

"Heliogabalus is Artaud's greatest and most revolutionary masterpiece: an incendiary work that reveals both the divine cruelty of the Roman Emperor and that of Artaud himself."

—Stephen Barber

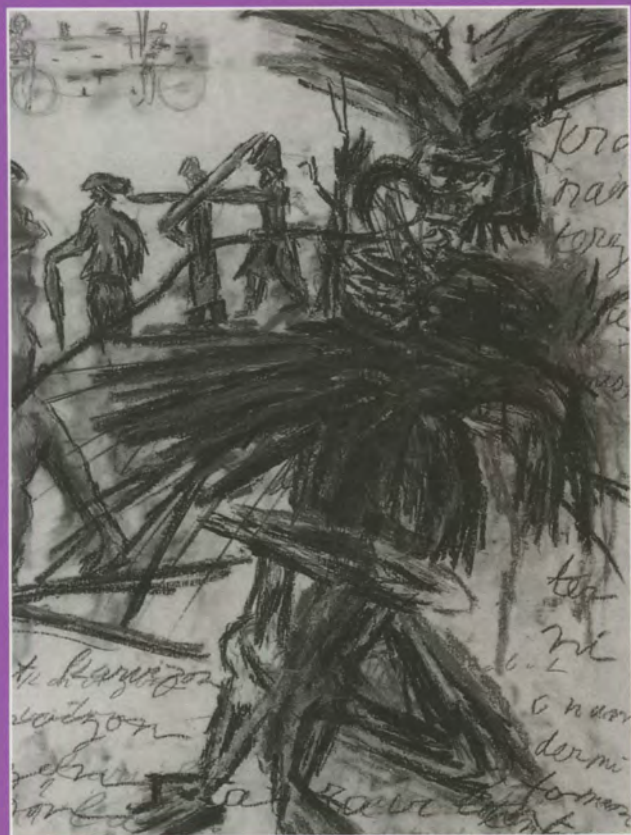
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HELIOGABALUS

OR, THE CROWNED ANARCHIST

ANTONIN ARTAUD

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or,

THE ANARCHIST CROWNED

Antonin Artaud

Translated by Alexis Lykiard



HELIOGABALUS

Antonin Artaud

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INTRODUCTION

The acts of excess, atrocity and aberration of the Roman Emperors have provoked richly obsessional responses from innumerable writers over the centuries. In the twentieth century, that compulsive fascination (now shared too by filmmakers) emerged at moments of profound upheaval and social disintegration: in Germany during the 1910s, in France during the 1930s, in Japan during the 1960s – and worldwide, in the contemporary moment. The grandiose abuse of colossal power, the overriding desire for immediate sexual ecstasy and oblivion through violence and torture, and the arbitrary eradication of entire populations, are ever-more vital and relevant preoccupations. Of all the Roman Emperors, it is the figure of the anarchist child-god Heliogabalus (along with the crazed Caligula and the matricidal Nero), with his ephemeral and implosive reign of gold, blood, semen and excrement, which most intimately connects into contemporary manias, panics and desires. The four-year reign of Heliogabalus, who was slaughtered at the age of eighteen, was characterized by spectacles of incest, sodomy, butchery, debauchery, and an anarchic ridicule for the powers of government. And of all the many responses to the Roman Emperors, right across the centuries, it is the French writer Antonin Artaud's extraordinary biography of Heliogabalus which most exactly aligns those divine forces of uproar with the seisms that now seize contemporary empires, audiences and perceptions.

Antonin Artaud is most renowned as the legendary instigator of the Theatre of Cruelty – the inspirational project which irreparably transformed the nature of theatre and performance – and as the dissident Surrealist poet and filmmaker who effortlessly out-imagined and out-hallucinated André Breton, and faced expulsion from the Surrealist movement as a result. It was in 1933 that his publisher Robert Denoël (who would later be assassinated) proposed that

Artaud was the ideal candidate to write a biography of Heliogabalus. The figure of Heliogabalus was a supremely revelatory one in the France of the 1930s, as its moral systems disintegrated towards warfare and Nazi Occupation (the writer Jean Genet would compose a play about Heliogabalus during the Occupation years, though he later destroyed it). Artaud researched the book over many months in the National Library in Paris, consulting ancient esoteric and astrological texts as well as books of Roman history; the finished book (which he dictated, largely by improvisation, from his notes) transmitted his own preoccupations as intensively as those of Heliogabalus' life. In outlining the book's intended sensorial impact upon its readers, Artaud displayed considerable hostility towards historical authenticity: 'I have written this *Life of Heliogabalus* as I would have spoken it and as I speak it. I have also written it to help those who read it to un-learn history a little; but, all the same, to find its thread.' Artaud revealed the degree of his deep affinity with Heliogabalus, emphasizing 'the central figure where I have described myself'. The novelist Anaïs Nin was an intimate friend of Artaud in Paris during that period, and she evoked Artaud's wild temperament as he exhaustively recreated Heliogabalus' life: 'Artaud sat in the Coupole cafe pouring out poetry, talking of magic: -I am Heliogabalus, the mad Roman emperor, because he becomes everything he writes about. In the taxi, he pushed back his hair from a ravaged face. The beauty of the summer day did not touch him. He stood up in the taxi and, stretching out his arms, he pointed to the crowded streets: -The revolution will come soon. All this will be destroyed. The world must be destroyed...'. Through this first-ever translation into the English language of Artaud's revolutionary masterpiece, its acute power of apocalyptic fury now becomes more seminal and prophetic than ever.

-Stephen Barber, 2003

I dedicate this book to the manes of Apollonius of Tyana, Christ's contemporary, and to any remaining truthful Illuminati in this fleeting world;

And in order to underline its profound unreality, its spirituality, its futility, I dedicate it to anarchy and to the war for this world;

I dedicate it finally to the Ancestors, to the Heroes in the classical sense and to the spirits of the Great Dead.

1.

THE CRADLE OF SPERM

If there was around the corpse of Heliogabalus, tombless, its throat cut by his police force in his palace latrines, a heavy flow of blood and excrement, there was around his cradle a heavy flow of sperm. Heliogabalus was born in an era when everybody slept with everybody; and it will never be known when or by whom his mother was actually impregnated. For a Syrian prince like him, consanguinity came from the mother's side; – and as regards mothers, around this newborn son of a charioteer was a pleiad of Julias; – and whether or not practising when in power, all these Julias were highclass whores.

The father to them all, to the female wellspring of this river of rape and infamy, must, before he became priest, have been a coachman, since otherwise it would be incomprehensible – the zealousness which Heliogabalus, once enthroned, put into being buggered by charioteers.

The fact remains that History going back from the feminine side to the origins of Heliogabalus shelters inevitably behind this bare and senile cranium, this wagon and this beard which comprise our impressions of the face of the elderly Bassianus.

That this old fossil served a cult doesn't condemn

the cult, but those imbecilic and spewed-up rites to which the contemporaries of the Julias and of Bassian, and the Syria of the newborn Heliogabalus, finally reduced the cult.

The cult dead, however, and reduced to mere remnants of gestures, to which Bassianus devoted himself, it will be noted that the moment the infant Heliogabalus appeared on the steps of the temple of Emesa, it resumed via articles of belief and vestments its energy of pure gold, of astonishing and refined light, and once again became miraculously active.

In any case, this forefather Bassian, propped up in bed as on crutches, engenders by a casual partner the two daughters, Julia Domna and Julia Moesa. He fashions them and does so with success. They are beautiful. Beautiful and ready for their dual roles of empress and whore.

By whom did he sire these girls? To date, History gives no answer. And we'll admit that it is of no importance whatever, obsessed as we are by the four medallion heads of Julia Domna, Julia Moesa, Julia Soemia and Julia Mamaea. For if Bassianus had two daughters, Julia Domna and Julia Moesa; Julia Moesa in turn had two daughters: Julia Soemia and Julia Moesa; Julia Moesa in her turn had two daughters: Julia Soemia and Julia Mamaea. And Julia Moesa, married to Sextus Varius Marcellus was, however, doubtless impregnated by Caracalla or Geta (son of her sister Julia Domna) or by Gessius Marcianus, her brother-in-law and husband to Julia Mamaea; or perhaps by Septimius Severus, her stepbrother-in-law; she gave birth to Varius Avitus Bassianus, later named Elagabalus, or son of the summits, false Antoninus, Sardanapalus and finally Heliogabalus, a name seemingly the happy grammatical contraction of the most high denominations of the sun.

With hindsight one sees this doddering old highpriest Bassianus, at Emesa on the banks of the Orontes with his two daughters, Julia Domna and Julia Moesa. – They're already a strapping great pair, these two girls spawned from a crutch with a male sex at its tip. Although made at length from sperm at the outermost reaches attained by his sperm on days when the parricide ejaculates, – I say parricide and it will soon be seen why, – they are both well-built and bulky; bulky, meaning, full of blood, skin, bone and a certain molten substance that underlies the colouring of their skin. The one, tall and leaden-complexioned, with the sign of Saturn upon her brow, Julia Domna, resembles a statue of Injustice, Injustice overcoming fate; – the other, small, skinny, ardent, explosive, violent and yellowish as a liver ailment. The former, Julia Domna, is a sex with probably some brains, the latter a brain in which sex isn't lacking.

The year this story begins, roughly 960 during the collapse of Latium – of the separate development of this race of slaves, merchants, pirates, encrusted like crab-lice on the Etruscan earth; race that never had any spiritual viewpoint but sucking the blood of others; that never had any idea save defending its treasures and coffers through the moral precepts previously mentioned; this year 960 or thereabouts, which corresponds to 179 AD, Julia Domna, the grandmother, would have been eighteen and her sister thirteen. And they were, it must be said, thus of marriageable age. But Julia Domna resembled a moonstone and Julia Moesa sulphur, sun-dried.

As to whether both were virgins, I wouldn't like to swear to it, and their menfolk should be asked that, namely Septimius Severus re the Moonstone; and as for Sulphur, Julius Barbacus Mercurius.

From the geographical point of view there had always been this barbarian fringe around what is usually called the Roman Empire, and within this Roman Empire must be placed Greece, which invented, historically, the notion of barbarism. And from this point of view we are, we people of the Occident, the worthy sons of this stupid mother, since for us the civilised are ourselves and all else – this shows up our universal ignorance – is identified with barbarism.

However, it must be said that all the ideas which enabled the Roman and Greek worlds not to die immediately, not to sink into a blind bestiality, came from precisely this barbarian fringe; and the Orient, far from bringing in its disease and unease, allowed contact to be maintained with Tradition. Principles aren't found, don't invent themselves; they protect themselves, they spread; and there are few more difficult operations in the world than to maintain the notion – at once clear, yet absorbed within the system – of a universal principle.

All this is to note that from the metaphysical viewpoint, the Orient has always been in a state of reassuring ferment; that it's never thence that things worsen; and that, on the day the magic ass's skin of principles shrinks seriously out there, the face of the world will shrink also, everything will more or less be lost; and that day no longer seems to me far off.

In the midst of this metaphysical barbarism, this sexual excess which, even through blood, persisted in rediscovering the name of God, were born Julia Domna and Julia Moesa. They were born of the ritual sperm of a parricide, Bassianus, whom I myself can't see as anything other than mummified.

This parricide planted his prick in the compressed

Kingdom of Emesa, which wasn't at first a kingdom but a priesthood; – and all of it, kingdom, priesthood, priests, and priest-king at its head, swore they'd been imbued with molten matter, and were made of gold and descended straight from the sun.

But one day, this priesthood, which manipulated precepts and mumbled of principles rather as one handles, haphazardly and without any skill, pins or gussets; this priesthood, which perhaps had in it something divine but no longer knew where that something might be located; priesthood in which the divine was crushed, reduced to nothing – as was the tiny kingdom of Emesa between the Lebanon, Palestine, Cappadocia, Cyprus, Arabia and Babylon – or just as the solar plexus is crushed inside our Westerners' organisms; this cow-priesthood of Emesa – cow meaning woman, and womanish meaning cowardly, malleable, insulted and enslaved – which didn't know how to impose its visible sovereignty by force of arms but felt comfortable with an atmosphere of ease and anarchy, and which knew how to profit from the disintegration of the kingdom of the Seleucidae that one hundred and sixty years later succeeded the far more important disintegration of the empire of Alexander the Great, by declaring itself independent.

From mother to son, the priests of Emesa, who for a thousand years or more came from the Samsiceramids, handed down the kingdom and the bloodline of the sun. From mother to son, since in Syria, consanguinity derived from the mother's side: it was the mother who served as father, who had the paternal social attributes; and she who, from the standpoint of generation itself, was considered the primogenitor. I stress *PRIMOGENITOR*.

It means mother is father; that it's the mother who is the father, and the feminine which engenders the masculine. And this must be reconciled with the masculine

sex of the moon, which prevents those who worship it from ever becoming cuckolds.

Nevertheless, in Syria, and especially amid the Samsiceramids, it is the daughter who joins the priesthood whereas the son joins nothing. But to return to the Bassiani, of whom Heliogabalus is the most notable and Bassianus the founder, there is an appalling hiatus between the lines of the Bassiani and of the Samsiceramids; and this hiatus is marked by a usurpation and a crime, which without interrupting it, divert the lineage of the sun.

Now, since among the Samsiceramids the mother was the father, for the Roman historian to deem it ‘parricide’, Bassianus would have to have killed his mother; yet because the succession passed not to a woman but a man and, despite the priesthood’s being female, it was nonetheless the man who was entrusted to protect it: hence I myself think Bassianus must have killed the person protecting it, and that he killed his real father, his father *by* nature and father *in* society. – He was thus of masculine blood; he was on the masculine side of the solar bloodline; but the fact of having re-established once again the supremacy of the male over the female, and of masculine over feminine, scarcely seems to have sorted things out, because with him the downfall begins; and in History it’s hard to find a more perfect aggregation of crimes, depravity and cruelty than this family’s, wherein the men assumed all the malice and weakness, and the women the virility. On that score one could say that Heliogabalus was shaped by women; that his thinking was done according to the will of two women; and that whenever he wished to think for himself, whenever his male pride – nettled by the energy of his wives, of his mothers, who all slept with him – wanted to manifest itself, we know what the result was.

I’m not judging what resulted as History may judge it; this anarchy, this debauchery, please me. They please

me from the point of view of History and from the point of view of Heliogabalus; but at the moment when I take up his story, Heliogabalus wasn't yet born.

The kings of Emesa, those little womenkings, who wanted simultaneously to be both man and woman, – like a megabyzus of the temple of Ephesus who, while a man, bound up his own prick in order to sacrifice as a woman, but turned into the embedded sacrificial stone in front of which he would sacrifice standing, – had long since entrusted their freedom to the hands of Rome. Of the ancient kingdom of Emathia there remains only this temple, gloomy and voluminous. The control of trade, war, protection of world goods, all belonged to the old troopers of Rome. As for the rest, each Syrian could believe whatever he wished, and the religion of the Sun remained mottled here and there with devotions to the Moon, with an admixture of moonstones, fish, rams and boars. No more bulls, eagles, some room for sparrowhawks; but no cocks! No, it doesn't seem that the cock had any great standing in those particular rites.

