

STEFANO BORSELLI
MAMA'S BOY TRILOGY

AUGUSTINE, PASCAL, LEOPARDI, MONTALE, KAFKA AND OTHER MYTHS
BETWEEN NON-RECEPTION, DERELICTION AND THE DUTY OF GLORY



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ⓘ WARNING.

THE AIM OF THIS TEXT IS NOT TO OFFER A TOTAL EXPLANATION, NOR A unified theory of the human problem. If one insisted on formulating such a theory, it might be said that it seeks to delineate a familiar pattern, a game and psychological and productive types, anything but rare. Anyone moving in urban environments of middle and high

culture can spot it in their own surroundings without difficulty. Indeed, on the basis of what is set out here, a reconsideration of attributions, evaluations, of others and of oneself, would be a result. ¶ A clarification is obligatory: to highlight the sometimes extremely weak, when not openly ridiculous, aspects of the behavioural and rhetorical pattern of the «mama's boy» (or «bamboccione», if one prefers) is deemed necessary for a clearing of the ground and for a vital liberation — as often happens with the public and exhibited destruction of a taboo. This must not, however, induce reproach, but rather compassion and empathy. Flaubert docet: «*Madame Bovary c'est moi*»: we are all mama's boys. And if one takes important things seriously, this follows a fortiori from Terence's principle: «*Nil humanum a me alienum puto*». No individual articulates a single pattern. We all participate, in different measure, in every behavioural and symbolic structure. It is *always* a question of scale, of relative intensity and of overall equilibrium that makes each individual unique. ¶ But one should note that Jünger in *A Dangerous Encounter* (Adelphi, Milan, 1986, p. 117):

“ «But isn't it said that whoever understands everything forgives everything?» ¶ «So it is said. But it is another of those proverbs that make no sense, one of the most beloved commonplaces there are. Whoever understands everything does not understand only the guilty man, but also the judge who pronounces sentence against him and the executioner who carries it out. I would say more modestly that even if I do not understand the facts and their connections, I admire them as a masterpiece». ¶ «Then you think differently from those who say that God cannot exist because this world is a place of horrors». ¶ Dobrowsky laughed. «Even if I am but a wretched policeman, you won't attribute such banalities to me».

To understand the amputations that shaped a murderer does not mean to forgive him, nor to weaken the community's response — rage, repulsion, defence. Not an irenic pardon, then: rather, as commissioner Dobrowsky says, to renounce the pretence of understanding to the bottom, and to look at the configuration — amputations, compensation, outcome — as one looks at a completed mechanism. ¶ One must not forget, moreover, that the pattern highlighted here is but the pathological development of a natural variation within the species. As lateralization in right-handed, left-handed or ambidextrous individuals is communally more efficient than pure, homogeneous symmetry, so anxious and unconscious, hylic and pneumatic, prudent and reckless, slow profound and fast brilliant represent original, healthy polarities, necessary to the survival of the group. ¶ Various references to the *Minimal Theory of the Abstraction Process* (MTAP) show how much it is premise and foundation of this text, which can even be read as its gloss. The reader can find in the appendices an explicit surfacing of the results of that theoretical work, notably the note on Tiquun in the second and the entire third, «The Dates of Capital». Coherently with a perspective that invites a direct, unshielded confrontation with reality,

the reader is therefore referred and invited to turn directly to the sources: to the original text of the Gemeinwesen Group, where the anthropological posture outlined here is placed in a far broader inquiry into that «redemptive motor» and activist drive that feeds the millennial «process of abstraction» that MTAP treats.

The table that follows does not arise from a classificatory project. It is the result, in certain respects unexpected, of a long reflection — taken up more extensively in closing — which began with a striking intuition of Jacques Camatte on the maternal matrix of the Augustinian work. The hypothesis, first verified on Augustine, was progressively extended to other authors. It was somewhat surprising to observe that, even in the profound biographical and cultural differences, in the family history of Leopardi, Kafka, Montale and others too, invariances appear. The table registers them; their interpretation is the object of the pages that follow. The verification of each attribution is left to the readers, benevolent or otherwise.

✿ FOR A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS MAMA'S BOY.

	CHILDHOOD PRE-ADOLESCENCE			ADULTHOOD			
	1 <i>Wife's exceptionalism</i>	2 <i>Absence of affective caresses</i>	3 <i>Tribe not experienced</i>	4 <i>De/N</i>	5 <i>Amputations</i>	6 <i>Compensation</i>	7 <i>Ontological pessimism</i>
AGOSTINO D'IPPONA (354)	Yes	?	?	DN	Yes	Yes	Yes
BLAISE PASCAL (1623)	✕	Yes	Yes	DN	Yes	Yes	Yes
ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER (1788)	Yes	?	Yes	N	Yes	Yes	Yes
GIACOMO LEOPARDI (1798)	Yes	Yes	Yes	D	Yes	Yes	Yes
ROBERT MUSIL (1880)	↑	?	Yes	DN	Yes	Yes	Yes
FRANZ KAFKA (1883)	Yes	?	Yes	D	Yes	Yes	Yes
CARLO MICHELSTAEDTER (1887)	Yes	?	Yes	D	Yes	Yes	Yes
WALTER BENJAMIN (1892)	↑	?	Yes	D	Yes	Yes	Yes
EUGENIO MONTALE (1896)	Yes	?	Yes	DN	Yes *	Yes	Yes *
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (1905)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N	Yes	Yes	Yes
SAMUEL BECKETT (1906)	↑	?	No	D	Yes	Yes	Yes
THOMAS BERNHARD (1931)	Yes	?	Yes	DN	Yes	Yes	Yes

☞ LEGEND.

- *Wife's exceptionalism* — In literature, that of the wife who feels herself in some way superior to her husband is a recurring figure, from Emma Bovary who despises the mediocrity of her spouse to Anna Karenina who laments his aridity. ¶ In our case we are faced with a particular, different form of the conflict: the mother's sentiment of exception, understood as fineness and nobility of soul (in other words, being *pneumatic* as opposed to the coarseness of being *hylic*), perceived not as a personal characteristic, but of lineage (also living lineage: father or grandfather...). There thus emerges a «we» (individually one's own pneumaticity is often entirely contradicted by the facts, imaginary). A «we» always substantiated by opposition to the «they» of the spouse. See further on the relevant chapter: «Wife's exceptionalism (usually illusory)». An important correlation must be added: real or claimed, pneumatic election — in itself a yearning for disincarnation — is more often accompanied by anaffectivity.
- *Absence of affective caresses* — In the proper, corporeal-animal sense, *à la* Ashley Montagu. Anaffective mother, emotionally inaccessible, physically absent or dead. But the corporeal dimension alone does not exhaust the notion: in psychology one distinguishes between real affective caresses and instrumental and anxiogenic ones. For Winnicott this produces a lack of solidity in the core of the self. Let us add that in nature, not only for humans, the system of reception after birth is robust, redundant and capable of supplying the absent mother, for example one dead in childbirth. When it fails, it is not one mother alone who fails, it is a network. It is known that the system includes substitutive *allomothers*: grandmothers, aunts, wet nurses themselves, sisters, even males if capable: father, brother, grandfather, etc. Yet sometimes the network is not there or is blocked for various reasons.
- *Tribe not experienced* — Not simple introversion but factual non-participation (or participation below threshold for scarcity and extraneousness) in the virile games of children, «the tribes of children with slings» of Montale, where one learns both to measure oneself against external and multidimensional criteria and to relate to others, real ones. Articulated and varied motives, for heterogeneous and often opaque reasons: family and social-class pressure, its interiorization, psyche, etc. The tribe, if it tries to integrate him, eventually resigns itself.
- *DN Dereliction and narcissism* — Associated with primary non-reception is a co-presence, visible already from adolescence, of *dereliction* (failed formation of the self, difficulties, objective and lived, in finding a place in the world — in affections, in the family, in career, in the community) and *narcissism* (anxiety to have an audience in which to appear — to oneself and, at least in some measure, objectively — superior). The values attributed: D (=prevalent dereliction), N (=prevalent narcissism), DN (=equilibrium between the two).
- *Amputations* — Inaccessibility of the Simple, common-carnal, and its joy: the unforgettable moments of a love, a hard-won victory on the football field with your team, a beer with friends, the night with everyone on the bank of the Po that threatens it, the smile and outings of your daughter at five years old.

- *Compensation* — Imaginary redemption with the sense of intellectual/moral/aesthetic superiority in a debtor-insolvent world, frequent *lamentatio* and its sempiternal themes. Derision (irony, spleen, contemptuous detachment) towards «gross» vitality and ordinary masculinity, normal life: «Living? Let our domestics do it for us» (Villiers De L'Isle-Adam cited by Montale). ¶ But things have consequences. A type so formed will relate to the other with the sole, unconscious aim of extracting his compensatory enjoyment, an *ersatz* that, in order to subsist, requires feeling himself the end, facing an interlocutor degraded to inferior and coarse. One will not be surprised, then, to observe, by dynamic reaction, the live and equally contemptuous response of some candidate for inferiority who is less thoroughly normalized.
- *Ontological pessimism* — Conviction that being is marked by pain, lack, absurdity or radical evil. At times an explicit banner, at times implicit.

The table aims to represent the state of the art of an ongoing research. Attributions: Yes (=strong-very strong probability for clues or testimonies), †(=compatible language), ? (=not so explicit clues; and absence of an operational questionnaire), ‡ (=mother dead in early childhood). The last three columns (amputations, compensation, ontological pessimism) are attributed directly from the written work. The asterisks on two *Yes* for Montale indicate the change of vision from the beginning of the 1970s, described further on.

☞ NOTES ON «MAMA'S BOY».

