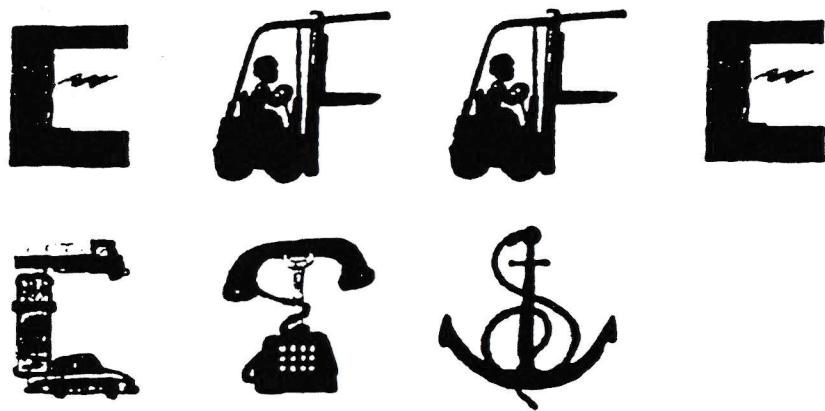


S-P-E-C-I-A-L E-F-F-E-C-T-S



Slow Reading Club  
Session for Cabaret Voltaire, 14 November 2022

A SEQUENCE

Leslie Scalapino

THOMAS THE OBSCURE

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MIMICRY AND LEGENDARY PSYCHASTHENIA

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THE VOICE

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Christine Brooke-Rose

CLOUD'S NOSTALGIA

Kim Hyesoon

SAINT MARTIN'S FOUR WISHES

unknown

MY LANGUAGE AND I

Ilse Aichinger



**A Sequence (2012)  
Leslie Scalapino  
from It's Go in Horizontal**

She heard the sounds of a couple having intercourse and then getting up they went into the shower so that she caught a sight of them naked before hearing the water running. The parts of their bodies which had been covered by clothes were those of leopards. During puberty her own organs and skin were not like this though when she first had intercourse with a man he removed his clothes and his organ and flesh were also a leopard's. She already felt pleasure in sexual activity and her body not resembling these adults made her come easily which also occurred when she had intercourse with another man a few months later.

When sexual unions occurred between a brother and sister they weren't savages or primitive. She had that feeling about having intercourse with men whose organs were those of leopards and hers were not. Walking somewhere after one of these episodes she was excited by it though she might not have made this comparison if she'd actually had a brother. At least the woman she had seen in the shower had a leopard's parts. In these episodes when she'd had intercourse with a man he didn't remark about her not being like that. And if women had these characteristics which she didn't it made her come more easily with him.

She overheard another couple together and happened to see them as she had the couple in the shower. The nude part of the woman was like herself and the man had the leopard's parts so that she had the same reaction and came easily with someone, as she had with a sense of other women having a leopard's traits and herself isolated. The man with whom she had intercourse did not say anything that showed he had seen a difference in her and that made her react physically. Yet other women seemed to have a leopard's characteristics except for this one she'd seen.

Again it seemed that a man with whom she had intercourse was her brother and was ardent with her—but this would not have occurred to her had she really had a brother. Yet her feeling about him was also related to her seeing a woman who was pregnant and was the only one to be so. The woman not receiving attention or remarks on the pregnancy excited her; and went together with her sense of herself coming easily and yet not being pregnant until quite a while after this time.

She also felt that she came easily feeling herself isolated when she was pregnant since she had the sense of other women having leopard's organs. They had previously had children. She was the only one who was pregnant and again she saw a couple together, the man with leopard's parts and the woman not having these characteristics.

Again she could come since her body was different from the adult who had some parts that were leopards, and having the sense of the women having had children earlier than her and their not having younger children now.

Her liking the other women to have had children when she was pregnant had to do with having them there and herself isolated—and yet people not saying much about or responding to the pregnancy. She thought of the man coming as when she caught a sight of the couple together—being able to come with someone a different time because she had a sense of a woman she'd seen having had her children earlier. There being a difference of age, even ten years, between a child she'd have and those the other women had had.

She happened to see some men who were undressed, as if they were boys—one of them had the features and organ of a leopard and the others did not. The difference in this case gave her the sense of them being boys, all of them rather than those who didn't have leopards' characteristics and this made her come easily with someone.

It was not a feeling of their being a younger age, since the men were her own age, and she found the men who lacked the leopard features to be as attractive as the one who had those features. She had the feeling of them as adults and her the same age as them, yet had the other feeling as well in order for her to come then.

She saw a couple who were entwined together and her feeling about them came from the earlier episode of seeing the men who were nude and having the sense of them being adolescent boys. Really she'd had the sense of the men she'd seen as being adults and herself the same age as them. The couple she watched were also around the same age as herself—the man being aware of someone else's presence after a time and coming. The woman pleased then though she had not come. She had intercourse with the man who had the features and organ of a leopard and whom she had first seen with the group of men who lacked these characteristics. The other men were attractive as he was. Yet having the sense of the difference between him and the others, she found it pleasant for him to come and for her not to come that time. The same thing occurred on another occasion with him.

She compared the men to plants, to the plants having a nervous aspect and being motionless. The man coming when he had the sense of being delayed in leaving—as if being slowed down had made him come and was exciting, and it was during the afternoon with people walking around. He was late and had to go somewhere, and came, with a feeling of delay and retarding—rather than out of nervousness.





**Thomas The Obscure (1941)**  
**Mauric Blanchot**  
**Translated by Robert Lamberton**

Thomas sat down and looked at the sea. He remained motionless for a time, as if he had come there to follow the movements of the other swimmers and, although the fog prevented him from seeing very far, he stayed there, obstinately, his eyes fixed on the bodies floating with difficulty. Then, when a more powerful wave reached him, he went down onto the sloping sand and slipped among the currents, which quickly immersed him. The sea was calm, and Thomas was in the habit of swimming for long periods without tiring. But today he had chosen a new route. The fog hid the shore. A cloud had come down upon the sea and the surface was lost in a glow which seemed the only truly real thing. Currents shook him, though without giving him the feeling of being in the midst of the waves and of rolling in familiar elements. The conviction that there was, in fact, no water at all made even his effort to swim into a frivolous exercise from which he drew nothing but discouragement. Perhaps he should only have had to get control of himself to drive away such thoughts, but his eye found nothing to cling to, and it seemed to him that he was staring into the void with the intention of finding help there. It was then that the sea, driven by the wind, broke loose. The storm tossed it, scattered it into inaccessible regions; the squalls turned the sky upside down and, at the same time, there reigned a silence and a calm which gave the impression that everything was already destroyed. Thomas sought to free himself from the insipid flood which was invading him. A piercing cold paralyzed his arms. The water swirled in whirlpools. Was it actually water? One moment the foam leapt before his eyes in whitish flakes, the next the absence of water took hold of his body and drew it along violently. His breathing became slower; for a few moments he held in his mouth the liquid which the squalls drove against his head: a tepid sweetness, strange brew of a man deprived of the sense of taste. Then, whether from fatigue or for an unknown reason, his limbs gave him the same sense of foreignness as the water in which they were tossed. This feeling seemed almost pleasant at first. As he swam, he pursued a sort of reverie in which he confused himself with the sea. The intoxication of leaving himself, of slipping into the void, of dispersing himself in the thought of water, made him forget every discomfort. And even when this ideal sea which he was becoming ever more intimately had in turn