The temple of Elagabalus at Emesa was for several centuries the centre of spasmodic attempts to gauge the gluttony of a god. This God, Elagabalus, or Descended from the Mountain, Shining Summit, came from very far away. And perhaps in the ancient Phoenician cosmogony he was called Desire; – and this desire, like Elagabalus himself, was not simple, since it resulted from the slow and multiple admixture of principles which shone deep down within the Breath of Chaos. Of all these principles, the Sun is simply the reduced figure, one aspect good only for the exhausted and outcast worshippers.

It must be said that the Breath which was in Chaos fell in love with its principles; and through this forward

motion, this kind of idea which does away with darkness, a conscious desire was born. – And in the Sun itself there are living sources, an idea of chaos reduced and completely eliminated.

However, in the human body what represents the reality of this breath is not pulmonary respiration – which would be to this breath what the sun in its physical aspect is to the reproductive principle – but this sort of vital hunger, changing, opaque, whose currents sweep across the nerves, and battle with the intelligent principles of the brain. And these principles, in their turn, recharge the pulmonary breath and confer upon it all their powers. Nobody could claim that the lungs which restore life aren't under the command of a breath conveyed by the brain. And the head of Elagabalus, god of Emesa, was kept very busy for all time.

In 179 however, when Septimius Severus in Syria takes command of the 4th Scythian legion, nothing is left of the noble Phoenician cosmogony peddled by Sanchoniaton except one black stone fallen from the sky – this monolith, this pointed block whose guardian Bassianus has appointed himself, but which is actually in the safe keeping of his two daughters, the voluptuous Syrian pair: Julia Domna and Julia Moesa.

Septimius Severus is already old and tired; the desert sands have long scorched his foot-soles and gnawed his horny heels. He is a widower two or three times over; but scarcely has he disembarked than he decides on taking a wife and to do so consults the official registry lists.

In these registers he finds the Moon, i.e. the Moonstone, i.e. Julia Domna. Now, Domna is Diana, Artemis, Ishtar, and also Proserpine, the force of the dark feminine. The dark in the third region of the earth. Woman

incarnate in hell, and who never reascends from hell.

But Julia Domna has a horoscope that destines her one day to be wife to an Emperor; and he decides to wed Julia Domna because of her horoscope. Besides, moonstone Julia Domna, horoscope, and the hydromantic oracles before whom imperial horoscopes are cast, are all in accord. I'm saying that in Syria the earth is living, and there are stones which are alive; and that Julia Domna is bound up with all this.

There are black stones in the form of a male member, a female sex incised beneath. And these stones are vertebrae in precious corners of the earth. And the black stone of Emesa is the largest of these vertebrae, the purest, and also the most perfect.

Yet there are stones living as plants or animals live, and just as one might say the Sun is alive, with stains which shift, swell and shrink, ooze into one another, merge and are once more displaced, – and when they swell or shrink, they do it rhythmically, internally, – just as one might say the sun lives. The stains live within it like a cancer, like the effervescent buboes of a plague. There is inside it pulverised matter which collects up, – like sun spots atomised but black. And, reduced to powder, they occupy less space; yet it's the same sun and the same expanse and solar mass, though in places extinct, and thus reminiscent of diamonds or coal. And all of it is living; and one might say SOME stones do live; and the stones of Syria are alive, as miracles of nature, for these are stones flung from the sky.

And there are many miracles and marvels of nature on the volcanic soil of Syria. This soil which seems plastered and wholly moulded with pumice-stones, but wherein the stones fallen from heaven live their own lives, without blending into the pumice. And there are marvellous legends about the stones of Syria.

Witness this text by Photius, the Byzantine historian of the period of Septimius Severus:

“Severus was a Roman, and father to the Romans, in conformity with the law; he it was who said he had seen a stone whereon could be observed the different features of the moon, taking on all kind of appearances, sometimes this one, sometimes that, expanding and diminishing according to the course of the sun, and thus retaining imprinted the sun itself.”

It should be said that this text of Photius is not itself an original work, but is one lifted from a lost book which, judging by the number of writers who refer to it, seemed to the ancients to have constituted a true Bible of Wonders: *The Life of Isidorus* by Damascius.

But the most extraordinary form of the Syriac stones is found among the Baetyls, the black Baetyls, or Stones of Baal. The black Cone of Emesa is a Baetyl that retains its glow and is ready to give it back, since the Baetyls are come from fire. They are like carbonised sparks of celestial fire. And to go deeper into their history is to return to the very creation of the world:

“I saw,” says Severus once more, “a Baetyl moved by the air, sometimes concealed in wrappings, but also on occasion borne between the hands of a servant; the name of the servant in charge of the Baetyl was Eusebius, who told me he had suddenly and quite unexpectedly experienced the urgent desire to leave the town of Emesa, although it was almost the middle of the night, and to travel a long distance towards that mountain on whose slope was the ancient and magnificent temple of Athena. He very swiftly reached the foot of the mountain and there sat down to rest, after the wearisome journey, when at this same spot he saw fall from the sky at high speed a ball of

fire and an enormous lion standing beside the fireball; the lion almost immediately disappeared, but he himself had run to the already extinguished ball of fire, laid hold of it, this Baetyl, and having carried it away, asked it to which god it belonged. It answered that it belonged to Gennaius (this Gennaius was worshipped by the Hieropolitans, who erected to him in the temple of Zeus a statue in the shape of a lion). He took it back to his house that very night, having travelled a distance, so he said, of no less than two hundred and ten stades. Eusebius was not master of the Baetyl's movements, but he was obliged to pray to it, entreat it; and it would grant his wishes.

“It was a perfectly spherical ball of a whitish hue; and a palm's length in diameter. But at certain moments it became larger or smaller; at other times it assumed a purplish colour. And he showed us letters traced on the stone, their colour what is called minium (or cinnabar). Then he set the Baetyl into the wall. Through these letters it was that the Baetyl would give supplicants the answer sought. It would make utterances akin to a faint whistling, which Eusebius demonstrated for us.”

In another passage from his book the same Photius, haunted by the marvel of these stones, feels the need to recap re their description, and once more relies on the testimony of Severus:

“Severus recounts, among other things, that during his sojourn in Alexandria, he had also seen a heliac stone, not like the one we saw, but which emitted from its inmost core golden rays forming a disc similar to the sun seated within the stone's centre, and which at first glance looked like a ball of fire. From this ball flashed golden rays reaching out to its circumference, for the whole stone was spherical in shape. He had also seen a selenite stone – not

one of those wherein a diminutive moon is seen to appear only after being dipped in water, and is therefore called hydroselenite – but a stone which through a neat motion, inherent in its nature, would turn whenever the moon did and, due to the way it used to turn, was a truly wondrous work of nature.”

The small town of Apamaea-sub-Emesa stands at the foot of Antilibanus, in a landscape of extinct lava and crumbled bones. Its little temple of the sun-moon possesses a hydromantic oracle, an oracle which is never mistaken.

Toward it, one day in the ancient world, under the glare of the solar light, the whole family of Heliogabalus might have been perceived – the great-grandfather Bassianus, great aunt Julia Domna, Julia Moesa the grandmother – walking in line like pilgrims. Bassianus, a jaundice yellow, trudges slowly at donkey-pace; and behind him are his daughters.

At the stroke of noon, the hour the oracle speaks, they reach the second chamber of the temple; and approach the sacred bowl.

The *Life of Isidorus* by Damascius contains a description of this oracle which, it is said, foretold royalty for Julia Domna. And according to this, the oracle that day was particularly precise and particularly conscientious, because afterwards the horoscope was cast announcing to Julia Domna that she'd be queen one day. And it's known that thirty years later Varius Marcellus, putative father of Heliogabalus, caused to be erected in the oracle's honour a votive stele upon whose stone was engraved Julia Domna's horoscope, just then come true.

“Those who came to honour the goddess (Aphrodite, emerging from the waters)”, recounts Juvenal,

according to the lost book, “brought gifts of gold and silver, linen cloth, byssus and other precious stuffs, and if these gifts were accepted, the fabrics as well as the heavy objects went to the bottom. If on the other hand, they were spurned and rejected, the fabrics were seen to float alongside all else, even things made of gold, silver and material heavy enough not to float naturally.

“Oblong bronze tablets, pierced with a hole enabling them to be strung with a small cord in the style of Etruscan charms, and bearing banal answers inscribed in an archaic Latin in a rhythmic form resembling the hexameter, have preserved for us a specimen of these talismans or charms whereon the Italic oracles lived.”

Among the other miracles and marvels of Syria to which the historians bear witness, are fabulous apparitions, such as that of Apollonius of Tyana at Antioch; and that of the mysterious divinity manifesting herself at Emesa shortly after the death of Heliogabalus, as Vopiscus relates in his *Life of the Emperor Aurelian*.

“Before Emesa, Aurelian’s cavalry had galloped away when a divinity, unrecognised until long afterwards, came and put heart into our soldiers. The Empress Zenobia fled, Aurelian entered Emesa in triumph and promptly betook himself to the Temple of Heliogabalus, wishing to fulfil his obligation toward the gods. There once again he saw, in just the same guise, the goddess he had seen in the battle, spurring on the efforts of his troops.

“On returning to Rome, he built in honour of the Sun a temple whose dedication was accomplished with the greatest magnificence.

.....

“So Rome was bedecked with these robes covered with gems that we see in the Temple of the Sun, with these

dragons which came from Persia, these mitres of gold.”

Yet beyond these legends and gossip about the earth, symbolic or not, which, like all symbols conceal and reveal in plain language but in a reversible manner the most precise and indisputable truths, there is the gossip and legend about heaven. There are the Metaphysical Fables, the Cosmogonies, and the Phaeacian not the Biblical Genesis which, false or not in its primitive wording, conveys to us via the Sanchoniaton stele the profundity of thought and alluvial preoccupations (that are, I mean, in touch with the ancient clay) of the first peddlers born of the colour red, red-ochre as menstrua. These red-ochre menstrua which are the flag and colour of the Phaeacians recollect the memory of the most terrible of wars. Red-ochre, the banner of woman, against sperm-white, standard of the masculine sex. On the subject of principles, I shall return to this war which with no truce possible opposes feminine to masculine. For now, I want to dwell upon a war of wonders, of anomalies of nature, of splendid ritual spectacles, where man and woman merge through gold and the moon beneath the mantle of the officiating priest.

In Syria, the temples are sounding-boards for real marvels, magical revelation. And a considerable number of temples seemingly placed there only to illustrate this war, these rites, these anomalies, vie with each other for splendour across the whole expanse of Syria, some consecrated to the sun, others to the moon, without it being very easy to ascertain which is the female, which the male, and whether it be the male that has generated the female or vice versa. There was the temple of the sun at Emesa, that apparently had primacy over the other temples of the male

sun, as if there were several suns, with each particular one being the double of all the others, and the moon were the female double of a single and masculine god; and the temple of the sun-moon at Apamea paved throughout with moonstones; and the one to the moon at Hierapolis, near Emesa, outwardly consecrated to womanhood, comprising a male throne stunted and reduced, displayed no more than once a year and under the aegis of Apollo. Apollo, signifying the sun in motion upon its course, the sun freed from a part of himself, the highest, and considered in its powerful momentum, the sun descended from his throne and who accepts getting down to work, who is no longer king since not enthroned, nor immobile and is at work, and who has become the son of the king, as christ is son of God.

Lucian, a Greek author of the 12th century AD, tells of a visit he made to the temple of Astarte at Hierapolis.

Yet one might search in vain through his account for precise information as to the rites practised there. Nothing seems to have struck him apart from a quite superficial picturesqueness:

“The temple contains precious objects, ancient offertories, a host of wonderful objects, revered statues and deities ever-present. Indeed, the statues there exude, move themselves and deliver oracles.”

For if stones make sounds, if they fly, if they have breath, their own form of respiration, statues too have a breath that is without doubt the spirit of the god.

“Often”, says Lucian, “a voice may be heard within the sanctuary when the temple is closed. Many have heard it.”

We are to believe that once the temple opened,

hoaxing became impossible. There will always be tricksters alongside initiates.

“I have seen,” continues Lucian, “the secret treasury of the temple wherein are stored relics, numberless riches: woven stuffs, objects in gold and silver arranged separately.

“The temple contains, moreover, elephant tusks, pottery, Ethiopian fabrics; inside the vestibule are to be seen two enormous phalloi. One can also see in the temple precinct a small bronze of a seated man furnished with an enormous member.

“Even the location on which the temple of Hierapolis was built is a hill situated in the middle of the town. It is surrounded by two high walls. One of these walls is ancient, the other does not long predate our own epoch. The propylaea extend to about a hundred spans (one hundred and sixty metres). Under these propylaea have been sited phalloi thirty spans high (forty eight metres). A man climbs up one of these phalloi twice a year and stays on its top for a week. Here is the reason for this ascent: the populace is persuaded that the man on his lofty perch is conversing with the gods, asking them for prosperity throughout Syria, and that the latter may thus hear his prayer the more clearly. Others think the practice is in honour of Deucalion and a remembrance of that sad occasion when men fled to the mountains for fear of the flood. (The temple of Hierapolis contained a hole through which the floodwater is said to have drained away.) In order to ascend the phallus, the man would attach a thick rope around the phallus and his body, then climb with the aid of wooden struts projecting from the phallus and wide enough for him to set foot on. As he raised himself higher, he drew up the rope after him, as charioteers draw in the

reins. This we may never have witnessed, but anyone who has actually seen palm-trees climbed in Arabia or Egypt or elsewhere will understand what I mean. Having reached the end of his climb, our man lets down another rope carried with him and, using this very long rope, pulls up to him everything he needs: wood, clothing, utensils. With all this he makes himself a home, a sort of nest, and sits there aloft for the period of time mentioned. Some among the crowd which assembles bring him gold, others silver, others copper; the offerings are laid out in his view and the donor, supplying his name, withdraws.

“Another priest is standing there repeating the names; and when he has heard them, he offers up a prayer for each. While praying, he smites a brazen instrument which emits a loud and high-pitched sound.

“The man does not sleep at all. Should he let himself succumb to drowsiness, it is said that a scorpion arrives to rouse him with a painful sting. Such was the punishment consequent upon his sleep. There, the scorpion is held to be sacred and divine.

“The temple faces the rising sun. In form and structure it resembles the temples constructed in Ionia.”

It's here we get onto the scent of woman. If, instead of giving us an external description of the temple of Hierapolis – and his description is never more external than when he appears to gain access to, and penetrate, its inmost secrets – Lucian had had the slightest curiosity about principles, he would have examined the temple colonnades as to the extrahuman origin of those female sexes in stone which comprise the ornamentation thereon. This is the very principle of Ionian architecture.

But let us return to his documentary description.

This description has the advantage of establishing a

certain number of details, concrete though superficial, and it defines this innate taste for decorum, this love of marvels real or false, among a race for whom the theatre was not on a stage, but in life.

“A foundation raised two spans above ground level. Upon this foundation rests the temple. Entering it, one is seized with admiration: the doors are golden, inside gold shines everywhere, gleaming over the whole vault. One can smell a pleasant odour therein, similar to that which they say perfumes Arabia. The further one has journeyed, the more one inhales this delicious fragrance, and on departure it leaves one not, clothing is deeply steeped in it and thus one always preserves the memory thereof. Within, inside a remote chamber are set the statues of Jupiter and Juno, to whom the town’s inhabitants give names drawn from their own dialect. These two statues are of gold, and sedentary: Juno on lions, Jupiter upon bulls. The statue of Juno holds in one hand a sceptre, in the other a distaff; her head, crowned with rays of light, supports a turret and is girdled by a diadem which ordinarily adorns only the brow of Urania. Her raiment is covered with gold and extremely precious gemstones, some whitish, others clear as water, a great number fiery in hue; there are onyx sards, Egyptian jacinths, emeralds brought her by Indians, Medes, Armenians and Babylonians.