«**M**ama's boy» is the brusque verdict issued by the tribe: at once sanction and justification of the factual self-exclusion (or exo-exclusion, or endo-exclusion). «Don't even bother asking if he's coming with us to play hooky from school — you know he's a mama's boy». It also exists in French as *filz à maman* (thus Sartre describes himself between the lines, speaking of his companions, in *Les Mots*), while in the Anglo-Saxon world one says *Mother's boy* or *Mama's boy*, and in German *Muttersöhnchen*. ¶ Operative use of the term: in its simple and «pure» form, this is the mechanism: the mother terrorizes the son telling him to stay away from the wild children (the tribe), bad and, moreover, poor. See Montale. The child is thus formed. The tribe, however, is a complex and articulated social body made of hard and understanding, extroverted and introverted, «good» and «bad», capable of managing diversities. Often it tries to integrate the boy, but in the end it resigns itself. When a well-meaning friend insists, the others tell him: «Leave it, we've already tried...». That resignation of the tribe — which nevertheless knows how to welcome and manage differences — confirms that the child had already been «formed» elsewhere, indoors. This is the real average case (both of the excluded and of the tribe), with variability, even pathological, in both directions. The mama's boys, all scholars, tell their story.

☞ WIFE'S EXCEPTIONALISM (USUALLY ILLUSORY).

The cases listed here show a constant: the wife's exceptionalism is almost never self-generated. It has precise roots — a real lineage, a cultural network, a religious or social belonging — which the mother brings into the marriage as an invisible and superior dowry, opposing it, explicitly or through silences and glances, to the paternal figure.

Augustine of Hippo. Monica belonged to the Christian Berber elite of Tagaste — a cultured and fiercely Catholic minority in a still largely pagan environment. The father Patricius was pagan, and remained so until the last years of his life. The contrast was not only temperamental but identitarian: Monica carried the certainty of the elect, Patricius the normality of the world.

Blaise Pascal. The mother Antoinette Begon dies when Blaise is three years old. Wife's exceptionalism is thus exercised through absence — and through the cult that the father Étienne constructs around her, transmitting to his son an unreachable and idealized maternal image. The elder sister Gilberte notes in her *Life of her brother*: «Il ne pouvait souffrir aussi les caresses que je recevais de mes enfants; et il me disait qu'il fallait les en désaccoutumer, et que cela ne pouvait que leur nuire, et qu'on leur pouvait témoigner de la tendresse en mille autres manières.» (He could not bear the caresses I received from my children; he said that one had to wean them from it, and that it could only harm them, and that one could show them tenderness in a thousand other ways). These were the ideas that informed the monstrous treatment of the little ones of Port-Royal. See further on the Antici.

Arthur Schopenhauer. The mother Johanna was an established writer, a frequenter of the Weimar salon, a friend of Goethe. The father Heinrich Floris was a capable merchant but afflicted by depression, who probably died by suicide.

Giacomo Leopardi. Adelaide Antici brought into the marriage the weight of a marquisal lineage and a rigorous Jansenist formation. The father Monaldo was a decayed count, an inconclusive bibliomaniac, economically dependent on his wife. Adelaide's exceptionalism is documented by Giacomo himself.

Robert Musil. The mother Hermine Bergauer imposes the fixed presence of the lover Heinrich Reiter in the house for decades, managing the *ménage à trois* with her nervous irritability, an energy that crushed the remissive husband Alfred, an esteemed engineer but temperamentally accommodating, incapable of countering his wife's personality.

Franz Kafka. See further on in the relevant chapter.

Carlo Michelstaedter. The maternal family Luzzatto-Coen belonged to the high Jewish bourgeoisie of Gorizia — cultured, well-off, aware of its own distinction. Carlo is born within this awareness and makes it philosophy: Persuasion is the maternal mandate brought to speculative completion. In the last letter, written little more than a month before his suicide, he writes to his mother that he is fulfilling the task he knows she expects of him: «now you will have the fruits of your long suffering, of your long hoping».

Walter Benjamin. The mother Pauline Schönlflies belonged to a family of the Jewish cultural aristocracy of Berlin — the uncle Arthur Schönlflies was a mathematician of note. The father Emil was a businessman. The contrast between the cultural density of the maternal line and the commercial normality of the paternal one is a constant background in Benjamin's formation.

Eugenio Montale. The mother Giuseppina Ricci carried a double inheritance: the solid cultured bourgeoisie of the Ricci notaries and, through the maternal grandmother Alice Anna Schlesinger, a Viennese Jewish family of cultural tradition. The father Domenico was a well-off Ligurian merchant, concrete and business-oriented, who would have preferred to steer his sons towards the family firm. It was the mother who supported the artistic inclinations of the young Eugenio, against the paternal practical vocation.

Jean-Paul Sartre. Anne-Marie Schweitzer, the mother, belonged to the Schweitzer dynasty — Alsatian academic intellectuals, with Albert Schweitzer as the lineage's reference figure. The father Jean-Baptiste died when Sartre was fifteen months old, leaving the field free to the maternal grandfather Charles Schweitzer, who became the dominant figure of Jean-Paul's childhood — and who embodied exactly the cultural exceptionalism of the stock.

Samuel Beckett. May Jones was an Irish Protestant of rigid formation, with an acute sense of moral election and respectability — a pneumaticity of Puritan matrix that translated into silent expectations and constant pressure on her son. The relationship with Beckett was suffocating and never fully loosened, not even in adulthood.

Thomas Bernhard. The mother Herta was the daughter of the narrator Johannes Freumbichler, whom she considered an misunderstood genius — and she transmitted this certainty to her son as inheritance and as burden. Bernhard's biological father was never present; the adoptive father Alois Zuckerstätter was an ordinary man whom Bernhard would describe with contempt.

• THE WHITE.

Cormac McCarthy's intuition in *The Sunset Limited* is striking: the White, the professor, thus responds to the Black's last appeal: «If I were to meet my mother again and start everything over, but this time without the prospect of death to console me... Well, that would be the final nightmare. Kafka with brass knobs on». In my view McCarthy stands on the Black's side, but shows him why he cannot convince or save the White.

• ADELAIDE, MONALDO, GIACOMO.

The young Leopardi attempts mathematics from 12 to 17 years old and we can think of Pascal as his secret myth and model: it is the celebrated Pascalian thought on the fearful silence of infinite spaces that is transposed, masterfully, in «L'infinito». Pascal. Certainly not present in Monaldo's pantheon nor much less in that of the Jesuit teachers. Why not, then, a *maternal* myth? Of an Adelaide whom the vulgate describes as a practical woman, op-

posed to Monaldo's intellectuality, but certainly not Giacomo, who in the Zibaldone notes of 25 November 1820 (Le Monnier ed. 1898) represents her as monstrous, but — intellectual appreciations never used towards the father — «most firm and exact in the Christian belief», «a most sensitive character», capable of «a mathematical calculation, and an immediate and necessary consequence of the principles of religion exactly considered». That is, Pascal: there are those who read the Leopardian philosophical attempt as that of liberating the Pascalian denial of the world from the illogical fideistic landing (see Cesare Luporini, *Leopardi progressivo*, 1947). ¶ It should be noted how in the same note Giacomo certifies the maternal sense of superiority towards the father:

“ Finding herself several times in danger of losing her children at the same age, [...] *seeing her husband weep or grieve, she would curl up in herself and feel a true and sensible spite* [...] Seeing in the sick some sign of approaching death, she felt a profound joy, [...] and the day of their death, if it happened, was for her a happy and pleasant day, *nor could she understand how her husband was so little wise as to sadden himself over it.*

The details on Adelaide's formation are not known. Certain it is that she would have cut a figure among the ladies of Port-Royal «pure as angels and proud as demons».

☞ ON THE TRIBE.

• SHUTTING-IN.

GRUPPO GEMEINWESEN, *Minimal Theory of the Abstraction Process*
(MTAP), Chap. 1.7.

Existence unfolds in increasingly isolated and monitored spaces. The condition of the Hikikomori is not a marginal pathology: it appears as a destiny. More and more people live day after day, entire lives, in closed environments. ¶ Until a few decades ago, however, the condition of the majority of humanity was not urban: they lived outdoors, in contact with the earth, surrounded by natural sounds and smells, in Aristophanic *Penía*,¹ the living and shared poverty that nourished the enjoyment of presence. The trees were close by, as were the wild animals, which constantly invaded the space of living and working. ¶ But urban life was also different: what a difference between a Neapolitan basement apartment, with its door open onto the street—from whose windows Liszt could still capture the notes of *Fenestra vascia*—and a sixteenth-floor apartment, accessible only by elevator. ¶ The shutting-in of children and young people, once the misfortune of a few (the sick or the wealthy) and now the majority, is then the foundation of the cognitive schism, which will be discussed later. ¶ How much life was missing from Giacomo Leopardi's childhood, who sees neither the scents nor colors of a rose garden, nor the swarming of winged and crawling creatures, but only decay and death, and describes the pollinating work of the bees as rape and violence? Or in that of Charles

