



M@ilbox
Gabriel Prospero

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MAILBOX

The others know not that in this quarrel we perish

Gabriel Prospero

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Characters in this novel are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

The others know not that in this quarrel we perish. Back home after Seth's funeral, Kev sends him a final email, which receives a reply. A voice from beyond the grave, a computer hoax by a Rogerian hacker, a manipulation of no importance? It is in India, following the course of the Ganges, that the discussion will take shape and substance, and come to life.

Goodbyes

From: <Kev> Date: Fri 16/12 16:26
To: <Seth>
Cc:
Subject: Re: Goodbyes

Hi Seth,

I know you are not going to answer me, but I wanted to leave this last futile message before Yahoo closes down your mailbox. I went to your cremation early this afternoon. They're all amateurs, pal. Your friends, well those presumed to be so, filed past to say what a fine-looking, sturdy, honest man you were. Well, they didn't know what the hell to say, and it was fairly obvious. The poor crematorium officer in charge behaved exactly as one should never do in this line of work: he was fawning.

To top it off, your two daughters threw themselves on the coffin crying "I want my daddy!" The old ladies shed a few tears, proclaiming how moved they were. I didn't attend the cremation itself, not being a presumed friend.

I just wanted to send you this last email which shall remain unread. To say what... Well, nothing really...

Kev

From: <Seth> Date: Fri 16/12 16:26
To: <Kev>
Cc:
Subject: Re: Re: Goodbyes

Hi Kev,

Sorry for not having replied sooner, but I was busy being dead. Don't get too upset over my two daughters, who are only sobbing over their own misfortunes and their personal comfort whose future is endangered by my definitive absence. Anyway, they find something or other to cry about every day.

What I'm most interested in are my presumed friends. You, who have been listening in the wings for so many years, must have had a good laugh. I can just imagine them, cell phone at the ready, racing around to organise the repatriation of my main avatar, henceforth out of commission, by which I mean my body.

"Hello, is that the Premier Visa service? Can you confirm coverage of expenses linked to a death overseas?"

"Yes, of course, Sir, you are covered for an amount not exceeding x euros, you're lucky. Oh, sorry, please accept my condolences... hold the line, I'll get back to you..."

In life you knew me as a man who was a model of social propriety, of politically correct affability, a meekly accepting servant of the system, be it political, economic, fiscal or familial. From a worthy man in life, I intend to be an unworthy one in death.

No but can you believe it! I've got my reasons! Deceased during a business trip to Benares, flattened by the statue of an elephant toppled from its pedestal on the banks of the Ganges, only a stone's throw from the Meer Ghat – Hindu cremations of sandalwood (10,000€), beautiful coloured saris, a gentle light, melodious songs of hope, and reincarnation. But what? They ship me back off to the Clermont-Ferrand and burn my body to cinders in a propane furnace (I wouldn't mind knowing how much that set them back), with by way of consolation the tears, doubtless sincere but of no interest, of my supposed friends, and the wailing, doubtless insincere and in any event hardly unusual, of my two bloody daughters.

You have to admit it's enough to make you want to drop a bomb. I never thought my exemplary life would be rewarded, but honestly, that's almost ... a declaration of war.

Anyway, I'll leave you to get over it.

Seth

From: <Kev> Date: Fri 16/12 20:26

To: <Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Goodbyes

Whoever you are, this is not funny. You are usurping a mailbox which is not yours.

Your IP is located in India. Yeah, it's easy to get hold of, an IP!

From:<Seth> Date: Fri 16/12/ 16:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Goodbyes

That's enough. Pack it in with the shock, horror act! Okay, so you have some difficulty believing...

Let's say I know you are screwing the PR trainee in the photocopy room (the one that locks)... See, I know all about you. You believe in rationality, so do I. So unless I'm the old geezer from the photocopier bestowed with a spark of wicked intelligence by some fairy or other, which in passing tends to suppose that fairies exist, then I can't have died in India and I'm still there, and you have stupidly, but in great pomp, burned someone else to ashes. Or maybe the other world is already equipped with a wifi modem. Or else I'm someone else who is also extremely well versed about your PR activities.

Look, let's forget the sordid details. I'm sure you'll agree they're just not all that important. My regards to your wife, by the way.

As you might imagine, I wasn't really in a position to follow the festivities all that well. I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me all about it. I'm not being morbid, I just want to know who said what...No, actually, I couldn't care less, but I want to be part of it...

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Fri 16/12/ 23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Goodbyes

I think it was Paul who went to recover your body. I hope they gave you a rectal exam to check you weren't transporting any drugs. I don't know any of the details, worst luck. I suppose you must have left instructions regarding cremation. It's a pity about the lack of organ donation – I suppose it wasn't possible to have your remains transported from Benares to Paris without breaking the cold chain.

Paul has always enjoyed doing the dirty work. I think he likes it because it reassures him of his own existence. When the coffin was opened, a powerful odour of curry and cinnamon filled the room. A stench of clay too. Even if I was quite a distance away, I could smell it strongly. There was a necklace made of wilted yellowy-orange flowers too. And also a little sealed copper pot containing water.

Your body was pretty squashed, but I never doubted an instant that it was truly yours.

The atmosphere seemed neither tense nor odd. Everyone was a bit surprised to find themselves there. They exchanged a "whoever would have expected it?" for a "it's so sad, especially for the girls" (note that it is manifestly not considered to be sad for you...).

You're just so weird. I don't want to act as your reporter on your own funeral. If you are a spirit, then why didn't you get a good look at the time?

You're nothing but a lousy, evil-minded dead guy. If I sent you that email last month, it wasn't because I intended you to read it and send some rubbish back, but just to have a last contact. It was dumb. And I'm not quite sure how to say this... Whoever is replying to these emails, I want to stop.

Goodbyes.
From:<Seth> Date: Fri 16/2/ 16:26
To:<Kev>
Cc:
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Goodbyes

How appropriate that "s". On "goodbyes", I mean... I hadn't forgotten you but I had a lot of stuff to do today (you know, hymns, poker with the acolytes...)

You wanted to say goodbyes, plural; agreed - we will have several. Or rather "God byes", "God be with you" or should I say "gods", since there are several. In the first case, we can speak of reincarnation; in the second, polytheism.

Before being crushed by Lord Ganesha, the god of good luck and felicity, I'd never really had much to do with the gods. I'm not going to say that it was a shock... but I've been in better positions.

I'd never really considered the world in all its mystique. For me, the notion of reincarnation was just words, a joke (more than likely you will reincarnate as ... a trainee's thong ;-)). Polytheism was, for me, an ancient religion, mere predecessor to modern monotheism. I think that's how we tend to represent things: as a form of progress, in the same way as the car replaced the horse-drawn carriage and the washing machine took over from the communal wash-house.

Quite logical, when it all boils down, to transform the forces of nature into gods – springs, sun, moon, stars, oceans, winds – allow you to talk to the rain to ask it to fall, to direct the prayer to what is being prayed for.

But divine rain falls no more frequently than statistics and fluid dynamics allow, no more frequently than its heretical counterpart. All rather bothersome for that caste of priests – no doubt self-proclaimed – officiating in the lands of South America. Ignored by an absented-minded divinity inattentive to the codified signs of its own clergy, said clergy sacrificed masses of young warriors, women and children to attract the interest of its gods. Small gold-festooned girls pushed into deep holes of blue shale, little boys mummified in the snow, the hearts torn from warriors.

Statistically, does it work?

The brutal forces of nature thereafter became somewhat humanised. The ruthless ocean became truculent Neptune. A head, a heart, a

personality, hostile no doubt but open to envy, desire, love and the thirst for power. From the abstraction which was the force of nature came the gods. Avatars, if you like. Avatars of nature. Avatars open to negotiation.

For these anthropomorphic gods, sacrifice also became symbolic, if ever present.

And yet the fear of death remains... On that subject, reincarnation fills a gap. We'll talk about that tomorrow. And to quote adepts of Near Death Experiences, "I'll go find out and I'll get back to you"!

Sorry. Got to go. Someone's on the other line.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/2/ 23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Automaton

I've just come up with another reason for your presence among us. There persists among the literati a certain pretension with respect to the absolute complexity of language and dialogue.

Thinking back to the eighties, I recall a neat little programme named ELIZA which simulated a dialogue with a psychologist. It was based on an algorithm from 1966 and simulated a Rogerian psychotherapist.

ELIZA: "Hello, I am your psychotherapist. Tell me what's bothering you."

Patient: "I'm really anxious".

"Why do you say you are anxious?"

"It's because of my wife."

"Tell me about your family."

"I love my kids."

"I'd like you to tell me about your relationship with your children."

"Nobody loves me."

"Are you bothered by the fact that nobody loves you?"

"Yes, I feel very much alone."

"Perhaps it's got something to do with your sex life, please go on."

OK, I know, thinking that a conversation with a psychologist can be simulated by fifty four thousand bytes is a bit far-fetched... even so, the software gave quite credible results...

I suppose it could have been perfected. Is that all you are? A pitiable digital rogue, a mere syntactical analyser programmed when you were alive to speak in your stead?

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/2/ 23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Automaton

You're anxious? Perhaps it's got something to do with your sex life;-))... Interesting but pointless hypothesis. If I am a linguistic robot programmed to automatically reply to your messages then I've absolutely no way of knowing it. I can help you, nevertheless, in your search for the Truth – even if I can't help thinking, more and more each day, that it's the biggest lie ever perpetrated on the poor brain-bound mammals that we represent.

I do remember that programme, actually. It was all the rage – "2001, A Space Oddity" and all that – with the public fascination for the perversity of man-machine dialogues. It's odd to imagine that the first of those films featuring a thinking machine encumbered it with such existential problems as to induce it to commit murder. Duty, faithfulness, affection, the behaviour to adopt faced with an indifferent parallelepipedic god, what better reasons to kill, especially if the future victims don't share the thinker's perspective.

If I am what you say I am, rather than a mere myrtle shade, lacking the means available to Hal9000, I'm not going to kill anyone. A pity.

In any event and whatever I am, an errant spirit, a digital rogue, a skilful usurper, I am finding this post-mortem conversation very amusing.

I saw something of India. You'll find enclosed a few pictures I took during a procession called Kavadee or Cavadee – I'm not sure which. I can't remember the exact place, either. No doubt somewhere in the south of India, in the Tamil Nadu.

The devotees, having fasted for several days, and unwashed, gather in the morning by the river bank. Bare-chested, covered only by a loin

cloth, they allow their friends to pierce the skin of their chests with silver skewers, or have their tongues skewered. Dozens of hooks weighted with lemons pierce their backs, and thus they walk several miles until reaching the temple, carrying on their heads a heavy, flower-festooned arch, walking on nails, broken glass, embers. Starving, weighted down, high on their own pain hormones, reeling with each step, cloistered in the recesses of their soul, they spin, only the whites of their eyes showing, deep in a shamanist trance. Upon arrival at the altar of the god, freed of their burdens and cleansed, honoured and reassured of their piety, they break their fast and rejoice in having been entranced. Avatars for a few hours of otherworldly forces, astonished and humbled by the mysteries, they sit by the statues, their eyes unfocussed, lost in another truth.

You can connect to the file server <LINK> using the password AVATAR. You'll like it.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/2/ 23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Test

I'll not bother trying to give you a Turing test then to see if you are human...I could always send you a deformed image of a text and ask you to transcribe it, since a machine is not able to do that...But I don't really give a damn; I find it entertaining, too. Anyway, I'm pleased to be talking to you. Well, writing to you. Not to mention that it's a hell of a lot easier logistically to send a mail rather than to light candles and gather a group of dishevelled clairvoyants around a creaky table, a bit too nineteenth century for me.

The photos from the server are almost disturbing. The expressions are inward-looking and convey the detachment obtained by a personal mystical experience.

Having your body taken over by a partially divine spirit must count as one. I've been taking PROZAC for the past few weeks. I went to see Bertrand and told him that I was sleeping fifteen to seventeen hours a day. So he said: "Okay, I'll put you on one Prozac a day!" and I agreed. It's the

first time in my life that I've taken mind-altering substances: coffee and chocolate excepted.

Did you know that in fact it's a slightly modified extract of St John's wort? I'm always amazed by the fact that nature does our chemistry for us; that plants, preceding us by several millions years, synthesise products which are medicinal. From the willow, aspirin; from mould, antibiotics; from the yew, anti-cancer drugs. And chemists copy and concentrate, but in fact create relatively little.

Over the past few weeks I've been feeling the effects. I normally sleep a lot, but usually I feel a lot more connected to the present; I'm no longer ruminating over things, without necessarily forgetting them, pondering the past and the future. I think about what I want to think about, and life's omnipresent "popups" – worries, regrets – are neatly kept in place.

It's really weird to imagine that a mere plant can change our souls. That a simple vegetal extract can change our behaviour, modify our priorities, the way we manage our time, how we cope with loss, how we manage the very awareness of our own existence.

St John's wort teaches us to be humble. Can our suffering be so noble, so ethereal, so religious, if it is dissolved by a shot of Fluoxetine hydrochloride?

To decide that which is divine, human or social, a frame of reference is required. Would a society under the influence of Prozac be any the less mystical? Can God be dissolved in a solution of St John's wort?

For an avatar to exist there has to be an original. And I'm not sure he exists.

While I was looking for information to catch you out, I discovered MyDeathSpace, the blog of the dead. This from the observation that most of the teenagers assassinated by a serial killer some time ago in a pitiful American high school all had blogs on MySpace.

So, after their deaths, an archive site took over and charges necrophilic techno-fans for the thrill of an otherworldly communication. The avatar on display continues to communicate news letters, update links and info, all by itself, depending on the programming entered before his untimely demise by the blogger. Whether he liked hard rock, Vietnamese cuisine or Japanese mangas, the blog will continue to display the latest news from Marilyn Manson, the latest soya-based recipes, the most recent cartoon of huge-eyed heroes.

Several years later, the partial avatar in the guise of the dead blogger will still be up to date, reacting to the trends of the moment, employing words and references that the deceased will never know.

Does the avatar respond to the need to pass something on, to bear children, to endure?

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/2/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Automaton

You're getting into stuff way over the horizons here; not related to the avatar itself but to the purpose we give it.

I think I'm in a good position to talk about that. My two daughters: half of my genetic patrimony transmitted not once but twice, the total of which does not make a whole. We share 99% of our genes with the great apes, 70% with species considered to be inferior. Worse, the language used to programme life only comprises four letters – for everything living on the planet, no doubt from the onset. I let you imagine, or work out if you will, how little of me there is in them; less than pure chance would give without good luck. Especially in that certain sub-programmes are common to all. The homeobox gene, which knows how to segment our spinal column, is the same as that of the fly.

By the way, did you break into my place as I asked you when I was still alive, to empty my safe?

You see, I'm not beyond contingencies, and I wouldn't like my own lucky accidents to get their dirty little hands on everything I held precious.

If you think statistically, the bricks of life – genes – are assembled from the beginning using the same code. This means that each living organism is an avatar of the principle "terrestrial life", and each, as for all good avatars, is possessed of its own capabilities, its own mission.