become the real sea, in which he was virtually drowned, he was not moved as he should have been: of course, there was something intolerable about swimming this way, aimlessly, with a body which was of no use to him beyond thinking that he was swimming, but he also experienced a sense of relief, as if he had finally discovered the key to the situation, and, as far as he was concerned, it all came down to continuing his endless journey, with an absence of organism in an absence of sea. The illusion did not last. He was forced to roll from one side to the other, like a boat adrift, in the water which gave him a body to swim. What escape was there? To struggle in order not to be carried away by the wave which was his arm? To go under? To drown himself bitterly in himself? That would surely have been the moment to stop, but a hope remained; he went on swimming as if, deep within the restored core of his being, he had discovered a new possibility. He swam, a monster without fins. Under the giant microscope, he turned himself into an enterprising mass of cilia and vibrations. The temptation took on an entirely bizarre character when he sought to slip from the drop of water into a region which was vague and yet infinitely precise, a sort of holy place, so perfectly suited to him that it was enough for him to be there, to be; it was like an imaginary hollow which he entered because, before he was there, his imprint was there already. And so he made a last effort to fit completely inside. It was easy; he encountered no obstacles; he rejoined himself; he blended with himself, entering into this place which no one else could penetrate.

At last he had to come back. He found his way easily and his feet touched bottom at a place which some of the swimmers used for diving. The fatigue was gone. He still had a humming in his ears and a burning in his eyes, as might be expected after staying too long in the salt water. He became conscious of this as, turning toward the infinite sheet of water reflecting the sun, he tried to tell in which direction he had gone. At that point, there was a real mist before his sight, and he could pick out absolutely anything in this murky void which his gaze penetrated feverishly. Peering out, he discovered a man who was swimming far off, nearly lost below the horizon. At such a distance, the swimmer was always escaping him. He would see him, then lose sight of him, though he had the feeling that he was following his every move: not only perceiving him clearly all the time, but being brought near him in a completely intimate way, such that no other sort of contact could have brought him closer. He stayed a long time, watching and waiting. There was in this contemplation something painful which resembled the manifestation of an excessive freedom, a freedom obtained by breaking every bond. His face clouded over and took on an unusual expression.



at least in their origins to those of true mimicry) phenomena some of which I have reported above.

[...]

Recourse to the magical tendency in the search for the similar can only, however, be an initial approximation, and it is advisable to take account of it in its turn. The search for the similar would seem to be a means, if not an intermediate stage. Indeed the end would appear to be an *assimilation to the surroundings*. Here instinct completes morphology: the *Kallima* places itself symmetrically on a real leaf, the appendage on its hind wings in the place that a real petiole would occupy; the *Oxydia* alights at right angles to the end of a branch because the arrangement of the spot representing the middle veining requires it; the *Clolia*, Brazilian butterflies, position themselves in a row on small stalks in such a way to represent bell flowers, in the manner of a sprig of lily of the valley, for example. It is thus a real *temptation by space*.

[...]

*I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself.* To [those schizophrenic subjects] space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at *himself from* any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, nor similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is "the convulsive possession."

All of these expressions shed light on a single process: *depersonalisation by assimilation to space*, i.e., what mimicry achieves morphologically in certain species. The magical hold (one can truly call it so without doing violence to the language) of night and obscurity, the *fear of the dark*, probably also has its roots in the peril in which it puts the opposition between the organism and the milieu.

Minkowski's analyses are invaluable here: darkness is not the mere absence of light; there is something positive about it. While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is "filled," it touches

the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence "the ego is *permeable* for darkness while it is not so for light"; the feeling of mystery that one experiences at night would not come from anything else. Minkowski likewise comes to speak of *dark space* and almost a lack of distinction between the milieu and the organism: "Dark space envelops me on all sides and penetrates me much deeper than light space, the distinction between inside and outside and consequently the sense organs as well, insofar as they are designed for external perception, here play only a totally modest role."

The assimilation to space is necessarily accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life. It should be noted in any case that in mimetic species the phenomenon is never carried out except in a *single direction*: the animal mimics the plant, leaf, flower, or thorn, and dissembles or ceases to perform its function in relation to others. *Life takes a step backward*.



**Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia**  
**Roger Caillois (1938)**  
**Translated by John Shepley**

From whatever side one approaches things, the ultimate problem turns out in the final analysis to be that of *distinction*: distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge, etc.—all of them, in short, distinctions in which valid consideration must demonstrate a keen awareness and demand for resolution. Among distinctions, there is assuredly none more clear-cut than that between the organism and its surroundings; at least there is none in which the tangible experience of separation is more immediate. So it is worthwhile to observe the condition as pathology (the word here having only a statistical meaning)—i.e., all the facts that come under the heading of mimicry.

[...]

There are reasons more immediate, and at the same time less to be suspected of sophistry, that keep mimicry from being taken for a defence reaction. First of all, it would only apply to carnivores that hunt by sight and not by smell as is often the case. Carnivores, moreover, do not generally bother with motionless prey: immobility would thus be a better defence, and indeed insects are exceedingly prone to employ a false, corpse-like rigidity. There are other means: a butterfly, in order to make itself invisible, may do nothing more than use the tactics of the *Satyride asiatique*, whose flattened wings in repose appear simply as a line almost without thickness, imperceptible, perpendicular to the flower where it has alighted, and which turns simultaneously with the observer so that it is only this minimum surface that is always seen.

The experiments of Judd and Foucher have definitively resolved the question: predators are not at all fooled by homophony or homochromy: they eat crickets that mingle with the foliage of oak trees or weevils that resemble small stones, completely invisible to man. The phasma *Carasius Morosus*, which by its form, colour, and attitude simulates a

plant twig, cannot emerge into the open air without being immediately discovered and dined on by sparrows.