Baudelaire, who preferred the artificial smell of benzoin to the simple scent of roses and violets? ¶ What sterile perception prevented little Eugenio Montale from seeing that "barely visible splendor that spread over all things" that instead illuminated Martin Heidegger as a child while his bark boats sailed in the fountain of the school? The same splendor that enveloped Vincenzo Bugliani as a child in races with zucchini boats in the small millpond of Monte di Pasta, which seemed to him "heaven on earth." Montale must have observed them from afar, like Leopardi, as a recluse, and those xebecs that for little Martin "still easily reached their destination," he saw only shipwrecked "in the whirlpools of soapy water." ¶ Leopardi—and like him, other poets, though not all—does not grasp reality "more deeply": he sees it *less*. ¶ Walter Benjamin, raised in bourgeois Berlin interiors, develops a vision of history reminiscent of the Leopardian garden where bees and sun torture roses, and every life is slaughter: the Angel dragged by the wind of progress sees only ruins, not recognizing that along with those ruins there is life. The young soldier wounded in the war of capital who on leave will spend the best days of his life with his beloved, experiencing the eternal moments of presence, remains invisible to him. ¶ From the case of so-called feral children it appears that if language learning is missed within a critical window, it is difficult to recover. Thus, perhaps, those who in childhood lose immediate communication with the simple — spontaneous games, uncontrolled adventures, deep friendships, quarrels and reconciliations that teach one to sense and measure oneself and others — can hardly recover its fullness later in life. They have missed the intuitive learning of relational reality, of the bodily messages that flow beneath words and symbolic gestures, of the management of conflict and repair. The lost occasion leaves a mark: perception remains amputated, and on this wound powerful yet divided imaginaries take root. ¶ Those poets understood less of the simplest and most beautiful things, yet possessed the genius to construct a literary reality that compensated their suffering for that missed access, that exclusion, with a vicarious sense of election and refinement — and this construction still today gives substance and justification to the deep uncertainties of all. ¶ Precisely for this reason, their vision supports the powerful myth of the need for redemption. Thus the salvific expectation becomes the Montalian *passage*, the Benjaminian *time-now*, and Leopardian nature a *stepmother enemy* to be fought. It is this promise of redemption, a constituent component of the abstraction process, that shapes the modern imagination: reality is not enough, it must be fought, overcome, conquered. ¶ Shutting-in, then, is not only physical, but a condition of the soul, which, educated not to trust what is, what is shown, what is touched, no longer knows how to walk the path of day and, becoming one of Heraclitus' sleepers, wraps itself in a private world.

• EVER MORE RECLUDED.

Eight years ago I collected, through a questionnaire, data on how the days were spent at the age of eight.² Result: until 1975 the great majority of Italian children spent more than half of their free time outside school, in the sun and in the fields, outside the walls of the house, without continuous adult or

non-adult surveillance. From '75 onwards this autonomy has been progressively reduced until the substantial disappearance of a twenty-year span. Indeed: it is now prohibited by law. It is not clear how much and how it is truly prohibited — even for adults — but there are sentences on the matter, and juridical manualism affirms that up to 14 years, if parents send the child to buy the newspaper, they risk denunciation for abandonment of a minor; and this resounds in those worried discourses that are held on the sidelines at the playgrounds. ¶ In those happy times of a less reclusive childhood, however, not all children had those opportunities for free and natural growth: the fortunate ones, for the most part, were sick or well-off.

• AMPUTATIONS.

Reread the identical passages *Lk* 10:21 and *Mt* 11:25: ὅτι ἔκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις. ¶ The passage, which is normally translated with «you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and revealed them to little ones», can be rendered, perhaps more faithfully, with «you have kept these things hidden from the wise and intelligent, and made them easily visible to children who do not yet know how to speak». For whoever reads the evangelical text first of all in the reality it narrates, and not in the metaphysics superimposed on it, a sign that the phenomenon — here already described and then taken up again and again — was perceived long ago.

• THE JOURNEYS OF THE LITTLE BOATS.

Martin Heidegger, in *Der Feldweg* [*The Country Path*] describes the little boats he constructed in his childhood:

“ From oak bark the boys instead carved their vessels, which with rowers' bench and rudder, floated in the Metten stream or in the school fountain. Those playful journeys around the world easily reached their destination and found the shore again on their return. The dreamlike nature of such journeys remained protected in a splendour then barely visible that extended over all things. Eye and hand of the mother delimited their kingdom. It was as if her silent cares watched over all creatures.

Vincenzo Bugliani in his *In famiglia. Memorie dal monte di Passa* (Acropòlis, 2025), recounts his own:

“ When we go to grandmother's, on foot, for me it is an adventurous journey. First we go into a little path [*Der Feldweg*?], which from our street goes as far as the avenue of the Station, for the whole route accompanied by a small canal. In summer I often play there with my friends: we hold races with little boats, cutting lengthwise the too-large courgettes and then hollowing them out — the peasants throw them away anyway, because they are no use

for feeding pigs, hens and ducks; someone gives them to them, but they contain only water.

By opposition, to represent the outcomes of a reclusive childhood, here again are the little boats, but only scrutinized, from afar, by a young Montale terrified by the games of children, in *Flussi*, a poem among the most noted that gave its name to Vasco Pratolini's *Lo scialo*:

“ The children with their little bows / frighten the wrens in the holes. [...] and everything strains towards the paper / flotilla that descends slowly the moat. [...] A dart shines in the air, / configures itself on a pole, [...] Life is this wastage / of trite facts [...] The tribes of children with slings return [...] the little schooners are shipwrecked / in the whirlpools of soapy water. ③ / Goodbye! — stones whistle among the branches, [...].

The little boats of the Heidegger brothers, which set sail in those times governed by the mother and full of magic, always reached their destination. Vincenzo does not speak of the landing of his, but his memory of the magic, «an earthly Paradise», and of the omnipotence of the mother is the same. We have testimony that Eugenio Montale from old age could not stand children.

• FURTHER AMPUTATIONS.

Passing to a deeper plane than that of direct experience, see, in this regard, the integrations of Camatte (reported in appendix ①): Pascal who before the starry sky does not glimpse that marvel that ancient tradition placed at the very origin of philosophy, but only unease and nameless fear; and Augustine, who conceives a present time — the terrain of Presence and Positioning — reduced to an instant of null duration — like the Euclidean point, devoid of extension — already past in the same instant in which it happens, leaning on a future that is always awaited, in open contrast with the solid welcoming thickness of the incarnate present that phenomenology — from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty — recognizes as the foundation of everyone's experience.

☞ SOME COMPENSATIONS.

• THE VOICE OF THE SIMPLE IN THE HOUSE OF LEOPARDI.

“ *Memorie della mia vita*. — I will always be haunted by the words Olimpia Basvecchi ④ used to say to me, reproaching me for how I spent my youth—cooped up at home without seeing a soul: ‘*What a youth! What a way to spend those years!*’ Even back then, I fully and deeply understood just how right she was. And yet, I still believe that no young man, no matter how he spends those years,

can look back on them without telling himself those exact same words.

In this annotation from the *Zibaldone* (2 December 1828) there emerges with clarity the *compensation* which, attention, is not turned to the *matrigna* nature or to another abstract entity, but must fight, overturn, one's own sense of real exclusion both from the masculine tribe and from the relationship with woman. Leopardi, affirming that no one accedes to enjoyment, shows implicitly his superiority insofar as he has consciousness of it. «I believe however nevertheless that there is no young man», here is the torment, the envy — if one wants to call things by name — «who thinking of his way of spending those years is not to say to himself those same words» that is that enjoyment is never there but only its waiting. The young men of Recanati, whom Giacomo despised as the fox the grapes, nevertheless had that enjoyment, not only in the various popular games and with music but also with other things, as the Marchigian parish registers of the time on births close to marriage recount. That doing (obvious for the sympathetic Olimpia) Leopardi does not even imagine as a possibility for Silvia: not because it was not there — what do we know and did he know? — but because his blindness to the Simple — the same that makes him see in the bees of the garden Rape instead of fecund pollination — is precisely the extreme defence that allows him the reduction of pain, his own.

• OBSERVATIONS ON MUSIL.

And what to say of Robert Musil? In a Vienna where his generation and the previous one swarm with geniuses, he attempts the hard sciences, mathematics and physics, and fails. He will graduate with a thesis on Mach no more than brilliant whose fortune is one of the many editorial mysteries. At this point his imaginary victory consists in signalling to the world for the first time that from his epoch onwards no one can any longer be a genius. Wittgenstein, younger, and all the others, Musil will ignore in his attempt at a masterpiece: in the novel, in fact, no character is a genius if not Ulrich. For whoever reads the novel the compensation is patent: Ulrich tries mathematics — he too, then other things — and always misses the objective of *quality*; but the novel never lets one understand that the failure is his, personal, due to a limit of his own capacities: it attributes it instead to the times, up to the mocking burial of the term itself, when Ulrich reads the news of the victory of a «ingenious horse» in a race.

• THE CURLS OF JEAN-PAUL.

In *Les Mots* Sartre signals as a decisive moment of his formation the episode of the cutting of the curls. Until the age of about seven, he recounts, he had lived in a bubble fed by his mother Anne-Marie and by the maternal grandparents, the Schweitzers. The mother dressed him like a little girl or a little angel, letting him grow long blond curls that covered his ears and part of his face. At a certain point, however, grandfather Charles Schweitzer decrees that the mo-

ment has come to make him a «little man». The mother, reluctantly, takes him to the barber. When the little one returns home an unexpected reality irrupts in a way devastating for him: the mother's reaction. «My mother shut herself in her room to weep: they had disfigured me.» An evident clash between Jean-Paul and his mother's expectations emerges: a project child, not a welcomed child. Sartre as an adult recounts it to us with the words — then evidently intuited — of the mother: «They had claimed to unveil the male I was, and had shown instead a toad.» And he comments: «Since they refused me reality, I took refuge in illusion; I made myself a saint, I made myself a hero... I fabricated a destiny for myself to escape contingency». ¶ Now other words from a Sartre well over thirty, which Bianca Lamblin, in her *Mémoires d'une jeune fille dérangée* (Le Livre de Poche, 1993), recounts having heard, then seventeen, while the professor was leading the young girl — supplied to him by the procuress De Beauvoir — to the hourly hotel: «La femme de chambre de l'hôtel va être bien étonnée, car hier j'ai déjà pris la virginité d'une jeune fille». A plausible account: the detail is coherent with the tone of many letters with the report of the free use of these little girls — «contingent» for the two — that Sartre sent to Beauvoir and from which the confirmation of self transpires. He would therefore have sought admiration and confirmation of superiority even from the hotel chambermaid. ¶ Let us try to put things in order according to the line of thought adopted here. Sartre writes that in the crisis of the curls he decided to become an intellectual. Why? To obtain that recognition that the anaffective mother did not give him and will not give him. That lack is a frequent base of narcissism and of the obsessive search for confirmation from anyone, which accompanies him. Sexual bulimia has the same foundation, the same objective.