India's colourful avatars also speak of that. Did you know that the number of spikes on the crests of temple roofs sometimes represents the number of orifices of a man or woman? Reproduction, transmission, is a central element of Hinduism: sexuality has long been venerated, as can

be seen from the temple frescos, composed of bestial couplings every which way.

On a daily basis, however, our offspring often disappoint us and, beyond the boundaries of our biological mission, there are no limits.

It's a good thing, my old friend, to indulge in a few drugs. And in fact, the question of the nature of the principle avatar is truly drug-related. It's normal at your age, and the molecule you have selected is just as good as the alcohol that the respectable family man gulps down in secret. Drinking without being seen.

Since such tinctures can change a man, modifying his personality, playing around with his soul, is it not a demonstration by the absurd that there is no fixed point of reference in our lives?

Why do you want to give up on complexity? If events are paradoxical, don't they represent an opportunity to be grasped?

Come back to earth. Stop thinking about things. Come to Delhi.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/2/ 23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Test

Will I find you there, in Delhi? I don't know if travel can be considered a cure. In an enclosure, subjected to intense stress, rats have three types of behaviour: there are those who let themselves die, those who attack the others, and those who try to escape, even if it means taking risks. Rats leaving the sinking ship, in fact. We know what kind of rat you are; I understand, and if the truth be known, admire you a little. But is anything solved by our leaving, or do we simply transport our bubble of paradox along with us?

We were brought up under the regime of brownie points. Do you remember at school, when you worked out the right answer, wrote something well or came up with the right answer (the one which you were supposed to come up with!), the teacher gave you brownie points. For ten points you got a star, and for ten pictures, a gold star.

Don't you think that such education is in fact the impression of a Pavlovian reflex, irrevocable, a pressing need to conform, to give what is expected of you?

Later on, at university, you learn to repeat. The best repeaters become teachers of repetition. And the brownie points follow you to work: bonus for objectives, Hay results, performance indicators. The most conformist among us take the decisions, and the creators or architects are kept at a distance and invited to keep their thoughts to themselves.

This works alright in periods of stability, when things have to be rebuilt, only rebuilt better. But when the world changes, it's a death warrant: not having known how to do things differently.

I want to shake myself up, no longer be part of the great brotherhood of late conformists, but what would I *do* in India? Or maybe *do* is not the right question. What can you *be* in India?

Is it the Empire of the Senses?

I went into your place – I didn't need to break in because I had the key – but I entered secretly all the same. I dialled the code of the strongbox and removed the hard drive (Western Digital made in 2006) and the parchments (Willem Vrelandt made in 1740). I carefully put away the vellum, and dropped the disk into sulphuric acid. The bearded man painted on a vellum, on the December calendar, was warming his feet before the hearth. His avatar is pretty thin, like that of the anonymous artist who produced the piece five hundred years ago. As for the antiphony, almost illegible, a venerable nine hundred years old, it won't see out the millennium. Have you played these few notes of music; neumes I think they're called?

The transfer has been made. I'll think about it.

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Arguments

You will find me, I can guarantee it, and in ways you wouldn't imagine. Why should you come? Because you know, because once you said so.

An escape? No, I don't think so. But you have to travel to be able to see enough information with your own eyes before synthesising it. A sedentary life in the middle ages followed on from a life of wandering. Today it's the contrary. During our youthful years we are chained by constraints, trapped in long studies, sterile and without substance: the sedentary life, we live it when we are young in body. Tired of knowing so well how to rebuild things, certain rats leave a ship that has become too worrisome.

The first argument is thus that you know what you should be doing.

The second is that you don't know what you want to do. Therefore, you need to have a multiplicity of dishes laid before you, so that from variety springs choice, relish and selection.

The third is that you what to know what is talking to you, and that, more than anything, this is where I am.

Here at <LINK> you will find Prash's address. Prash is a gentle Indian who shakes his head from left to right to say yes: first paradox of India which, for reasons of practical convenience, I avoid practising myself.

If you allow him to organise your trip, you will be able to visit all the places which have been photographed for the Michelin Blue Guide, or for the brochure of the travel agency of your choice (he can even show you the exact spot where you have to stand to obtain an identical photo), all the Kashmiree-run emporiums in which you will be able to buy at ten times their value incomparable silk bits and pieces, visit boring dusty old museums, and photograph the bench where Lady Diana was herself photographed just before she, like I, bit the dust. Do that, and you're in it up to your neck. Which I why I took the liberty of preparing a short specification – by way of indication of course (although he doesn't need to know that) –which will allow you to enjoy the pleasure of not having to decide anything; the first two days, anyway.

He will give you the survival kit (for which you have me to thank): anti-mosquito stuff comprising prohibited chemical substances but which, contrary to the shop-bought stuff, actually live up to their promises, special rehydrating salts for the runs, to take before you ingurgitate the miracle product – ofloxacin – which kills off the bugs without preventing you from eating.

I don't doubt that you will be coming. An electronic ticket is waiting for you at <LINK>, fully changeable. It's for the outward journey only, I don't mean anything by that, it merely offers greater flexibility.

Please, go to this address <LINK> before leaving.

I'll leave you now to have a go at me and then I'll get back to you!

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/2/ 23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Departure?

Are we setting off for the right reasons? Whatever they are, good or bad, they are still obscure. Your arguments haven't made any difference, but I'm going all the same. First off, I didn't want to read that book "The Kindly Ones", but for the wrong reason: the unanimity of the media, proponents of so many flatulent and empty phrases. And then someone lent it to me. So, obedient hacker that I am, I read it: nothing so good as a free meal.[1] I'll not bother you with the story and the historical location, but this is a capsule version of what I think it's all about. It is thus possible for a charismatic manager to organise a society to ensure its implosion; to transform talented musicians and lovers of European literature into bloody brutes with ever-stained hands.

The formula is plausible: incarnate a superior interest, God, the people, then prevent any specific orders from being given but only allow the wishes of this superior interest to be expressed: vital living space, common good, salutation. All that remains is for the middle management to put in place action plans to fulfil this ever-distant need. The eagerest will find industrial solutions and, their guilt being dissolved in common desire, will kill in the great sadness of a dire duty professionally performed.

There is said to be a triad other than that of the rats, men who, this time, divide into a majority who believe that life is serious business, and those for whom it is nothing but a farce and who flourish under this state of affairs, and yet others, who also know and who can't abide it.

Will Tomorrow say it better? Whatever happens, I hope to move from the last category to the second, this one being as uncomfortable as it is useless.

Every day confirms the farce. A poor cat gets run over on the road, just as easily as the kid who might happen to be there. A quirky but brilliant

character at the height of his glory has his life snuffed out in India by a falling Lord Ganesha.

The laughter at our expense of all the Pucks[2] in the whole resounds in our ears and we don't hear it.

In my comfortably cheerless existence, the symptoms I suffer are merely logical. Should I increase the dose? Change my poison? Slip into someone's bed?

I chose to go with the wind and catch whatever might fall.

By the way, I went to visit your "friend". I entered a sort of workshop, a technical centre, I think. I asked the general secretary and saw the person in question, who reckons he doesn't know you; a model of closed-minded stupidity, nattering away, an old geezer, in fact. I broached the subject of India, thinking there was maybe some kid of password. Nothing. We visited the rubble, and he with the brain well past its use-by date played lord and master, throwing obscure truths from before 68[3] in my direction.

In fact it's a good example for men of how not to grow old (I much prefer the prototype of the distinguished old gent).

That he was sad when he departed didn't sadden me.

You're trying to say that the former distinguished technical expert becomes that old geezer? That the young and brilliant executive becomes this old distinguished gent?

You're right: that's not what I want to become. They stink of yesterday's shit and incontinence pads replete with ineluctable promise.

Yeah, that argument is one likely to get me going and even to scare me off. So let's flee old geezers who don't know how to die and pollute the world with their slow mouldering.

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Well done!

I can almost see him, in the evening with his old woman, thinking about your freedom, your tight arse, your desire to know everything he doesn't.

Not only is valour not a fruit of time, but the fresh fruits of knowledge have a tendency to rot.

So, you're coming, or else you're already here. You'll have to tell me all about the plane and the passengers. I was certainly already dead, or worse, not paying attention, where the book came out. A pity: I only ever read you now.

I have to warn you of a few things. First of all, let's put an end to your fears: it is essential for people to believe in Mother Theresa, in the wasted bodies picked up in the morning, in the kids all skin and bones dying alongside sacred but uneatable steaks. It keeps the ignorant masses away. My old mate at the Technical Centre must certainly have told you that he would never set foot in India because "everyone knows what it's like there". Our thanks to the old lady from Albania for providing such an excellent repulsive for old geezers. So don't be a prude: India is safe[4], which is not to say you should go around licking or sucking anything you are offered just for the sake of it, and I even advise you to wash your teeth in Coca-Cola (they sell it and it seems it is not very politically correct, but very reassuring). Bring your PC so you can write to me.

Thereafter, there's no point hurrying to consult the Indians about religious mystique: they know nothing and care less, being royally (or rather imperially) disinterested. The Brahmans are there to tell you what to do, and they do, they do it well.

The gurus are harmless but tiresome. The ashrams for westerners are not tiresome but are very dangerous. As often, you have to choose between a risky but fascinating life and a safe but deadly boring life.

But more than anything what hits you most is the Indian face. All those faces you have seen in Europe, white-skinned and blond to dark-haired, are one face here, dark-haired and dark-skinned.

Identical strangers.

I reckon that it is this physical similitude which is the key, since being similar they do differently.

Look at this woman, she shares the same kind of chin as this other woman in Paris.

Look at this man's eyes: they are identical in black to those, blue, of a friend. Only the kids seem different to ours. Or perhaps we don't have kids any more and can't remember what they are supposed to look like.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/2/ 23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Flight

When the young ex-lover of "The Lover" leaves Saigon on a steamer, the mood is dreamlike, the background music, enchanting. But plane travel is the pre-packaged antithesis of a dream. You do realise what it's like with a few hundred arse-holes enclosed in a few cubic metres letting off the inevitable fart... I'm sure the rate of carbon dioxide has risen by the end of the trip.

So, attractive hostesses wearing silly hats and tight-arsed stewards. What can I tell you? A cargo of European hoi polloi embarking on an all-inclusive package. Just beside me, a bald-headed man on the wrong side of fifty nibbled his biscuits.

"How are you?" he asked me.

"Very well, thank you. And you?"

"Very well. I'm going to a study workshop in India on powder mechanics.

I'm a university researcher of some note. There are a lot of young people who need training over there. We have to train the young."

He said nothing for a few moments, then turned to me.

"How are you?"

"Very well. And you?"

"Very well. Do you know where we are?"

"Just over Dubai if we are to believe the on-board GPS."

...Silence...

"How are you?"

"Very well. And you?"

"Well, but I can't eat any peanuts because I have a peanut allergy."

Silence.

"How are you?"

"Sir, would you like an aperitif?" the hostess enquired.

"Champagne, please" replied the old guy.

"And you, Sir?"

"I'll have a glass of port, please. With peanuts."

"And you, Sir?"

"Oh, no peanuts for me. I'm allergic to them."

"How are you, young man?"

"Very well, thank you."

"I'm a senior professor at the University of Orleans and I'm going to a conference in Delhi."

"That must be fascinating."

"Yes, we have to train the young, you know, ah the young..."

"Would you like some nibbles?"

"Yes, thank you."

"How are you?"

"Very well. And you?"

"I'm feeling rather stifled, will you call the air hostess?"

"No, that won't be necessary. It's true it is over-hot in here. Would you like me to accompany you to the toilets?"

"That's would be very kind."

Half an hour later, the choked corpse was found in the toilets and the pilot announced: "further to a fatality on board, we will be making a one hour stopover in Dubai."

A sad day for *dishonorary* doctors.

I drop off to sleep.

Then I awoke in my own bed in Paris. I'll set off tomorrow.

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: ok

Ok, ok... I'm filled with dismay. If only it were true, if only you had actually bumped off the old windbag. This indeed is another variety of elderly species: the honourable university professor. Perched on the barricades in 1968 haranguing the Sorbonne with cries of "down with

intellectuals!" and down with those old moth-eaten regurgitators of accepted truths and their symbols of power. Down with conformity and ermine-edged robes for congregation.

Forty years on, they parade around like drag queens in ermine and purple, and pass crude judgement in their oblique fashion.

And hence do they grow old, these swots of another age and the most conformist among us.

They fall victim to providential depressions, public service depressions, whose origins lie in a lack of recognition, and yet we recognise these revolutionaries from afar, licking the boots of their dear colleagues.

Can't you find an old guy we can look up to? Or is a good old guy necessarily a dead old guy?

And there's the rub. How can you hope to choose employment with the potential for you to grow spiritually when you can't even contrive an appealing old age?

The problem is that our old people are not exactly jolly. You have to see it from their position, though. Given what constitutes their relatives, they exist only if they are presentable, only if the syrupy smell of urine doesn't follow them around, only if they have money and a personal financial advisor and take their summer holidays in thalassotherapy centres.

Wow, thalassotherapy! Have you tried it? When you go in, the golden oldies are already there, dressed in a white gown and blue and white slippers, with a little see-through beach bag containing their minute-by-minute programme of "cures" for the day.

First they get blasted with hi-tech jets of sea water to get them used to the water from thereabouts, then they get wrapped in sea mud to get them used to the earth. They shuffle off then into the swimming pool where nobody swims, scratching off the muddy crusts as they go. A deployment of technology, all to avoid them having to be touched.

The staff, inured by now to so many wrinkles, speaks to them as will one day the non-medical personnel in the hospice of their final days.

More redolent of the grave than the sea.

We haven't gone very far in our search for the lost aged role model.

The James Dean retrospective on Arte doesn't help us any. The message is manifest. Die young and you will be mourned forever. Even

better, if you miss the boat, don't even think about fame later on, since there will be no Leonardo on board your Titanic.

I'm rather enjoying my mean-spiritedness. We'll let the subject lie for the time being.

I also wanted to tell you not to be afraid. Fear and apprehension are human emotions linked to our personal past experience, but what of the real past: our common heritage?

Tanjore is a town in the state of Tamil Nadu. It is the site of an ancient temple and visitors have been going there for a thousand years to see the Hindus worshipping the dancers. For Shiva is a god who loves dancing and competing with his beloved wife to see which of the gods will be the first to give up, to twist an ankle. On the immaculate walls, Siva displays the harmony of his feet and hands. From the roofs to the red stones, adorned with statues, all tell of the artistic contest of the gods. There a hand laid, a foot unfettered; here a smile to the people delivered. The temple has always been progressive, unique in its acceptance of strangers, in its holiest of holies. The prince who commissioned it was at the cutting edge of his time, and would have been proud to see his present-day clerks take the Visa card in payment of donations. He welcomed in the world, and the strangest of strangers, and never ceased to be surprised at their customs. Perhaps he showed them how to dance, to be elegant and worthy of the gods. He talked about the world beyond the sea, but without the slightest conquering spirit. Swathed in silk and incense, the musicians played for a light-eyed gentleman, wearing a hat. I possess a blue illuminated manuscript from that time on which the thirteenth century makes its timid appearance. Beautiful and coarse but ailing, it shows pain and women's beautiful dresses. On the lambskin are inscribed the punishments supposedly applicable to frenetic dancers. The sins of the flesh were condemned, and yet the plaque and leprosy ruled here as masters.

