

The departure of the argonaut

[by] Alberto Savinio, [with illustrations by Francesco Clemente, English translation by George Scrivani]

Author

Savinio, Alberto, 1891-1952

Date

1986

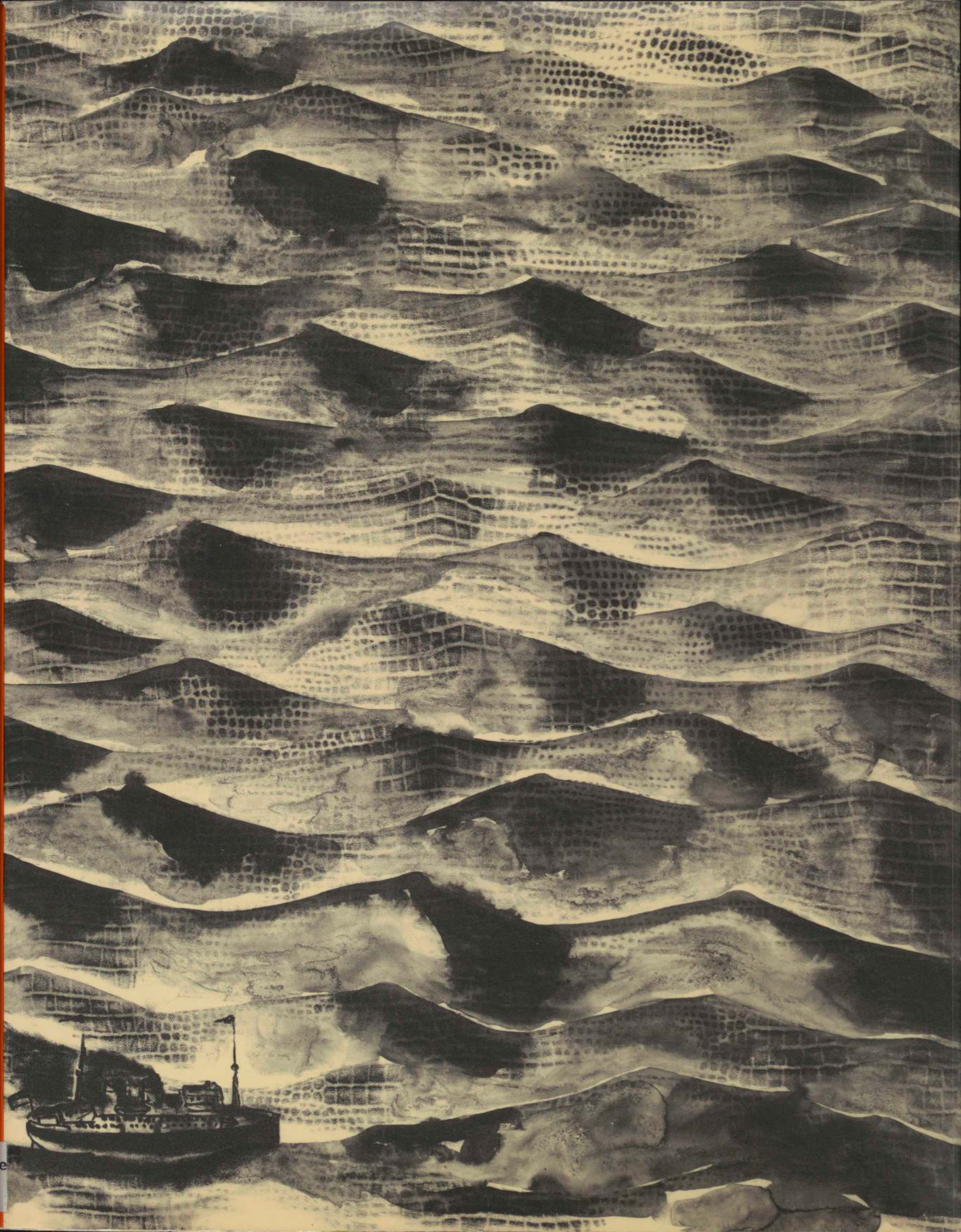
Publisher

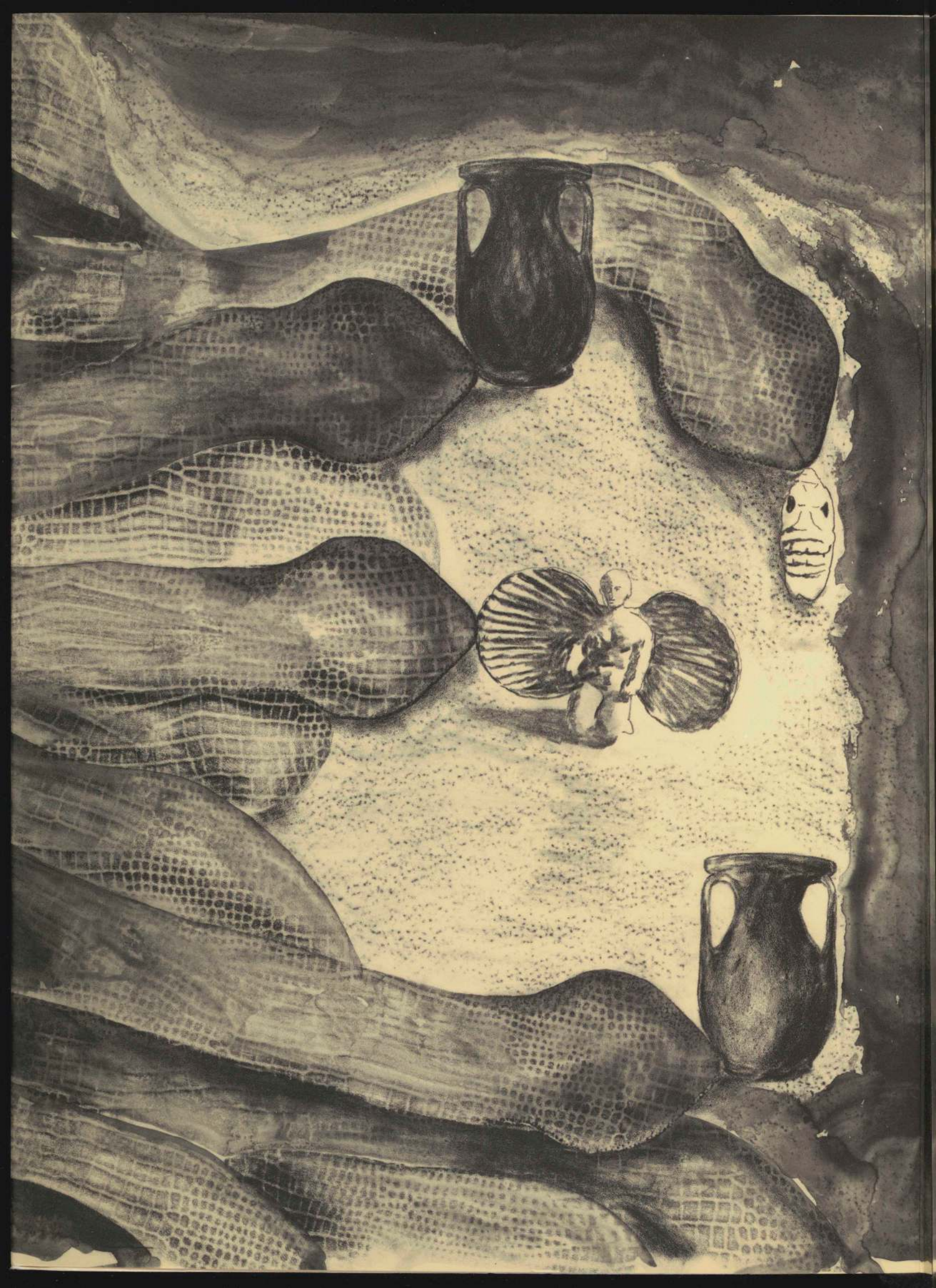
Petersburg Press

Exhibition URL

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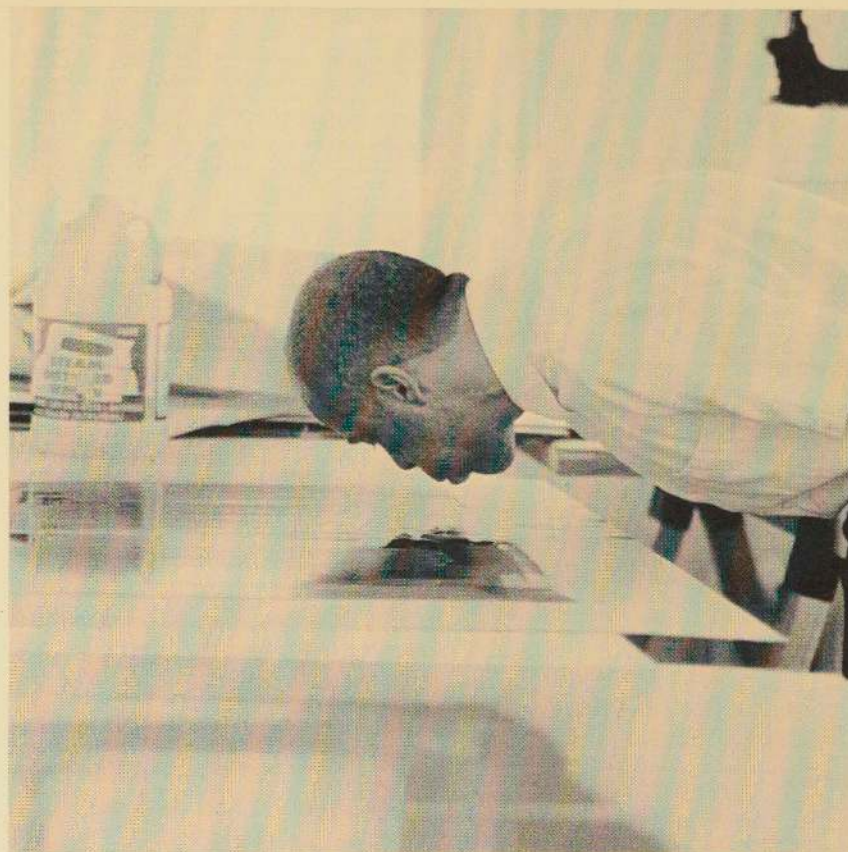


Photo: Elizabeth Mahoney

The Artist Francesco Clemente was born in Naples in 1952. His early education consisted of extensive travel (Scandinavia, Greenland, Turkey, Afghanistan and India), as well as wide readings in classical literature and philosophy. In 1970 he studied architecture briefly at the University in Rome, after which he stayed on, living among artists, poets, filmmakers and theater people. He first exhibited his paintings at the Galerie Gian Enzo Sperone in Rome in 1975. Since then he has enjoyed numerous oneman exhibitions, including those at the Sperone Westwater Gallery and the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London; Galerie Paul Maenz, Cologne; Galerie Bruno Bischofsberger, Zurich; and the Akira Ikeda Gallery, Tokyo.

Francesco Clemente's paintings, drawings, pastels, watercolors and prints are in many public and private collections worldwide, including amongst others The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Tate Gallery, London; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Kunstmuseum, Basel; and the Saatchi Collection, London.

"Francesco Clemente; The Fourteen Stations," was organized by the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 1983. Major museum exhibitions were mounted also in 1984 by the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, and the Kunsthalle, Basel. The Ringling Museum of Art, Florida is touring currently an exhibition titled "Introducing Francesco Clemente" which travels to selected American museums through 1987.

Clemente divides his time between New York City and Madras, India.

The Departure of the Argonaut

by Alberto Savinio, with illustrations by Francesco Clemente

This book reproduces in its entirety, in reduced format, the limited edition publication of *The Departure of the Argonaut*. For that publication, Francesco Clemente produced a series of forty-eight lithographs, embellishing each double-page spread of the text, in its first English translation.

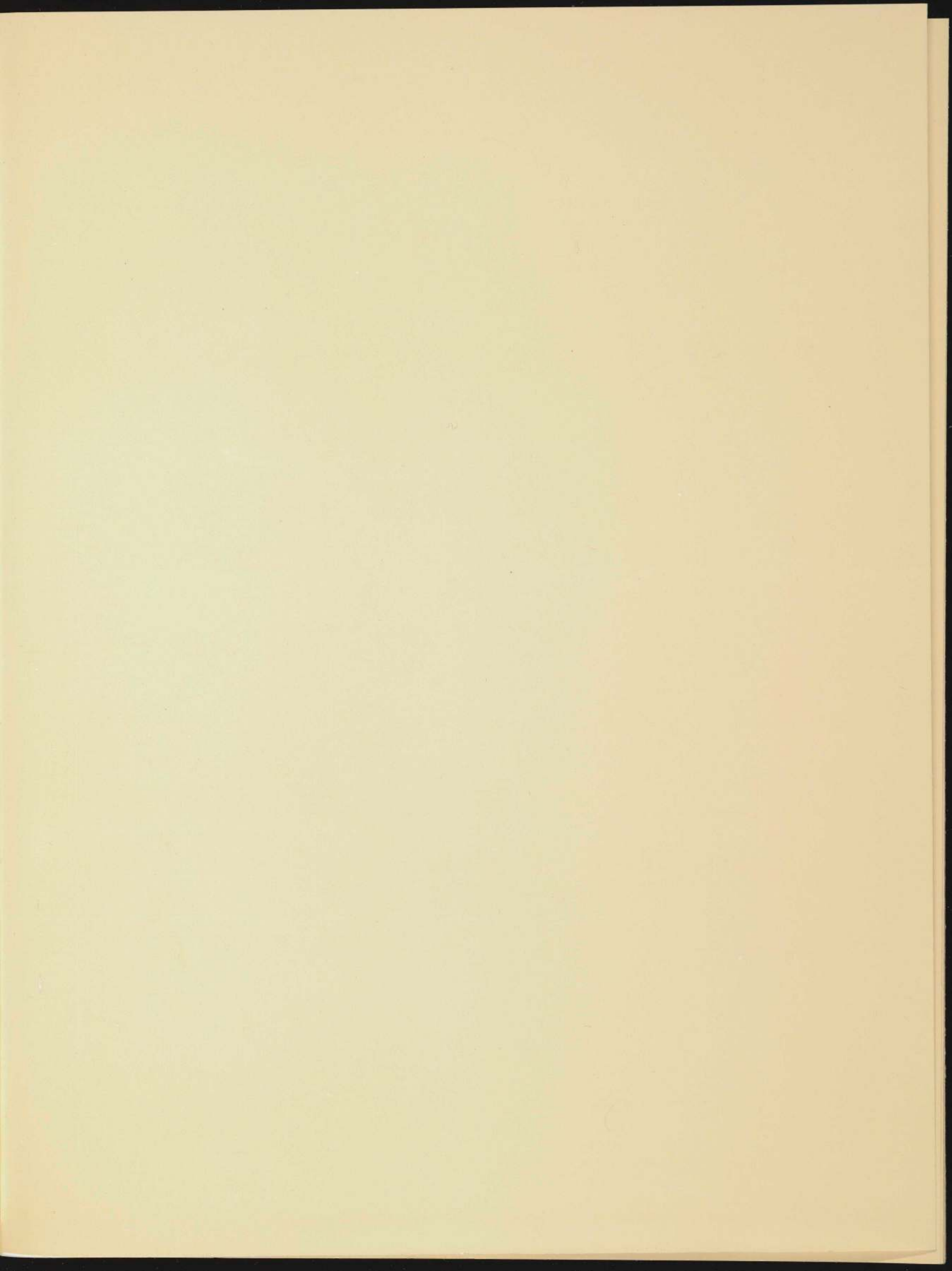
The Departure of the Argonaut (1918) is the travelogue and wartime diary of Alberto Savinio, one of the seminal figures in twentieth-century Italian arts and letters. Clemente's accompanying images transcend traditional illustration, providing a subtle balance between the fantasy of the artist and the visual ideas of the text. Each chapter is treated in a fresh and different style, and in each a unity of word and image is achieved that represents the art of the illustrated book at its most ambitious. Clemente has stated that during his work on this project he became fascinated, as never before in his career, with the technical aspects of printmaking. He has used a broad range of lithographic techniques and materials to produce a remarkable variety of visual effects. His illumination of the text is a richly personal work, inventive, witty and elegant.

The English translation is by George Scrivani, whose notes on the text appear on the back flap of this jacket.

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Cover: Reproduced from a lithograph in four panels, each 65 x 50 cms., drawn by Francesco Clemente in 1986 for this edition.

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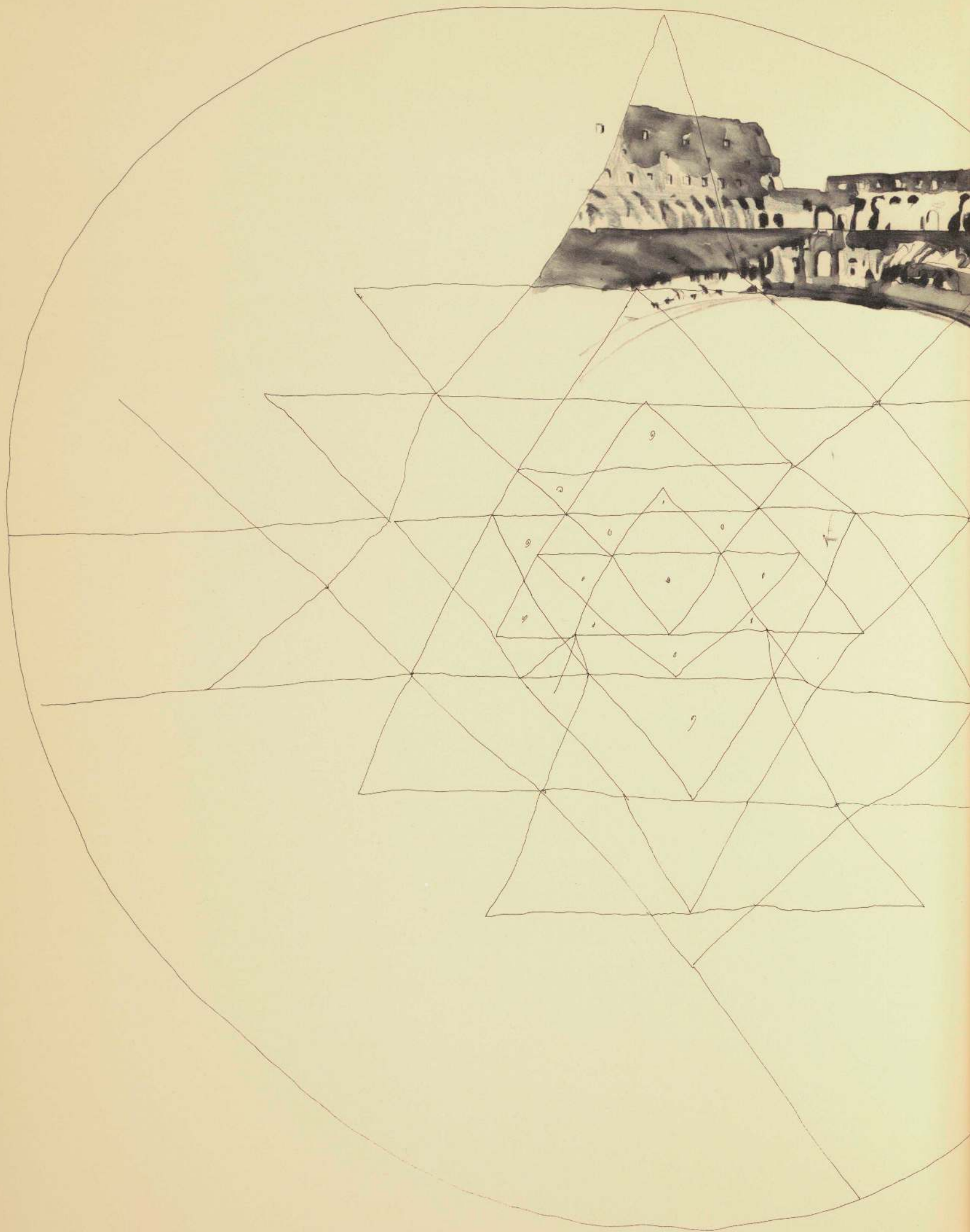
Alberto Savinio

THE
DEPARTURE
OF
THE
ARGONAUT

Francesco Clemente

Petersburg Press

1986





Chapter I


Under the station roof, in the heavy, painful shadows of heat peculiar to the hour immediately following midday, I catch sight of the light brown eyes of my brother. I watch him zigzag through a crowd that views my departure with indifference. But for us and the burning circle of our affections, it takes on the solemnity of an act of fate.

A jolt rattles my delicate stomach; an obvious sign that the train has begun to move.

On the hemp-yellow horizon nothing remains but spires: the herculean campanile and the square towers of Ferrara.

Despite all efforts to acquaint myself with the more sceptical philosophies – beyond what is natural to me – I still can't master that prickly, indefinable sensation which takes hold of a traveler at the beginning of every journey. Every hint of pragmatism vanishes from my soul and I feel as if I'm suddenly tumbling back through the sepulchral centuries until I find myself in the situation of the troglodyte, pitted against some terrifying phenomenon, some vague doom. Deep in my instincts, insufficiently cauterized by the theory of positivism, primitive fear – that incubator of superstitions – is born again inside me. I anxiously search the brown horizon of the city for the frivolous little balls of the astronomer Bongiovanni. I catch sight of them far off, cheerfully turning in the powerful glint of the sun, and with their aid I cast lucky horoscopes and happy auguries for the uncertain outcome of my ultramarine voyage.

Encouraged, I swiftly travel back up the order of the centuries descended but a moment ago and situate myself once again under the sun of our own epoch of splendor and conquest. My good humor returns and, seeing that I've passed the danger zone, I dangle from the train window to stick my tongue at Worbas, the enigma no longer to be feared. But in so doing I notice Ferrara has ceased to exist, and so I salute her: Goodbye, city of geometrical debauch!



I lack the requisite self-esteem to travel by express train: in one of those arrogant luxury convoys that split your ears when they rumble by, equipped with sleeping and dining cars and towed by two enormously bloated locomotives, set high atop paired wheels and crowned with stumpy smokestacks – horrible in the false impression it creates of being an ironclad battle station.

The train carrying me and my destinies is a modest, homely train. It's a long tapeworm of old black cars with little third class coaches at the rear and a fine old-fashioned steam engine in front which retains in its anatomy a certain familiarity with the early machines of George Stephenson: lean in the belly, slender in pistons, but with a fierceness to its smokestack, tightly pinched at the throat and full and dignified at lips covered with a sort of inverted sieve which bestows on it an imperial haughtiness.

My train has no fixed goal, has a capricious way of moving and takes on all the mathematical nomenclature of the railway timetables from its "16."

I'm amazed that it persists in remaining within the idiotic rigidity of the tracks, and await some stimulus for it to toss itself into the countryside, springing over hedges and the pointed tops of farmhouses, escaping through the fields to the hysterical flight of chickens and the furious howling of enraged dogs.

Nevertheless, I feel wonderfully calm, stirred by none of the sensations of speed and impatience which generally titillate the paying, voluntary traveler. I travel cost-free and at the command of the state, which instills in me a sweet serenity that is reinforced every time I touch the parchment warrant in the left-hand pocket of my jacket; a military document on which some man, undoubtedly powerful though unknown to me, has traced out my destiny with indelible characters.

My powers lie dormant since suspended above me I sense the

threat of a far greater power generated by and, as it were, associated with the triple phantom: Government, Army and Nation. This is the power that has set me in motion and directs me with a slow yet irresistible pressure, forcing me to bury my willpower and cherish the illusion that I'm amongst the Blessed in my apathy; it compresses my actual nature into the form of an infinitesimal molecule in the immense body of an army composed of flesh and bone and nurtured on the blood of all the sturdy manhood this great country has to offer.

I take a seat in the last coach which is very comfortable and copiously ventilated by such a long line of large windows that I experience the sensation of careening through the landscape on an electrified bench.

What's more, my coach is embellished at stem and stern with two charming balconies that are no longer built into the modern conveyance. Progress in the art of locomotion and commercial exigencies have degenerated that aimlessness which typified the Stendhalian voyage into a mere anxiety-ridden dash to one's goal.

My coach isn't crammed with malodorous humanity, as one might expect of a coach requisitioned for troop transport: we are but a few – a dozen – add to them a pair of identical guards with hands folded over the mouths of their carbines, standing rosy-cheeked and mindlessly bolt-upright at the front of the car, and a sailor who from force of habit perches on the railing of the rear balcony with the nautical elegance of someone about to hoist sail over the moorhead on the foremast.

A burly soldier lies on the bench opposite me with his head hanging upside down and his mouth wide open, looking like a seduced Holofernes. He has such a tragic look about him, such a stormy cast to his face, that I gather he's the victim of terrifying nightmares.

But I notice that his sleep hasn't taken him too far beyond reality, since like clockwork he's still capable of sticking his left hand under his



seat, to raise a two liter flask from which he guzzles red wine.

My neighbor drinks and sweats. The large drops of perspiration flow from the pores of his low flat forehead and irrigate the canal system of wrinkles in his face, then run down over his jowls and cascade onto a large neckerchief with a geographical print, opening onto the breast of his jacket, like the little bibs wise mothers put on their children around the time papa arrives.

The passengers – that is, these soldiers – are forever lying in wait, ready to pounce on the least trifle or frivolity they can dredge up out of the murky atmosphere into which they've been plunged by the monotonous din of the rolling wheels, punctuated at fixed intervals by a thud at the beginning of each new rail. It's no wonder I'm overjoyed to have discovered a pastime both amusing and edifying in the contemplation of the neckerchief on the giant beside me.

The neckerchief is storied with a marvelous representation of Italy. Firmly strapped to the heart of Europe by enormous gaiters, the fateful boot stamps, trim and quivering, into a bath of three seas. Under the triangle of Sicily, in the vastness of the Mediterranean, I see the shield of Savoy floating like a biblical ark. Along the right border, facing the Adriatic coast, I notice that there are many compartments, each of whose squares contain an eminent personality from the Risorgimento. With the mouth of a suckling child Cavour smiles at me beneath cunning eyes set in the middle of his globular cranium; but the Great King rises above his minister, looking absolutely furious; with petulant moustache, hair on edge, whiskers bristling, he stares at me in rage. I straighten to attention, but, higher up, it is the apostolically gentle Mazzini – smoothing the King's hair back into place with the greatest of care and rounding out the crescent shape of his beard who brings me back to calm and tranquility.

I raise my eyes to the celestial compartment which shows the draping of this historical poncho to best effect. But, what's this? The

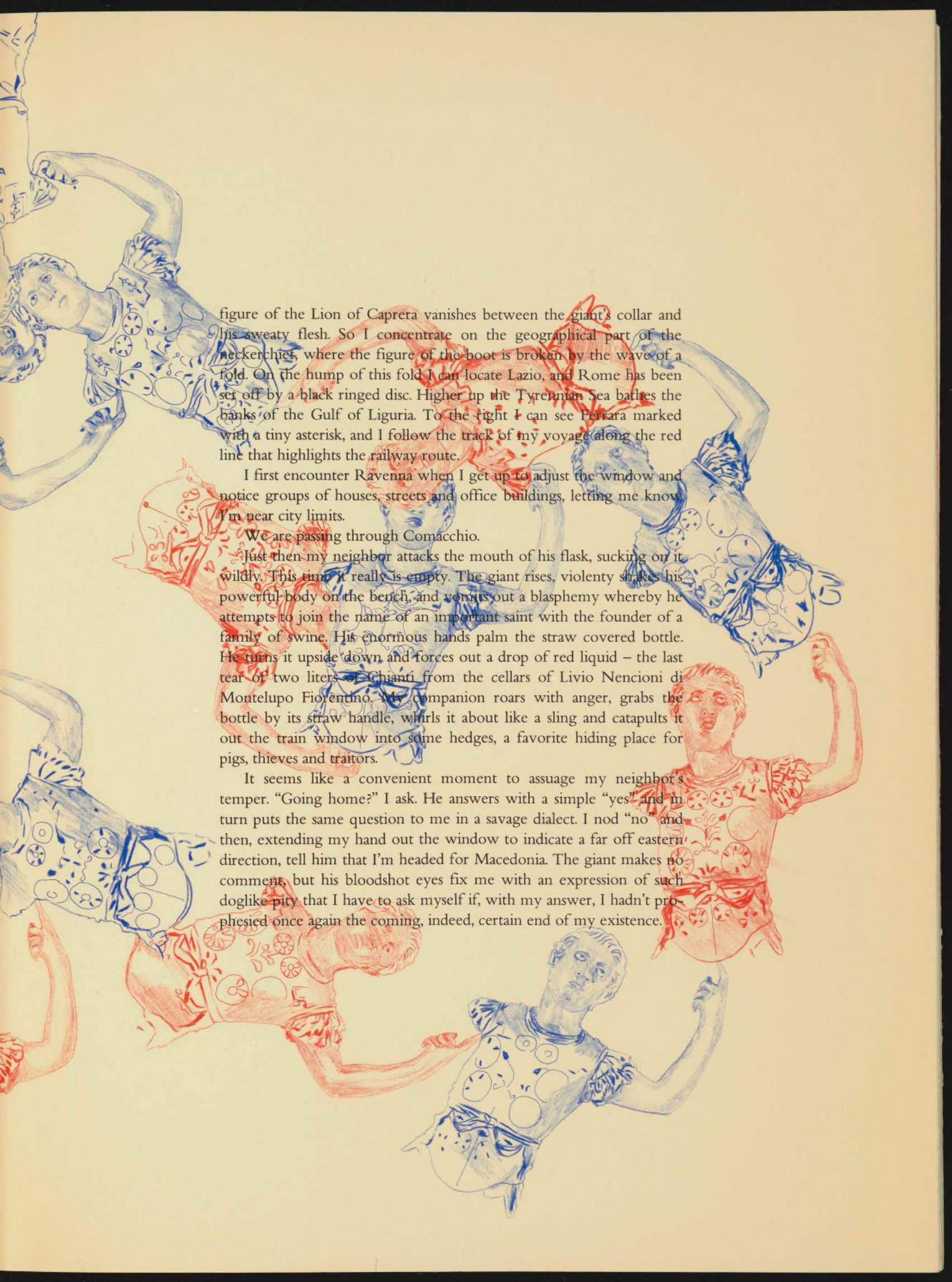


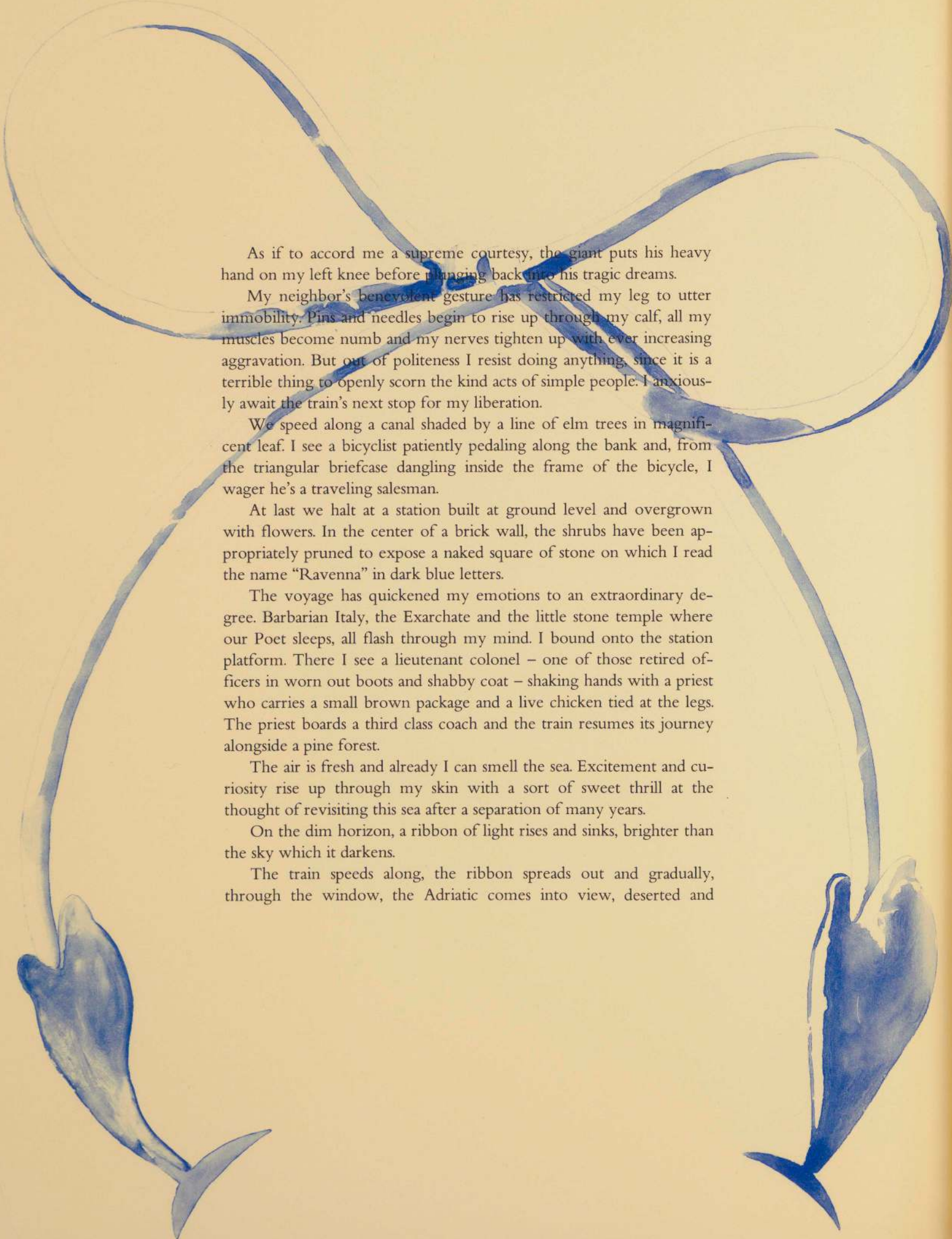
figure of the Lion of Caprera vanishes between the giant's collar and his sweaty flesh. So I concentrate on the geographical part of the neckerchief, where the figure of the boot is broken by the wave of a fold. On the hump of this fold I can locate Lazio, and Rome has been set off by a black ringed disc. Higher up the Tyrennian Sea bathes the banks of the Gulf of Liguria. To the right I can see Ferrara marked with a tiny asterisk, and I follow the track of my voyage along the red line that highlights the railway route.

I first encounter Ravenna when I get up to adjust the window and notice groups of houses, streets and office buildings, letting me know I'm near city limits.

We are passing through Comacchio.

Just then my neighbor attacks the mouth of his flask, sucking on it wildly. This time it really is empty. The giant rises, violently shakes his powerful body on the bench, and vomits out a blasphemy whereby he attempts to join the name of an important saint with the founder of a family of swine. His enormous hands palm the straw covered bottle. He turns it upside down and forces out a drop of red liquid – the last tear of two liters of Chianti from the cellars of Livio Nencioni di Montelupo Fiorentino. My companion roars with anger, grabs the bottle by its straw handle, whirls it about like a sling and catapults it out the train window into some hedges, a favorite hiding place for pigs, thieves and traitors.

It seems like a convenient moment to assuage my neighbor's temper. "Going home?" I ask. He answers with a simple "yes" and in turn puts the same question to me in a savage dialect. I nod "no" and then, extending my hand out the window to indicate a far off eastern direction, tell him that I'm headed for Macedonia. The giant makes no comment, but his bloodshot eyes fix me with an expression of such doglike pity that I have to ask myself if, with my answer, I hadn't prophesied once again the coming, indeed, certain end of my existence.



As if to accord me a supreme courtesy, the giant puts his heavy hand on my left knee before plunging back into his tragic dreams.

My neighbor's benevolent gesture has restricted my leg to utter immobility. Pins and needles begin to rise up through my calf, all my muscles become numb and my nerves tighten up with ever increasing aggravation. But out of politeness I resist doing anything, since it is a terrible thing to openly scorn the kind acts of simple people. I anxiously await the train's next stop for my liberation.

We speed along a canal shaded by a line of elm trees in magnificent leaf. I see a bicyclist patiently pedaling along the bank and, from the triangular briefcase dangling inside the frame of the bicycle, I wager he's a traveling salesman.

