

**D**ust and  
dirt, festive  
harnesses, bits  
between the  
teeth, nervous,  
prancing  
animals,

violently curbed, wounded mouths, tested, sorted out again, with a congealing of blood and sweat, bits of mud sticking to fluttering robes, the group departing in a line, spreading during the race, drum of hooves making the hill shudder, rushing upright and abreast, at their approach your heart shrinks, dust and dread, calm spectators, a row of explosions, smell of ochre, signal for an abrupt halt, rearing up at the outside edge of the tents, vanishing smells of flames, blue wisps, the shell to the ear, the body's ochre in the nose, this subdues the rhythms of war and soothes the beast into a pleasing docility, calm after

ferocity, the damming up after the release, white mascots of war disappearing behind the dark earthbank on the surface of the ground, waiting to be entertained by the appearance of just such another thundercloud on the empty scene, sounds of hooves already under way, a light wind clears the air before the next wave draws near.

First images to strike you on arrival after coming round the hill, the direct route blocked, prohibited to the crowd by the police, you take a path through the tumble of olive trees, twisted, knotty, rough, shining green, fragments of silver on the back of the leaves, there in the distance clearly visible in level transparency, the Roman ruins, revealed in a blaze of yellow, precise arcades, broken lines, a funereal pace, a roadway with dangerous bends, the wheel which spins in a void over the sandy edge, face to face you are amazed by the daring of this site, which appears as something built white against the side of the hill, an inspired music playing over the deeps interrupting its fullness according to some asymmetrical daring, thus disguising the enigma which is solved if you take account of the fact that this apparent improvisation is dictated by necessity: the windows which appear to float haphazardly riddle its surfaces according to the calculation of plans which ignore the dictates of storeys; and this, lightening the heaviness of stone, reverberates into a lively fantasy.

You park your car before mingling with the crowd and becoming aware of the horse race, that alluring dance which unleashes the lust for violence, your body giving itself over to its reflections, holding back its cries, in its precipitous descent into the stuff which enfolds you and becomes the town, looking for Aya, the telegram in your head: come stop. Dreadfully depressed total black nightmare stop. Am at Moulay Idriss stop. Aya.

Who are you? An angel perhaps, in a visitation, descended amongst festive humans, with your flowing hair, your staff propping up your body, caught awkwardly up there on the saint's property, in the south, at the edge where the Atlas ends, you plough into a crowd which catches you up and you merge into its embrace, on your right a poor old grocer,

selling seeds, grilled chick peas, factory made sweets, on your left, a woman telling fortunes, with huge, black glasses, pretentious armouring like the frontage of a Cadillac with massive bumpers, chrome glinting in the near-evening light, the clouds of the day's final hour agonising for control over a premature night.

To the dubious light is added the fumes of grilled kofta, a bitter smell of fat and mashed potatoes, the mortar which binds the ground meat together, a pliable mound formed into a miniature mountain, nibbled at by the hand which takes a bit at a time to smooth it in handfuls around an iron column, to put it on the grill, where it sweats through the grate, and the fat which falls revives the glowing coals, drops of sweat, a shrivelling of fat, the punishment of hell seen in a flash, through the eye of a needle.

And the music which rolls languidly around the crowd, the procession which advances at a snail's pace, jolting over the flattened path, the footsteps determining the rhythm, and the procession begins through the lowest door, disorganised, ill-clothed, ill-fleshed, barely dressed, flaking plaster, rubbed by time, green, red, white flags, huge letters showing the sects they belong to, banners on glittering masts, incense-burners swung copiously, oliban burns, bodies break free, going against the tide. You leave the procession, and you find yourself outside the walls, half-way up the slope, in the midst of the mandarin mists of evening, the outlines of the tops of the remains of the Roman city, sketch for a scene with weeping women, marking itself out there in a perspective of vales and hillsides, hazy unmoving shapes speckled by tufts of green and grey, recognisable by the shape, the trunk, or the branch, the almond tree, the fig, the olive, the walnut, the plum, the poplar, the aspen. Bodies lying in a sort of tent, an awning stretched between a couple of makeshift stakes, on the edge of the precipice, filthy men squatting, sipping tea, recovering, in an inert pose which ignores time, which parallels fatalism, which courts fate, you rediscover the antiquity of your people, carrying Greek tragedy to this theatre, putting its words into these marbles, now dumb, disturbing the law of this archaic