In those times, the Prince received a man in a soft felt hat, an ambassador for the Emperor of China. He showed him the correct way to receive visitors, to dance and live in his temple home. Pale-faced Marco Polo made a good impression, and stayed on as a host for the monsoon period. He was a friend and Ambassador, not of his own country, but of the aging Emperor. Then one day he left on another mission, or else back to the dark night that was Europe, to explain to fanatics how to dance and pray at the same time. No one would believe him, but back in Tanjore, the Prince had his face engraved on the high roof of the temple.

Beside Shiva and Parvati, the man in the screwed down hat gazes forever at the square where the dancers honour their artistic gods. He opened the way for others – Europeans – to come. The courage of the thirteenth century man reinforced that of his successors. Vasco came, then from discovery moved to conquest. They took over the world and chased away the dancers. Ambitious merchants opened up a realm of possibles for others, stronger, who would later be found everywhere. Have we lost the guts of these men, who had such strength of character that they were able to come out of the shadows and risk everything and more? Do we only ever go there now by charter and package tours?

Two ruddy-faced Germans wander around grumbling. They are looking for the elephant photographed in the guidebook from which they seek a blessing with a deft wave of his trunk, for the price of a few rupees. Today, nobody even thinks of showing us the dance, but points the tourist rather towards the nearest shopping emporium. Curious retreat from the world while at the same time discovering it. Would Marco find us deserving descendants?

Seth

Avatars and Icons

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: here

I got here at midnight. Once I successfully passed the passport control, a gently sloping ramp, six metres wide, guided me into the hall. On either side, behind bars, thousands of black faces scrutinised the disembarking passengers, bathed in a yellow light. A constant wave of noise washed through the crowd. She was waiting for me behind a cardboard sign inscribed with my name. A petite but determined Belgian who, after rapid condolences, ushered me outside in a flow of words which I was unable, at that speed, to digest.

No doubt last year you went through this very cark park, probably at the same time, accompanied by the same grasshopper! That means you also saw the carnage. As far as the eye could see, in the dark, bodies

lying in all directions, every which way. Lying stiffly, occasionally with crossed ankles, stretched out. The seeming victims of a chemical holocaust, scattered there. Thousands of sleepers in place of cars. Thousands of solitary sleepers, for none were grouped into families or clans.

No colours either, just monks' rough cowls.

We stepped over them.

Until we reached a round-angled white car, a throw-back to the fifties, so familiar.

It wasn't the faces which I first found familiar, but rather the car. So typical, so reminiscent of the design of post-war radios, lamps, telephones made of black Bakelite.

We set off and I suppose she gave me a briefing. I dragged myself to the hotel, which I will see tomorrow, into my bed of reconstituted wood. I'm already asleep. I am here.

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: here-2

I expected a message from you this morning. But my mailbox is empty. For a long time I watched the ceiling settling, after the day had finally dawned. From behind the window of the Lemon Tree Hotel, I can see a guard washing an Italian motorbike, and passers-by strolling in the distance, at the end of the long pathway which leads to Gurgaon.

I am disappointed. Where are all these colours that I was supposed to enjoy? Where are all the spirit forces? Where are the monkeys and the signs, on this self-locking pavement as pink as that of our own pedestrian streets?

I'm on the lookout for differences. The colour of the guard, yes, a little. The plants, OK, tropical. The sky, yes, heavy and white. In the street, the dust and the people. The hotel gateway opens in the white light and flying dust onto a handful of people striding past, carts and car horns, carts of greenery.

My fifties style car has arrived. I've got to go. Write to me.

Kev

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: here-3

No answer. I went to Connaught Place to buy something to read. I came back with a GPRS kit so that I can send unlimited emails from my PC and cell phone. So I can reply to you, supposing you reply to me.

The square is both concentric and polygonal. The cars, which in the place de la Concorde turn and then disperse, drive straight on then turn at right angles to enter a broken but more central circle.

This square will no doubt sooner or later become a great hub for the commercialisation of pointless but fashionable bits and pieces, of materials stamped with their pretentious labels turning us all into sandwich board men (and women) promoting some haute couturier or other. "Sir, why did you kill this sandwich board man?" "I was hungry, your Honour".

Familiar, Place Connaught? Yes, it was, very. But lined with rather neglected little family stores rather than large bay windows showing off expensive scraps of cloth. Food stores, hardware shops, shops for useful or utilitarian things, things you need or need to have.

A portly old gent took my photo for the mobile internet access in a digital mini-shop, both familiar and strange. Hi-tech in a grocer's with its hand-written price tags and homespun advice.

An odd art gallery displaying gods cast in bronze was sufficiently new for me to find it strange. The craftsman, very diligent, only had a few models, all fairly identical to each other but of which hundreds were offered for sale. Pre-industrial artisanal art. A sort of Indian plastic Eiffel Tower, in fact.

The designer craftsman wasn't expecting me, but offered me tea with milk, a bit difficult to digest afterwards, a little like his accomplished art.

Familiarity. Yes. It's a bit like going into a place you know, say your regular cinema. Everything is there, in principle: a large screen, but it's made of blue canvas, stools instead of armchairs, spot lighting but which is intermittent, and the usherette is carrying a weapon. You are in no

doubt as to the place and what you have to do, but everything is foreign, another way of doing things.

I am in my room in the Lemon Tree. I still have one night left here. I don't know what to do here. Why did you get me to come? What's the next step?

Kev

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: here-4

I said to myself: "No message, I'm getting the hell out of here". Going through Gurgaon, now familiar with its towers and shopping centres, with its multitudes of computer programmers hopping around in their glass cages built by Europeans to squeeze them like lemons (is that the meaning of this hotel? Is it a storehouse of lemons waiting to be squeezed?): I did a bit of tourism to amortise the ten hours of flight time for which I thank you, not.

The driver ejected me, since he wasn't able to park, near to a large square mosque, coffee mocha.

I gave it the once-over, submerged in waves of ennui, men in white: where have all the colours gone?

A photo or two, a man in white deep in reflection is reflected in the central pool.

I get fed up and move on, going down another flight of steps leading into a resolutely colourful confusion, an impenetrable street cloaked in green and blue fabric, of men and women whose parity is in contrast to the close-by mosque.

Metals such as I have never seen since those in my grandfather's barn, polished and unpolished tin as objects, recipients, in bulk, nuts of all types, oils and fried foods. All this was not quite so familiar. It wasn't like a market. Here, the confusion is not feigned, it is merely the product of utility and the urgency to sell.

I walked for about 100 metres and then came back. Then I walked for another 200 metres, and came back, and nobody noticed me. I left.

I need to look for something. A phrase, Buddhist perhaps, "know that in this quarrel we perish".

"No message, but tomorrow I'm leaving for the Ganges, the Ganges at least."

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: You've got it!

"The others know not that in this quarrel we perish; those of them who realise it, have their quarrels calmed thereby." Yes, it's the Dhammapada.

I didn't answer you because nothing in what you said was of any interest to me.

The discovery of Delhi is urbane in its familiarity. All cities are alike.

Once I read something curious, pointless but enlightening. In South America, in Chile I think, archaeologists have discovered an ancient settlement, dating from the Stone Age, all hope to find out why our ancestors invented the city as such.

A Chilean team and an American team explored the site making a sort of ontology.

The American team believed that men grouped together in settlements because it enabled them to encircle it with walls and protect it from their enemies, which is to say those who lived extra-muros.

The Chileans thought nothing, while continuing to ponder. Scratching the earth around the periphery of the settlement, the Americans found nothing like a wall in this very first township.

The Chileans, scratching around in and among the houses, found remains of fish and cotton seeds. This settlement without ramparts wove nets for the fishermen of the Pacific, who came to buy them there, and to sell their fish. Fear of barbarians was not, therefore, at the origin of the township, and here more than anywhere you will see merchants.

The mosque, yes, and samples of the rest. There are Catholics in all their variants, Muslims, and even those curious Islamo-Hindu hybrids with their superb pelt.

I don't know the ontology of settlements in India. The quasi-comprehensive ontology of the gods, past, present and perhaps future, yes, that is here, without a doubt.

Ah yes, the Ganges, I remember.

In fact, don't go back yet, since we are perishing.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Avatars and Entrails

I'm leaving in a few minutes, on board a car called an Ambassador. The Ambassador of the Ganges?

My old friend is dead. I found out in this morning's mail. He well knew that here we perish and, since he should have died twenty years ago from kidney failure, no doubt he had had time to get used to the idea. In extremis, twenty years early, when he was just about to shuffle off this mortal coil, the brain death of a young biker, or the hapless victim of a stroke, gave him the chance to have new kidneys. He was always grateful for the donation made, the ultimate biological avatar, precious and carefully preserved, of a generous donor. A respect of conscience, a need to share, a need not to train young people, as the old geezers we spoke of before, but a desire to help them, creating possibles, allowing himself to enable. His precious avatar, entrusted to him twenty years ago by an anonymous friend, would probably not have withstood chemotherapy doubtless doomed to failure and which he thus chose to avoid. Two avatars thus departed together; they died in part, and other parts remain, omnipresent.

Can we say that the shadow is gaining? Or is it up to us by an unexpected pirouette, to elude it?

Since I also owe a lot to the anonymous donor who died twenty years ago, I need to participate, even at a distance, even here. I've picked up an organ donor card, the apprehension of being cut up dissolving in the necessary detachment of those parts which, having become useless to my person could nevertheless statistically transmit my remaining biological avatars, which despite being perishable, would create possibles in their turn.

Flights of fancy on the transmission of abstract avatars must, and must first, involve finding the courage to designate one's own entrails.

Sometimes I rebel, since I am at that age when death has started taking those close to me, wondering if all this pain, this waste of humanity that we see everyday is just, and justifies what is unacceptable.

Life is a slowly progressing, sexually transmitted and mortal hereditary disease. Some believe it to be an error, since the symptoms of death appear by definition at the end of life, we have the time to reproduce before and thus further transmit the illness. True enough, but we don't know of many organisms exempt from the rule; a little Italian jelly fish able to regress into a polyp, I believe; our genetic defect is shared by many.

The Buddha said something like "when you've got an arrow piercing your shoulder, you don't much care what wood it's made of". And what's more, you don't much care who fired it at you, or want to know if it was a god or an accident, if it was aimed at you or if its was unintended. If we are the victim of a stray bullet fired by a divine but poor shot, or if death serves some purpose, it doesn't lessen the pain of the projectile.

You see, of you after your death, there remain those images from the Middle Ages which you managed to preserve and protect during your time on earth, and there are these exchanges. Death has thus filtered you. What does it matter if there remains something else of you and what does it matter how many sugars you liked in your coffee, your favourite colour, or even your affectation for redheads. Similarly, our gametes are a "best of"[5] of what was us. These cells are enough to make us again. But why bother keeping this nose and these ears, why bother keeping this cholesterol and that beauty spot?

Now you're nothing but dry extract, old pal, ready to be incorporated in another soup.

Kev

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Alone

We're driving alone, him and me, him a driver, me an unhurried passenger. Nothing and no-one in the car but us and a small crystal avatar of Lord Ganesha, your divine assassin, on the dashboard already festooned with stickers and bunches of dried flowers.

For the driver, he's the equivalent of a Saint Christopher's medallion. So this is Lord Ganesha: a round-bellied artefact, with an elephant's smiling head, a voluptuously curving trunk, his arms overloaded with gifts. A nice graceful little Babar, a seated Dumbo, happy-go-lucky, a tiny sliver of childhood.

The driver doesn't speak English, except for the odd: "airrr condition-nninggg" and "waterrrr".

He whips between lorries hooting the horn to warn of his imminent passage, in a cloud of dust. He fishtails rickshaws; those noisy little tri-cycles painted New York taxi colours, and scrapes the hide off pedestrians as he swerves past.

The car swings to the right, to the left, pitches and rolls, in perpetual agitation on the beat-up road. The cow remains unharmed, watching us with her calm confident eyes, sure in her power to stop the car dead. The car sets off again creaking like an old boat.

The driver boasts a certain elegance with his thirties-style pencil moustache, to which he accords the attention due to his most attractive feature, slim, erect, clad in white cotton. His carefully groomed hair, combed to one side, recalls that of an actor, and is obviously highly fashionable. The streets are filled with such role models. Film posters the size of swimming pools, drain the light from the streets and shower it onto the bejewelled women and men with their greased-down hair.

We drive on and the cows brush past us.

From:<Puck> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Boing

Hi Seth, it's Puck! Your friend got here in one piece, just a bit bruised. The driver, no doubt day dreaming, missed the cow but not the wayside cross.

Did he come here to look for, find, be with you? Or else to look for, find and be with himself?

He's stretched out in the bales of silk, and the weavers are stroking him. Don't ask me if he likes it, as his flag pole is standing to attention, although he is now sleeping.

I gaze at him. He is like an ocean of blues and pinks, a nose like a bruised apple. He is soft. I like his pelt.

We put the driver upstairs; he is well but ashamed. As a true Hindu, he is discomfited by his lack of professionalism. We reassured him with caresses.

I'll be in touch soon, as soon as he wakes up, I'll be back.

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Puck>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Boing

Ah Puck, God bless, or curse, you – as you prefer – but in any event you are distinguished among us for your chivvying but guiding hand.

Are you still in the business of creating possibles, dropping spanners in the works so that everything, at last, can go flying?

Poor Kev never had a chance, except that of having met you. Should we thank you for this fortune and kiss the hand which guided the cow?

I will kiss your hand. Promise.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Hell

My machine is working well. That's lucky at least. Seth, I am in Hell. I have just seen a very tall man – maybe two metres tall – naked and very hairy, and on his forehead were two small bumps, two diminutive horns. When I opened my eyes, he was lying next to me, supported by an elbow, hand under chin. He rolled onto his back and left but not before giving kissing me on the forehead, a great sloppy kiss which made my ears ring. I am lying naked on bales of red and green fabric. There is noise all around me, but I see no-one.

I am still tired. I think I'll go back to sleep.

I ache all over, especially my nose. The little crystal Lord Ganesha is on the bedside table. Saint Christopher is having a good laugh.

I'm going to sleep.

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Hell

Welcome to terra firma, folks! Don't forget to thank Puck. He loves it when you stroke his back. He purrs like a big cat when you run your hands through his fur.

If Hell is with Puck, then that's OK! No, in fact, Puck is nothing out of the ordinary: an extraordinary golden pelt, enterprising hands, and two coral implants which he had inserted last year under the skin of his forehead.

Puck has given himself an extremely important task. You will no doubt have noticed that things tend to go their own sweet way. You are born, you go to school, you earn brownie points, after so many points you get a gold star, or a diploma, it's all the same, after that you to a few social events, girls come sniffing round you, they make you think that you're a goer and then you get married, end up with two stupid daughters (genetic lottery = no luck), you struggle the whole time. You can't change your job, because your label has you better branded than a supermarket chicken. You can't stand it any more, so you sod off to India pre-texting work, since it would never occur to you to simply tell the truth, and you die. There you go! And here I am!

As for Puck, well he enjoys fucking things up. He takes something that's all worked out and changes something, just a little thing: he tears up a letter, puts your keys in a flower pot, or a cow in your path, whatever.