At last we halt at a station built at ground level and overgrown with flowers. In the center of a brick wall, the shrubs have been appropriately pruned to expose a naked square of stone on which I read the name "Ravenna" in dark blue letters.

The voyage has quickened my emotions to an extraordinary degree. Barbarian Italy, the Exarchate and the little stone temple where our Poet sleeps, all flash through my mind. I bound onto the station platform. There I see a lieutenant colonel – one of those retired officers in worn out boots and shabby coat – shaking hands with a priest who carries a small brown package and a live chicken tied at the legs. The priest boards a third class coach and the train resumes its journey alongside a pine forest.

The air is fresh and already I can smell the sea. Excitement and curiosity rise up through my skin with a sort of sweet thrill at the thought of revisiting this sea after a separation of many years.

On the dim horizon, a ribbon of light rises and sinks, brighter than the sky which it darkens.

The train speeds along, the ribbon spreads out and gradually, through the window, the Adriatic comes into view, deserted and



shining like a vast sheet of rock on which huge mechanical butterflies dance.

Eagerly I search for a direct correspondence with my childhood memories and fix on two paired waves, thin as thread, which come into being at the opposite expanses of the shore and rush to cancel out their brotherly lives on the sands of the beach.

We cut through pathetic little bathing colonies. Cesenatico and Viserba, passing by on the left, are tiny margins of artificial life and forced happiness, which materialize and then fade away.

From high up on the bastion where the railroad tracks run, I spy fleetingly on intimate living room scenes.

It's dinner time and still bright out. Families sit in circles around tables set for the evening meal.

As I swell with pride that this train is taking me far away, towards destinies loftier than any of these people could face from behind the closed doors of their little baroque villas, on the shores of the Adriatic, between the months of June and September, the giant beside me opens an eye and curses the bourgeoisie.

An anemic looking girl stares out a window, gazing at the passing train with eyes so sad, you'd think this poor train of mine had snatched away her last hope.

Half-naked boys play tag through lanes lined with rows of dwarf poplars that lead down to the beach.

I feel I'm about to suffocate, but the train takes wing and I'm set free from the petty circle of all this misery. For me, humanity is more odious in the spectacle of its narrow-minded prosperity than in the darker visions of its real tragedies.

The beach is already deserted. On the polished mirror of the waters I see two tiny black points appear, disappear, reappear. A voice at the back of the coach cries out that it's the Germans, but the sailor perched on the balcony calls him an ass and informs us that they are

our own submarines defending our coast. The argument comes to nothing since it stems from rivalry between two branches of the Armed Forces.

Evening draws near. The open plain to my right is completely black. And look! A giant trapezoid composed of lights suddenly appears. We are passing by the airfield at Rimini where a seaplane takes off and performs pirouettes above our train.

My heroic companions remain unmoved. Some among them lean out the windows to watch, but without a trace of any real curiosity.

These few stare at the seaplane and the airfield, but they stare at it all with bull's eyes, that is, with the eyes of an animal appreciated while alive by myself and all philosophical men, and appreciated, when dead, by the entire community of anti-vegetarians as well.

With an exquisite naturalness these men show that they have already seen enough, that nothing more can surprise or astonish them. I must confess that I like the unconscious scepticism of my simple heroic companions. I really do!

When we arrive at Rimini it's quite dark. The men file out of the train and shut themselves up again in a dark station warehouse, under the armed supervision of the sentinels.

Roll call is interminable. I answer 'present', which sounds like a curse, to a stupid voice that's bungled my name, and then proceed to the back of the warehouse where there's a dim light and a quasi executioner in a T-shirt, selling stale cold cuts and moldy loaves of bread at the outrageous prices of a Lucas or a Larue.

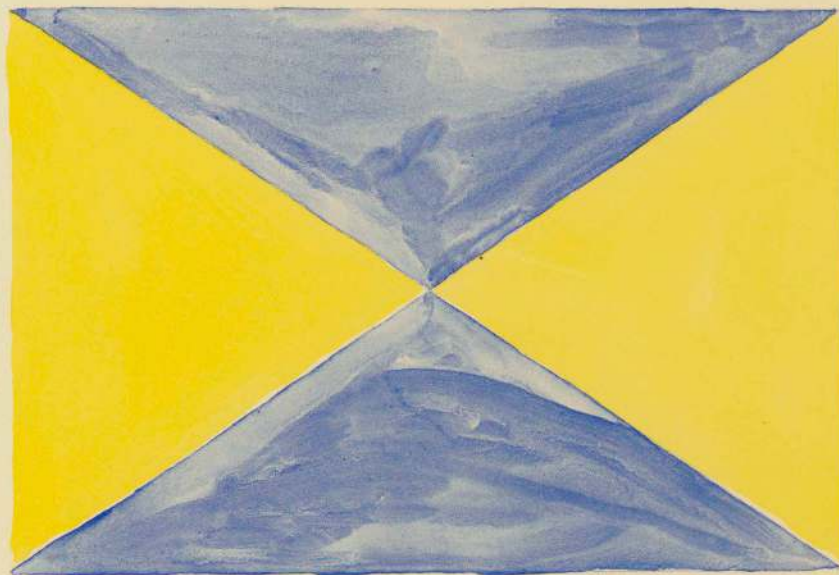
I dine on the bread and two rounds of stinking pigs feet, sipping a tepid Fontanella.

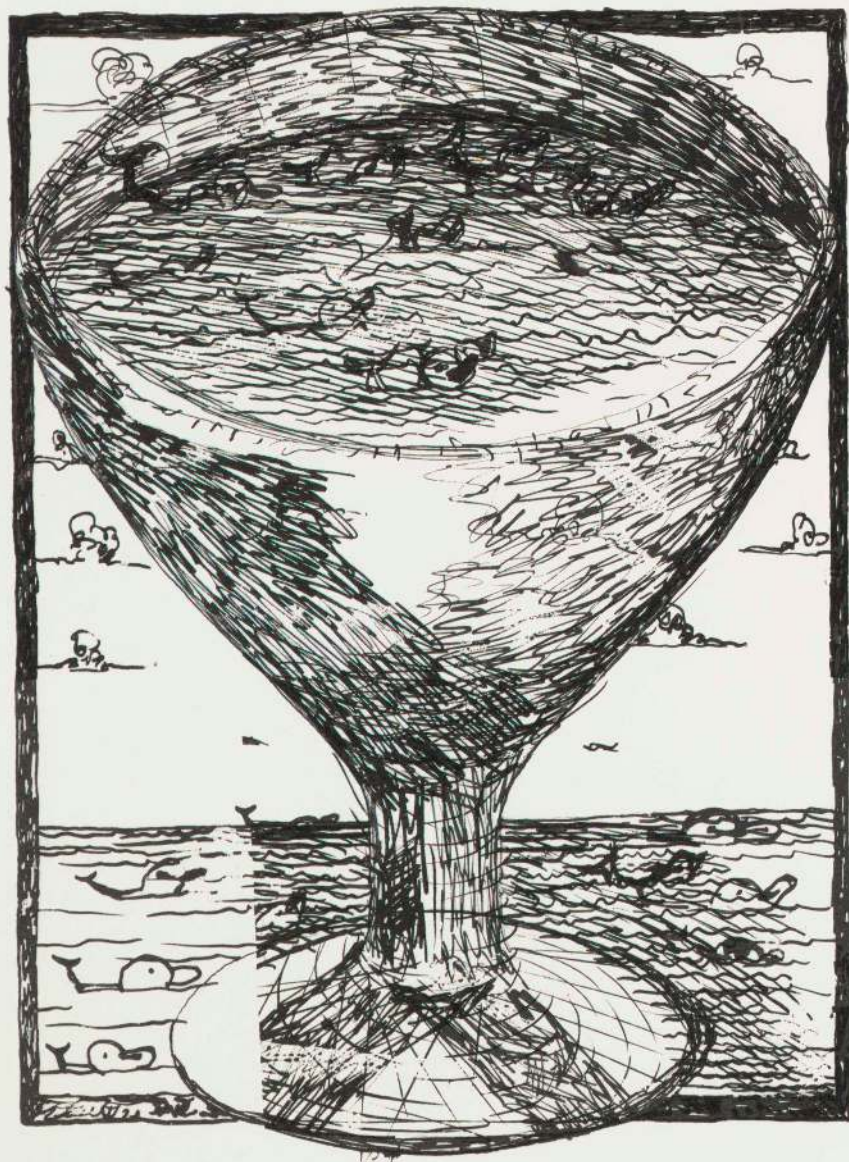
I'm getting tired, so when everyone gets back on the train now bound for Ancona, I search for an isolated spot to sleep and choose one outside the toilet.

I spread out my coat on the pitch pine boards and flop into position.

By its sheer improbability, my sleep is enlivened with erotic visions. The most illustrious of love's heroines, from Semiramis to Leda Gys, gather around my lair outside the little railway latrine.

But in the middle of frenzied hugs and the perfumed delicacy of tasty fish, I realize I'm being climbed over, pushed and kicked by my heroic companions, driven as they are by gross or subtle needs, to stumble incessantly over my dead weight just to find a little privacy in the public convenience – and each time it opens its arms to a new pauper, there blows into my face an exhalation so sad and weary that I am brought to that ultimate disgust one must ever after feel for all the mysterious sufferings of militarized humanity.





Chapter II

The first glimmer of dawn drags me out of the state of sleep and, at the moment my illustrious concubines come crashing down in an eddy of evaporating dreams, an imprudent movement from between my legs lets me know just how tired I really am. I pull down the window and sniff the air. The spectacle of the stone cold Adriatic beneath the life giving sun anoints my pained joints with a sweet balsam.

I write – that is, I lay out little black cadavers on the immaculate shroud of the page – but this doesn't begin to capture the magnificent innocence of sky and sea ... I would prolong the sensation: the caution of a man who smells something fishy restrains me from flying off into some sentimental, pseudoerotic outburst, capable of dragging me down into a mire of incalculably grave consequences – where, for instance, I might end up composing a Naval Ode. Nevertheless, I can't stop the rush of feelings that this ocean encounter provokes. I reflect that the sea is, above all, an amiable element, when cleansed of that asthmatic wheeze of grandeur poets of the greasy style like to give it. The sea is capable of improving one's character, of developing honest, adventurous desire and of mitigating those tenacious bonds which glue our organic volumes to a plush, household prosperity. It yanks, in short, on the elastic of the spirit, making it taut, and it peels back the crust formed by stagnant middle class life exposing the root of its pretention to a strict happiness maintained by long flabby inertia, as it rediscovers the spurting erection.

The strip of sand dividing the railway from the sea is narrow indeed; if I don't lean far enough out the window, it's impossible to see. Looking straight ahead gives me the illusion of sailing a ship – absolutely stiff!

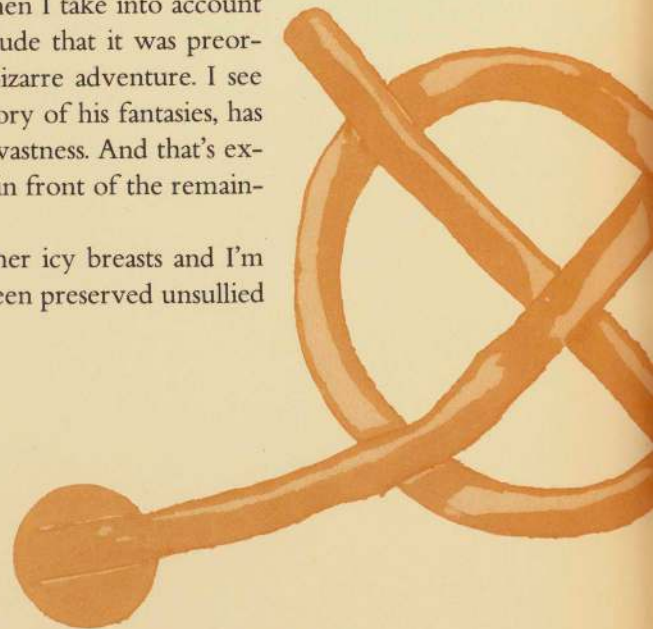
The sea is empty and immobile. Not a sail; no smoke. It seems more deserted than any other deserted sea I've ever seen. I look on it as if it were a sea of ice, and my mind wins a free trip to Antarctic imaginings.

A lucky coincidence procures me a polar spectacle: we come across an ancient tower set on the shore and ringed with the flight of white birds. Some fly close to the water while others, crying out, dive into the eyes of the crumbling wall. On the side of the tower facing land there is a staircase of moldy stone leading to an open entrance high at the top. At the foot of this secular construction, three men – three soldiers, three members of the local militia – squat around their bowls, eating with all seriousness. I say “soldiers” not because there flashes anything of the military in them, but because Vetterli’s bullets – otherwise known as *shit-blasters* – hang in belts on the wall like ancient bows and, together with some crossed butcher knives, they compose a pretty picture of comic trophies, as if from an old revolutionary epic. Inside, above tufts of vapor-like thyme, near some articles of underwear, I can see hanging a vast array of gray green jackets and shoes, looking like disfigured human skins – presumably the victims of a recent laundering.

The three are castaways from a glorious enterprise. In the first I recognize Arthur Pym, in the second I can identify Captain William Guy, and the third, I submit, is Quartermaster Allen. They consume an escallop of reindeer fried in seal oil.

My voyage couldn’t have turned out otherwise!... Under different circumstances the strangeness of this encounter might have left me in doubt as to its reality, but not so now, for when I take into account my train’s eccentric temperament, I must conclude that it was preordained I’d bump into these castaways on this bizarre adventure. I see that the engineer, chosen for the tangled repertory of his fantasies, has decided to conduct me to Tsalaland’s consoling vastness. And that’s exactly what happens, since I find myself standing in front of the remaining crew of the unfortunate schooner *Jane*.

The Antarctic sweetly draws me down to her icy breasts and I’m absorbed in her mystery – which would have been preserved unsullied



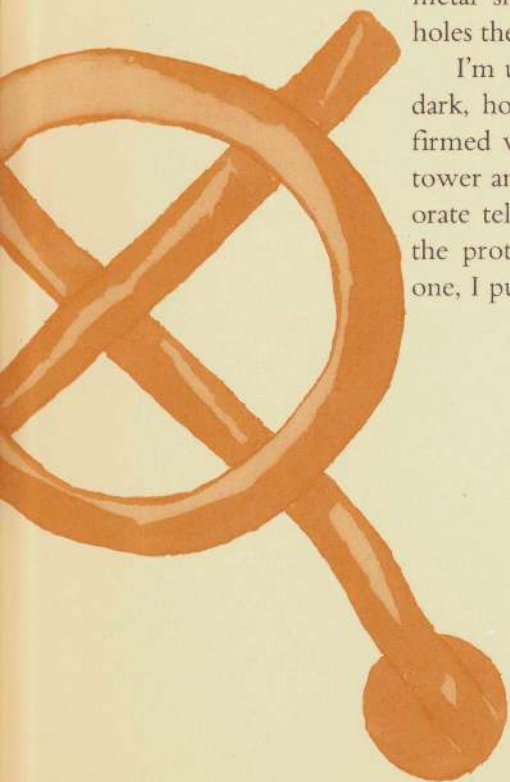
in solid ice if, at this point, Captain Guy hadn't had the Boeotian inspiration to raise his bowl to the train passengers in a sign of offering: this gesture completely shatters my magnificent iceberg. The block-head, adding to this act of imbecility, opens the jagged maw of his monkey-like mouth and laughs, his despicable nature forcing me to unmask myself: soldier of The Awe-Inspiring, stationed to guard works of art along the railway line. I curse him, and in cursing him I curse the world-wide idiocy of men who, uneducated and blind to the very existence of our *mundi alius*, are capable of shattering the splendid icebergs of our galloping minds with a single thoughtless act.

Just then, the locomotive hurls out a whistle and rears itself up.

One might think this a mere literary device (and an *empty* one at that) but such is not the case, especially if one considers that the assimilation of the horse by the steam engine is of old and popular origin, and that by 1860, the Genevans were already calling the locomotive the *black mule*, as today the Afrikaners call it *ysterpaad*; that is, iron horse.

The locomotive's whistle and rearing indicates that our way is blocked. The train slows down to let people pass, then executes a difficult maneuver: it backs up, then strides ahead again, and finally pulls up beside something terrifying: the armored train – earthly dragon and conqueror of pneumatics! It is a cheerless thing, completely encased in metal sheets which hang down to mask the wheels. From square holes the camouflaged cannons dart out like evil fingers.

I'm unaccountably spellbound by this stopping place. I can feel the dark, hostile doom in those ballistic stingers. My impression is confirmed when I see a young sergeant emerge from the little armored tower and begin to scrutinize the sea with a particularly long and elaborate telescope. I feel like a child in my wooden train; heartened by the protection afforded in that other train, the armed and ironclad one, I put myself in the proper frame of mind to entertain only what



can be empirically verified.

Since the Adriatic's green innocence isn't stained by any menacing dark spots, the beardless officer reenters the cabin under the tower, as if he were a snail, a pet of the house.

Tout-de-même, je n'ai pas de veine!... The terrifying train begins to march, and as it passes near its tremendous engine emits a voice, somewhat screeching and low, in disgust with my little Jardin d'Acclimatation trolley!... There's a disproportion here approaching obscenity.

When the coastguard train has passed, I catch sight of an encampment of gigantic mushrooms on the other side of the embankment; beneath them swarm a hoard of sailors busily washing military issue. It dawns on me that I should dispatch a cablegram to my friend Agnoletti, complaining of this infraction. As usual I turn to Agnoletti – who is neither secretary of the Florentine Academy, nor professor at the Academy of Rome, nor member of the Commission of Aesthetics for the Beautification of the Third Rome – I won't even mention the fanciful metonymy of the Futurists and its influence on our war effort, and I dare to sing that

our sailors are on their ships?...

But what's this? Transvaluation of values, dear Agnoletti: our sailors have been turned into railroad troops, our cavalry used as infantry and the infantry – this is the saddest, most outrageous part of the joke – have been supplied with Godillot's bizarre lifejackets and stand ready to hurl themselves into the assault on the enemy fleet at Cattaro and Pola.

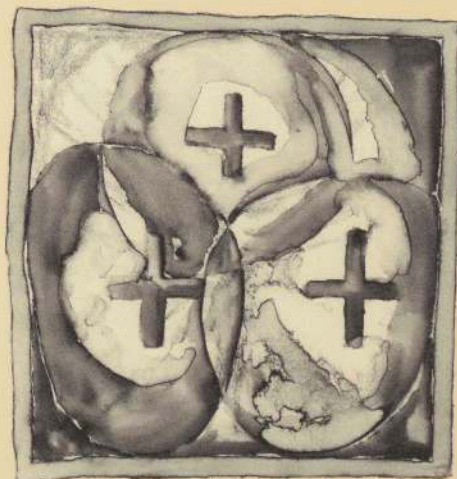
My train is destined for Foggia; yet it takes on the *chauvanism* of certain northern bell-ringers, who feel a stubborn dislike for any place they've already been at one time or another. So it procrastinates, stopping time and again for no apparent reason, creating a feeling of suspension between mountains and sea during the long pauses.



Rather than growing impatient and pacing back and forth, getting angry with the troops and raging against the dogs in the government, I join in the *nonchalance* of the voyage and study how I might best fill up these intervals with a recreation both noble and healthy.

During the stops – rich with the happy abstraction of the hour – I climb down onto the tracks and there reclaim, one by one, the white beatitudes of my fossilized childhood. I loosen my muscles by performing long forgotten leaps and sprints. Like a child, I bend down and peer at polished stones and curious shells, trace dirty drawings in the sand – that is, outlines of men and animals with hypertrophic development of the private parts – I also give my words uninhibited reign. . . so uninhibited that, for a moment, my contempt for brutalizing civilization keeps me from signing them; . . . but finally, I add my signature. They remain there, before surly lobsters and sentimental algae, attesting to the magnificent obscenity of my spirit. Next, I practice a little stone throwing; here I reach an unheard of virtuosity, producing incredible somersaults over the water, even if only amateur ones. I'm deeply intent on getting a triple bounce when I notice that, treacherously, my train has begun to melt away; still, I remain engrossed and only after a masterful skip do I decide to run after the traitor, catching up to it, stopped, a little further down the line.

Each time my train arrives at a station it apparently loses the proper meaning of its course, veering off down dead end tracks covered with weeds. *Ysterpaad* displays the caprice of an uncoöperative little lady who likes to go off on her own to relax and picnic. The convoy seems to be getting ready for a night's sleep in the country, but deep inside it seethes with the life of a London club: my hero-companions furiously hurl themselves into games of chance. Every stool supports the destinies of four players. Murari's mythology comes to life and marches by on display – chivalry and legends, kings and scepters, jacks and chargers, queens and crowns. The strong smell of fortune rises from the



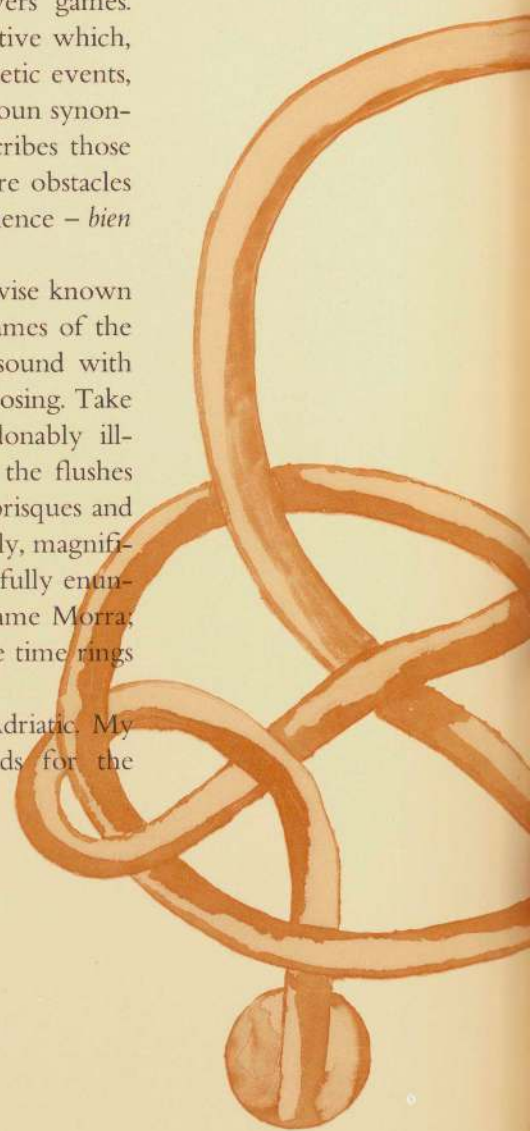
decks of cards.

Observing these dismal warriors (who quench their burning thirst for money in the whimsical combinations of the draw) calls to mind a ridiculous etymology that got caught in the nets of commentary to Luigi Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*:

AZZARDO (CHANCE) – at the time when the Crusaders were fighting in the Holy Land for the liberation of the Sepulcher, they were often subject to fits of boredom. During the various truces which were called in the fighting, they were accustomed to repair to a certain castle, and there to amuse themselves with divers games. Now, the name of the castle, called Hassart, bears a derivative which, in the sequence of various linguistic phenomena and phonetic events, ends by taking the shape of the present, active, masculine noun synonymous with: risk, danger, contest, etc. The word still describes those games which have no fixed stakes and are, therefore, severe obstacles to the morality of upright men. Etymology is a comical science – *bien fol qui s'y fie!*

The winning suits in the hands of the fortunate, otherwise known as the *sons of bitches*, give rise to storm and frenzy. The names of the divinity and the saints, with copious adjectives added, resound with praise or abuse depending on whether one is winning or losing. Take note that the various madonnas are always and unpardonably ill-treated. But beyond all the trumps, above the marriages, the flushes and melds, the full houses and gins, the twenty-ones, the brisques and the rummys, the voice of one sovereign game looms; cruelly, magnificently, the prevailing ciphers conquer the air, those powerfully enunciated numbers, flung out like catapults, of our national game Morra, as old as Italy herself, and whose name at one and the same time rings – Death and Destiny.

I pass five hours of my life at Castellamare-on-the-Adriatic. My train ignores the station house and platform and heads for the



storage bins, halting beside a mountain range of coal.

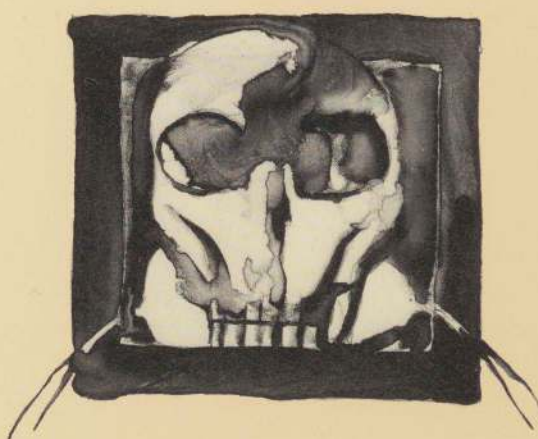
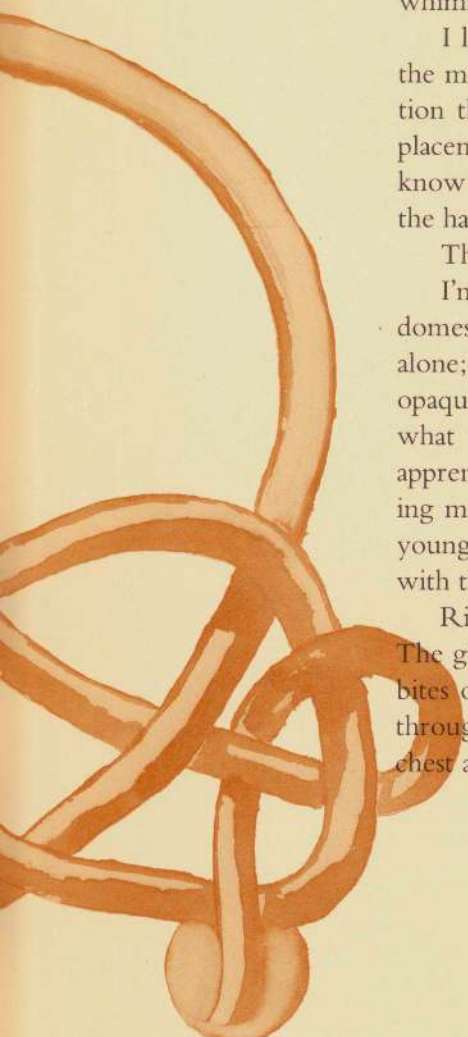
By now, I've grown accustomed to my house on wheels and share in the intimacies of its life. I partake of its motion and am concerned with its every maneuver, participating in the railway's very organism. A ridiculous affection for my coach wells up inside me to the point where I find that I'm becoming jealous. Away from the stations, in the open countryside, I enjoy undisputed possession of my train, but each time it makes an important stop, I'm attacked by fears of a possible change; I'm subject to the torments of a husband hypersensitive to the whims of honor.

I live through a terrible quarter of an hour at Castellamare: I hear the murmurs of change all about me. I rush onto the tracks and question the workers. They whisper that we'll be proceeding with a replacement engine and a new engineer. I gasp! From the gleaned news I know that the hour has come in which my destiny will be placed in the hands of a young novice, someone still in the experimental stage.

The aspirant arrives.

I'm no armchair adventurer; I detest the good-natured idiot and his domestic security; I have faith in the ever unfolding harmonies of fate alone; I shove myself into the insipid face of the future, and the more opaque and inexact it is, the greater my curiosity – and I don't care what Wolfgang Goethe's writings have to say. Consequently, the apprentice's lack of experience is incapable of disturbing me, or turning me into a coward. It's easier for me to give my sympathy to this young debutant than to someone who presents himself for the test with the arrogance of a seasoned toreador.

Right from the start he takes command. He is dark and muscular. The girls of the Romagna would say of him: *he's a handsome Moor!* He bites on the stem of a flower with the whitest of teeth. He goes up through the tender which serves as his wardrobe, raises the lid of a chest and removes the clothing of his trade. Then he strips down with

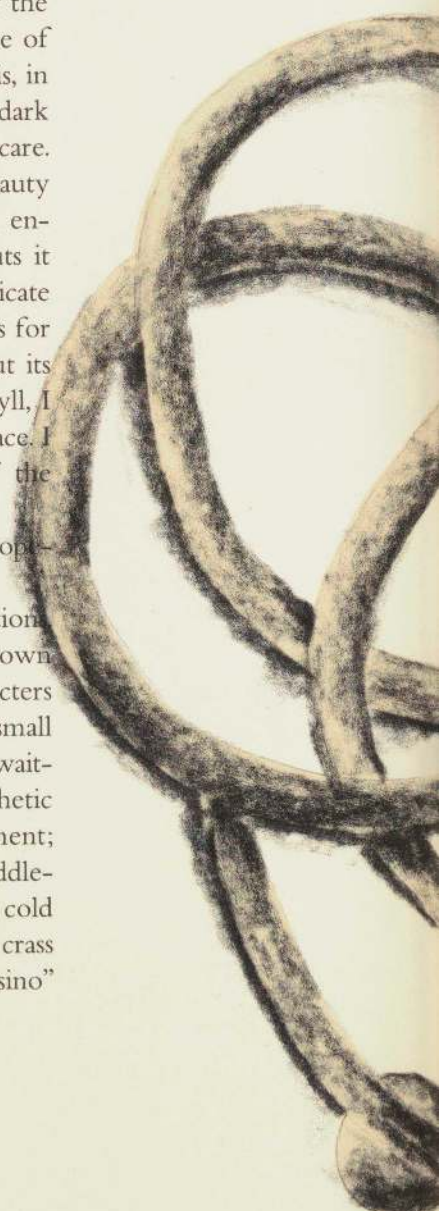



the slowness of a courtesan who intelligently exploits the gradual exhibition of her fleshly capital and stands there naked – simply and stupendously naked.

Hidden behind the train window, I spy on the movements of the *espada* like an *habitué* ogling in at a star's dressing room. He's aware of what he's doing and wears a conscious smile of satisfaction which is, in fact, conceit. Threading himself into his trousers and putting on a dark blue shirt, he attends to the minutiae of his *toilette* with meticulous care. One can't deny the capacity for creating effects of picturesque beauty that this lurid uniform possesses. Now ready in the dress of an engineer, the apprentice takes the flower out of his mouth and puts it behind his ear, then grabs a duck-billed oil can and bends to lubricate the old steam engine on which he must prove his talents. He cares for the *black mule* with infinite love. He strokes its rump, searches out its more intimate parts. While admiring this anthropo-mechanical idyll, I hear his senior colleagues call him *maestro*. The title is not out of place. I note, in fact, that the young railman possesses something of the orchestra conductor and the virtuoso.

We leave Castellamare for the debut of the railway's young hopeful.

The next stop brings us back to one of the beach resort stations. From high up on the railway embankment I look threateningly down on an absurd structure whose raised script of pompous floral characters tells me this is "Casino des Bains." In front of the "Casino" a small upright piano – the spine of which is draped in red velvet – stands waiting for a cart. Seen in passing from the train, the piano looks pathetic indeed, like something one might mistake for a child's toy instrument; beyond this it conveys another impression: that of a pinched middle-class shabbiness, which makes me feel as if I'd been held under a cold shower till I was soaked and shivering. All of the unbelievably crass amusements hidden behind the stuccoed walls of this box of a "Casino"





are exposed in this simple traveling piano, where, each night, the polished black galley slave has to spill out idiotic laughter from its decrepit keyboard and, with a tinny tinkling, hammer out the same old dried up *valse lentes* from all the weepy *sauteries* before a quaint tribe of the grotesquely tame, who gather by the side of the piano to undulate sickeningly to the music, with the fawning gyrations typical of the lowest opportunist, and whose clothes exude the musty smell of the shopkeeper, the stench of the bookkeeper's smoky hovels, and that famous perfume – "Piss of the Cat" – which ineffably wafts through the halls of cheap real estate. In an utterly stupid phantasmagoria, I retrace the tragic absurdity of these entertainments: I see girls – bony priestesses of the high heel – dancing a macabre Boston waltz, tangled in the arms of vulgar, faithless young men, entwined in their fates, their clothing, leashed to them yet holding themselves at a distance from any given one as if by some unspeakable repugnance; I see mothers posted on guard in corners – battleships of icy energy, pandering their endless marriage contracts; I see fathers belching out inanities, the fishy smell of the soup of satisfaction still on their breaths, drowsy animals who plunk themselves down behind the greasy pages of the *Evening Courier* to suck up all the blood and detailed literary horror of the Barzinian battlefield – as if it were some digestive elixir (in fact, an al-iksir), as if it were a mere trifle – or else they excite their swollen corpulence on the twisted, half-baked odes of the Bald Sibyl.

Faithful ysterpaad, help me!... and as the train slowly embarks, answering my call, I pass by the front of the "Grand Hotel," standing absolutely mute behind the hermetic enclosure of its venetian blinds – like a castle in a Walter Scott novel. The commencing fart of my tragic mare wafts its way through this convent of holiday delights and, while the corpses of the plague-ridden vacationers putrify in the sarcophagi of their numbered, nailed up rooms, the hotelkeeper – that brave Swiss spirit – now divested of the ceremonial robes of his

servitude and in shirt-sleeves, dines apart. Together with his wife in her housecoat, and their sons, dressed in sporty knits and sandals, he dips his now liberated lamb chop sideburns into a homemade fricassee, in front of the pompous entrance to his factory of lucre and death.

On the nearby beach I view the sad fossils of ancient, ignored amphibians, and if I hadn't given up when I discovered that they were cabanas, abandoned on the sands, I would have had reason to believe that I was on the shores of Tanganica where – as is well known – legendary plesiosaurs still live.

From Castellamare onward – *usque ad finem* – each time we start up again, a certain something both agreeable and familiar takes hold of me, calling to mind family celebrations – Easter, Christmas, Epiphany and the ceremonies for elementary school graduation. For while the stationmaster strikes the bell and the signalman empties his lungs blowing on a gossipy horn, our bright young engineer doesn't bother to budge until he's finished drinking to the health of his friends, gathering up good wishes and compliments, and shaking hands with his admirers. Though respectful of the warnings from the platform, he obeys rather the whims of the spectators, and when the soldiers at the windows try inciting him to greater feats of danger, shouting – “Go ahead, maestro!... Give it a try!!!...” – our artist takes a bow, pirouettes, blows kisses to his public, bounds onto the locomotive, gives a blast from the whistle and hurls the beast forward at full throttle.

I'm no expert in the art of driving trains and so I will not, on this page, pass judgement on the geniality, the talent or even the simple leanings of our apprentice. I will only say that he is a performer of *temperament*, an impassioned spirit who, while on a par with all the others of his species, doesn't know how to divide each individual exertion so as to get a cumulative yield. He throws himself at once into the fray with a foolish petulance that quickly weakens and exhausts him. He's left moaning hoarsely, numbed in nerve and muscle, his willpower



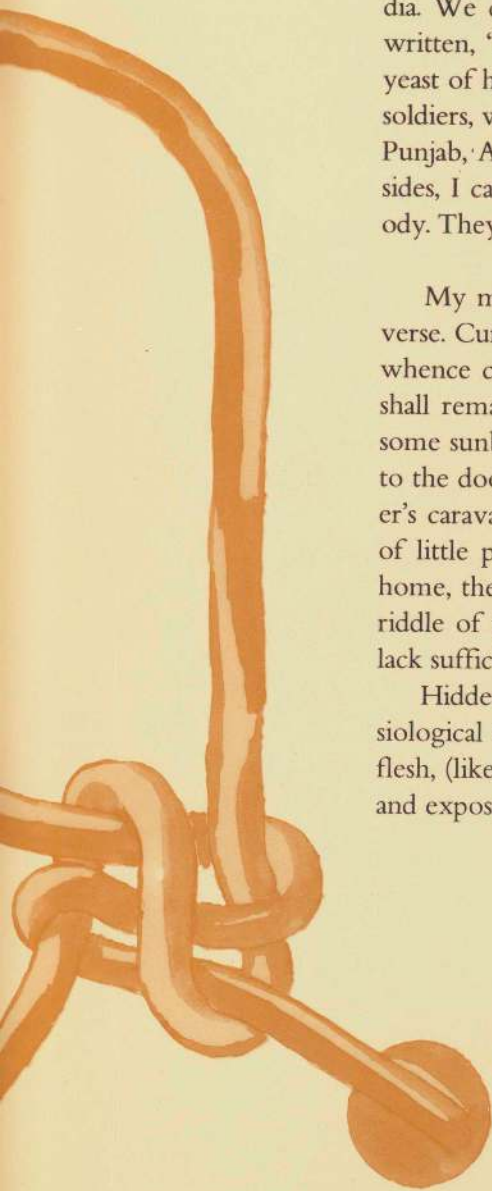
drowning, going down for the third time. For these reasons, my train's mad race doesn't last long; after reaching the heights of vertigo, it sinks almost immediately into an exasperating crawl. From ultimate tumultuous passion, a groaning vacuity follows, a relative loss of tension in the springs and the whole mechanism. Our artist, swooning before his levers and gauges, lets the train wheels drag like the worn out shoes on a pair of paralytic feet.

