

*Giorgio de Chirico*

## Monsieur Dusdron

The town hall clock sounded the hour of ten. Monsieur Dusdron had just woken up in a very bad mood because he had dreamt unpleasant dreams. They were not really nightmares per se, but instead they were featureless dreams that brought on a sense of anxiety. In the first of his dreams, he had seen a rather sinister looking Spaniard with whom he had sometimes dealt with in business. He was seated backwards on a chair, applying lipstick while looking down on Dusdron with a sly look. In the second dream, he was in front of the steps up to an expensive hotel that belonged to a millionaire for whom he had once carried out some work. In the dream he had tried to get into the hotel where a sumptuous reception was taking place by trying to enter through a window that gave onto the garden. He was caught by surprise by the hotel maids and felt all the fears of a thief who had been caught, along with the fear of complicated and terrible punishments. Above all, he felt enormous shame that made him tremble from head to toe. Also because, as the maids were dragging him out of the reception room into the garden, he saw through the large glass doors the owner of the hotel, on the stairs, dressed in a magnificent, dark brown sports outfit. Monsieur Dusdron woke up feeling depressed about this dream. The room was dark even if it was ten o'clock in the morning, it was that season of the year, in the month of November, when fog occluded the light of the entire day. As such, in shops, offices and houses, the lights had to be kept on all day. Moreover, the shutters were sealed shut and the curtains that decorated the room were of thick dark ultramarine blue velvet which Monsieur Dusdron closed carefully every evening before going to bed. The noises of the city, of the traffic in the streets, of the people who were talking or whistling familiar tunes, arrived muffled through the walls, the shutters, the windows and the curtains. "Life" thought Monsieur Dusdron, that mysterious life that began every morning: "life".

Oh life, if your face  
Will be carved in gold and ivory  
At the entrance of my tomb!

Happy to have found these verses of his poem, he turned on the light to write them down on paper, the paper that was always there on the night table. Then he lit his pipe and continued to think: I have come back from meandering pathways with harsh rocks, full of underbrush and burrs. I have returned to this studio of life that I had abandoned for many years. I was interested in the beaches, to the delimiting lines that make up the shores of the sea because I thought that they looked like they might create real problems, even more problems, problems that require dedication. The only thing was that it was necessary to think of life. In order you haven't been killed or at least injured. In order your thoughts remain natural. It is not necessary to use a light that is too bright. Often the exigencies of life are in contrast with the environment in which we have to live, work, think of create.

A special and precise amount of different sources is necessary from which to draw inspiration. I know about the joy of discoveries and the bitterness of delusion. Yes, I remember well this day. This clear winter day that is distant. A heavy sense of tiredness weighed me down. A horizon of unbelievable purity shone with an eternal light and in the harbour the shadows of the morning lengthened immeasurably along the quays and down to the cafés where stewards waiting for embarkation were sleeping on the terrace in front of metallic tables. On the ship of my thoughts I took up once again my chimerical voyage according to the ideal itinerary that I had drawn up myself. This is how Monsieur Dusdron spoke to himself, while waiting through this fear, which was accompanied by a light bothersome colic that was slowly fading away: like a fermenting fog in the damp humour of the night that dissolves in the golden warmth of the first rays of sunlight of springtime. In place of the fear, he felt an integral sense of confidence growing within him, of a man who is well-shaved, with good shoes and well-dressed, and he touched his pocket and his wallet that he knows was full of large bank notes and cheques, identity card, an updated passport. He also knows that in the other pockets there are all the things that are necessary to a provident man, sound of mind and body when he leaves the house to enter upon this mysterious forest full of surprises, which is the large modern city. That is to say: a fountain pen, a pad of notes and addresses, a pencil sharpener, wood tubes containing iodine dyes, small rolls of rubberized taffeta, a watch, a compass, a box with at least six tranquilizer, a tobacco pouch with a pipe and Swedish matches, a piece of bent iron to touch in case he passes a funeral, or an individual.