And all of a sudden, life takes another turn: the letter bringing bad news is never read, and you have a good day; unable to get back in your house you end up in love with a lesbian locksmith; you hit a cow and end up being lapped all over by a wealth of weavers.

OK, I may as well tell you right now: Puck is totally probabilistic. He is just happy to change the order of events which are a constant irritant to

us to add a certain unpredictable something which is either good or bad for you but which doesn't leave you indifferent.

Puck is a particularly gentle anti-indifference agent! Others are there for bigger jobs.

Puck is the name of a personage from mediaeval English mythology. An arbitrary arbiter. An intelligent agent, like ELIZA, only older and more affectionate.

Give him a cuddle from me.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Oil on troubled waters

I woke up bathed in oil. I tried to get up but kept slipping. There was a heady perfume of herbs and aromatic plants, almost good enough to eat. A flabby young attendant came in asking me if everything was alright... I risked a dry-mouth and misunderstood "Nothing like pouring oil on troubled waters".

The attendant starting chopping and kneading. My bones cracked one after the other. What heaven when it all stopped! Holding me by the hand, he guided me under the shower which he entered after me, and washed me with perfume-reddened water and a green gram paste to get rid of the oil. I didn't get an erection.

My nose resembles a Belisha beacon. I asked for news of Puck, and the young guy laughed. I wondered if it were because he'd gone off to do the dirty on someone or if he were simply preparing to do the dirty on me again. There is a magnificent woman wandering in the walled garden of this place. A curious place, more Roman than Indian, with a light-filled atrium and fountains. A place which seems really small, but with rooms that very large – bigger on the inside than on the outside. Don't you find that wicked?

The woman came towards me smiling. The left half of her face was tattooed with a Celtic motive: the tattoo continued down her neck, slipped under her sari and seemed to make a reappearance on her pelvis before plunging towards her thighs.

She took me into her very, very wide arms, and hugged me for a long moment, breathing deeply, and I felt asleep.

I feel as if I were drunk, that same sluggishness, but the Ganges is flowing below, glinting. I haven't seen Puck again and I'm starting to wonder if he really existed, if you were making fun of me with all your talk about horn implants and sleek golden pelts.

There is a multitude of people here, but I see no-one.

Kev

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Puck

Who is Puck? He came back last night, noisily, after several days travelling. He came into my bedroom, sniffing, took off his clothes and gathered me into his arms as you would a cat, got into bed, and fell asleep, snoring. His hair tickled me as he stirred and I couldn't move. He stroked my head and I really felt like a hypnotic cat which makes you fall asleep. I eventually fell asleep myself. His odour, which at first bothered me, finished by making me comfortable. Puck is an animal. I couldn't help squirming down to see if his member was proportional to the rest of his being, and perhaps also to see what I was risking. But Puck is a cuddly animal.

The following morning, he smiled in his sleep and his two little horns formed a shadow on the silk.

He got up, and went to take a piss in the garden, the sound of his own stream momentarily masking the sound of the river.

"Good morning, Kev. You're so soft!"

"Thank you, Puck", and he stroked my head.

"You're horns are not real, are they?"

"Of course they are, as real as my tongue", and he deployed a long forked tongue, a serpent's tongue, which he flicked as he turned his head towards the lady from yesterday, who was leaning against the door post.

He followed her, joyfully.

Later, the sighs and darker twilights invaded the vesperal order.

Puck is addicted to extreme corporal remodelling, and is designing his own body. I get the impression that he's investing in his biological avatar to give himself shape and form! He is Puck.

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: The Beast

When I went to Puck's house, I saw the Beast. I don't know who this man was before. I was attracted by the guttural sounds he was making. Enclosed in a sort of wooden cage, large and luminous, he was crouching, naked and soiled, his matted hair sticking to the nape of his neck, very wide-shouldered, muscular but hair-free, entirely covered by scars, of all sizes and criss-crossing in all directions. He roared at me.

Puck told me that the Beast had chosen to be an animal, that his avatar on earth was the Beast. He'd had his tongue modified so as not to have to speak, and was able to produce a powerful roar. Puck also thought that the powerful instrument between his legs was also the result of surgical intervention. Puck fed him on bits of meat which he absorbed, purring all the while. One evening, I saw a woman of a certain age slip into the cage (which I later discovered wasn't kept locked), and they made love for an eternity. That morning, I was close to them and Puck smiled at me.

Puck: "So, now you're alone?"

Me: "Yes, and it makes me sad, everyone seems inaccessible to me, even when I touch them".

Puck: "Post-coital depression, the perigee after a furtive apogee, perhaps it's nothing more than... organic chemistry".

Me: "Are you passing off sadness as our personal chemistry?"

Puck: "You're in a better situation than before; you are here, you have friends and lovers, is this betterness which makes you sad actually linked to your tangible situation?"

Me: "I feel as if I all my combustible has been burned off in oxygen, all that remains are a few pathetic embers to continue my existence. I feel tangibly empty."

Puck: "And the fool feels wise, the blind black guy thinks he's white and everyone believes in God! Two or three drops of LSD and everyone's grey turns to colour. Do you know Timothy Leary?"

Me: "I know what everyone knows."

Puck: "My old friend! He didn't really believe that it was chemistry in charge, but he knew that it helped to unblock passages in the brain which are not otherwise accessible. He flirted with the mystical side to chemistry, and almost certainly with shamanism. " *Throughout human history, as our species has faced the frightening, terrorizing fact that we do not know who we are, or where we are going in this ocean of chaos, it has been the authorities, the political, the religious, the educational authorities who attempted to comfort us by giving us order, rules, regulations, informing, forming in our minds their view of reality. To think for yourself you must question authority and learn how to put yourself in a state of vulnerable, open-mindedness; chaotic, confused, vulnerability to inform yourself.*"

Me: "Nice. I knew *"Think for Yourself, Question Authority"*

Puck: "Yes, that's it, and "Admirable Paradox"! "One can navigate on the outside only in the exact measure that one navigates from the inside". A mystique of transcendence, quite western in its approach in that the brain is considered a muscle to be exerted, that by getting it up on its tip-toes it is able to see over the wall.

Me: "At the end of his life, he considered that colonising space should become a priority and made fun of Greenpeace any other ecological movements..."

Puck: "Good old Timothy...Always higher up and further away...He invented SMI²LE (Space Migration Intelligence Increase Life Extension) and here he is in front of his last panspermist frontier, life is everywhere, the earth organism is spreading throughout space, man is a technological gamete whose role is to take life elsewhere...Sometimes I think he was one of the last western philosophers, as Gorbachev by his actions negated his own system, so did he, exceeding all his aspirations, a little by surprise."

As we were about to go our separate ways, he added:

"His death was filmed, you know, his last production. His last words were: "Why not, beautiful?"

The last western philosopher, gone to conquer the west, in his search for the Holy Grail, for answers, truth, ultimately experimental logic, thus pronounced concluding words which leave the door open for all possibles to exist.

A curious obsession pushes the western man to search for something which, in confusion, he believes he has lost. A little as if you remembered that once upon a time you knew how to ride a bike, but you no longer knew how to do so. There is thus a sort of rage to understand, the rage of the cuckold, the rage from the frustration of an amputated memory.

So primitive man, when so as not to be even more two-faced we don't say "early" man, has become the fount, and we must study what they ate, smoked or drank to try to discover who we are.

And the great quest for the transhumano-psycho-psylo magic mushroom starts and ends in a melodious soup.

But have we really forgotten?

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Leaving

"Poland's misfortunes are one of the proofs of the existence of God"[6]. I don't know what Timothy saw that was so beautiful before his death. The white light preceding death? Divine catholic or cathodic, the same effect as when you cut off the electricity to the tube, when the last image is reduced and centred in the centre of the screen, just before total black-out?

Why Poland? Well I've just heard that a busload of Polish pilgrims have kissed the bottom of a ravine. All those who died, had they not prayed enough, were they only pretending? Or had their life of abnegation merely played one last dirty trick on them: "Hold on to your faith since I'm snuffing you out! Yes, I know, you haven't had enough of life, but even believers shouldn't believe everything."

I think if we counted up and compared the number of times misfortune happened to believers and the number of times good fortune happened to non-believers, the tally would be the same. Anyway, it's

both mathematic and financial: if God recognised his own, religion would be taken into account when calculating insurance premiums, and so it would be easy to find out if we were following the true God by looking at the bill: the lower the premium, the near we are to God. And since we can always count on insurers to play around with statistics and databases, we would find that good and bad fortune correlate, experimentally, more with your daily life than with your spiritual life. Better to be a sober non-believer than a hit-and-run believer.

I once heard a parable which I think is great. How to deal with trouble depending on your religion.

Hindus: "In any event, trouble like that has already occurred in History."

Buddhists: "Is it really trouble?"

Christians: "If you're in trouble then you deserve it since you must have committed a sin."

Jews: "Why does trouble always come knocking on my door?"

Muslims: "If you're in trouble, snatch a hostage."

Jehovah's Witnesses: "Knock, knock, here comes trouble."

Deep in the heart of the French countryside, life was generally serene: mass was followed on principle, and in principle. My grandfather explained to me that when he was a young man, not attending mass was a motive for dismissal. My own region is somewhat sluggish and a bit slow on the uptake. During the revolution, the period of exaction was long-over when our peasants starting wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea to smash up a few gargoyles on the village church. In short, everything is pretty well preserved.

My aunt used to live on top of a hill and was Polish in origin. My uncle married her after the war. At the bottom of the hill, there was a small pond in which she jumped occasionally in an attempt to commit suicide, apparently at random, since there was no correlation between her unsuccessful aquatic suicides and any known natural, lunar, menstrual, seasonal or climatic phenomena, which could have served the cause of prevention.

My childhood was punctuated with cries of "But where on earth is Aunt Irene? I hope she's not jumped in the pond again!" "Oh, by the way, your aunt's jumped in again." "Good Lord, she's going to end up killing herself!" and "I've had it with this habit."

The only real correlation was that these attempted suicides very frequently came shortly after visits from Jehovah's Witnesses who, in their desire to be with God, tended to be rather too persuasive.

I liked the elderly lady you spoke of. She remembers you a little. The Beast isn't here, he's gone off to let his fur grow somewhere on the coast. In fact, she's not at all elderly, it's just that her salt and pepper hair, and the toll that the years take being more visible on a woman than a man, make her look older. Undine is rather Germanic. I am learning a lot from the way she does things. Firstly, she doesn't dress in the Indian style but as a European, elegant but comfortable. Over here there are a multitude of lost Westerners, dressed in linen stuff, dirty ceremonial clothes, which they believe makes them look oriental but which the Indians only wear on occasion. A little as if a visiting Indian went wandering around a market in Paris dressed in a dirty dusty wedding dress: the effect would be rather ridiculous. Well, that's what they do, and the Indians don't laugh too much.

Also, she has a European way about her. She doesn't try to do what others do, nor does she emulate either tourist or Indian.

Her behaviour echoes that which she would adopt in a city of Rhenania, strolling through the market stalls in Delhi as she would in the Christmas market in Strasbourg. The décor and everything else is different, but she is always the same.

All these crazy Americans with their unwashed hair, leave me feeling a little ashamed, whereas that of the Indians is so clean and that of the Sadhus, those ash-coated hermits, is powdered with mineral salts from burned animal droppings.

But what are they hoping for in this transposition? And why are their dirty avatars so lacking in credibility, whereas Puck seems so natural?

We stopped off to visit a temple dedicated to Shiva which had beautiful black and whiter chequerboard paving made so hot by the sun that bands of felt had had to be laid down to protect the feet.

A spider man, deformed, moving crab-wise, belly to the ground, was the guardian of the white-eyed idol sheltered from the tourists.

Idols are forbidden everywhere in Europe. I remember an article in which a journalist explained how a cloister and its mother superior had been conned into buying relics, counterfeit naturally. It's amazing how credulous believers can be. The sects in Europe and the hippy-seducers in India are in no doubt. Above all, nothing plausible: extra-terrestrials,

miracle cures, trances, and the believer believes, so deep is his need. How many times have we also believed our dear friends, knowing intimately that they were lying to us...

The driver and car have now been knocked back into shape and the drive on carefully: Undine sitting sideways, against the rear door, visibly confident of the solidity of TATA INDICA cars.

Lord Ganesha has been returned to his place on the dashboard, with perhaps the addition of a few more garlands.

First of all, we chatted so as to get to know each other. And then we were drawn into the street extravaganza, "as always", so she said.

I seem to remember that it was the existentialists who invented the theatre of the absurd. The performance consisted in showing something totally commonplace, for example a couple with a child enjoying a TV dinner. If you are the husband, or wife, or child, you find that situation perfectly serious, but the audience howls with laughter at the absurdity of those "pass me the salt" and "eat your soup".

So you see, I am in a linear theatre, behind my window. The Indian streets speed past me with their thousands of metre-wide shop fronts festooned with cooking pots, cows and their chewing gum, colourful posters and bags. And I find that interesting. It is neither funny nor serious, but it is interesting.

This evening we are staying in a small lodge, very near to the Ganges, very near to the Himalayas as well. Our room is sombre.

Undine is sombre too. She has always felt the need to revere men. This reverence led her onto paths which angered her father and caused her to be rejected by her family.

As a young woman she expected men to give her sense and perspective. Her first lover, a lost horseman, crippled with certitude, was revered and admired as he never should have been. And, as was only natural, she wearied ... "Undine, dear sister, my sister, wounded by what love, do you expire on the banks of your abandon?", "I have endured, dear brother, but with such tears, revering a principle leads to disenchantment."

In fact, Undine reveres the principle of maleness, which does not withstand its declension into flesh and time, no doubt because it is unsustainable and mortiferous. The criteria subject to such reverence are bound to weaken: strength, ambition, audacity, not being such that their development can or must be constant, and since she revered this principle, she

did not see that she was surrounded by weak and gentle men who could have taken her hand.

She travelled around the world and, as the years caught up with her, like a man she started to take Ethiopian or Nubian lovers, as young as the law would allow, dreaming that she could give them what she hoped one day they would give her.

Fleeing men to chase their principle, it was older and greyer that she arrived in India, two years ago.

While we were walking in the temple – well, one of them – in Delhi, how affected she was by the lingams, by the virility of the devotees of Shiva!

So she still chases after that old principle, and her long life is asymptotic.

Seth, I think I'm going to have to go to hospital because my forearm, which Puck bandaged up for me, really hurts. I don't have a temperature, but I don't want it to get infected.

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: On the road

Look after yourself.

So Undine is still chasing Mickey's tail in the roundabout of life? Take heart ... The Beast probably disappointed her too, since he himself reveres another principle.

You are drawn to her, aren't you? And she is a pleasing lover, who keeps nothing back and gives of herself, reverently.

Today, she goes on her way, admiring the Indians' supple skin, licking the napes of men from the warrior caste, stroking the tight arses of the untouchables. No doubt she is one of Shiva's disciples and as such worships the dancing virile god whose symbol is subtly phallic. Vishnu is a conservative, a "Christian-democrat" god. Shiva is a destructive/creative/dancing/hedonistic god, all of which would appeal to Undine.