Ortona-by-the-sea presents me with a fragment of migratory India. We come across a strange convoy: a rosary of cars on which is written, "Horses 8 - Persons 40," overflowing with a dark, glistening yeast of humanity. On closer inspection, this yeast reveals a mixture of soldiers, workers, women and children sprung from the presidencies of Punjab, Assam, Curg, High Burma, etc. As the roar of the wheel subsides, I can hear a chorus of nasal voices rising up in a pulsating melody. They sing:

The road to Tipperary is long and short . . .

My mind is incapable of penetrating the meaning of this barbaric verse. Curiosity leads me to the window, as if to seek out the regions whence comes this harmony of conflicting adjectives. But that realm shall remain forever sealed up in the higher reaches of the heads of some sunburned English soldiers dressed in T-shirts who, elbowing up to the doors of one of the migratory cars at the end of this slave driver's caravan, laugh as they bite with rotten teeth on the mouthpieces of little pipes. I quickly pull my head back into my official mobile home, there to swallow my humiliation. I am now persuaded that the riddle of the contrary analogy will remain a mystery forever, since I lack sufficient light to pierce the obscurity of Anglo-Saxon lyricism.

Hidden behind this super-reported psychodrama, is another physiological drama: these naked Indians, and everything inhabiting dark flesh, (like chocolate kisses and eclairs), slice into my manly sentiments and expose an appetite not lacking in a certain tendency towards scato-

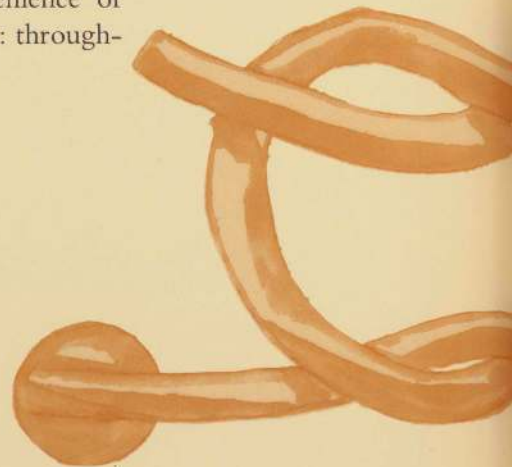


phagy. There occurs that which must inevitably occur: *je bande*. From this I reflect that on long voyages – those which have a bit of temporary sequestration, a bit of preventive detention – it would behoove one to protect himself from the aforementioned situation by taking a few stewed water lilies – an excellent concoction for stimulating the frequent drainage of the bladder – or, depending on the situation, by making use of a mild *sedanum*, much prized by the English in cases of identical complaint.

With our arrival at Foggia the little arrow of my personal time-piece dismounts, the weary sign that it's midnight. My train pulls into a stall and tomorrow morning will attempt to couple me to other cars taking the direct route to Bari. Here I get the opportunity to catch a good night's sleep, and so I set myself up in the advantageous velvet alcove of a first class coach, left abandoned in the train yard confusion.

In observing everything that transpired on the stretch between Rimini and Ancona, it should be pointed out that the harder the bolsters on which I rest my head, the more sensual the dreams that bloom thereon. As for the dreams I gave birth to on the softness of this luxury compartment, they bear no resemblance whatsoever to those of the preceding night – grown on the hardness of American larchwood. Isn't what we consider tasty monopolized entirely by love? But these new dreams are rather shocking in their insipidity, concerned as they are with a Florentine brother-in-law, a mean and excessively pious man mixed up in certain shady affairs which, in the logic of dreams, are linked to events I'm convinced are real, but would be thoroughly unreal to anyone else – according to a common phenomenon which, on it's own, constitutes one of the most important principles of oneirocriticism.

My sleep stretches into the morning: that is, until the moment I open my eyes and acknowledge once again the convenience of facing tyrannical destiny with passive abandon. Here's why: through-



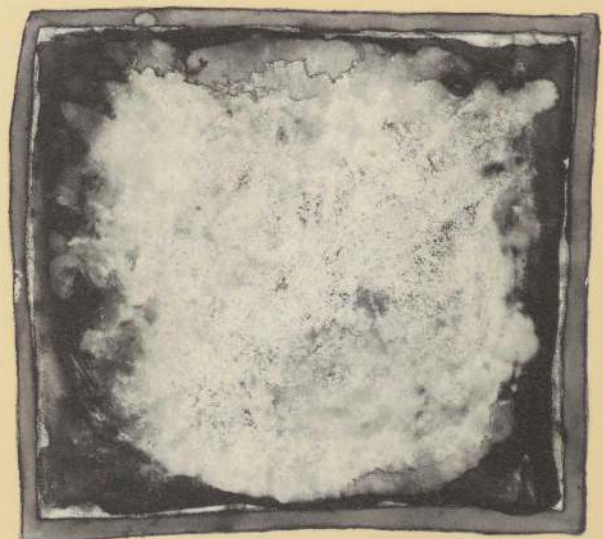
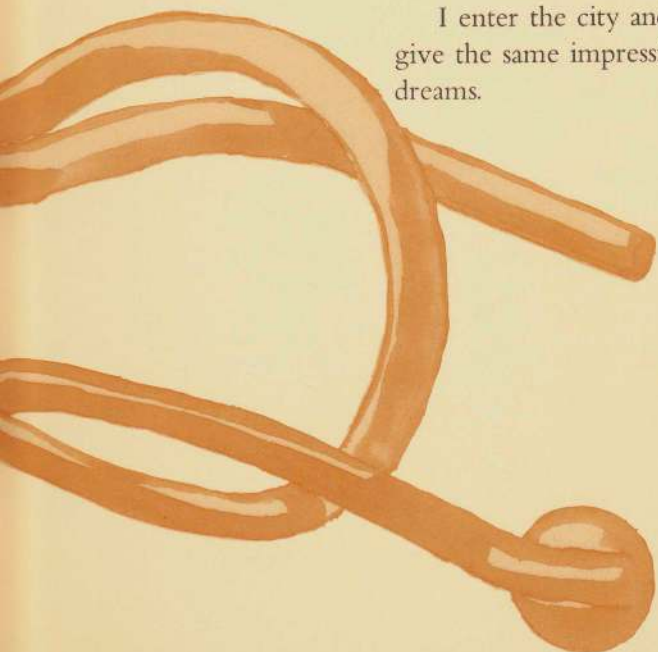
out the night I slept in the idle coach with the certainty of being woken at Foggia, but I'm shocked when I wake to the dawn of Barletta. The reasons for this mysterious shift in events still remain obscure; I have the sneaking suspicion that Hypnos – inseparable brother of Thanatos – wove himself into the state railway system to serve as nursemaid to his chosen sons of art.

If my faithful ysterpaad hadn't stopped at the dining facilities in Foggia, we would've undoubtedly arrived just in the nick of time to assist the valiant renegade Claudio Grajano, to bask in the light of Fieramosca and scorn the villainy of La Mothe; but, alas! as it turns out, I'm condemned to endure the idiotic dullness of the regulated timetables, and will come to know still more of the sublime fits and capricious abandon in this sad but beautiful *black mule*, driven by the steady pulse of the fearless apprentice.

The fashion for *petite levers* doesn't seem to have completely vanished, since a crowd of boys – dressed in multicolored vests and adorned with brilliant ties – invade my alcove, mistaking it for one belonging to the Sun King.

We arrive at Bari. From the start I take a liking to these southern stations; this one hasn't been requisitioned for military use; (how far away, the savage Romagna!). Taking advantage of the situation, I hurry off to the station restaurant together with all the *bourgeois gentlemen*. Here I chance to meet a Serbian major, busy gulping down an extra-large cup of coffee and showering the brick floor with honey and pastry crumbs. The voivoda responds to my military salute with such kindness and gratitude that you'd think my greeting had harbored some reversal in the fortunes of the recently constituted government of Serbia Velika.

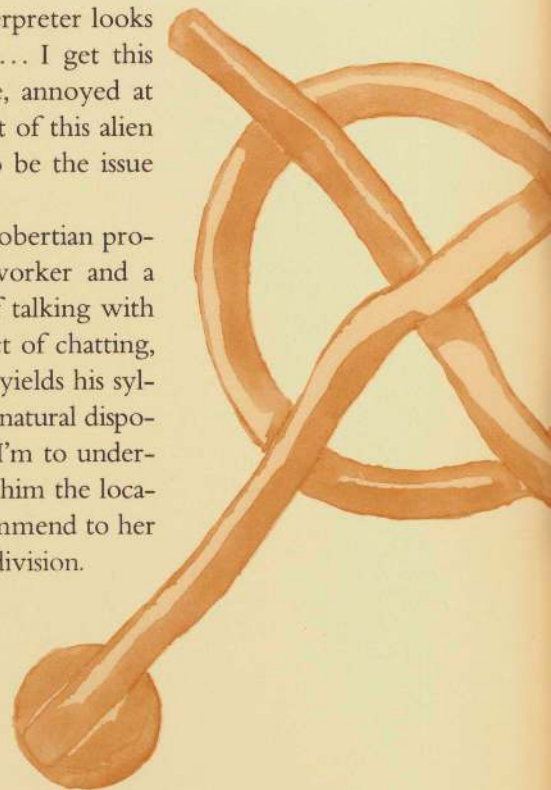
I enter the city and stroll along its regular, deserted streets, which give the same impression as the stupid, extravagant cities one finds in dreams.



I'm opposed to Maurice Maeterlinck – what I mean is I don't possess the soft-headed spirit of ideal hermaphroditism – entertaining fancies with one's eyes wide open repulses me. I much prefer seizing the rarities which the capital of Apulia offers. Letting curiosity dominate my interests, I settle on two goals – only two, but important ones: the Laterza bookshop and Giuseppe De Robertis. I've set out in search of the company propagating Crocian deductions and the immortal commentator on the works of Salvatore di Giacomo.

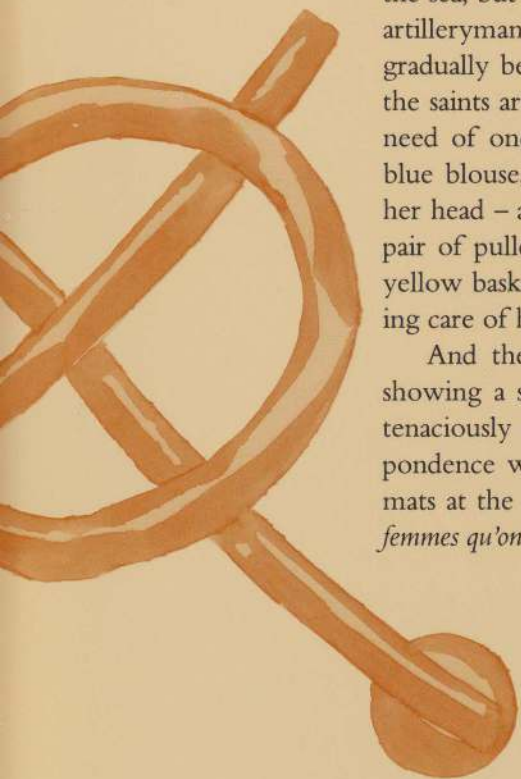
In spite of all the aggravation of walking around, turning corners, despite the care with which I sought out the Laterza bookshop, I didn't succeed in unearthing it; on the other hand, I did stumble across much that was pure De Robertis – homonyms, synonyms, homomorphs – but, in the end, I gave up hope of ever finding the real man. Then, on a street corner, I read a signpost which is a revelation: "Via Putignani." *Lux in tenebris!* I dare accost a native idly taking in the sun and ask him for a complimentary clarification of the sign. But the interpreter looks at me with a pitying smile: he doesn't understand me!... I get this empty feeling in my stomach – standing there all alone, annoyed at being abandoned, feeling like a total stranger in the midst of this alien race streaming all around me, who somehow pretend to be the issue of the great Indo-European family.

While racking my brains in a quandry of quasi-De Robertian proportions, I myself am accosted by two men, an old worker and a young soldier. The old man has the obvious intention of talking with me, but being possessed of a rigid modesty on the subject of chatting, he shows enormous reserve in his manner of speech and yields his syllables, one after the other, with visible exertion against his natural disposition. At length, he succeeds in expounding his purpose; I'm to understand that he's turned to me because he thinks I can show him the location of a certain miraculous madonna, as he wants to recommend to her care this child who will be leaving soon with the artillery division.



I'm not used to seeing myself so rudely shaken before the mysteries of theology. If this man has taken me for an industrialist incognito, he's certainly missed the mark, and he's even more mistaken if, by recourse to the madonna and the saints, he thinks he can overcome a problem which can't be solved, which not even the authority of the Eternal Father himself can solve, he not seeing himself as a god-concept susceptible to explanation – none of which is contained within the intellectual capacity of this little man from Apulia, anyway. I answer him by saying that the miraculous madonna knows no fixed points, neither overthere's nor elsewhere's. But because in the innermost depths of my character I always retain a core of goodness and innate nobility, I can't dismiss the postulant with such a depressing statement. Since he's from Bari, I recommend that he discuss his theological merchandise with Saint Nicholas, a very influential type on matters of the sea, but who, in my opinion, would never refuse a *shot* to a young artilleryman. The old man doesn't seem satisfied with this answer and gradually begins to look on me as a shifty character. He tells me that the saints are incapable of doing anything to help him and that he's in need of one specific madonna, the true madonna, the one with the blue blouse, the serpent trampled under foot and the big stars about her head – and he's ready right then and there to propitiate her with a pair of pullet hens and a dozen eggs, fresh ones that come in a little yellow basket. I tell him that she, the madonna, is quite capable of taking care of herself, because I don't know what else to say.

And they leave me there – without saying good-bye, or even showing a strong desire to punch me in the nose; this old-timer, so tenaciously entrenched in his Mariology that, by a paradoxical correspondence with the past, he ends up being as pigheaded as the diplomats at the court of Louis XIV, who were convinced that; *c'est par les femmes qu'on arrive*.







Chapter III

From Bari to Taranto nothing of note – except the short stop at Gioia del Colle ... I hang out the window, take a look, go back to fiddling with my pack, then return to the window and take another look around ... This is what I find: I'm in the feudal domain of Ricciotto Canudo, captain of the Zouaves and one-time mouthpiece for International D'Annuzianism, who uses his literary megaphone to broadcast the battle cry of the French paladins: *Montjoie!*

Leaving the Adriatic to the left, my train plunges into the Apulian countryside and cuts across the heel of our mother, the Boot.

White chalked houses, gardens choked with prickly pear hedges, green olive trees twisted like women in heat, yellow yards, more tepid jars and forever icy tiaras; ... and all around, the stench of nearby Africa. Everything glitters: those shameless walls, those roofs never repeating the brown smile of their rooftiles, those moorish terraces, those narrow windows that look like battle casements with their grid-irons screaming out Saracene jealousy, and above all this grim labor of the sun, that light which scatters everywhere the same light.

Brown cow, you've never done a thing! Under which one of these dry stones are you hiding a human breeze, in the middle of this scorched ocean? ... No! I yield the melon of orientalism to my more knavish side (to the Northerners, with their insulated minds, my brain's overcooked) and I lower the blind. The heat presses down, crushes me, I begin to dissolve; I slide along the bench like melting tar, and sink into the dreams of a fakir drunk with poppy.

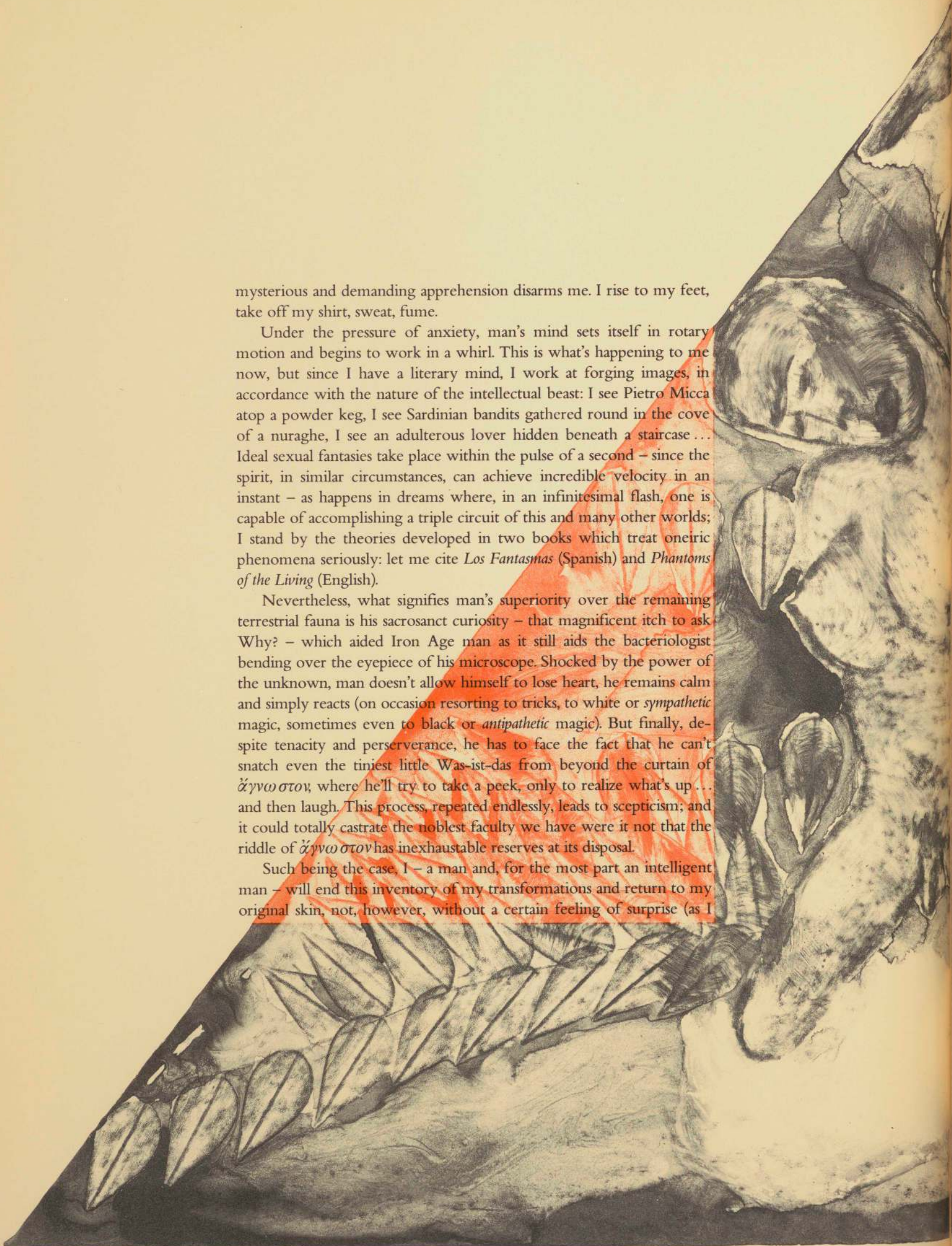
I endure in a state somewhere between animal and human until my sensibilities start to the sudden explosion of an indescribable – what? Ears pricked, eyes peeled – like a thief *peering into the darkness* – yet I see nothing but the square shutter of the blind where opacity struggles weakly with the terrible sun who has it in his sights, beating against it. But behind this anemic defense, I *sense* with terror the captivating glance of some strange hostility directed against me. This


mysterious and demanding apprehension disarms me. I rise to my feet, take off my shirt, sweat, fume.

Under the pressure of anxiety, man's mind sets itself in rotary motion and begins to work in a whirl. This is what's happening to me now, but since I have a literary mind, I work at forging images, in accordance with the nature of the intellectual beast: I see Pietro Micca atop a powder keg, I see Sardinian bandits gathered round in the cove of a nuraghe, I see an adulterous lover hidden beneath a staircase ... Ideal sexual fantasies take place within the pulse of a second – since the spirit, in similar circumstances, can achieve incredible velocity in an instant – as happens in dreams where, in an infinitesimal flash, one is capable of accomplishing a triple circuit of this and many other worlds; I stand by the theories developed in two books which treat oneiric phenomena seriously: let me cite *Los Fantomas* (Spanish) and *Phantoms of the Living* (English).

Nevertheless, what signifies man's superiority over the remaining terrestrial fauna is his sacrosanct curiosity – that magnificent itch to ask Why? – which aided Iron Age man as it still aids the bacteriologist bending over the eyepiece of his microscope. Shocked by the power of the unknown, man doesn't allow himself to lose heart, he remains calm and simply reacts (on occasion resorting to tricks, to white or *sympathetic* magic, sometimes even to black or *antipathetic* magic). But finally, despite tenacity and perseverance, he has to face the fact that he can't snatch even the tiniest little Was-ist-das from beyond the curtain of *ἄγνοστον*, where he'll try to take a peek, only to realize what's up ... and then laugh. This process, repeated endlessly, leads to scepticism; and it could totally castrate the noblest faculty we have were it not that the riddle of *ἄγνοστον* has inexhaustable reserves at its disposal.


Such being the case, I – a man and, for the most part an intelligent man – will end this inventory of my transformations and return to my original skin, not, however, without a certain feeling of surprise (as I





assume happens to Leopoldo Fregoli when, after washing off his make-up, he leaves his dressing room to go out for dinner). I take an aggressive stance, reach out and with a jerk of the cord annihilate the obstructing shade to reveal the sea... *the* sea, yes, the Mediterranean; gray, heavy, dusty and like armored plate on plate, crackling with the sun's lamination. It seems so hard and massive that, imagining my coach had taken a plunge, I'm convinced had I banged my head against its surface, I still wouldn't have sunk.

That remote controlled trap, that enemy behind the canvas shade to whom I had a terrible attraction right from the start, was the sea... And this isn't so amazing if one considers the suspect reputation which the sea has been making for itself for some time now. As far as owning up to one's weaknesses (especially when they may be synonymous with cowardice), I'm not ashamed to admit that the sight of this sea is capable of creating an impression somewhat discomforting – an impression which, in its pathological consequences, manifests itself, in my case, as a sensation of intense cold in the kidneys, an overbearing desire to urinate and a noticeable relaxation of the intestines in the diarrhetic direction. One mustn't forget that, although this impression was new, the apparition responsible for it had been repeated often enough when passing that other sea, the Adriatic, seen just a while ago; yet the Adriatic appeared under a benign light, admired as it was through the eyes of a dilettante. I made no deals with that sea, and, from a comfortable distance, I savored its emerald glory with a neutral frame of mind similar to that of the bourgeois who sits in his stuffed easy chair after dinner with his quaint little cup of coffee and his dainty rubber finger guards and samples the convolutions of war through the bombastic rhetoric of reporters. With the Mediterranean this is an entirely different matter: this is the sea *of my destiny*. No longer the sweet solitude of a deserted and beckoning Antarctic, the sea now before me throws tragedy into relief: on its surface I see

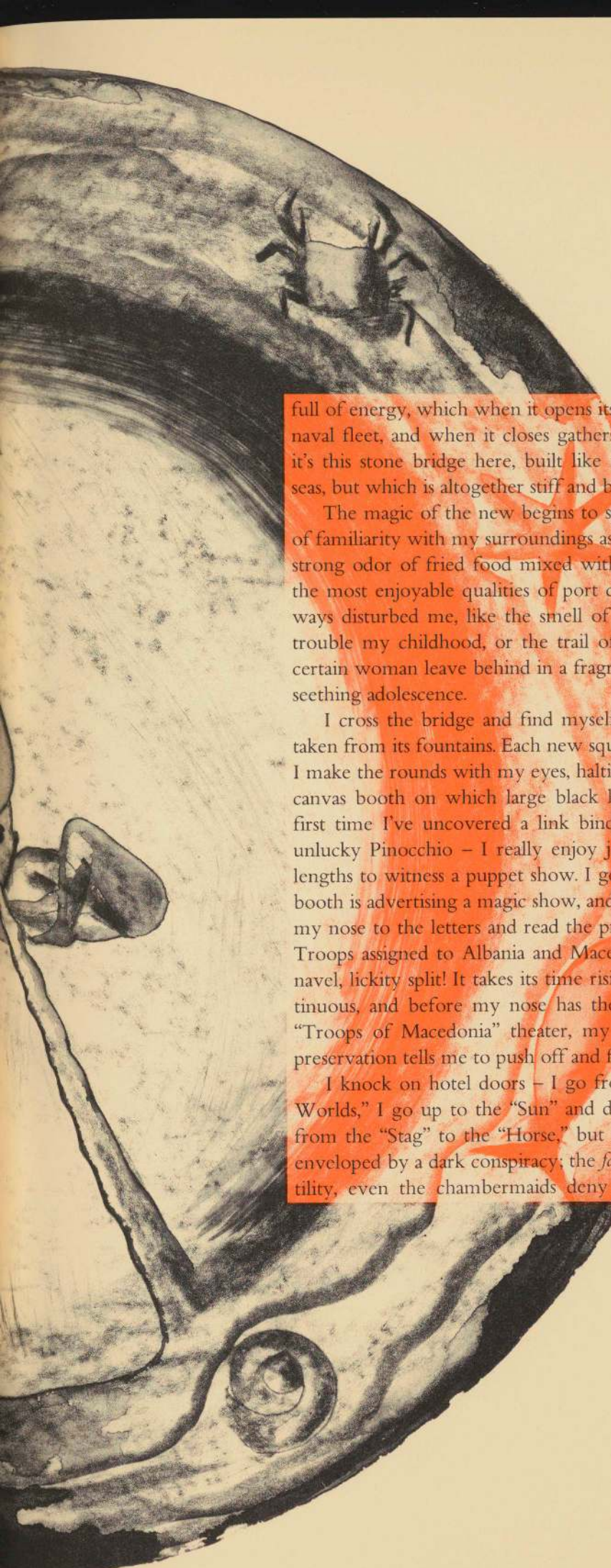


phantoms glide by in a drama that is ripping the continents apart, its treacherous back is bent under the heavy stride of a hostile humanity ... in that smoke on the horizon ... in that fat steamer lethargically pulling out of the harbor which I can sight between the prongs of the masts on that battleship down there ...

Facts accumulate, signs become denser, reality is accentuated and, in the end, I have the feeling that I'm moving into a shadow; the shadow of a roof, the roof of a station, the station at Taranto!

I pack up my things and vacate the room where I've spent three days and two nights and it gives out a shriek at the loss. I step out of the coach – that is, I leave home for the last time – and, as if compelled by some desperate warning, I turn around to look at the train which has taken me this far ... Had I ever really gotten to know her properly during my stay within her flanks? ... It's as if I were seeing her for the first time: small, pathetic, lost among the enormous freight cars and powerful locomotives jamming the tracks, as if she had insinuated herself amidst all this grandness like some insulting intrusion, nearly crushed beneath the thundering arch of the trestle ... I don't have the kind of eyes that can cry for a train, *tout-de-même!* With my heart breaking, I walk down the ramp and enter the modern sector of the city. Everything is totally new to me, as if I'd thrown myself into an abyss. Held back by useless guardrails, I look about for a reference point of a more abstract nature, something of note on which to fix my mind, something dominant, characteristic, that municipal place in every city whose fame precedes it and which attracts the arriving traveler like a magnet (St. Peter's in Rome, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Statue of Liberty in New York, *el palacio del gobernador* in Mexico City), which in this enormous armed buoy of a town is the *Bridge of Two Seas*.

So I head out, keep on walking and in fact come across a bridge. But what a disappointment! It can't be this steel bridge, lace-like and



full of energy, which when it opens its embrace gives free flight to the naval fleet, and when it closes gathers all into its watery bowels. No: it's this stone bridge here, built like that other bridge, between two seas, but which is altogether stiff and bedraggled.

The magic of the new begins to spread and I easily slip into a sort of familiarity with my surroundings as my olfactory sense thrills to the strong odor of fried food mixed with the dull scent of algae, one of the most enjoyable qualities of port cities. This tangy mixture has always disturbed me, like the smell of a sawdust circus which used to trouble my childhood, or the trail of springtime that the armpits of certain woman leave behind in a fragrant wake, which so troubled my seething adolescence.

I cross the bridge and find myself facing a square whose name is taken from its fountains. Each new square invites one to take a look, so I make the rounds with my eyes, halting my gaze just opposite a white canvas booth on which large black letters are printed. This isn't the first time I've uncovered a link binding me in brotherhood to that unlucky Pinocchio – I really enjoy juggling acts and will go to any lengths to witness a puppet show. I get the impression that this canvas booth is advertising a magic show, and so I skip past the fountains, raise my nose to the letters and read the program: "Command Post for the Troops assigned to Albania and Macedonia." My nose plunges to my navel, lickity split! It takes its time rising again, since this show is continuous, and before my nose has the chance to buy a ticket to the "Troops of Macedonia" theater, my overwhelming instinct of self-preservation tells me to push off and find lodgings.

I knock on hotel doors – I go from the "Abyssinia" to the "Two Worlds," I go up to the "Sun" and down to the "Moon," then I run from the "Stag" to the "Horse," but to no avail. I feel like I'm being enveloped by a dark conspiracy; the *famuli* greet me with obvious hostility, even the chambermaids deny me bed and commode with a

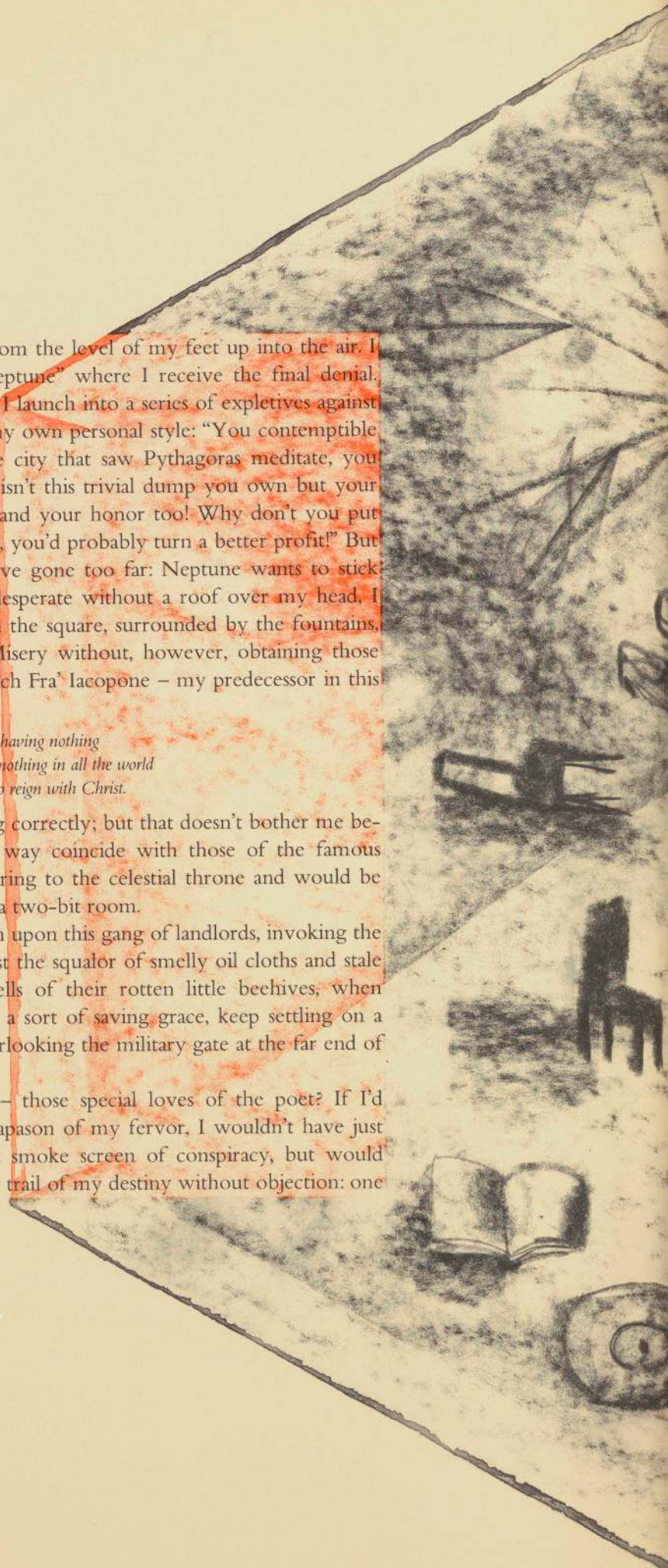
mute thrust of their chins from the level of my feet up into the air. I go no further than the "Neptune" where I receive the final denial. Losing all faith in humanity, I launch into a series of expletives against the heartless proprietor, in my own personal style: "You contemptible landlord! Being of the same city that saw Pythagoras meditate, you should at least know that it isn't this trivial dump you own but your very soul that *est locanda* . . . and your honor too! Why don't you put your wives out on the street, you'd probably turn a better profit!" But I immediately realize that I've gone too far: Neptune wants to stick me with his trident. Now desperate without a roof over my head, I flee the hotel and end up in the square, surrounded by the fountains, where I raise a hymn to Misery without, however, obtaining those monarchical consolations which Fra' Iacopone – my predecessor in this kind of song – received:

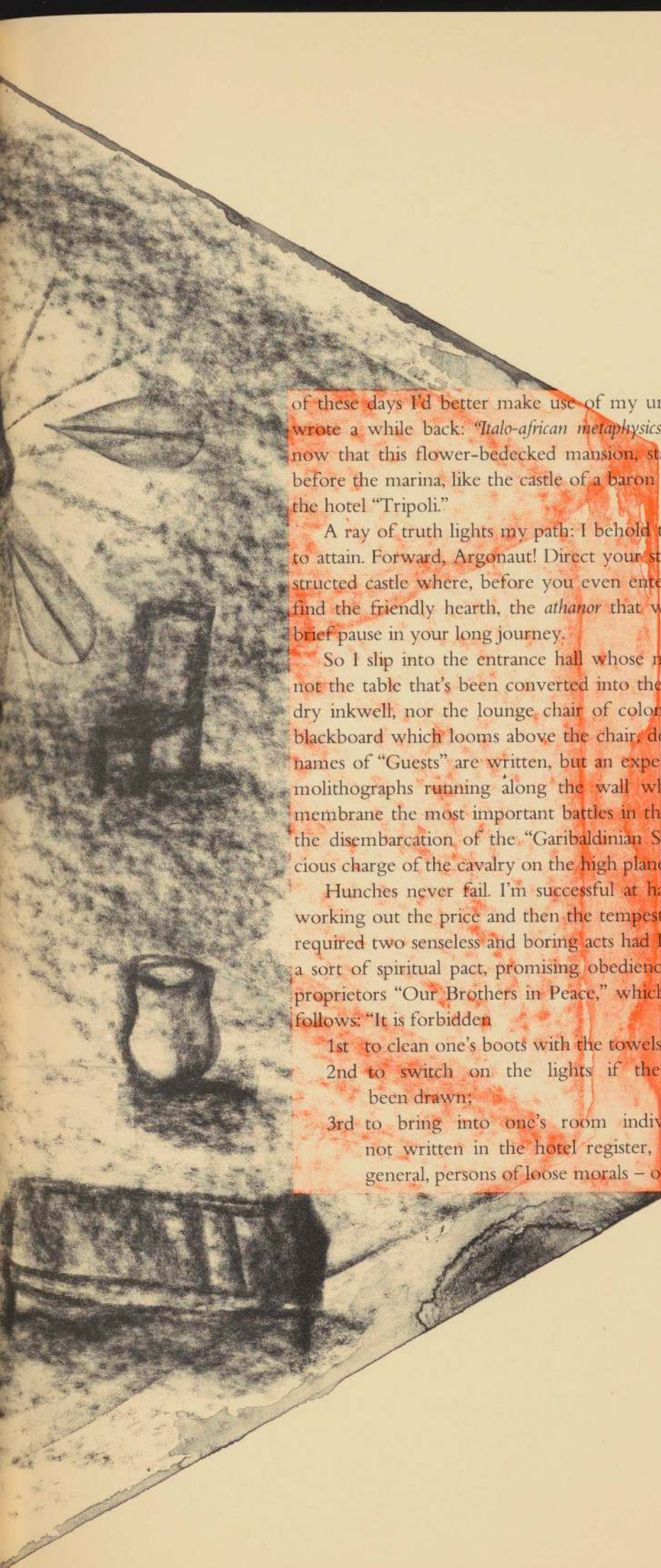
*Poverty is having nothing
possessing nothing in all the world
and thus to reign with Christ.*

I'm certainly not quoting correctly; but that doesn't bother me because my intentions in no way coincide with those of the famous monk of Todi: I'm not aspiring to the celestial throne and would be only too happy to settle for a two-bit room.