And as such, Monsieur Dusdron continued to philosophize, until he looked at his watch and he saw that he just had time to jump on the bus to catch a Mass in celebration of the memory of a student at the Polytechnic school where the other students called him Melons-Monsieur Melons, to make fun of him. This was because he often talked of cucurbits that had a strong perfume and which he liked so much during the summer months. This nickname irritated him enormously, and once he became so furious in front of his schoolmate who continued to call him with this nickname Monsieur Melons. He pulled a razor out of his pocket; he opened the razor and jumped on the schoolmate with his eyes wide open and his jaw protruding. Who knows what would have happened to him if this young boy

that had been attacked so suddenly hadn't had the presence of mind to escape by running away zigzagging around the copies of ancient statues which decorated the halls of the school, under the fixed and distant smiling gaze of Zeus, of Juno and Hercules, so that he was able to flee his assailant and reach the anatomy hall where he closed the door with a double turn of the key.

He remembered all these problems that he had had to face with all the students of the Polytechnic school. With a sort of latent regret, they decided to celebrate his memory in a small church outside of the city located in the middle of an olive grove. When Monsieur Dusdron arrived, the Mass was just finishing. It was a beautiful, cold and clear winter's morning. It had snowed the day before and the ground was still white, and white patches, like flakes of cotton wool, hung on the branches and trunks of the trees. Some of the students, dumbfounded, looked most Dantesque. These trees gave the land a southern look, in contrast with the northern dark grey sky where heavy-seeming crows in couples flew and the ground was still covered in snow. After the Mass, the students left the church rubbing their hands that were red from the cold and raised their collars of the coats. Seeing as it was almost midday, they entered an inn and took a light lunch of bitter herbs, that had been washed and served with an oil, salt and lemon dressing, with olives and black bread. Each of them drank a cup of coffee into which they dunked biscuits. Even though it was a light lunch, it warmed them up and removed the sense of sadness they were feeling in the memory of the Mass and their fellow student, who had, in their thoughtlessness, become their victim. They had a guitar which they passed from student to student, and one of the students who played it knew a little music. They sang as a group and with the guitarist in front they went out singing sad love songs. Their feet sank in the snow. Every so often there was the cawing of crows and under the low sky their verses sung to the rhythms of the guitar dissipated in the frozen air.

The streets are white with snow  
And yet you see that I continue forwards always  
Oh young girl, keep our love going  
Because the world is very evil

Monsieur Dusdron had his coat thrown over his shoulders and walked beside the group of singers looking down at the ground with a thoughtful air. He was thinking of his past. He could see him, alone in this city with its various colours and he was following an ideal of escape. Off in the distance he could see himself in another city where in southern gardens under the clear sky of the winter days orange and mandarin groves shone in all their splendour like small lights lit up amongst the green and dark leaves.

Our torments are their joys  
Our tears are our treasure

Once again they were at the entrance to the city. Twilight had descended. Off to the horizon there was a long, low, clear red part that augured a beautiful day for the next

day. This made Monsieur Dusdron somewhat melancholy since he was extremely sensitive and feared bright, clear sunny days: "When the sun shines and when the sky is clear, it seems that our troubles become more pronounced, he said. This invisible stairway towards the unfathomable blue sky on which we climb, like a stairway leading towards trapezes where we plumb infinitely the world and life, or at least that which we believe to be the world and life: what we should call our world and life. From these ineffable ups and downs we jump into the unknown, and every jump weighs on our stomach and a dizziness overwhelms our senses; ever higher, ever forward, ever lower, ever backwards, ever deeper, back and forth. The years past and the years to come are all folly; a measure of time. But during my sleepless hours, I lay down in the early morning hours and I could feel the large city trucks that stopped in front of every city door to empty the contents of garbage containers. With these noises, I often felt a far off echo of eternity. The chastity of my internal life and you faithful servants, you who were my first teachers and who gave me my first taste of art, of fine painting, of love, tobacco, be blessed. If ever one day I can give back to you what you have given me. If ever I can express my recognition, and take you, one day, for a walk on a Sunday and take you to a café where I can offer you a croissant, some ice cream, a cup of chocolate with whipped cream. But please do not have it in for me. You must not have it in for me because in this sad sense of impossibility you will see that this feeling is the price I must pay for my destiny for the very pure joys that I experienced in your company and for the new horizons that opened up before my surprised eyes: these eyes of a philosopher and a poet when I saw you ready for the carnival dances. The consequences, the sadness and the shame of delusions for this adopted, only child for whom we made many sacrifices and whom we thought, when he became an adolescent that we could help study law or mathematics in order that he could become a lawyer or an engineer. However, one morning, upon entering his room we found his bed empty, his sailor's clothes on a chair and this letter left for us to find on the fireplace that explained everything: "I'm leaving, because down there, they are offering me more; this ship owner (yes, he of the short legs and the long blond moustache) has made his city available to me". Yes, our little one had escaped like a villain in the same way a traitor would flee. And now he is in that city where they wear stiff military uniforms; these intransigent military men and this boy from high up on the enormous cupolas looks down to take in the distant polyphonic sounds of the formidable orchestras coming from noisily caves, down there where they are all in rows. They are in straight lines, disciplined and they are formidable orchestras directed by thick-haired conductors with the frowns of epileptics who push ever higher the sublime melodies of eternally unwritten symphonies. Monsieur Dusdron is thinking of this prodigious child slowly, tenderly, without anger or hate, and tears came to eyes. Rarefied and dusty tears ran down his cheeks slowly, as he stood on a balcony like an athlete resting. From this pose, he followed the course of his sad memories. Monsieur Dusdron then realized that he had to force himself to take a distance from these sad thoughts and thus made himself think of joyful and gay scenes such as bear hunting, small welcoming castles lit