“The statue bears upon its head a diamond known as The Lamp. This casts during the night so bright a radiance that the temple is illuminated by it as by torches; during the day this light is far fainter: the jewel does however retain some of its fire. There is yet another marvel pertaining to this statue; if you look at it from the front, she looks back at you, but if you move away, her gaze follows you. If another person applies the same test from another

side, the statue does not fail to do likewise.

“Between these two statues may be seen a third, of gold also, but having nothing in common with the other two. This is the Semeion: she wears on her head a golden dove.

“On entering to the left of the temple, one finds a throne reserved for the Sun, but the figure of this god is not there; the Sun and Moon are the only two deities whose images they do not show, for they say there is no purpose in making statues of deities who show themselves every day in the sky.”

The cult of Baal at Emesa represented by the vigorous prick of Elagabal, the black god, paralleled, through its complex and overloaded rites, the cult of Tanith-Astarte, the moon, which held sway a few kilometres away, in the fragrant depths of the temple of Hierapolis. There it was, in this temple consecrated to woman's vagina, to her deified sex, that a sweating and bearded Apollo would emerge during the main festivals and would consecrate his oracles through the voice of the high priest, advancing or retiring upon the shoulders of his bearers. This Apollo all in gold, with a thick fringe of black horsehair affixed beneath his chin, arrives borne on men's backs, carried by a dozen or so tottering bearers who can scarcely manage to support his weight. The crowd bows down. The incense rises, as if streaming from every orifice. At the far end of the temple, the high priest awaits the god, – himself painted with insignia, laden with gemstones, rags, feathers; erect, frail, like a bell's tongue in air, dripping gold. In the silence that has suddenly fallen, footsteps are heard, voices, comings and goings of every sort in the building's underground rooms; all this comprising layers, superimposed storeys of whispers and

noises. Beneath the earth, the temple spirals down toward the depths; the chambers for the rituals are stacked one upon the other in vertical succession; it's as if the temple resembles a vast theatre where everything would be real.

At the moment of the appearance of the god, the drunken god who makes his guardians stagger, the temple vibrates in harmony with the stratified vortices of the basements, known of and located since remotest antiquity. In the ritual chambers reaching down to several hundred metres below ground level, the watchers pass the word, give voice, strike gongs, and make the horns moan so the vaults resound with echoes.

On the wing of cries, on rolling clouds of incense and noise, like moving masses of smoke, the high priest interrogates the oracle, sounds him out, invokes him with great shouts, rhythmically. Then one sees the madman-god, whose beard forms a great black hole in the midst of the gold in which he is utterly drowned; one sees the god grow agitated, foam at the mouth as if beset by rabies or stricken with inspiration.

If the oracle is favourable, if the response of the oracle is

“*yes*”,

the god pushes his bearers forwards.

If the oracle is unfavourable, if the response of the oracle is

“*no*”,

the god pulls his bearers backwards.

Lucian himself claims one day to have seen this god, weary of the questions put to him, free himself from the grasp of his guards and take a sudden flying leap upwards. One can picture the crowd, smitten with a kind of religious terror, rushing out of the temple, trampling over the parvis, crushing each other and swirling round the two great phaloi tall as pylons, temporarily superfluous, for all

their few hundred cubits of height.

All this scarcely accounts for one particular external aspect of the religion of Astarte, the moon, bizarrely intermingled with the rites of Apollo, the bearded sun. But one must emphasise the presence of those two pylons aligned one behind the other, standing in the temple's interior. The two pylons, representing phallos, stand on the same axis of the sun in order to form, at the point where the sun rises at a certain time of year, a sort of ideal line along which the temple is sited, so as to ensure that the shadow of the first column, the nearer one, coincides exactly with the shadow of the second.

That is the signal for an intensive sexual orgy in which everyone especially religious, and even those not so, would be careful to take part. But what for the Galli is an invitation to mutilation is, for the majority of the people, one for fornication. While the new virgins are sacrificing their freshly attained virginity upon the altar of the moon, their devout mothers, getting out of the family gynaeceum for a single day, give themselves to the temple sewer-men, the keepers of the sacred sluices who, also emerging from their darkness for a day, come to offer up their male sexes to the rays of the sun outside.

With these Galli who scatter their members as they run, who shed their blood in abundance on the altars of the Pythian god, women become suddenly besotted. And the husbands, the lovers of these women, respect these sacred loves.

Such amorous explosions last only a short time. The women soon leave the corpses of these men garbed in the female attire they have assumed during their fatal race.

This noted, we must recognise that the Syria which feuded with the temples, which forgot the war male and female once waged in chaos, and those wars the Phaeacians or Phoenicians, who aren't Semites, waged in former times against the Semites, not through any notion of male and female, but rather of masculine and feminine – the Syria which in its temples reconciled these two principles and their multiple incarnations, had nonetheless a feeling for a certain natural magic: Syria believed in prodigies and sought them out; but above all, it preserved an idea of the magic that is not natural: Syria believed in zones of the spirit, in mystic lines of influence, in a kind of roving magnetism, something that took on a form, and this was expressed by the figures on their maps of the Barbarian heavens, which have no connection with astronomical charts.

One woman, alone of her kind in History, was the incarnation of this magic and these wars: Julia Domna.

At the junction of the real and the unreal, she elevated her grandiose views, sustained in underhand fashion by the afflatus of the speaking stones, and to her the marvellous served simultaneously as décor and as mirror.

Julia Domna, who waged war, who sparked off and instigated wars to satisfy her womanly ambitions and schemes of domination, was equally responsible for that accumulation of marvels filling the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written by Philostratus: Apollonius of Tyana, the white magician, who recharged the earth's spirituality via emblems made inside the tombs.

I forgive Julia Domna her marriage to that sort of

Roman madman named Septimius Severus; and I forgive her for her sons, even madder and more criminal than their father, because of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* – written at her behest, and all of which I take literally.

Besides, without Julia Domna there would have been no Heliogabalus, although I think that but for this pederastic alliance of royalty and priesthood in which the woman aims at being male and the male surrenders himself to the allures of femininity, Julia Domna's regal femininity, imbued with the sense of the marvellous and with intelligence, would never have thought it might shine forth from the throne of the Roman empire. That took outside circumstances, and her being a manipulative woman. All this combined to make a monster who goaded an emperor into war, yet someone who, once she was done with war, encouraged poets at her court as she would encourage quacks and sorcerers. All her lovers were serving folk, servants to some purpose, who served her. She fused sex and spirit – and never the spirit without the sex, nor yet, indeed, the sex devoid of spirit. In Syria, while still a young girl, she slept with allcomers, but always with doctors, politicians, poets. She gave herself to people in her own genealogical line, without bothering about *their* lineage. To be queen first and foremost: her fucks led her to royalty. And one imagines she must have made Septimius Severus dance to her tune in 179 in Syria, when he had just assumed command of the 4th Scythian Legion – and she did so until her marriage, shortly afterwards. And even thereafter.

She spent without counting the cost; and unlike Julia Moesa did not know how to weave a subtle intrigue though she laid great plans. Ambition above all, and strength. Ambition almost in the blood and, once, even

above blood. When her own two sons fought to the death, she abandoned the dead for the living, since the survivor was called Caracalla, and he would reign. And because with her intelligence she dominated Caracalla and kept the throne, while she packed him off to wage war far afield.

A Latin historian, Dio Cassius, recounts that Julia Domna slept with Caracalla in the blood of her son Geta, assassinated by Caracalla. But Julia Domna only ever slept with royalty, with that of the sun primarily, whose daughter she was; and, later on, with that of Rome, which she covered as a stallion does a mare.

Still, that vigour came not without indulgence. There were distinctly good times to be had at the court of Julia Domna since, under the auspices of her sister Julia Moesa and the latter's daughters, she arrived to establish in Rome the customs of Syria.

Floods of sperm flowed, perhaps, but it was a stream of intelligence, that river of sperm that was poured forth and knew it was not lost.

For indulgence, here, is only the froth of vigour: a wave-crest shuddering in the wind.

Nothing disheartened this extraordinary woman. When war was off, poetry was back. And during this time, her sister was there under her thumb and her daughters too, through whom she would perpetuate the race of the Sun.

Heliogabalus was born at Antioch in the year 204, during the reign of Caracalla.

And Caracalla, Moesa, Domna, Soemia the mother of Heliogabalus and at that time widow of Varius Antoninus Macrinus, and Mamaea – mother of Alexander Severus and widow of Gessius Marcianus, curator of crops or of waters – all of them slept together, acting frenziedly and banqueting while all around themselves they provoked

the trances of the Syrian fakirs.

Then there occurred, a long way away – near a temple of the male moon, the god Lunus – the assassination of Caracalla as he got off his horse for a piss.

And Macrinus, the new emperor, installed himself upon the throne of Rome without ever returning there, imagining he could govern from furthest Syria, where he then was, and whence he had perpetrated the assassination of Caracalla.

So perhaps the royal status of Julia Domna had had it. However, Macrinus left her in place: he respected her; – and Julia Domna never got over it. For all that, she was no longer really queen. She kept the title, the honours, the escort (military power stood for something), and, above all, a queen's fortune (the fortune the most important thing); but she no longer had a role in the governance of the empire and she discreetly conspired to regain such control.

Macrinus learned of all this, and recalled to Syria post-haste Julia Domna, Julia Moesa, Julia Soemia and Julia Mamaea, as well as little Varius Antoninus of the Bassianic clan of Emesa whom we shall call Heliogabalus, although he has not yet received the name.

Heliogabalus's mother happened to be in Rome when he was conceived, and consequently Caracalla might have been his father, despite being only fourteen at the time. Yet why shouldn't a fourteen year old Roman, son of a Syrian woman, have managed to sire a child by an eighteen year old Syrian woman? Heliogabalus wasn't actually born in Rome, but as luck had it, at Antioch, in the course of one of those mysterious shuttles to and fro which the Bassian family would make between the court of Rome and the temple of Emesa, by way of the military capital of

Syria.

On her return to Syria, Julia Domna, who'd always loved royalty above all else, and for whom love was really an also ran (the poetry of Apollonius of Tyana and a few others always having been, to her, the highest form of royalty) – Julia Domna, who couldn't stand losing the crown, decided to let herself starve to death; and this she did.

Here reinstalled in Syria are Julia Moesa and her brood.

It is the year 211 AD.

Heliogabalus is about seven, and already for two years he's been priest of the sun.

But surrounding the tiny kingdom of Emath ruled over by Heliogabalus, is the Syria of white deserts: it would seem important nevertheless to know what becomes of it.

From the military viewpoint, Syria is calm. From the physical and geographical viewpoint, it is more or less identical to how it is today. Today the Orontes, which used to rinse the walls of the temple of Emesa via a sort of diverted arm, has ceased rinsing them. Antioch is called Antioch and Emesa is called Homs. Of the temple of the Sun nothing remains, and one might think it has vanished underground. It truly has vanished underground, for it's still there, and a mosque has been built half a stade to its right, facing the setting sun; but a plain paved square covers its fabulous foundations, for which nobody has ever taken a notion to dig.

As for the town of Homs, it stinks like Emesa stank, since love, meat and shit are all to be found in the

open. And pastry shops are near latrines, ceremonial slaughterers beside ordinary butchers. The whole of it shouts out, spills forth, makes love, squirts poison and sperm, just as we ourselves might hawk and spit. In the alleyways, taking huge rhythmic paces like those the vast statues of Ahasuerus might have made, merchants sing out in Homs as they used to drone in Emesa, before their stalls, all veritable auction sales.

They wear the long robes one reads of in the Gospels, and they rush about amid the dreadful smells, like mountebanks or oriental clowns. And in front of them, in 211, a crowd passes, slaves and aristocrats thronging together, and above them on the town heights gleam the shining walls of the millennial temple of the Sun.

Leaving the market alleys where, amid the alimentary rubble, fat sewer-rats rot away, we reach the actual temple whose hidden splendour has given some of the ancients themselves cause for reflection. Half a stade from the temple, the odours fade, silence falls. A sun-filled void separates the temple from the lower town, since the temple of the Sun at Emesa, like almost all the Syriac temples, looks down from an elevated monticule. This monticule is built from the bowels of other temples, from palace debris and vestiges of earlier earthly convulsions whose origin, if one wished to determine it, would take us back to a Flood far more remote than that of Deucalion. A low surrounding wall of pinkish clay closes off the temple at the hillock's top, succeeded, at a distance as sizeable as the Place de la Concorde, by a second wall of rare stones covered in a glaze of glistening mica. The door of the second enclosure once open, the sacred sounds, the noises inside, begin to be heard, and a disconcerting spectacle meets the eye.

There is the temple, with the eagle with wings outspread, which guards the sacred Phallus. Great waves of argent light pulse over its marble surfaces, bringing to mind the myriad cries which in the course of the great solar festivals seem to be uttered by Pythias Apollo. And all around the temple, in multitudes issuing from huge black sewer-mouths, stream forth the servants of the rites, as if born of the earth's own sweat. For in the temple of Emesa, this service entrance is below the ground, and nothing must disturb the empty space bordering the temple beyond the outermost wall. A river of men, animals, objects, supplies, victuals, originating in various corners of the commercial town, converges towards the underground passages of the temple, creating around its supply rooms something of the tracery of an immense spider's web.

This mysterious intersection of men, of live or flayed beasts; of metals humped by a species of little Cyclops that only once a year sees daylight; of foodstuffs, of things fabricated – creates at certain hours of the day a paroxysm, a cluster of complaints and of noises, but it never actually stops.

Below ground, butchers, bearers, carters, distributors – who emerge from the temple's depths and rummage around the town all day long so as to provide the greedy god with his four daily feeds – crowd past the sacrificial priests drunk with blood, incense and molten gold; passing the smelters, the timekeeper heralds, and the blacksmiths pinned inside their narrow cells the year round who leave them only on the prophetic day of the Pythian Games, also called Helia Pythia.

Around the four huge ritual feasts of the solar deity revolves a whole tribe of priests, slaves, heralds, beadles. And the feasts themselves aren't simple, for with each gesture, each rite, each bloody piece of handiwork, each knife dipped in an acid and wiped, with every new

vestment Bassianus doffs or adopts, with the striking of each sound – to each abrupt clash of gold and silver, of amiantus or electrum; to every hinge creaking and resounding through the gleaming underground passages with all the din of the Cosmic Wheel, there corresponds a whirling flurry of dark and tortured notions, ideas in love with form, and which burn to be reincarnated.

A mass of gold flung into a pit fed by the Cyclopeans, at the very instant the Grand High Priest frantically ravages a vulture's throat and drinks its blood, intimates a theory about the alchemical transmutation of feelings into forms and forms to feeling, according to the ancient Egyptians' sacred ritual.

But to this notion of bloodletting and the material transmutation of forms there corresponds an idea of purification. It has to do with isolating the very essence of any sensual ecstasy experienced momentarily and individually by the priest, so that this explosion and this rapid outburst of frenzy may return, unencumbered by matter, to the first principle from which it's been born.