people just emerged from idolatry, in the flesh, the compost from which the myth grew that lent itself to the form of tragedy, thoughts like this flicker round your body, a star in every pore, like the eye of the sieve which separates the grain from the chaff, a body cast loose, in the search for Aya, letting the meeting happen on the path of chance, your conscious mind dulled, heart stumbling.

The world rights itself, is the hiding place of a spot in the shade where wine flows, black smell, a watery stream which follows the hidden bed of beaten earth opposite the long wall which hides the garden sloping down the hill towards the stream which echoes through the pomegranates, scattered green breasts whose shapes can hardly be seen, a patriarch sitting on his prayer rug, some distance away groups of men talking, the chiefs are discussing the next part of the procession, a bat in the empire of the night, one by one the men bow and kiss the hand of the patriarch, then leave.

Of the reign of the earth there remains only the nightly contemplation which establishes itself unnoticed after the final flourish of the birds assembled for a last warble, after the last homage paid by a chorus of children dedicating their cacophony to the day's dying light while the call to prayer celebrates the power which marks out the drama of time through the gap which withers away during the unending succession of day and night.

From the other slope, as you turn your back, the town: to conquer the gloom, garlanded lanterns, painted in bright colours, swaying to music full of incense, grit and grime, air so sandy it scratches your throat, makes you spit, jingling, riddling the asphalt, loud noisy band, ghaitas like oboes tearing at your eardrums, repeatedly, urgently, but not plaintively, aggressive phrasings jostle in your blood, modulating until they batter at your jugular, multicoloured fumes, dry smacks, light drums, sharp blows stopped by a glance as you reunite yourself with the procession, forgetful of Aya, once having crossed the wasteland which goes up, which runs alongside the garden wall, and separates the bottom door from the top one.

Sounds registered through the body, bunched hands

beating out the rhythm, between shoulder and cheek, tambourines poised, long barrels from which the tempo trickles, a percussion marked on the skin itself, a tattoo of sound, the tambourines modulate their unceasing rhythm, the procession is hardly moving, like a sleeping river, from everywhere, roofs, windows, scaffolding, awnings, paths, from everywhere, graceful women bound together, shimmering dresses, conspiratorial looks, struggling children, stands from which the gaze wilts, growing hazy in the useless search for Aya.

Storm in the soul, emptiness in the heart, you are the only one to flee the wooden building which stands over the tomb, at the edge of the embankment, that reef which contains the ship of souls, out of the opening hangs a heavy hand, still, criss-crossed with bloated veins, skeletal sculpture, hand of the unseen, of the centenarian, who does not stir in the narrow sepulchre of his edifice, propped upon a hundred years' worth of branches, just the height of a seated man who neither moves, nor washes, hardly eats, only emerges when the town is asleep, an inert bundle, lying here for fifty years, across the path to the most famous of holy shrines, where the glory of the Name is emblazoned everywhere, the emotion in which such a beggar would want to openly participate, who shows off his poverty and his retreat with the stunning effect of a golden icon carried in a procession.

Music everywhere, young women delicately dancing, modestly, approaching the risk of the measure, freeing themselves little by little from their modest demeanour, coaxing out the essence of their being as the oscillations vibrate, as the pressures mount, look at that one, could it be Aya dizzily wrapped up in the careering of an atom? and that one who suddenly abandons herself to ecstasy, exorbitant, in a state of shock, out of this world, flecks of foam on her lips, and that one who falls down in tears, crying out like a young camel on its way to the slaughter, and that one, doleful and silent who is shut up inside a voluptuous cruelty, that one in a blissful trance as if under the spell of some treacherous caress, that one still moving seriously, caught up in the abandon

which flows into her from all around, like that in the womens' dancing, recreating an insight into female pleasure, dancing, twisting their bodies with the force of orgasm.