Generally speaking, one finds many remains of mimetic insects in the stomachs of predators. So it should come as no surprise that such insects sometimes have other and more effective ways of protecting themselves. Conversely, some species that are inedible, and would thus have nothing to fear, are also mimetic. It therefore seems that one ought to conclude with Cuénot that this is an “epiphenomenon” whose “defensive utility appears to be nul.” Delage and Goldsmith had already pointed out in the Kallima an “exaggeration of precautions.”

We are thus dealing with a *luxury* and even a dangerous luxury, for there are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse: geometer-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears. The case of the *Phyllia* is even sadder: they browse amongst themselves, taking each other for real leaves, in such a way that one might accept the fate of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a *provocation* to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast.

[...]

This tendency, whose universality thus becomes difficult to deny, may have been the determining force responsible for the present morphology of mimetic insects, at a time when their organisms were more plastic than they are today, as one must suppose in any case given the fact of transformation. Mimicry would thus be accurately defined as *an incantation fixed at its culminating point* and having caught the sorcerer in his own trap.

No one should say it is nonsense to attribute magic to insects: the fresh application of the words ought not to hide the profound simplicity of the thing. What else but *prestigious magic* and *fascination* can the phenomena be called that have been unanimously classified precisely under the name of mimicry (incorrectly as I see it, one will recall, for in my opinion the perceived resemblances are too reducible in this case to anthropomorphism, but there is no doubt that once rid of these questionable additions and reduced to the essential, these facts are similar





**The Voice**  
**Norman H. Pritchard**  
**from The Matrix Poems: 1960-1970**

s talk s t oo in t rude  
up on t his d une  
s till ness b rush e s the sea  
c alm t oo s oo n g r e w  
c alm ab out the s and  
a few gu ll s drew in t heir w in g s  
a h us h  
be s ide t hem  
t he r us h  
l in g e r in g  
fr om the v o ice  
of a dr op f all in g



**Sphinx (1986)**  
**Anne Garreta**  
**Translated by Emma Ramadan**

That evening, without a glance at the audience, I steered myself toward a table tucked to the side where I always insisted on sitting, and where A\*\*\* was waiting for me. The proclamations that I had debated nonstop en route crystallised unexpectedly at the sight of A\*\*\*, and I abruptly broached the subject close to my heart, as if to get it out of the way. A declaration of love is always tedious; it exceeded my patience to dilute the exasperation of my passion in a detailed statement, to represent discursively the unbearable confusion of my immediate desire—tolerating neither delay nor explanation, so much did its urgency torment me. My intentions were clear; my speech only muddled and veiled them in incoherence. I was alternating aimlessly between snippets of narration, the minutes of my interior monologue, syllogisms and images, passing without transition from slang to high style and from the trivial to the abstract without ever finding the right tone or genre in which to deliver my words. A\*\*\* was taken aback by this unprecedented bout of garrulous, confused violence.

A\*\*\*'s response to the declaration I proved incapable of making was, however, perfectly clear. It could be summarised with a simple verdict: "You must not love me"—an attempt to claim that A\*\*\* was unworthy of my passion and that it would damage our friendship. A\*\*\*'s propensity had always been to refrain from passionate attachments of the flesh, attachments that, once broken by misfortune, betrayal, or accident, resulted in prejudicial excess of sadness. Consequently, A\*\*\* thought it wise to disavow the idea of amorous possession, which could do nothing but exacerbate my confusion and forbid us from returning thereafter to that honest friendship, that guarantee of stability, to which we would be better off confining ourselves. That response, the arguments used to justify A\*\*\*'s refusal, were attempts to disorient me; in fact they did nothing but accentuate the imperative violence of my desire. They also left room for debate. All of the notions of love A\*\*\*'s reasoning invoked seemed erroneous to me, and I set about proving it. Those reasons were only a pretext; I wanted the truth. I was ranting, using cunning to obtain



it, and seeing that the facts were being concealed from me, I brazenly concluded that they must have been in my favour. We spent the night discussing, disputing the erroneous fables used to justify A\*\*\*'s refusal, and the valid reasons for my desire. Through every tone I modulated the absolute demand and legitimacy of my passion.

In return, A\*\*\* took refuge behind a moderation far from the habitual impulsiveness to which I was accustomed. That night the inversion was complete: I made myself into a demon, and A\*\*\* symmetrically put on the mask of the angel that I had abandoned. A\*\*\*'s final argument, pronounced on the threshold of the Eden, was of this order: "I rely on your friendship, and a physical relationship would annihilate it irremediably; so you must not love me, for such a relationship would be hellish. Don't ask of me what I am unable to give you without the risk of letting you down." I relate neither the exact terms of this plea—they were much more trivial—nor the precise progression of A\*\*\*'s personal logic, which was much less clearly defined. And I cannot relate them simply because A\*\*\* never formulated a link between successive sentences. From an unorganised mass of statements, of partial notes and arguments, I managed to extract a line of reasoning, a collection of synthetic propositions that I subsequently reiterated to verify their accuracy. For example, the following statements, made more than an hour apart: "If I agree to sleep with you, things won't be the same afterward;" and, "I'm ill-tempered, no one tolerates me for long;" and, "We can't sleep together, we'll end up fighting because neither one of us will want to let the other take the lead." I concluded implicitly that A\*\*\*, only able to imagine love as a system of power relations, could only envisage our relationship as a battle, leading irremediably to a violent rupture. I had to translate and arrange every word so that they became intelligible to me. Add to this some misunderstandings stemming from different mother tongues, and perhaps one can grasp the difficulty of my enterprise.

This resistance, despite being hard to define, did not disarm me: I persevered and I kept at it for weeks, trying to prove to A\*\*\* through every means imaginable that to succumb to my pleas and do the deed, far from destroying our affection, would only deepen and reinforce it. I insisted, tactically, on this shocking fact: A\*\*\*'s not-so prudish attitude could coexist with my moral rigidity, and a carefree practice of bodily exhibition could rub shoulders with an equally strong contempt and suspicion of the flesh. In other words, that A\*\*\*'s excesses could go hand in hand with my moderation and decorum. Far

from being enraged by my obstinacy or taking offence at my incessant urging, A\*\*\* found it all quite amusing. This was a good sign. Certainly the variety of my pleas was astonishing; one finds oneself suddenly capable of deploying the treasures of rhetoric, imagination, and persuasion in order to convince someone to have sex—a very common ambition, and not so interesting when one thinks about it in the cold light of day. But voilà, the price that I seemed to attach to my conquest, measured in terms of the energy and ingenuity I was expending, was high enough to be flattering. What must have at first seemed like a blaze of concupiscence was, over time, taking on real form.