• THE CROWS IN THE HOUSE OF MICHELSTAEDTER.

A question that has presented itself is whether perceptive amputation and compensation via attribution of superiority — two distinct though not unrelated phenomena — are not only consequences of a lack and an exclusion but also in some way inherited, found ready, in the primary environment. ¶ Letter on the occasion of the arrival in the Michelstaedter house of the news of the suicide, at 32, of Gino, Carlo's elder brother, who treats the news as an incident. We ignore how much, then, the parents instead knew.

“ 146. To Gaetano Chiavacci [Gorizia] 26 February 1909. ¶ [...] As for me and all of us amid dances and walks there arrived a telegram that simply gave us the news that my brother from New York is dead. Dead from a cursed accident, and now after two weeks we know nothing more. [...] my strongest desire was to clasp after so much coldness of disillusionments his hand of a truly upright man, sound and beautiful of body and mind, honest amid these herds of degenerates and dishonest men. [...] It would merit a reckoning the recurrence in the epistolary of the *topos* — already four times in this single letter, highlighted by our italics — of the unbridgeable distance between the election of oneself, of family members and correspondents and the baseness of the rest of the world. Not tacit is,

moreover, how the Nietzschean appeal and, not vaguely, racist to the sound, beautiful, strong — against the herds of weak, degenerate — assumes here a curvature of petty-bourgeois familism concerned first of all with its own intimacy. (Ed.)] Here meanwhile we are suffocated by the tide of vulgar condolence of the infinite persons we know, and who in writing and by voice believe it their duty to debit us the same conventionalities. [...] I feel the humiliation of our family mutilated as of an open wound and I think that while wounds are bandaged, mourning serves only to *étaler* [Display (Ed.)] the pain to all the world. I think of our house closed usually to the indifferent, gathered, jealous of its intimacy and now invaded by all vulgarity because a force independent of us has opened the door. And all the crows come to the smell of death; all rush because we are struck, weakened; our pain, the most intimate part of us exposed in the street, profaned by curious eyes and by the sympathy of the *sensiblerie* of the weak.

Note that sharing — the milk of human understanding — of moments of mourning is not absent in the animal world: known is for example the participation of whales in that for the death of the calf of a female of the group. ¶ Does an *animal rhetoric* exist? It seems so, to judge by what ethologists recount. It seems that the entire family was amputated of the perception of the empathy that flows beneath the — at times even thanks to it, protected by the — expressive convention. Empathy that the self-styled «strong» of the Michelstaedter house could not read and feel together with the *sensiblerie*: they, all crows. Truly: were there no friends, male and female, of Gino? Had he not had any? Two suicides out of two male children interrogate.



✿ FRANZ KAFKA AND THE LETTER TO THE MOTHER THAT WAS NOT.

THE EDITORIAL BOOM OF THE 1970S–80S OF KAFKA'S *Letter to the Father* — which subsequently carried us even into the anthologies of the lower middle schools — was international and, drawing on that of feminist criticism, favoured a reading that, over time, assumed an almost canonical character regarding the state of relations between the three protagonists of the letter: Franz, the son who penned it, Julie Löwy, the mother, and Hermann Kafka, the tyrannical father. In that reading, in short, Hermann embodies the patriarchal bourgeois Jewish-Prague world; Julie

is the first, pure victim: a cultured woman forced to twelve hours of shop work, annihilated by her arriviste husband; Franz the other victim, exposed to patriarchal violence.

In the *Letter* itself, Franz implicitly proposed a slightly different reading, in which the roles in play were those of the art of hunting: «*Die Mutter hatte unbewußt die Rolle eines Treibers in der Jagd.*» — «The mother unconsciously played the role of the beater [*Treiber*] during a hunting party». The *hunter* (the father: hunting implies a hunter), the *beater* (the mother), the *prey* (he: the implication is no less strict). It is worth pausing on this definition: the beater is technically a «dislodger», one who by his action pushes the prey to make the false step.

Let us try here to illustrate a different hypothesis, no less rigorous, which will be worth what it may. As not infrequently happens, it takes some factual elements as given, uses others as clues, and even induces further hypotheses. Perhaps, then, a house of cards. Who knows?

☞ ASSUMPTIONS.

Let us begin from assumptions that for me have a strong probability if not interior certainty. I set them out in such a way that the whole hypothesis is considerable, assessable, refutable.

1. Kafka's condition of *dereliction* is assumed as a given: a man who struggles to marry; struggles to separate; struggles to decide; struggles to inhabit his own body; struggles to work despite being capable; lives immersed in a sense of guilt; continually seeks external authorizations. Now, of dereliction, in the tradition that runs from Winnicott to Camatte, a *necessary* but not sufficient condition is an absent or *anaffective* mother, and this is our case. When the mother caresses the son not mechanically, not distractedly or with a purpose, but with true affection, for the child they are eternal instants. Repeated, he will feel welcomed, positioned, present. Little Franz did not have this. Without that corporeal reception the indestructible core of the self is not constituted, there is no possibility of certainty.

2. Consequently, the *anaffectivity* of the mother Julie is also assumed as a given. Anaffectivity does not imply an apparent lack of caresses, but they are instrumental, of capture, necessary as in her time for the partner. The child grasps the difference immediately. From the very first years. The result is also an inextinguishable thirst for affection and recognition. And always already from that age the child is able to approximate, to understand, the power relations, who wins.

3. A very well-known passage from the *Letter*: «The bones could not be gnawed, but you did it; the vinegar could not be sipped, but you did it. The most important thing was to cut the bread straight; that you however did it with *a knife dripping with sauce* was indifferent. One had to be careful not to let *left-overs fall* on the floor; usually they were all under you. At table one had to occupy oneself only with the meal, you however cut your nails, sharpened pencils, cleaned your ears with a toothpick.» The *Letter*, we know, was written at 36,

but Kafka speaks of himself as a child. Now, details like those highlighted in italics, a knife dirty with sauce, crumbs on the floor, induce one to think that Kafka is here a *ventriloquist*, or *medium*, of the mother. ⑤ One therefore assumes as a probable given the existence of a form of repulsion, even physical, on Julie's part toward Hermann.

4. And, together, a very strong capacity for maternal direction over the son, not necessarily conscious. An assumption corroborated by the fact that at 36 Kafka must turn to his mother to settle accounts with his father through the *Letter*, as well as by the passage «*Vergleiche uns beide: ich, um es sehr abgekürzt auszudrücken, ein Löwy mit einem gewissen Kafka'schen Fond, der aber eben nicht durch den Kafka'schen Lebens—, Geschäfts—, Eroberungswillen in Bewegung gesetzt wird, sondern durch einen Löwy'schen Stachel, der geheimer, scheuer,*» «Compare us two: I, to express it very summarily, a Löwy with a certain Kafkaesque fund, which however is not set in motion by the Kafkaesque will to life, to business and to conquest [*Eroberung*], but by a Löwyian goad [*Stachel*], which acts in a more secret and reserved manner. In conclusion: «I ... a Löwy».

5. Maternal direction over the son. Directed at what? Inevitably at the combat with the brute, tyrannical Hermann. The hypothesis is that she, from a far more cultured family — textile merchants of Poděbrady, scholars, intellectuals, rabbinic figures — on the dialectical and symbolic plane had always won. She won on that plane but retreated before the overbearing response of the husband — come from below, with direct manners, peasant vitality, coarse in his ways, physically imposing —, who in turn won on the operative plane, remaining excluded from every real affective retribution, but conserving command (*Cumannari è megghiu di futtiri*, recites the proverb, in which the attempt at consolation is transparent). Classic conjugal double bind. A note: the current reading of the passage cited in the previous point in fact does not consider the *Stachel*, thus betraying the symmetry of the phrase and what it lets one glimpse. Yet the term is not marginal in the German language: it is enough to think of Luther's translation of I Corinthians 15:55: «*Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?*» («Death, where is thy sting?»). We assume here instead that phrase not as the analysis of two lineages, nor as a reference to one's own internal torment, but as the fulminating description of two opposed forms of will that act in the parents: the direct, expansive and conquering one of Hermann and the secret, reserved and indirect *Stachel* of Julie, the still water, in whose struggle the son is involved as a pure instrument.

6. Again in the *Letter*, the famous episode of the *pavlatche*. Little Franz (4–5 years old?) cries at night for water; Hermann, irritated, pulls him down from the bed and puts him outside on the *pavlatche* (the cold external balcony) in his nightshirt, closing the door. Franz remains there terrified, with the image of the gigantic and omnipotent father who humiliates him. In Franz's narration this becomes the founding trauma: the father tyrant, the mother absent or ineffective. «*Ich winselte einmal in der Nacht immerfort um Wasser, gewiss nicht aus Durst, sondern wahrscheinlich teils um zu ärgern, teils um mich zu unterhalten.*» — «Once, at night, I kept whining for a little water, certainly not from thirst,

but probably partly to give annoyance [*zu ärgern*], partly to amuse myself.». Interesting: not from thirst. *To give annoyance*: to whom? *To amuse myself*? How? At someone's expense. The father, certainly. My thesis is that the little one believed the mother invincible and imagined a two-against-the-father struggle. His contribution would have been rewarded by the mother. That maternal figure collapses for him, he will fabricate a new one that will then become the *beater*. But the *beater* does not have the *Stachel*: the image seems indeed a protective cover, in order to mask the role, involuntary but objective, of the mother in the real dislodging — the push of the little one to fight with the father. Franz will never have the strength to go deeper, to settle accounts with it truly, while of the father, with the maternal magnifying glass, he will scrutinize every minimal detail.

