

THEODOR W. ADORNO

trans. Rodney Livingstone

Los Angeles, end of May 1942

I dreamt I was to be crucified. The crucifixion was to take place at the Bockenheimer Warte, just by the university. I felt no fear throughout the entire process. Bockenheim resembled a village on Sunday, deathly quiet, as if under glass. I observed it closely on my way to the place of execution. I imagined that the appearance of things on this my last day would enable me to glean some definite knowledge of the next world. At the same time, however, I declared that one should beware of arriving at premature conclusions. One should not let oneself be seduced into ascribing objective truth to the religion practised there simply because Bockenheim was still at the stage of simple commodity production. That aside, I was worried about whether I would obtain leave from the crucifixion to attend a large, extremely elegant dinner to which I had been invited, though I was confidently looking forward to it.

Another night

I was talking with my girlfriend X about the erotic arts with which I thought her conversant. I asked her whether she had ever done it *par le cul*. She responded very frankly, saying that she could do it on some days, but not on others. Today was a day when it was quite impossible. This seemed quite plausible to me, but I wondered whether she was speaking the truth or whether this wasn't just a prostitute's pretext for refusing me. Then she said that she could do quite different things, more beautiful, Hungarian ones, of which I had never heard. In reply to my eager questioning, she said, 'Well, there was Babamüll, for example.' She started to explain it to me. It soon turned out that this supposed perversion

was in reality a highly complicated, to me entirely opaque, but evidently illegal finance operation, something like a safe way of passing worthless cheques. I pointed out to her that this had nothing to do with the erotic techniques she had promised me. However, she stuck to her view and replied in a supercilious tone that I should pay close attention and be patient – the rest would come of its own accord. But since I had completely lost track of the connection, I despaired of ever finding out what Babamüll was.

Los Angeles, 10 January 1943

I was visiting an American brothel. It was a large, distinguished-looking establishment. Even so, anyone who entered had to undergo endless formalities. He had to register, fill in a questionnaire, and speak to the madam who ran the place, her assistant and finally the woman in charge of sales. By the time it came to making a choice, it turned out that the administration occupied almost the entire brothel, so that the girls were left with nothing more than a small, untidy communal room. It reminded me of the hotel room of some travelling virtuoso where the unmade bed has to serve as a seat for the all too numerous visitors. The girls felt very cramped. There were no more than five or six of them, all either unprepossessing or downright ugly. Only one of them seemed pretty to me; she was cowering on the bed, naked but otherwise quite harmless. She was called Eads. (Motif: Wildgans's Sonnets to Ead. The previous evening I had written a sonnet for R.) She had only one flaw: she was made entirely of glass, or perhaps from the same elastic, transparent synthetic material that my new braces are made from. One could even see through her head. She was not actually dead, but had a sort of life, though not a real one: it seemed to be connected with the suppleness of the material. I couldn't make up my mind whether to have her. Of course, I did not fail to notice that the woman in charge of the girls was herself very attractive, although somewhat plump. I explained to her politely that I trusted she would not feel insulted, but her position in the brothel made me feel that she would be free from prejudices, and that since she was so much more attractive than her protégées I would like to ask her if she wouldn't like to do it with me (motifs: the madam in the Sphinx in Paris). She seemed flattered, but during the elaborate negotiations that followed, the dream went dark.

Fragments, Los Angeles, October 1944

There was a large party at which Trotsky was present. He was the centre of a group of disciples to whom he was lecturing in an animated and somewhat authoritarian fashion. The question arose of whether one should speak to him. I voted in favour, adding that one should not talk politics, but simply that it would be inelegant to cut such a renowned guest. – In an otherwise completely destroyed German city, I saw a giant, blackened church spire. Overjoyed, I exclaimed, ‘So the cathedral is still standing’, only to be told that this was not Frankfurt, this was Magdeburg. – A very pretty brunette kissed me with great skill. But she insisted on keeping her cigarette in her mouth during the kiss.

Los Angeles, 29 October 1945

Visit to Anatole France. A highly elegant lift – black as ebony – brought me up to his room or office. The door was ajar; the room, a corner room all in red. I knocked and France told me to come in right away. He was a tall, slim man in his early forties, smoothly shaven, with brown hair, quite unlike any of his pictures. He wore a black, strikingly well-tailored velvet jacket. The conversation turned first to his latest novel, whose title I still knew when I woke up, but then instantly forgot. This was followed by a discussion with sharply diverging views, polite, but uncomfortable. Then my glance fell on two photographs. One represented France himself, the second showed a lady very elegantly dressed in an old-fashioned way, with a plunging neckline, whom I instantly recognized as an actress and whose outstanding beauty I greatly admired. It was the writer’s mother. ‘I too am a child of the theatre’, I said to him: ‘my mother was a celebrated singer.’ At this moment the transformation took place. France, evidently delighted by my confession, changed before my eyes into a young, highly seductive woman with provocative breasts which pressed hard against the V-shaped neckline of her black lace dress, and long, black silk stockings. I kissed the top of her breasts, her mouth, played with her legs, and it was settled that from now on she would be my mistress. She asked whether she could come with me to the opera the following Tuesday – it was now Friday – to *The Marriage of Figaro*. I agreed enthusiastically. She said she wanted to go to the *matinée*, for children. This put me in a highly embarrassing position. I tried to explain to her that I had already

invited Maurice Ravel to that very same children’s performance. I gave her a highly rational account of the latter’s mental illness from which I concluded that he was only capable of enjoying performances for children, and this explained why I could not cancel the arrangement. But I had the feeling that this explanation did not go down well and woke up with the fear that my new love had already passed its highpoint before it could even blossom properly.

Berkeley, 24 March 1946

During the night before the decisive quarrel with Charlotte, I had a dream. As I awoke, I remembered her final words: ‘I am the martyr of happiness.’

16 June 1960

The night before I left [for Vienna], I dreamt that the reason why I cannot relinquish all metaphysical hope is not because I cling to life, but because I would like to wake up with G.