Then there are the innumerable rooms consecrated to a single action or even to one simple gesture, with which the underbelly of the temple and its rumbling bowels seem to be crammed. The rite of ablution, the rite of abandon, diversion, renunciation; the rite, in every sense, of absolute nakedness; the rite of the biting power and unforeseen bursting forth of the sun, paralleling the sight of a wild boar; the rite of the savagery of the Alpine wolf and that of the stubbornness of the ram; the rite of the warm zephyrs and that of the great solar conflagration at the time when the first male scored his victory over the serpent; all these rituals, in ten thousand chambers, are observed daily or monthly, biennially, – they link a robe to a gesture, a stride to a spurt of blood.

For that side of the religion of the sun as practised

at Emesa took place on the surface, and what the majority of the people would see was just the watered-down and abridged part, whose tormenting and abominable inspiration only the priests of the Pythian God could reveal.

If a revolving phallus, swathed in innumerable robes, stands for whatever was dark about the cult, the bustling storeys that took the notion of the sun far underground physically enacted through their snares and their sharp-edged spells, a world of infinitely grim imaginings, whose more ordinary sexual narratives are merely their external garb.

Those ideas which the sun cult practised at Emesa codified, touched upon the cosmic malice of a principle in which the error periodically committed by adherents was to procure a detestable outcome of events, all the while revering that principle's darkness.

The inverted triangle the thighs make when the belly sinks between them as into a corner, reproduces the obscure cone of Erebus, inside that malefic space into which the devotees of the solar phallus, who therein went hand-in-hand with the devourers of the lunar menses, would interject their exaltations.

So it was not coitus but death, and death in the hopeless light, in the downfall of a piece of God – whose impotent face all these initiatory religions reveal – a face simultaneously impotent and wicked, like a gold coin which, so as to show its sovereignty over the realm of low denomination, will watch a part of itself fall away, owing to the weight of the lead.

And all this, revealing the frightful aspect of a religion nonetheless monotheist, proves that God himself becomes only what one makes of him.

There, where the pyramids of Egypt with their solid triangles summon the white light, one must imagine at the subterranean centre of the temple of Emesa a sort of triangular filter, a filter for human blood.

The blood from the sacrifices up above cannot be lost down the usual sewers; it must not – mingled with the usual human evacuations: urine, sweat, sperm, spittle, or excrement – find its way back to the primitive waters of the sea. And so beneath the temple of Emesa there is a system of special sewers wherein the human blood rejoins the plasma of certain animals.

Through these sewers, coiling into broiling corkscrews whose circles diminish the further they descend to the depths of the earth, the blood of those sacrificed according to the needful rites will find its way back to the sacred recesses of the earth, reaching toward the primitive geological seams, the congealed cracks of chaos. This pure blood, thinned and refined by the rituals, and rendered acceptable to the god of the underworld, splashes the groaning deities of Erebus, whose breath finally purifies it.

Now, from the tip of its phallus to the last loop of its solar sewers, the temple with the profusion of its niches, fountains, bas-reliefs, its glistening stones studded like nails into its walls, is wholly contained within a sort of immense circle that corresponds to the spasmodic circle of the sky.

At the very centre of this illusory circle and akin to that animated point of a web when the spider is poised therein, may be found the filter chamber resembling an inverted triangle. And the filter's hollow tip corresponds to the glans of the phallus as seen from above.

Into this narrow chamber, the high priest alone descends by rope, like a bucket down the depths of a well.

The descent is made once a year, at midnight, to the

accompaniment of strange rituals in which the male member assumes a disproportionate importance.

This triangle had at its sides a type of rampart walk with a broad parapet. And off this walkway opened other chambers, without exits toward the daylight, but where for a period of a week, equivalent to the Greek or Roman Saturnalia, dreadful slaughter was perpetrated.

Now I return to Heliogabalus who is young and enjoying himself. – From time to time they dress him up. He is thrust onto the temple steps and is made to effect rituals his mind can't grasp.

He officiates with six hundred amulets that form girdles about his body. He whirls around the altars consecrated to the gods and goddesses; he absorbs rhythms, chants, odours and multifarious notions; – and the day comes when everything coheres, when the sun's blood fills his head like dew, and each droplet of solar dew becomes an energy and an idea.

It's too easy to say that it was Julia Moesa, mouse or sulphur, who led the whole intrigue designed to put Heliogabalus upon the throne of the Roman Caesars. All those who have been talked about and who succeeded in life did so because they had something; and as for those like Heliogabalus who managed to shock History, they had qualities which could have changed the course of History, if circumstances had been propitious to them.

Julia Moesa was here superior to her sister Domna: she never sought anything for herself; never confused either the Roman royalty or the solar sovereignty of the Bassians with her own little self, and she did know how to play down her personality.

Sent back to Emesa by Macrinus, with her she transported both the treasure of the empire amassed by

Julia Domna and the treasure of the Syriac priesthood which was mouldering somewhere in Antioch; and all this she shut away inside the inner sanctum of the temple, universally considered inviolable and sacred.

Mouseykin, she scurried round and round, ceaselessly doing her mousework. She amplified and everywhere nurtured the fame of Heliogabalus, nurtured it in all respects and by every means possible. And she wasn't fussy about the means used.

On the pedestal she placed under the sacred statue of the little prince, the beauty of Heliogabalus played its part, as did his surprising intelligence and his precocious development.

Heliogabalus early on had that sense of unity which is at the root of all myths and all names; and his decision to call himself Elagabalus and the zeal he showed in living down his family and name and in identifying himself with the god who protected them provides a first proof of his magical monotheism, not only of the word, but the deed.

This monotheism he then introduced into the things he did. And it's the monotheism, the universal unity, that obstructs mere impulse and the multiplicity of things, which *I* call anarchy.

To have a sense of the profound unity of things is to have a sense of anarchy, – and of the effort required to reduce things while restoring them to unity. Whoever has the sense of unity also has the sense of the multiplicity of things, of that dust of appearances through which one must pass in order to reduce and destroy them.

And Heliogabalus, in so far as he was king, found himself in the best possible position to reduce human multiplicity and restore it through blood, cruelty and war to the sense of unity.

2.

THE WAR OF PRINCIPLES

Take the Syria of today, with its mountains, sea, rivers, its noisy towns and something vital seems to be missing – but in the way the lively and seething pus goes missing from an abscess after it has been drained. Something frightful, replete, hard and, if you like, abominable, has suddenly departed, abruptly as an air pocket empties; or as God’s thunderous ‘Fiat’ volatilized the whirlwinds; as a spiral of vapours vanishes in the sun’s deceptive rays – something has left the air of the heavens and the decayed town walls, something to be seen no more.

At the moment of its death – just when the religion of Ichtheus, the perfidious Fish, made signs of the cross over the guilty parts of the body – the religion of Elagabalus exalted the dangerous activity of the dark member, the organ of reproduction.

Between the shriek of the man of the Galli who castrates himself and runs through the town brandishing his still stiff and neatly sliced cock, and the howl of the oracle baying on the verge of the sacred lakes, there was born a grave and spellbinding harmony, based upon mysticism. Not a sounding chord but a hypnotic harmony of things, which demonstrated how – in Syria just before

the appearance of Heliogabalus and for some centuries after him, up until the crucifixion, there hung from the façade of the temple at Palmyra the Roman Emperor Valerian's flayed carcass daubed in red – this dark cult didn't fear to display its charms to the male sun, whom it thereby made the accomplice of its dismal efficacy.

What can one say of it, and of what in the end did it consist, that cult of the Sun at Emesa, for whose diffusion, after all, Heliogabalus gave his life?

It wasn't enough that the ruins in the desert still reeked of man, that a menstrual breath might run thence into the masculine whirlwinds of the sky; it wasn't enough for the eternal struggle of man and woman to be channelled through the grooved ravines of the stones, via the overheated columns of the air.

The stupefying magical colloquy which opposes heaven to earth, the moon to the sun, and which the religion of the Fish, Ichtheus, destroyed, is, although it no longer holds sway within the ritualistic ethos of the festivals, at the very origin of our current apathy.

With hindsight one can pour scorn upon the blood-drenched rites of the Tauroboli, to which – in a sort of mystical line whose course has never been superseded, running from the High Plateaux of Iran to the exclusive precincts of Rome – the adepts of the Mithraic cult devoted themselves; one can hold one's nose in horror at the mingled emanation of blood, sperm, sweat and menses, combined with that intimate stench of putrefying flesh and unclean sex rising from the human sacrifices; one can exclaim in disgust at the sexual pruritus of the women stimulated to frenzy by the sight of a member freshly torn off; one can deplore the craziness of people entranced, who, from the rooftops of the houses into which the Galli flung their members, tossed them down onto the shoulders of women's garments, the while invoking their gods;

which is not to say that all these rites didn't contain a certain amount of violent spirituality that went beyond their sanguinary excesses.

If in the religion of Christ heaven is one myth, in the religion of Elagabalus at Emesa heaven is a reality, but a reality that acts like another, and reacts dangerously upon that other. All these rituals unify heaven – heaven or what is separated from heaven, man or woman, under the sacrificial knife.

That is because there are in heaven gods, forces in other words, which are seeking only to swoop down.

The force that builds up tidal waves, that makes the sea lap at the moon, that has lava rising from the depths of volcanoes; the force that shakes buildings and creates deserts; the force red and unpredictable that sends thoughts like so many crimes seething through our heads, and crimes innumerable, like lice; the force that supports and aborts life – these are concrete manifestations of an energy whose heavier aspect is the Sun.

As for anyone who rakes up the gods of the ancient religions and stirs them around at the bottom of his hod as though with a streetcleaner's spiked stick; as for him who is driven crazy by the multiplicity of names; as for him who in straddling one country and another, finds similarities between the gods and the roots of an identical etymology in the names that make up these gods; and as for anyone who, having inspected all these names, the clues to their powers and the meaning of their attributes, complains about the polytheism of the ancients, whom he calls accordingly Barbarians – that person is himself a Barbarian, namely a European.

If nations, as time progressed, made the gods in their own image; if they extinguished the phosphorescent idea of the gods and, having left the orbit of the names encircling them, they revealed themselves to be powerless

to reascend via the concentric contacts of forces, via the diligent and concrete magnetization of energies, as far as the initial discharge, up to the revelation of the principle which these gods wanted to manifest, one must historically and partially blame the nations not the principles – still less that superior and all-encompassing idea of the world which Paganism wished to restore to us. And since, deep down, ideas are only to be judged by their form, one may say that, trapped in time, the development of countless myths – paralleling within underground passages chockful of solar temples the stratified congestion of deities – no longer gives us an idea of that formidable cosmic tradition at the core of the pagan world, any more than the dances of oriental ballet and the stylised passes of the fakirs recently seen on European stages are likely to restore to us the sense of freedom without images or the mysterious commotion of images resulting from a genuinely sacred gesture.

The holy spirit is that which cleaves firmly to principles with a dark force of identification resembling sexuality, – sexuality on the level closest to our organic consciousness, our consciousness blocked by the depth of its fall. I wonder whether that fall does represent sin. For in the area where such matters arise, this identification goes by the name of Love, one form of which is universal charity and the other, the more terrible, becomes the sacrifice of the soul, meaning the death of individuality.

All these struggles of god with god, power against power, the gods feeling those forces they are thought to control crackling at their fingertips; this separation of the power from the god, the god reduced to no more than a sort of word, falling, an effigy dedicated to the most hideous idolatries; this seismic din and physical convulsion in the heavens; this way of riveting sky into heaven, earth onto earth; these mansions and expanses of heaven which are handed on and pass from mind to mind, with each of us,

inside our heads, refashioning our gods; this interim occupation of heaven, here by a god and his wrath, there by the same god mutated; this takeover of power, succeeded as though by the perpetual spasmodic pulsation, top to bottom and back again, of other takeovers of power; this respiration of cosmic faculties, similar, on a higher level to the coarse and buried faculties dormant within our own individual natures – and for every faculty there is a corresponding god and a power, and we are heaven on earth, and they have become the earth, the earth drawn into the absolute; – this stormy instability of the heavens which we call Paganism, and which sometimes strikes us blind and lashes us with its truths, is us, it's our Christian Europe, it's History that's fabricated it.

To replace it in time, this proliferating deployment of the gods whom the nations in their historical progression spread out in turn, across the skies, – and often the same location in the visible sky is occupied by opposed images of nature, and these gods are man and woman, and the woman-god overlays the masculine god's image, identical to hers; and Ishtar, a name originally masculine, ended up signifying the moon, and the moon at the selfsame point in space and time encumbered with both phallus and **κτελς**, fucked herself and dispersed her dew-tide of children; – to replace it in time, this footdragging around principles affects their initial validity no more than the masturbation of an onanist idiot affects the principle of reproduction.

If nations ended up by considering the gods as beings veritably separate, if they mistook the significance of these gods, we should note that each nation, taken in isolation and at the same moment in time and space, has always tried to organise its powers hierarchically, and that wherever a feminine one overlaid a masculine one and vice versa – in the minds and hearts of the people who placed

above them upon pedestals those essentially contradictory gods, the masculine was masculine and the feminine feminine with no inversion of nomenclature possible; I must say forthwith that the same name would never apply to two forms, made, apparently, so that one might devour the other; and the Syria of the era of Heliogabalus took to a supreme point the notion of this mysterious fusibility.

What differentiates us from the pagans is that, at the root of all their beliefs, there is a dreadful effort not to believe in man, in order to maintain contact with the whole of creation, with divinity, that is.

I know well enough that the smallest impulse of love brings us nearer God than all the knowledge we may have about creation and its stages.

But Love, which is a power, involves Will. One doesn't love without the will, which passes through the consciousness; – it's the awareness of the consensual separation that leads us to detachment from things, that leads us back to the unity of God. One wins love first through the consciousness, and thereafter through the strength of the love.

However, in my father's house there are many mansions. And he who is cast onto the earth with the consciousness of an idiot, after God knows what travails and sins in other states or other worlds – which have brought on his idiocy; but with just enough of the awareness he needs in order to love, and to love in a detached manner, with no messing about, on a wonderful spontaneous impulse; whom everything that *is* the world eludes, and who knows of love only the flame – the flame uninfluenced by the hearth and home mob – will have less than his neighbour whose mind joins up all creation and to whom love is a finicky and horrid separation.

Yet – and it’s always a tale of a thimbleful, at that – he shall have all he can absorb. He’ll enjoy an exclusive bliss, but one which, filling his cup, gives him too the feeling of infinity.

Until the day when this meek wretch is swept away like everything else. His sense of infinity is snatched away from him. Great and small, we shall all be judged according to our delightful paradise, according to that bliss which isn’t everything, I mean it’s not the be all and end all, the Almighty, i.e. Nothing. We shall be rendered down, merged within the One, the Only, the great cosmic One that soon shall give way to the infinite Zero of God.

This said, I hark back to the contradictory names of the gods. And I call these gods by name; I don’t call them gods. I’m saying that these names were names for forces, ways of being, modes of the great power of being that changed into principles, essences, substances, elements. The ancient religions from the very beginning wished to take a look at the Almighty. They didn’t separate heaven from man, man from all creation, since the origin of the universe. And one might even say that from the beginning they understood creation.

Catholicism closed the door, as Buddhism had done before it. They deliberately and knowingly closed the door, while telling us we didn’t need to know.

Now, I consider that we do need to know, and that our only need is to know. If we could love, and love at one fell swoop, knowledge would be useless; but we have unlearned how to love, under the influence of a sort of fatal law that originates in the very weight and richness of creation. We’re in creation up to our necks, we’re in it with every organ: the strong and the subtle. And it’s hard to reascend to God via the graded road of the organs, when

those organs fix us within the world we inhabit and tend to make us believe in its sole reality. The absolute is an abstraction, and abstraction requires a strength opposed to our fallen human estate.