up in the evening under a late autumn frost, bars full of people, big shops full of practical objects and magnificent and wonderful games. This joy and happiness that he had been searching for with an implacable stubbornness seemed to have been realized. But unfortunately, it was a slow process which he savoured parsimoniously. Thus, Monsieur Dusdron, egged on by curiosity, continued on behind the backstage curtains searching to see onto the stage of this strange theatre. The trees whose heat exaggerated their bitter perfume and which were the only covering of a sombre and damp gorge where the fiery rush of cold waters could be heard. And then suddenly, an oasis. The horizon opened up. Large trees with their entwined and dense foliage carried out a round dance upon green meadows where the finally calmed river changed into silver garlands. Above this unexpected park, close to a small waterfall that seems to be issuing from a rock, there was a completely white sanctuary. Monsieur Dusdron's mother was there looking young again. She was sitting on the soft grass in a meditative pose like a biblical figure. In the sky, dawn was shining and lit the world up softly so as not to cause shadows. Then the scene changed. It was midday. The sun shone over the countryside of yellow wheat. Far off the cover of a car slid away slowly. All throughout the air was a sense of torpor. No birds cried, and no insects buzzed. Monsieur Dusdron thought of the vanity of his sacrifices, the debts he had paid up, his future engagements and his lost reputation. Instead of complaining, he remembered the beginning when from a window of the ground floor he let go a pistol shot. The bullet was still in the wall of a small café located across the street. He escaped to a far off place, towards the northern countryside thinking that he had fled destiny's manhunt. In a room without iron in this farmer's house during a night of insomnia where water transformed into ice and broke the carafes he went to the window in order to breathe because he was suffocating. In spite of the very cold temperatures, his forehead was burning. With his face at the farmhouse window he watched outside into the deep night. The numerous stars shone way up in the black ink sky.

Some of the stars shone in groups while others formed lines and yet others shone individually at great distances. There was one part that was very bright that went from the central part of the sky to the south that forked off above his head. Among these clear patches, there were big empty spaces and the firmament seemed to be a large blue sea with archipelagos and islands. He remembered what he had read or heard said: behind the Milky Way there are nebula, above which there were more and more stars. The nearest one was at a distance of three hundred billion myriamètres. He looked towards the Ursa Major that he had always pleased him; he looked for the Polar Star, and Cassiopeia whose constellation formed a Y-shape, and Vega of the Lyra constellation, all shiny, while far off in the low horizon, the redness of Aldebaran. For this he had to evoke the past that beyond all appearances would not reappear on the stage of his memory. It was necessary, for actions lasting from many years and that allowed the true guilty parties to partake in criminal deeds, to proceed to different proofs of Order as well as that on the other side where we all look for the compensation of a job that was both heavy, if not dangerous. Monsieur