Our daily telephone conversation were no longer anything but a game: a hypothetical reconstruction of our relationship if A\*\*\* were to succumb to my desires. We were presenting each other with illusions, visions, and tableaux. The object of this display was to figure out how to get along without drama, how to deal with the overcrowding engendered by a relationship that we hoped would not be temporary, but rather truly invested with stable affections, tastes, habits, and lifestyles—all of which differed radically, even more each day. We discussed everything down to the most trivial details. Would we live together? And if so, how would we divide up the household chores? Would we sleep in separate beds, thus shielding ourselves from the boredom of a complacent conjugality? And if not, what type of bedding would we choose? A\*\*\* was pushing for the classic pairing of sheets and covers, I for the more rational duvet.

The slow workings of this fiction, which didn't shy away from ridiculous or insignificant detail, were taking on the meticulous traits of familiarity. I was winning A\*\*\* over to the possibility of such a relationship. Its incongruity, its danger was dissipating in the soothing quietude of our constructed fable. Repetition and habit tend to diffuse excess. A\*\*\* was no longer systematically imagining the worst, no longer predicting disasters at every turn; the scenarios were becoming less catastrophic. Our union, by dint of simulation, was no longer inconceivable. The game of "and if" wore down A\*\*\*'s reluctance; every day, we already belonged to each other in our imaginations. My desire was gaining power through a trick, was gaining life through a fiction.





## Life, End Of (2006) Christine Brooke-Rose

The head top leans against the bathroom mirror so that the looking glass becomes a feeling glass. But what does it feel? This position is for body-balance during the brushing of teeth and the washing of face neck arms and torso. Below is for the biddy, and the feet, if sitting on a stool. But especially the torso. For in fact the teeth can also be brushed if the loins touch the washbasin however cold, or the hand grips the edge, on condition neither is wet.

And then the drying of the body-parts, one hand on the tall towel-radiator, the other on the lower part of the towel to dry the lower body. Dressing means sitting on the bed, entering pants, rising, legs in calf-love with the bedside, to slide the pants then trousers past the bottom before swiftly sitting again. The feet feel where the entrances are, whether of pants or slippers. Standing, on its own, without support somewhere, causes a tidal wave of nothingness in the head and a limping rush to the nearest armchair or bed. That means that nothing, nothing at all, no action or gesture, can now be done with two hands, if standing. That's a lot of gestures to unlearn.

But one contact is enough for minimum stability, one touch anywhere, from headtop to hip to hand or even one fingernail on the wall as the blood pressure is measured first sitting then standing, orthostatic as they say, when the tension drops by several degrees in a few seconds. Or sometimes rises, for no reason unless euphoric, or falls systolically and rises diastolically or vice versa. It staggers and lurches, like the body unless contact is made through headtop hand finger thigh calf with the ground the earth the planet the galaxy the universe. But then the universal is what is wrong with humanity.

The tidal wave of nothingness is not vertigo, from the inner ear dipping like a builder's plumb rule, for which there is a cure with turning lights, undergone. It is at unlucky times a faintingness due to the latest change of pill prescribed by the cardio, cancelled by the doctor after heartbeat drop, represcribed by the cardio, recancelled by the doctor, the process repeated with three different pills until a pacemaker is put in.

Besides, many seek vertigo, addicts of all kinds including mountain climbers vertigo to all that trouble for a moment of spurious hegemony above all that beauty and now, like everywhere over-populous, leaving their human garbage all the way up, all the way down.

No, it's an imbalance from the brain's wrong messages to the inside of the feet and legs, their nerve fibres slowly withering and reversing their tasks, so that where there should be feeling there isn't and vice versa. Just like love of all kinds. At first the feet on the car-pedals feel like two blocks of ice, then can't feel the pedals at all, but steadily burn and braise where they shouldn't feel more than the normal fatigue of a long walk, which, like the car, slowly becomes a thing of the past.

But who feels what? The fingernail of contact feels nothing. Is it the feet that feel or their boss the brain? Nous no use. Mirrors, once polished steel or later crystal to flatter more, are soon called *glace* from Latin for ice, or *miroir* from Latin for looking, however icy the image. Both get borrowed as ever by the English élite, the first fused with native glass, the second just chic, then disdainfully discarded when picked up by the then-called lower orders and shattered down to become a class-labelling code, replaced higher by two native words, looking, plus glass. Grammatically, it's the glass that looks, as in blinding light (for who can blind a light?). Or at least ambiguous, like running-board, dressing-gown, drawing-room, frying-pan (who fries, man or pan?), driving-wheel. But then the so-called higher orders are never hot on grammar, any more than the so called lower.

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The thalamus and hypothalamus are in the forebrain under the cerebral hemispheres. Thalamus means inner chamber, or cavity, or the receptacle of a flower, a ventricle in the brain, and so, surely, a cerebral womb. Yet like a phallus it takes over the medulla's transmission from the spinal cord to the cerebellum, still in the hindbrain, and sends it all to the cerebrum, the top brain, that convoluted glory as developed in the higher mammals and more especially humans. There the transmitted sparks clash into motor neurons inside a synaptic cleft and create impulses.

Hypo means under, lesser, for the hypothalamus is a lower or downstairs inner chamber (a kitchen? a pantry? a scullery?), controlling pleasure, pain, hunger, thirst, blood pressure, body temperature, the sex-drive and the hormones governing the phlegm secretions of the front pituitary gland, not to be confused with the pineal gland, called *epiphysus cerebri* meaning a growth upon the cer-



ebrum, a parasite which, structured as an eye in the lower vertebrates, is not organised as an eye in the higher, where it functions as a light-receptor. To act perhaps as the tain foil of a looking glass? The eye-shape but not the eye as mirror of the soul? Seemingly endless, like that sentence. At any rate this gland is where Descartes places the soul, thus putting *de cart* before *dehors*.

But the hypothalamus does not control balance and coordination. That, in the division of labour, is the task of the cerebellum (the war of Ceres?), back in the hindbrain, receiving the signals from the spinal cord.

The floor the ground the earth are for walking on feet, the world the universe for walking in the head. A walking illness keeps the universe for the head but leaves, for the feet, only the floor. How long will the head last? The few remaining pleasures are not the sex-drive, nor body-temperature hunger thirst or blood pressure but pleasures in the head so rich and devious, and, also, pain as the dubious pleasure of a constant companion, sometimes intolerable, and now vanishing only in the just reachable armchair or bed. And only insofar as the cardiovascular gamma network still functions, more or less. Pain is from Old French *pener*, to punish. For what? *Nulla poena sine lege*.