Take care of her, and yourself.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Avatars and icons

This city, whose name I will not mention, is unbelievable. Its dilapidated walls are adorned with green and pink posters advertising courses in object-oriented programming. Nearby, a Bollywood film is grandly exhibited on steel trestle. The next wall features Lord Ganesha and his offerings.

When John Lennon and friends arrived in India to have their guru experience, the avatars encountered the icons.

Poor i.cons ... Ok, so it's a lousy pun, I couldn't resist it...

Shrouded in doubts promoted to certainties, generation Woodstock dives into Indian religious art with a particular appreciation for its mind-altering smoke.

On the Ganges, their mud-filled boat houses are left to rot.

The icon is an egocentric avatar with bad taste, only interested in its own reference frame projected onto searching spirits, and finally representing nothing.

Not an example, not for freedom, they were the spirit of a revolution lead not by revolutionaries but by mere rebels without a cause other than that of their own will, which they, only naturally, tried to impose on others.

The avatar is a universal principle, a personification of an overly-complex divine appearance to which a purpose is attributed.

The icon holds to the principle of belonging, a model, recognition; the icon reflects the influence of the tribe where the avatar reflects that of the tribute.

Whatever could they have said to each other?

John Lennon: "I worked for money cos I wanted to be rich."

What can you add to this quotation so shallow that there must be depth in it, somewhere?

John Lennon: "Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans."

Yes indeed, and if we divide rather than multiply such plans, life exists anyway. We are deep in meaning here.

John Lennon: "Imagine there's no countries. And no religion too."

Interesting, and so what would there be? Blacks and whites? Men and women? Straight and queer? Right handers and left handers?

And there goes the vainest of all hippy quotations: so there will be no separations, no differences, why limit ourselves to nationality and religion? Down with cack handers!

And as for religion, why make things difficult when our cute little hippies have the solution to sell us self-declared subversive records: peace and love, man has created a god to bear his suffering. Good idea, yes indeed. Congratulations on the depth of thought, *de profundis clamavi*[7] !

And us? We are moved by such mercantile philosophy from the Beatles to Madonna.

It's true that we can not be aware, since we believe. The only truth is no doubt that of suffering which, when not in the wake of some stupidity, is a real problem.

We have seen it all: from the Christian who says "suffering is good for you and you deserve it" to the Buddhist who says "to avoid suffering, desire nothing", the hippies are merely masochists with a smile.

You know how much I hate tribes. It is perhaps the lowest expression of our humanity: reassure me that you are like me and not like the others. And if you are like me, then we are a rare people whose values must be defended since they are under threat by the others. And if hell were not the others, but members of one's own tribe, one's own elected people?

The icon has his tribe, which mimics him. The avatar has his devotees, who worship him. They see each other when their followers look together toward a common principle.

Sometimes I wonder if religions were not also created to eliminate the tribe, to make all sights converge towards an external objective, a god who is not part of the tribe.

From tribal to civil and not forgetting ethnic wars, the tribe kills and we demand more.

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Bastard!

Puck is a real shit! I've just arrived at the hospital, in front of which squats a field of patients, perhaps up to three hundred, waiting their turn. Luckily, the small shops around the hospital were willing to play infirmary for the price of a few rupees. A man, a dentist judging from his garb, carefully unwrapped the bandage. Once the rest of the haematoma on my forearm had been cleaned up I could see three little horns, aligned along the outside of my arm between the wrist and elbow. That bastard Puck finally managed to penetrate me!

As the bandage was pressing down on the implants, the pain was starting to be constant. Now, the horns can stick up freely, they don't hurt any more, but I can't stop touching those little bumps. It's just like when an unexpected spot erupts on your body and your hand constantly strays to it to assess the damage.

The poor Indian nurse wanted to remove them, but I didn't fancy launching into open surgery on my forearm right then and there, which could have done more harm than good.

I feel cheated, manipulated, used, marked, violated. Undine, who burst into gales of laughter, found them very pretty and appealing. So she started licking the little horns and anything else in erection. It was hot, and her ministrations were delicious.

I'd like to be sure that you knew nothing about it. You're nothing but a shit yourself, so I'm no longer going to tell you where I am because I can never tell if you're not going to prepare another surprise for me.

I don't know the meaning of this barbarous implant.

Kev, furious.

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: On the road

Technically speaking, Puck is at the height of his art. He fully masters extreme bodily modification and I don't doubt you will soon be fully recovered. With regard to the way he went about it, ok maybe that leaves to be desired, but it did allow you to get between Undine's breasts, and you have to admit that that is well worth a decorative sacrifice which, thanks to her, has become votive. So now you are an alien among the freaks!

I hope you don't mind my saying what I think about it, but it may be rather surprising.

Puck wanted to change you, so you would change yourself. Here no-one knows you, and your Indian avatar, still being developed, is a mystery for us all, even for me who knew you as a regular guy, under a grey sky, in a closed shopping centre in Châteauroux, one rainy Sunday afternoon in February.

Admit that being a new born has a certain charm. If you in turn want to make them happy, ask Undine to inscribe you something as well, to finish off your arm.

Puck told me she could do tattoos, using a very black ink from the blue lagoons of Polynesia.

She probably knows you're not the man for her, but she will write for you.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Re: On the road

OK, OK, let's drop it. Here the Ganges is limpid, clean as a mountain stream, with soft brown algae. Pilgrims come here to find inspiration in the sources, to breathe in the first hours of the river water's consecration, the first steps of the god.

But the offspring is strong and turbulent; it swirls in whirls, and churns in the sun in noisy torrents.

The pilgrims are suspended on chains, and throw themselves into the water clinging onto the steel which stretches taut and grinds on the concrete base.

They hang on with their hands, nothing around their waist, holding on by the sheer strength of their fists: would they want to let go?

We watched this performance for a long time, all day, in fact. Undine so wanted this water that we tarried a while. Her eyes never left the white torrent and a small drop of saliva formed at the corner of her lips: desire.

We returned in the small hours. She didn't say much, ran herself a cold bath, and slipped into it as into a silken negligee. She decided to skip dinner.

Reclining Roman-style on a carpet, sprawling in fact, I sipped at a little Indian wine. A thick sweet wine, velvety and heady, evocative of an Italian Spain, a Toscan Rioja.

Sitting beside me were Viviane, from France and her husband, Muirdun, of Welsh origin. We listened to the bird chirping outside and spoke of the chains.

Muirdun was a great artist, a renowned contemporary painter, exhibited and commissioned. An artist cursed by none is not necessarily an artist blessed. Today, he drinks and Viviane keeps him locked in their bedroom the whole day. He no longer paints, but his body appeals to his wife, a supine position is thus required of necessity.

It is he who taught Viviane how to keep a man in check. He has paid the price. It is essential that Undine, this all powerful mistress of misfortune, not meet Viviane.

We went up to their room and made love, whilst Muirdun wrote post-cards on the bedside table, querying his spelling and counting out his stamps, franked in their case then released.

How can that lover be me?

I returned to my own room, but not before enjoying a last whiskey with Muirdun. He was radiant and elated, joyfully anticipating his forthcoming night with his eccentric wife about whom, without her knowing, the power trap had closed its jaws. Which is the slave and which the master: and, for that matter, who instrumentalises whom?

Tomorrow we're going back to see the chains. It would be better for Undine not to speak to Viviane.

When I got back, I asked Undine to tattoo a sign on my already embellished arm. She smiled, procured a needle and a tiny bottle, and started. Some mild pricks under the skin, interspersed with soft kisses around the freestyle drawing.

She worked for a long time, the tip of her tongue caught between her teeth for greater accuracy.

Later, in the early hours, a pretty little black wave, with a multitude of swirls, wrapped itself around the horns. Seth, I really like Undine.

Kev.

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: wave

"Wave" comes from an old English word, pronounced in almost the same way. It is a time of sweeping away, of great movements of liquid which devastates as they cleanse. A sign of renewal after great upheavals. I don't know your "dominatrix" and her husband. They are living the paradox of success in terms of love. A whole life spent in the desire to imprison the other so as best to love him, to love him absolutely, only to find that the slave revels in his submission whereas the mistress grows weary, when she is not afraid of losing the upper hand. What can we say, then, of the submission of the cleric...? They call themselves slaves to a god, subservient and blissful in front of the almighty, and contrary to Undine, their veneration lacks insight. If the mechanics apply, the divinity thus revered by his blissful subjects happy to be considered as sheep grazing divine pastures, must be profoundly bored, since who wants to be revered by an easily led sheep?

The divinity in question should rather pamper those who detest him, and take for the better their contribution to the world's tumult.

This is why monotheisms invented the devil. You will note that the divinity actually much appreciates him, and rather than striking him down, which his almightiness should surely enable, instead allows him to play around with souls.

Western mystic, or rather in this case, middle-eastern mystic, and oriental mystic do not have the same definition of what constitutes an atheist. For the former, atheists are those who oppose belief in the divinity, that is to say those who are not lambs; for the latter, they are those who do not believe in themselves and in their mystical responsibility for their surroundings.

Ample is the difference.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26
To:<Seth>
Cc:
Subject: Re: On the road

It was a hard night. First, I saw Undine swimming in a lagoon, a liana lost among the weeds trailing from her ankles. Then, I sweated a river of water. My eyes saw as if underwater, sharper and clearer. I felt my blood beat in my neck. I saw Puck and the Beast making love together and devouring each other.

"You OK?" asked Undine.

"What's happening to me?"

"A minor shamanic experience".

"Well, that's a relief"

"I make my ink from the ink of a Polynesian mollusc, a sort of porcelain. Every year, tourists from the Club Med bring them back in their bathing trunks to add to their collection. The shellfish has a stinger which pricks them in the balls and rare are those who get back to the shore alive. But correctly prepared, just like anything else which doesn't quite kill you, it opens the pathway to the sea."

"Does Seth know?"

"If it were Puck who told him to suggest your tattoo, I doubt very much that the divine bastard told him."

"It's going to happen again."

"Even now and then, but less and less frequently, the wave does its clearing out job in your little brain."

She kissed me on the forehead, and switched off the light.

You see, I've left the way open for your excuses. Go on, drop Puck in it!

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26
To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: On the road

Yes, I knew... I thought it would maybe amuse you. In any event you don't seem very angry. Shamanism is an experience of animal fusion, and I think we all wonder about it at some time or other: seeing with the eyes of a tiger, sleeping as a sloth, flying as a bird, swimming in among the glaciers in the body of an orca, invulnerable to the cold.

Undine's preparations are quite appreciated in Europe. She also makes mushroom dishes which, in my opinion, are hard to digest and make you belch for a long time after the meal.

You were talking about Prozac before your departure. Undine's inks are no less natural than Saint John's wort. Who fixes the moment when the chemical modification of one's personality slips from the acceptable to the unacceptable? What is normal by the banks of Lake Titicaca and its peyotls has become a drug in Europe. The difference is what goes with it. The shaman who acts as guide among the animals and monsters spawned from the imagination, as opposed to the dealers and the loneliness round the back of the station bogs.

Chemistry is neither good, nor evil, nor both together. Do you like your tattoo?

With my deepest affection.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Poison

I don't hold it against you since I'm still stunned by the colours in the streets. I have the feeling that wherever I look, the colours I see were unknown to me before.

The four of us went to the ghat near to Laxman Jula bridge where the pilgrims venerate the Ganges. Tired from his nocturnal activities, Muir-dun sat down on a log. Undine could no longer wait to catch hold of a chain and drop into the embrace of the live water. Carefully, helped by a Brahmins, she climbed up onto the platform, caught a chain and slipped

into the water. She was like a wind sleeve in a storm, her frail body balloted between the waterlines.

Here, the Ganges flows fast and clear, carrying mountain dust, and the occasional precious gem. Here the ritual bath takes on airs of rafting, and the pilgrims of all ages, some of whom don't know how to swim, cling onto thick chains like those in Atlantic ports.

Hanging on however they can, they slip into the water. The usual sacred gestures, such as scooping up water in both hands to pour it on one's forehead, take on a certain perilousness here.

The ghats are crowded with Japanese, and cows. Oh, the sheer joy of the Japanese yelping as their thong-saddled feet slip in the cow pats!

Undine laughed and plunged her head into the water like a ram into a wall. She slipped along the chain. Every time she changed hands, she held it further down. Naturally enough, she finished by letting go. In a burst of laughter she shouted, "see you at the bottom!". She dived and swam, occasionally even going against the current, which was truly remarkable.

We took the car and set off for the town of Haridwar, twenty kilometres downstream, and the great sacred pool where everything should finish up. She wasn't there.

Arriving on the bridge, in front of a great statue of Shiva, was a large white facade marked "Seth house 1962". Your house? I went to chat there with some people from Bhawan, a pilgrim house with its feet in the Ganges. You weren't there either.

I started to cry. Viviane slapped me a couple of times. She and Muir-dun took the car to go and see further downstream, they would sleep in the next town. I went back to the hotel with a Californian called Arthur, who travels alone, as I intend to do from now on.

Kev

From:<Puck> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Poison

Calm yourself, little man... Undine is an excellent swimmer and has certainly gone a lot further than you imagine.

Seth will not be answering for the next few days. But there's no need to worry.

Who is this guy Arthur I've never heard of?

Puck

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Arthur

My dear Seth, my dear mail-hacking Puck,

I find you rather uncaring, we haven't found her yet. Arthur is very nice. His business in California is going well. He works in a detective agency specialised in finding rare, ancient lost property.

He's a really flexible confident Californian, with a deep and caring voice. Exactly the sort of friend I need.

He has also known what it is to fail. He was searching for an object, a vase I think, mislaid by the owner or stolen. His contract included an obligation of result clause, and he went down because of that. Now he doubts whether the lost object had actually ever existed, and thinks that his client just wanted to lose it.

Arthur is a human construction, built on solid foundations, heavy thighs and body of stone. He is hardness itself, his hands are hard. I bumped into his shoulder, at one point, and it was like bumping into a rock, and I ended up with a bruise.

He grieves for the loss of his friends, his co-detectives, all lost in the conspiracy.

I'd like to help him, but he says so little about it.

He speaks of his wife, his lost home.

The nostalgia of a family man, divorced, who doesn't have custody of his kids.

We have decided to go on together in his car, with his Sikh driver. I didn't want to leave alone. I don't much being on my own, even though he does. I'm leaving in good company.

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Return

I have changed my password since Puck has been reading my messages. It was useful for you, but that's no reason not to fight against that wicked sprite.

Your new friend doesn't sound much fun, but he will no doubt be able to help you find Undine since it's his job to look for rare ancient things.

Do you know the story of kuru? Kuru is a disease afflicting certain women of Papuan tribes. The symptoms are a loss of balance, a degeneration of the brain, madness and death after a period of incubation of several dozen years. The disease was arrested in 1950 when the Australian government banned those sacred rites which consisted in them eating the dead. Since the women mostly ate the brain, and the men the muscles, women were mostly affected by this prion-based disease, cousin to mad cow disease. Mad cow disease started to develop when we made cow eat beef reduced to flour. There is a law in physics which forbids self-consumption, even in mathematics. When a parametric programme runs in a loop, after a sufficiently long period of incubation it can enter into a chaotic state, turning around weird mathematical objects which are "strange attractors". Solitude, isolation, the cult of autonomy and self-sufficiency all lie at the heart of illness.