Dusdron closed the window and went back to bed and to warm up put on all his clothes, his overcoat, a carpet stained with ink that was on a table embroidered with Hindu warriors waving torches and pushing elephants forwards that were in front of them. He also added some old newspapers taken up from an old wardrobe that were mouldy. The night air had done some good to him and after turning over again two or three times he fell asleep and began dreaming. It was still night but the stars had all disappeared and he found himself in a type of park or public gardens of a surprising banality and Romantic aura. Everlasting ruins could be seen, along with sanctuaries, moss, caves, tiny bridges, and farmhouses placed here and there near gently babbling brooks. At one point there was a sort of Rialto which went over a basin whose borders were encrusted with mussel shells, through which went dark pathways and deserts where Monsieur Dusdron walked holding his shoulders and hugging a girl that had a melancholy yet intelligent air. It was the daughter of the woman he loved. It was "his daughter" thought Monsieur Dusdron in the dream, a thought which sent waves of infinite sweetness through his heart. The landscapes that he had loved appeared in his memory that combined both dream and reality, along with all the toys taken out of their cardboard boxes, painted shiny toys on the dining room table. There were lead soldiers, small houses, small boats with wheels. All the palpable joy he could carry with him. All the sureties of happiness that even the gods, including those with silky white beards that had an ineffable glance. These gods with distant eyes smiling without understanding anything, who know everything and who hesitated in giving their indecipherable signatures at the bottom of solemn sheets of paper marked by destiny and the seals of Eternity. They bit at their beards and scratched their chins under their beards with a thoughtful air. But once we have it we can be calm and Monsieur Dusdron knew this. This was why he was sat confidently on a bench even though there was a heat the weighed down the air everywhere; despite this anxiety due to this sweet laziness of a Sunday and the sadness of a summer day. Before him lay the valley in which a river flowed meanderingly along the valley bed. There were blocks of red granite erected here and there and at intervals larger rocks that formed a natural sheer cliff above the countryside covered with fields of ripe grain. On a hill located before him the vegetation was so dense that the houses could barely be seen. The trees formed unequal square plots in the middle of the grassy area.

The trees formed dark, clean lines. To the right there was an estate that seemed to be have been painted on a canvas, as well as some roofs with tiles that indicated a farm. The castle with the white façade was situated in the middle with a wood on behind and a meadow that went down to the shore with a line of poplars that reflected in the water. "Ah, nature" thought Monsieur Dusdron, upon which he saw another scene in front of him: some deserted beaches and milky, and calm seas, while off to the horizon there was the hot sun, tragically alone, which was setting into the humid, red twilight. Sometimes the horizon steaming, a monstrous animal with the head of a parrot, an enormous and black mass like a mountain emerged slowly from the water dragging itself along the sand among the shells moving them



with great effort, some of which even moved. After this, he saw calm lakes surrounded by dark, stark firs. Behind some tall mountains some tops showed with long crevices that were covered with snow that had the colour of white lava. At the top of a prominent rock there was a waterfall that led down to the lake. Even though it was a long way off Monsieur Dusdron could hear the noise it made, especially since all around was tranquil and there was total silence in the still air. But not even for this scene would Monsieur have renounced the company of men, nor the spectacle of young tailors who worked late into the night in order to provide for a sick father. They worked with their needles under lamplight while their thoughts were elsewhere. They thought about their girlfriends, lovers, and betrayal; about the young mother carrying her baby in her arms hiding behind the columns of the church, while the organ played the wedding march and he was in a white suit giving his arm to the bride dressed completely in white and crowned with orange blooms as they passed, followed by the inevitable parade of parents, friends and guests. Then Monsieur Dusdron saw himself at his father's home. His father's desk was on the ground floor and looked out onto the gardens. When it was stormy you could see, through the window, the black masses of trees that moved and darkened the room. On the walls were framed photographs of locomotives and in the engineer's post there was a man smiling, wearing a melon-coloured hat.

"After all" thought Monsieur Dusdron, "it's everyone for himself, this is the law that governs the world" while at the same time he had missed many occasions. The joy that he could have experienced in front of this spectacle of intrepid and numerous young men precipitating to the boats in order to reach their ships that were sounding their bells loudly was not enough to calm his mind that had become bucolic and calm due to an act of God. They were enough rather the large centres where the mechanical instincts of millions similar to him converged, day and night, an exasperated crowd fought for their lives and tossed and turned in harmonious groups carved in stone and whose cube shaped bases representating dancing, music and poetry. "To be satisfied on oneself is not all," thought Monsieur Dusdron. "One must have a series of small victories that assure one's position in life and raise the necessary barriers around oneself in order to protect ourselves from attacks of people similar to us, and which will happen sooner or later". He could no longer escape. He was lying in bed and looking out the curtainless window, a window that reminded him of the eves of departures for the countryside in the summertime, and he experienced something similar to the fear of exams, the laughter of girls who made fun of him, and military service. Perhaps happiness had another aspect. Perhaps it was mixed up with an indefinable fear; with the surprise that comes from seeing fish in an underground river, or the surprise of going to live with a family where we go to work as a professor of drawing at a public school in the middle of a melancholic and common city set off from the rest of the world at the bottom of a valley surrounded by high and stark mountains. It was there, finally, that Monsieur Dusdron could have a serene, joyful interior life. In the morning he could get up early and after drinking *café au lait* he could walk to the school to get some exercise.

