machine is dark.

(The African runs through at top speed, grabs Wittgenstein and propels him off the stage. A few moments later, Wittgenstein runs through with the African in his grip and propels him off the other side. They repeat this back and forth.)

VOICEOVER

(continued)

The professors of zoology gather in the meadows. With the palms of their hands they turn back the rainbow.

(Mona Lisa enters, naked, with a mustache, puts her arms out to her sides and turns around and around.)

MONA LISA

OO
OO
OO
O

VOICEOVER

(contd)

Then typhoons if such a thing is possible. Hurricanes if such a thing is possible

(The beginning of a long slow siren that builds steadily. Flashing red light as though on top of a police car.)

VOICEOVER

cry my voice. Cry my name.

(Canned laughter)

Human flesh pulsates at my call. Parrots falling from the branches. The rivers beneath the bridge of sighs. High hats of tin. Tents pitched from morning to night. A great slaughter fills you out.

(The clanking of steel, as though large steel pieces are being put into place to build a tower. Also echoing corridors, heels against steel.)

BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU

(His voice miked, speaking quietly.)

eure Adern sind blau rot grün und orangefarben wie die Gesichter der Ahnen die im Sonntagsanzug am Bord der Altäre hocken Zylinderhüte riesig o aus Zinn und Messing machen ein himmlisches Konzert

(The sounds of destruction, but very distant.)

die Gestalten der Engel schweben um euren Ausgang als der Widerschein giftiger Blüten so formet ihr eure Glieder über den Horizont hinaus in den Kaskaden von seinem Schlafsofa stieg das indianische Meer die Ohren voll Watte gesteckt.

VOICEOVER

(A message, as though broadcast into air-raid shelters in an alert, but spoken by a bored voice.)

Rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu rouge bleu

(A dog barks, over and over.)

MONA LISA

OO
OOOOOOOOOOOOO OOOOOOOOOOOO
OOOO OOO

DEAD SOLDIER

Boum boum boum
il deshabilla sa chair quand les grenouilles
humides commencerent à brûler j'ai mis
le cheval dans l'âme du serpent à Bucarest

ondependra mes amis
dorenavant et c'est tres interessant.

SCHWITTERS

(Entering, glass held in hand as though for a toast, speaks simultaneously with the others.)

My friends, after the many excellent speeches here tonight I feel the urge to thank the great, courageous, high-spirited people of Berlin and especially the officers who are here with us this evening. I shall recite my poem, "The raid on Adrianople."

Adrianople est cerne de toutes parts
SSSSrrrrr zitzitzitit PAAAAAAA AAAAAAAghrrrrrrrrrr
Ouah ouah ouah, depart des trains suicides,
ouah, ouah, ouah
Tchip tchip tchip—Feeeeeeeeeeee eeeeeeeeeeeee eeeeeez!

(He whirls and smashes a wine glass against the back wall.)

Tchip tchip tchip—des messages telegraphiques, couturieres Americaines
Piiiiiiiiiiiiing, sssssssssrrrrrrrrrr, zitzitzitit, toum toum Patrouille
tapie—

(He throws himself on top of the table.)

Vaniteeeeeee, viande congeleeeeeee—veilleuse de La Madone.

(He ends on a whispering note, and then slowly slides to the floor, pulling the green baize cloth with him, along with whatever plates and glasses and silverware are on the table. He lies, as though dead, the green baize pulled over him.)

WITTGENSTEIN

(twirling around and around, his arms out to his sides, and then turning and running full tilt into the steel wall, which is miked to resound when he hits it, falling, getting up again, repeating the same.)

rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
rrrrrr rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
r rrrrrrrrr rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

MONA LISA

Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it, everybody's doing it, doing it,
doing it

(The singing continues while Brockdorff-Rantzau speaks.)

BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU

Aus den gefleckten Tuben stromen die Flüsse in die Schatten der
legendigen Baume

Papageien und Assgeier fallen von den Zweigen immer auf den Grund

Bastmatten sind die Wände des Himmels und aus den Wolken kommen
die grossen Fallschirme der Magier Larven von Wolkenhaut haben sich
die Türme vor die blendenden Augen gebunden

O ihr Flüsse Unter der ponte dei sospiri fanget ihr auf Lungen und
Lebern und abgeschnittene Halse

In der Hudsonbay aber flog die Sirene oder ein Vogel Greif oder ein
Menschenweibchen von neuestem Typus mir eurer Hand greift ihr in
die Taschen der Regierungsräte die voll sind von Pensionen allerhand
gutem Willen und schonen Leberwürsten was haben wir alles getan vor
euch wie haben wir alle gebetet vom Skorpionstich schwillt der Hintern
den heiligen

Sängern und Ben Abka der Hohepriester walzt sich im Mist

DEAD SOLDIER

(singing)

See that ragtime couple over there, see her throw her shoulders in the
air. She said to him as she raised her heart oh yes oh yes oh yes oh yes
yes yes yes oh yes oh yes oh yes oh yes oh yes oh yes oh yes yes yes yes oh
yes. Sir.

(Repeats)

(Full volume thundering music frantic, with a strong beat. Deafening. Perhaps something by Einsturzende Neubauten or Cabaret Voltaire.

A Rube Goldberg contraption, of enormous complexity and stupidity, slowly descends, deus ex machina fashion, from above. Swelling heavenly music under the music of Einsturzende Neubauten. The actors stand amazed. One kneels. One prostrates himself entirely. The contraption blinks its lights. At last it lands on the stage. The music continues, crashing, filled with the sounds of trucks starting, clanking, voices of airplane pilots, static.

Wittgenstein steps up to it, takes out a cigar. The contraption whirls, cranks, flails, rocks, and finally produces a light for Wittgenstein's cigar. The actors all pause a moment silently, then all turn and run out at top speed, and the contraption explodes with a huge ball of fire and enormous smoke and ascends again into the flies. The music ends with clanking, echoing banging against steel walls, hoarse crying out and wailing in the night.)

III. Los Alamos

(A silver screen descends to cover the shattered mirror. The nineteenth century chairs are replaced by silver chairs. A vision of the technological future.

There are zinging sounds, as of an occasional laser, or an electron in an acceleration chamber. Space sounds. The stage is bathed in beautiful shades of red, including pink and coral. Projections of bubble chamber tracks. Throughout the scene we see dreamy, silent projections—as though on a large green television screen—of the precise course, like trails of little white bubbles, of laser-guided rockets and bombs, striking extremely small, precisely targeted, sites. Oppenheimer enters, uncertainly. He wears cowboy boots, wide-brimmed hat, blue jeans. Enters, stops, looks, goes to card table, stops, looks, sits, shuffles.)

OPPENHEIMER VOICEOVER

Dear Professor Bridgman, you may remember that when I was at Harvard two years ago I was very much interested in your theory of metallic conduction. Recently in the course of some work in quantum mechanics that I have been pursuing at Gottingen, an idea has turned up which seems to offer a certain support to your theory. I think it will be some time before a complete quantum theory of conduction is possible, but perhaps I may tell you briefly of this one point.

(While he shuffles and his voiceover is heard, the other players enter, some moments apart, and take their places around the table: All wear sunglasses; Teller wears heavy gloves, welder's goggles; Fermi wears white laboratory overalls. Von Neumann dresses like a banker, in three piece suit, pocket handkerchief. Eventually, Oppenheimer deals. While all this goes on, the voiceover continues.

ANOTHER VOICEOVER CONTINUED

I hope you will pardon my presumption, but I have taken the liberty of drawing up a revised Ten Commandments, since the old Ten haven't worked so well.

First. Recognize the connections of things and the laws of the conduct of men, so that you may know what you are doing. This is an important one. Try not to forget it. You may begin, for instance, with a thought of what you are doing and find, soon enough, that someone else has taken over the direction of your work and what you thought was fine and pure, extraordinary even, has become mundane or dreadful. Or not even that someone else has taken it over, but that some other aspect in your own character. As, for instance, fear. Or vanity. Lust for power. Etcetera.

Second. Let your acts be directed toward a worthy goal, but do not ask if they will reach it. They are to be models and examples, that's all. This is an important one, too—though harder to get at first. I could elaborate, but I think I ought simply to leave this one to you to consider.

Third. Speak to all men as you do to yourself, with no concern for the effect you make, so that you don't shut them out from your world; lest in isolation the meaning of life slips out of sight and you lose the belief in the perfection of creation. You see what I mean.

Fourth. Do not destroy what you cannot create. Do not destroy what you cannot create.