Should we be astonished, after that, if the pagans ended up becoming idolators, coming to confuse effigies with principles, and if in the long run the attraction of principles escaped them?

And don't we, as Christians, do likewise? Haven't we too our effigies, totems, scraps of god which, in the hearts and minds of the individuals who worship them, also come to settle into fixed forms, to split off into a multitude of gods?

A thing named is a dead thing, and it's dead because it is set apart. Too much devotion to crowns of thorns, wooden crosses, hearts of Jesus venerated here and there, Bloods and Chrisms, – and finally to the innumerable Virgins who, black, white, yellow or red, respond to as many different adorations – represent for individuals surrendering to them the same spiritual danger, the same threat of falling into an irremediable idolatry, as the shifts in creative energy in the pagan mysteries.

God is thought of in the consciousness, not the cosmic consciousness, but the individual consciousness, and, as for a consciousness thinking in images and forms, can it ever be said that there's any man who hasn't ended up taking his images for his thoughts?

The Christian dogma is contained in the Creed, I admit, but from the Creed to my individual consciousness there's a world of interpretations, libraries full of saints, heresies, and synods. And only hell has never altered.

Besides, Catholicism, which closes the door of knowledge, opens that of mysticism. It rendered secret what ought to be secret. It called what is at the root of ancient initiations by a harsher name. Yet the final result is

the same, despite the difference of vocabulary and conceptions.

In love, formerly, there was knowledge; and I doubt whether – with their flesh on fire, ravished to the very height of their being, unto the vertigo of him who is no more – the Christian saints ever managed to transcend the terrifying chasm wherein everything that is dwindles and ends as that which is not.

Once again I return to the gods, to those ravaging gods who devoured one another like crabs in a basket.

It's enthralling to note that the older the cult, the more it shapes a terrible image of the gods; and that only their terrible aspect can make us understand the gods.

That's because the gods are only good for the Creation, and the battle in chaos.

In matter, there are no gods. In the balance of nature, there are no gods. The gods are born from the separation of forces and will die of their reunion.

The closer they are to creation, the more frightful countenances they have, countenances corresponding to the principles within them.

Plato speaks of the nature of the gods, he identifies them with principles without of course allowing us a clearer glimpse into these principles which are forces and into these forces which are gods.

Jamblicus was questioned as to why the sun and moon which are gods, are visible, when gods have no bodies.

And here's what Jamblicus replies in *The Book of the Mysteries*:

“The gods are not contained within their bodies at all, yet their divine lives and actions contain these; they are in no wise translated to bodies, but the bodies they contain

are translated to the divine cause.”

It was the coarser classes of the population that created the gods they chuck in our faces, and if – to mention only authors traduced in the classroom – we were still now capable of understanding Plato as he should be understood, we could, through the path of classical esotericism, get back to a notion of divinities – principles which mustn't be confused with the anthropomorphic representations of the gods.

And here, moreover, is the nub of the question:

Are there really principles? Separate principles, I mean, which exist behind things? Or, in other words, do the gods of the pagan nomenclature have a less positive and less valid existence than the principles which we use to reason with? And that question gives rise to another: Are there in the mind of man faculties truly separate?

Furthermore, one may wonder if a principle is anything other than a simple verbal facility; and that leads back to the question of knowing whether there's anything outside the thinking mind, and if, in the absolute, principles exist as realities, or as beings that divide their energies.

To what extent – and going how far back towards the origin of things, of principles, existing as separate realities – do they escape a witticism about principles?

And are there in man himself varieties of faculties – principles which would have individual existences and might live separated?

Are there moments of eternity that can be fixed like notes of music are set down and fall into place via numbers? – and are these notes separate?

For the alchemists, these defining moments of eternity correspond to the appearance of the star in the

crucible.

This question seems stupid to me. Since the absolute needs nothing. Not good, nor angel, nor man, nor spirit, nor principle, nor matter, nor continuity.

But if in continuity, in duration, in space, in heaven above and hell below, principles exist separately, it isn't as principles that they exist, but as definite organisms. Creative energy is a phrase, but one which makes things possible by arousing them with its sustaining flame. And just as in the created world there are all qualities of matter, all aspects of possibility, of countless elements, themselves reckoned by their density, so with the creative flux which catches fire on contact with things, – and every shot life fires at things is equivalent to a thought – that flux within closed organisms, and those who go from our gross corporeality to the unlikeliest subtlety comprise what one calls Human Beings, and they are nothing else but puffs of breath in eternity.

Principles are only of value to the mind, and to the thinking mind; but outside the mind that thinks, a principle is reduced to nothing.

One doesn't think up fire, water, earth, sky, one recognises and names them, since they exist; and under that water, fire, earth or sky, beneath mercury, sulphur and salt, there are still subtler substances the mind can't name since it hasn't learned to know them – yet something subtler than the mind, things far more profound than anything in our heads are pressing, and might be recognised wherever the mind has learned to name them. For if principles are of value to the mind, things have value for things; and there's no pause in the subtlety of things, any more than there's any obstacle to the subtlety of the mind.

At the pinnacle of fixed essences, and corresponding to the innumerable modalities of matter, is that which – in the subtlety of essences, in the violence of the igneous fire – corresponds to the generative principles of things and what the thinking mind may call principles, but that with respect to the seething totality of human beings, correspond to conscious degrees of the Will within Energy.

There's no principle of subtle matter, no principle of sulphur or salt, but beyond salt, mercury or sulphur, are substances still subtler, which right up to the very height of organic vibration account for the diversity of the mind via things; and for him who asks to be presented with these things, there are only the numbers to account for their separate existence.

I'm certainly not for the Spirit-Matter duality; but between the proposition that's all in favour of the spirit and the other one all in favour of matter, I say there's no conciliation possible, for as long as one lives in a world where spirit can become some thing only if it consents to materialise.

Matter exists only *through* the spirit, and the spirit only *in* matter. But at the end of the day, it's always the spirit which retains supremacy.

And as for this question of knowing if there are principles which might account for things, it now seems to me easy to reply that there are no principles, but that there are things; and likewise that there are solid things, and rarity in these solids; and assemblages of unique matter that give an idea of perfection – just as there are beings to account for the Being who issues from the Oneness.

And all this only applies to the world which is

puffed up and assumes harshness, and to the mind's eye cast into the centre of things, – when it is cast therein. But it's too simple to see that if in the mind there is nothing, everything that is, is a function of the spirit. And things are functions of the spirit. They have an ephemeral and functional use; but that is only true of what's created.

Nothing exists only as function, and all functions lead back to one; – and the liver that turns the skin yellow, the brain that syphilises itself, the bowel that extrudes ordure, the blazing look that takes the place of flames – they boil down for me, when I die, to my regret at living and my desire to be finished with it.

Besides, one can carry out the same destructive or rather, repressive, operation – which eliminates the accidental aspect of things so as to direct them back to unity – on no matter what subject. As for me, I'm doing this on the subject of Numbers; since for those who think in terms of Numbers, that also directs one back to a detached faculty, which lives only if detached and at the moment when it is detached; yet one doesn't need to add things up in order to account for their duration. I'm obliged to make a huge mental effort to envisage that which exists in respect of quantity, or rather of what one divides and tots up and finally converts into an ominous total. And be it not said that Number, in the sense in which Pythagoras meant it, doesn't take us back to quantity but on the contrary, to the absence of quantity. For in its highest sense the written numeral is a symbol for what one can't manage to add up or measure.

I think I have already imposed upon my mind terrible enough standpoints concerning the absence of quantity for me to have acquired at least an inkling of this. Yet whether or not one works it out, that state which results

in the separation of principles, meaning effigies, obeys laws whose Numbers can yield revelation.

Numbers, that's to say the degrees of vibration.

And if the number 12 renders the idea of Nature at its perfect point of expansion, integral maturity, that is because it contains three times the whole cycle of things, which one represents by 4; 4 being the number of accomplishment in the abstract or of the cross within the circle, and the 4 cardinal points or nodes of magnetic vibration through which everything that is must pass; and 3 is the triangle that thrice breathes the circle, the circle that contains 4, and rules over the Triad, that is the first module, the first effigy or first image of the separation from the unity.

All these states or nodes, all these points, these degrees of the great cosmic vibration are interconnected and communicate with each other.

But if 3, pure or abstract, stays fixed in principle, 4 alone falls into the tangible where the soul revolves, and 12 into the reality that one treads underfoot, and where one has to fight to eat, but without eating.

For if 12 makes war possible, it still doesn't cause it to be born, and 12 is the possibility of war, the teasingness of war without war, and there's 12 in the case of Tantalus, in that depiction of stable but hostile forces, because they're opposable and cannot yet devour each other.

The war of effigies, representations or principles, with myths on their external visage and effective magic beneath, is the only explanation that makes sense of the ancient world. It shows in plain language the nature of its

preoccupations.

And this war from on high is symbolised by meat. It's been incarnated at least once in meat; it has disturbed, on at least one occasion and for a good long time, the government of human affairs, through inexpiable struggles, wherein men who were fighting one another knew why they fought.

It has set one against another – not two nations, not two peoples, not two civilisations, but two fundamental races, two images of the spirit made flesh and which fight each other in the flesh.

And this war of the spirit battling with itself, which lasted as long as several civilisations put together, as one can see in the Puranas, wasn't legendary but real. It took place. And every principle, each with its strengths and energies, joined in. And above all, the two principles on which hangs cosmic life: masculine and feminine.

I shall not tell of Irshu's schism [1], but he it was who made the war, who set man on one side, woman on the other; who returned to fleshly beings the notion of their superior heredity; who separated sun from moon, fire from water, the air from the earth, silver from copper and heaven from hell. For the idea of the metaphysical constitution of man, of an ideal and sublime hierarchy of circumstances, into which death casts us in order to reduce us to an absence of circumstance, to a kind of inconceivable Non-Being that has no connection with nothingness, is based on the separation of the spirit into two modes, male and female: with regard to these, it's a question of knowing which is the other's principle, which led to the birth of the other, which is male or female, active or passive.

It seems that these two principles wished first to settle scores on their own and above the masses of

unthinking men who were fighting one another.

But the war only became relentless, only turned truly inexorable and merciless the day it turned religious, and when men were conscious of the disorder of the principles that presided over their anarchy.

It was in order to cut short this separation of principles, to reduce their essential antagonism, that they took up arms and fell upon one another, quite convinced that only a reduction of carnal substance was able to provide counterbalance in heaven and to provoke their fusion, this positioning of essences, which is obtained with blood alone.

And this war is wholly within the religion of the sun, and one finds it in some degree, sanguinary yet magical, in the religion of the sun practised at Emesa; and although for centuries the warriors had not been prompted to clash, Heliogabalus followed its trail in the line of aspersion of the Tauroboli, that magical line which on returning to Rome, he'd mark simultaneously with physical cruelty, theatre, poetry and real blood.

If instead of dwelling upon his depravities because such anecdotal description panders to their taste for lewdness and their love of glibness, the historians had truly tried to understand Heliogabalus, – it's not so much in his own personal psychology, but rather in the religion of the sun that they should have sought the origin of his excesses, his follies and his highly mystical lewdness which had the gods as coadjutors and witnesses. Above all, they should have noted this detail of the solar tiara with the horn of Scander, of Aries that is, which makes Heliogabalus the successor on earth and acolyte of Ram and his Mythological Odyssey. [2] And then they would have understood the rationale and origin of this incredible mixture of cults: moon, sun, man, woman, whose living semblance and striking geography Syria is.

Whether or not one believes in a race of Superhuman Teachers arriving from the pole at the time of the first subsidence of the earth, and who seem to glide across it and walk upon the Indies, one must acknowledge the incursion, in some distant prehistoric period, of a white race which spread all over the earth emblems, rites and strange sacred objects in the guise of supernatural weapons.

It seems that in the end it may have been the partisans of the White, that's to say the Male, who kept the conquered territory; but in keeping it, they lost the notion of the unique and untouchable principle that they'd come to reveal to the aboriginals of Pallisthan.

The *Vedas* seem to attest to this change of principle in one mysterious text:

“ONLY A FEW BLACKS, REDS AND YELLOWS SHALL REMAIN, BUT THE SONS OF THE WHITE LIGHT DEPARTED FOREVER.”

And while the adherents of the White, or Hindus, remained masters of the Indies which they organised according to the heavenly law; and under the sign of Aries bequeathed by Ram, the ‘Pinkshas’ or ‘Reds’ who ate the menses of women and placed its colour upon their standards, looked for a far-off land that resembled them, and under the name of Phoenicians they wove along the hem of the sea a weather-resistant purple that mapped the extent of their beliefs even more than the might of their industry.

Without a war over principles, the sun-religion hostile to that of the moon would never have risked intermingling with it until it was inextricably merged. I don't think History can tell us by what miracle a race springing from the Phoenicians, zealots of Woman, could

have erected on its lands, and above all others, a temple to the cult of the sun, i.e. the Masculine.

All the same, Heliogabalus the pederast king who wanted to be a woman, was a priest of the Masculine. He achieved in himself the identity of opposites, but did not achieve it without harm, and his devout pederasty had no origin other than an obstinate and abstract conflict between Masculine and Feminine.

But if in every country where one seeks to put oneself directly in communication with the diverse forces of God there are temples to the sun, and hostile temples to the moon, and other temples for the sun and moon allied, never, at any moment in History, and on such a tiny expanse of earth that these battles have convulsed, does one find, as in Syria, any similar assemblage of temples in which male and female simultaneously consume one another, merge together and separate their faculties.

The life of Heliogabalus seems to me a typical example of this sort of dissociation of principles; and the life-size statue, taken to the utmost extreme of religious mania, aberration and lucid lunacy, the image of all the human contradictions and of the contradiction within principle – that's what I wanted to depict of him, as we shall see in the next chapter.

3.

ANARCHY

In 217 at Emesa, Heliogabalus isn't yet fourteen but has already reached that state of perfect beauty which all the statues of him show us. His flesh is plump as a woman's, his features waxen-smooth, eyes verging on burnt gold. One senses he will never be very tall, yet he is admirably proportioned, with Egyptian shoulders – broad though sloping, slim hips, a backside not at all protuberant. His hair borders on reddish-blond; his overly white flesh is blue-veined, with here and there in its folds and creases, curious lividities.

In profile his lips lightly pout, like a bottle top. He is not yet as we see him in the Louvre, with that frizzy fluff under his chin like a blond pubic thatch; and above all, the ignoble gob, the breached fellator's mouth.

His is the apogee of the beauty of the ephebe who's going to make use of his beauty.

Yet it's to his mother he owes this brimming femininity, this Venusian impress which even flashes through the flickering fires of the solar tiara he puts on each morning; to his mother, the tart, the prostitute, the harlot who never knew how to do anything else but lend herself to the brutalities of the Masculine. And speaking of

Julia Soemia, of the brutalities of the Masculine, by this I mean that Julia Soemia on heat wasn't constrained by simple epidermal proximities, but would surrender herself through principle, to a notion of ritual, not to the males who wanted her, but to those she chose.

“She lived like a courtesan”, says Lampridius, “unable to resist her whim. And all, down to the lowliest of slaves, would blush at her debaucheries.”