From nine to ten o'clock he would have held his drawing lessons and then he would have corrected his students' works. He would have given them his advice on how to work with shadows in pencil by criss-crossing parallel lines. Then he would have walked for two hours among the plaster casts and lithographs of Roman peasants, expressive heads, of Alexander the Great, of the Belisaire, and of feet in different positions or virile hands of warriors holding clubs, or drawings of orator's hands held out towards invisible crowds, making a gesture to emphasize his words. Or a crowd of women in gracious poses, lifting their veils or holding a child to their breasts. At eleven o'clock the lesson would be over and Monsieur Dusdron would go walking in the harbour to see the departure of ships full of armed men; or he would have gone to talk to the sirens who appear every day towards midday and who rise up with difficulty on the dock's blocks under construction. With their hands on their chins they would watch the smoking factories with an air of nostalgia, or look at the numerous houses as they listened sadly to the noises of the life that they would never know. And it is the most beautiful of sirens that Monsieur Dusdron was thinking about continuously. He saw her as one sees figures in a dream: with a low voice, cracking with emotion, she would speak of her son Alfredo whom she had named rather melodramatically Alfredo. She had left him down there in this distant, somewhat uncivilized city. She wanted him to become a painter because the child, even at the age of eight, demonstrated a talent for painting. When he had received a box of watercolours as a gift, he painted a drawing of a magnificent tiger's head on a piece of paper. Everyone who saw this head agreed that its ferocious expression was terrifying. Another time he was dining in a restaurant with his uncle who, after some bad speculating, had money problems and the boy rescued him from a very difficult position. When the waiter brought the bill, the uncle realized he did not have enough money, the boy blackened a plate with a match and with his uncle's tie pin he drew two horses' heads. His drawing was executed with such talent that the owner of the restaurant took the plate and said he would be very happy to be paid with the drawing. However, Alfredo's career did not worry, at least for the time being, Monsieur Dusdron. He had many other problems and there was no great hurry. What people say counts little, as well as (...) and Monsieur Dusdron did not trust prodigious children but he made a mistake over Alfredo because he thought this was something else. He thought the child simply had talent. Then, thought Monsieur Dusdron, this happens to the child of a siren. I myself have heard that the children of sirens have many opportunities in life and they never run the risk of falling in love with a woman. They are immune to this danger since they are always in love with their mothers. Besides, sirens remain young for a long time and I remember very well hearing once from a navy captain, who knew a child of a still attractive, sixty-year-old siren. The captain attributed her longevity to the action of salt water and that is why he made his wife in the sea take baths in the sea water even in the winter. He poured into her bathtub some buckets of salt water fetched by the servants avoiding that they had once been imprudent enough to fill their buckets with water close to the quay, a place that gave good reason to fear typhoid. 1)



With regards to sirens, Monsieur Dusdron knew more than others due to the fact that he would lose himself in metempsychotic dreams where he imagined once that he was Ulysses and that he had his ears plugged up so as not to be seduced by the charm of irresistible songs.

There was another image that often haunted his mind. In the beginning he tried to persuade himself that he was remembering a painting, or images that he had seen once and that he had forgotten, both the time and place. Afterwards, due to the emotion provoked by this image in his mind, he understood that he was remembering a previous life. He saw an ancient beach that was beautiful and serene. The sky was reddish orange and it reflected in the mirror of the sea thus giving it the same colour. The horizon had a line that was a fiery red colour. The sky had some small clouds whose roundness was accented by purplish shadowing, and which floated across the sky here and there like sheep in a pasture. On a prominent rock there was a white stain of a sanctuary. In front of him, on the beach among some bases of columns buried in the sand and whose presence signalled the destructibility of human constructions, there was a group. A young warrior held the reins of a big white horse whose overly large and incredibly thick tail dragged on the ground. On the other side an old athlete was leaning on a rock, a type of Hercules in repose, who, with a thoughtful and tired air, looked off into the distance at the sea. "Memories of past lives in the eternal present connect you to my life," thought Monsieur Dusdron. "Memories of that which was and that which will be, watch over laborious visions oh you, sleep, that every night take me softly into your arms. Oh my sleep that is heavy and slow like a large river! The wave where I will sleep gets closer as I age. If only I could sleep there.