I'm calling down a wrath upon this gang of landlords, invoking the power of the evil eye to cast the squalor of smelly oil cloths and stale zinc urinal piss into the cells of their rotten little beehives, when I notice that my eyes, with a sort of saving grace, keep settling on a reseda-colored mansion overlooking the military gate at the far end of the square.

Did I ignore a hunch – those special loves of the poet? If I'd adjusted my spirit to the diapason of my fervor, I wouldn't have just stood there struggling in a smoke screen of conspiracy, but would have followed the luminous trail of my destiny without objection: one





of these days I'd better make use of my understanding of a phrase I wrote a while back: "*Italo-african metaphysics! mysterium mirabile!*" I see now that this flower-bedecked mansion, standing squat and turreted before the marina, like the castle of a baron (from *βαρύς* i.e. heavy), is the hotel "Tripoli."

A ray of truth lights my path: I behold the fated goal I was meant to attain. Forward, Argonaut! Direct your steps toward that well constructed castle where, before you even enter, you *know* that you will find the friendly hearth, the *athanor* that will warm you during this brief pause in your long journey.

So I slip into the entrance hall whose most outstanding feature is not the table that's been converted into the main desk, nor the dusty dry inkwell, nor the lounge chair of colonial physiognomy, nor the blackboard which looms above the chair, desk and inkwell where the names of "Guests" are written, but an expensive series of shiny chromolithographs running along the wall which reproduce on a stiff membrane the most important battles in the conquest of Libya: from the disembarkation of the "Garibaldinian Seafarers" to the last audacious charge of the cavalry on the high plane of Fezzan.

Hunches never fail. I'm successful at haggling over the rent, but working out the price and then the tempestuous payment might have required two senseless and boring acts had I not first bound myself to a sort of spiritual pact, promising obedience to the decalogue of the proprietors "Our Brothers in Peace," which, to put it briefly, runs as follows: "It is forbidden

- 1st to clean one's boots with the towels or bedsheets;
- 2nd to switch on the lights if the shutters have not first been drawn;
- 3rd to bring into one's room individuals whose names are not written in the hotel register, specifically, women, or in general, persons of loose morals - of both sexes."



The above commandments were drawn up with the same patchwork austerity usually reserved by the military for rules governing the use of latrines. I won't bother to mention a host of other details too insignificant to report. It may help, however, to transcribe the *nota bene* which summed up the laws: "... wherewith, to facilitate the duties of the room servants, departing guests are not to remain in bed beyond 7 am."

These first blows to my stay at the hotel "Tripoli" convince me more than ever that at last I've touched upon that

beautiful land of love

But this isn't the only thing that cheers me up as, step by step, I head up the staircase to the third floor: above all, I'm thinking that here, in this house owned by the "Brothers in Peace," I've discovered the perfect defense against any intrusion from Captain Canudo, for if he dared hazard an entrance, he'd be summarily tossed out – not merely as a prophylaxis against an outbreak of *cerebralism*, but because Ricciotto was born at Gioia and is one of her sons, thus qualifying as – *un fils de joie*.



Chapter IV

An intense midday in this hottest of months, July. I'm stretched out on the bed in my room, which is fortunately ignored by the sun.

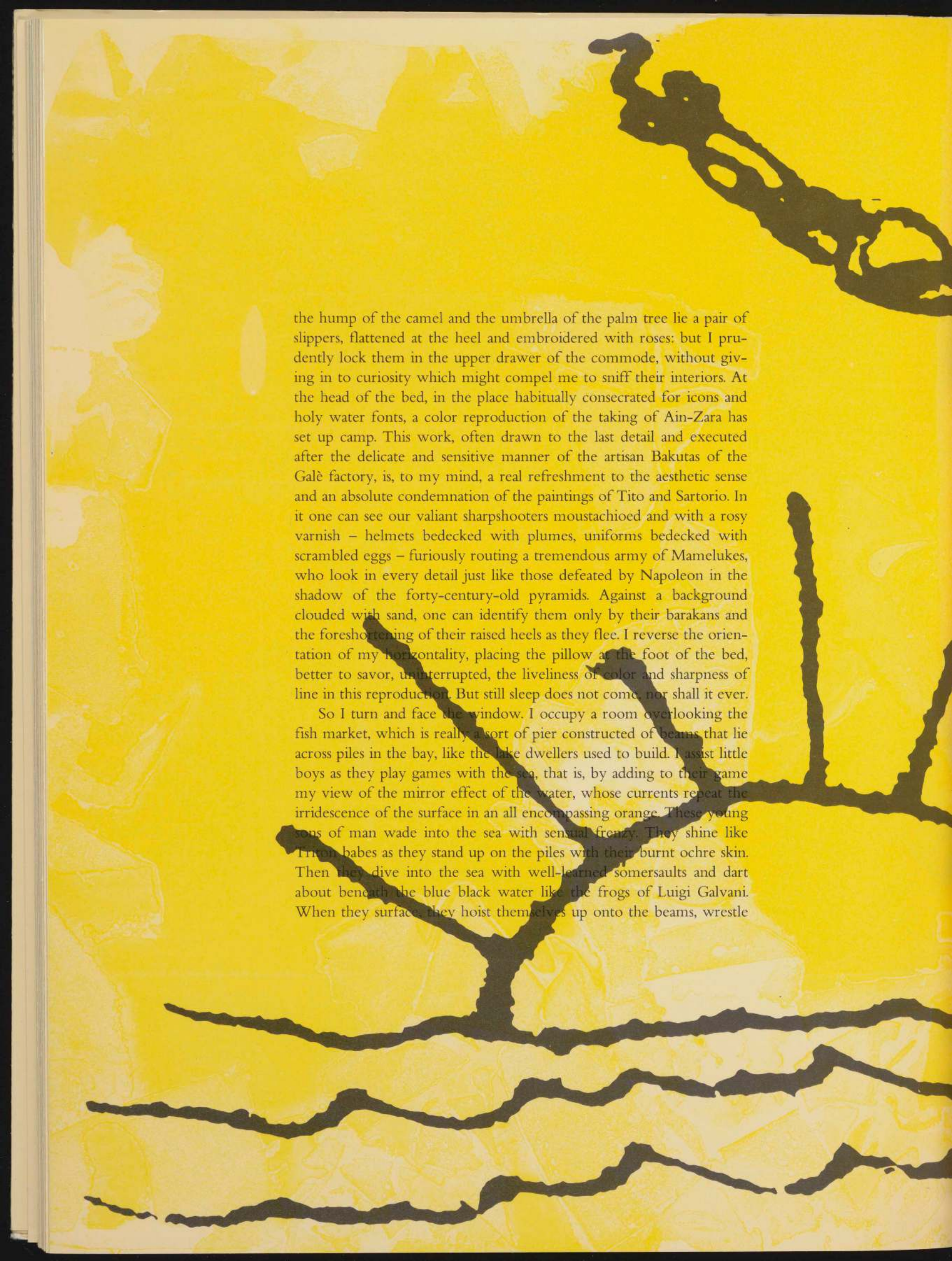
This bed of mine certainly isn't worthy of an odalisque drenched in oleander and myrrh (such a woman would be destined for the padishah's alcove), still, I make myself all the more comfortable on it because it was acquired after hard work and even a little glory.

As I understand it, landing in bed is an unavoidable necessity, is so absolutely foredoomed that – I should add – the certainty of a favorable outcome to my recent tribulations never left me, for had I allowed the deteriorating effects of despair to overwhelm me, I would have indeed ended up impaled on Neptune's trident.

I can't conceive of an existence that doesn't make use of some sort of pallet. In a similar vein, I share the opinion of the Abbé Coignard about the importance of table and bed. These are the furniture supreme: the first is the "field" of eating and serious study; the second, the "field" of dreams and cruel lovemaking. However, I'd like to broaden the Abbé's opinion by including one more thing, the commode – a piece of furniture which, if not supreme, is nevertheless of great importance, especially for organisms such as mine, whose bladders often require unexpected discharges during the night.

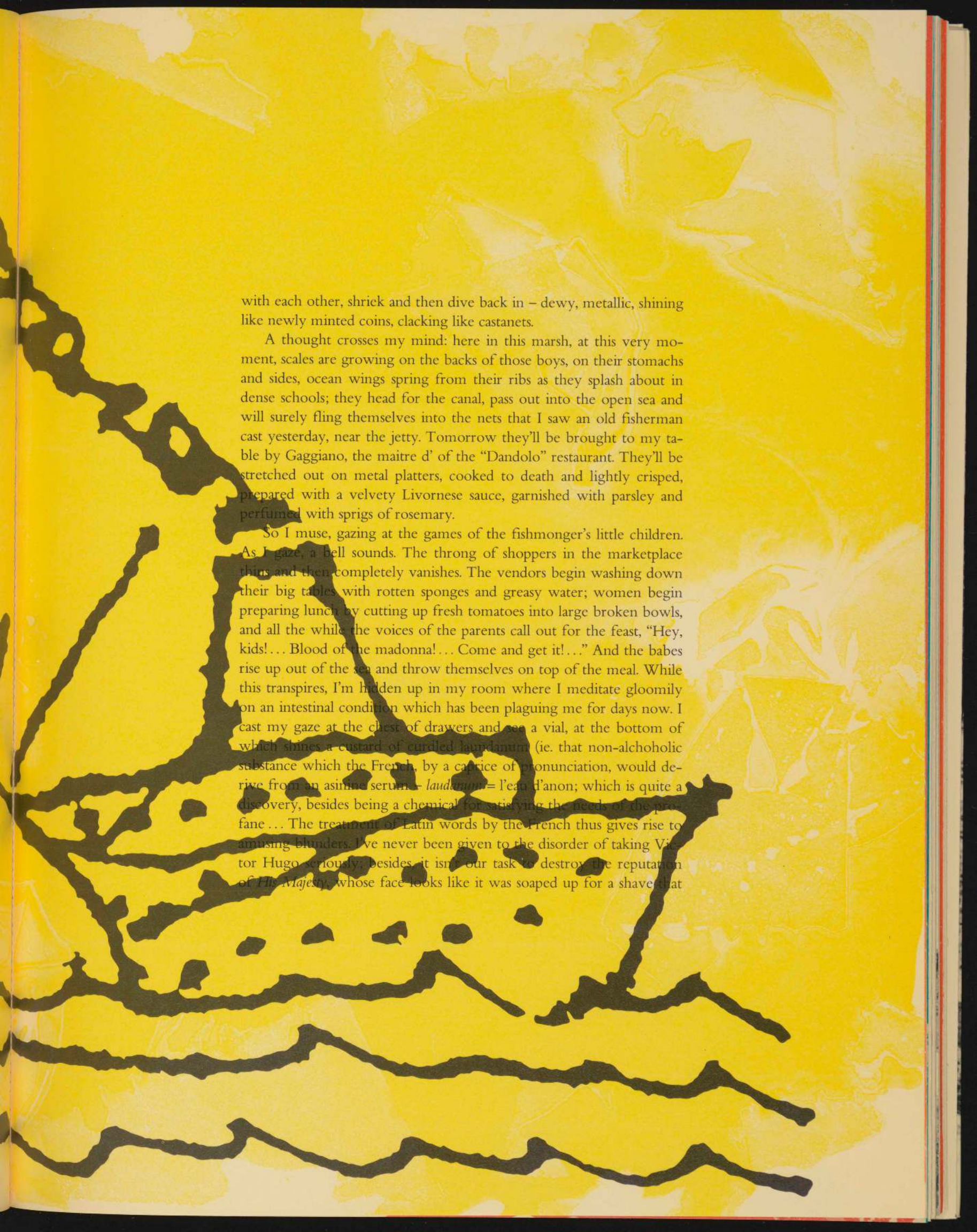
From the way things have turned out in my life – and this really burns me – I've had to give up the table (or at least that "field" of study), but I haven't been able to entirely forgo the use of the bed (especially that "field" of rest), and so it is with a feeling of great satisfaction that I now touch the one under me and lovingly stroke its flanks.

Both the bed and commode are of white enamelled iron and graced with a floral pattern. In front of the commode there's a small carpet depicting a bedouin squatting beneath his camel and sucking on a narghile in the shadow of a palm tree. In short, one of those scenes of which M. Louis Vauxcelles has said: "c'est de la littérature." Between



the hump of the camel and the umbrella of the palm tree lie a pair of slippers, flattened at the heel and embroidered with roses: but I prudently lock them in the upper drawer of the commode, without giving in to curiosity which might compel me to sniff their interiors. At the head of the bed, in the place habitually consecrated for icons and holy water fonts, a color reproduction of the taking of Ain-Zara has set up camp. This work, often drawn to the last detail and executed after the delicate and sensitive manner of the artisan Bakutas of the Galè factory, is, to my mind, a real refreshment to the aesthetic sense and an absolute condemnation of the paintings of Tito and Sartorio. In it one can see our valiant sharpshooters moustachioed and with a rosy varnish – helmets bedecked with plumes, uniforms bedecked with scrambled eggs – furiously routing a tremendous army of Mamelukes, who look in every detail just like those defeated by Napoleon in the shadow of the forty-century-old pyramids. Against a background clouded with sand, one can identify them only by their barakans and the foreshortening of their raised heels as they flee. I reverse the orientation of my horizontality, placing the pillow at the foot of the bed, better to savor, uninterrupted, the liveliness of color and sharpness of line in this reproduction. But still sleep does not come, nor shall it ever.


So I turn and face the window. I occupy a room overlooking the fish market, which is really a sort of pier constructed of beams that lie across piles in the bay, like the lake dwellers used to build. I assist little boys as they play games with the sea, that is, by adding to their game my view of the mirror effect of the water, whose currents repeat the iridescence of the surface in an all encompassing orange. These young sons of man wade into the sea with sensual frenzy. They shine like Triton babes as they stand up on the piles with their burnt ochre skin. Then they dive into the sea with well-learned somersaults and dart about beneath the blue black water like the frogs of Luigi Galvani. When they surface, they hoist themselves up onto the beams, wrestle



with each other, shriek and then dive back in – dewy, metallic, shining like newly minted coins, clacking like castanets.

A thought crosses my mind: here in this marsh, at this very moment, scales are growing on the backs of those boys, on their stomachs and sides, ocean wings spring from their ribs as they splash about in dense schools; they head for the canal, pass out into the open sea and will surely fling themselves into the nets that I saw an old fisherman cast yesterday, near the jetty. Tomorrow they'll be brought to my table by Gaggiano, the maitre d' of the "Dandolo" restaurant. They'll be stretched out on metal platters, cooked to death and lightly crisped, prepared with a velvety Livornese sauce, garnished with parsley and perfumed with sprigs of rosemary.


So I muse, gazing at the games of the fishmonger's little children. As I gaze, a bell sounds. The throng of shoppers in the marketplace thins and then completely vanishes. The vendors begin washing down their big tables with rotten sponges and greasy water; women begin preparing lunch by cutting up fresh tomatoes into large broken bowls, and all the while the voices of the parents call out for the feast, "Hey, kids! ... Blood of the madonna! ... Come and get it! ...". And the babes rise up out of the sea and throw themselves on top of the meal. While this transpires, I'm hidden up in my room where I meditate gloomily on an intestinal condition which has been plaguing me for days now. I cast my gaze at the chest of drawers and see a vial, at the bottom of which shines a custard of curdled laudanum (ie. that non-alcoholic substance which the French, by a caprice of pronunciation, would derive from an asinine serum – *laudanum* = l'eau d'anon; which is quite a discovery, besides being a chemical for satisfying the needs of the profane ... The treatment of Latin words by the French thus gives rise to amusing blunders. I've never been given to the disorder of taking Victor Hugo seriously, besides, it isn't our task to destroy the reputation of *His Majesty*, whose face looks like it was soaped up for a shave that



never happened and whose stupid little eyes are always crinkled up with anger. There are, already, those who have said of him: *il est bête comme l'Himalaya*; so the case is closed. Still, in those Himalayas, I recently discovered this verbaliberationist phrase in Book V of *Les Contemplation*, specifically in the Virgilian ode whose title, if it is pronounced in accordance with the intentions of Hugo, gives a daring manifesto of the avant-garde: "*Majitusche . . . bum!*"). The sodium sulfate I took this morning has given me a raging thirst, so I pour myself half a glass of "acid, alkaline, antiuretic, naturally carbonated, gushing from the springs of La Francesca di Rionero at Vulture" mineral water. While I stretch my legs on the bed, I recall the advertising slogan of the aforementioned bottle: *mala digestio nulla felicitas*. It is neither a proverb nor an aphorism. It points out neither the ethical standards of the people at large nor of the moralist in particular. It suffers from none of the foolishness of the third estate nor of the first. It is a truth. It has the sublime ring of one of those absurd flourishes from the hand of a weird quacksalver in ancient Rome. What's more, this truth resounds to the beat that animates the modern cosmos, it joins forces with the walls of our cities, conspires with the more tragic aspects of the present reality, is indistinguishable from the destiny oozing from the painted labyrinths of our squares and streets, and is summed up particularly well in the billboards where one finds programs for the theater, death notices and advertisements for miracle pills. Consequently, the axiom is true, and so I respect it. But I'm also aware that there are many truths and that the absolute truth doesn't exist, since truth is precisely that which contradicts itself. For example, I know that spiritual felicity declines in relation to the progressive decay of my gastric tubes. But then, *felicitas* does exist in me, in spite of *mala digestio*.

Resting now on the cushion of this soothing auto-consolation, I doze peacefully beneath the fixed flight of the Mamelukes.

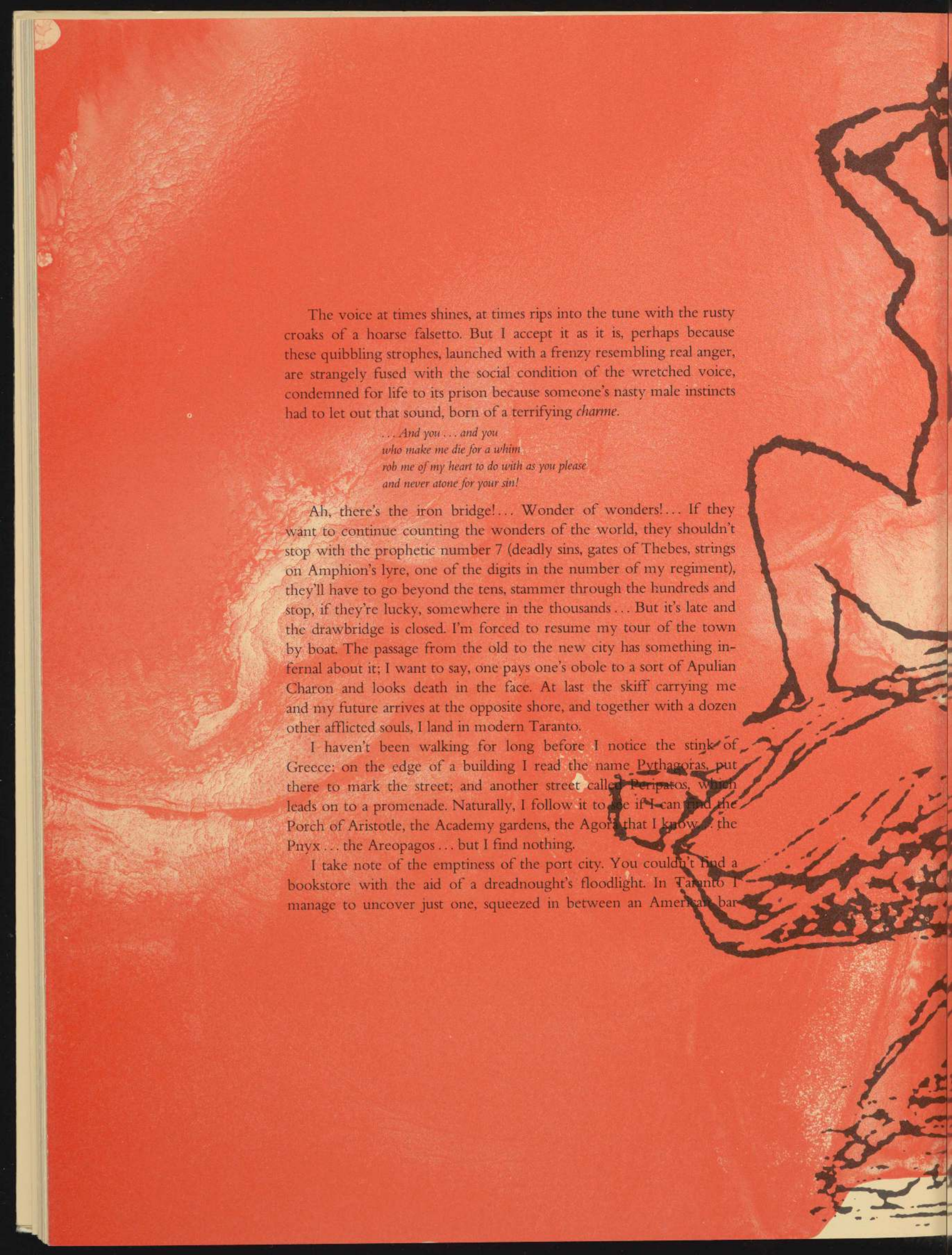
With the evening sun, I leave the hotel "Tripoli" and stop at a



“Salon” to have my jewels raked over, after which, shaved and perfumed with the scent of “Frisson de Reine,” I head out to discover Taranto.

But what’s this, oh ultimate Tezcatlipoca! . . . All of a sudden I find myself in the company of a crowd swarming in front of the entrance to a dark alley; an excited, noisy crowd, yet a petrified one, planted in the ground as if from the stillness created by two opposing motions: the frenzy to push forward, and a repulsion casting them back. As I approach, I imagine all sorts of terrible accidents have transpired . . . it’s a swarm of whores, bristling with red high heels that look more like stilts, sticking their noses out from behind the pillars of an arcade. I can hear the challenging voice of the procuress, “Come on, Gents! Put up or clear out! . . . the big one there, half a lira, the little one. . .” But before she can get out the reduced tariff for these worm-eaten organisms, the crowd explodes as if in revolt, lets fly with high-pitched whistles and, from right in the middle of the howling bitches, a mimetic joke created by the lips bursts out in a gooey mess; what Luigi Pulci has christened *pordane*. The riot jams itself into the throat of the dead end street and who knows what abominations might have taken place if a police patrol, on its nightly rounds, hadn’t arrived in the nick of time. Dressed in full battle fatigue, chin straps down, enormous revolvers dangling from their holsters, they sweep the crowd off the pavement and restore order to this little piece of putrifying Sodom. The shouts die down and, as I head in the direction of a more wholesome quarter, I hear a voice springing from the prison of that infernal marsh – like a golden finch out of a black cage – breaking into some ample tune from *Ladra*:

*I've seen many a thief get the book
From a judge with a cold, bitter look.
But what if you've stole only bread?
The law only pardons the dead . . .*



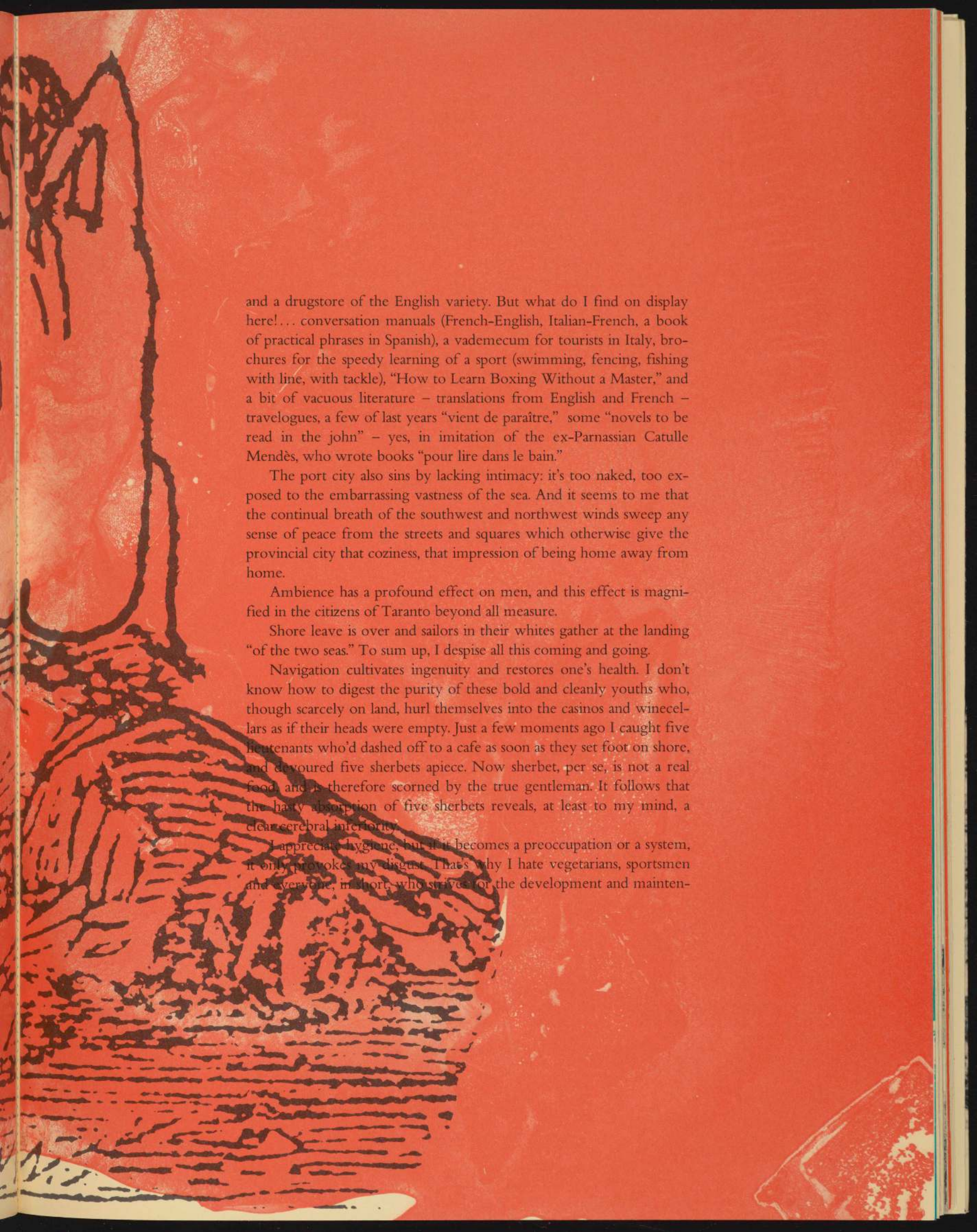
The voice at times shines, at times rips into the tune with the rusty croaks of a hoarse falsetto. But I accept it as it is, perhaps because these quibbling strophes, launched with a frenzy resembling real anger, are strangely fused with the social condition of the wretched voice, condemned for life to its prison because someone's nasty male instincts had to let out that sound, born of a terrifying *charme*.

*... And you ... and you
who make me die for a whim
rob me of my heart to do with as you please
and never atone for your sin!*

Ah, there's the iron bridge!... Wonder of wonders!... If they want to continue counting the wonders of the world, they shouldn't stop with the prophetic number 7 (deadly sins, gates of Thebes, strings on Amphion's lyre, one of the digits in the number of my regiment), they'll have to go beyond the tens, stammer through the hundreds and stop, if they're lucky, somewhere in the thousands... But it's late and the drawbridge is closed. I'm forced to resume my tour of the town by boat. The passage from the old to the new city has something infernal about it; I want to say, one pays one's obole to a sort of Apulian Charon and looks death in the face. At last the skiff carrying me and my future arrives at the opposite shore, and together with a dozen other afflicted souls, I land in modern Taranto.

I haven't been walking for long before I notice the stink of Greece: on the edge of a building I read the name *Pythagoras*, put there to mark the street; and another street called *Peripatos*, which leads on to a promenade. Naturally, I follow it to see if I can find the *Porch of Aristotle*, the *Academy gardens*, the *Agora* that I know... the *Pnyx*... the *Areopagos*... but I find nothing.

I take note of the emptiness of the port city. You couldn't find a bookstore with the aid of a dreadnought's floodlight. In Taranto I manage to uncover just one, squeezed in between an American bar



and a drugstore of the English variety. But what do I find on display here!... conversation manuals (French-English, Italian-French, a book of practical phrases in Spanish), a vademecum for tourists in Italy, brochures for the speedy learning of a sport (swimming, fencing, fishing with line, with tackle), "How to Learn Boxing Without a Master," and a bit of vacuous literature – translations from English and French – travelogues, a few of last years "vient de paraître," some "novels to be read in the john" – yes, in imitation of the ex-Parnassian Catulle Mendès, who wrote books "pour lire dans le bain."

The port city also sins by lacking intimacy: it's too naked, too exposed to the embarrassing vastness of the sea. And it seems to me that the continual breath of the southwest and northwest winds sweep any sense of peace from the streets and squares which otherwise give the provincial city that coziness, that impression of being home away from home.

Ambience has a profound effect on men, and this effect is magnified in the citizens of Taranto beyond all measure.

Shore leave is over and sailors in their whites gather at the landing "of the two seas." To sum up, I despise all this coming and going.

Navigation cultivates ingenuity and restores one's health. I don't know how to digest the purity of these bold and cleanly youths who, though scarcely on land, hurl themselves into the casinos and winecellars as if their heads were empty. Just a few moments ago I caught five lieutenants who'd dashed off to a cafe as soon as they set foot on shore, and devoured five sherbets apiece. Now sherbet, per se, is not a real food, and is therefore scorned by the true gentleman. It follows that the hasty absorption of five sherbets reveals, at least to my mind, a clear cerebral inferiority.

I appreciate hygiene, but if it becomes a preoccupation or a system, it only provokes my disgust. That's why I hate vegetarians, sportsmen and everyone, in short, who strives for the development and mainten-



ance of an appropriate muscular tone.

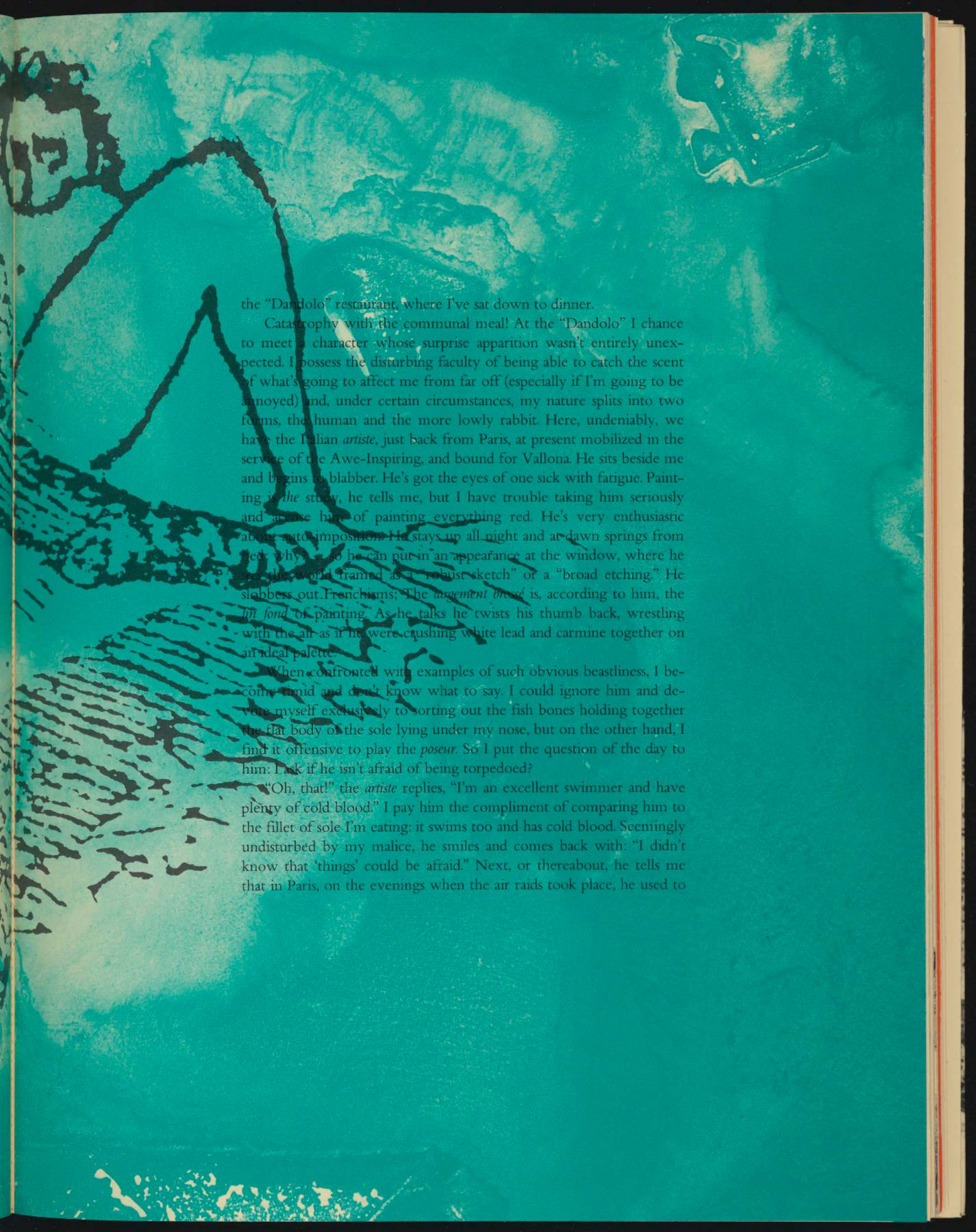
Sailors practice hygiene to excess: they are soldiers without warmth. Let me express my opinion on the subject of cleanliness. I hold the Cubists in the highest esteem, but with this obvious reservation, namely that I don't feel obliged to give in to all the tricks of their argument.

Thus, I don't think it necessary to take the axiom of my friend Picasso to heart when he states: "washing becomes a useless habit for anyone who, like myself, takes great care in not getting dirty." No, this is a Catalan point of view. Still I detest a disciplined hygiene — I find the Anglo-Saxon sort of cleanliness repugnant, as well as the cleanliness of all those individuals who leave the overwhelming odor of Windsor soap on your hand when they shake in or who, when they're speaking too close, billow in your face a gaseous breath laden with dentifrice, camphor and liquorice.

What's more, I don't feel that I've anything in common with these sea boys; taken together, they remind me of recreation period at boarding school: they dress like schoolboys, and that is a monstrosity, besides being an immoral spectacle.

There's no room for objection. The search for truth in first causes is the prerogative of gods and men; it's simply the caprice of etymologists and grammarians, or else of would-be poets. Let us not make use of the elevators that rise to these sources. The only acceptable condition is that of the actual. The "eppur si muove" doesn't belong to Galileo; it is Galileo who belongs to the "eppur si muove." The sailor's uniform is more befitting to the schoolboy than the sailor; adopted and generally worn in one's youth, it has now become the possession of youth — in accordance with the inevitable process of drawing one's observations from the facts, which surpasses and negates abstract reasoning.