You must walk, says the physiotherapist, for your legs. Of course, walking is a joy. But slowly the rest of the body prevents it, with flailing anginal pains and breathlessness, demanding sit-downs on low walls or electricity meters, first at the end of the walk, shorter and shorter, now even before leaving. Just moving from one room to another, from the bed to the bathroom, the bathroom to the revolving armchair, the armchair to the kitchen, the kitchen back to the table or preferably the armchair with a tray held between hand and bosom to keep the other hand for support from passing walls and slow-flowing furniture. And sometimes not so. Sometimes the whole tray clatters, shatters to the floor (the earth the universe). Then comes the collapse into the revolving armchair in order not to crouch, and the picking up of the food, the broken plate and glass. For the hardest is the rising after crouching. Hence the resurrection myths. Objects also have trouble being picked up.

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And the body, though it may cause laughter, has no sense of humour of its own, no small sparks of slow but planetary motion, no fleeting stars of word-play, only the mind has those. But then, what is the mind but body, the corn-goddess at war with the gleaming cerebroom that sweeps up for a little peace and order and

doubtful cleanliness. The mind without the body couldn't laugh nor murmur nor shriek nor have tears in the eyes. It couldn't play nor run nor stumble with words, it couldn't read.

Even languages die, like species, thousands per century. All those colonised people lose theirs to the stronger power, while those overlooked by the colonisers shrink back through isolation into a tribe, a clan, a family. Whichever is our own language we can hear the grammatical and phonetic changes, the lapse that may grow into an unimagined transformation during one lifetime, but can we spot the slow death-symptoms?

It is the brain, it is the brain endures.

But is it? Or the pillars of fire? All these streaking snippets of facts occur only because of long familiarity, long love of language and its bones and flesh, and how it grows from Primitive Human to Old High Human to Middle High Human to Modern Low Inhuman. The world in other words. Nobody else is interested.

And now, in any case, new information, from the still retained and enjoyed passion for reading, is quickly lost. So are proper names, even of well-known politicians, reporters, writers, sudden black holes although the names of stars familiar and loved from youth are remembered, and pang slightly when they die, after a longish spell of vanishment so as not to advertise their old age. And holes for what has just been seen, the original place of a word in a huge puzzle after looking up to think, or the reason for grindingly moving into one room from another, to fetch what, a black hole. The only access now to the world, the universe, is made through bits and pieces, clung to as small heroes battling against withdrawal.

A scientist on some learning programme says black holes can hide renewed creativity.

Painfully jerking, like a babe learning to walk, stagger, jerk, plonk, old age a mirror of childhood but childhood not for one second reflected in the present-bound, floorbound eyes. The child trips towards its mother, the old towards Mother Nature, looking into a glass darkly.



**Cloud's Nostalgia (2006)**  
**Kim Hyesoon**  
**Translated by Don Mee Choi**

Rabbit's ear entered as the white wall laughed  
I pulled that smelly thing  
Rabbit-cloud mushroomed-mushroomed

Buttocks-cloud came down from the ceiling  
Those buttocks belong to the wrestler at our neighbourhood gym

A rope for strangling came down, but it dispersed as soon as it hanged a neck  
The walls floated in air and barked  
The door to the room opened, where the angels were tortured and had cried  
My screams poured out like shit, so I opened an umbrella to receive them

A thousand nipples protruded from my body  
Every nipple needed to be milked white milk  
My body overflowing with milk was swollen like a jar  
The jar smelled of white rabbit

Those plastic things, paper, cloths  
I sang about the memories of my attachment to those things in my room

When I sang, all the sweat pores on my body salivated  
my black fur got wet

I pulled the mask tightly like a shoestring  
and waddled-waddled out like a wrestler

Now it's time to confess, my lover is that cloud  
Water falls from its face every time its expression changes hundreds of times  
a day

Shall I call it The morning nap of someone who has left?  
(I almost said A dirty sight, for I'm unable to forget it)  
Shall I say It's a flustered rabbit because its hutch has vanished?  
Shall I say My melancholy's nostalgia?  
or Your facial expressions fall off every second and get buried in the ground?

Green-strawberry-summit-cloud  
White-hair-cloud encircles god's neck  
Hook-cloud hooks my neck's artery onto a cloud  
Lens-cloud opens the lid of my house and peers into it

Over there, the boys from martial arts gym run into the sunset with red-red  
briefs  
over their heads and

I pull threads from the crimson cloud and weave my undergarments and  
twist my fat fattened body





**Saint Martin's 4 Wishes (13th c.)**  
**Author Unknown**  
**Translated by Ned Dubin**

In Normandy there lived a peasant  
of whom is told so quaint and pleasant  
a fabliau that I've a notion  
to tell you. Such was his devotion  
to Saint Martin that he'd invoke  
him in all things he undertook;  
whether elated or depressed,  
it was Saint Martin he addressed;  
every day he called on Saint Martin.  
The peasant set out on a certain  
morning, as was his wont, to plow.  
He'll not forget Saint Martin now.  
"Saint Martin!" he cried out, "giyyup!"  
and that's when Saint Martin showed up.  
"Peasant," he said, "you have been loyal  
to me, and never start to toil,  
no matter what your task may be,  
without first calling upon me.  
You have well earned my special favor.  
Now leave your harrow, drop your labor,  
and get you home with a light heart,  
for I will truly do my part  
and herewith promise I will grant  
whatever four wishes you want,  
but use your wishes wisely, for  
once they've been used you'll get no more."  
The peasant bowed low to the ground  
in reverence, then turned around  
and hurried home walking on air.  
There's trouble waiting for him there.  
His wife, the one who wears the pants,

lit into him: "What evil chance  
brings you home now, oaf? Did you quit  
work 'cause it's clouded up a bit?  
You've hours of daylight left for tilling.  
Or is your paunch in need of filling?  
Are you afraid you'll miss your chow?  
You've never taken to the plow,  
No — life for you is one big lark!  
We may as well sell off the stock  
since you won't work them anyway!  
See what you call a working day-  
you're back when you have scarcely gone!"  
"Don't be upset, my love, keep calm,"  
the peasant said. "Our fortune's made!  
Henceforth our burdens may be laid  
aside, of that much I am certain,  
because I met up with Saint Martin.  
He gave me four wishes to use  
as I thought best. I've yet to choose;  
I meant first to consult with you,  
and as you advise me to do  
I now intend to make my wishes  
for gold and silver, land and riches."  
When she heard this, the woman reached  
to hug him and toned down her speech.  
"Husband," she said, "can this be so?"  
"Indeed yes, as you soon will know."  
"My dearest, sweetest love," said she,  
"my heart is yours eternally  
to love and serve you hand and foot.  
You should repay me good for good.  
I ask you, please, to let me have  
one of the wishes the saint gave.  
You still will have the other three,  
and you will have done right by me."  
"Hush," he replied, "my darling wife!  
I wouldn't, no, not on my life,  
for women all have addled brains.  
Why, you might ask to have three skeins