She identifies with Venus, the watery moon, the humid feminine that does not however descend into the dark. Which again is not to say that such ritual identification didn't prevent her once or twice setting principle aside.

The fact remains that from a sexual point of view Julia Soemia is what's called 'a high-class piece'. Of the four Julias, she is physically the most perfect. She meets that canon of slightly heavy feminine beauty established by Albrecht Dürer. That's to say there's an alchemy in her physique, a thousand years before alchemy.

Solidly built and well-rounded, as we can see from her statues and medallions; her skin amber-coloured, she too with a gold-dust sheen, yet always with that greyish haze making shadow on her skin.

Her insignia is the violet “Ioneh”, the flower of love and sex, because its petals fall apart like a sex. And on her shoulder, the dove “Ionah”.

Like Domna, she gives herself to whoever is of service to her; and knows how to sniff out whoever will serve her turn.

Or rather – and this is what's remarkable in her case – her loves serve Heliogabalus made, so they seem, to unite with the fame of Heliogabalus, the ephebe she will follow unto death.

This love Heliogabalus more than returns, as an ancient historian Lampridius recognises; he won't go as far

as saying Heliogabalus is a good son, but gives us to understand the contrary, that in Heliogabalus's love for his mother there's something incestuous and a touch of sexual inversion in that love of Julia Soemia for her son.

"He was so devoted to Soemiamira his mother", says Lampridius, "that he did nothing in the republic without consulting her, while she, living as a courtesan, abandoned herself in the palace to all kinds of licentiousness. Also, her acknowledged relations with Caracalla Antoninus naturally cast some doubts on the origins of Varius or Heliogabalus. There are even those who go so far as to say that the name Varius was given him by his companions as befitting one born of a courtesan and, consequently, who came of mixed blood."

In the casualness of her amorous bouts, and what may be called Julia Soemia's sexual slackness, in this varied mixture of seeds, there is a will and order. There's even unity, a sort of mysterious logic which isn't without cruelty.

Cruelty against herself, first and foremost.

"Moesa, an excessively ambitious woman and one resolved to risk all rather than remain in the obscurity of the private rank, prepared as soon as informed of the favourable disposition (of the soldiers towards Heliogabalus) to profit by it. She began by spreading the rumour that the young Heliogabalus was not simply related to Caracalla, but was his son; and, not in the least concerned about dishonouring her daughter, would say that the emperor had made love to her, and this with her complete complaisance. And this consideration made a strong impression on the soldiers."

Far from protesting, Soemia makes herself her mother's accomplice, becoming her ally over this revelation of her own adultery. She does herself honour through what to any other woman would be the proof of

her infamy. This infamy, this dishonour, she insists upon: Yes, she loved Caracalla, yes, she gave herself to him. She proclaims it everywhere and gives the exact date. And so that the date can be checked she provides all the documentation one could wish for. It was in Rome in 203, when she was not yet widowed, in Caracalla's palace, in Caracalla's very bedchamber. Yes, this warrior lay with her: he was indeed the father of Heliogabalus.

And for the soldiers encamped at Emesa, who idolise Caracalla, Heliogabalus is the rightful king, duly descended from the equestrian god. Heliogabalus is indeed the son of a warrior.

This new warrior is shown to the soldiers. While Soemia confirms his lineage, proves his noble kinship, Julia Moesa bears him aloft for the soldiers like a mummified object from a shrine, as when at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in Provence, the assembled Gypsies are shown a preserved arm that belonged to Mary the Egyptian, or the heads of the other two Marys.

Around the temple of Emesa there are mysterious comings and goings. Julia Moesa has hotted things up. The temple cellars are chockful of real gold, Roman gold brought by Domna to Antioch and transported by Moesa from the tiny temple at Antioch – that dwindles towards extinction there at the far end of its long street – into the Emesa temple, isolated upon its hillock, which resounds from morning till night with cries and music and occasionally lights up like a brazier.

The subterranean traffic night and day feeding the greed of the great solar deity seems to have dissolved into the light, sweated away into the daylight outside.

The movements of the troops commanded by Macrinus hide the fact that this abnormal activity might

have anything about it to worry the master of the hour.

The gold convoys don't stop rolling into the temple, accompanied by a peculiar crew.

One man stands out from this whole crew: tall and grim, supple-hipped and with glistening pectorals, he bears below the belt the mark of quite fresh and very recent cruelty inflicted upon him by Julia Soemia.

Gannys, lover of Julia Soemia, and tutor of Heliogabalus, has just undergone ritual castration. Across his tanned features there appears the slight mottling caused by abundant loss of blood.

Gannys is a pious man, an initiate of the solar priesthood; being the lover of the mother of the sun god is for this initiate a great honour. But for Soemia to have cut off his member is a calculated cruelty. It's not just her jealousy expressed in this action, but the desire to leave on the spirit of Gannys an ineradicable mark.

Moreover, Gannys is tutor to Heliogabalus. Soemia has intuited his subtle mind, his shrewd and practical intelligence that reveals itself when required, and which will serve her and her son in the events about to unfold, for which a real man is needed – real as regards brain, if not by virtue of that virility he no longer has – in order to defend the interests of Elagabalus, the erectile Cone, as symbolised by a young child.

The serious, wily Gannys has a stand-in, a second eunuch who has also enjoyed the favours of Julia Soemia and has paid for them with the deletion of his member. This second eunuch, Eutygian, is a pitiable buffoon, of an amorphous malleable nature and an utterly abject femininity. He is as necessary to Gannys as Sancho Panza to Don Quixote, or Sganarelle to Don Juan. And it may be said that Julia Soemia has given herself to him from a sense of equilibrium; and because she has sensed the profound versatility, the unpredictable and slippery

character of Heliogabalus who needs close to him, as counterweight to the serious Gannys, a sort of licensed jester.

In Julia Soemia's amorous logic, in her all-absorbing and attentive mothering, are clearly to be noted all these notions, and that prescient lucidity which has thought of even the most trifling detail.

And in due course we shall see that her logic doesn't deceive her.

The loves of Julia Soemia have always been made with something in view, and at present that something is the success of a conspiracy.

In this conspiracy figure the two poles of her sexual complicity:

GANNYS THE SUBTLE, EUTYCHIAN THE GROTESQUE,

as do Julia Moesa's clandestine transportations of gold, as do the daily appearances of Heliogabalus on the temple steps below which, incessantly galloping, crisscross groups of Scythian horsemen and Macedonian mercenaries.

Every day, Elagabalus climbs up to the temple. He puts on the solar tiara surmounted by a ram's horn. He appears borne down by amulets, gleaming gemstones, precious enamels. All this ablaze like a brazier. It is beautiful, its beauty fit to baffle barbarous hearts who have never seen a king on fire, a statue of human flesh that shoots forth flame without being consumed.

Moesa, who knows how to rekindle enthusiasms, has the solar gold distributed abundantly and without its being counted, but at nightfall she descends into the tiered

cellars of the temple to supervise the grading of the bullion: she labels and sorts them like some warehouseman or customs official.

All her life, Julia Moesa has given proof of meticulous foresight, and of a very prescient intelligence that knows how to prepare things far ahead of time.

For example, when in a public letter still extant in our own day, she writes to Heliogabalus to scold him about the money he is spending, and clearly intimates to him that she is in charge of the family coffers, funds accumulated for the glory of the Bassianids, and not for him.

For the moment, the most pressing necessity is to reconquer the throne whose loss has caused the suicide of Julia Domna, and to topple from it that parasite, that filthy lowlife Macrinus, who has become ruler of Rome, by means of an assassination. He installed himself bloodily and shall be bloodily removed, by war if need be; petty clandestine murders aren't right for Julia Moesa. She's not afraid of underhand machinations, she's very good in the role of termite, in burrowing and undermining, in advances from below. But these machinations must be of use to her, must lead to something big. Because whoever lays the mine knows it will all end in fire, in the great solar explosion, in broad daylight, bang in the middle of matter, in a huge material upheaval that obliterates all the workings underground.

There's a plot, then; and Julia Moesa has concocted this plot from very far off.

In contrast to the imposing intelligence of her sister Domna – imposing but effective only in the abstract – Moesa's mind dwells on facts.

As to these facts, the first is that absurd division of the throne on Septimius Severus's death between two

ambitious and exasperated fanatics: his two sons Caracalla and Geta.

I bet the anointing of Heliogabalus as priest of the sun, at the age of five, would have followed quite closely upon the death of Septimius Severus: Julia Moesa sniffs the wind well.

Another fact is the nomination of Macrinus as prefect of the praetorium, in which Julia Moesa certainly had a hand. She, the mouse, has for some considerable time scented his hostility; but no matter, she'll find a way of turning the enmity of the weak Macrinus to her advantage, by a crime if need be. For there's another crueller, less admissible fact: Caracalla's murder committed by Macrinus, but intended and doubtless suggested by Moesa, if one knows how to interpret the facts.

Julia Moesa must have had that spirit of calculating intrigue which weaves its plot out of nothing, creating as if by some magical operation firm substance even from gauze.

For there's one final fact: if Domna, a daughter of the Bassians, reigned, and by her a Bassian in the person of Caracalla reigned, that for Moesa meant the bloodline being diverted and not coming from its source within herself; and so then it wasn't the blood of the Sun – the true blood of the Sun that is, though the issue of the same seed; it wasn't the baptised blood, the magnetised blood brought into being through the rites, that fuses under the epidermis, gathering there in pure masses, sieved and pure, – which becomes pure again under the skin like the blood of Heliogabalus.

Heliogabalus, sprung from the sun, was returned to the sun. He joined again with the sun. At the age of five, sometime after the death of Septimius Severus, Moesa dedicated him to the sun. She re-established the pure

cadence, the reality of his descent, by exposing him as was needful to the crossfire of the Heavenly Ray, whose mirror his body became.

So Heliogabalus, at five, was made priest of the Sun, and that was the beginning of the conspiracy.

But before continuing I must say a word about the era of blood, cruelty and casual crimes which encouraged the advent of a Macrinus.

Septimius Severus having died in his bed, his son Caracalla acceded. At first he didn't reign alone, since he had to share power with his brother Geta, craftier yet less decisive than he.

Their promiscuity hampered them both; and it fell to one of them to eliminate the other, by fair means or foul. And they both dreamed of murder.

The crafty Geta contrived his conspiracy, Caracalla exposed it and, without more ado, cut his brother's throat as he lay in Julia Domna's arms.

Dio Cassius, swayed by political bias, accuses Julia Domna of giving herself to Caracalla in the very blood of Geta, her son. Splendid. But is it true?

It's not impossible that that might be true.

Anyhow, from that moment on, Julia Domna who for some time had been sidelined from the Empire's councils, resumed the reins of government.

And the influence she exerted over Caracalla didn't waver for one minute. She retained it until his (Caracalla's) death.

Caracalla met a bloody end. He walked into an ambush set by soldiers, somewhere beside the Euphrates, near a temple of Lunus the god, to whom he was going to offer sacrifice.

Macrinus, who for some while had been leader of

his praetorian guard, was the instigator of this ambush, and he it was who profited from the death of Caracalla.

Things had to be going rather badly inside the government of the Roman empire, if a quite undistinguished individual – notable only for his impulsiveness, maleficence and an audacity that was nothing else but fear – could have become master of Rome. For the fact remains that if Macrinus had Caracalla killed, if he could have contrived the intrigue which led to Caracalla's assassination, he was driven solely by fear; and because, as commander of the praetorian guard he must have had a moment's anxiety about saving his own skin; and next, so as to protect himself, he put to death the officer of the guard who finished off Caracalla with a sword-thrust in the back.

A fortunate sword-thrust, that gave rise to the notion of blood, setting off the series of crimes which cleared Heliogabalus's route towards sovereignty. For Caracalla's crime, assassinating his brother Geta, was a settlement of family scores; and that crime initiated nothing.

From that sword-thrust Domna died, but it wasn't lost on her sister Moesa who took it like a real warrior.

She will take revenge on Macrinus, she is to wash away with blood that blow dealt to the honour of the Bassians. She will re-establish the Bassianids on the Antonine throne.

And thereupon she decides that her grandson Elagabalus shall be king.

Firstly, he has the beauty of a king, the physical exterior of a king, but above all he has the divine ancestry of a true king. He is of the lineage of the priest-kings of Emesa. As far back as one goes into the genealogy of the sun kings, we find, from mother to son, Elagabaluses aplenty; their filiation is incontestable: it proceeds without

the slightest pause. Heliogabalus has the right to rule.

It may be said that the throne is vacant, since Macrinus the usurper has installed himself at Antioch and is there leading the abandoned and luxurious life of an oriental satrap.

The historians of the time refer to him as a kind of dismal clown, an idiot in king's raiment.

He was, they claim, of plebeian origin, and so as to conceal his low origin he would strive to give himself the physical demeanour of a king. He used to pace up and down his palace clad in voluminous very long robes, changing his tone, and from one moment to the next modifying the range of his voice. If he had not the wit and insight of a Marcus Aurelius, he would talk like Marcus Aurelius – always on a very low pitched note, into which his raucous voice seemed to sink.

Such is the puppet Moesa finds in her path, at the moment when she decides to take action; and she takes action, sure that the bold stroke which has carried this puppet a first time to sovereignty won't happen twice, nor will he rediscover how to tap that energy required to defend a throne – having initially had the notion to seize hold of it.

Besides, the whole conduct of Macrinus is a marvel of improvidence, impotence, self-satisfaction. Under his very eyes, Moesa is able to effect collection of his funds, those coming from Rome and those lying idle at Antioch; and then to heap them up in the cellars of the temple of Emesa, which none would dare desecrate.

With the war chest in safe keeping, one must be occupied with seeking counsel and studying the terrain.

And this is where Gannys comes in.

If, in the preparation of the conspiracy, Julia Moesa

is the brains behind it, Julia Soemia is its atmosphere, space, air, the genetic core, the voluptuous pincer-movement; with Gannys its audacious executant.

Gannys is the man we've observed overseeing the conveyance to and fro of victuals, animals, men, gold bars gleaming in their coarsely woven sacks; while the tramp of armed men masks the secret shipment of the treasure.

One fine day he shows up with a bloody linen cloth between his thighs. And on another day, Eutychnian also is seen with a bloody cloth. Eutychnian, who exaggerates his false grotesque's voice and plays the jester so as to distract the attention of the soldiers and occupy them with his pranks.

It is Gannys who talks to the soldiers, while Eutychnian entertains them; and who along with Moesa's gold which he disburses with an inexhaustible abundance, drops a word in an ear, terribly specific words, the appropriate words.

These words are cunning and specific. Captivating and well expressed. They make the soldiers search their consciences, and visualise in their very core this spectacle of a blazing king; they invite these barbarians – whom no one until now has known how to charm – to draw the positive inferences of the vision which has aroused them. And every emotion swayed by gold is an unforgettable emotion.

The ground once prepared, and hearts and minds well primed and readied as one prepares an artist's canvas with background details that will become apparent upon the work's completion, Julia Moesa deems the moment has come to act. And she acts.

One night in June 217, – 217, if we go by the steles, tablets, lapidary inscriptions, the inclination of star signs; 216, if we are to believe the dubious texts of historians of the era, – Heliogabalus, escorted by Gannys, and clad in

the purple, is driven into the soldiers' camp.

Yet if we are to believe those contemporary historians, Heliogabalus is nothing but a puppet, a hollow mummy's head, a sordid statue of a king. And in the hands of Julia Moesa, who's untroubled by principles and has devoted her life to politics, Elagabalus is only a male organ to be flourished above the soldiery.