Fifth. Lead your life with a gentle hand and be ready to leave whenever you are called. That one is for the poets. Others are welcome to it, of course, as they wish.

Sixth. Do your work for six years; but in the seventh, go into solitude or among strangers, so that the recollection of your friends does not hide you from being what you have become. This is a personal one. Crucial, I think.

Seventh. Do not covet what you cannot have. Also personal. And not personal at the same time.

Eighth. This is an important one again: do not add to the madness. If you can't stop it, at least do not help to push it over the edge. That's obvious enough, hardly worth stating. I wouldn't state it if we weren't all so forgetful.

(They bet before they look at their hands.)

OPPENHEIMER

Bets?

VON NEUMANN

Five dollars.

TELLER

Five and raise you fifty.

FERMI

Are you going to cheat?

TELLER

Why do you say that?

FERMI

I know something about odds.

TELLER

I have a fantastic hand.

FERMI

Evidently.

OPPENHEIMER

Bets?

FERMI

Do you think I'd bet in a game like this?

OPPENHEIMER

I only ask.

FERMI

One hundred dollars.

VON NEUMANN

I don't know.

FERMI

Well, you have to estimate. What's the fun in life if you don't estimate. For instance. Take a problem. Let us say: how many barbers are there in the United States? How many piano tuners are there in Chicago? What is the number of sheep in Nevada? These things can be quantified. Try and make an estimate within a factor of ten. Take another problem. How many locomotives are there in America?

TELLER

This is quite boring.

FERMI

Within an order of magnitude. First, how many miles do you have to drive before crossing a railroad track, on the average? From this number you obtain the number of miles of railroad track in America.

TELLER

I don't need to listen to this.

FERMI

Third, estimate the number of miles of track per locomotive. And there you have it.

TELLER

Who cares about this?

FERMI

You remember Archimedes' famous experiment where he measured the amount of gold in a crown by putting it in a tub of water to see how much water it displaced. One may measure anything in this way: a crown, an automobile, a human being. The water doesn't know the difference. I did the same thing with my Nobel Prize, for instance, and I must say I was pleased to find that it had a gold content. These Nobel Prizes are not entirely worthless after all. I was able, in fact, to do the same thing with my wedding presents. The first step is to identify what it is to be measured. That's the essential point. If you go wrong there, you've gone wrong, and that's all there is to it. You may say that the beauty of life is its complexity. And I would say, yes! And also the beauty of life is its simplicity.

TELLER

Locomotives. Crowns. Wedding presents. Does one care about these things any more?

VON NEUMANN

It makes one giddy to think about these things. I think. If anyone says he can think about quantum theory without getting giddy, he hasn't understood the first thing about it. One musn't discount the miraculous aspect. One doesn't want to reduce the mysteries to a mere game.

OPPENHEIMER

Dealer is in.

FERMI

What do you think are my chances of becoming Pope? For instance, how would you calculate that?

TELLER

I think it would be a miracle.

FERMI

Precisely. And what is a miracle? Offhand, I would define a miracle as an event which has a probability of less than ten per cent. Rabi said to me: look, these things ought to be kept secret. Because you know what it might lead to.

(He laughs.)

Nuts! I said to him. Nuts! Well, he said, what do you estimate are the probabilities? Remote, I said. Remote, he said, what do you mean by this word remote? Well, I said: remote, that would be ten per cent. Ten percent, he said. That is not remote, I think, if it has consequences!

(He laughs.)

Fortunately, for me, no emotion lasts more than two minutes.

OPPENHEIMER

Lord, these affairs are hard on the heart.

FERMI

Of course this ten percent factor is reversible, too. I wouldn't say it's not.

OPPENHEIMER

Cards?

FERMI

Three cards.

VON NEUMANN

Two cards.

(Through the remainder of the scene we hear the sounds of radar, a NASA launch preparation, remarks of casino dealers, crap tables, pilots talking to each other, control tower talk.)

TELLER

Of course, you may speculate all you want about these things, but it all comes down finally to a world where animals eat one another, doesn't it? If you choose to think of it in a certain way: we are waging a war against all the non-human animals, aren't we?

FERMI

That's a bit extreme, isn't it?

TELLER

Do you think so?

FERMI

Well, we aren't food faddists, are we?

VON NEUMANN

I should hope not.

FERMI

Well, there you have it.