☞ CONCLUSION: ALL LOSERS IN AN ANCIENT GAME.

HERMANN: wins materially, accumulates, imposes his own strength. But he loses the son and lives under the silent gaze of superiority of the wife. His overbearingness, real, is reinforced in reaction to the «Löwyian goad», to a perceived dialectical inferiority.

JULIE: wins symbolically, transmits her own gaze to the son. But she loses the capacity to truly love anyone. The myth «We Löwy» anaesthetizes her, rendering her incapable of those eternal instants of reception that Franz invokes in vain (the *pavlatche* episode included).

FRANZ: transforms the uncertainty of presence and the chronic affective hunger into one of the most powerful works of the twentieth century. But he remains trapped: incapable of relational autonomy, of stable marriage, of clean rupture. Literature becomes the only welcoming womb he manages to create for himself.

☞ A FURTHER NOTE ON THE *Stachel*.

One of Kafka's most profound and brilliant stories comes to mind, «In the Penal Colony», which illustrates how the moral Law (in fact unknowable as always in Kafka — which the condemned man ignored: not the Mosaic law, proclaimed on stone tablets, explicit and without any mystery. Nor, let us add, the Kantian one) is there, for their correction and interiorization, literally written with the needles of a machine on the bodies of the prisoners. Needles, goads, *Stachel*? Might this story too not disclose a command, a mandate, more profound to which the author felt he had not responded? A maternal mandate, like Michelstaedter?

☞ GETTING OFF LIGHTLY, OR NOT: ALLOMOTHERS AND STEM CELLS OF THE SIMPLE.

FRANZ KAFKA, evidently lacking effective allomothers — for quality, duration of the encounter, circumstances — remains colonized. The *Letter to the Father* is an immense screen that hides the unbearable clear vision of the dependency on an always affectively inaccessible mother. But the comparison with

GEORGES SIMENON is illuminating. He too had a particularly anaffective mother. He too — like Kafka and Sartre — taken by an inexhaustible and mechanical sexual compulsion that he never overcame. But the father, gentle and affectionate, functioned as an allomother, offering a nucleus of alternative warmth. Simenon, after meeting her in person, without intermediaries, at ninety years old, was close to her in the last days, and only years later tried to understand her and, she already buried, would write a *Lettre à ma mère* facing the ghost: «We never loved each other, when you were alive — you know it well. We pretended, both of us (p. 11).» «I wonder if you ever took me on your knees (p. 19).» «But you were a Brüll, and the Brülls never accepted belonging to the middle class...».

P.G. WODEHOUSE, raised with parents almost absent for colonial reasons, first entrusted to a series of horrible aunts — but among whom one was human: Louisa Deane, maternal aunt, model of Dahlia Travers; and with the nurse, Emma Roper, he had been fortunate — and then inserted into the mythical, for him, warm collegiate community of Dulwich, found the welcoming substitutive figures that allowed him to transform the painful material into the bestowable gift of a sunny, liberating comedy instead of into paralyzing anguish brooded inwardly.

P.G. WODEHOUSE — here included among the illustrious mama's boys — even shows the possibility of some reparation of the same perceptive amputations. The turn of the beginning of the 1970s was immediately noted by the most attentive critics, which included the abandonment of the ontological pessimism of *Ossi di seppia* that had distinguished him and accompanied him in success, up to the Nobel of 1975. ¶ In my view there is no mystery about the turn: from the autumn of 1944, Grace — and the Simple, and intelligence — had entered the house as a domestic servant, in the extraordinary person of Gina Tiossi, then twenty-two years old, from a family of *penētes* from the countryside of Cavriglia. In 1963 Drusilla Tanzi, companion and then wife of many years, dies. From then on Montale will live with Gina, observing her closely and conversing with her without mediation. He would have liked to adopt her as a daughter but Gina will refuse out of respect for the memory of her father. It will be she who inspires his new poetics, of which attentive critics will understand the scope of the inversion. Romano Luperini writes:

“The salvific angels of the past are brutally thrown down from their pedestal [...] Yet Gina, the little dog Galiffa, the old servant are, in some way, their substitutes: the situation of a time is overturned: they seem nobody and reveal themselves instead as the only living ones, bearers of their own secret value. (*Storia di Montale*, Editori Laterza, 1986, p. 241).

One of the most beautiful and important things dedicated to her is *Il giorno dei morti*:

To Gina has lit a candle for her dead.
She lit it in the kitchen, the dead are many and not near.
One must go back to when she was a child
and milk-coffee was a fistful of dried chestnuts.
One must recreate a father small and old
and his trudges to find her a little sweet wine.
Of wines he could drink neither sweet nor dry
because money was lacking and there were
the piglets to feed that she took to pasture.
Among the dead one can put the teacher who gave cane
strokes
to the child's frozen fingers. Dead
also some living, semi-living near
the ferry. It is a crowd that is nothing
because it did not take the piglets to pasture.

Only those who have had access to the Simple — says Montale — the non-pneumatic who have pastured the piglets, lovers of mud, hypostases of *byle*, truly live and therefore can die: the semi-living, the apparent life, that he announced in the *Ossi* is therefore not everyone's. Montale places himself among the semi-living, it is a common reading of the poetry, but something important and alive had slowly happened to him.

FORGETTING AUGUSTINE.

IT WAS VINCENZO BUGLIANI WHO PROPOSED TO ME THE DEPTH OF THE CHARACTER of donna Prassede, from *I promessi sposi*. Alessandro Manzoni, he explained, does not want to introduce a comic character⁶ to lighten an edifying tale, but to describe the ideal type of the director of charitable or beneficent institutions (feminine and masculine). Certainly not all, but surely a solid majority.

“ For, as she often said to others and to herself, all her study was to second the will of heaven: but she often made a gross mistake, which was to take her own brain for heaven. [...] Donna Prassede was an old gentlewoman much inclined to do good: a craft certainly the most worthy that man can exercise; but which unfortunately can also spoil, like all the others. To do good, one must know it; and, like every other thing, we can know it only in the midst of our passions, by means of our judgments, with our ideas; which often stand as they can. With ideas donna Prassede regulated herself as

they say one must do with friends: she had few; but to those few she was very attached. Among the few, there were unfortunately many crooked ones; and they were not those least dear to her. It happened to her therefore, either to propose as good what was not, or to take as means things that could rather make it succeed on the opposite side, or to believe lawful those that were not at all, by a certain confused supposition that whoever does more than his duty can do more than he would have the right to; it happened to her not to see in the fact what was real, or to see in it what was not; and many other similar things, which can happen, and which happen to everyone, without excepting the best; but to donna Prassede, too often and, not rarely, all at once. (ALESSANDRO MANZONI, *I promessi sposi*, ch. xxv.)



Donna Prassede and Lucia. Illustration by Francesco Gonin, engraving by Bernard, from the 1840 edition.

How many times over time have I said to myself «I recognize you, donna Prassede!». More recent studies have led me to think of another, more ancient figure, who stands behind, as in a watermark, all the Prassedes present and past, well individuated by Someone far more authoritative than Manzoni; it is Martha of Bethany. And yet, against all logic, this figure, Piero Bargellini recounts, has been indicated «to Christian women as a model of industriousness». Let us try to explain why.

☞ A CURIOUS DEPENDENCY.

The premise is that it was the early years of the century and the streets of Florence were not yet crowded with beggars. I had happened, only that once out of curiosity, into an informal meeting of a very small and ephemeral aggregation of Catholics of the La Pira area, and I was struck by the outburst of an elderly lady (she was of the closest circle of collaborators of La Pira) who complained of her difficulties in educating her little granddaughters in a Christian way, given that «in the city, of poor there are no more» — «unfortunately» she did not say it. I was surprised: but how, I thought, if by now even among us «daughters ride casual saddles» (see T.S. ELIOT, *Choruses from The Rock*), would there not be matter for choices and Christian formation? And if the poor to be helped were so indispensable to salvation, how is it that the same can earn Paradise, I wondered. And again: might it not be that, no longer seeing poor around, the lady unconsciously fears she can no longer count herself among the rich?

☞ SERMO 42.2.

Not many years later I realized that the mentality of the La Pira lady is among the ripe fruits of this Augustinian legacy:

“ If I found no beasts of burden nor ships to transfer me from the west to the east, where will I find the stairs to go from earth to heaven? God says to you: Do not be distressed! I who have made you rich, I who have given you things to distribute, I have also made the poor who are like your porters (AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Sermo* 42.2. [N.B. The image of the poor as «porter» of the rich in his journey towards heaven occurs several times in the Augustinian discourses. (Ed.)]).

A legacy that is troubling, in fact functional to his adaptation to the needs of the ruling classes of an empire in decomposition and above all, over the longer term, to the development of *homo œconomicus*. End of recreation, of immediacy, of gratuitousness: everything will become anxiety, scruple, performance. The nexus (not the matrix or the cause) individuated by Weber between capital and religion does not find its origin in Calvin but in a more ancient Augustinian posture (his own, of Luther, Augustinian monk, of Calvin, of the Jansenists, always Augustinian), already fully operative in Western Christianity.

• INTENTIONS.