Such are the meditations which accompany me even at the table of

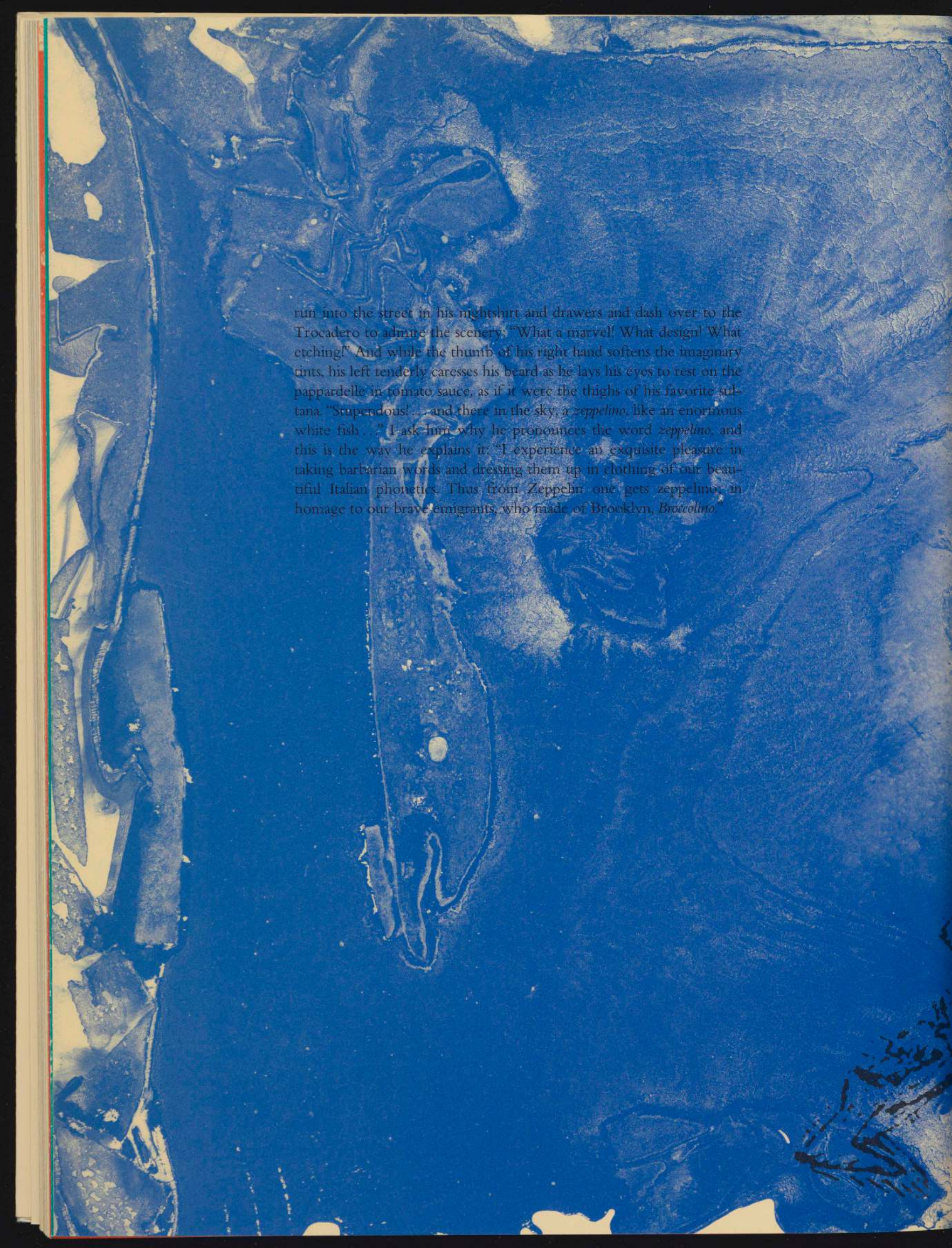


the "Dandolo" restaurant, where I've sat down to dinner.

Catastrophy with the communal meal! At the "Dandolo" I chance to meet a character whose surprise apparition wasn't entirely unexpected. I possess the disturbing faculty of being able to catch the scent of what's going to affect me from far off (especially if I'm going to be annoyed) and, under certain circumstances, my nature splits into two forms, the human and the more lowly rabbit. Here, undeniably, we have the Italian *artiste*, just back from Paris, at present mobilized in the service of the Awe-Inspiring, and bound for Vallona. He sits beside me and begins to blabber. He's got the eyes of one sick with fatigue. Painting is *the* study, he tells me, but I have trouble taking him seriously and accuse him of painting everything red. He's very enthusiastic about auto-imposition. He stays up all night and at dawn springs from bed; why? — so he can put in an appearance at the window, where he sees the world framed as a "robust sketch" or a "broad etching." He slobbers out Frenchisms; The *largement brosse* is, according to him, the *fin fond* of painting. As he talks he twists his thumb back, wrestling with the air as if he were crushing white lead and carmine together on an ideal palette.

When confronted with examples of such obvious beastliness, I become timid and don't know what to say. I could ignore him and devote myself exclusively to sorting out the fish bones holding together the flat body of the sole lying under my nose, but on the other hand, I find it offensive to play the *poseur*. So I put the question of the day to him: I ask if he isn't afraid of being torpedoed?

"Oh, that!" the *artiste* replies. "I'm an excellent swimmer and have plenty of cold blood." I pay him the compliment of comparing him to the fillet of sole I'm eating; it swims too and has cold blood. Seemingly undisturbed by my malice, he smiles and comes back with: "I didn't know that 'things' could be afraid." Next, or thereabout, he tells me that in Paris, on the evenings when the air raids took place, he used to



run into the street in his nightshirt and drawers and dash over to the Trocadero to admire the scenery: "What a marvel! What design! What etching!" And while the thumb of his right hand softens the imaginary tints, his left tenderly caresses his beard as he lays his eyes to rest on the pappardelle in tomato sauce, as if it were the thighs of his favorite sultana. "Stupendous! . . . and there in the sky, a *zeppelino*, like an enormous white fish . . ." I ask him why he pronounces the word *zeppelino*, and this is the way he explains it: "I experience an exquisite pleasure in taking barbarian words and dressing them up in clothing of our beautiful Italian phonetics. Thus from Zeppelin one gets *zeppelino*, in homage to our brave emigrants, who made of Brooklyn, *Broccolino*."



Chapter V

My window eyes the military gate, and the marshalling of the battle fleet is entirely contained within the perimeter of its quadrant.

I've always nourished a lively interest in war ships. This is but one of the many infantilisms which resonate through the period of my maturity. Rifles, cannons, battleships – in short, the whole warlike apparatus – have a powerful fascination for us – babies. How many times have we sworn to ourselves that we wouldn't just grow up one day, but that we'd grow up to become officers?... I was such a child, and now I am a grown-up; true, I haven't become an officer, but I still retain a fresh curiosity for firearms: fresh, however, only so long as circumstance doesn't lead to a familiarity with them which, were it to occur, would corrode the very magic of their mystery. With reference to warships, the phenomenon of corrosion replays itself in me: the first day here I planted myself at the window with the same enjoyment one feels while observing a cobra in a glass tank. By the next day I'd had enough, and as to those following, I prefer not to think about them. But now that I've come to feel more at home with these armed, bloated fish, I follow their lives and study their habits. Here's one that's repeated every morning: a seaplane takes to the sky, climbs high and patrols the sea; a flotilla of torpedo boats and minesweepers leaves its moorings and unleashes an inspection on itself; a battleship hoists anchor and slowly heads for the open sea, turns its side towards land and begins removing grease from its parts, opposite some sort of ballooning red scaffolding that floats far out to sea. The plane buzzes around the battleship; the torpedo boats and minesweepers circle like ants around a dead horsefly. In the evening the battleship returns to base. I ponder this matter: "according to the calculations of the experts, that ship is worth some sixty millions – but my life is worth much more than that. I'll be leaving soon and the government hasn't given me command of a seaplane, or a torpedo boat, or even a minesweeper. I must file a protest with the Ministry." *Friday: the 13th of July.*







This morning I manage to scramble as far as the drilling grounds. While visiting army camps during this, my voyage, I often get the impression I'm in the Blessed Republic (blessed, apparently, for the worse), because these camps are arranged in every detail like the *Civitas Solis* which was sung by that Campanella whom the French, in their frenzy to claim for themselves even what is foreign, have rebaptized for their own uses: Monsieur Thomas Clochette.

So I climb to the city of the sun, built on the ascent to a high plane that cuts, clean and orderly, through the northern hills. The barracks and tents are arranged in a circle in the center of which stands a little white chapel with altar and tabernacle. From this point overlooking Taranto, the city reveals its physiognomy: a half-shaven face, with new Taranto the shaven cheek, and old Taranto the unshaven one.

I am the metaphysician, and I go to meet the Genoese. Alas! It's Friday the 13th and in the quarter where the Genoese live, or at least people like them, I encounter a Constantinopolitan instead.

It was doomed to happen! This awful day, coupled with an even more awful date, would never pass without ensnaring me in something dreadful: I foresaw it all (here you see I'm the rabbit). The superstition proves true: Taranto reserved this encounter with the Byzantine just for me; he's an "Italian" from the East, at present a soldier in His Majesty's army, who finds himself conscripted by an improbable turn of events, of laws governing subjects, of birth certificates, the whole thing an obscure intrigue of the consular bureaucracy.

With his first words, the Constantinopolitan confesses he has great difficulty making himself understood in Italian, because he took *toutes ses classes en français*; then he tells me he is *enchanté* to have finally met *un monsieur grec*. I shout, I protest, I shriek that I'm not Greek at all, the mere fact that I was born at Athens doesn't necessarily decide my lineage – I could just as well have come into the world in an elevator, in a cabin on a transatlantic ship, what would that make me? . . . I strive





to prove my Italianity, and dive into my *riso con verdura*, the army ration for the day, but my censor smiles with an exasperating complacency and assures me there is nothing I can say to persuade him otherwise. I point out that my case is hardly the only one of its kind; I bring to his attention the famous examples of Ugo Foscolo, Arturo Graf and the less famous though more convincing examples of Matilde Serao. But the young Levantine doesn't know who Foscolo was and seriously doubts anyone named Arturo Graf could ever have walked amidst us mortals. Only the name of the famous Matilde makes him prick up his ears a bit, but I quickly see he's gotten tangled in an homophony, confusing her name with a certain Mea Tilde, who bleats out French ditties through her mouth and derrier in a *beuglant* about her detestable Cospole.

He is one of those creatures who are incapable of sustaining an argument by showing either approval or disapproval. They let you sink and never offer anything to hold onto; as you speak they whittle down your spirit with their deaf and dumb apathy so that, by their first assault on the conversation you've become timid and impotent, as if you were being forced to climb a glass wall: you slide down the soapy surface they present and are left standing before them looking like an eggplant, strangled by your own unvented anger.

Not even five minutes have elapsed and he's already inundating me with an affability at once intimate, communicative and confidential. We make our voyage *ensemble*; he holds up both parts of the conversation. "Ah, mon cher, quel plaisir! nous irons together à Salonique où nous pourrons boire at last du café turc et smoke des cigarettes Nestos... Ici en Italie trop de misère, my dear. Avez-vous été à Cospole? ... Ah, si vous voyez la Cospole de maintenant! ... Plus jolie que toutes les grandes capitales de l'Europe. Ah so glorious, mon cher. A Taxim, qui est le plus beau baktché du monde entier, nous avons maintenant quatre cinémas: le Vénus, le Parisiana, l'Olympos et le





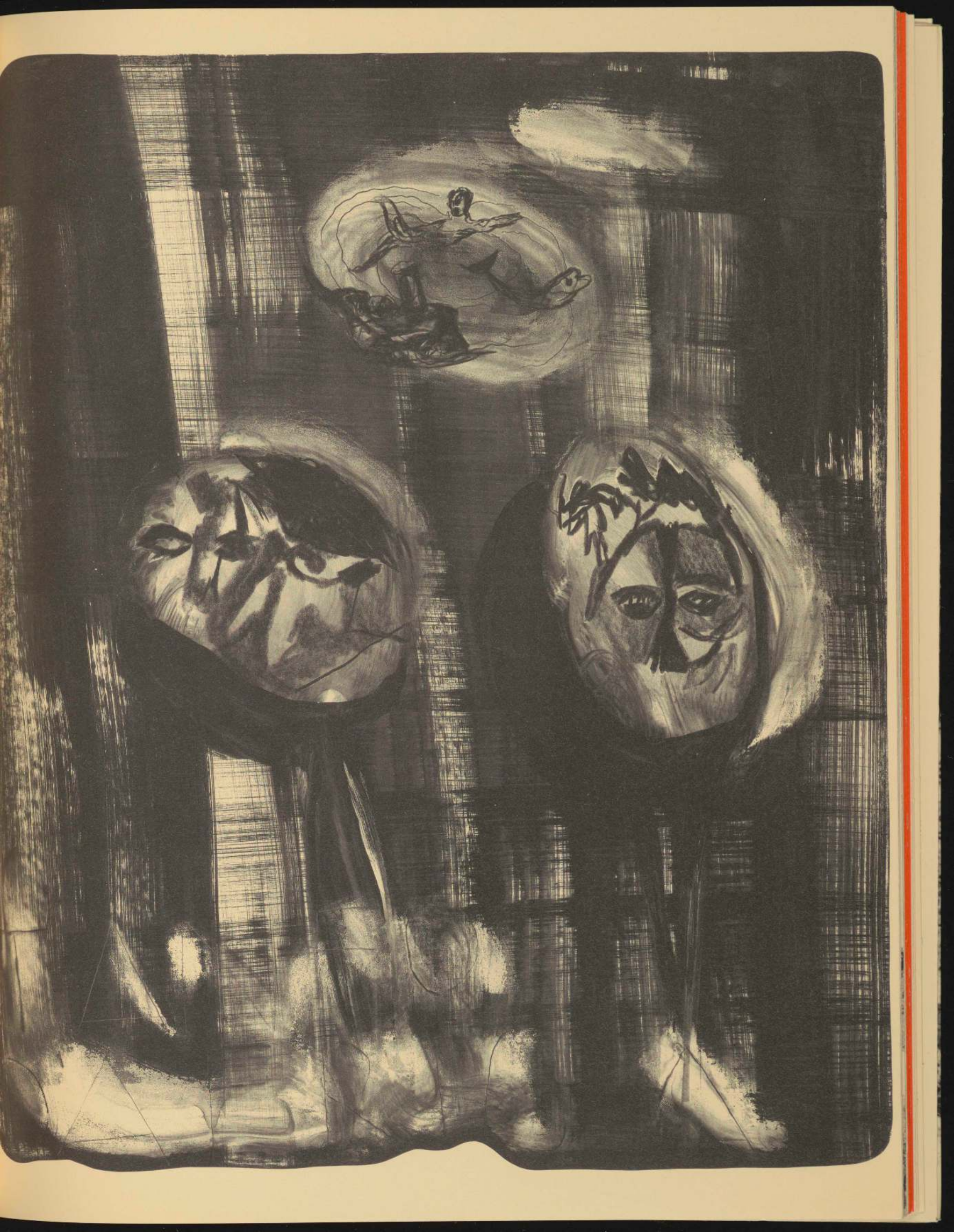
Splendid. Ah, si vous saviez quelles festivités à Taxim!... Avez-vous connu les Paskaly?... Vous devez savoir que le fils de John Paskaly, Antoine Paskaly, était fled au Pirée avec une cocotte de Paris que les dandys de Péra appelaient Miss Modesty, et qu'il a mangé tous les médjidiés de son père, qui est le plus riche banquier du stavrodròmi. Ah, ces françaises, mon cher, comme elles savent vous to strip un chrétien!..." But here I insist he stop: No, you're not going to travel on the same boat with me, you misfit! I'd rather swim to the land of Turkish coffee and Nestos cigarettes. I don't even know who you are. I refuse to recognize you, I dismiss, I ignore, I deny you! And as I shout, I cover my face like a dying Ceasar and take the main boulevard in the direction of the unshaven check of the city – to old Taranto.

I return to the "Dandolo" restaurant – I'm in the habit of eating twice a day – like everyone else.

An M.P. sergeant enters, he's incredibly old, and sits down just opposite me, at the same table.

Why I write M.P. here isn't necessary to explain. Without a qualm, the intelligent scholar adopts words, phrases or metaphors sanctioned by use. The exigencies of life repress language, whose evolutionary path leads not to verbosity but to phonetic truncation. English – i. e., the most intoned language in turbulent modern life is, by nature, already semi-negresque, and won't stop there but threatens to become a language of the deaf and dumb or something even worse. If I were to say that I'd bought a car from Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino, I certainly wouldn't be understood nearly as well as if I'd simply said: I purchased a Fiat (and leave the rest to conjecture). Fiat, M. P., G. S., (sticking to the strict discipline of *Usiam*) – behold, the language lives!

Those who embrace rhetoric only create empty works – they banish themselves from modernity. The modern lyric is perfectly matched to direct speech: that is to say, to the newly created vocabulary, or rather one necessitated by the new.





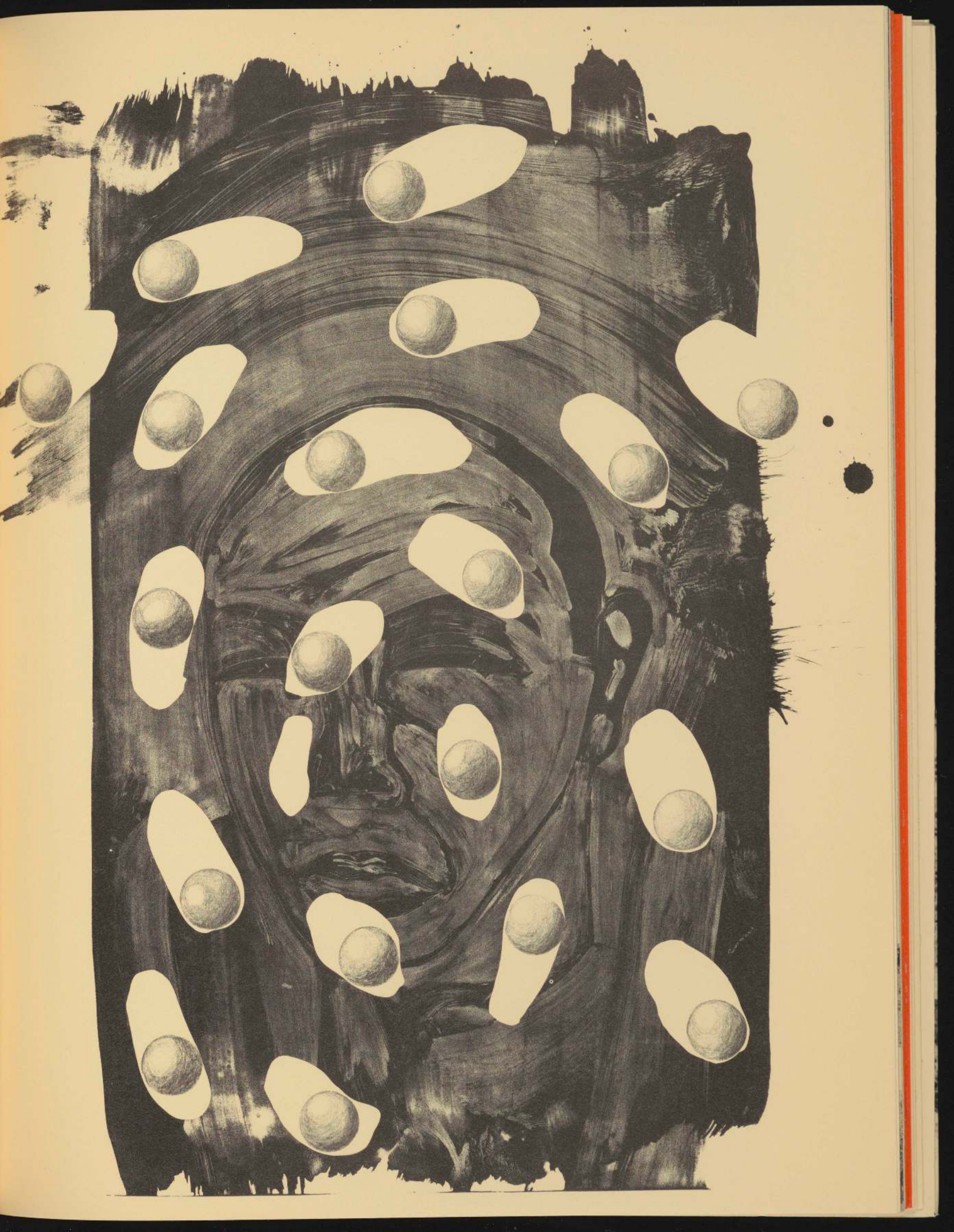
At first glance, this new vocabulary might give the impression of being silly because it's crude, harsh, lacking the polish words acquire from rubbing up against obsolete vocabularies. But this silliness harbors truth, reason, the classicism of the future. That's the trick of the Futurists. And when such silliness enters common usage, it's a good idea to accept it outright. We have to strip ourselves of the amour-propre of antiquity, and the oppressive aristocratic view. A more humble cretin might become as obstinate as a Spanish Grandee and want to attack everything new from a fortress of stagnant custom; but I'm not that humble cretin.

Anyway, the M. P. sergeant is furious because a short while ago one of his colleagues from the 99th regiment told him that at his age he should've been made general. It's in the heat of this insult that the veteran subaltern has entered the restaurant, and he vents his anger in every direction. Almost immediately he fixes on the military regulations and at length screams out, "I hate regulations like I hate white navy pants, whether filthy or clean, they serve Italy in the same fashion!" I stand up at this point and in front of everyone, including the restaurant manager Gaggiano, I refute and finally quash the blasphemy of this heretic.

The 19th hour. The drawbridge is open. Crowds gather on the embankment. I stand facing forward: two Japanese destroyers pass by, and after them a transport ship loaded with French soldiers on deck standing at attention, with their Basque berets flopping over their ears and their cork lifejackets held tightly in their armpits. The officials on the ship's bridge stiffly salute and trumpets blare. Along the shore the crowds applaud. A naval chorus rises in broken waves of sound:

*La République nous appelle
sachons vaincre ou sachons mourir . . .*

Beside me a lieutenant from the chasseurs, swollen with enthusiasm, grabs my arm and, as if he were trying to force me to corroborate



something, shouts, "y pas à dire, ils sont bien crânes!" I nod my head with a gesture that might be interpreted as meaning: Don't get so worked up, my good man, I never said those were humps on their shoulders. Meanwhile, from the poop of the ship, which looks like a fat hen dragging her ass over the water, the last strophe of the verse can be heard:

*un français doit vivre pour elle
pour elle un français doit mourir...*

I only ponder the things I know: I know that further out, almost on the high sea, a different transport ship sits waiting, black, smoking. It didn't cross the channel to the applause of the crowds; it's packed with soldiers dressed in gray green – brought to that ship on barges and rafts – they'll weigh anchor as quiet as mice and they'll fight and die at the most terrifying sector on the Macedonian front: elevation 1050.

There's another aspect to the Arabic influence here: Taranto lacks women. No matter where I go, wherever I poke my head – in the cafes, by the Marconi steps, at the Sant' Angelo theater, in the parks at concert hour – I never seem to stumble across any skirts worthy of hanging my expert glances on. Only periodically do I bump into half a dozen coquettes who carry out their duty of enticing men with the disciplined regularity of the *vigiles* (the military police). I have to ask myself, in a city that's been subjected to all the shit that the whirling Janissaries used to fling around, why aren't they in the habit of giving out the battle cry of the peripatetics? ... These contractors of "quick" love, mistakenly called *allegre*, display on the contrary an attitude of iron-like austerity: they reproduce perfectly the characteristics of whores destined to be handed over by soldiers of fortune to their mercenary troops as pay; (a custom nowadays practiced by certain colonial governors who inspire these women to follow the Foreign Legion column into the African interior along with the mules and baggage) and those characteristics are: sunken, glassy eyes, unsightly





bruises on the face, blotches and red tubercular patches on the cheeks, an undulating motion to the back, raspy voices, etc., etc.

To this image of women, however, I find a corrective in certain French dames, wives of sea captains – getting on in years but admirably well preserved, a bit full-form but energetic, with finely turned ankles, looking all frothed up in their crisp white apparel, beneath little *niniche* bonnets that bounce on big braids of *henné* colored hair, naked, vibrant throats and creamy breasts decorated with roses and lace which make them look like baskets of freshly picked strawberries . . . in short – a *charmant retour d'âge*, whom I encounter on the terrace of the Cafe Moderno at the hour when one takes an aperitif. Not far from my table, I follow a republican couple as they preserve themselves in the conjugal jar: he calls her *Liliane ma chérie*, to which she replies, *mon gros choux* while at a nearby table, I savor some small consolation in the goblet of mint julep and soda water before me. You see, I can't convince myself that this vegetable name is the sole property of the husband (if husband he be), i. e., this graying forty-year old man who has the furry sideburns of a boatswain on either side of his smooth shaven chin, a cap with a pointed crown that bends his ears, and who wallows in a pair of trousers that display a ferocious and prolonged aversion to being ironed. But I've sliced off a generous piece of property for myself in the triple assonance of this nickname, and I offer it up ice cold to my vainglory. Yet not so vain, since every time the name "big cabbage" occurs in the conversation, with a voice so sweetly modulated, as if it were the throbs of an oboe in the chords of nones, I'm surprised (and with what pleasure!) by the attention Liliane dangles in front of me like an amulet – either fixing her gaze on the buttons of my jacket, or on the green of my cuffs, or even on the strap of my binoculars. Certainly, I'd prefer the sweet lady pay equal attention to the beautiful reproduction of "The Taking of Ain-Zara" hanging above my bed, but ah me! *noblesse militaire oblige*: cruel







circumstance forbids that I push the idyllic point. For the next seven days I content myself with the part I play (not grand but agreeable), in that exquisitely modulated phrase, where the name of a tasty vegetable has been raised to the level of a plaything of love. An appendix before closing our romance: on the night before leaving, I permit myself the liberty of writing this verse on the marble tabletop which I squirt out from symbolist memories for the occasion:

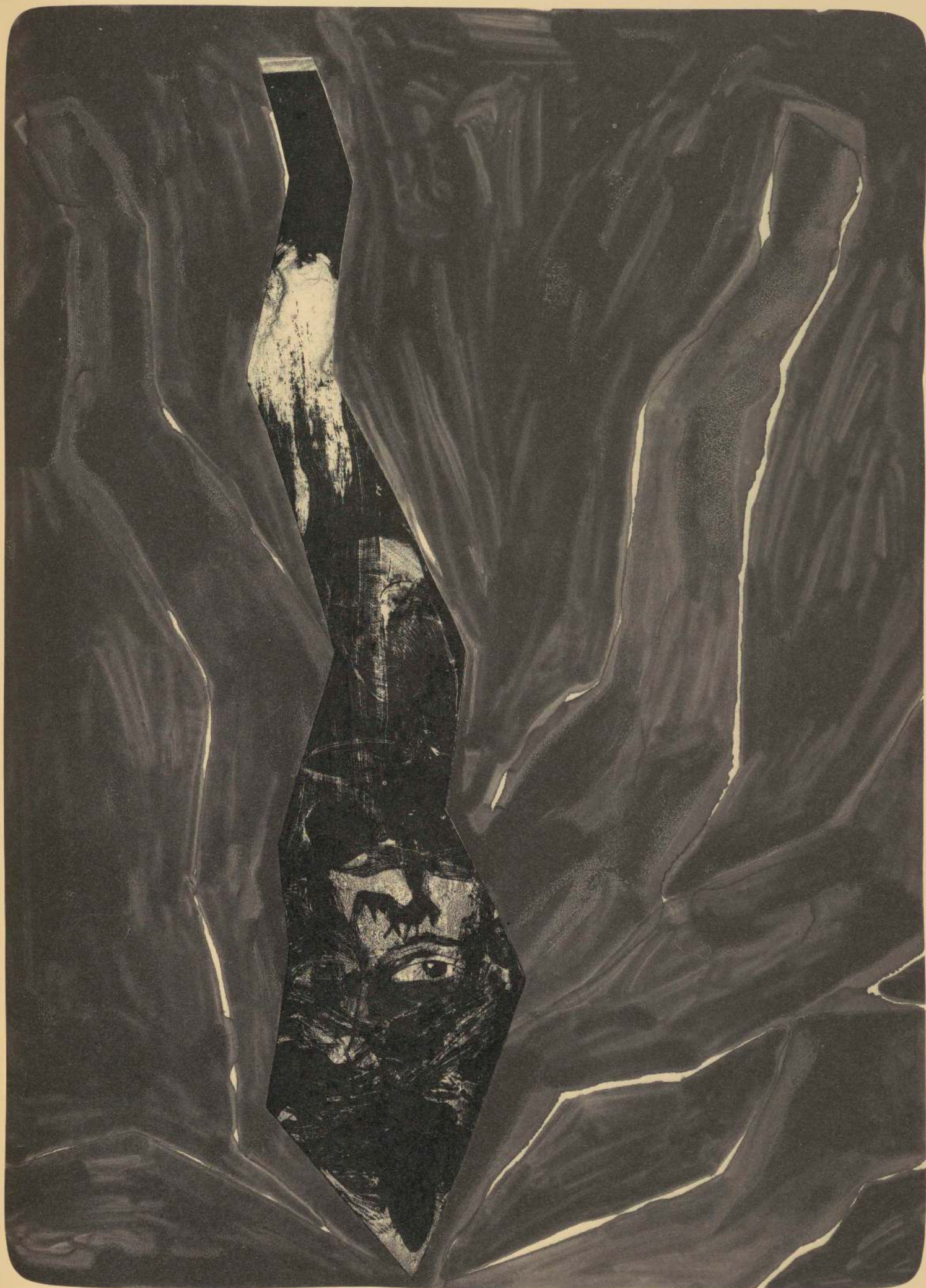
"les allégreses, ô sœurs si pâles, s'appellent et meurent"

but now that I recall it, I realize that the loathsome, unfit-for-duty waiter will probably have passed his rag over the still wet ink of that awful strophe before the sweet lady's eyes could have caressed it with a glance. So even the nostalgia of our love has failed; scarcely in bud, it never blossomed into a flower

*Navigare necesse est
vivere non est necesse*

Launched from the Odero shipyards at Genoa, the *Savoia* is a large black steamship with a pointed bow and big smoke stacks tilted toward the stern.

Today, after a beautiful dawn, we were ready to embark on the *Savoia*. First, we had to hear a lecture "on the methods of comportment during emergency situations," and then were provided with life-jackets. The lieutenant in charge of this lecture dished up this heartening argument at the end of the talk: "Keep a stiff upper lip, boys! Take a look at the sky: it's empty. The sea: smooth as oil. And the weather is magnificent. At this very moment hundreds of allied ships are crossing the sea. And the eyes of our sentinels are everywhere vigilant. So why should misfortune fall on our heads? ... Are we not Christians like everyone else? ... Have we blasphemed the Lord or mocked the Cross? ... No! So lift up your hearts, boys, and trust that Providence will uphold the just cause of Italy."



At the 18th – that magnificent hour – the commander of the bridge blows the whistle to get under way. The crew casts off the mooring lines, the pulleys begin to turn and the chains, wrapping around the windlass, hoist the anchors as they screech into their iron slots. With a clash of engines and ever increasing thrusts, the *Savoia*, arrogantly topped with hypertrophic smoke stacks, aims her prow impertinently at the open horizon.



Farewell! Farewell!

Prankish dwarfs gather on deck and, leaning on their elbows over the ship's dressing, gaze out at the city we've left behind as it clings to the edge of land. They're no longer laughing, and for the first time an expression of sadness wells up in their wide eyes. Like the dwarfs, none of us are laughing any more, lined up barefoot on deck, girded in gray lifejackets.

Our "theological" officer did make some sense; the sky is empty, the sea like oil, and the weather magnificent in the July sunset.

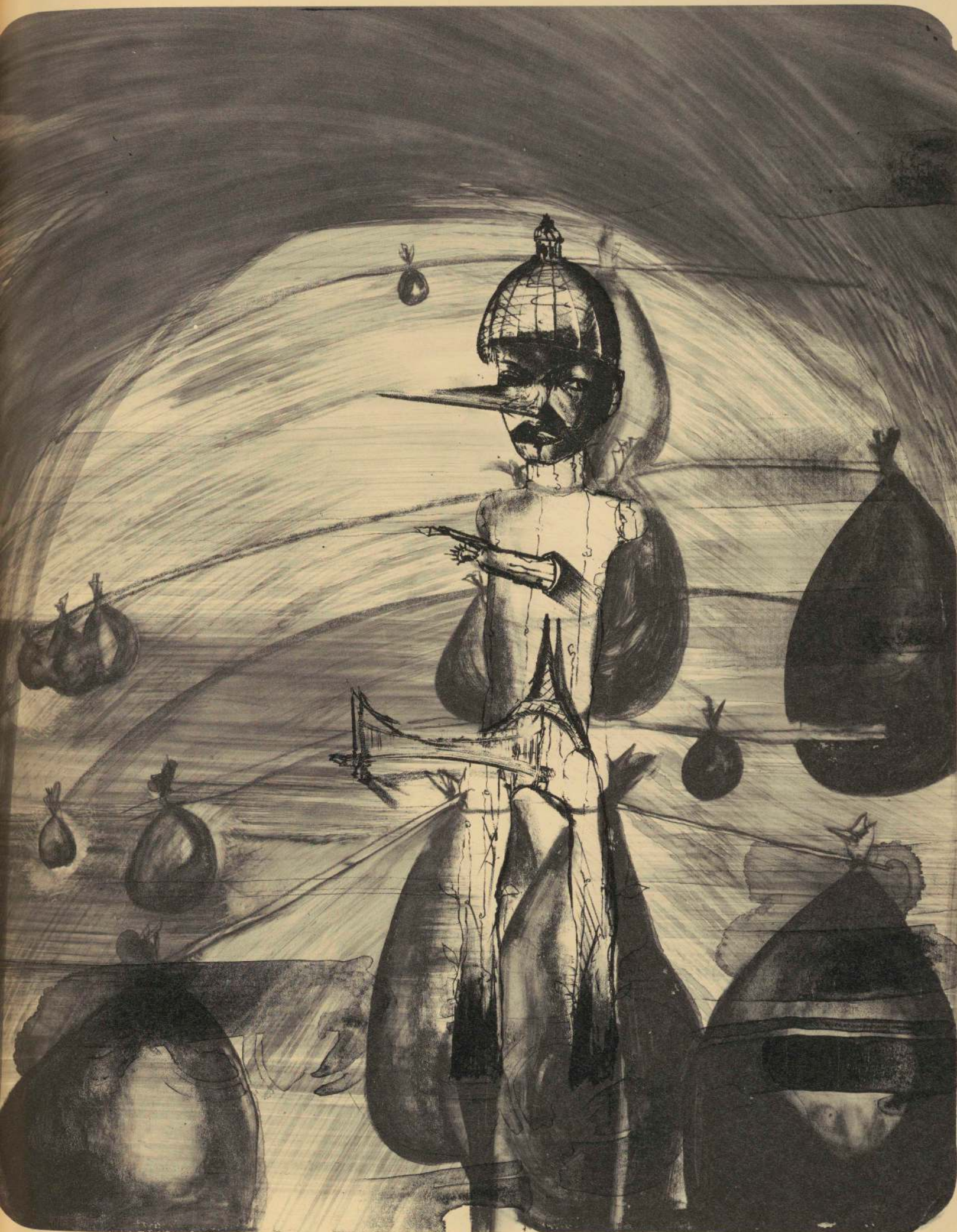
With gathering speed, the *Savoia* proceeds through the double wake of torpedo boats that lead the way. I regret having spoken ill of the government. No, there's no doubt about how much they value my safety, since they've dispatched these two iron ships.