of hemp or wool or linen thread!  
 I remember Saint Martin said  
 that I should wisely use my wishes  
 and only wish for something such as  
 will benefit us evermore,  
 so I intend to use all four.  
 Know that I'm mortally afraid,  
 if I gave you one, that instead  
 you'd wish for something that might do  
 untold harm to both me and you.  
 If you should wish I was a bear  
 or jackass, or a goat or mare,  
 I would become one on the spot.  
 I know how much you love me: not.  
 That's why I fear to let you share  
 my wishes." "Sir," she said, "I swear  
 in good faith with both hands raised high,  
 you'll stay a peasant till you die.  
 I'll never wish you other than  
 you are, dearer than any man."  
 "My dear," he said, "let it be yours.  
 By God, when you wish, make a choice  
 by which you and I stand to gain!"  
 "I wish," she said, "that, in God's name,  
 there spring up penises galore  
 over your body, aft and fore!  
 On face, arms, sides, from head to foot,  
 may countless penises take root,  
 and let them not be limp or slack:  
 let each be furnished with its sack,  
 and let them stand stiff and upright!  
 Now, won't you be a horny sight!"  
 Then, as soon as the woman spoke,  
 hundreds of pricks began to poke  
 out all over. Penises grew  
 around his nose and his mouth, too.  
 Some pricks were thick, some oversized,  
 some long, some short, some circumcised,  
 curved pricks, straight pricks, pointed and hardy...

every bone in the peasant's body  
 was miraculously endowed  
 and prickled, fully-cocked and proud.  
 You've never heard wonders like these!  
 Pricks grow out of his ears, and he's  
 amidst his forehead, standing tall,  
 the most enormous prick of all,  
 and right down to his feet he's coated  
 with penises erect and bloated.  
 From toe to crown he was bedecked  
 with antlers, bloated and erect.  
 Weighed down by penis upon penis,  
 the peasant said, "This wish was heinous!  
 Why give me all this finery?  
 Better to be stillborn than be  
 with pricks so overgrown and cluttered!  
 Was ever any man so studded?"  
 "Husband," she said, "I'll tell you why.  
 Your one prick couldn't satisfy,  
 just hanging limply like a fox  
 stole, but now I've a wealth of cocks!  
 Your lot is likewise much improved  
 in that, whenever you are moved  
 to travel, you won't be assessed  
 tariffs or tolls. All for the best  
 I made my wish, so don't resent it.  
 There's not a creature half so splendid!"  
 The peasant said, "I'm not amused.  
 Three wishes more are yet unused.  
 I wish," the fellow said at once,  
 "that you had just as many cunts  
 on you as I have pricks on me.  
 May your cunts pop out rapidly!"  
 At once the cunts start to arise.  
 A pair appears before her eyes,  
 four on her forehead in a row,  
 and cunts above, and cunts below,  
 and cunts behind, and cunts in front,  
 every variety of cunt—



bent cunts, straight cunts, cunts gray and hoary,  
 cunts without hair, cunts thick and furry,  
 and virgin cunts, narrow and tight,  
 wide, gaping cunts, and cunts made right,  
 cunts large and small, oval and round,  
 deep cunts, and cunts raised on a mound,  
 cunts on her head, cunts on her feet...  
 the peasant's joy is now complete.  
 "Husband, what have you done?" said she.  
 "Why have you wished this thing on me?"  
 The good man said, "One cunt won't do  
 for all the pricks I got from you.  
 Don't be alarmed, for your condition  
 will lead to widespread recognition:  
 when you go walking, you'll continue  
 to be known for all the cunt in you."  
 "Husband," she said, "what can I say?  
 That makes two wishes thrown away,  
 and now you must use one to fix  
 us and remove these cunts and pricks.  
 You'll still have one left out of four,  
 and we'll be rich forevermore."  
 The peasant wishes thereupon  
 that all their cunts and pricks were gone,  
 but she was anything but cheered  
 to find her cunt had disappeared,  
 and he, too, had an awful shock  
 to find himself without a cock.  
 Both of them were extremely wroth.  
 "Husband, it's time to make the fourth  
 wish we have left to us," said she;  
 "one prick for you, one cunt for me.  
 We'll return to our former state  
 no poorer off, at any rate."  
 He wished the wish that still remained;  
 and thus he neither lost nor gained:  
 he got his prick back at the cost  
 of the four wishes, which he lost.



**My Language and I (1978)**  
**Ilse Aichinger**  
 Translated by Uljana Wolf & Christian Hawkey

My language is one that tends towards foreign words. I choose them, I retrieve them from far away. But it is a small language. It doesn't reach far. All around, all around me, always all around and so forth. We advance against our will. To hell with us, I sometimes say to it. It turns, it doesn't answer, it lets us happen. Sometimes Customs officers appear. Your passports? We pass, they let us pass. My language didn't say anything, but I did, I nodded obligingly, I did them this favour. One person, and something around him, unsuspicious. But what was around him? A coiled spring. No, smoke. There is something around everyone, don't you know this? These poor boys, I honestly feel sorry for them. Honestly. Now you're babbling. What do they have or not have that makes you feel sorry? They're young, that's all—what's there to feel sorry about? They'll grow, that's inevitable. They will get powerful and they will become a force. While we remain stuck in the ink, like a farce, slaving away, pretending to be cheerful—while we're losing our cheerfulness. Honestly. Who is that, who says that? Me. This cracks me up. This always reminds me of the one who said Me!, when he arrived too late at his own house and wanted to be let inside. I am reminded of him, what was his profession? Custodian, I believe. Yes, custodian. Are you hungry? Because I definitely am. But I have this habit of always omitting one hunger. First one, then two, then three. But then there will be a meal, I swear, where nothing is omitted, where everything will be on the table, spread out before me. Then they all cavort around, all around me, and then I have it. Sleepy? Well sleep, go ahead and sleep. I'll keep watch for you.