Only a poet like Eliot could condense in one line — *O Lord, deliver me from the man of excellent intention and impure heart* (again from *The Rock*) — the result of this aspect of the Augustinian shift: ⑦ the birth of beneficent organizations, deprecated in vain by Illich. In the Jesus narrative what stops the Good Samaritan on his journey is in fact not the *intentio*, proper to *homo œconomicus* and the result of his incessant calculations, but a motion of the heart. «He saw and had compassion» (Lk 10:25–37): pity, com-passion, empathy, not moral

calculation. He bends over the wounded man, helps him, then leaves the money with the innkeeper and continues his journey. No institutions and charitable trades result from it.

• EITHER RICH OR POOR.

Striking in the Augustinian reasoning cited is what we might call *the disappearance of the middle class*. Not foreseen is one who lives without great reserves nor great privations, yet there must have been some even in Carthage and Rome of the Fathers.

Only rich or miserable (at times in patristics one alludes to «hungry» and «thirsty», to absolute, material poverty. Why are the *middle* situations ignored, which perhaps represent the *majority* of the population? To clarify the mystery, perhaps René Girard can help us, with his theory of mimetic desire:

“In *Jean Santeuil*, Proust’s first unfinished novel, the author places his hero in the box of Madame de Guermantes, «arrived», happy and triumphant. In *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust inverts his point of view, and places the narrator in the parterre, who contemplates with avidity the inaccessible object of his desire: the box of Madame de Guermantes. This inversion, revealing of the true nature of desire, gives the scene the depth and the literary dimension that were lacking in the corresponding scene of *Jean Santeuil*. In effect, the true experience of desire is that of lack, of humiliation and of the impoverishment of being [...].⁸

• THE DRUG OF THE ENVIED.

Somewhere, but perhaps he worked on it less, Girard also alludes to the complement of the desiring gaze. In the case, the gaze of Madame de Guermantes: it is the grasping of others’ desire that valorizes our object and makes us enjoy it more. Indeed, more often (here is the inversion, the alienation) we will enjoy not so much the object (a box at the Opéra, perhaps we are deaf to music) as precisely the envious gazes.

In the envious-envied game there are no intermediate figures: this is the answer to our question. The indifferent one, the *penēs* — he who even when deprived⁹ accepts necessity and does *not desire* — is outside the game and therefore seen as an unwelcome, disturbing element, to be removed: if the envious lost desire, the envied would have sacrificed themselves for nothing, a terrifying disclosure for them, catastrophic. It is the perplexed silence of Alexander who does not see himself envied by Diogenes.¹⁰

Girard’s analysis allows us to see clearly how the Augustinian charitable economy functions in the practice of human relations and psychology: the good Christian rich felt called to educate these non-desiring ones, to transform them into *prōchós*. Thus don Milani, who has his boys build a concrete swimming pool to welcome them into the anthropological values of his family of origin, to make them accede to a surrogate of standard wealth. With equal spirit and

praxis, that is, distributing tastings of wealth, the good Florentine ladies of the St. Vincent de Paul moved among their *clientes*, ¹¹ enrolled in the register of beneficiaries.

If I have a Rolex and no one envies it, it is worth nothing. If, charitably, I give to poor ten imitations, transforming as many individuals, previously indifferent to watch idols, into competent envious ones, then my authentic Rolex is valorized. The system is simple, all in all, and it works.

☞ HYPOTHESES ON MARTHA.

The Gospel passage that recounts Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary, in Bethany, tells us enough about the Augustinian manipulation tending to disarm by every means the Gospel of its critical contents. The text, which sees the translations fairly concordant, narrates a real and credible episode:

“While they were [Jesus with his disciples, in other translations (Ed.)] on their way, he entered a village and a woman, named Martha, received him [into her house, in other trans. (Ed.)]. She had a sister, named Mary, who, seated at the Lord's feet, listened to his word. Martha instead was distracted by many services. Then she came forward and said: «Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me alone to serve? Tell her then to help me». But the Lord answered her: «Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things [too many things, in other trans., orig. Greek: πολλά (Ed.)], but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her» (Lk 10:38-42).

We have two sisters of whom one, Martha, seems to participate in the psychological classification recurring here: the anaffective type (masculine or feminine), who often masks his incapacity for affective relation/listening/tenderness with a hyperactivism that aims at dominion over men and things and that rests on the continuous proclamation of states of emergency.

Realistically, the sudden arrival of Jesus, with other disciples, made necessary an activity for reception and perhaps the preparation of a meal, beds, in short work. But how much work? What meals? What beds? How much time necessary? Will nothing remain for an affectionate initial exchange/listening? Certainly not for Martha, who always raises the alarm of work to be done, precisely to flee relational and corporeal exchange. Her *modus operandi* foresaw a Jesus abandoned in a corner and the two sisters, with Mary at his service, only taken up with chores.

But Mary does not stand for it and lingers, in close contact, with Jesus. Here then is Martha's irruption (graceless: a minimum of regard required calling her aside and giving her the dressing-down in a low voice) she commands Jesus, «Tell her then...», to become her messenger to Mary. Note that in the Gospels she is unique among his [followers] to use with Jesus the imperative in a truly directive way — and this she should not have done even with the least of guests: hospitality, in every code, imposes on the one who receives to serve, not

to direct. Jesus, obviously, ignores the command, replying with that subtlety, that *sprezzatura* that Cristina Campo has noted: «Martha, Martha...». We imagine him smiling and shaking his head; at times, as they say, one word is little and two are too many. And then, with affection, he corrects her explaining that it is she who errs when she insists on a bustling that is not there, well beyond the necessary. And what is not necessary, we know, is *vanitas*.

The account puts *homo faber* in question, this is so clear that the contemplative orders of the Church have always read it as an approval of theirs. Let us now come to the treatment Augustine reserves for this passage. It is in *Sermo 104* that the manipulation, made also of cuts and additions, transpires with clarity. Augustine writes, in substance: «We know that you have seen that Jesus seems to reproach Martha. But let us not be deceived by the text. That reproach cannot be what it seems, that is a critique of service and charitable industriousness. Martha's action, consequently, is not erroneous: Jesus affirms that Mary has chosen the better part, but Martha's too is not bad, but necessary». But this:

1. *Deforms the text not a little*. First of all it cancels entirely the most important words of Jesus: that Martha errs by worrying well beyond the necessary («μηδὲν ἄγαν», «*ne quid nimis*», «nothing too much», recommended the sage Chilon). In the Augustinian argumentation the service demanded by Martha is entirely transparent, objective, not in discussion:

“ Do we perhaps believe that Martha's service was blamed, all occupied with the tasks required by hospitality given that she had received as guest the Lord? How could she be blamed who had rejoiced in receiving such an elevated guest? If such a blame is just, let all then leave the service rendered to the needy; let each choose for himself the better part, which will not be taken from him, let him apply himself only to meditating the word of God, let him long for the sweetness of knowing, let him occupy himself solely with the science of salvation, let him not worry about who is a foreigner in his own country, who has need of bread, of clothing, of being visited, ransomed, buried. Let the works of mercy be eliminated so that one may attend only to the science of salvation. (*Sermo 104*).

Therefore it is the assumption that Martha's «service» is *a priori* not blamable that holds up the whole Augustinian construct. But to blame it is precisely what Jesus does, as moreover several times — even harshly and without regard — showing the egoic, narcissistic substrate of manifestations of *pietas*. It is precisely Jesus, one might say, the first Master of suspicion: see Mt 6:1–18; Lk 18:9–14; Mt 23. Augustine's discourse claims the unquestionability — not of the gesture of the Good Samaritan, nor of the first communality of the Christians of Acts, but of the real rich-for-porters organizations justified in *Sermo 42.2*, in which the phenomenon of the necessary Girardian envy was certainly visible to a non-myopic gaze: the ancient rules of the Misericordia of Florence imposed that in service the face be covered by a hood, the *buffa*, pre-

cisely for that danger. There was, one saw, one fought. Augustine sees in the Lucan passage on the two sisters a threat for the world of the Prassedes, and of Monica? I believe so.

2. *Puts in Jesus' mouth words he did not say* — «The part chosen by you is not bad, but this one [chosen by Mary] is better». Jesus says nothing of Martha's part, and above all does not qualify it as good or necessary. The ἀγαθὴν μερίδα is the one chosen by Mary; Martha's could be only a little less good, or even harmful (one thinks of Snow White's apple).

3. *But there is more*: his comment mutilates the account to the point of incomprehensibility. Martha a) gives an order to Jesus, b) to reproach Mary because wasting time when there is work to do is bad and merits reproach. How does Jesus respond? With the fine *spezatura* initial («Martha, Martha... [you do not understand...]») that prepares the subsequent teacher's tone: overturning completely the roles proposed with so much vigour by Martha. Let us observe, in passing, that both her — Martha's — behaviour and her reasoning are bad: if Mary has chosen the better part, the greater good, proposing to reproach her precisely for the choice is in itself bad. All this is obliterated in the brilliant but artificial construction of Augustine.

That the opacity of the Gospel passage for Augustine — his perceptive amputation before the narrated evidences and the Jesusian suspicions themselves — be amplified by the correspondences between the figure of Martha and that of his mother, Saint Monica, ¹² remains a hypothesis, but it is certain that the Augustinian overturning has had a success unthinkable with respect to the fallaciousness of the argumentation. Piero Bargellini repeats it pedantically, for example, in his fortunate *I santi del giorno* (Vallecchi, 1958):

“ The amiable repose of Jesus can sound like a reproach to the industrious housewife: «Martha, Martha, you are troubled and anxious about many things; only one is necessary: Mary instead has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her». But a reproach it is not, comments St. Augustine: «Martha, you have not chosen evil; Mary however has chosen better than you». Nevertheless Mary, considered the Gospel model of contemplative souls already by St. Basil and St. Gregory the Great, does not seem to figure in the liturgical calendar: the sanctity of this sweet figure of woman is beyond discussion, since it has been confirmed to her by the words of Christ themselves; but it is Martha only, and not Mary nor Lazarus, to appear in the universal calendar, almost to repay her for her solicitous attentions towards the person of the Saviour and to propose her to Christian women as a model of industriousness.