Navigare necesse est

I confess that, personally, I long for some calm place where I can study how best to hinder or avoid the many calamities pressing in on me from all sides. I think I'd come out ahead if I became a citizen of Paraguay. My goal is to die between raptuous kisses – it may be necessary to push on to Labrador. But the place that really attracts me is a city in Palestine, sweet to the memory, buried in time: Cariatharim, the City of Repose. In short,

vivere non est necesse

and these are not the most luxuriously comfortable of times. So I can't pretend that this voyage is going to bring me to a perfumed El Dorado. I'll be happy enough if they just don't point that prow in the



direction of Tipperary! . . . No, that I wouldn't like. The roads are long and, at the same time, short. This worries me. Except for that vague, unreachable goal, I accept all others: in flight, then, to the land of the Phillipi.

We traverse a mine field. The sea is empty, the water very rough: we are . . . hold on . . . Long Live Italy!

"It's only the first sip that's hard to swallow." I can make use of the gravity of this axiom which my mother served me everytime my gastric situation required the intervention of a purgative. It's been two hours now since we've been out on the open sea – a sea dyed dark, beautiful but hostile: a sea of Prussian blue. Having regained my balance and finding myself on deck, I take note that the *Savoia* doesn't sink any lower than the red band of her water line. So I make an indissoluble pact with pure Faith and joyfully laugh at the torpedos as I laugh at the dolphins,

immortal babes

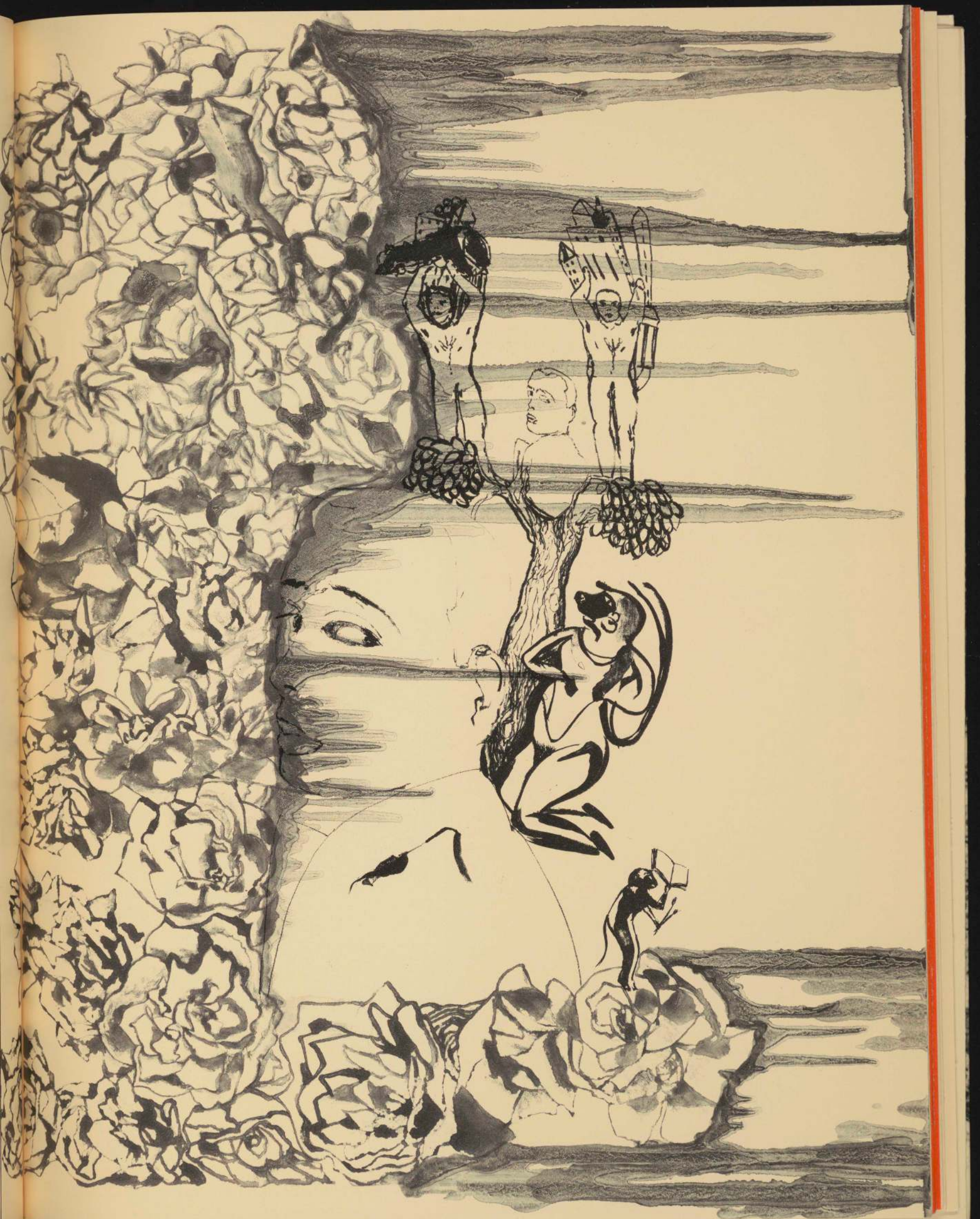
that cavort happily in the lather the propellers kick up.

It's been two hours already, and the dolphins still swim adjacent to the ship . . . Ah, Jason, more than ever I feel myself the Argonaut. Just before night descends, standing in front of the foremast's tarred trunk, looking straight into the face of guiding fate, I take off my cap:

*O Méditerranée, salut; voici Protée
qui lève de tes vagues son front couronné d'algues.*

But Proteus doesn't exist, except in the imagination of latinate poets who use *componere versus* with internal rhyme; instead of him, I watch a school of superstition's sirens arrive on the crest of a wave from Manchuria. It dawns on me that these sirens, formerly of the *Odyssey*, have had time to evolve and they now display a domesticity so complete they'd be perfect for the music hall, since, as they present their shining sea-breasts, they attack the arietta of Malbruk, and sing for me:







*The Argonaut, if he goes
tralallera tralalla
The Argonaut, if he goes
when he'll return, nobody knows! . . .*

Night has fallen. Secure in the embrace of my newfound companion, Faith, I settle into a perfumed dream of wind and salt. As my mind drifts off, the ballad dies away

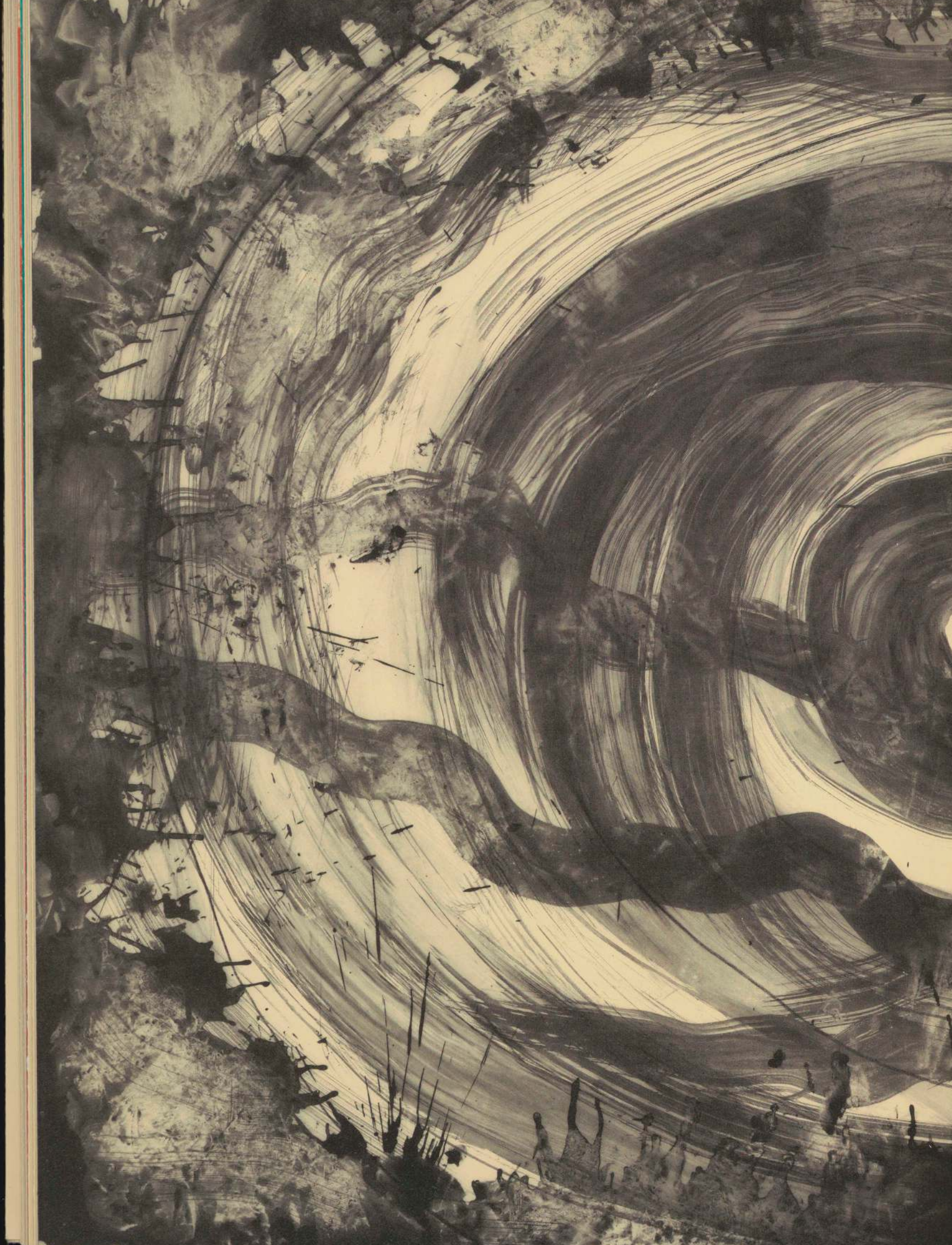
*tralallera tralalla
when he'll return, nobody knows . . .*




Epilogue

Well look at me in the sea!... Reacting to that idiotic mental process that inevitably predisposes us towards what is most likely to happen, I finally penetrate into the more substantial part of my adventure – amidst dangers crossing swords over my head and snares spreading their nets under my feet. But no!... It's a hazzardous affair rearranging facts to suit the pleasure of one's particular fantasy: those who do are very fastidious, curiosity makes them sick to their stomachs and, when someone peers through a hole in time to spy on the future, they set themselves up for a joust with mischief – since it so happens that I predicted with this voyage a foolhardy enterprise, a headlong leap into the abyss, a stretching out of one's hand towards livid death...

The sea, to the hotheaded organizers of the military supply lines, is no longer the element it used to be, a little dangerous but, above all, a manageable thing – like the sea of the *Odyssey*, the *Lusiads* or even of Jules Verne... The sea of the war of 1914–1918, in addition to containing all those elements every good tragedian employs in dishing up his cold design, has a look that could only be rendered with materials that were particularly dense and depressing, crammed with interior dangers, pregnant with iron spikes, bristling with nervous periscopes, belching explosions and weeping with torpedo wounds – the whole thing one horrid ventriloquism of murderous ferment. But I, to the contrary, with license from the pathetic bourgeoisie and the hypersensitive objectors to war, disavow all this: the sea I engage is the same one I've called "friend" as far back as my earthly birth: the sea of delight, of sparkling air and hearty appetite. With regard to the *Savoia* – that good-natured hulk which doesn't waive its dull postal duties, even out of deference to the 75 mm gun fixed to the edge of the poop deck and which, bending to sniff the sea, resembles a guardian nose waiting anxiously for the sneeze that will never come – the *Savoia* brings me serenely and without running aground, from the sacred heel of Italy,



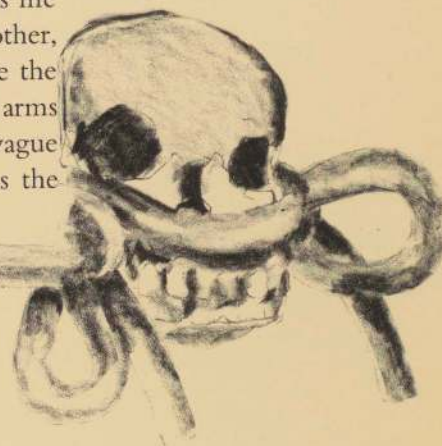


*A curse on the railway
and the engineer its inventor:
it's taken my girl away,
who knows if I'll ever see her! . . .*

I can certainly appreciate Soldier Just-turned-fifteen's strophe. Locked up in my brain I have a buzzing workshop of uncommon locomotion: I'm jealous and cruel about it and won't acknowledge any competition from group vacations, cheap tourism, or that travel agent Mr. Cook and his son.

In spite of all this, I'm having a hard time freeing myself from an hysterical desire for heroism, and during my first hours aboard ship, I'm swayed by the hope that an Apollonius, of Rhodes or elsewhere, will splash out of one of the Holy Grails of ever renewed poetic license and work up a sweat singing my fugitive tale in contorted blank verse.

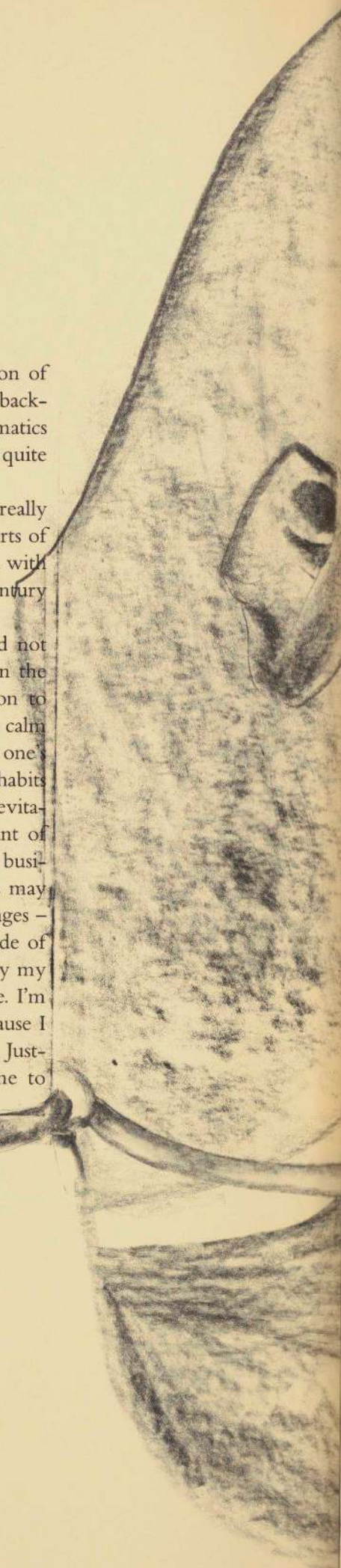
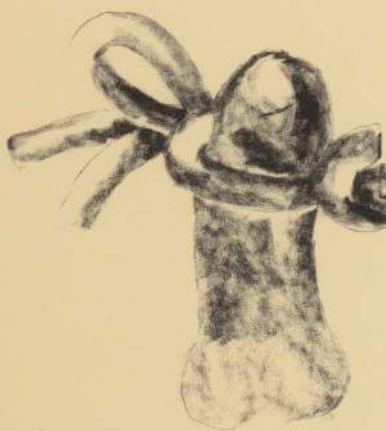
As time passes, the phenomenon of sailing runs up against the possibility of another phenomenon – shipwreck – which I'm forced to stomach because I'm not Isaac Laquedem, and am thus deprived of those fabled boots which alone would permit me to make a successful flight over the crests of the waves. With no way of avoiding danger, I adapt myself to it – simply by strength of apathy (a form of reverse fear). I stare the spectre of my watery death in the face, examine it, analyse it and then reply: all right, so who needs to live, what's the use of loving? . . . I know an even better psychic stance: that of the man "inspired" by the idea of death. Little by little, this idea of death fills me like a conquering sleep, but my sleep of death coincides with another, a purely physical sort of sleep, and I end up having to play quite the Argonaut poised before the mast: my head turns to lead, my arms weigh me down and my knees begin to buckle. I abandon my vague efforts at maintaining a posture of hero-like erectness and cross the



after five days and four nights, to the land where Alexander, son of Phillip, lived, reigned and who, *tradunt*, had his head screwed on backwards. The ship has done its job so well that my thirst for dramatics and adventure, having missed out on the icy drinks, remains quite simply an unslaked thirst.

I said five days and four nights, but in truth the days don't really count, since they were spent idling around, safe in the various ports of call. Navigation was by night, with lights out, silent, cautious, and with the diversionary maneuvers you'd expect from a nineteenth century pirate tale.

By nature I'm inclined to the more sedentary positions (and not for services *idem*). Two desires carousel in opposite directions on the merry-go-round of my personality: one, the spirit, spurs me on to travel and activity while the other, the body, is preoccupied with calm and tranquility. I know the benefits one derives from exploiting one's moves, one's changes in climate and altitude, in disrupting one's habits and in the ever recurring slaughter of the daily rat-race which inevitably leads to progressive arteriosclerosis of the mind; I'm ignorant of the diplomatic education important men receive through all the business trips they make. As impressive as their comings and goings may be, are they all true voyages? I lean more towards imaginary voyages – those not involving the transfer of organic matter. I'm on the side of Dante's *Commedia*, not the *Odyssey*. Change disturbs me, especially my bowels, which resent even the slightest variation in temperature. I'm more attracted to a parcel of land, a city, a house – probably because I possess neither land, nor city, nor house. This morning Soldier Just-turned-fifteen, from Cortona near Arezzo, veritably married me to my bunk bed when he sang this song:

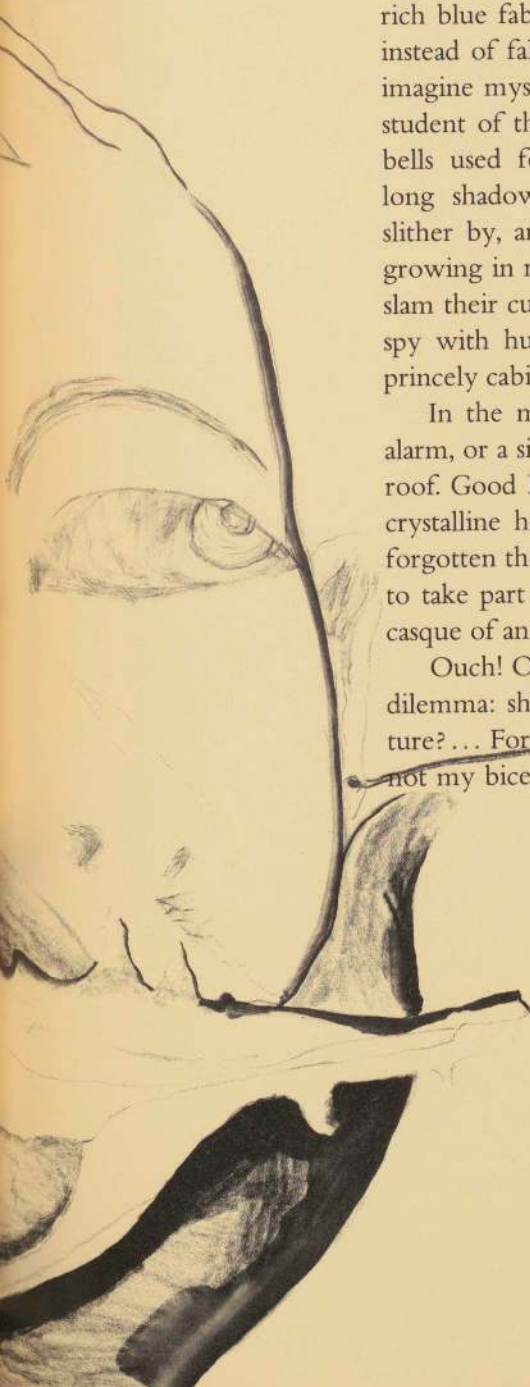


perfection of the Fatal Three.

But when I open my eyes, I leap from the divan: "It's happened, I'm at the bottom of the sea!..." My roof's interior is flecked with a bluish semiclararity – the light of the sea's abyss. But the engine's throb that stirs the linoleum under my feet, tells me my first impression was false, as are all impressions when heightened by the murky effects of sleep. I realize this bluish hue is the result of the porthole's glass gently filtering into bands the first light of dawn. Reassured, I lie back on the divan – a magnificent couch, thickly upholstered and covered with a rich blue fabric – and give myself a complimentary forty winks. But instead of falling asleep, I delight in the fairy-like mise-en-scene, and imagine myself in the role of H. R. H. the Prince of Monaco, serious student of the ocean's flora and fauna, enclosed in one of those glass bells used for underwater exploration, along whose sides the oblong shadows of submarines (those underwater dirigibles) silently slither by, and where are seen paralysing polyps with eyed tentacles growing in rows, and where monstrous forms rise from the depths to slam their curved, bony beaks against the glass window of the bell and spy with huge, myopic eyes into the intimate surroundings of the princely cabin.

In the meantime, the steam whistle lets out a tortuous coo. An alarm, or a signal that we've sighted land? ... I step out from under my roof. Good Lord! What a spectacle! ... sea of lacquer and enamel, the crystalline heaven a piece of satin powdered with Dorine dew. I've forgotten the demanding groans of my stomach and don't even bother to take part in the distribution of coffee, stupefied before the gilded casque of an ecstatic pre-dawn on the high sea.

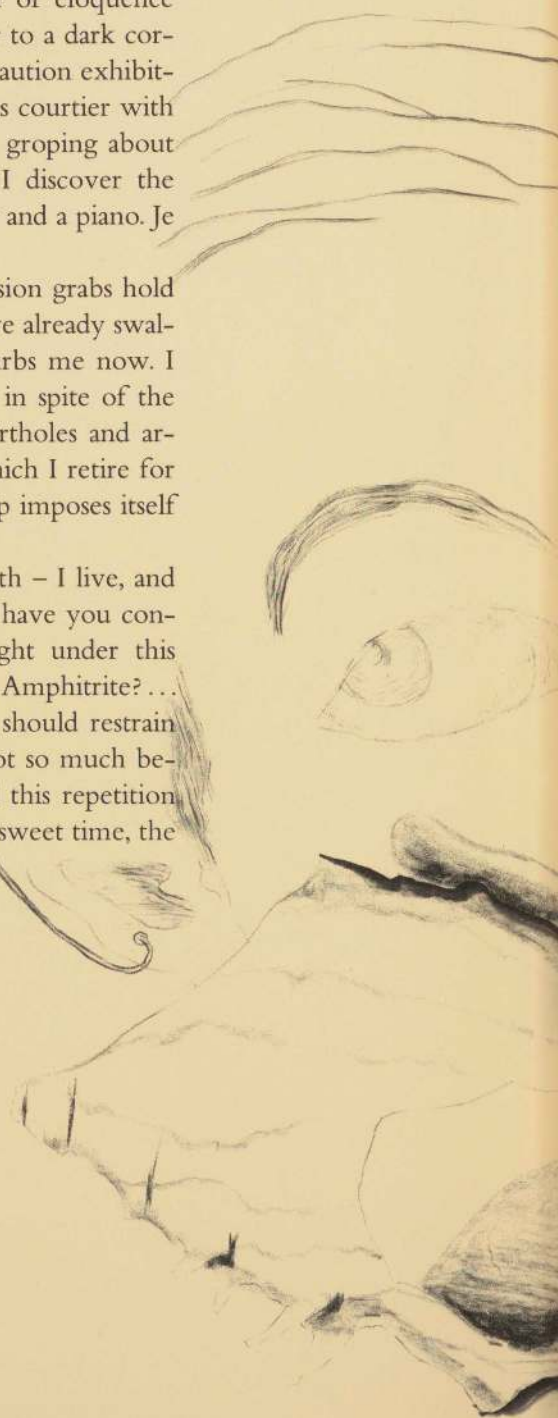
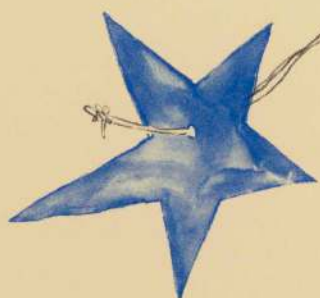
Ouch! Once more I find myself caught on the horns of a vicious dilemma: should I or should I not raise a hymn to beauty and nature? ... For a moment I play Hercules – by virtue of my hesitation not my biceps – and, as usual, I choose the negative solution: I abstain.




ship's bridge, clambering over the horizontal volumes of my sleeping shipmates. By the poop mast I catch sight of the *roof* to the second-class cabin. I try the door but it's locked. I go down into the hold and when I run into a cabin boy busily rearranging the petty officer's pots and pans, I propose the idea of renting this roof for my head. He's a Milanese who answers: "It's all the same to me, you understand, but there's the captain." Now with one foot in the door, I enrich him for his troubles with a promissory note. This mute form of eloquence triumphs over his Milanese austerity. He drags me over to a dark corner and slips a thin, ornate key into my hand with the caution exhibited by a clever chambermaid when favoring an amorous courtier with entrance to the royal suite. I enter under the roof and, groping about in the dark, explore its interior with my fingertips: I discover the presence of a circular divan, a steady table, an easy chair and a piano. *Je suis chez moi.*

Before stretching out to sleep, my shipwreck obsession grabs hold of me with renewed force. It's not the idea of dying (I've already swallowed that one) but my fear of getting wet that disturbs me now. I can accept death, but death by drowning – never! So, in spite of the hothouse temperature, I tighten the screws on the portholes and arrange myself as if in a sort of dry sarcophagus, after which I retire for the night on the divan where, almost immediately, sleep imposes itself upon me with the power of a master.

While sleeping – what some call a state of half-death – I live, and in a more precipitous mode than when awake. Where have you conducted me, Hermes Oneiopompos, for my first night under this roof? . . . To a banquet? . . . to the table of Poseidon and Amphitrite? . . . I recall it all darkly, and even that's best left unsaid. I should restrain myself from airing my mental aberrations yet again; not so much because I'm afraid of provoking the suspicion that in all this repetition I'm resorting to fakery, but rather to ward off, this one sweet time, the

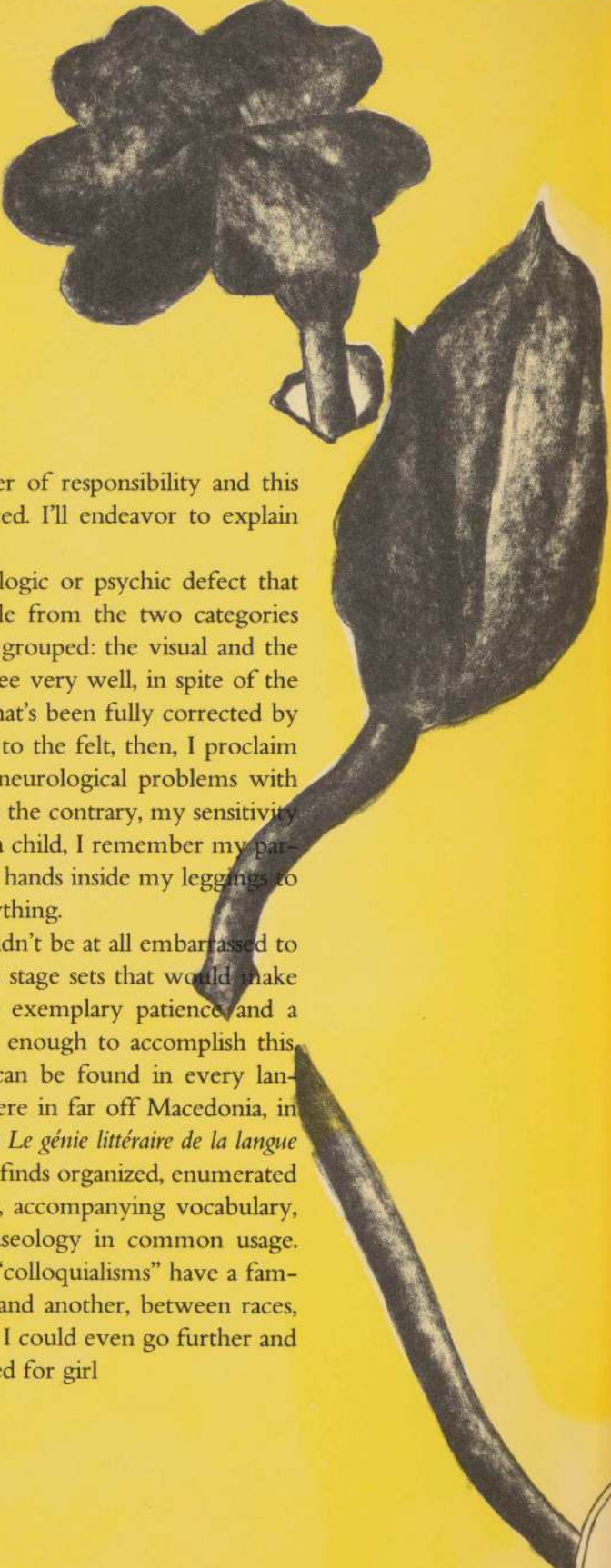




she'll be a mimosa or wisteria for his colleague in Nagasaki. It's a question of making inspiration tally with flowers and objects and the peculiarities of one's surroundings. But, unfortunately, I'm not a magician of the word, I'm not a juggler of adjectives, I'm not a prestidigitator of images; a virtuoso display of effects is not my intention and I wouldn't even hesitate to use one of the more cretinous forms of fakery – such as paraphrasing the *Lord's Prayer* as an opening address to the recruits of 1900.

It is precisely at this point that the problem rests, and is quite rightly exposed, as I'd like to demonstrate: I resemble the lover; I've suffered long under passion's imposing will and am thus well aware of its burden. I am no Don Juan. I don't conquer, I allow myself to be conquered. I simply can't act coolly, on the contrary, I'm easily over-excited. This ridiculous sensibility of mine has played me many a dirty trick. But at its root, nature is benign and prudent. There are no creatures, neither mastodon nor protozoa, that haven't been provided their own protection. In the natural course of my development, I became sensitized to an *entourage* both ideal and material, but in the process I ended up clothing myself in a shell so thick that the arrows of the more piercing inner emotions for the most part no longer have any effect. I've become enough of a fox to keep myself from being lured into the panic of pathos. My conscience has come through a long soak in the hot and cold baths of good and evil and has brought me right reason and infallible powers of observation, or at least a reason and infallibility which seem to me justly paired and which I accept as such, not worrying whether others wish to join me in this or not. My prudence operates at its best in matters where one finds the so called "sensitive" making the same slip-ups as the common herd, i. e., getting by with just a modicum of real understanding and a whole lot of hand-me-down tradition. I go into a faint before a natural spectacle; my brains get twisted out of shape before the psychopathic problem of a





Still, I don't want to be thought a shirker of responsibility and this time I don't intend to let it pass unnoticed. I'll endeavor to explain myself.

I'm not aware of any organic, physiologic or psychic defect that could rationally justify my voluntary exile from the two categories into which my intellectual colleagues are grouped: the visual and the emotional. With reference to the seen, I see very well, in spite of the dioptric sect to which I belong. Besides, that's been fully corrected by the convex lenses I wear. With reference to the felt, then, I proclaim that I'm no castrato, nor do I have any neurological problems with turning off the faucet of my emotions. On the contrary, my sensitivity has known a precocious development. As a child, I remember my parents were in the habit of slipping my little hands inside my leggings to curb my spastic compulsion to touch everything.

Were I a magician of the word, I wouldn't be at all embarrassed to offer to the public one of those luxurious stage sets that would make an ass out of M. Diaghilev himself. My exemplary patience, and a *Manual of Literary Commonplace* would be enough to accomplish this. I'm not talking nonsense. Such manuals can be found in every language. I don't have Italian in mind, but here in far off Macedonia, in the home of new friends, Goyer-Linguet's *Le génie littéraire de la langue française* has come into my hands. In it one finds organized, enumerated and catalogued all of the adjectives, verbs, accompanying vocabulary, metaphors, in short, every tidbit of phraseology in common usage. And I could make a case for the fact that "colloquialisms" have a family air about them, between one peoples and another, between races, between the old demimonde and the new. I could even go further and say that if, for the poet in France, the longed for girl

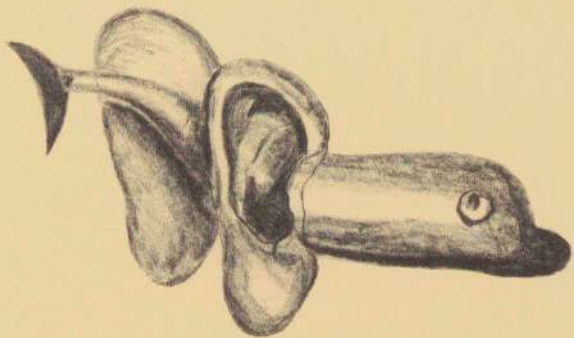
*est une rose
à peine éclosé,*




second holds me back from uncorking everything that, as it bubbles inside me, yearns for freedom and open air.

I hope we understand each other when I say: don't side with sincerity of a more pristine type. Ours is no longer an epic of candid chatter. The demands of the age are indeed grave; we must uncover their meanings, the better to further their ends. The age of sublime ignorance is far from where we stand, since our own experience is nothing if not a lifelong attempt to acquire a razor sharp cunning. What's more, we live in a world which has cauterized free speech, sealing its mouth forever. It's a matter of appreciating the vocabulary. Sincerity, too, has gone its way and I stand before you as one who embodies the perfect image of what the slow-witted are wont to call hypocrisy. Anyone who'd call me a *hypocrite* wouldn't be offending me. Let's unravel the meaning of the word: a *hypo-crite* is one who *criti-cizes* from *below* (hypo-) – a position which contains the corollary of two other positions from which to examine an issue: to criticize from above and to criticize from inside. *To understand the All by penetrating the All*. The All, here, has a religious value. Look at me conspiring with Heraclitus of Ephesus, and he died on a dung heap! Undoubtedly I am a Hypocrite: i. e., I pin a defect on myself the wearing of which is, after all, an idle boast.

It follows from the above that I'm for a school of learning that would intensify the use of the senses. Where one doesn't consider aroused senses as a mere effervescence of the erotic itch (and that would only be the position of a thorough beast), they constitute the internal flowering of every major seed of intelligence, comprehension, fore-and hindsight. Creation, that is to say the exhumation of ancient forgotten values (second hand creation), arises through the stimulation of the senses: a tremendous force whose manipulation exacts a consummate experience. For lessons in sensual ballistics, as with the preparation of gun powder, an inborn skill is required to mix and package





lady who *wishes to be understood*; my guts tie themselves into knots before someone else's idealistic whim – there are so many sharp corners I carefully avoid. I'm not given to *being understood* nor can I bear it when I am. To pass freely through the middle of this life, fraught with bacteria, I'm dedicated to laws and have established a moral code. I confess that I too have been known at times to stoop to the level of a piggish act, but with this difference: while others bring out their transgressions piping hot, dishing them up into the faces of everyone with the unwavering conviction that they're accomplishing something significant and praiseworthy, I, during those brief moments of swine-like abasement, am used to taking my wretchedness off to an appropriate little room, there to suffer a reasonable shame. This side of me resembles Menelik – Emperor of the Multitudinous Dead. Negus neghusti, most refined of souls, had such a highly developed shame-instinct that he even shielded himself during the act of eating: he'd eat alone, hidden by a screen behind which only the arm of a servant would appear to proffer him victuals. I am Menelik: I enjoy my slice of beauty, of sky, sea, air, light, color, etc., but I won't allow anyone whatsoever to assist during my aesthetic meal.

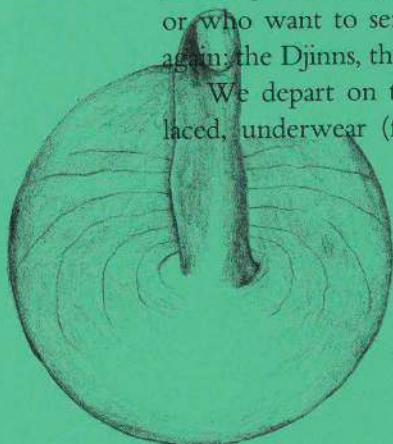
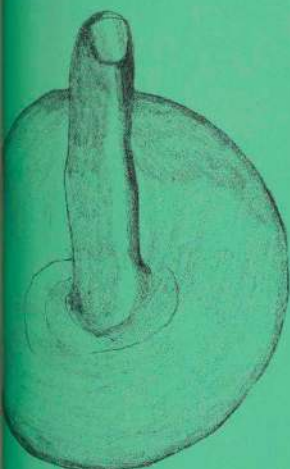
But am I being sincere? ... On this point I'm in the habit of paraphrasing Pontius Pilate: what is sincerity? ...