Anyway, if you don't like being alone, you won't be.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Re: Arthur

I find you rather distant and your messages are shorter. Sometimes I forget you are dead, I was going to ask you if you were OK.

Arthur is a first-rate companion. He's reassuring in a crowd, being a head above everyone else, is reliable in all circumstances, suffers in silence, and in bed, sleeps nice and straight without snoring.

I've been eating vegetarian since I've been here. It's not difficult because the Indians know good ways of cooking vegetables. Arthur, however, loves meat and is suffering. Yesterday's Tandoori chicken wasn't cooked enough and was toxic. He suffered a lot, in a dignified and self-contained sort of way, even though he was largely emptied of his innards!

I was touched by his wanting me to leave him to get on with it, so I took great pleasure in looking after him, helping him without modesty to relieve his guts, making him drink rehydrating fluids, keeping an eye on his temperature, and waiting for his body to pick up.

These stomach bugs are truly a refined torture, which to the unbearable pain, persistent, tenacious, is added the anal humiliation.

Sometimes, his face was tormented with the apprehension of the next bout of vomiting, more painful with each one.

Sometimes I gave him a bit of electrolyte solution, salts to prevent his body, composed essentially of salt water, from dangerously dehydrating.

We navigated the pathways of pain together for twenty-four hours before the anti-biotic fairy deigned to lean over Arthur's cradle.

This morning the rock is weakened, his eyes vague, fragile.

I'll give us another day.

Wiping someone's arse probably makes you friends for life.

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Love

I remember a text by Desproges[8] (a true reflection of our generation!). It said something to the effect that "a man and a woman, laid in an alcove, on silken sheets and who say they love each other, is not

necessarily love; two dustmen, behind a dustbin lorry at five o'clock in the morning who say the same, then love it surely is!";;))

Undine is fine. Viviane found her. She is going on with her, so you can take advantage of your weakened rock for a little longer.

It's true, I've been seeing to my evolution in the netherworld. I'm feeling a little nostalgic, in fact, since I haven't yet got over my loss of action.

I don't think I can survive without action. The question of contemplation disturbs me. When I was alive it seemed to me that the world belonged to the early bird, and the heavens to those early contemplatives. The Indian synthesis, of a people as fully in action as in contemplation, seems inaccessible.

I doubt India will ever be accessible to us. It says one thing and its opposite are equally true, that one can be free as a prisoner and captive in one's freedom, that one can be a believer whilst being atheist, that new things have already been.

In those Ashrams for westerners in search of their lost selves, which sell solutions and soaps, there is not much experience to be had. Brahmins wielding business cards hold court recycling Hinduism for a handful of dollars.

Basically, I'm suffering from spiritual indigestion.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Faith

Faith is the fact of believing what we know is not true. Take a typical American: he will explain that what we know, for example the evolution of the species, is not true. He really believes it. That's the way it is. I remember a drawing from one of my childhood books. A very beautiful marchioness, crinolined, armed with her white lace parasol, raised her gloved hands to cover her mouth in horror. In front of her sat a monkey, and the wording said "Oh yes, marchioness, your ancestor was a monkey."

How should one react to the collapse of our nobility and to the stubborn reminder of our humble origins?

Reincarnation avoids the issue of the evolution of the species, since each living being may, in other lives, find himself in another.

True or not, which in India is immaterial, it is in any event a good reason for all the marchionesses to be humble.

I found this picture edifying, since I think that having a common ancestor with animals and even plants shows in itself a great nobility of descent.

Since we are made of the same bricks, the same matter, let us not forsake our brothers.

Do you know Koko? Koko's a female gorilla adopted by an American and able to read sign language. One day, when she was bored, the American gave her a kitten. The gorilla cuddled the kitten and looked after it. After the kitten got run over by a car, the gorilla signed "Koko sad, cry".

Thus, marchioness, it is not only shape and substance that we share but also, no doubt, most of our feelings and affection.

Arthur is in love with Pooja, who performs ayurvedic massages. He wanders around the bedroom displaying a huge erection and watches her through the window. The term "in love" is somewhat of a misnomer. It's more a question of "in lust". Less romantic, no doubt, but more accurate. As a knight errand, he packages it up in cheap sentiment. But all his sweet words mean nothing, they are the lie in the heart of the romantic.

Arthur: "Pooja is fabulous. She is a shining light and as she sits in the half-light of the massage parlour I can't tear my eyes away from the beauty of her golden gaze and her silver-adorned hands. The smoothness of her arms' velvety skin guides my hand and excites my tongue, lessening the dryness. At night, I think of all her oiled hands can do, of her humble way of touching."

"Nature has given man a key with which he winds up his wife ever twenty-four hours", so we read in Victor Hugo's notes; Hugo who, after having romantically seduced his first wife, proceeded to physically seduce her repeatedly during their first night. Goodbye romanticism...And hello all these immodest notes carefully preserved according to the wishes of their author, so that "when I am no longer around, you will know me as I was."

So, my friend, Arthur is in full mating mode and strides up and down the paths and massage parlours, he talks of marriage and of fucking Pooja, masturbates in the dark and stains his sheets.

I'll have to find some of that so-called anaphrodisiac stuff to calm his ardour, because if he doesn't get it out of his system, we will never make any progress on our trip.

Kev.

From:<Undine>

Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Sorry

Sorry for having left you. I just couldn't resist the temptation of dropping into the rapids, of feeling my limbs advancing, of feeling the liquid cold on my body.

Viviane and Muirdun took me with them on their trip. I suspect they wanted to get me away from my precious water, and that's how we ended up in Mathura.

Our host received the elite, overweight and oily members of local government. The hallway displayed the most incredible stomachs, snoozing, and to top it all in this half-starved country, a dog, flat out on the floor and so fat that he could no longer walk, waited for a boy to bring his bowl.

This overweight and oily India, half-snoozing and raising weary eyes to glance at the street, is not the India of my predilection. I prefer the scorching street.

My friend, what a joy those men are, those Tamils with their supple dark skin and gleaming hair.

I couldn't resist taking a walk by the river Yamuna, almost dry. A little street, or rather a path into which I slipped, ascended under a modern wide concrete bridge.

Resounding crashes accompanied my arrival in this long courtyard overflowing with metals. Wielding heavy sledgehammers, eight or ten marvellous men were beating a dish of some two metres in diameter as they turned it.

Eight men with that perfect skin, gleaming with sweat, their muscles tensed; eight perfect Greek statues, to the glory of the male anatomy, braced in the forging of iron.

Their lacerated bodies, their scored hands: it was on me that I wanted them.

I didn't dare stay there watching them, so I went to lay down on a sack, with loads of kids around me and a happy-faced old man with a white beard.

The eight marvels smiled at me and I watched their beauty in action until night fell. How could a photograph render such perfection?

The dish they were forging was almost finished, and they showed it me so that I could admire their work. They signalled to me to climb into it, so I slipped into its bed of oiled metal, still warm from the men's beating. They spun it around for a while, and then off I went in my hemisphere atop their shoulders.

It was thus we descended the pathway surrounded by children laughing and jumping until we all reached the river where we all dived in, rubbing the disk to remove the traces of its manufacture.

I rubbed the dome passing my hands over theirs, over their arms wet with river water and sweat, head over heels in laughter, touching and kissing anything I could until being finally submerged by an explosion of pleasure.

I am still moist and contented.

I am slowing dying with desire for these men, for their smile, the perfection of their supple skin.

I'll stay here a little while longer.

You know, along the river I discovered a new proof of what we are, of what we have never ceased to be.

Going towards the Ghats, you have to go through very narrow, closed-in, high-walled streets. People are kind enough to warn passers-by about the "monkey problem". Definition: the "monkey problem" as its name implies is a problem regarding monkeys. There are monkeys everywhere, on the walls, on the roofs, on the transformer stations and the poorly-insulated distribution boxes. The "monkey problem" comes from the wicked intelligence of our cousins. One day, here, they worked out that if they stole the glasses off passers-by, they could then exchange them for bananas. The myopic passer-by is thus obliged to buy some fruit off the stall of an indifferent vendor to pay his ransom. Both they and us are

scared greedy monkeys, and it is from this fear and this desire that our great aggressiveness finds its origins, the fear of not having, the fear of losing what we have or what we think we have, of losing our lives, or our lovers, if ever we actually believe we possessed such a lover for more than a few hours of his lifetime.

I spent the afternoon in Gokul, in a sandy ashram. Krishna is believed to have played in that sand, in that courtyard. So hundreds of Sadhus choose that place to read their sacred texts. The pilgrims, overcome, roll around in the sand supposed, in a previous time, to have been crushed under the feet of the blue child. And the monkey is thus reassured, but self-deceived, thinking himself blessed by sand touched three thousand years ago.

Undine

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Undine>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Sorry

It is said that water washes everything away, and perhaps, at the end of the day, everything should be washed away.

I have with me a man who burns with desire for poor Pooja the masseuse. And you, your limbs tremble with desire for blacksmiths.

And me, I desire nothing! Does that make me your keeper? I'm not as good as all that, you know.

We were finally able to set off again but not before Arthur, following a massage, managed to entice Pooja into the perfumed oil, his satisfied desire now part of the past.

Men, with respect to women, have a practical advantage: the limited content of their balls. Once these have been emptied out, the late object of desire seems less appealing, overly fleshy, her smile less enchanting, her person less presentable. For a man, his sex is like an enemy which requires a pounding from time to time for it to leave him in peace.

You are not able to free yourself from your desire, however much you want to, whereas the desire of men can be counted in discarded Kleenex.

Once the desire has been satisfied if the affection remains, well then it's very different.

Since desire is but a wave which, whatever is height and its unfurling, says nothing of the depth of the sea.

I naturally agree with your opinion on Krishna's sand pit. But you know, here, they throw three thousand years at you as they would a moment. Krishna, eighth avatar of Vishnu. Before him, in order, were a fish, then a turtle, a wild boar, a lion-man, a Neanderthal dwarf, Parashurama (the first human avatar), Rama then Krishna. Vishnu's descent reflects Darwin's descent of man. It's disturbing.

Brahma, creator of the world, performs his task then falls asleep to dream of the world. In this way, upon awakening, he will be able to remember and so start again. One day and one night for Brahma is called a kalpa. Its duration is about nine milliard years[9] and this figure is almost exactly that of the lifetime of the sun.

Whereas the second part of Brahma's day is underway and since nuclear science has shown us that the sun is approximately five milliard years old and is in the middle of its lifespan, let us pray that our star doesn't indulge in a mid-life crisis!

Kev

From:<Seth> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26

To:<Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Indian paradoxes

Undine told me of your surprise with regard to the coincidence of the Hindu principles with those of modern science, such as evolution of the species or astronomy. It's true, but the probability of the coincidence is all the more important here than elsewhere. You have no doubt noticed that nothing is certain here. It is Puck's paradise: there being such fraternity between him and their Shiva, he could, unless five thousand years ago when we separated from the Indians to head west he already was, be an avatar of Shiva fulfilling some impish purpose.

The rigidity of the castes, with the freedom to change inside the structure, the religion, devoid of dogma, with a multitude of guru's opinions, everything and its contrary, all at once. Shiva is both constructive and destructive and it bothers nobody.

In the twentieth century, the papers praised Einstein and his relativity. Fascinating indeed, but who uses his finding everyday, who needs to calculate the effect of the Sun's mass on Mercury's orbit?

On the contrary, when we switch on our computers, the lights, when we call someone, our lives can be saved thanks to medical sensors and medicines which all owe their existence to a theory unknown to the papers: quantum mechanics.

What ingratitude!

I've always found shocking those T-shirts portraying Einstein sticking out his tongue, whereas no T-shirt features Heisenberg blowing a raspberry to European metaphysics.

Why? Because the theory is correct, but also because it is unbearable in that it says the same as eastern metaphysics, and worse in that it proves it using those western mathematics so dear to our hearts.

A lecturer once said: "don't worry, nobody understands quantum mechanics, not even those who invented it".

How indeed with our five senses can we possibly imagine a world with eleven dimensions instead of the four which we perceive, dimensions in which a small portion of matter can slip through two distant possibles simultaneously without being cut in half, where everything in existence has a non-nil probability of being somewhere else at the same time, where an event and its exact opposite can coexist and only the fact of there being an observer can define what is happening.

To the child's question: "how can we know if the light is on or off once we close the fridge door?" the answer becomes "it is both on and off, but if someone is closed inside it then it is most surely off. If there is no one inside, then it is both at once."

Naturally this is not very popular, a great "up yours!" by the scientists to western faith but also to Cartesian rationality. Especially since that every time you use a machine which utilises these findings, a calculator, your watch or anything else, you can check for yourself that it works. Descartes himself would say that since it works, it must be at least partly true, no?

So everyone plunged into relativity and its paradoxes based on rockets and twins travelling at the speed of light and aging differently, everyday experience of course for every one of us.

It is therefore possible, by electronic publication, to publish a true faith in creation, and using these means, demonstrate to what extent faith in

avatars, multiple possibles and paradoxes, whose solution is totally pointless, tangibly exists.

If we take a close look at our own equations, we notice that we haven't invented a word to designate a being which is two things at once. The Indians call that an avatar. Does that mean that Indian mystic is quantum mystic? Have we understood at least that one thousand five hundred years of philosophy, science and mathematics have combined to demonstrate that we were wrong to kill of the fairies, trolls and all the Januses of our folk tales?

Do you remember that programme which you suspected of being my nature, ELIZA, the computerised Rogerian psychologist? I had a bit of fun making two ELIZAs have a conversation.

Eliza 1: "Hello, I'm Eliza. Can I help you?"

Eliza 2: "I feel tired."

Eliza 1: "Yes, I often feel tired, too."

Eliza 2: "Can you tell me why."

Eliza 1: "Why do you ask me that?"

Eliza 2: "Oh, I was just wondering."

Eliza 1: "Can you tell me why?"

Eliza 2: "Why are you asking me that?"

Eliza 1: "Oh, I was just wondering."

Eliza 2: "Can you tell me why?"

Eliza 1: "Why are you asking me that?"

Eliza 2: "Oh, I was just wondering."

Eliza 1: "Can you tell me why?"

Eliza 2: "Why are you asking me that?"

Eliza 1: "Oh, I was just wondering."

Eliza 2: "Can you tell me why?"

Eliza 1: "Why are you asking me that?"

Eliza 1: "Oh, I was just wondering."

Eliza 2: ... / ...

If Eliza 2 doesn't understand Eliza 1, perhaps it is merely because Eliza 2 is exactly as complex as Eliza 1 and that quite simply a being of a certain complexity can only understand those of lesser complexity.

Imagine our terrified ancestors, unable to understand one another, incapable of giving the smallest sense, the slightest instruction, incapable of reassuring each other. A more complex being had to be discovered, to understand us, a multiple being, with multiple avatars.

And so we can understand Eliza, mathematics, language, fluid dynamics. But there's no way we can understand anything nearly as complex as ourselves. Bacteria, with which we share approximately two thirds of our make up, are pretty much inaccessible to us and we don't know how to create them.