A slow mounting of a human tide like the sap mounts up to the wound in the tree, a mere summer's wave which hardly interrupts the music and dancing, one of them this toothless old man with his bald head welcoming the rain with open arms, vulnerable face, hovering in his white gown, back bent parallel to the ground, drunk with the water that falls from the sky, stuttering greedy mouth, convulsed features, pupils turned up, with only the whites of his eyes showing, like a lonely star, turning, twisted in on himself, frenetic, having just enough awareness to dare to reach out to you and to perhaps awaken in you the angelic light which the others are on the look out for.

Sucked along or not, this complicity, this joy of being there for an hour soaked in a contemporary antiquity, on tiptoe emerging in the square where the smell of animals and rancid fat mix together, spattered with blood from the ritual carved out by a circle of statuesque members of a sect banned from the procession, outlaws, pirates, singed heads, who satisfy themselves by staying to the edges, meeting a halo of kif, your body shudders, like lightning striking some deep part of yourself and waking a sleeping part of your brain, this is what interrupts the unchanging circle of thoughts, this severs the thread of images, this opens a void at your feet, a moment when you might collapse, never get back, then you get control of yourself with a shudder and slowly you recover consciousness while the clumsy dancer, like a convict at work, slashes at his face and forearm with the aid of a safety catch made in Germany, the blood trickles down the white shirt, the child cries and shivers, the flute is breathless, the bendir tinkles out its force, the music exhausts itself, unable to keep up with the urgent call of blood.

A square opening from the neck of a funnel, from the road, like the mouth of a never-emptied bottle, terraces, chairs and tables for a restful pause, it will be a long, wide-awake night, doorways enlivened by stalls, the noise attacks you and

you do not meet Aya either amongst those sitting down or amongst the circles of those who stand around the negro sect, whom intolerance has also excluded from the procession, confining them to the other side of the square, gowns as white as foam on the tide lighting up the blackness of the night, gigantic fireflies, evanescent ghosts, apparitions changing with the speed of light, leather belts studded with cowrie shells, bodies in tune to their music, like being inundated with steel, a hymn of servitude, which invites you to press into their mysteries, drain out litanies which stir up the demons inside you, and something which lusts after the child who ornaments their appearance, who teases them, sniggerings and affectations, a comical face in a red cap which he constantly puts on, takes off, collecting coins.

Neon hurts your eyes, at the entrance to the covered passageway, and other luminescences, fluorescent, lamps, flashlights, twisted candles, daubed, tarted up in colours, on the lookout ploughing through highly-sugared donuts, cakes of semolina, cocoa, vanilla, furred over with peanuts, with sesame seeds, to be cut into thin strips, weighed, wrapped up bit by bit, that assuage your hunger, you swim, the crowd dense, carried by the mob, becoming cut off by the chain which confronts you at the top and forbids entry to the mausoleum to those who do not share the beliefs of the community, here the outsider's journey ends, and you, the angel with the twisted walking stick, in search of Aya, your hair hanging loose, you dare to lift the heavy chain instead of bending to get under it, like others do, and at that, whispers, at that, questions, is he one of us or not, yes, no, the uniformed guards are worried, the force of the majority, the herd instinct, intolerance, and what it might suggest to an imprisoned soul, no room for insubordination unless allowed by law, a large entrance hall, vulgar marble, a high blank wall, whitewashed, opposite the green balustrade which surrounds the huge raised courtyard where water runs from many taps into a large oblong trough for either thorough or fleeting ablutions.