This is where I sit with my language, only 3 metres away from the people who talk like that. But we made it through, we have passed, we can take a rest when we are out of breath. There are plenty of empty spots, put a blanket down, the sun shines everywhere. My language and I, we don't talk to each other, we have nothing to say to each other. I know what I have to know—it likes cold food better than warm food, not even the coffee should be hot. This can really keep you busy. It's a lot of work, laying out the plates, cutting the food, measuring the cold, letting the warmth dissipate. While my language stares out at the sea. It's easy for my language to stare, because I do everything. I don't rush like I used to, I now calmly



smooth the blanket, I calmly weight it with stones when it gets windy, but it's true: I work and it stares. It doesn't even express wishes. This wouldn't be the utmost one could ask of it, but it would be something. A good deed, a service to me, a way to help me progress. But my language doesn't care, that much I understand. It only stares or listens to the surf, my language. I make sure that we are always near the sea. I, not it. I would like to know what would happen to my language if one day I walked inland, if I simply took a turn like other people do, picking a stone table for us between the hollows, the shaved pines. What would it do then—would it come with me? The coastal wind is bad for my ears, this much I know. Sometimes I begin to sing, or to bang the silverware, then everything becomes quieter. Even though our kind of food doesn't require utensils, I unpack the silverware, the plates and glasses, too. I hold up a knife and then I let it fall, carefully, on the plate, always from the same height. For five weeks now everything has been getting quieter. Recently I tried to let the knife fall on the plate from a slightly higher distance. It banged loudly, I heard it clearly, but the plate broke. My language remained calm, its gaze pinned on the sea, always, I believe, on the same spot. It seems to be the opposite of certain paintings where the gaze follows you everywhere—its gaze follows no one. Sea monsters and fishing boats would be equally lost on it. And none come anyway. At some point I begin to set out our cold meal, I pour the cold coffee, but in vain. Carefully I've set everything on our blanket, I even placed a coastal flower in the middle or right next to its plate. But my language doesn't turn around. I then put the plate in front of my language—right between it and the sea foam. My joy is gone, the hearing test has dampened my spirits, and the sea annoys me. My language used to have a lavender shawl, but it's gone. I fear we might ruin our health in this place. If my language loses its voice, then it has one more reason to stop talking to me. While I continue to besiege it with questions and offers—whispering, coughing. The lavender shawl looked good on my language, it covered its overly long neck and gave its unspoken appearance both gentleness and resoluteness. Now all of that's gone and my language doesn't even turn its collar up. The way it looks now, it sometimes reminds me of a mature swan but very dull in colour, as if its maturation were still ahead of it. But it shouldn't flatter itself. From afar I hear the voices of the Customs officers. They talk and talk, or at least one of them is always talking. It wasn't my idea to settle down so close to the Customs booth, but my language refused to go further. The fourth country has ended, I shouted in its ear, the fifth is right over there. It followed me reluctantly—and no further than right here. The truth is, we might as well be Customs officers. Among them, only one does the talking, too—about food and youth while the other sleeps or stares at us through the windows, like right now. Earlier, when I searched for our passports, he was sleeping. I don't let my language carry our passports any more since it lost its shawl, I have them now.

They are bored over there. Or maybe they find us suspicious. They find my language suspicious, not me. I am normal, I eat and drink, and when I let the knife fall on the plate it doesn't look to them—at such a distance—like a hearing test, it looks like clumsiness, and that's quite all right with me. But if we stay longer, it will stop looking like clumsiness and will start to look like intent. If only my language talked to me, then I wouldn't need this kind of hearing test, but it does very little to keep us free of suspicion. Not even for my sake. It should really care more about me but I suspect it of only caring about itself. Or not caring about itself at all. Or both—how convenient. My language didn't touch what I put out, it lets sea foam salt its food. Each to his own, I think. I can also take others for my own. Or mistake them. I can become a Customs chef, a Customs entertainer, Customs officer. The two over there will not ignore what I put in front of them. We will talk about Customs, about Customs items, silver and lead and similar things. About card games—I also know card games. And about my language, which I suspect will never move away from here. From its salty meal, its grey gaze. I will do what I can for it. The talking alone will help, the conversations about it, the observations which will soon repeat themselves. In time, no one will want anything from my language. And I will do my part. I will weave in a sentence here and there to make it free of suspicion.





## Meine Sprache und Ich (1978) Ilse Aichinger

Meine Sprache ist eine, die zu Fremdwörtern neigt. Ich suche sie mir aus, ich hole sie von weit her. Es ist aber eine kleine Sprache. Sie reicht nicht weit. Rund um, rund um mich herum, immer rund um und so fort. Wir kommen gegen unseren Willen weiter. Zur Hölle mit uns, sage ich ihr manchmal. Sie dreht sich, sie antwortet nicht, sie läßt uns geschehen. Manchmal tauchen Zöllner auf. Ihre Ausweise? Wir passieren, sie lassen uns passieren. Meine Sprache hat nichts gesagt, aber dafür ich, ich habe diensteifrig genickt, ich habe ihnen die Freude getan. Einer und etwas um ihn herum, unverdächtig. Aber was das war? Eine Spiralfeder. Nein, Dampf. Um jeden ist etwas herum, weißt du das nicht? Die armen Jungen, sie tun mir ehrlich leid. Ja, ehrlich. Jetzt faselst du. Was tut dir an denen leid? Was tut dir denn leid? Jung und sonst nichts, was soll einem da leid tun? Das wächst sich aus, das ist unausbleiblich. Erstarrt und wird mächtig groß. Während wir in der Tinte bleiben, uns abrackern, immer mehr abrackern und dabei die Vergnügten spielen. Und dabei das Vergnügen verlieren. Ehrlich. Wer ist das, der das sagt? Ich. Da muß ich lachen. Das erinnert mich immer an den, der ich sagte, als er zu spät ins Haus wollte. Ich bin draußen, ich, ich. An den erinnert mich das, was war er nur von Beruf? Hausmeister, glaube ich, ja, Hausmeister. Hast du Hunger? Ich schon. Aber ich habe so eine Art, immer einen Hunger auszulassen. Erst einen, dann zwei, dann drei. Aber dann kommt eine Mahlzeit, das sage ich dir. Da bleibt nichts weg, da kommt alles auf den Tisch, alles vor mich hin. Da tummeln sie sich, rund um mich herum, da habe ichs dann. Schläfrig? Dann schlaf eben, schlaf nur. Ich schaue für dich.