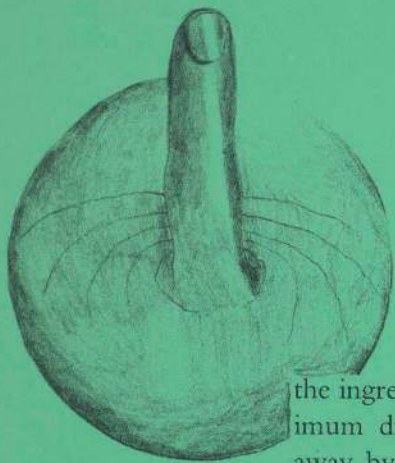
Sincerity is an involuntary state of mind nurtured on the fruit of another state of mind rooted in the morality of men who put a price on virtue: i. e., innocence. I possess little of that virtue, not because of my age but by natural disposition. I can't recall ever being a pure innocent, not even during the so-called Age of Innocence. I'm always blocked by an annoying inner valve that prevents the free escape of my instincts. It's like the caution of the savage or the man of excessive refinement. I fear compromise, and to allay that fear I'm protected by a dual instinct of self-preservation: the first part (the social instinct) puts me on guard against the hostility that glares from outside, while the



time enough to lead us astray of our intended latitudes and bring us into the disquieting world of the Thousand and One Nights. Sinbad the Sailor prepares to board our ship from a skiff which resembles a floating bedroom slipper. Sinbad the Sailor deals in cigarettes and yellow raisins. From Sinbad's basket I pick out a packet of "Sultanas" but Sinbad refuses to accept the money I offer him. Assuring myself that I haven't handed him a long-necked Vittorio, I offer it to the Mohammedan once again. He gives the appearance of taking umbrage and then protests that *"parà italianús no bono"*. And I, "Oh, really! Well, what do you intend to do about that tricolor flying from the roof over there? ... And, to raise the prestige of our flag in the eyes of Sinbad, I grab him by the hem of his stambulina and threaten to tie him to the top of the foremast, like the corsairs used to do, to serve as a scarecrow against the Kaiser's submarines. My Italian fury tames the arrogance of the Oriental who, now meek and cringing, begins to salaam with deep bows and swear that *"italianús bono camaràd"*. I seal our friendship with the delivery of a footprint to the seat of his pants, the gesture sufficing to make me the gratuitous possessor of the "Sultanas." While replacing the pimping coin in my wallet, I meditate on the incident: I'm enlightened to the psyche of the Orient, which I now deem the land of delight. Nevertheless, I won't allow myself to run off into some flighty lyric since, by nature, I'm opposed to Victor Hugo, Benjamin Constant, indeed to Fausto Zonarro - ex-court painter to the now very defunct Abdul Hamid - and I'm opposed to all those people who have the taste and the courage to illustrate Turkish lands, sing of the creamy sweet loves of the sultanas, thrill to the nights on the Bosphorus, delight in the sparkle on the crescent edge of yataghans, or who want to send out flocks of flying Djinns on maneuver once again; the Djinns, those demons of the night.

We depart on the 18th. Dress on board is as follows: life jackets laced, underwear (for decency's sake, out of deference to the two





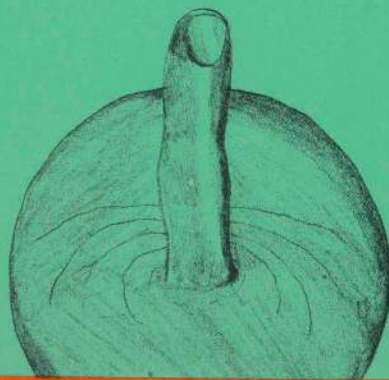
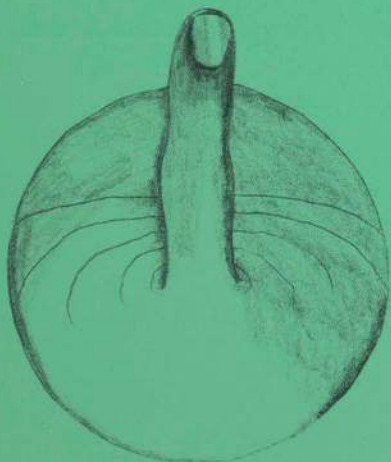
the ingredients. This boosts production and helps bring about the maximum discharge in the explosion. The crude scholar gives himself away by his choice of powders: either he has the right powder but handles it in the wrong way so that it fizzles out or, lacking the needed assistance, he scratches together powder that's gone bad. But he who holds in his hands the right explosive: nitroglycerine or guncotton (and he'll know if it's right by instinct, by a tingling that goes to his head, eyes, to the very tips of his fingers, coursing through the blood at an uncontrollable gallop) – oh, he's so impressed, so possessed, so taken with it that it almost frightens him; he works with prudence, pours the doses with infinite care, acts only under continual self-supervision and a discipline awake both day and night.

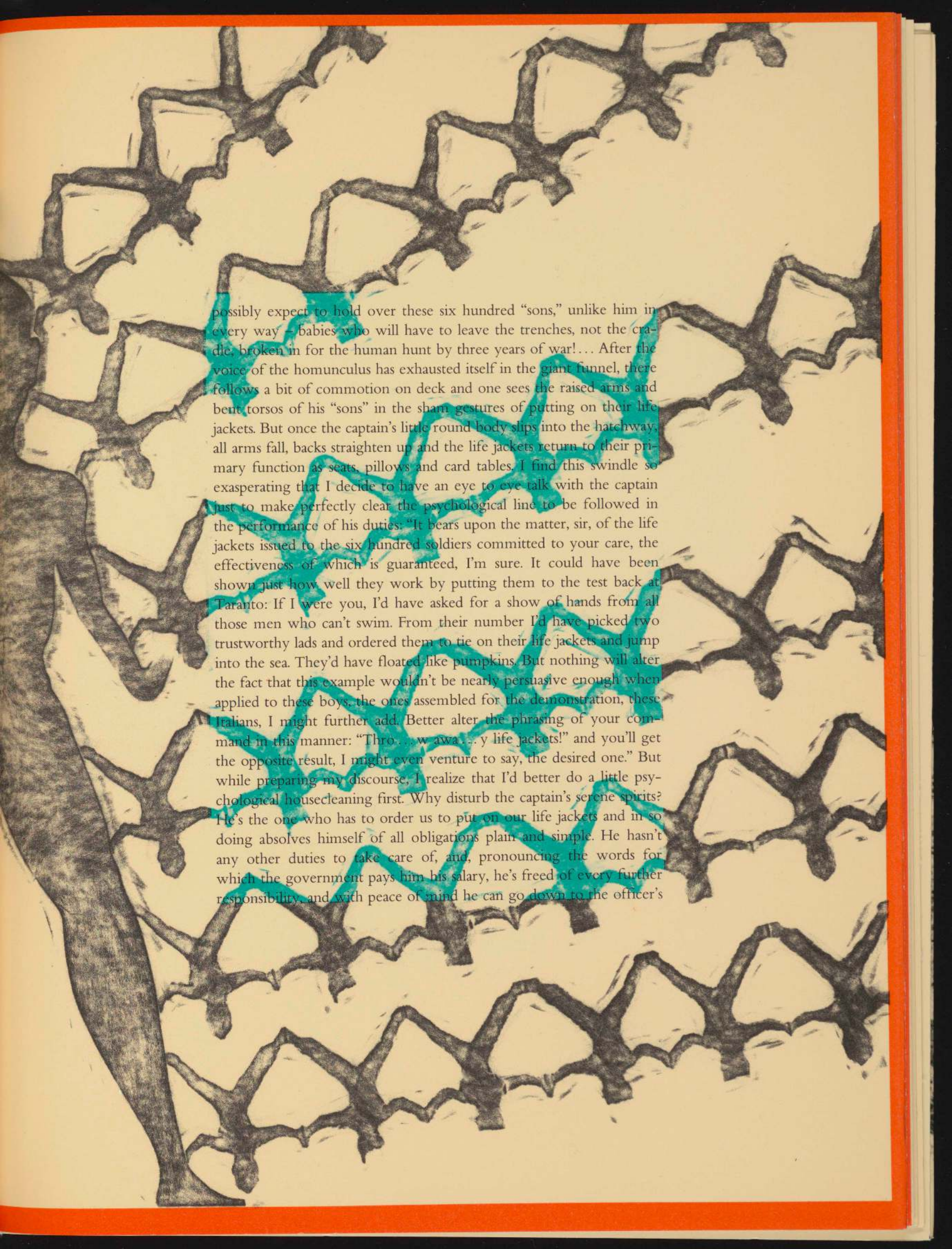


As I stand meditating on this intensification of the senses, that heavenly pulley pops up in front of my face, a surprise on the high seas. We sail in battle formation: a torpedo boat at the front of the column, then the *Savoia*, followed by a Russian transport crowded with troops, and finally a second torpedo boat closing the procession.

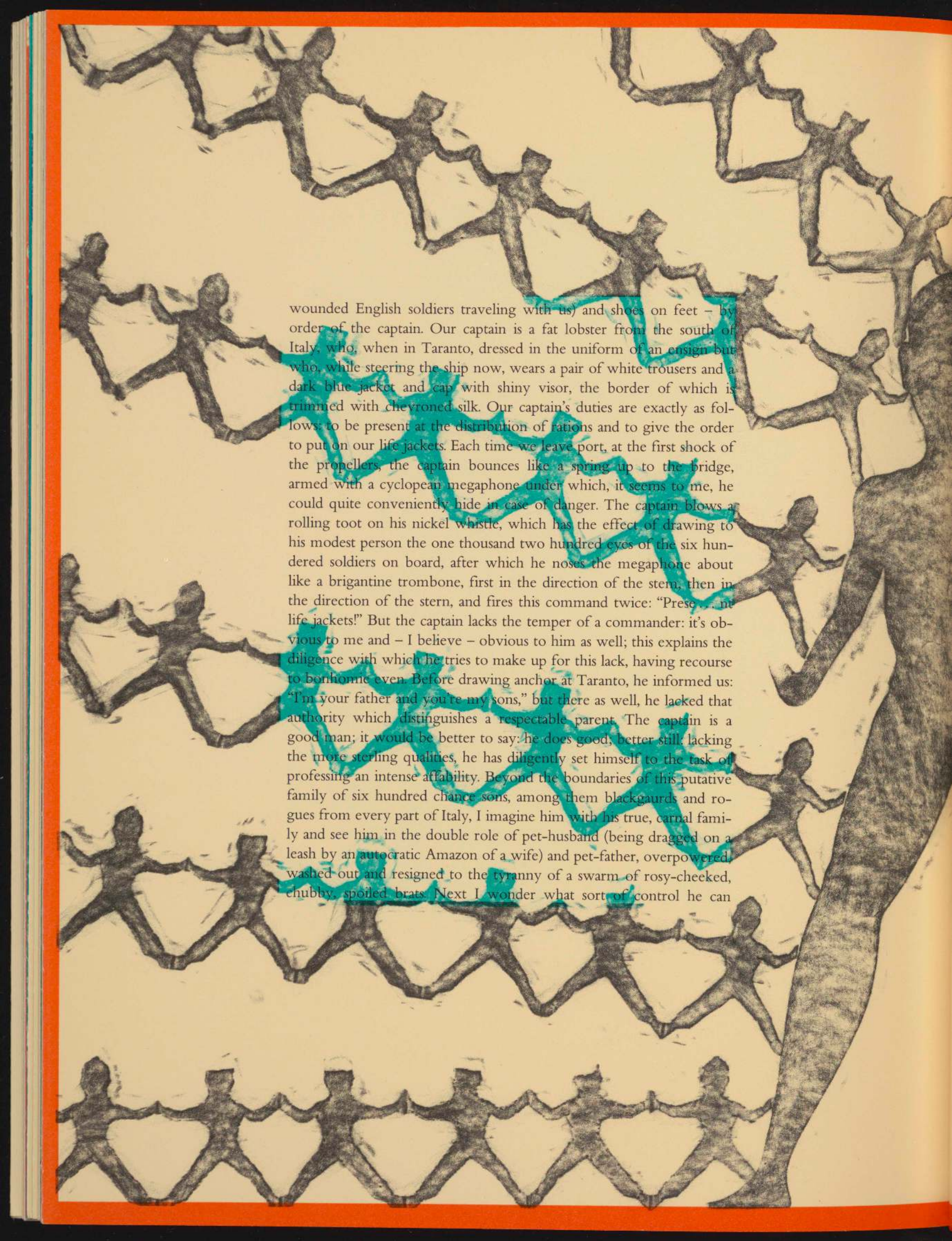
The profile of land appears. A bit of smoke: we are met by a fishing boat, small but well built, snorting away, with a bow so incredibly high and a stern so low that the aft looks like the dead part of the boat being dragged with considerable difficulty by the fore. Following a signal from its pilot, we proceed through a minefield. After endless detours and zigzags we come upon land – that is, upon a velvety mountain covered with thickets, all mirrored in the transparent water – and we cast anchor into the heart of this anonymous port. It's our first stop.

In these parts the geographical boundaries are a chaotic affair, so I can't say for sure if we're in Albania or Epirus. True, off to the right I can just make out the hazy violet outline of Corfu. But, in the end, what's the difference if I'm in Albania, Epirus or even among the Papuans? ... What really surprises me is that we've only been sailing for twelve hours – and though the *Savoia* has aged but little – that was





possibly expect to hold over these six hundred "sons," unlike him in every way – babies who will have to leave the trenches, not the cradle, broken in for the human hunt by three years of war!... After the voice of the homunculus has exhausted itself in the giant funnel, there follows a bit of commotion on deck and one sees the raised arms and bent torsos of his "sons" in the sham gestures of putting on their life jackets. But once the captain's little round body slips into the hatchway, all arms fall, backs straighten up and the life jackets return to their primary function as seats, pillows and card tables. I find this swindle so exasperating that I decide to have an eye to eye talk with the captain just to make perfectly clear the psychological line to be followed in the performance of his duties: "It bears upon the matter, sir, of the life jackets issued to the six hundred soldiers committed to your care, the effectiveness of which is guaranteed, I'm sure. It could have been shown just how well they work by putting them to the test back at Taranto: If I were you, I'd have asked for a show of hands from all those men who can't swim. From their number I'd have picked two trustworthy lads and ordered them to tie on their life jackets and jump into the sea. They'd have floated like pumpkins. But nothing will alter the fact that this example wouldn't be nearly persuasive enough when applied to these boys, the ones assembled for the demonstration, these Italians, I might further add. Better alter the phrasing of your command in this manner: "Thro... w awa... y life jackets!" and you'll get the opposite result, I might even venture to say, the desired one." But while preparing my discourse, I realize that I'd better do a little psychological housecleaning first. Why disturb the captain's serene spirits? He's the one who has to order us to put on our life jackets and in so doing absolves himself of all obligations plain and simple. He hasn't any other duties to take care of, and, pronouncing the words for which the government pays him his salary, he's freed of every further responsibility, and with peace of mind he can go down to the officer's



wounded English soldiers traveling with us) and shoes on feet – by order of the captain. Our captain is a fat lobster from the south of Italy, who, when in Taranto, dressed in the uniform of an ensign but who, while steering the ship now, wears a pair of white trousers and a dark blue jacket and cap with shiny visor, the border of which is trimmed with chevroned silk. Our captain's duties are exactly as follows: to be present at the distribution of rations and to give the order to put on our life jackets. Each time we leave port, at the first shock of the propellers, the captain bounces like a spring up to the bridge, armed with a cyclopean megaphone under which, it seems to me, he could quite conveniently hide in case of danger. The captain blows a rolling toot on his nickel whistle, which has the effect of drawing to his modest person the one thousand two hundred eyes of the six hundreded soldiers on board, after which he noses the megaphone about like a brigantine trombone, first in the direction of the stem, then in the direction of the stern, and fires this command twice: "Prese . . . nt life jackets!" But the captain lacks the temper of a commander: it's obvious to me and – I believe – obvious to him as well; this explains the diligence with which he tries to make up for this lack, having recourse to bonhomie even. Before drawing anchor at Taranto, he informed us: "I'm your father and you're my sons," but there as well, he lacked that authority which distinguishes a respectable parent. The captain is a good man; it would be better to say: he does good; better still, lacking the more sterling qualities, he has diligently set himself to the task of professing an intense affability. Beyond the boundaries of this putative family of six hundred chance sons, among them blackguards and rogues from every part of Italy, I imagine him with his true, carnal family and see him in the double role of pet-husband (being dragged on a leash by an autocratic Amazon of a wife) and pet-father, overpowered, washed out and resigned to the tyranny of a swarm of rosy-cheeked, chubby, spoiled brats. Next I wonder what sort of control he can

that comes loose from its tyrannical stalk and fulfills its destiny to fly. And then the chorus comments gloomily on the strophe in the Roman dialect, as was customary in ancient tragedy:

*Such are our loves;
they come and they go.
We might as well jump
in the Tiber's flow.*

The next day we arrive at Navarino. *Malchance* doesn't abandon me, since here as well – regardless of what befell me at Barletta – I arrive too late to aid in the defeat of the Turko-Egyptian galleys. Not a trace remains of the Battle of Navarino; neat and rust colored, the town tranquilly rests in the corner of the small green shell of its gulf. One can hear the loud clanging from the orthodox bell towers in this white village hanging on the mountainside. It's Sunday and the schismatic Christians are squeezing themselves inside church to stand before the local pope and hear the liturgy. These schismatic Christians have a vision of living at peace with the world, once the liturgy and the little pope put them in direct contact with Theos (otherwise known as Pantocrator, Dimiugos, Pantaleimon etc.), for Theos isn't only present as a manifestation of the good, of Divine Goodness, but is probably here as well to forgive the sins of thieves, especially if the theft was committed against occidentals, who are charged with being non-believers anyway.

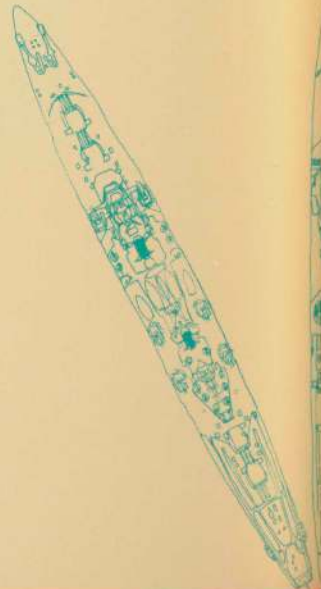
Commander Silvestrelli, when he was His Majesty's plenipotentiary minister to the Hellenic Government, published an account of the present day Greeks wherein he sought to demonstrate that they were a degenerate form of their ancient forefathers. This account meant the end of Mr. Silvestrelli's mission at Athens and his transfer to the embassy at Madrid. The Commander was a diplomat who lacked psychology. In fact he was totally incapable of recognizing that those ancient virtues of the brave Lacedaemonians were taking root even

quarters where, to cast the vanity of his previous warnings into still greater relief, he can strip himself of the miraculous life jacket and throw himself with freer movement into the assault on a plate of dumplings in tomato sauce and a fillet of red mullet prepared in the Livornese style.

Just outside the anonymous port the *chalutier* which was leading the way for us hoists the flag that signifies: submarine sighted. The two steamships throw their engines into reverse while the torpedo boats move ahead and circle like wasps. All at once there's an explosion, together with a jet of white fire and a rumble which is prolonged by the stillness of the sea and the echoes from the nearby land. It was a depth charge from one of the torpedo boats. I must confess that these projectiles, aimed at an invisible enemy, make something more than mere holes in the water, they set off an impression of strange terror. Yet the mystery is never solved and in a little while we take up our course again. Night descends once more, according to that deplorable habit of continuity which governs the lives of men as it governs the celestial fruits. The air is calm but humid and permeated with the subtle odor of tar and the vapor produced by a ship alive and moving. Excited by the alarm of a few minutes ago, my mates are slow in dozing off, and as I go back to my hothouse, they still haven't run out of songs to sing. Above the bass line of the tragic chorus, a tenor's bleating voice first buds then bursts into flower, trembling the sensitive wires of the radio antenna stretched between masts, finally even tickling the fancy of the cortege of ferocious beasts that line the bridge:

*My mother bid me be wary,
she told me that love was just pain,
I'd say to her: mom you're mistaken,
I'm in love and I'm happy again.*

Ending the strophe, the voice of the tenor melts its earthly chains and leaps into the heavens intermingling with the stars, like a corolla



Republics, has left its mark on many an edifice. And how moved I am to speak with the people of Corfu and Zante, who still preserve the somewhat comic cantilena of the Venetian dialect!... Now I finally understand the Latin of Saint Mark:

Navigare necesse est

Aye, to set sail! And never to rest except to catch your breath, and then once more: to sail onward!

A boatsman boards our ship to engage the head of the household in a bit of bartering: he wants lots of chickens and eggs in exchange for sacks of half-moldy bread. Since the dialogue between Navarine and Italian proceeds with some difficulty, I intervene with my knowledge of Greek. When I've succeeded in negotiating a contract satisfactory to both parties, I happen to notice the hat on the native. It's a beret worn by French sailors, topped by a scarlet *pompon*. I interrogate the man as to how he came to get such a beret and he answers:

"Clothing from a shipwreck, misseur."

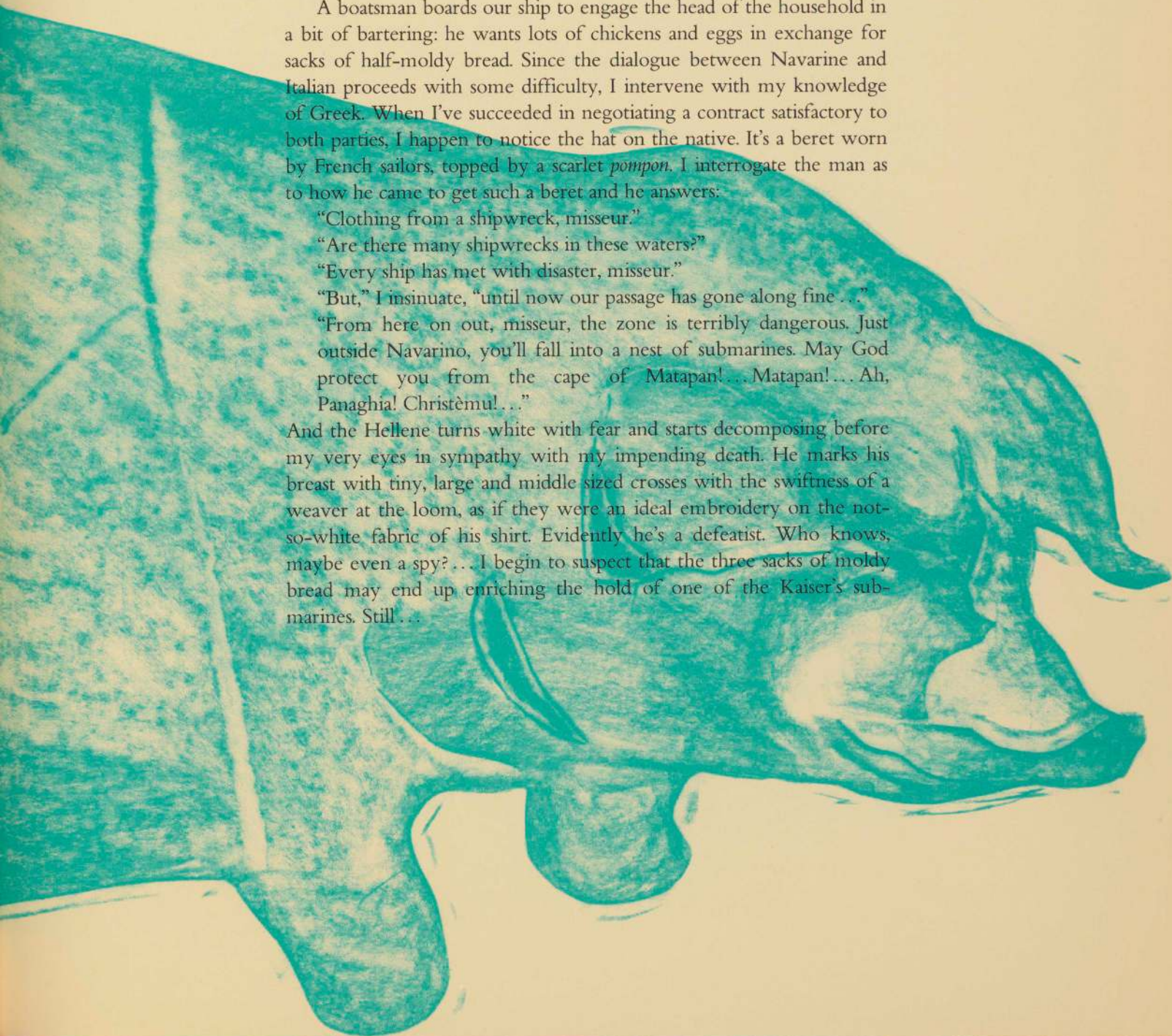
"Are there many shipwrecks in these waters?"

"Every ship has met with disaster, misseur."

"But," I insinuate, "until now our passage has gone along fine..."

"From here on out, misseur, the zone is terribly dangerous. Just outside Navarino, you'll fall into a nest of submarines. May God protect you from the cape of Matapan!... Matapan!... Ah, Panaghia! Christèmu!..."

And the Hellene turns white with fear and starts decomposing before my very eyes in sympathy with my impending death. He marks his breast with tiny, large and middle sized crosses with the swiftness of a weaver at the loom, as if they were an ideal embroidery on the not-so-white fabric of his shirt. Evidently he's a defeatist. Who knows, maybe even a spy?... I begin to suspect that the three sacks of moldy bread may end up enriching the hold of one of the Kaiser's submarines. Still...



now among Venizelos' Greeks. Let me present the evidence: 9:30 am, arrive Navarino; 9:35 am, assault by a rabble of local peddlers – by 9:40 am, the following phenomena are verified on the *Savoia*: the disappearance of ten pair of military boots, numerous nickel plated pots and pans, and an enormous pig, distant nephew of the ferocious god Tamuz. I have every reason to believe that by 10 o'clock the snatcher of the boots, kitchen utensils and pig was kneeling prostrate before the local pope and confessing his sins thusly:

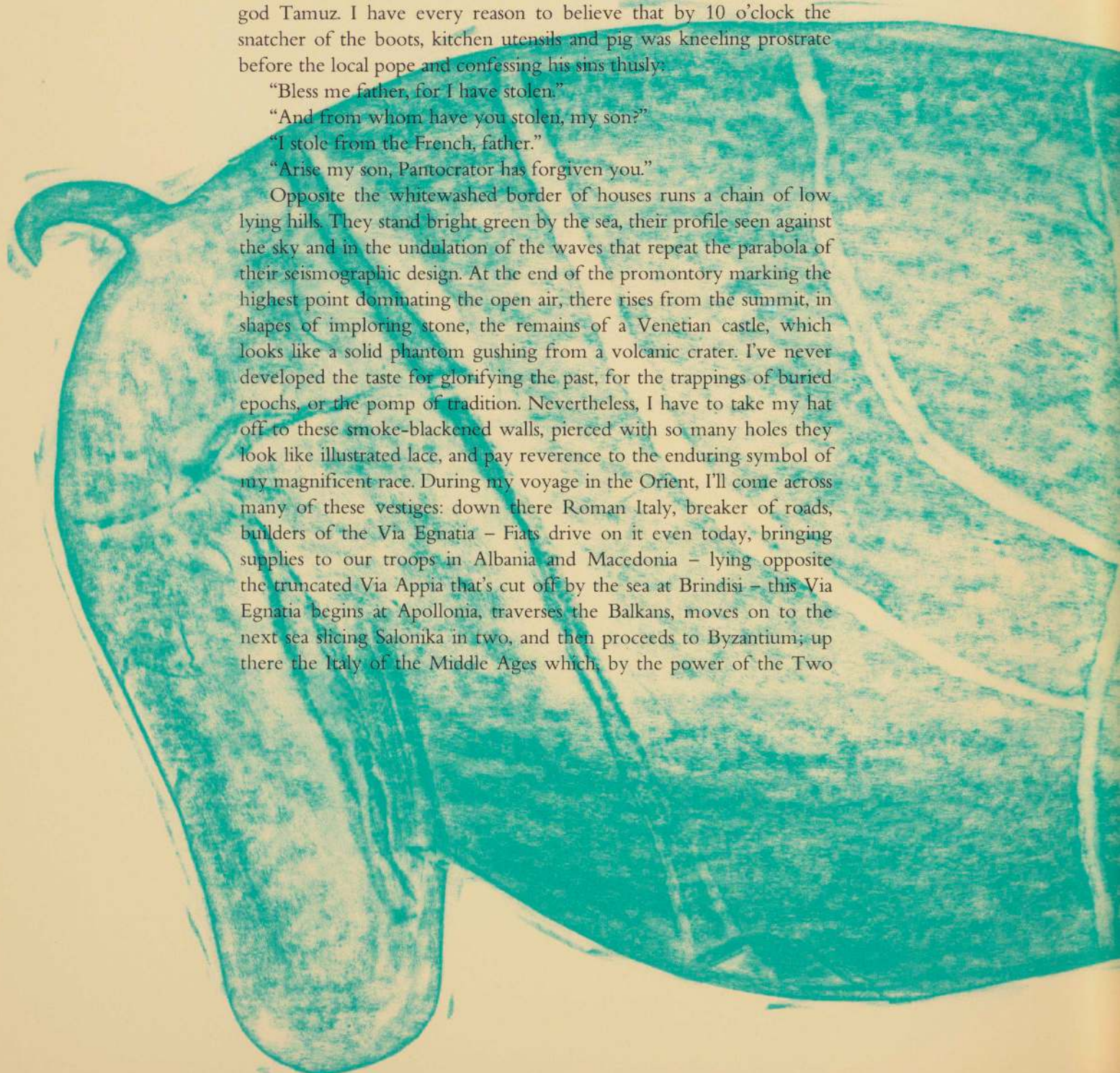
"Bless me father, for I have stolen."

"And from whom have you stolen, my son?"

"I stole from the French, father."

"Arise my son, Pantocrator has forgiven you."

Opposite the whitewashed border of houses runs a chain of low lying hills. They stand bright green by the sea, their profile seen against the sky and in the undulation of the waves that repeat the parabola of their seismographic design. At the end of the promontory marking the highest point dominating the open air, there rises from the summit, in shapes of imploring stone, the remains of a Venetian castle, which looks like a solid phantom gushing from a volcanic crater. I've never developed the taste for glorifying the past, for the trappings of buried epochs, or the pomp of tradition. Nevertheless, I have to take my hat off to these smoke-blackened walls, pierced with so many holes they look like illustrated lace, and pay reverence to the enduring symbol of my magnificent race. During my voyage in the Orient, I'll come across many of these vestiges: down there Roman Italy, breaker of roads, builders of the Via Egnatia – Fiats drive on it even today, bringing supplies to our troops in Albania and Macedonia – lying opposite the truncated Via Appia that's cut off by the sea at Brindisi – this Via Egnatia begins at Apollonia, traverses the Balkans, moves on to the next sea slicing Salonika in two, and then proceeds to Byzantium; up there the Italy of the Middle Ages which, by the power of the Two



song is getting old, he still hopes to see the

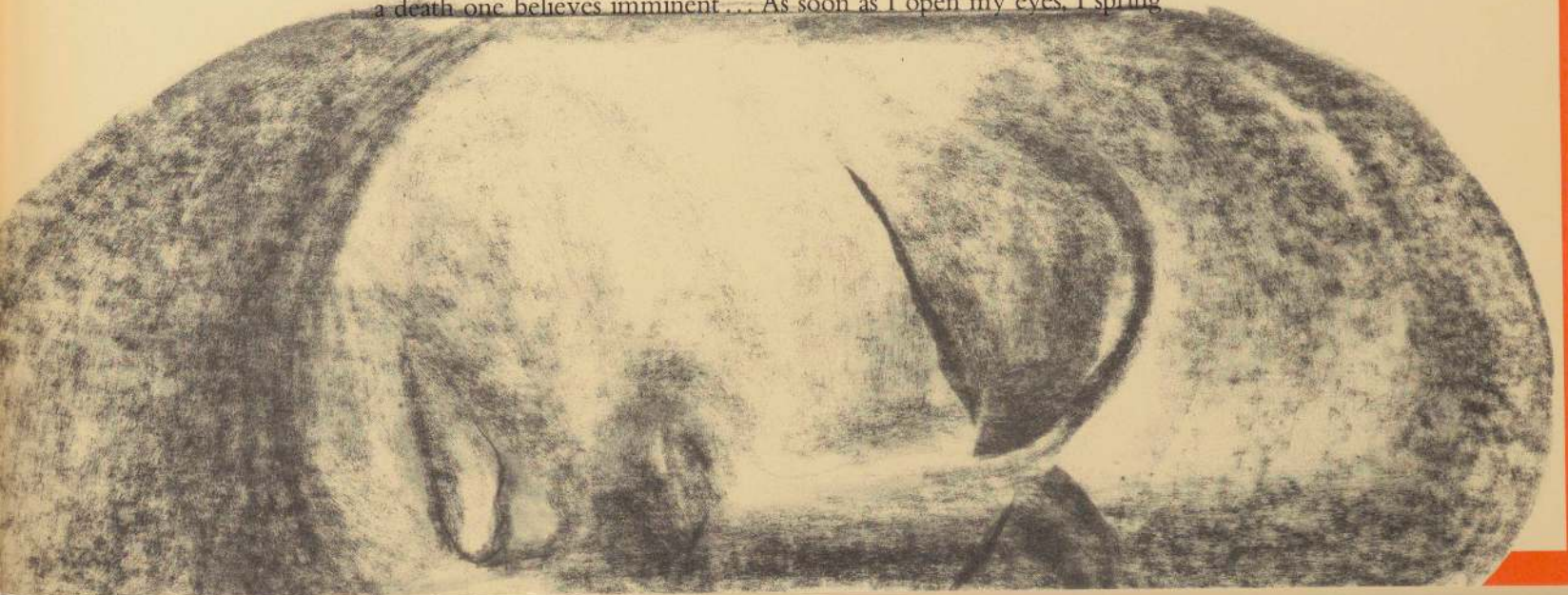
sun of the life to come

rising before he dies. I deem it inopportune to throw cold water from the shower of my skepticism on Odoacre's humanitarian enthusiasm. I offer him, instead, the hospitality of my roof.

Analysing the substance of this refined gesture, I detect a certain dose of my inborn egoism and admit that my generosity is, above all, calculated: in as much as I have to pass the Matapan Straits and negotiate a nest of submarines, it would be wise not to be alone under my roof, it would be even better if the person sharing my roof were a humanitarian with the physiognomy of a Salvation Army general – in short, a person who may come in handy if the need arises.