Will software, for mathematical reasons, always be of lesser richness than its creator? Will nature, system of all systems, always be a mystery to us? We should maybe content ourselves with playing in our sand pit, and taking a quick look from time to time beyond it, just to remind us how small it is.

So welcome, my friend, to the moving sands of paradox, which, you have to admit, constitute a fairly acceptable reality.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23:26
To:<Seth>
Cc:
Subject: Avatar

And Arthur is my avatar. I adore him. With every passing day he becomes more a part of me. I have the impression that he represents a fully "straight" part of me, straightforward, a little naïve, and very loyal. He is a good avatar, and also now my paredre since we are now travelling together, side by side.

Sorry, I'm digressing; it's just that Undine's tattoo is affecting my eyes. I don't take myself for a god, but I sometimes get the impression that I am starting to understand.

When I pour a drop of milk into my tea, it firstly forms complex curls, very beautiful, and then invades the whole area, dilutes, spreads out. You would have to spend a fortune on extractive technology to recover it using sophisticated filtering methods. There is thus a natural inclination against which we have to make great efforts to be able to counterbalance the effects.

Therefore, if we don't nourish our body with food, if there is not enough energy to fight against this inclination which pushes our body to be diluted, we die, and our constitutive substance which we have spent so much time since our birth organising into bones, muscles, complex chemical balances in our brains thus making us what we are, is dispersed in nature degrading into elementary components which one day other organisms will metabolise. In that, at least, we are truly reincarnated.

All that effort, that energy, that suffering, and we still end up diluted...

I am in Khajuraho. Tourists are sniggering at the bas-reliefs representing acts of penetration of multiple geometries. The guardians explained that the ancients carved these representations to excite the senses of the religious devotees, since the latter, overly-absorbed by their search for the divine, omitted to perpetuate their lives.

Imagine our own prelates, imams and other particularly sharp ecclesiasts who, observing that their precepts were so well followed that their followers became fewer and far between, obliged the overly-devout to read pornographic literature to ensure the regeneration of their sparse congregations!

How comical to see these clerics running after young men, whose sole obsession would be to serve their faith in total celibacy, armed with old copies (which they would have forbidden and burned a few years previously) of Playboy, Penthouse and the lingerie page of the La Redoute catalogue, weeping and begging the young insurgents to display more salaciousness once the candles had been snuffed out (they would already have had the electricity cut off because of the dangerous implications of quantum mechanics on its supposed existence).

Here in India I am disturbed by my life in Europe. The motto on the oriflamme decorating the pediment of the Republican Palace which, previously, seemed only logical, now seems to need justifying. Freedom, Equality, Fraternity. That great Freedom, liberator from slavery, seems to have been taken over by mere "spaces of freedom". A space of freedom is a simple stamp where the citizen can believe in his freedom. When the space of freedom as represented by his blog seems too narrow, he is able to move into another confine where he can stimulate his freedom.

One day, in Bora Bora, when I was talking to a grocer-chemist, a dispensing chemist, I discovered the sombre nature of freedom. "People must be really happy here", I said, as stupidly as possible. "Yes", he replied, "if they are hungry, they can eat a fish from the lagoon – they are

easy to catch – and a coconut for a perfect cocktail. People here can live with nothing. The problems start when they want to have satellite TV". Freedom, therefore, transmutes into a space of freedom limited by a subscription which makes the customer dependant on a needless requirement. Thus, we all have spaces of freedom, each provided with its own share of subscriptions, whose weighted sum does not Freedom make.

And thus sacrosanct Freedom is overruled and the new concept of Safety comes to take its place. Shrouded in salutary virtues, it shields us along the motorways under the eye of a thousand cameras, on which a range of freedom of some dozens of kilometres per hour allows us to believe in the freedom of speed. The country roads, more dangerous, are ignored. Does Safety love us so much that it wants to shield us? No, of course not. A dead customer is a customer who doesn't purchase anything; and doctors, although nobody ever asked it of them, prolong our lives until, like vegetables, or cocoons, we continue consuming expensive mush and costly medicines. The country roads are very enticing in my white Ambassador, delivered without an airbag, with no ABS, and repaired using a hammer and chisel. Each missed cow opens up new possibilities, a new departure for both the cow and me. It's not very safe, but it's so much less boring than on the monotonous but reassuring motorway.

Equality. Ok, what of it? No one head higher than the other. It should be an open door so that everyone can develop his range of possibilities unrestrictedly. But we are all equal in conformity. I am the equal of that distinguished business man, who is exactly as tall as his colleague, enjoying the same type of sandwich on the dreary esplanade of La Défense. Conformity pushes this most equal of us to act as an advertising hoarding and to pay for the privilege of sporting a brand name on their jeans or shoes, both chosen to be identical to those worn by other high school pupils. No comparison with the infinite variety of saris and skins, jewels worn in a unique way in the astonishing streets of the capital of an Indian province. There is a sort of common shape, but which doesn't stand up to the wind and rain for long.

Fraternity is one of man's nicer ideas, when it is often with their fists that brothers get along. The reference to brotherhood resembles nothing so much as a misleading advert for the promotion of the modern family. The originator of the motto could just as well have chosen "Friendship" as a universal value and it would have changed nothing. It's been years since we truly spoke to each other. Another's becoming is a crime of ennui. But once Fraternity had been dispelled by modernity, the

telemarathon invented Solidarity. A great void between us, by means of the TV, enables us to think of our wallet and give generous but tax-deductible donations. When a donation is made in India, it's good for the karma, a good point for the next life, so that the brother in need becomes a friend indeed and protects you in turn. When Gandhi, going against his caste and his mother, takes the defence of Uka, an untouchable sweeper, whom he likes to hug, that is Fraternity, not show business. Real politics!

Safety, Conformity, Solidarity. Don't you see, my dear heart, we're post-modernists, and despite our ennui we will be able to film the constant yawns of our offspring with our credit-enabled camcorder.

Kev

From:<Kev> Date: Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Seth>

Cc:

Subject: Conversation in the cave

We are caught in the black monsoon. We are bogged down in red mud from the wheels to our boots, and the bottoms of our trousers are heavy with clay and water.

The car is once again at a halt, and the rain is falling in huge, heavy, hot drops. We're stuck here and the driver has gone off in a light rickshaw to find a tractor to drag us out of the slimy rut which has brought us to a standstill. The rain hammered down incessantly on the roof of the Ambassador in a constant clatter. The hot humid air, already saturated, could not absorb the humidity of our sighs, which deposited a mist of droplets trickling down the windscreen and the windows. Legs outstretched, we chatted to kill the time, in the close, mud-bound Ambassador, encircled by water falling and running in colourful torrents.

"We are in the cave shelter protecting us from the hostile elements, just like our long-gone ancestors who would wait for the return of the sun before going back to the hunt."

"We are prisoners, in a locked cell, a cramped humid cell, and we are waiting out our sentence."

"The cave protects us from Nature. Our rear covered by a rocky wall, we watch the outside and the wild beasts, we await the return of the hunters."

"The cell cocoons us and reassures us about the outside which is in constant change. Protected by our walls, we peer through the mist and see only the surfaces of things which change in the external limitless society which we do not wish to know better."

"In front of the cave, the fire makes a beacon and keeps the wolves away; it marks the entrance to the controlled territory, the small piece of nature over which we have control."

"The cell is closed, but who holds the key? Are we locked in from the inside, or will the guard come and execute us? We depend on the outside for our subsistence, we are forced to endanger ourselves to prolong our existence and eat."

"The hunters, our brothers, want only to enter, or else we are here and that questions their judgement, when will they themselves be able to eat? Will they kill the old and the sick? Should we show ourselves to be helpful and, as do the monkeys on the rock, show our arses to those who are stronger than us?"

"Do we compromise? Will we go as far as to compromise ourselves? Should we agree to commend the absurd spectacle, as others do, should we listen to the background music, watch the televised crypto-pornographic entertainment, that is to say pornographic in that everyone knows who will fuck whom, but without it being said, under the pretext of entertainment, of a game, of a holiday, under the pretext of boredom and "Yeah, so what?"

"And should we revere the self-proclaimed avatars, those fleeting stars rising from some reality show or other; swiftly adulated, swiftly forgotten, and so soon old and dead? Indian avatars are principles. Human principles linked to our nature and our Nature. No principles back there, only substitutes, poor and pro-temp replacements obliged to gesticulate exaggeratedly for us to remember they exist, obliged to make love noisily in public to raise a little interest, obliged to get together and to split up, to remain immature lovers, since human investment is not of this time."

"Western strength lies in this violence, an ambiguity swept away by the hustle of life. In churches, promises are made which can not be kept, we declare our equality and fraternity and we reject the old, we

transform the words so as not to touch what repels us; the blind become the 'visually handicapped'."

"In India, the Christians are no less strange! During Mass, in Pondichery, in front of the priest preaching the equality of men before God stand the assembly of Indian Christians, in clear rows, the Brahmans in the front, then, following the Hindu order of the purity of the castes, the warriors, merchants, peasants, untouchables; each in their row, listening to the exemplary life of the carpenter's son. The principle remains."

"It sickens me; castes can not be justified. What a disgusting idea to think that your birth determines your place and your marriage for the whole of your life, as this as surely as the fact of your genes being transmitted to your children and your whole descent. It sickens me; but once again, is that not the luck of the draw and in Europe are we not born, at random, in a slum or in a mansion? Are the slum-born children any more likely than the untouchables to marry above them?"

"The difference is that the rich silently despise the poor in their street. Here, in India, since you were born in a lower caste and you keep your place and rank, the Brahmans respects you and perhaps even envy your strength and bearing. There is on the one hand the fact of saying things and assuming them, opposed to the other which dissimulates them to escape them, and are things changed by not being shown?"

"Yes, no doubt they are, but without that being able to create new possibilities. India, however, is a fount of possibles. You are in a cell, a caste, a trade, and in this cell you have total freedom. And this prison is mobile, moving through society; and an untouchable becomes Prime Minister, and an Italian Christian, the wife of Rajiv Gandhi, presides Indian great political party."

"My grandmother, born in California in 1908, was a devout disciple of Jiddu Krishnamurti. Do you know of this irreverent messiah? He was born Indian and Brahmans and, at the age of thirteen, the Theosophical Society of Madras saw in him the future teacher of the world, the long-awaited messiah. This international society, whose Madras-based headquarters influenced the whole world, brought him up in this objective and in this belief. Each Indian caste has one day tried to destroy the supremacy of the priests and the unjust caste system: Buddha the Warrior, Gandhi the Merchant.

It's a long story. Just before Rama, Vishnu's previous avatar, the Parashurama destroyed twenty one generations of the warrior caste because they were unkind to the priests! The Telugu Brahman promoted to

the role of teacher of the people would go even further. Around him, donations and funds allowed the Order of the Star to flourish. My grandmother, and all those from everywhere in the world, from Europe, America, Russia, confidently awaited the coming of the divine child. Great was the crisis, the uncertainty, the fear of being without, the fear that God would abandon America, or worse, had already done so.

The Messiah! Of course not. All of them, listening attentively to their wireless sets learned from Krishnamurti in person that not only was he not the Messiah, but that one shouldn't believe everything one heard, be it about faith, God or gods. He said "Truth is a pathless land". Not content with demolishing their hopes and abandoning his ex-future disciples, he said he would never be a guru for anyone, and that each and everyone should find his own path to the truth and to meaning. He dissolved his order, gave back the goods and property entrusted to him, and left to pursue his own thoughts, for the remainder of his long life, alone, taking the time to answer fundamental questions, refusing to transform those answers into a divine truth. A perfect example of education without servitude: "the god of a mediocre mind is a mediocre god."

"I don't know if Timothy Leary ever met Krishnamurti. Certain encounters would have been good to make."

"The great ocean in which all can be dissolved, that's what this country is. But as the salt transforms the taste of water, making nonsense from purity, so the invaders transform the taste of India, without really changing either the nature or the extent of its indifference."

"I am reassured by that, by the indifference. Since that allows me to be here without worrying about the image of myself I give to others whose opinion means nothing to me. Who was it said: "Try to live in harmony with those ideas we do not support."

"Seth bought me a single ticket to India. Do you think he knew I wouldn't buy a return, and that I would become like you, like Undine, like Puck?"

"No, I don't think so. By making this choice he merely left you the initiative of deciding upon your return. Had you had this ticket, would you have considered the possibility of staying?"

"What about you – have you never left?"

"Yes, several times, to several places, but I leave less and less frequently. Sometimes I get cravings: I need an American barbeque with those sickly sauces. I need that technology which I find fascinating. I

need to know what new machine has been invented and what I can do armed with this in order to create new things and pursue my quest."

"So you're becoming Indian – defiant but non-opposing."

The driver tapped on the window and we stepped out into the road. A rusty soviet tractor dragged us out of our conversation.

From:<Seth> Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Kev>

Cc:

Subject: Seth

Do you have any idea where my given name – Seth – comes from? No? I am named for an Egyptian god, not a very nice one, moreover, who fulfilled the same trouble-making role as Shiva. Some believe he formed the inspiration for the westernised devil. Or rather a daemon, in fact, an agent of upheaval, since things must undergo upheaval before becoming fecund.

We will perhaps meet again in Benares where you will some arrive with your valiant knight. In the city – humanity's oldest still-inhabited city. Hey, why was it built? For American or Chilean reasons? For war or trade? Or why not, for life? Normal paradox because the devil died there, crushed by Lord Ganesha. The most presentable avatar in western mystique was crushed by the most amusing of Hindu avatars. Oh, the irony of it!

I am not bitter. But I'm getting weary of trying to enlighten a shadow.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Seth>

Cc :

Subject: Re : Avatar

Seth, I came for you. Whatever you have become, you will always have my affection and my gratitude.

We are now travelling by night train and I am sharing my compartment with Arthur who can hardly fit in lengthwise. A red bedecked and bedevilled baggage handler threw us in the train with neither indication

nor information as to its destination. We're huddled together for warmth as it's cold and I don't know how to modify the air conditioning.

A sort of Carpathian vampire chucked a couple of sheets in through a crack in the door. The compartment is grey, the remains of someone's vomit decorate one corner. We eat a few biscuits.

We talked about Puck's gifts, the three horns he put on my forearm, of Undine's gift, my wave. He said he also wanted to make a contribution to my illustrations. I held out my arm. From around his bull-like neck he withdrew a gold medallion, heated it with his lighter and quickly slapped it onto my arm. A clear leaf-shaped burn appeared above Undine's wave.

"It's a Ginkgo leaf. The Ginkgo inhabited the Earth way before man was even a species. We find its fossilised remains all over the planet. When the meteorite which destroyed the dinosaurs ravaged the Earth, most species of Ginkgo were also exterminated. After a life-long quest, a botanist found a specimen in a single valley in China. Extracted from its valley, the tree exerted its powers of attraction, as the flower attracts the bee, firstly on the Koreans, then the Japanese and finally the Europeans. Today it has conquered the whole planet once again, all the cities in the world, all the public gardens and is now more widespread than during the time of its splendour. During the first springtime after Hiroshima, the Ginkgo planted in the gardens of a burned out temple grew a few new tender green leaves. I admire the man who succeeded in that particular quest, transforming our species into a bee for that tree."

Seth, wait a while for me, will you?