The historians indicate when necessary, as often as necessary, the personality of Heliogabalus through his acts as king. But for them that personality displays itself only once. It's on display under the walls of Emesa, on the occasion of the battle which wins him kingship. There little Heliogabalus, not yet fourteen, at the head of a thousand Scythian horsemen, rallies the routed Syrian troops and, heedless of danger, on a tiny white horse, charges the cohorts of Macrinus!

“The praetorians of Macrinus,” relates one historian of the time, “all crack troops, were even stronger and in still better fettle since being relieved of all their heaviest accoutrements, and fought with such valour that they began to rout their enemies and fling them into confusion. At this perilous moment, ambition and audacity made heroines of Julia Moesa and Julia Soemia. Young Heliogabalus too, for the only time in his life, gave some sign of vigour. Mounted on a charger, waving drawn sword, he encouraged his men to follow his example and rejoin the fray. His exhortations had their effect. Shame rekindled the courage of the vanquished.

“They come to a halt. They rally. They hold fast and set about regaining the ground they had lost.”

The characteristic which strikes historians and they quote – and one understands why it has struck them, since it's of a military nature – is that Heliogabalus later on did

not hesitate to shed blood and here it was warriors' blood, bloodshed in battle, military blood that will make fine corpses of combatants and warriors.

Now I consider that heroism, heroism on all fronts, wasn't at all lacking in little Heliogabalus – ascending the throne at fourteen and falling bloodily off it at eighteen.

No doubt it's through heroism that Heliogabalus commits that notoriously cruel act considered by all to be impious and abominable, because motiveless and gratuitous; the act – his own murder of Gannys, the tutor he loves but who stands in the way of his debaucheries.

The historians lay stress on the fact that when Heliogabalus decided to put Gannys to death, no one wished to be party to this impious and stupid act, and that Heliogabalus after hesitation, distress and serious reflection ended up killing him himself.

Now Gannys is his beloved tutor. His tutor and initiator in the rituals of his father the sun, whose blood Heliogabalus has been taught by the former to control.

Whether Heliogabalus was an initiate, as we understand it today, is unlikely; and his behaviour seems to demonstrate that Heliogabalus was never an initiate on a high level. Besides, one is only ever initiated by workings, rites, outward signs, and magical passes that set us on the path of the secret. And one cannot doubt the dogged determination of Heliogabalus to be initiated into every sort of magical operation and rite – the furthest removed from one another and sometimes the most contradictory.

“He also had himself initiated,” said Lampridius, “into the mysteries of the Mother of the gods; and assumed the right to the Tauroboly, so as to be able to carry away the statue of the goddess and to be privy to everything employed within her cult and which was held to be inviolably concealed from the profane. He could be seen inside the temple, among fantastical eunuchs, rushing

excitably here, there and everywhere, binding up his organ of generation, in order to end by doing even as the Galli; then, once the statue of the goddess had been removed, he transported it into the sanctuary of his god.

“He acted the role of Venus lamenting Adonis, with the whole panoply of groans and contortions which in Syria characterised the cult of Salamambo; he himself thus presaging his own end. He loudly proclaimed that all the gods were but his ministers, assigning to some the status of officers of his bedchamber, while others had the role of his valets, and others still, different functions connected with his own person. He desired to remove from the temple of Diana at Laodicea, the stones called Divine, which Orestes had placed there, and even that of the goddess he put into his sanctuary.”

Thus, while he was being used like a puppet, a puppet devoid of royalty, while he was being manipulated like a virile member, – and the daily parades to the temple were part of these manipulations, – everybody was working on his behalf, everybody meaning Julia Moesa his grandmother, Julia Soemia his mother, and her, Julia Soemiamira’s, two eunuchs: Gannys the farsighted and sagacious, Eutygian the grotesque. And, close to Julia Soemia, her sister Julia Mamaea actually worked for her son, little Alexander Severus (to replace Heliogabalus with a young emperor whose prick was pure and who had curly locks); whilst everybody worked for him, Heliogabalus also worked for himself, but in a way that would have greatly astonished the historians of the day, had they ventured to take a closer look. He might have been led every day to the temple; and, wearing the solar tiara bearing a ram’s horn, might have been made to move around according to the rituals like a statue, speechless; Heliogabalus, assisted by Gannys, got to know of every intrigue, and purposed to profit therefrom.

But to profit therefrom as befits a king. With grandeur and magnificence, with a truly regal awareness of the powers that fall to the king and upon which, behind the rituals, he draws.

And in these rituals there's his name:

EL-GABAL.

And the whole series of countless written variants of his name, which correspond to graduated pronunciations, to gushing gouts, to fan-shaped forms, to the black, white, yellow and red features of the Celestial Character of God.

And these features in their turn correspond to the colours and species of stars ranged by groups in the Zodiac of Ram.

And the four great human races correspond like organic echoes to the divisions of the Zodiac of Ram inspired by God.

And all these divergent states, all these stealthy shapes, all these names in their turn flash forth in cascades within the contracted name of

HELIOGABALUS

ELAGABALUS

EL-GABAL.

Thirty nations have trampled on, have dreamed about, the richness of this name, whose pronunciation awakens in every direction, as a compass does, the images of thirty powers.

Gannys his tutor, who moves in the shadow of gemstones and enamels, has taught him the meaning of the rituals, the eruptive force of the names.

As for names, it isn't said from the top of the head, it's begun in the lungs and rises up into the head. But the command coming from the head is a name only in the lungs.

And that takes shape with
GABAL

plastic and formative
thing. Word that
takes and gives form.

And in

EL-GABAL

There is

GABAL

which forms the
name.

But in

GABAL

there is

GIBIL (*in ancient Accadian
dialect*)

Gibil, the fire which
destroys and
deforms, but
prepares the rebirth
of the red Phoenix,
born of fire, and that
is the emblem of
woman, of woman
because of the fire-

red menstrues.

And in

EL-GABALUS

there is

EL

that's to say, God,
and it's written with
or without H; but
mingled with Gabal
equals

HELAH-GABAL

And the earth of
Elam, close to
Bactria, is God's
earth.

But in

GABAL

there is also

BAAL

or

BEL

or

BEL-GI

Chaldean God; god
of fire pronounced,
written and spelt out
backwards equals

GIBIL

(Kibil) fire in
ancient Aramaic.

And further,

GABAL

which means
Mountain in
Aramaic-Chaldean

But above all there's
BEL

dialect.

supreme god,
reductive god,
through whom
everything is
returned to the first
principle unitary
god, eliminator.

Heliogabalus gathers unto himself the power of all these names, wherein we can see that the sole thing which first springs to mind – the sun, doesn't arise.

It was the Greeks who introduced Helios into the name Heliogabalus and confused it with

EL,

supreme god, god of the mountain summits. For if the Sun comes into his name it's in the manner of a high place, to be identified by a cone, a pointed object, since as a rule every mountain may be depicted by a cone or by a triangle, and since the sun, through its light, is at the tip of the created world.

The world above and the world below are reunited in the six-pointed star, Solomon's magic seal, and both end in a point, the visible like the invisible, the created like the increate.



This god the maker and distorter who contains within him all the names of the gods, all the forms they have taken.

From

SATURN ISWARA

the sun, fiery
principle, male
principle,

up to

RHEA, PRACRITI

the moon, moist and
female principle,

which remain between the two opposed poles of formal manifestation: the masculine and feminine.

If Saturn be the sun, as Apollo is the sun, we needn't find that surprising, when we know that god, who descends, changes his forms and powers, along with the forms of his action.

And we know that

RA

the sun

for the Egyptians is a sparrow-hawk, but that he's also an ox or a man, with the ox preceding the man – according to the custom of the time.

But this

RA

becomes

BEL-SHAMASH

in Chaldea.

And he is the *judge* who decides the customs of the Chaldees.

And

APOLLO

active force of the
sun, without losing
his name, has a
shadow-double, a
sort of sobriquet,

that remains always
affixed to him.

Hence he has been called

LOXIAS APOLLO

LIBYSTINOS APOLLO

DELOS APOLLO

PHOEBUS APOLLO

PHANES APOLLO, and Phanes

Apollo is Apollo
repercussive,
double-barrelled, or
twin-seeded.

LYCIAS APOLLO

LYCOPHAS APOLLO, and

Lycophas Apollo is
Apollo the wolf,
who devours all,
even the darkness.

And Apollo who, made of matter, moves in the
orbit of matter, is also called:

ARGYROTONUS APOLLO.

And Apollo is sometimes called

SMYNTHEUS APOLLO, and

implies excess,
extremity, the point
of death, the swollen
abscess.

Finally there is

PYTHIAS APOLLO who, as male,
knows nothing of the
female Pythia; and
has no connection
with the oracles.

Here he is Apollo the
stifler, who rules
over the Serpent-
Python.

The dark humour of Chaos flings up mists which
slither around the earth, forming the figure of a dragon.

And Apollo, the fiery principle, leaps up with one
bound and reaches the spheres, whence his shafts flash
through the rings of the Serpent-Python.

Heliogabalus derives from these lofty notions and
from these names which belong to him, the awareness and
arrogance of a king; yet from them his child's organism
derives a confusion and anxiety which will not cease.

Heliogabalus arrived on the scene during the
anarchic period of the noble solar religion and arrived,
historically, in one period of anarchy.

That did not prevent his ritual identification, his
effort at identification, with god. It did not – during his all-
out attack upon Roman polytheistic anarchy – prevent his
behaving like the true priest of a unified cult, like the
personification of a single god, the sun.

Yet if for Julia Moesa Elagabalus was merely a
member, a sort of painted statuesque thing handy for
dazzling the soldiery – to Heliogabalus, Elagabalus was
the erectile member, at once human and divine. The
erectile member and the forceful member. The member-
force that shares itself and is shared, to be used only when
shared.

The erectile member is the sun, the cone of

reproduction upon earth, as Elagabalus the earthly sun is the cone of reproduction in heaven.

He must therefore become the sun, pass into Elagabalus himself, change his way of existence.

Concerning this identification of Heliogabalus with his god, sometimes the archaeologists inform us that Heliogabalus imagines himself to be his god, at other times that he conceals himself behind his god and is distinguishable from him.

But a man is not a god, and if christ is a god made man, it is as man that they say he died, and not as god. And why shouldn't Elagabalus believe himself a god made man; and why should that stop the emperor Heliogabalus putting the god before the man and crushing the man beneath the god?

All his life Heliogabalus was tormented by these polarities, this dual conflict.

On the one side,

THE GOD,

on the other,

THE MAN.

And in the man, the human king and the sun king.

And in the human king, the man crowned and uncrowned.

If Heliogabalus brought anarchy to Rome, if he appeared like the ferment precipitating a latent state of anarchy, the initial anarchy was within him and ravaged his organism, it toppled his mind into a sort of precocious dementia which has a name in the medical terminology of today.

Heliogabalus is man and woman.

And the sun religion is the religion of the man, who can do nothing without the woman, his double, wherein he

is reflected.

The religion of the ONE which cuts itself into TWO, in order to act.

To BE.

The religion of the initial separation of the ONE.

ONE and TWO reunited in the first hermaphrodite.

Who is HIM, the man.

And HER, the woman.

At the same time.

Reunited in ONE.

In Heliogabalus is the dual struggle:

1st Of the ONE who is divisible while remaining ONE. Of the man who becomes woman and remains man in perpetuity.

2nd Of the Sun King, the male aspect of whom can ill accept being a human king. Who spits upon that manhood and ends up casting it into the sewer.

Because a man is not a king, and so for him – as king, solitary king, god incarnate – living in this world is a fall and a strange displacement.

Heliogabalus absorbs his god; he eats his god as the christian eats his; and he separates the principles inside his organism; he displays these warring principles within the double cavities of his flesh.

And that's what Lampridius, historian of the era, didn't understand.

“He married a woman, shy Cornelia Paula, and consummated the marriage, so he said.”

This historian is astonished that Heliogabalus can sleep with a woman, can penetrate a woman normally; – what in a born pederast would be a strange aberration and

a sort of organic treason towards his pederasty, in Heliogabalus proves that this devout and precocious pederast had singleness of mind.

But far more than the Hermaphrodite is apparent in this devious image, this fascinating and dual nature descended from Venus incarnate – and in its prodigious sexual aberration, itself the image of the most rigorous mental logic – and that is the idea of ANARCHY.

Heliogabalus was a born anarchist, and one who ill bore with kingship, and all his acts as king were acts of the born anarchist, the public enemy of order, who is an enemy to public order; but he first practised his anarchy on himself and against himself, and as for the anarchy he brought to the government of Rome, he might be said to have practised what he preached and to have paid the required rate for it.

When a Gallus cut off his member and was tossed a woman's garment, I perceive in this ritual the desire to have done with a certain contradiction, reuniting man and woman at a stroke, combining and merging them into one, in and through the male. The male being the Initiator.

According to the historians, Heliogabalus also came within an inch of having his member cut off.

If that were so, it would have been a grave error on Heliogabalus's part; and I think the historians of the day, who understood nothing of poetry and still less of metaphysics, must have mistaken the false for the true, ritual simulation of this act for the actual deed.

Let men gone astray here and there – priests, unimportant Galli – subject themselves to a gesture which finishes them off; certainly in that gesture there's something which intensifies the ritual's value, but Elagabalus, the Sun on earth, cannot lose the solar symbol,

he mustn't function only in the abstract.

In the sun, there's war, Mars – the sun is a warrior god; and the ritual of the Gallus is a rite of war: man and woman melted in blood, at the cost of bloodshed.

In the abstract war of Heliogabalus, in his battle of principles, in his war of semblances, there is human blood as in real war, not abstract blood, unreal blood of the imaginary, but real blood that flowed and can flow; and if Heliogabalus shed no blood in defence of territory, he paid with his own for his poetry and ideas.

The entire life of Heliogabalus is anarchy in action, since Elagabalus the unitary god who brings together again man and woman, the hostile poles, the ONE and the TWO, is the end of contradictions, the elimination of war and anarchy, but by way of war, and that's also – on this earth of contradiction and disorder – the putting into action of anarchy. And anarchy at the point to which Heliogabalus pushes it, is poetry realised.

There is in all poetry an essential contradiction. Poetry is pulverised multiplicity and it produces flames. And poetry, which restores order, first revives disorder, disorder with semblances ablaze; it causes appearances to clash in restoring them to one singular point: fire, gesture, blood, cry.

To restore poetry and order to a world whose very existence is a threat to order, is to bring back war and the permanence of war; it is to bring in a state of enforced cruelty, to arouse a nameless anarchy, anarchy of things and appearances which awaken before sinking anew and melting into unity. But he who arouses this dangerous anarchy is always its first victim. And Heliogabalus is a diligent anarchist who begins by devouring himself, and ends by devouring his excrement.

In a life whose chronology is impossible yet in which the historians – who recount at some length its dateless cruelties – see a monster, *I* discern a nature of prodigious plasticity that resents the anarchy of facts and rebels against facts.

I discern in Heliogabalus a throbbing intelligence which draws an idea from each object and from each encounter with objects.