Da sitze ich dann mit meiner Sprache, nur drei Meter von denen entfernt, die so reden. Aber wir sind durch, wir haben passiert, wir können uns niederlassen, wenn wir atemlos sind. Öde Flecken genug, eine Decke darauf, die Sonne scheint überall. Meine Sprache und ich, wir reden nicht miteinander, wir haben uns nichts zu sagen. Was ich wissen muß, weiß ich, kalte Küche ist ihr lieber als warme, nicht einmal der Kaffee soll heiß sein. Das beschäftigt einen schon. Das hat man zu tun, zu decken, aufzuschneiden, die Kälte zu messen, die Wärme vergehen zu lassen. Während sie aufs Meer starrt. Meine Sprache hat es leicht zu starren, weil ich alles tue. Ich überstürze mich nicht, wie zu Beginn, ich streife die Decke ruhig glatt, ich

beschwere sie ruhig mit Steinen, wenn es windig wird, aber es ist wahr: ich arbeite und sie starrt. Sie äußert nicht einmal Wünsche. Das wäre nicht das Äußerste, was man von ihr verlangen könnte, aber es wäre doch etwas. Eine gute Sache, ein Dienst an mir, eine Art, mich voranzubringen. Aber daran liegt ihr nichts, gar nichts, so viel habe ich schon heraus. Sie starrt nur oder horcht auf die Brandung, meine Sprache. Wir sind immer in Meeresnähe, dafür Sorge ich. Ich, nicht sie. Ich möchte wissen, was mit ihr geschähe, wenn ich einmal landeinwärts ginge, einfach einböge wie andere Leute auch, uns einen Steintisch zwischen den Mudeln suchte, gehobelte Kiefern. Wie sie sich dann verhielte, ob sie mitkäme? Der Küstenwind ist schlecht für meine Ohren, das weiß ich. Manchmal beginne ich zu singen oder mit den Bestecken zu klappern, es wird leiser. Obwohl man bei unserer Küche nur wenige Bestecke braucht, hole ich sie hervor, auch Teller und Gläser. Ich nehme ein Messer und lasse es vorsichtig auf einen Teller fallen, immer aus derselben Entfernung. Es wird seit fünf Wochen leiser. Vor kurzem versuchte ich es einmal, das Messer von etwas höher auf den Teller fallen zu lassen. Es schlug laut auf, ich hörte es deutlich, aber der Teller zerbrach. Meine Sprache blieb ruhig, den Blick aufs Meer geheftet, wie ich glaube immer auf dieselbe Stelle. Sie scheint mir das Gegenteil gewisser Bilder zu sein, deren Blicke einem überallhin nachgehen. Ihr Blick geht keinem nach. Seeungeheuer und Fischkutter wären gleichmäßig an ihr verloren, es kommen auch keine. Ich breite dann unsere kalte Mahlzeit aus, gieße den kalten Kaffee ein, aber vergeblich. Ich habe unsere Decke sorgfältig gedeckt, oft sogar eine Strandblume in die Mitte gelegt, oder neben ihr Gedeck. Sie wendet sich nicht um. Ich nehme ihr Gedeck und lege es vor sie hin, zwischen sie und den Gischt. Meine Freude ist weg, die Gehörprobe hat mir den Mut genommen, das Meer ärgert mich. Meine Sprache hatte früher einen lila Schal, aber er ist weg. Ich fürchte, daß wir uns hier die Gesundheit verderben. Wenn meine Sprache die Stimme verliert, hat sie einen Grund mehr, das Gespräch mit mir sein zu lassen. Während ich sie noch wispernd und hustend mit Fragen und Angeboten überhäufe. Der lila Schal stand ihr gut, er verdeckte ihren zu langen Hals und gab ihrer unausgesprochenen Erscheinung zugleich Sanftmut und Entschiedenheit. Das ist alles dahin. Sie stellt auch den Kragen nicht auf. So wie sie jetzt ist, erinnert sie mich manchmal an einen ausgewachsenen Schwan, aber so matt in den Farben, als hätte er das Wachstum noch vor sich. Sie sollte sich nichts einbilden. Aus der Ferne höre ich die Stimmen der Zöllner. Sie reden und reden, wenigstens der eine spricht immer. Es war nicht meine Idee, uns so nahe der Zollhütte niederzulassen, aber meine Sprache war nicht weiterzubringen. Das vierte Land ist zu Ende, schrie ich ihr ins Ohr, da drüben ist schon das fünfte. Sie folgte mir widerwillig, nicht weiter als hierher. Wir könnten ebensogut Zöllner sein. Von denen spricht auch immerfort nur einer, vom Essen und von der Jugend, der andere schläft. Oder star-

rt durch die Scheiben herüber wie jetzt. Vorhin schlief er, während ich nach den Ausweisen suchte. Die überlasse ich meiner Sprache nicht mehr, seit sie den Schal verloren hat, die sind bei mir.

Denen ist langweilig da drüben. Oder wir sind ihnen verdächtig. Meine Sprache ist ihnen verdächtig, nicht ich. Ich bin normal, ich esse und trinke, und wenn ich das Messer auf den Teller fallen lasse, sieht es auf diese Entfernung nicht nach einer Gehörprobe aus, es sieht nach Ungeschick aus, und danach darf es aussehen. Bleiben wir aber noch eine Weile hier, so wird es nicht mehr nach Ungeschick aussehen, sondern nach Absicht. Sprache meine Sprache zu mir, so hätte ich diese Art von Gehörprobe nicht nötig, aber sie tut nur wenig dazu, um uns unverdächtig zu erhalten. Mich wenigstens, es müßte ihr mehr an mir liegen, schon lange. Ich habe sie im Verdacht, daß ihr nur an sich selbst liegt. Oder nichts an sich selbst. Oder beides, das trifft sich. Was ich ihr vorgesetzt habe, hat sie nicht berührt, sie läßt es vom Gischt einsalzen. Jeder wie er will. Ich halte mich daran. Ich kann auch andere für die meinen halten. Ich kann Zollkoch werden, Zollunterhalter, Zöllner. Die beiden da drüben werden nicht liegenlassen, was ich ihnen vorsetze. Wir werden vom Zoll reden, von Zollgütern, Silber und Blei und ähnlichem. Von Kartenspielen, ich kenne auch Kartenspiele. Und von meiner Sprache, die sich, wie ich vermute, von hier nicht mehr wegrühren wird. Von ihrer eingesalzenen Mahlzeit, ihrem grauen Blick. Ich werde tun, was ich für sie tun kann. Die Unterhaltung allein wird ihr helfen, das Gespräch über sie, die Beobachtungen, die sich wiederholen. Man wird mit der Zeit nichts mehr von ihr wollen. Und ich werde das meinige dazutun. Ich werde hier und dort einen Satz einflechten, der sie unverdächtig macht.

**Slow Reading Club**  
**Session for Cabaret Voltaire, 14 November 2022**