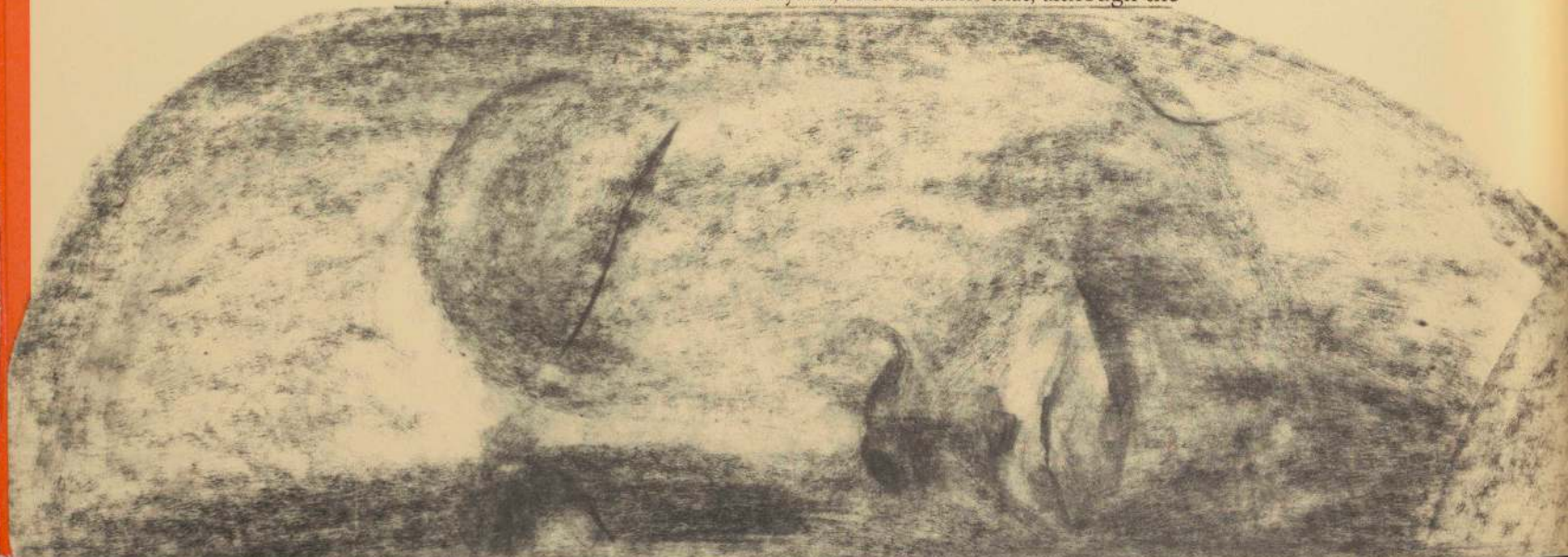
So I take Longshanks by the arm and drag him off to my sarcophagus. The socialist collapses with thanks. He, who professes the nauseating doctrine of equality; he, chimerical contractor of an ideal brotherhood where today's rich man and today's worker would toil in united labor and share their recreation in righteous harmony; he who would consequently require that the same pallet be equally hard on the backs of the aristocrat as the pleb, is overjoyed to stretch his legs out on such a soft, luxurious divan: this he candidly confesses after we've gotten ourselves ready for sleep – he, in the illusion that perhaps tomorrow will bring the dawn of that sun foretold by Filippo Turati – I, just wanting to be engulfed in a sort of nirvana-like chaos, with one gloomy thought in mind: if I have to die, better that it be while I'm sleeping – to die, that is, already being a little dead, to become a little bit more so. In the midst of this morphine addict's calculation, I succeed in reducing the problem of passing away into something less sad. The discovery comforts me and helps me tumble into a sleep that weighs tons.

How hard it is to wake up after having slept under the incubus of a death one believes imminent ... As soon as I open my eyes, I spring



In the evening, while preparing myself for a taste of Matapan, I make friends with a certain Longshanks Odoacre, of the 77th division, a member of the League of Farmworkers. Here's how it takes place: I've spread out on my knees one of those maps of the Balkans so tastefully printed at Leipzig. I'm following the route of my voyage with my fingers, putting my thumb on the threatening point of Matapan and poking the rest of my fingers in search of the famous nest of submarines along all the inlets which give that peculiar spasmodic contour to the polipoid configuration of the Peloponessus. At this point I'm greeted with: "I beg your pardon, professor!" Were I really a professor this form of greeting would have left me cold, but I'm not, and therefore find it impossible to dislike a man who attributes such a high social status to me, even if undeservedly.

Longshanks wears a beard, eyeglasses, and looks like a Salvation Army general. Longshanks, when he was a *bourgeois*, served in the honorable corporation of the building trade, having attained the rank of masterbuilder. Now – and he looks just the type – the masterbuilders are characterized by two inclinations: towards wine and towards humanitarian equality. He needs to believe that the exact art of compass, ruler, hammer and plumb bob implies, in the moral attitude of the professional, the adoption of these same instruments in their symbolic form. So Longshanks Odoacre is enrolled in the Masonic Congregation and vehemently professes the socialist doctrine. And he doesn't merely profess it but amplifies on the subject after his own manner, decorating his argument with personal commentary. The banner under which he does battle is the *United States of the World*, which he immediately has to explain to me in luminous detail, in the course of which he maps out his design for an ideal society, cramming the discourse with lots of references lifted from famous ideologies. His description excites him to such a pitch that, in the guise of an epilogue, he launches into Amitore Galli's hymn, and exclaims that, although the





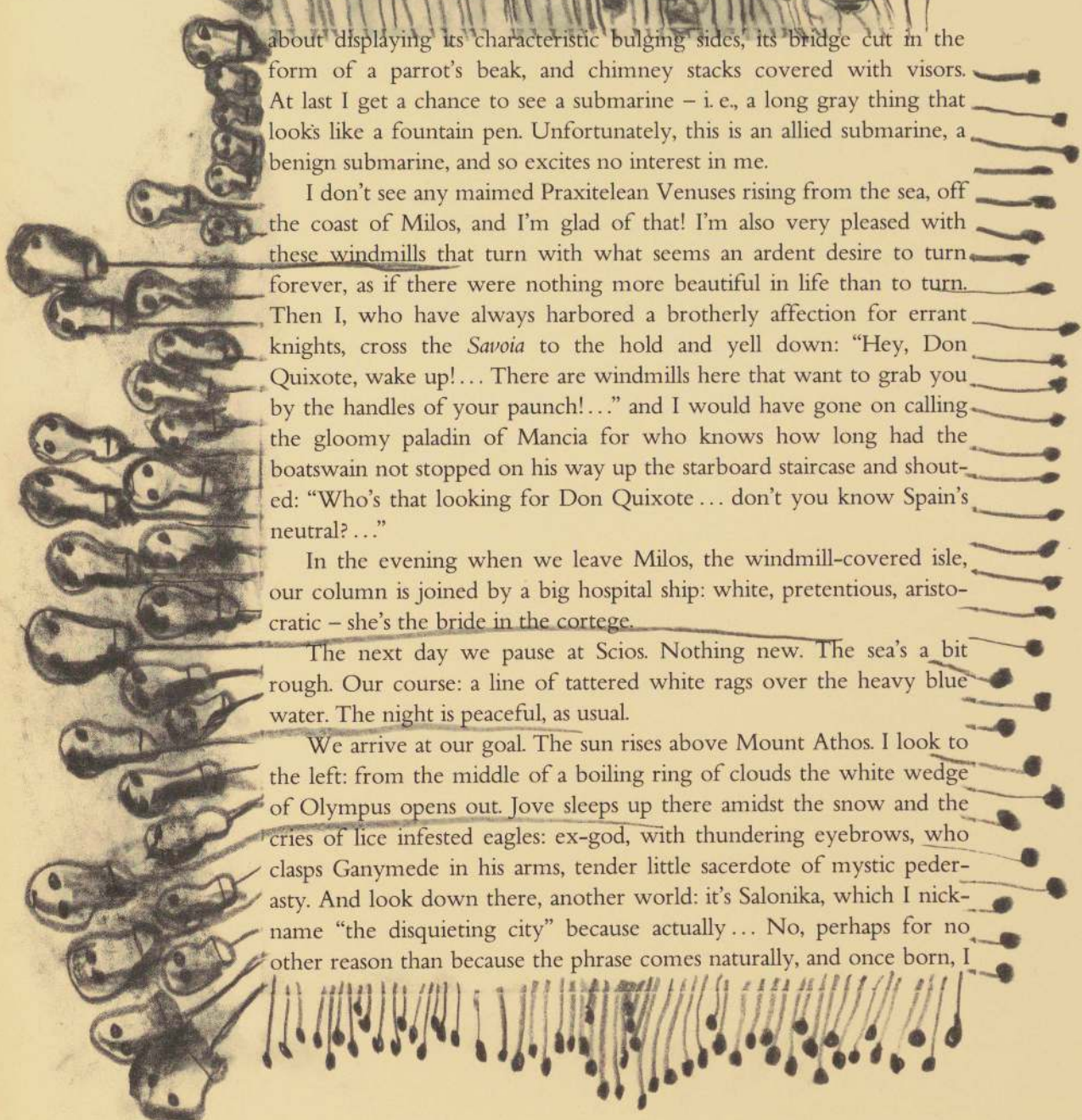
about displaying its characteristic bulging sides, its bridge cut in the form of a parrot's beak, and chimney stacks covered with visors. At last I get a chance to see a submarine - i. e., a long gray thing that looks like a fountain pen. Unfortunately, this is an allied submarine, a benign submarine, and so excites no interest in me.

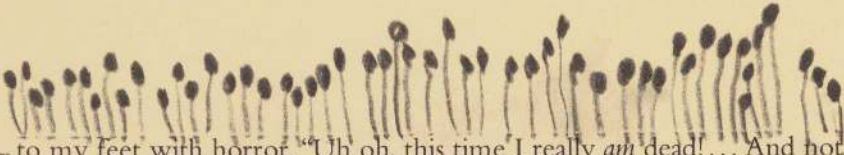
I don't see any maimed Praxitelean Venuses rising from the sea, off the coast of Milos, and I'm glad of that! I'm also very pleased with these windmills that turn with what seems an ardent desire to turn forever, as if there were nothing more beautiful in life than to turn. Then I, who have always harbored a brotherly affection for errant knights, cross the *Savoia* to the hold and yell down: "Hey, Don Quixote, wake up!... There are windmills here that want to grab you by the handles of your paunch!..." and I would have gone on calling the gloomy paladin of Mancica for who knows how long had the boatswain not stopped on his way up the starboard staircase and shouted: "Who's that looking for Don Quixote... don't you know Spain's neutral?..."

In the evening when we leave Milos, the windmill-covered isle, our column is joined by a big hospital ship: white, pretentious, aristocratic - she's the bride in the cortege.

The next day we pause at Scios. Nothing new. The sea's a bit rough. Our course: a line of tattered white rags over the heavy blue water. The night is peaceful, as usual.

We arrive at our goal. The sun rises above Mount Athos. I look to the left: from the middle of a boiling ring of clouds the white wedge of Olympus opens out. Jove sleeps up there amidst the snow and the cries of lice infested eagles: ex-god, with thundering eyebrows, who clasps Ganymede in his arms, tender little sacerdotess of mystic pederasty. And look down there, another world: it's Salonika, which I nickname "the disquieting city" because actually... No, perhaps for no other reason than because the phrase comes naturally, and once born, I



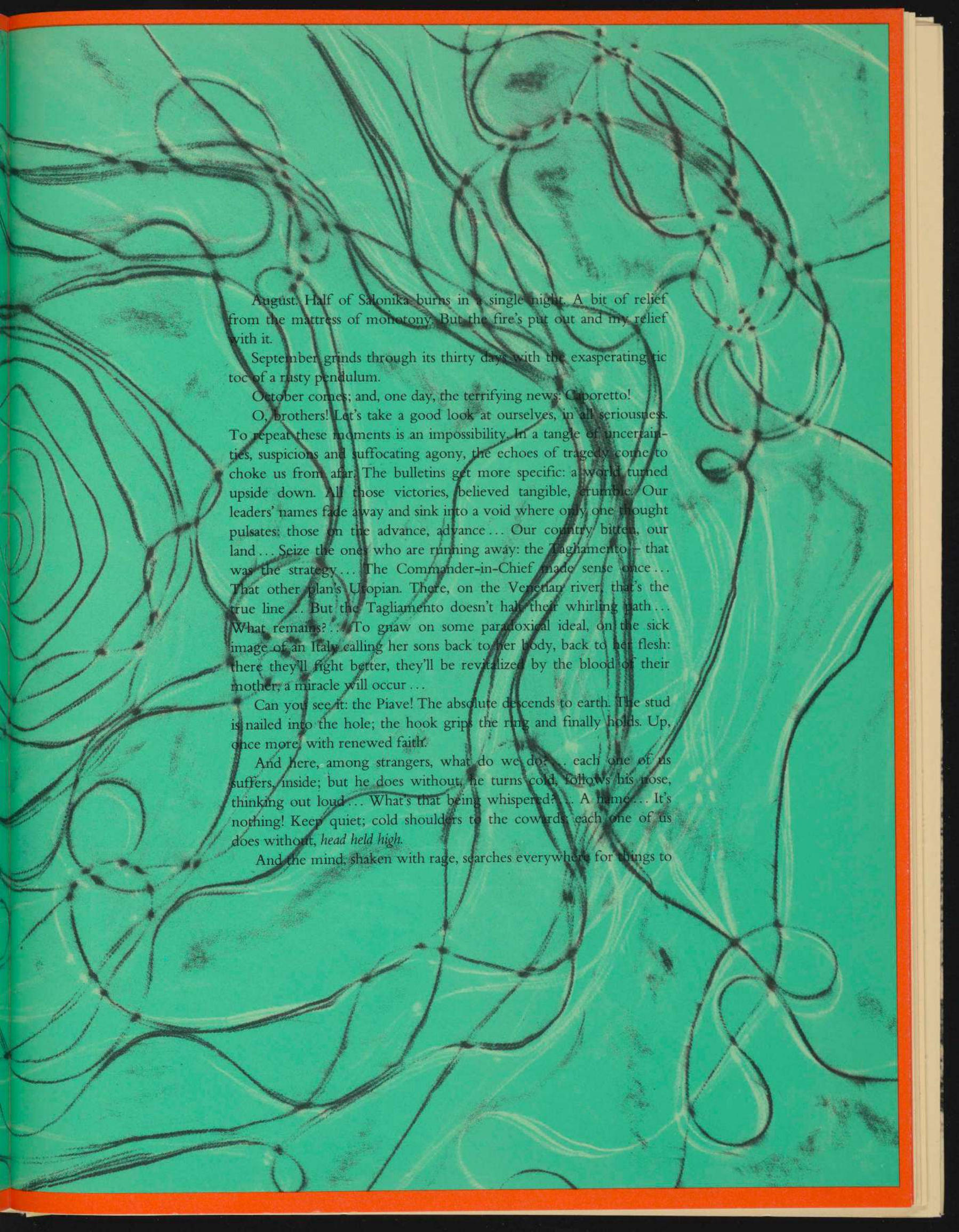


to my feet with horror. "Uh oh, this time I really *am* dead!... And not just dead, but already putrifying!" I feel my body to determine the extent of decomposition and am amazed to find that it's all still solid. In spite of this, my nostrils quiver from the stench of rot, the whiff of fermenting carrion and a painful sting irritates my eyes - like sprayed ammonia, or turpentine, some strong corrosive substance. While I strive to uncover the source of the stink, the weary rhythm of a gentle snore reminds me of Longshanks' existence. As I draw near him, I'm enlightened by the truth: Longshanks Odoacre possesses a close affinity to Frederick the Great, Kaiser Wilhelm and his son Kronprinz, to all the descendants of the House of Hohenzollern and in general, to the entire race of Germans who, according to a noted scientist, are afflicted with a peculiarity which consists in the disproportionate dilation of the pores on the epidermis of the lower extremities. The feet of the Salvation Army general seethe, fume and stink horribly. Air!... Air!... I throw myself out into the open; I notice an island, a gulf, a city: we're at Milos.

Milos is a rocky gray hollow with the appearance of an anatomical landscape. It has the austerity of certain drawings by Albrecht Dürer and Hans von Thoma, the last representatives of that pictorial symbolism which lies between the mystical and the purely pagan, and in which painters of another type have distinguished themselves, namely Böcklin and Klinger. The slopes of the naked mountains bristle with cones, straight strokes and pinwheels made by an army of windmills which bestow on this leaden isle something flighty, a certain air of Castilian madness, a harsh flavor somewhere between chalky and sharp, that leaves a taste in the mouth like the bleak ballad of the *romancero*.

Today, Milos is an important military base for expediting this unreal war. Its gulf affords optimum protection and contains a dozen ships, among them one of those old-time French cruisers, prancing





August. Half of Salonika burns in a single night. A bit of relief from the mattress of monotony. But the fire's put out and my relief with it.

September grinds through its thirty days with the exasperating tic toc of a rusty pendulum.

October comes; and, one day, the terrifying news: Caporetto!

O, brothers! Let's take a good look at ourselves, in all seriousness. To repeat these moments is an impossibility. In a tangle of uncertainties, suspicions and suffocating agony, the echoes of tragedy come to choke us from afar. The bulletins get more specific: a world turned upside down. All those victories, believed tangible, crumble. Our leaders' names fade away and sink into a void where only one thought pulsates: those on the advance, advance... Our country bitten, our land... Seize the ones who are running away: the Tagliamento — that was the strategy... The Commander-in-Chief made sense once... That other plan's Utopian. There, on the Venetian river, that's the true line... But the Tagliamento doesn't halt their whirling path... What remains?... To gnaw on some paradoxical ideal, on the sick image of an Italy calling her sons back to her body, back to her flesh: there they'll fight better, they'll be revitalized by the blood of their mother; a miracle will occur...

Can you see it: the Piave! The absolute descends to earth. The stud is nailed into the hole; the hook grips the ring and finally holds. Up, once more, with renewed faith.

And here, among strangers, what do we do: ... each one of us suffers, inside; but he does without, he turns cold, follows his nose, thinking out loud... What's that being whispered?... A name... It's nothing! Keep quiet; cold shoulders to the cowards; each one of us does without, *head held high*.

And the mind, shaken with rage, searches everywhere for things to

like and adopt it, since it seems to me it would make a good title for a book... one that I'll probably never write.

N. B. We dock at the Italian wharf. Turkish porters, Hebrew dockworkers, soldiers of every type – in the middle of all this I notice two soldiers whom I assume are English, despite olive complexions, terrifying black moustaches and the filthiest of uniforms. I consider it a marvel that a division of tommies could arrive at such a state of negligence, and I share my observation with the native next to me. From him I learn they're really Greeks. I thank him warmly, the information is useful; now every time I happen to meet filthy Englishmen, I'll know beforehand they're really Greek warriors.

From here on out my life is the same as the stupid troops'.

The existence of the anopheles mosquito and the struggle against malaria. The dull summer months slowly pass. Events worthy of note are rare. My friends have abandoned me. What's going on back there?... Even art becomes a friend estranged. What is this horde of macaques doing chattering inside me?... I've even had to give up the little bourgeoisie diversion of reading the newspapers. I don't have the courage to barter away half my pay for one of those smart, hybrid, multilingual sheets that tell me, "Luna di Moisè Molhò and Guida Bejà Matarasso are *fiancés*" or "Maison Saporta met en vent des articles militaires à des prix très réduits"... Ah, well! there's always the latest official bulletin, eternal breath of the war: "during hard-to-hand combat, patrol maneuvers, a few prisoners, two aeroplanes shot down..." Then there's the night life: "The White Tower" and the little shack called the "Variétés" where a Corinthian pop songwriter sings "My Lover's Deaf" in the Neopolitan dialect, "Les petits Cochons de Guillaume" in argot, and I don't know what kind of nasal "song" in English. Oh, my far away friends, I have dreams, so many dreams; and how I envy that old god who, though he stems from this land, lies asleep amidst the snows in boy Ganymede's disturbing embrace...

to — and are the very expression
of superstitions, clings to hopes, and
in accord even out of our childish-
comfort. That's why the fall of the
such bad blood. That Boselli never
him, I'd turn over his homonym in
used to put the bedpan under my
I was recuperating in the hospital.
dame, rising at the point where the
that I hold Ariosto in high regard.
that the idea of Fury is born in me
of a new minister. Fury has need of

wrapped his rotten skeleton in the
horn; the 98th division holds the
Mexico and a powerful esoteric

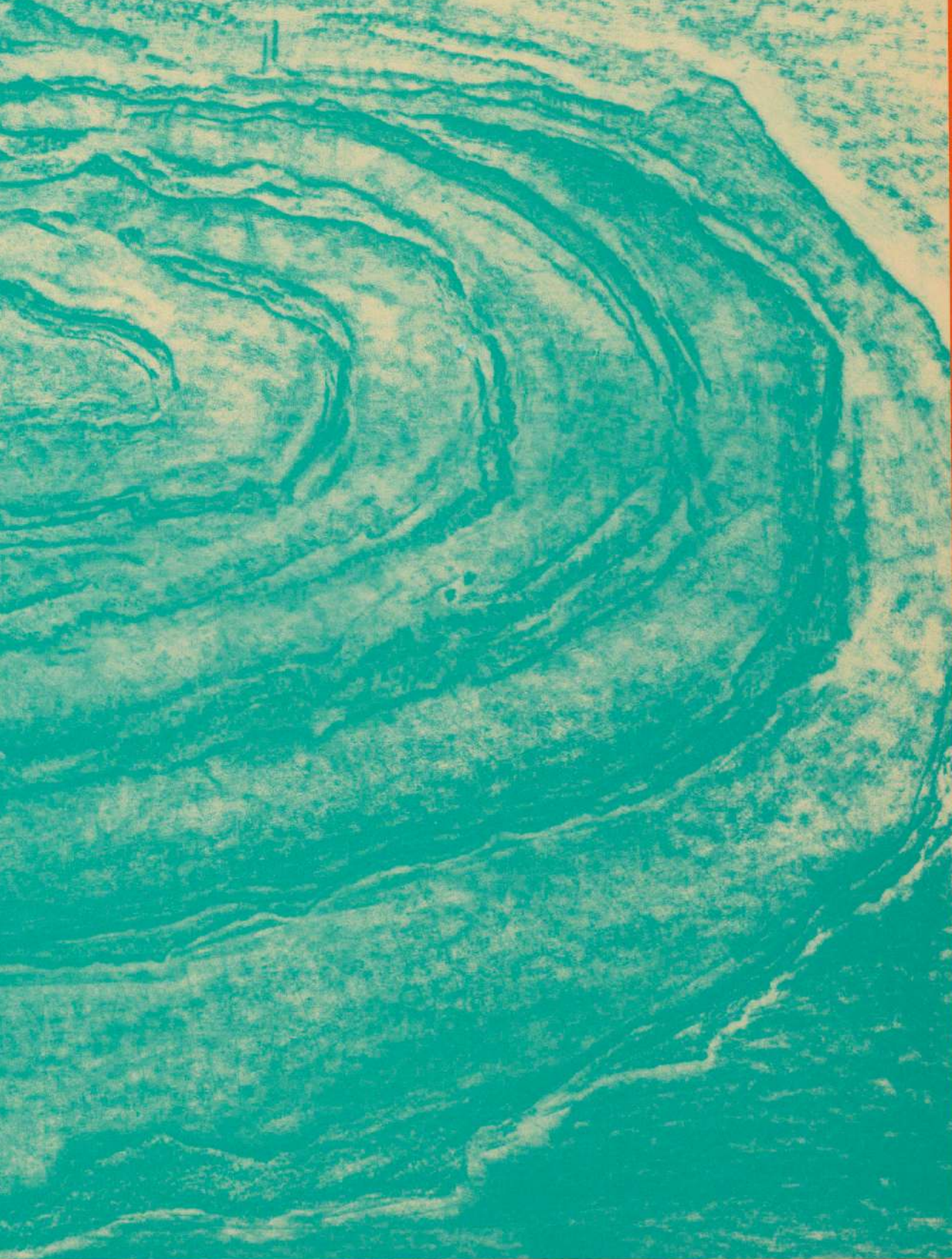
reënter the fray with a fervor, to
is purer, more sacred. No longer
permeated, I come back to the figure of
to her body and her flesh: there
giving blood.

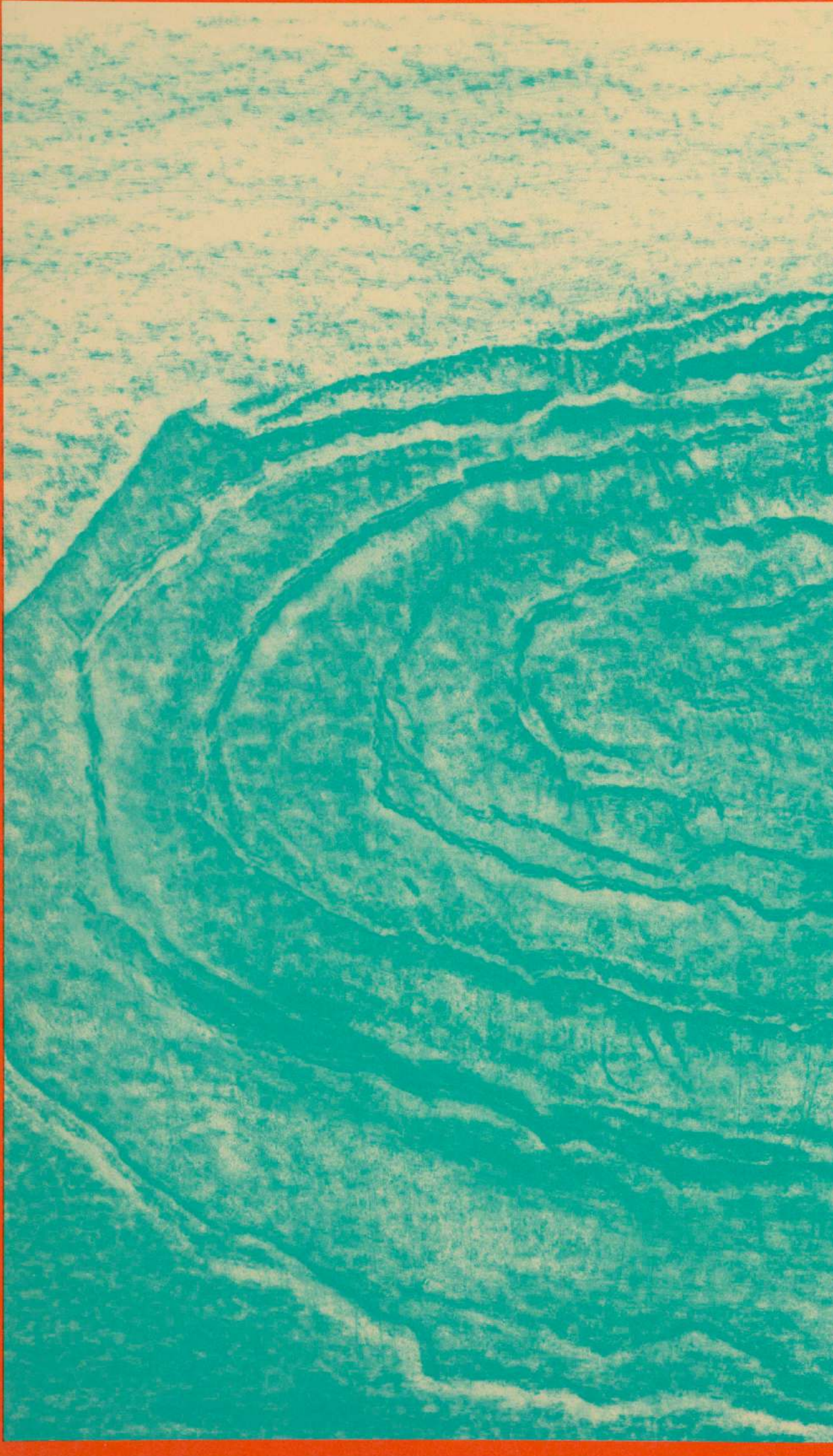
is a manifesto of united patrio-
aesthetics!

imagination returns to thoughts of
And how annoying the song of
ears:

nobody knows? ...

and to my own heart... Because,
else if the Argonaut returns never-





hold onto, things which compel
of - prejudices; the mind grabs on
it is hope itself which rises of its own
ness - toying with us, offering us
government makes me spit so much
suited me. Every time I thought of
my mind, a military malenurse, who
bed for my nocturnal needs while
Orlando is a new and more lively
wicks on the old bastards burn of
Orlando will be furious. Take note
out of the heavy-eyed, bald image
us: hence - Orlando.

Once more Jove has died and
snows. The "New" strong man is
line; Diaz: a name - why recall
flower?...

Now that the tragedy's over, we
reconquer our losses. The struggle
feverous, but with steady pulse re
the mother who recalls her child
better to fight, revitalized by her li

Does it matter that this imag
tism?... To the devil with elegant

At this moment my expanded
the homeland. I want to go back
the ever present sirens ringing in m

The Argonaut, if he gl

tralallera trallalla

The Argonaut, if he gl

when he'll retur

Yes, to return: but only to myself
after all, does it matter to anyone
more?...

This book, reproduced from the original edition described in the colophon below, was printed by Staib and Mayer, Stuttgart.

The book contains the complete text of "La partenza dell'argonauta" by Alberto Savinio. First published in serial form in France and Italy in 1917, it appeared with related texts in book form in 1918 under the title *Hermaphrodito*, La Voce, Florence. It has been translated from the Italian by George Scrivani from the Supercoralli edition of 1981, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin. The original lithographs were drawn by Francesco Clemente in April, May, and June 1983, July 1985 and January 1986 at the Petersburg Studios in New York. Stones were proofed in 1983 by John Hutcheson and Perry Tymeson. The text and plates were proofed in 1985 and 1986 by Perry Tymeson and Richard Garst, with studio coördination and production assistance from Elizabeth Mahoney. The publication was edited by Raymond Foye. The lithographs were printed by hand from plates on a flatbed offset press at the workshop of Rolf Neumann in Stuttgart onto Okawara 60 gsm mold made kozo paper from the Takaokaishi Mill, Ino-Cho, Kochi, Japan. The type was set in 24 pt. Bembo and printed letterpress at Staib and Mayer in Stuttgart. The binding and boxes were conceived by Rudolph Rieser and executed in Cologne by Helmut Kloss. The production was supervised by Hansjörg Mayer and Elizabeth Mahoney. The book 65 cm x 50 cm is bound in Okawara paper and boxed in linen with an image embossed on the cover. Each book is signed by the artist on the colophon page and numbered in type. Two hundred books are numbered 1 to 200, with thirty-two proofs numbered I to XXXII, twelve of which are individually dedicated. The portfolio of text and image is unbound and boxed, signed by the artist on the colophon page and numbered in type; each sheet is stamped with the artist's mark and page number. Fifty portfolios are numbered 1 to 50, with six proofs numbered I to VI.

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Publication © Petersburg Press 1986









Translator's Note

ALBERTO SAVINIO was born Andrea de Chirico at Athens on August 25, 1891. Following the death of his father, the family moved to Munich, where Savinio studied musical composition with Max Reger. At the age of seventeen Savinio wrote his first opera, *Carmela*. By 1909 he made his first visit to Paris, and in 1912 appeared in Appolinaire's revue "Les Soirées de Paris." At this time he met Picasso, Picabia, Max Jacob, Blaise Cendrars, Brancusi, and others. He entered his paintings in the Salon d'Automne of 1912. Still known primarily as a composer, he began signing his compositions "Alberto Savinio, Dionysiac Artisan." Both Savinio and his brother, Giorgio de Chirico, were inducted into the Italian army in 1915, and were stationed in Ferrara. It was there, awaiting mobilization, that Savinio and his brother helped found the Metaphysical school of painting, in close contact with Filippo De Pisis, Carlo Carrà and Giorgio Morandi. In 1917 Savinio was sent to the Salonika front. The experiences surrounding this voyage are recounted in "The Departure of the Argonaut." In 1926 he married the actress Maria Morino. Throughout his varied career, Savinio produced numerous novels, plays and stories, and continued to compose, paint and design for the stage. He died in Rome in 1952.

Hermaphrodito is a composite work made up of loosely joined poems, tales and theater pieces, in French and Italian; here, the characteristic elements of Savinio's style were first developed in book form; "The Departure of the Argonaut" is its final section, its lengthiest and most autobiographical. The original text provides no footnotes. Yet Savinio's use of foreign languages and Italian dialect and his literary and historical allusions are essential to an understanding of the structure and style of the work. While this translation remains faithful to the Italian edition, a familiarity with so many languages (and with Italian history) cannot be assumed on the part of the reader; some explanations are therefore in order. To fill this need some literal translations have been provided, and where Savinio has used English this too has been noted. Some additional literary and historical material has been deemed necessary, although in a work of this nature the potential for annotation approaches the infinite. I have used throughout the "Supercoralli" edition (1981) of *Hermaphrodito*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Turin.

Chapter I

Worbas: a reference to a previous section of *Hermaphrodito*, "Frara città del Worbas," where Worbas is invoked as a titular god of the city. One of the characteristics of Savinio's prose is the threading of certain thematic material throughout various texts, indeed, throughout his entire opus. These motifs—sensual, bizarre, absurd—are bewildering in their variety and apparent lack of connection to the narrative, yet their cumulative effect underscores Savinio's 'metaphysical' intentions.

George Stephenson: 1781–1848. English inventor of the railway locomotive.

"16": Savinio's locomotive bears the number 16. In the Cabala the number 16 signifies the head, hence the intelligence of the train.

the shield of Savoy: the House of Savoy, a kingdom embracing parts of southeastern France and northwestern Italy. The king of Savoy, Victor Emmanuel II, together with his minister Cavour, forged the movement for the unification of Italy. The House of Savoy ruled Italy until 1946.

Cavour: Count Camillo Cavour. 1810–61. Italian statesman largely responsible for the diplomacy of unification. He was Italy's first Prime Minister.

the Great King: Victor Emmanuel II. 1820–78. Italian king (1861–78).

Mazzini: Giuseppe Mazzini. 1805–72. Italian revolutionary, political writer and patriot, fought for Italian unity and independence from foreign rule. His republican ideals were rejected in favor of Victor Emmanuel II.

Lion of Caprera: Giuseppe Garibaldi. 1807–82. Italian revolutionary commander of the forces of unification. He was awarded the island of Caprera, off the coast of Sardinia, where he retired.

the little stone temple where our Poet sleeps: Dante Alighieri. 1265–1321. Italian poet, buried in Ravenna; a mausoleum commemorates his exile there.

Semiramis: in legend, daughter of the goddess Astarte; wife of Ninus, founder of the Assyrian Empire. Her luxury and perversity are celebrated.

Leda Gys: the stage name of Giselda Lombardo. 1892–1957. Silent film star, active 1918–26.

Chapter II

Vetterli's bullets: Friedrich Vetterli. 1822–82. Swiss engineer and director of an arms factory at Shaffhausen, developed a firing cap widely used in Europe, even after the adoption of modern bullets in 1891.

Arthur Pym: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, (1838), by Edgar Allan Poe. Savinio alludes to characters and events in Chapter XVII–XXIV, a visit to an imaginary island, Tsala, aboard the ship Jane, somewhere near Antarctica.

mundi alius: *L*; other world.

Tout-de-même, je n'ai pas de veine: *F*: all the same, I'm unlucky.

Florentine Academy: Accademia della Crusca, founded in 1582 to protect the Italian language from foreign or negative influences.

Academy of Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, founded 1603, by Prince Frederico Cesi, for the study of mathematics, physics and natural history.

"our sailors are on their ships": from the Hymn to Tripoli (c. f. *Hermaphrodito*, p. 39), a song from the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912).

Godillot's bizarre life jackets: Alex Godillot. 1816–1903. French industrialist, developed the first life jacket.

Cattaro and Pola: modern Kotor and Pula, cities on the Dalmatian coast of present day Yugoslavia. These ports were the main harbor and arsenal of the Austro-Hungarian navy after 1866.

Luigi Pulchi's Morgante Maggiore: Luigi Pulchi. 1432–84. Poet and writer of the Italian Renaissance, at the court of Lorenzo de Medici. His *Morgante*, a narrative poem in 28 cantos, celebrates the deeds of the paladins or knights.

AZZARDO (CHANCE): the etymological note on chance is adapted by Savinio from the 1855 edition of the *Morgante*, annotated by Pietro Sermolli, v. 2, p. 42.

bien fol qui s'y fie!: *F*; "Souvent femme varie, bien fol qui s'y fie!" Attributed to Francis I of France (1494–1547), 'often women will change their minds, quite the fool he who believes them.'

Morra: or Mora, a game of chance played with the fingers, each designated with a number.

Wolfgang von Goethe: 1749–1832. Savinio alludes here to Goethe's novel *The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister* (1795–6).

valse lentes: *F*; slow waltzes.

sauteries: *F*; wild parties; dancehall tunes.

Barzinian battlefield: Luigi Barzini. 1874–1947. Italian jingoist, he covered the Russo-Japanese and Italo-Turkish Wars for the leading newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*; developed a vivid style of reporting which became known as *barzinismo*.

Bald Sybil: perhaps Sibilla Aleramo, the pseudonym of Rina Faccio. 1876–1960. Italian poet and writer.

m. 800
1365 fore
11/14/70