At the back, no sign of Aya in the smelly latrines, the flooded urinals, sickening smells, stink of digested food, urea,

acid, ammonia, gas, rotten stench, retchings, urine or shit, wet floor, muddy ruts between the flagstones, mottled with sewage, the gaps in the doors allow you to see without looking at the buttocks at work, defecating, tufts in the water, echoing metal, streams of piss in harmony, others silently waiting their turn, men and women together, an old woman gown up, pantaloons lowered, enormous buttocks, washing the folds of her sex and her anus, the den of an ogress, indifferent to shame, a pout on her lips, a fetid underworld, the far end of the enclosure, beyond the courtyard, climb the stairs, alongside a blocked doorway, massive, bolted panels, a reign of excrement in the dark intimacy of the sexes, to free oneself from that which might be an embarrassment, purgings, wastings, loosenings, behind the dormitories opening up on the courtyard for washing, there where one purifies oneself after getting rid of the muck, makes oneself clean after the ritual of shitting, able now in saintly purity to cross the last threshold of a door, monumental, with flat metal panels, carved plaster, arabesques in crude colours of blue, yellow, green, under the blessing of a square calligraphy which refines the letters until they are almost transformed into flowers.

As you enter, the questions become keener, who is he, where is he from, he speaks Arabic, he has an accent, a spy, let him alone, no stop him, long hair which brushed aside by the hand shows your light coloured eyes, changeable, intense, showing the required fear, hair which covers the face, and gives you an old-fashioned look, lots of Indian type clothing, a hippy curiosity, it's a clashing style, glistening ring, the metaphor of an eye, an agate polished to show off all its shades, casting light on its silvery setting, an intrusion which is worrying, a crowd stupefied in its celebration of the saint, which notices the entrance made by a contrary into Islamic territory, who is he, forbidden to unbelievers, your reply is Koranic: "*their sign is in their face*", identity does not shun itself, that disconcerts the censoring and cancels it out, a middle room, marble, a felted shimmering of feet, intense colours, elegant gestures, they bend over and take off their shoes, carry them sole to sole, walking barefoot on the marble wet with the drizzle of August,



the night which advances without exuding from the sky the seed of its stars, looks still question your descent, might you be lost amongst these creatures who pass judgement on the daring of your unlikely faults, right there in the shadow of the great mosque, in a grove of palms with many paths, you are not even shabby and abandoned like the holy idiots, tolerated and feared, would they understand if you told them that the Koran does not convey to you a law, but a musical experience, that you search freely for the invisible through the cult of beauty which inspires in all the ways of life the assiduous and spontaneous search for Aya?

And defying the babble of teasing children, you cross the narrow band which leads towards the stairs whose descent leaves you on a level with the final terrace, a light breeze is scarcely moving the welcome jet of water in the centre of a fountain which is overflowing its rough, concentric grooves, electric lights, green red yellow flashes which would have dimmed the presence of the stars if by chance the dark sky had been freed from the greyness which held it, the balletic dance of people crossing, going in, coming out, sitting down at the entrance to the porch, looking for a place on the left, in the new room, the gift of the prince for the glory of the saint, that clashes with the testimony of the secular stone, a new hangar which nothing subdues, not even the decor, colours rap you right in the eye, but the spirit of concrete stands out, the cranium cannot cope with the veracity of material, migrainous light, an illusory space which welcomes, without calligraphic subtlety, the genealogy in stone which, in spite of obvious gaps between generations, awards to the one who has funded it the prize of origin, granting him the immunity of prophetic descent, carved in small script, close to the eastern alcove, opposite the square where seated women are received, where you can hardly make out, glimpse the shadow of Aya, for fear of contravening the code of honour, which in a place like this governs the separation of the sexes.

You give your shoes to the beggar whose job this is and you make your way into the cupola which protects the sepulchre, a servant welcomes you with authority, the women