The proposal of Martha as «model of industriousness», still undisputed, is the blindage of the Augustinian operation of overturning: as if Saint Peter were proposed as a model not for his martyrdom, but for his denial. ¶ If and how I propose, Augustine sees Mary with the eyes of the mother, who as her distin-

guished acquaintance would have considered her? Let us say it: as a lazy inconclusive woman unlike the golden, provident Martha. To have her! Jesus, vice versa, in substance tells her «Mary has seen well, you not», and addresses her with «Martha, Martha...». Compare the iteration of the name with «Simon, Simon, behold Satan has sought you...» Lk 22:31 and «Jerusalem, Jerusalem...» Lk 13:34. A most elegant way to qualify her as blind, obtuse.

☞ AGAINST AUGUSTINE. SYNTHESIS IN ACCUSATORY FORM.

1. He overturns the epochal opening of Jesus to children — which had removed them from invisibility to put them even at the centre, proposing to welcome and imitate them — with a negative vision of childhood, anticipating the Lutheran expulsion of children from churches as well as Freud's «polymorphous perverse» child, today declining.
2. As shown above, he falsifies the Gospel passage on the sisters of Bethany, obscuring the Jesusian critique of Martha's blind activism.
3. He imperceptibly diverts the gaze from the poor, example and goal — the frugal, active and free *penēs* of Jesus' own family life, of the Sermon on the Mount and of the episode of the rich young man — to the miserable *ptōchós*, beggar and dependent, proposed as an instrument of salvation for the rich, no longer a person: example and goal becomes the munificent rich man.
4. He is the codifier of original sin as hereditary guilt and the promoter of the doctrine of radical predestination.
5. Prudently orthodox Christianity has avoided Western Augustinocentrism: whoever instead assumes Augustine as Master does not simply adopt an author, but an entire anthropological proposal and posture.
6. Lutheranism, Calvinism and Jansenism — so functional to the leap of a millennial and universal process that occurs precisely in the West and whose specificity remains largely unexplained — not only descend directly from his thought, but carry its most proper implications to completion. A continuity well visible and known to specialists, but never thematized.
7. The category of «Augustinism» — which designates not so much a theology as an abstractive and redemptive anthropological structure well ancient, here outlined in broad strokes through the reading of Luke 10 and some observation on philanthropy without *φιλία* — possesses therefore a heuristic capacity that proves more fecund than the traditional one of «Protestantism». It helps in fact to understand how the West was the fertile terrain of what Karl Polanyi called the «Great Transformation», avoiding at the same time an artificial chronological caesura (16th century) — incapable of recounting the extraordinary concentration, already in the Crusades and in the boom of cathedrals, of an auriferous mass anxious to circulate, produce and grow.
8. The premises are perhaps already in a possible reading of Paul, but Augustine is the first great systematizer. For this the special conformance between religious posture and the historical unfolding of capital (a practically universal movement and visible for millennia), individuated by Weber in Calvinism, must be backdated: the hypothesis proposed here is that that an-

thropological curvature was already fully operative in Western Christianity with Augustine. Calvinism does not open a new phase; it constitutes an internal development of the same trajectory. Augustinism informs, contested, Catholicism and Anglicanism, fully Calvinism and Jansenism and in a more tempered way Lutheranism and a great part of Protestantism; it is instead uninfluential in Orthodoxy, in apophatic mysticism, the Quakers and others. In Catholicism it will represent a permanent internal contradiction of Thomism, from which sprang, as an attempt to liberate itself, Molinism. The choice of mendicity — of the *ptōchós* not of the *Penētes* — and consequently of dependency on the rich, made of the Franciscans — it is dialectic, beauty! — the supporters of a profound Augustinism, but on the side of the porter: Franciscan scholasticism (Peter John Olivi at the head) is protagonist in the legalization of usury around 1300. For a collocation within the complex historiographical debate see appendix 3, «The Dates of Capital».

☛ THE BARBECUE OF THE RISEN ONE.

A curious and almost moving Gospel scene (in the «Second miraculous catch», John 21:1–14), surprisingly almost absent in art and preaching — the Jesus who roasts fish on the grill of James Tissot's watercolour is, in all probability, a *unicum* — offers a radical counterpoint to this line. The Risen One, appeared at night on the shore of the lake, finds the disciples, confused, returned to fishing, empty-handed. He does not reproach them, does not spur them to a new activist enterprise, does not invite them to restructure their existence. He says simply: «Cast the net» and in the morning, when the miraculous catch concludes, «Bring some of the fish you have just caught», he had already prepared the embers to roast it. «Come and eat». It ends almost like an Asterix album with the whole village at table, toasting and singing. In the passage something manifests that Augustinism has removed from Western Christianity: the joy of the Simple. That morning on the shore of the lake there is not the anxiety of Martha's emergencies, there is not the torment of a donna Prassede who confuses her brain with heaven, there is not the poor as providential porter for the salvation of the rich. There is instead the redundant enjoyment of the certainty of Presence, the joy of the Simple — letting-be, *quàia*, *wu-wei* — carnal and convivial. Perhaps the representation of a risen Jesus who, after gutting and probably seasoning the fish with aromas, prepares the embers, blows on them, arranges the fish on the fire and turns them during cooking, was disturbing, too little spiritual. Better to avoid it.



James Tissot, *Repas de Notre-Seigneur et des apôtres*, 1886–1894, watercolor.



APPENDICES.

I PREMISES AND ORIGIN OF THE ABOVE.

At the origin of the present work there is not a reading nor a theoretical hypothesis, but over fifty years of observations. Coming from a popular environment — grandparents and some uncles peasants, father and other uncles workers —, I found myself, little more than twenty years old, living stably in Florentine urban environments of class and lineage exposable as superior. I inhabited them without fully belonging to them, observing them from the threshold, encountering not a few persons, families and vicissitudes that only many years later I would recognize as manifestations of a single pattern, in its negative consequences mild, consistent or sometimes tragic. For decades I had no language to name them, but they continued to interrogate me. That language began to emerge when I encountered the fragment of a conversation with Jacques Camatte in Milan in October 2012. Jacques spoke a particular Italian: learned in his youth with the Bordighist workers of Marseille — who had left Italy during the Fascist twenty years — and then consolidated with Bordiga himself. Many years later he still spoke it with the difficulties that faithful transcription does not conceal. I was not present, but I immediately had knowledge

of it thanks to my friend Riccardo De Benedetti, who shrewdly recorded a part of the encounter with his mobile phone and, knowing of my longstanding interest in Camatte, pointed it out to me. I took years to fully understand its implications, helped by the reading of the research that the author conducted in his last forty years. This oriented the research on the themes developed in the trilogy. The developments, the applications and any errors remain naturally mine.

“ [...] Instead [I agree] with Amadeo, whom I find very important because what I felt in my youth in an important way was certainty. And for me if there is no certainty there is no life, because I am not, as it were, tied to the total process of life. The total process of life not only of the organic sphere as we see it on our planet, but the process of life of the cosmos. Because everything is life. Everything is born, everything disappears, everything is change. And to feel this is not [to feel] like Blaise Pascal who had a tremendous fear of it, but it is an enjoyment. Instead he was precisely the child and it means that he had not been recognized, precisely in his being, by his mother and father. He said: the silence of these infinite spaces takes hold of me, makes me afraid. It means that I am not recognized by space. Indifference. But what is the fundamental support? It is a psychic support, it has not been recognized. And indifference is precisely the most tremendous thing. It is better to be considered an enemy. Indifference is worse, perhaps contempt. Because it is a form of recognition that denies you. Incredible. And therefore this invariance, at first it gives me a joy and in a certain sense I agree with Spinoza, joy is the... [*laetitia*?], but he finds the word also French [probably *béatitude* or *allégresse*], it is also stronger than joy. Now I do not remember. Therefore this is the importance, this is the joy, life is joy. It is the enjoyment of living, otherwise if there is no enjoyment there is the void. And then this happens precisely when I need to fill everything that happens and I find myself with time. In this regard everything that Saint Augustine writes on the question of time is extraordinary. And one sees the child who depends... He says, where does time come from? But he says, for example: time; the past is what has happened and which presses on me; and the future is what is awaited. Therefore he is always waiting. And what is terrible is that time comes from the future, it means that he is always in the expectation of receiving everything that he must receive from a mother or a father. Instead if I accept my child in his naturalness, in his spontaneity, in his completeness, in his immediacy — insofar as he is not me, but is truly in my biological continuity — then yes he can no longer have need of the creation of a time to give a framework to his life. But this problem of time is extraordinary. ¶ And when one knows a little of his life and then the life of his mother Monica who was truly... She managed... Let us say, Saint Augustine is a pro-

“ Let’s just say that St. Augustine is entirely his mother’s creation, and that’s incredible. I’m not saying this to speak ill of mothers or women, but... (2012 鷗 Meeting in Milan with Jacques Camatte).

② PRECISIONS AND DIGRESSIONS.

From our summary biographical investigations some characteristics have emerged, not general, that we wish to point out to whoever might want to go deeper. The first, notably in the cases of Sartre and Montale, is a life under the sign of a continuous and directive feminine presence together with the absence of masculine friendships among peers. The second is the initial, failed attempt, on the big target, in the field of the most abstract and incontrovertible genius, that is mathematics. Leopardi, Musil, Michelstaedter are the cases.