Kev

Goodbye

From:<Undine>

Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Kev>

Cc :

Subject: Re: Re: Sorry

We're also making our way up to Benares. This morning, I helped Viviane to untie Muirdun who was stretched out on the bed covered in clothes pegs – she hadn't been able to undo the wet knots.

It almost made us miss the plane, but we managed to catch it in extremis: me, Viviane, Muirdun and all the paraphernalia belonging to our endearing little couple.

I am extremely excited at the prospect of seeing the Ganges again and the ritual baths with all those men from all over India, meditative and almost naked.

We've booked into a small guesthouse on the Assi Ghat, quite far from the centre, near the boats and the river.

Birgit, whom you already met at Puck's, will no doubt be there with him. She has something to tell us.

You'll recognise her by her giant Celtic tattoo.

I don't know your friend Seth very well, but I hope you'll find him there.

Undine

From:<Kev> Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Undine>

Cc:

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Sorry

So this is where everything is lit up and the fires are reflected in the water.

The station is far away. I hope you'll have more luck with the airport. I miss you.

I walked around a little with Arthur. Not a brilliant idea since he attracts attention, firstly because he is so good-looking, and secondly because he is so tall, and we are often invited to chat, or to stand for a photo with a recently bereaved family here for the incineration.

The crowd put us on edge and we took a boat which was leaking everywhere. Here, finally, everything takes water.

So we slowly made our way between the bodies immersed in the water, at the foot of the wide steps overlooked by dilapidated housing and shelters for the widowed.

The funeral pyres burn the corpses rolled in brightly-coloured cloths, whereas further down, a young man puts back on his jeans after taking a ritual bath.

There is no fussing here, no obsequiousness, death has its place among the living, enjoying their clothing and benevolent company, in distracted, inward-looking rituals, which the Brahmans explain through the example of their own bodies.

And everywhere, smiles of white enamel or smooth toothless mouths, offered to the city and to oneself.

The Ganges is a mystery for the senses. Millions of people are dispersed along its length, from its sources to this city, and yet there reigns no fetid odour, and bathers leave its waters – potentially guilty of every corruption – cleansed, in the glory of good health.

The Ganges, sacred, at the heart of prayer, is also the public bath and wash house; only a few centimetres away from the ceremonial, the profane is welcomed among the sacred, since the sacred is tangible and must not be extracted from the world.

We are the only ones in the guesthouse. The bedrooms have no windows and we eat our meals under the protective but oppressive supervision of the family, in their green saris.

We saw Puck on the Meer Ghat. He was wearing a heretical, cow-skin, "horn-muffler" hat, and was discussing manifestly consternating ceremonies with the Brahmans if their alarmed expressions were anything to go by.

On one side of the river, Benares, Kashi, Varanasi and millions of people; on the other a desert of bare sand.

Everywhere people are preparing for the Holi festival of colours. It is a festival which is surely an avatar of our carnival, where the aim is to be hidden behind the clouds of coloured powder which the revellers toss into the air.

Everywhere, bags overflow with green, fuchsia, red or yellow powders which, mixed with water from the Ganges and poured into plastic pistons, provide ammunition to decorate the revellers.

Some have already started to paint each other and to drink, they laugh and call out to each other, carousing from group to circle, from circle to band of joyous revellers, and from there into vaster companies.

A young boy pounces on us with a handful of powder, but having underestimated the altitude of Arthur, has second thoughts, and races off giggling at the trick he could have played.

My dear friend, don't set foot here in your white dress.

I saw little sealed copper pots, soldered to enclose a little river water, which the pilgrims buy and we do plastic virgin Marys from Lourdes. There was one of these little pots in Seth's coffin when it was opened after the journey.

Others offer sugar, fruits, hair and also, Undine, sex. Here you can venerate your god, since the sexual offering, rarefied since the arrival of the Victorian conquerors, is perfectly well accepted by these gods here.

The last time I walked for as long as in New York during the period in which my fascination was held by urban mechanics. The Brahmans install their divine paraphernalia on little wooden benches: a little copper pot, a small dish of coloured powder, and self-satisfaction in abundance. They will tell those of lesser castes what to think about life, and justify the injustice of the castes. They sit cross-legged, gesticulating.

The Spirit is no more here, than there, at other religious goings-on. The families arrive and sit down opposite the holy man. I suppose they question him before pouring a little milk on the phallus that is Shiva's. What on earth can he say to these poor people? That they must be patient until they are reincarnated better, and that if they are so wretched it's merely because of the lives they led before? Resort to faith can sometimes be frightening. I am no less surprised than on previous days that these rotting fruits, these perspiring bodies, the oily river water don't stink more than they do. It is hot and humid.

In Benares even our own psychology is different. I'll let you in on a secret. In the past two days, I've gulped down fourteen litres of mineral water, and in the same two days I haven't taken a piss once, without necessarily sweating a lot either. Could it be that the water absorbs here never leaves the body? Do they have to be burned to be dried out? For once to be in a place where pissing in the street is as natural as breathing, it is frustrating to not even feel the need.

I've found a good place, half way up the slope between the Ganges and the town, between the slums and the lepers. I had difficulty finding this place, in the middle of the crowd, surrounded by colours and incessant noise. Perhaps it's the best place there is, an oasis of serenity at the heart of all the noises of faith. Since faith is indeed noisy, and it seems to

me that Brahmans and Shamans must have the same roots, in that the same power they project comes from the same Nature.

On a Ganges-dampened step, a satyr squats, his back criss-crossed by muscle and leather, brushing his teeth with an acacia twig. Near him, a man pisses against a stone post. A young Indian comes up wearing a white shirt and Levis jeans. He drops both shirt and jeans, revealing a soft loin cloth by way of underwear, and slips into the water, without ceremony. He is not there for the service, just for the refreshment. He moves a few steps from the cows.

Red alert, intruder in my safety perimeter. A broad hand touches mine in an improbable fashion, its fingers sliding between my own, joining with them. I have the impression of both a powerful yet distant contact. The hand is rough, almost horny. Its owner spins round to face me and slides me closer to him on the bench. His hand moves, sliding up my arm, across my face, the nape of my neck. The man is young, dressed in grey cloth, rolled in the manner of the Sikhs, his face coated with powdered ash. His hands massage, and smiling he makes my poor joints crack; he takes me in his arms, and a welcome warmth invades me. He says: "Ayurvedic massage", and I say "yes", knowingly. I feel rather ashamed of having felt so much pleasure. After having rewarded him with a few notes, I went back to the hotel, floating on a cloud. In every place he placed his hands, I can still feel the warmth. The body mystique: I had forgotten that.

Soon,

Kev

From:<Kev>

Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Seth>

Cc :

Subject: Birgit

Birgit has arrived, on a rickshaw, escorted by a dozen or so kids like a goddess on parade. We all went to the river together and put a few little boats made of dried leaves, each cradling a flickering candle, to float on the water.

The lights slipped out onto the slow-moving, heavy waters of the river: we watched them float away, merge and disappear.

Benares, Varanasi, Kashi, empire of joyful death, sacred site of the Buddha's first sermon, the Ganges curves a loop to honour you.

I walk beside Arthur along the river pool, observing the miracle: they bathe in the Ganges, and survive. My superb Australian bush hat – waterproof and foldable at will, made of 100 percent cow hide – is at odds with its surroundings. They don't need one. In addition to first class skin, they boast hair of perfect substance. Maddening! We were leaving the Assi Ghat behind us, when a bald rectangle of a man pounced on us with a camera, all smiles. He asked us if his wife could take a photo of us with him. He stood between us: immortality in a pious Hindu family album. He came for the funeral of one of his relatives. He smiled, such a nice day.

I turn away from the pyres. I know that matter is nothing, that you can just as easily pay your respects to a flower pot, a river, as to a recently deceased whose very name already sounds unpleasant.

First of all, Mathru engages Arthur, newly promoted "Thanatonaut"[10], ignoring me, and my irreverence. The bargain seems a hard one: the explanation of the cremation rite will cost us nothing, but in order to help out his bulk heating enterprise, we are kindly requested to make a visit to a fabric shop, the celebrated best Silk Factory in the area. Death doesn't take vacations, he explained, nor does it make selections. From cremation in an electric oven for the price of a loaf of bread from the baker's, to that on a pyre of sandalwood for the price of a bottom-of-the-range Clio, everyone has to have access to the service of the "burner of the dead". He provides that service, tranquilly, with no more ceremony than required by the gods. He is well aware how many are still unaware that he is already expecting them.

While Arthur was chatting, with ease and enjoyment, I was watching the bodies passing, enveloped in golden fabric – here goes a pregnant woman – like Christmas parcels. Here, the bodies are wrapped descriptively, a certain colour for young men, another for the old, the virgin, the mother who died giving life. To say that I'm not exactly at ease would be an understatement. One family loudly debates the modalities of the combustion, negotiating animatedly. Draped in bright colours, the women smile. Mathru, as for him, looks tired. I can't help thinking that it must be the smoke from the funeral pyres which irritates his eyes: the soot of Beings, which brings tears. We continue our way along the Ganges. Apart from the fact that it is the fortieth silk painting shop I will have put up

with, I for who clothes hold so little interest, Mathru's shop is quite far away. So, we'll see about that later.

He was so weary of all this humanity who died here; I was so fascinated by his words. Mathru considered his to be a noble task, a higher mission, a meticulous destiny. He wasn't wealthy, with his torn clothes barely covering his wiry body. He wasn't disturbing, either.

We ended up having to go to the silk factory belonging to our "burner of the dead", on our sixth or seventh trip along the Ganges. Arthur followed him in the humid streets with me trailing along far behind. In one such narrow, sultry alley, in a darkened doorway, a tired young man was welding small copper pots from which the few mouthfuls of river water it contained would no longer flow. Somewhat reminiscent of the plastic virgin Marys sold in Lourdes. There is no comfort to be found by the Ganges, just a task to be accomplished when life slips away, a task which Mathru does well, with weariness. But all this has something comical about it. The photo-loving pilgrim will smile at my ridiculous hat on the snap shot he has taken. Mathru would say that life goes on, and never mind the dead.

As the Brahmans performed a very New Age and "Benares-tourist-information-centre-approved" farewell to the Ganges, I was able to get a good look at Birgit, who I had seen only fleetingly in the doorway to Puck's house.

A tall slender woman, with disproportionately large breasts, which must have posed somewhat of a challenge to her spinal column. Her tattoo, vine-like, wound its way over the full length of her body; manifestly, Puck had not only "honoured" her but also revered her.

We went to join her as the rosy sun dipped into the Ganges. She told us that tomorrow we would perform your cremation on the Meer Ghat; Puck has already prepared everything and swears he will not do anything to screw up the ceremony.

I am not surprised. In the ocean of possibles, that must surely have been one, and as it is fascinating, why refuse it? Not that I am still expecting any sort of answer as regards your nature or the content of your messages, certain of which open for me future possibles, but simply because we are here, touching each other, taking each other's arms, kissing each other. Like so many other families here, we will burn our dead friend on the day of the Spring Equinox, the feast of rebirth.

I didn't question anything. Puck caressed my arms and the little horns he had left me. Undine licked my wave, and Arthur placed the flat of his

hand on my Ginkgo leaf. Birgit smiled at me in delight. Everything is alright now; I am no longer afraid of turmoil and of questions without answers.

Kev

From:<Seth> Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Kev>

Cc :

Subject: Re : Birgit

I am very touched by the tribute, and I have often spoken with Birgit lately. Her help is all the more precious in that she has already suffered so much having been vilified and mocked, in all her avatars, and for so long parodied and prostituted in the role of saint.

You know you could have met her when you used to go to Antwerp. She lived near to the Zeemanshuis, that hundred year old shelter for seafarers. You know her street, with the orange shop fronts, in the drug-hazed cold of outback Flanders, where sailors pass by eyes downcast, glancing furtively at the bordellos, at one thousand five hundred Belgian francs a trick.

She knows men inside out, through a succession of five to ten minute investigations, hardly long enough to breathe in the odour of the already departing sou'westers and beards.

She is so aware of the harshness of things, the harshness of nature, the rigidity of moral considerations, that more than any other, she knows how to let things go, let the sand and water flow, let benevolence have its day.

She is so unaware of the causes and the consequences, of the bonds which connect us, of the complex chain of events seen, that she – like you, Kev, in your humbleness – knows how to watch without controlling, to influence without guiding, with the greatest reserve with respect to principles.

There is a virtue in complexity; a sense in the absence of response if such response leads to the obstruction of possibles which could have been productive.

There is a virtue in reversibility, the possibility of having a second chance, before taking on the irreparable.

Birgit is planning the irreparable. She learned that in Europe.

Seth

From:<Kev> Date : Sat 17/3/23 :26

To: <Seth>

Cc :

Subject: none

This time I know you will not answer, but I'm going to tell you anyway. We all met up in front of the pyre prepared by a man with very dark skin, very white hair, and eyes red, as if from crying. Too much smoke, no doubt, too many fires.

Puck, as is his wont, was stretched out on the stones, hand supporting chin, bulky thighs crossed facetiously; Viviane and Muirdun stood with their arms about each others waist; Undine stood by the water, staring across towards the other bank; Arthur stood behind me, his hands on my shoulders.

Erect, Birgit held a large red box in her hands. She smiled at us then placed the box in the centre of the pyre. An Indian family came to sit near us, close by. Children ran across the Ghat, leaping on the steps and shouting, painting each other red.

The old man handed me the burning brand.

Birgit: "My very dear Seth: I am we thank you for everything you have tried to do to help men overcome their fear. I thank you for having sustained us when we were hunted. Back to the source, avatars from avatars, we will never say goodbye".

I knew that opening the box or asking what it contained would have led, by simple observation, to the prevention of so many desirable possibilities that the futile satisfaction of knowing that it did indeed contain ashes, or a hard drive you had programmed with dialogue simulation software, or nothing at all, seemed pointless.

How mistaken they are, those hippies over there. There is no meaning and even fewer answers to be had in India. There is only the unhopd-for freedom to free oneself.

READING KEYS

Merlin (or Muir Dun) was enamoured of the fairy, Viviane. Even though, foreseeing the future, he knew she would use this power against him, he taught her how to imprison a man.

Birgit was the only feminine principle, in her multiple avatars, of the Celtic pantheon. Christianity would recover her in the form of Saint Brigit.

Kev (Gaius), the humble, was the seneschal of Bedivere, and one of King Arthur's close advisors. King Arthur was the legendary king of the quest, and Gaius was his foster brother.

Undine was a nymph to be found in the rivers of Alsace.

Puck was the playful sprite, full of tricks and mischief, from English folklore.

Seth (or Set) was one of the most complex gods of Egypt, and like Brigit, was recovered by Christianity and transformed into the devil figure.

[1] In English in the text.

[2] Translator's note: Puck is the mischievous character in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream

[3] Translator's note: May 1968 in France saw a series of student protests and general strikes which radically changed French society. A certain mentality is attributed to those having been part of these events.

[4] In English in the text

[5] in English in the text

[6] Film "The Barbarian Invasions"

[7] From the depths, I cry!

[8] French comedian

[9] 8.71 milliard

[10] a reference to the book of the same name by French writer Bernard Werber, the name being derived from the Greek, explorer or navigator of death.



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