on the right, the men on the left, a very high room, in the shadow of the entrance an indolent and apathetic circle of those who are of a recognisably aristocratic class, the descendants of the saint, end of a noble line, degenerates like wax models, you sit down with your back against the threshold covered with mosaics, decorative pieces, discontinuous mandolas, many-shaped and marked by a dotted line which explodes as you look at it, shimmers, resettles, many colours which shine, then dissolve into the overwhelming whiteness of the wall, sometimes violated by votive offerings, embroidered cloth, ostrich eggs, clocks, a wall which climbs very high to reach its pyramidal cupola, complex iron casings, perpendicular in style, a confusion of small beams livened up with varnished bundles which leave their tracery on the vague tattoos, traces of henna decorating the limbs of the newly married bride, the mausoleum a huge square stone which crowns a lofty pyramid, a linking which marks a rare overture just rhyming with the intervening space, beneath a corniche drawn the colour of the earth, and in the axes, opposite the entrance, encased by the wall, the monumental catafalque, place of the saint, a prism mounted by two pitched roofs, an ancient cedar sarcophagus, covered with many silk veils, silks of flame, jade, garnet, purple, a sonorous depth from which shines forth a swarm of golden letters, a lightly worked filigree, a humming light which shatters the equilibrium of vision and casts you into solitude, Aya is not on the women's side.

The pilgrims approach the tomb, the most zealous peel back the veils where they can, at the corner, to get at the fruit, the core of the matter, reach the wood, the age which their prayers long for, and with their hands thus charged with unknown energy fervently caress their faces, and they finally read *The Prologue* to give their gesture a scriptural reference, while the lover of god dances around the catafalque stretched out at full length, hairy, slobbering, the heavy weight of his body occasionally making the earth shudder, accompanied by a guttural noise, to get his breath back and to strike up an unintelligible litany, his face scarlet, his face, sown with light,

an unrestrained body thrown into pain by the rapid and jerky rhythm, on the edge of collapse, moaning, not disturbing those who are concentrating, more than reason that takes you out of yourself, burns like a shared pact, that destabilises belief, leaves you to wander around the burning periplum of your own adventure, without increasing the image of the stained gown beneath which the lover all nerves in his lonely dance trembles, a dove brushing a beam with his wings, could it be Aya reincarnated? The cries of the lover grow, a holy man tries to bring him back to himself, you get up and go off on the track of a trail gone cold.

You are seized by a feeling of eviction, that adds nothing to the gap between you and your identity, thrown into confusion by a mere nothing, cut into, split, like a mobile image, altering, which throws doubt on anything which tends to certainty, that creates corporeal lightness and secures to you the spirit of visitation which makes you a living part of the story of the angel, light, delicate, you leave these places to the caprice of some local, first rank authority, dressed in the deep-green uniform which the crowd seems to fear while notoriously holding it in scorn.

You hurl yourself out of the forbidden enclosure, you turn right, you turn your back on the crowd, you go up the dilapidated alleyways, muddy, dark, you cross the crowded passages, in places the music comes to you like a faraway refrain, you sense the vocal power of unheard words which linger in the agitation of the breathing which troubles your chest, you do not stop when you reach the edge of the middle terraces, you see the line of high vaulting architecture, leaning, not resting on anything, precarious, one small street reveals bloated facades, askance, as if transfixed on the point of collapse, cracked walls invaded by weeds, dustbins overturned by hungry cats, seemingly abandoned upper storeys, ruins holding promise of treasure, lamps casting a poor yellow light which prolongs the shadows, catching the smell of a bakery, a dwarf at the doorway, very ugly, hairy, knock-kneed, an evil smile, he offers you a smoke, he smells neither of flour nor burning wood, but of butcher's blood, seated on a crate, his

smock open, revealing an enormous phallus, some kind of evil spirit, a sardonic smile, you take a drag from the hookah held out to you, you shake his hand, rough, repulsive, and you carry on walking, you reach the edge of the town which overhangs the rooftops of the space given over to the monument, the pyramid of the shining mausoleum with its gleaming green tiles, at the top of which rises a mast of three balls, each smaller than the one below and which modifies finally into a huge crescent, humble indicators of the naves of the mosque, green plaster, old, the incongruous image of the new, pear-coloured room, a clash which nudges your weakening will, waiting for Aya's return, you leave the town behind and continue to climb up the path towards the grottos, where rock rules, scattered trees, an owl hoots, whoops and lands on a stump, she blinks her eye, a symbol of Aya welcome on the swarming silence of the black night.