Sleep will be long and sweet, and on my unmoving head springtime after springtime will flower while the storms pass by with the wind and the stars. And a cadenced march will sound for the groups of warriors of future wars, along with the implacable buzz of flying machines. And then there will be a very gentle peace. Men dressed in white will go here and there smiling, doing light and complicated work until the day when the entire Earth will once again be a desert, after the last men and the last animals will lay down in their final resting place. The rivers will dry up and the vast seas will disappear. There will be only arid, still rocks everywhere and all will be peaceful and silent under the grand, starry sky."

Monsieur Dusdron came out of his dreams and began to observe the landscape around him. He walked slowly, smoking a pipe, while watching the slow-flowing river that was very large and muddy. In certain parts it shone with the rays of the September sun. The right shore provided a contrast with the steeper left shore where there was a long beach that was all foamy due to the light undertow. In the distance there were enormous fields of wheat and corn, along with square tracts of orchards. There were well-positioned irrigation canals everywhere that took in and sent out water profusely. Beside the villages with their greyish homes, groups of trees scattered here and there.

Among these old trees there were old apple and eucalyptus trees with burnt

leaves due to the recent dog days of summer. There were many fishermen seated taciturnly along the shore watching every little movement of their fishing line floats of cork. At every sound of the sirens of the boats that passed, ducks, crows, ravens, woodpeckers and sparrow hawks flew up among the long grasses. Even though the big road that ran along the shore was empty, the movement of boats up and down the river did not diminish. There were torpedo boats with their grey painted canons, some of which were covered with waterproof tarps. There were the customs boats, large merchant ships and pleasure yachts pulling dinghies that looked like small toys.

Nevertheless, the villages became less frequent. Along the shores there were square ovens that gave off dirty smoke that melded into the smoke of the steamboats. Night fell gently. After a short while, the uniform and symmetrical white dunes disappeared in the twilight. Monsieur Dusdron realized that he had arrived in the salt marches. In this arid land, the estuary of the river opened up. "What a sad landscape," thought Monsieur Dusdron, "where all is salt, dust and powder!" There was a small café open alongside the road with chairs around tables in front of the door. Monsieur Dusdron sat down at one of the tables and called for a waiter in order to have something to eat. Then he turned to look inside the café to see whether he had been heard. The inside of the café, especially for someone like Monsieur Dusdron who was used to the strong light of the outdoors, seemed totally black and he could not see anyone. But we have to remember that it was easy to see Monsieur Dusdron for those inside. Thus, there was a strong shout of joy coming out of this black trunk, immediately after which, at the threshold of the door there appeared a very white-skinned, young man who came out to shake Monsieur Dusdron's hand heartily, announcing how happy he was to see Monsieur Dusdron again after so much time. He was a young painter that Monsieur Dusdron had known two years earlier and with whom he had often talked about the technique of painting.

Because Monsieur Dusdron was very interested in this technique of painting and he was strongly contemptuous of all these artists who ignore the technical side of painting, dismissing it as so much "cooking". He had even written a short essay on pictorial technique that had been well received by the experts. Monsieur Dusdron asked the young man to sit down and after asking about his and his parents' health he lit up a cigarette. After a pause, and as if in prayer, he said: "You will not believe how happy I am, my dear friend, after a week in these parts. My mind is ever active travelling in a sublime heaven of poetry and I have the impression that I have been infused with something rich, grand and perfect. Just a week I ago I was able to realize one of the most beautiful dreams of my life. You probably know of this acropolis at about fifty kilometres distance from here and which rises up against the sky in the whiteness of its ruins. I think that I have already told you how many times I have visited it and how many hours I have passed losing myself in my dreams in front of these sublime ruins of the past. The thing I was looking for - the dream I held most dearly - was to spend a clear moon-

light night there. This was not an easy venture because after sundown, the guards close the gate, as one would close the doors of a museum. This is because this place is now considered like a museum and not as a place of poetry and meditation where anyone can enter as one would with a church. In my father's times when he was young, anyone could enter both day and night. Now times have changed. You must now pay an admission ticket during the day whereas at night, even if you really want to, you cannot enter. Alas, the times have changed.