TELLER

Indeed. One cares about what works, there's my point. Physics is interested in an estimation of forces.

OPPENHEIMER

When one says that now we physicists have known sin, I don't think we have, in some particular sense, committed an act that is wrong or bad. Rather, I think what is meant is that we have entered a realm that was always forbidden to us as human beings, a realm that was reserved to the gods, or, if you prefer, to the universe itself, and that our entrance into that forbidden realm was sacrilege. Now we see the punishment for it. We've transformed our home into the most perilous place in the universe. Not even a dog would do that. So that now, our fondest dream as a species is to leave the earth. We think of nothing else.

TELLER

Nonsense. I think of other things all the time. I think of what works.

OPPENHEIMER

We 've had the lifespan of butterflies really.

VON NEUMANN

Cards?

TELLER

No cards.

OPPENHEIMER

Dealer takes one. Bets?

TELLER

One thousand dollars.

FERMI

Of course, if you're going to cheat, there would be no point in going on.

TELLER

That would be up to you.

FERMI

I find anything other than an honest game uninteresting.

TELLER

Each to his own taste, to be sure.

FERMI

Tennis without a net is pointless, surely.

TELLER

In what sense?

FERMI

Where is the mathematics then? What is the point?

TELLER

What is the point of mathematics?

FERMI

It is its own end.

TELLER

That is a matter of taste, surely. The point, really, is beating you.

FERMI

I have a parlor game I sometimes play with friends called MURDER. The rules are very simple. First, you turn out the lights. Second is poking. Third is kissing. Fourth lights on again. And then you determine who is the murderer.

TELLER

How do you do that?

FERMI

Well, we already know: you are.

TELLER

This is an ugly thing to say.

FERMI

We all know you have no sense of fun, no sense of play.

TELLER

Is this meant to be a charge against me? Will you condemn a grown man because he doesn't like finger painting?

FERMI

Must a man be so homicidally serious to be a man?

TELLER

I'm a logical person. I'm simply a logical person. What sort of madman would consider this a charge?

VON NEUMANN

Consider your logic. Is it sufficiently inclusive. For example, it is clear that neither a pencil-stroke nor a steamship is simple. Is there really a logical equivalence between these two?

OPPENHEIMER

Are there bets?

VON NEUMANN

I fold.

FERMI

What is the point? I'm out.

OPPENHEIMER

I'll see you and raise you a thousand.

TELLER

See and raise a thousand.

FERMI

What are the probabilities of both having winning hands?

VON NEUMANN

Where $y_i(p)$ is the expected payoff for player one of his strategy p against player two's actual hand s and actual choice i equals i , then $K(p/o)$ equals $1/Sy_i y_i$.

OPPENHEIMER

Are you still in this game?

VON NEUMANN

In a certain narrow sense. Shall I explain the rules to you?

OPPENHEIMER

Please. Be so kind.

VON NEUMANN

In game theory it is assumed that both players have examined all the strategies before the game begins and have also decided which strategy to take. The play itself is consequently completely mechanical and predetermined. The value of the game lies in attaining both the smallest maximum and the largest minimum—one and negative one. This theory applies only to games where the players have full information of the state of the game at any time during the game—tic tac toe, checkers, and chess. For games such as paper, scissors, stone, or poker, one must add the word average to the value of the game. I can recommend for games of incomplete information only a sound policy for many rounds. The best strategy, then, is random and mixed such that the largest minimum of average payoff to A obtains and coincides with the smallest maximum of the average payoff to B, and this value is the unique average value of the game. There is no best strategy for one round. One can play or not play, but the game goes on in any case, with new players replacing the old; and it has its own logic on which the players are carried along with ever increasing stakes. There are no exact parallels since the play is ever-intensifying. The players cannot affect the game, although the game can affect the players.

TELLER

Will you deal?

(Oppenheimer again shuffles.

The light is such that the silver screen glistens like a metal of the distant future.

Green fog pervades the stage.

The physicists all descend through trap doors.

The dead soldier rises through a trap door, holding an empty red pottery vase, stands silently.

Space music. Very strange, violent, and beautiful.

Projections of stars, bubble chambers-very beautiful. Projections of microscopic underwater life forms of all kinds-very beautiful. Sounds and images that call up an unreasoning love of the earth, other space sounds-but these very beautiful.

Finger cymbals.

Whale songs.)

The end

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