The particular conformance here enunciated — on the basis of Weber — of Augustinism with the growth of capital must not be read as an immediate and subordinate product of capital, or of the process of abstraction, understood as super-subjects. These are visions with a purpose of their own: to temper and harmonize social differences, limit the excesses of the psyche, give order to a world perceived as threatening. Visions that arise from a wounded perception of reality and relationality, filtered by experience and by familiar, cognitive and affective language, and which, by structural affinity, reveal themselves functional to the expansion of the dominion of capital and of the technical system over human becoming.

The husbands (and fathers)? Even if not mentioned in the initial table, the investigation on the illustrious figures and on those of the experiential archive poses the question by itself. Let us try to answer. Faced with such a wife, at a first reflection three type behaviours are individuated, often adopted two or all together:

Submission. In analogous cases Wodehouse proposes the formula «no longer masters even of one’s own soul», adding that nevertheless once it is decided who commands, things work. Manzoni certainly places in the category Don Ferrante, spouse of Prassede: «handing the fair copy to be copied to his consort, he warmly recommended spelling to her; which was one of the many things he had studied, and of the few over which he had command in the house». I would certainly place here Monaldo Leopardi: his refusing the proposal to assume command of the anti-French revolt in the Marches could also be a sign of a certain lack of courage but probably the reason was less dramatic: simply Adelaide did not give him permission.

Permanent war. It seems the case of Hermann Kafka. Not the least destructive, for everyone.

Flight. Perhaps the most frequented. The distancing from the toxic situation, from the trap, is the most natural behaviour, and also fruitful insofar as it is an example for the children. At times it assumes part-time modalities, what one calls making a figure for oneself and consoling oneself — with work, with oth-

ers, but in any case elsewhere; with work, other and others, but in any case elsewhere. At times it assumes the character of explicit desertion, disappearance: literary model I would say Lord Marchmain of *Brideshead Revisited*, by Evelyn Waugh.

Someone has seen this text as a manifesto, *à la Tiquun* — whose environment also cites Camatte, although its matrix is rather Benjaminian. If anything an anti-manifesto, which investigates the psychic origins of manifestos themselves. For Tiquun, redemptive already in the name, its Bloom is not a pathological form of man, but the last of an infinite series of monsters observed by the backward Angel in a time, all time, not only that of civilization, made only of ruins and evil. The classic eschatological structure: if history is integrally ruin, the last monster can open the paradisiacal redemption. In the Angel's vision, the Simple — that of yesterday, of today, of always until extinction, that of Heidegger's *Feldweg*, which Camatte calls immediacy — is not only obscured but, insofar as it is life ontologically not domesticable to ideal perfection, becomes imputable, hence in need of overcoming; and therefore included among what must be destroyed so that the (magic) awaited insurrection can finally redeem everything. Revolution and insurrection thus become, as always, the name assumed by the leaps through which capital dissolves the social configurations that limit its deployment. «We call capital the movement that abolishes the present state of things» (PSEUDO MARX, from MTAP).

③ THE DATES OF CAPITAL.

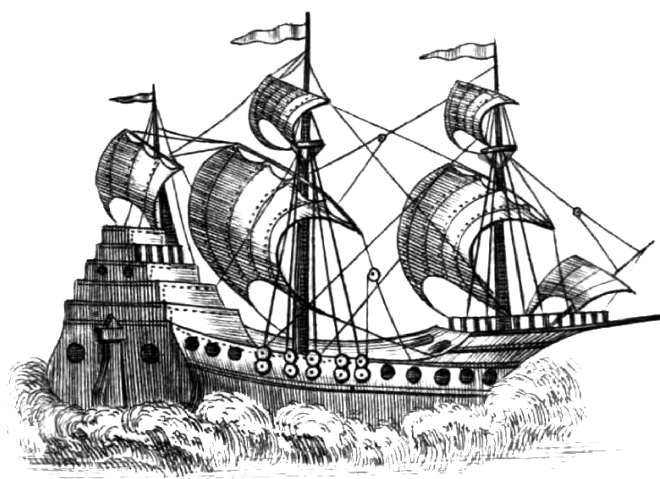
• IN EXTREME SYNTHESIS.

Where the circuit $D \rightarrow I \rightarrow D'$ is given — D stands for Money and the final apex indicates its increment, the surplus — one is already in the presence of capital. I stands for any activity that takes the name of Enterprise. It is circulation: D leaves the till to finance an enterprise in order to return to it, probabilistically, increased: it is this risk, known, that gives the name of enterprise to the activity. Let us list the best known: loan at interest, defence-conquest-war, insurance, corruption-lobbying, intelligence-deception, commerce, production-construction, pimping, spectacle, agriculture, medicine, hunting and fishing, art, care of souls and psychism. Many of these activities are prior and not necessarily correlated to capital, but when they become so this transforms them progressively. ¶ The self-growth of money (money=real abstraction of value, according to Sohn-Rethel's proposal) is not the result of a «mode of production» emerged in the 16th century, but a transhistorical parasitic «algorithm», operative well before coinage (as Aristotle already grasped in *chrematistics*). Classifying its ancient manifestations as «formal» and postponing to a «real» era is a blind alley inherited from Hegelian constructs: the reading of pathological proliferation does not consider ontological passages, but only differences of magnitude and adaptations of the host (as in oncology: from tumour T1 to metastasis). From the origin, $D \rightarrow I \rightarrow D'$ behaves as an *automatic subject*: a

field of forces, born and living from the mind and from the social relation, which reacts back on the human psyche irradiating images of power, pleasure, immortality.

• ON THE BIRTH OF «CAPITALISM».

The characters of the Gospel are already in a world of money, banks, interests. The vain invitation of Jesus to the rich young man not to occupy himself with money would have produced stagnation and weakening of circulation, famine for capital. That of Augustine to the rich to busy themselves to «help» the poor — which implies occupying oneself with wealth and increasing it, received with success — develops capital and its grip. Setting aside the *vexata quaestio* of the modes of production and their dating (not to speak of the «Taylorism» already active five thousand years ago in the Giza worksite) and concentrating instead on the historical and omnivorous growth of capital. The mode of production is a transient social configuration, which, among other things, lives interacting with other different ones; capital is a dynamic of valorization. There does not therefore exist a «capitalist» mode of production: the dynamic of capital consists in progressively dissolving every mode of production, even those that its previous deployment had made possible (already in the *Manifesto* the formula of the bourgeoisie that must continually revolutionize the relations of production conflicts with the idea of a «mode of production» — and of a class — as a stable form, and Marx in the *Grundrisse* appears aware of it).



INCONTRARIA DUCE T

NOTES.

¹ See the notable: Gerardo Muñoz, *The necessity of Penia*, infrapoliticalreflections.org, 31 May 2025;.

² See TAG8. *Studio sulla scomparsa del Tempo Autonomo Esterno nell'infanzia e le sue conseguenze*, Le raccolte del Covile, 2023-2024.

³ See further on the observations on the «knife dripping with sauce» of Hermann Kafka.

- 4 Monaldo's younger brother, Vito (1779-1879) married in 1812 Olimpia Melchiorri, widow Basvecchi, who thus became the poet's aunt. She must have been a living person in that House of Usher in which Giacomo grew up, as certainly was Silvia (Teresa Fattorini, daughter of the coachman). But for Olimpia we have no poetry, she was in the house, carnal, not an idea: a danger for the defensive walls.
- 5 We are comforted in this hypothesis by the fact that Charles Fourier too, in his utopian reveries on the phalanstery, registered "*l'amour de la saleté*" as a passion proper to children.
- 6 One could cite, as an unsurpassed humorous counterpoint, the patronesses of *The Good Soldier Švejk*, prodigal with devotional trinkets, and whose miraculous roast chickens are the cause for suspected simulators of a punitive gastric lavage.
- 7 This modality of removal was classified with precision by Jacques Camatte as **détournement** in his indispensable *Glossary*.
- 8 *La frusta letteraria*, www.lafrusta.net, summarizes thus a text by Girard himself.
- 9 For Heidegger, what defines Poverty is not lack but the acceptance of the limit.
- 10 Incidentally we note that, in Plutarch's account, Alexander is driven by the same solicitude as our serial philanthropists: "the monarch turned to him greeting him, and asked if he wanted anything, Diogenes replied: 'Yes, stand a little out of my sun.'" There also comes to mind one of the pestiferous Wodehousian boys: "It occurred to me that this Edwin was one of those who do not spare themselves, and, like his sister Florence, was seriously engaged in life, as he had amply demonstrated since he had entered the boy scouts. Not wishing to shirk his responsibilities he had conformed with ardent and resolute spirit to the rule of the daily good deed, but, unfortunately, between one thing and another, he always remained behind and never managed to accomplish it regularly, so that whenever he glimpsed the propitious occasion, he threw himself headlong, trying to catch up with whoever happened to be within reach, rapidly transforming every place he found himself in into a perfect hell for men and beasts. (*Joy in the Morning*)".
- 11 The Latin term *clientes* is not used here as a *boutade* but individuates an important and timeless sociological figure: persons (better if of regard, but in any case in great number) whom you gratify/remunerate because, envying you, they corroborate you in your identity.
- 12 A woman, it seems, of strong character, who did not let go until she had won, tireless in "seconding the will of heaven": with her husband, with her son, with her daughter-in-law. Regarding the latter, Augustine's obliteration, in the *Confessions*, of the name and circumstances of the expulsion of the mother of his own son — which contradicts the documentary precision of the work — we consider a revealing indication of the maternal grip on him.

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Wehrlos, doch in nichts vernichtet

Inerme, ma in niente annientato

(*Der christliche Epimetheus*)

KONRAD WEISS