I have seen men go in and out of their houses  
 I have seen the gentle flowers opening up  
 I have learnt the great laws that are based on numbers  
 I have carved upon rocks in the darkest of caves  
 When the wind complained near the sleeping people  
 I thought of the old gods as one would think of ants  
 And everywhere where vagabond lives moan  
 Where the remains of ships float upon the waves.  
 An eternal task that gets carried out over time and  
 Unites the present with the sweet dreams of long ago.

I could not take it anymore and I tried to think of a way in which I could get into this place in order to pass the night there. I remember having noticed more than once those insects that frighten me a lot. They are called scolopendra (or more commonly, millipede) and when they flee along a wall to escape danger and run into a stain of their same colouring they stop there because they feel as if the danger has passed since they are no longer visible. The quail does the same thing. My father who was a great hunter explained to me that when this bird, with its disconcerting looking head, finds himself on ground similar in colouring to his feathers, it will stop in its tracks and will not move even if a hunter approaches. Sometimes my father would walk by a quail without seeing it.

Thinking about these curious phenomena concerning animal instincts as well as those of insects, it came to me to dress in white so that I would be less visible in the midst of the white ruins and columns. I looked for a sailor's uniform made completely of white cloth and I shaved carefully and powdered my face and I placed a pair of light cotton gloves in my pocket. Thus, one afternoon when I knew that there was going to be a full moon, I paid my admission ticket and went into the acropolis. I climbed up the sides of the temples and sanctuaries and looked out over the landscape and concentrated on the comings and goings of the tourists. I waited impatiently for time to pass and closing time to arrive. In the meantime, the sun was sinking low into the horizon. The noises of the city that came from down below, the grand buzzing of the hive began slowly to diminish in intensity, and soon I heard the nasal voice of a guard who dragged his syllables, yelling at intervals. "We are closing". The fatal moment had arrived. With the air of one who is going, the most natural air in the world, I went towards the exit, but instead I hid behind a pile of ruins. I quickly removed the black shoes I was wear-

ing and put on a pair of tennis shoes. I put on my white cotton gloves and then I hid myself in such a way as to be the least visible possible. I waited. To the east, behind the purple line of mountains the full moon rose; it was magnificent, luxurious and regal, giving a sense of completeness. A true summer's full moon. The moon slowly rose and yet was still enveloped in the haze of the heat. The sky darkened. I felt that the last tourist had already left the acropolis, but I decided not to move away from my hiding place until the night had completely arrived. This was a smart thing to do because a few minutes later I heard the footsteps of a guard who was slowly approaching the place where I was hidden. I felt a frisson of fear. The guard had arrived near my hiding place when he stopped. He did not see me even though he was only two feet away from me. He was slowly twirling his moustache and looking off into the distance. Then he turned around and spat on the ground and pulled out of his jacket pocket a pipe and a tobacco pouch. He started to fill his pipe slowly. There was a confusion of noise from the distance: bats were flying over our heads. I thought of the hunter who does not see the quail that is close by. The seconds seemed to be hours. I held my breath. Having filled and pressed the tobacco into his pipe carefully, the guard lit his pipe and then he moved slowly away towards the exit. I began to breathe again but I decided to stay completely still. I decided to stretch my legs only when I heard the guard closing the heavy gate at the bottom of the acropolis. In this way I understood that he had left and that I was finally alone. While waiting for night to arrive completely, there was only a little bit of light where the sun had disappeared. On the other side, where the humidity of the summer night had also disappeared, the moon had risen. It was an enormous full moon, clear and solemn. The moonlight lit up the front of the temples causing the columns to create long shadows on the ground. The silence intensified. I had the impression that a great awning had been pulled down over my head. The superhuman masks of the ancient gods appeared to me as giant plaster casts on the roof of the sky and they had got closer to me. They were smiling. I felt as if I could touch them with my hand. An unlimited sense of trust imbued everything and in the intense gentleness of this summer's night I understood that evil had disappeared. Debts had been paid off, punishment abolished, bad dreams were buried down there in the burning sand of the condemned deserts. Everything that I had loved, everything that had been positive for me in my life closed in on me. I wanted to look down to see once again the lights of the city because all this happiness and this beauty began to worry me, but I didn't see anything. The haze, the gentle fog, had risen up from the ground and the acropolis was floating on this ocean of divine tenderness ~~like an island on an enormous and very gentle ocean~~, like a ship on the shore\*

*Translated from Italian by Mark Newman*