The man who, as he hurls sacred objects into the furnace he's had lit upon the steps of the temple of Hercules in Rome, howls out:

“Only this, yes, only this is worthy of an Emperor”; who squanders thus a part of not only the royal, but of the sacerdotal treasury; the man who enters Rome tightly claspng in his arms the conical stone, the great reproductive phallus; the man who seeks to set above all, higher than all else, this stone as principle; the man who believes in the unity of all things and hauls to Rome not a stone but a sign, a symbol of the unity of all things; the man who tries to unify the gods, who, in front of his god has hammered to smithereens the statues of the false gods of Rome, – is to me no idolater but a magus and, being born amid rituals, he partakes of their powers.

On the night of 15-16 May, 217, Heliogabalus is led out to the soldiers. His half-naked mother, the stunning Julia Soemia, pushes him ahead of her – the little Bassianus Avitus, attired like Caracalla – and passes between the ranks of the soldiers bivouacked at the foot of the temple, as if she intends to give herself to each of them. Some Roman music has been set up within the temple's inner sanctum, a primitive harsh music that of course rather plagiarises the styles of certain Assyrian players. Esoteric and mysterious music, despite being Roman –

filched from the temple of the mother of the gods. This music punctuates the walk by Soemia and Heliogabalus through the middle of the warriors' camp. The latter, alerted by Gannys, are not unaware of what's about to happen.

After one or two circuits of the camp, with Elagabalus having assumed the Roman purple – the heavy cloak of the emperors, almost too long for his young body – the latter ascends the ramparts.

Ten thousand torches blaze through the camp, reflected in tall mirrors brought in under cover of darkness. And suddenly there is witnessed an unexpected vision:

A painting thirty cubits high, twenty wide, is unrolled from the top of the ramparts; the light from countless torches reflected in the tall mirrors falls directly upon the immense painting. A sort of warrior-god is there revealed: is it Heliogabalus or Caracalla?; it's Caracalla's regalia surmounted by the head of Heliogabalus. But it's a head of Heliogabalus which seems to gleam through the lineaments of Caracalla.

The camp applauds, the music stops. The timely Gannys makes an announcement:

GANNYS. – This is Caracalla's son.

Silence! Astonishment. The soldiers look at each other.

At the other end of the camp, dishevelled, bare-breasted, yet haughty in posture, Julia Soemia is white against the firelight.

JULIA SOEMIA. – Yes, this is Caracalla's son. This is the god I've conceived in his arms.

No one laughs, no one protests; this is theatre well performed, splendidly rehearsed.

GANNYS. – There's a false emperor in Antioch, that Macrinus who's nobody's son, who's taken the purple of Caracalla and is on the throne of Rome at the cost of

Caracalla's own blood. I ask you to restore to Caracalla's son his lawful rights. Young Bassianus Avitus must regain his Bassianid heritage upon the throne of Rome. Through thirty wars you've followed Caracalla, who was descended from Septimius Severus; through new wars you shall follow Elagabalus Avitus, who is descended from Caracalla.

At this, applause, an explosion of joy, prolonged murmurings that spread to the furthest reaches of the camp.

The torches wilt. Dawn breaks. A breeze gets up. The troops reassemble and set off. Gannys, astride a wild stallion, is at the head of the warriors.

The battle around Emesa may be divided into three phases.

In the first, Heliogabalus gains the soldiers' vote. The latter, sensing that their action constitutes a sort of open rebellion, barricade themselves in their camp and make ready to withstand the attack of the government forces, led by one of the praetorian commanders, Ulpus Julianus.

He, however, who hasn't bargained for the strength of the insurrection, leads the attack without conviction and without fervour. He temporizes, refusing to credit the enthronement of a monarch fourteen years old.

He could have settled it all in one day had he pushed home the attack but, counting on the spontaneous defection of Heliogabalus's troops, he withdraws after a travesty of combat.

During the second phase, Ulpus Julianus returns to the attack, determined this time to settle the issue. But too late. The besieged have taken stock of their own strength, and of the wavering attackers. However, the battle is hardfought. It lasts an entire day, from dawn till sunset.

Late in the day appears the moon. Not décor, more a force of nature. The moon of Domna and Soemia, which has nothing in common with Ulpianus Julianus. Heliogabalus's soldiers from high on the parapets urge Julianus's praetorians to desert. Emissaries of Gannys, infiltrating Julianus's forces, surreptitiously make them tempting promises, and distribute gold freely among them.

Amid Julianus's troops a vacillation is noticeable, for although the praetorians hold fast, the mercenaries are disbanding; until the praetorians themselves, whose lives Heliogabalus has promised to spare if they agree to defect to his camp, end by abandoning Ulpianus Julianus.

King for king, Heliogabalus is as good as Diadumenianus. Since Macrinus, for his part, has put in place a kinglet elect, has got the praetorians of Apamea to support his son, young Diadumenianus – so-called because of the natural coronet formed by the projection above the superciliary arch of his frontal bone. Little Diadumenianus is ten and has just taken the title of Augustus. No sooner, though, is he king, than his cruelties render him infamous. He has the genitalia of his guards sawn off lingeringly, maintaining that on his coronation day they hadn't shouted loudly enough. Impromptu coronations are plentiful in this neglected area of history.

Confronted with the nearly unanimous desertion of his troops, Ulpianus Julianus flees. He might have cast himself, heading two or three hundred faithful followers, into the midst of this dealing, this purchase of loyalties, this auction of duty and conscience conducted from atop the ramparts. He cravenly prefers to flee the field of battle and, disguised as a priest, to seek refuge in a small temple rurally sequestered. But he is recognised. He is recaptured. And two days later, the emissaries of Heliogabalus, arriving to announce to Macrinus the battle's outcome, demonstrate defiance by throwing before him in a bundle

of dirty linen the bloody head of Ulpianus Julianus.

Macrinus, having left Apamea at the head of five hundred faithful praetorians, circumvents Emesa and returns to Antioch where he proclaims victory. Then, under the pretext of pursuing the defectors from Heliogabalus, he rallies around him all the reliable troops he can find and goes back towards Emesa, thinking to make short work of this heterogeneous mass of men commanded by three women, two eunuchs and a young child. But he has reckoned without Gannys; and this is the third phase of the engagement.

Gannys, who knows the country well, does not give Macrinus's troops time to reach Emesa; he joins battle with Macrinus at the place and hour chosen by himself. The battle takes place under the walls of Antioch, in a sort of meandering valley ringed by hills, where the adherents of Heliogabalus are already installed.

It is two in the afternoon. The sun directly floods the valley, dazzling the legions of Macrinus, who has under him Rome's best troops. Gannys's soldiers attack from three sides simultaneously. But although blinded by the sun and initially disadvantaged by the pincer attack, the legionaries of Macrinus stand their ground, – and they thrust forward. The music of the Roman legions rings out at full blast, causing some unease among the praetorian defectors to Heliogabalus, who no longer know where their allegiance lies. They see before them praetorians like themselves whom, through some whim of fate, they must now engage. They lay down their weapons and make ready to change sides.

Sensing this, seeing before them like a wall the united front of the praetorian guard, the Macedonian mercenaries, the Scythian cavalry, and the Syrian volunteers who wave above them the red banner of Phoenicia, throw their arms and banners into the dust and

make as if to flee. Gannys, on his wild stallion, rushes into their midst and tries to rally them with strange movements of his elbows and arms, which are crossed and uncrossed over his burnished pectorals. Waste of time. Then the two Julias, Moesa the grandmother and Soemia the mother, descend from their chariot and fling themselves into the fray.

Corpses lie all around them in the dust, riddled with arrows; and stray arrows go on whistling through the air. They snatch swords from corpses, they shelter behind a shield hoisted amid the dead, they mount runaway horses, they raise the red banner and without a word charge at full gallop straight into the combatants. Twice, three times, they plough into the mass of troops now breaking ranks; for his part, Heliogabalus wavers. His purple cloak flaps in the wind, snapping like Moesa's and his mother's banners. The praetorians recognise a leader. The mercenaries enraptured by the heroic charge of the two women pick up their banners from the ground. The officers once more sense they have the men in hand and regroup them. A concerted charge crashes into Macrinus's legionaries, overwhelms them and thrusts up as far as the impregnable triangle of the praetorians; a dreadful *mêlée* ensues during which old Julia Moesa cuts and thrusts wildly and Julia Soemia, as if drunk, shelters behind her shield, deflects all spears and hurls them back.

While the two women attack the centre Heliogabalus, also mounted on a runaway horse, and followed by a thousand Scythian cavalrymen, Gannys at his side, executes a wide wheeling movement, driving a sort of lethal wedge into Macrinus's flank. The praetorians' fortress seems to tremble to its very foundations, shudder, thrash about like the head of a horse shaking itself. Already the sun has moved over. Heliogabalus, at the far end of the battlefield, and riding

hell for leather at Macrinus's rear, receives full in the face the rays of the setting sun. Its radiance inflames him further yet. He now sees ahead of him, very far off, his mothers' banners flying. A grievous moaning, sustained, prolonged, rises from the battlefield, above the smell of dust, blood, dead beasts, burnt leather; in a deafening din of clashing metal where the harsh screams of the wounded fill every second. Shadows fall a long way across the ground, mingled with the sun's red rays, which spread out in immense trails. Macrinus the weak, Macrinus listens to the crescendo of the combat. He senses renewed and continued, in a manner unfavourable to him, that contest which seemed to him to be won. However, nothing is lost, but you need to hold your ground; and Macrinus can't hold his ground. He's not one of those who can. He's beset by panic. Heliogabalus's charging onslaught draws ever nearer. Julia Moesa and Julia Soemia who have been unable to pierce the steadfast line of the praetorians, – as if locked and welded to one another, – circle them shrieking, here and there splitting any heads that appear above the never broken line. Macrinus spots on his right flank, amid the grappling soldiers soldered limb to limb, as if opening up bit by bit, a sort of slim anfractuosity. He tears off his purple, hurls it over the shoulders of the first officer he can find, lobs his crown onto a general's head and, using the spurs, urges his horse forward and gallops off. On seeing this, his praetorians throw down their arms, turn towards the newly arrived Heliogabalus and greet him with an enthusiastic three cheers.

Thus ended the battle which for Heliogabalus opened the royal road.

The battle done, the throne won, the return to Rome called for a brilliant entrance. Not like Septimius Severus,

with soldiers armed for war, but in the style of a real sun king, of a monarch who maintains his passing supremacy as by right, who won it in war yet must make that war be forgotten.

And historians of the time never tire of epithets concerning the coronation festivities, their decorative and peaceful character. Their superabundant luxury. It must be said that the coronation of Heliogabalus began at Antioch toward the end of the summer of 217 and ended in Rome the spring of the following year, after a winter spent in Nicomedia, in Asia.

Nicomedia was the Riviera, the Deauville of the time, and it's this sojourn of Heliogabalus in Nicomedia that drives the historians crazy.

Here's Lampridius, who seems to have appointed himself the Joinville of this St Louis of the Sex Crusade, who'd carry a male member to serve as cross, spear or sword:

“During one winter the Emperor spent in Nicomedia, as he behaved in the most disgusting manner, admitting men into a reciprocal commerce of depravity, the soldiers soon repented of what they had done and recalled with bitterness that they had conspired against Macrinus to create this new prince; they therefore considered setting their sights on Alexander, cousin of this same Heliogabalus, and the one on whom the Senate, after the death of Macrinus, had conferred the title of Caesar. For who could support a prince who gave over to lust his every bodily orifice, when such is not allowed the beasts themselves? Finally he reached the point where nothing in Rome occupied him save for despatching emissaries entrusted to procure precisely those men best suited to his vile tastes and to admit them to the palace so that he might enjoy them.

“He took pleasure, moreover, in having the fable of

Paris performed; he himself would play the role of Venus and, suddenly letting his clothes fall to his feet, quite naked, one hand on his breast, the other on his genitals, he would kneel and, raising the posterior part, would present it to the companions of his debauch. He used also to do his face as that of Venus is painted, and took pains to keep his whole body perfectly smooth, deeming it the principal advantage he could derive from life to be adjudged fit to satisfy the libidinous tastes of the greatest possible number.”

The return to Rome was by easy stages, and along the route of the imperial escort, that immense escort which seemed to draw with it the countries it had travelled through, false emperors appeared.

Pedlars, labourers, slaves who, given the reigning anarchy and on seeing all the rules of royal heredity overthrown, thought they could be kings too.

“Right enough,” Lampridius seems to say, “anarchy!”

Not content with taking the throne for a stage, with giving the countries he crossed an example of laxity, disorder and depravity, next he proceeded to take the very soil of the empire for a stage, thereby prompting false kings. Never was a finer example of anarchy given the world. Because for Lampridius this nakedly realistic performance before a hundred thousand people of the fable of Venus and Paris, with the fevered state it created, with the mirages it engendered, was an example of dangerous anarchy. It was poetry and theatre raised to the level of the utmost veracious reality.

But when looked at closely, the censures of Lampridius do not stand up. Exactly what did Heliogabalus do? Perhaps he did transform the Roman

throne into a stage, but in so doing he introduced theatre and, through theatre, poetry to the throne of Rome, into the palace of a Roman emperor, and poetry, when it's real, is worthy of blood, it justifies the shedding of blood.

For one may assume that, so close in time to the ancient mysteries and the sprinkled bloodline of the Tauroboli, the personages thus brought onstage wouldn't have behaved like cold allegories, but that since they symbolised forces of nature – I mean second nature, the one corresponding to the sun's inner circle, the second sun according to Julian, the one between the periphery and the centre (and we know that only the third is visible) – they must have retained a force of pure element.

Apart from this, Heliogabalus might wrench Roman customs and morality however he pleased, might jettison the Roman toga, assume the Phoenician purple, and give that example of anarchy which, for a Roman emperor consists of adopting the costume of another country and for a man in wearing woman's clothing, adorning oneself with jewels, pearls, feathers, coral and talismans: what was anarchic from the Roman viewpoint was for Heliogabalus fidelity to an order, which is to say that this decorum fallen from heaven thither reascended by all available means.

Nothing gratuitous in the magnificence of Heliogabalus, nor in this marvellous ardour for disorder which was merely the application of a metaphysical and superior idea of order – of unity, that is.

He applied his religious idea of order like a slap on the face of the Latin world; and he applied it with the utmost rigour, with a sense of rigorous perfection wherein was an occult and mysterious idea of perfection and unification. It's not paradoxical to consider that this idea of

order is poetic into the bargain.

Heliogabalus undertook a systematic and joyous demoralisation of the Latin mind and consciousness; and he would have pushed this subversion of the Latin world to the limit had he lived long enough to carry it through.

No one, anyway, can deny Heliogabalus the coherence of his ideas. And none can doubt the singleminded obstinacy with which he set about applying them. This emperor, who was fourteen when he took the crown, was a mythomane in the literal and concrete sense of the word. That's to say, he saw what myths there were, and applied them. He applied for the one and perhaps only time in History, real myths. He cast a metaphysical idea at the vortex of poor earthly and Latin effigies nobody believed in any more, the Latin world less than any other.

He punished the Latin world for no longer believing in its myths or in any myth, and furthermore he didn't stint in showing the contempt he bore this race of farmers born-and-bred, whose faces turned toward the soil and who had never known how to do anything else but keep watch for what thence emerged.

The anarchist says:

Neither god nor master, I alone.

Heliogabalus once on the throne, accepts no law; and he is the master. His own personal law will thus be the law of all. He imposes his tyranny. Every tyrant deep down is only an anarchist who has seized the crown and who brings everyone to heel. There is though, another idea in the anarchy of Heliogabalus. Believing himself god, identifying himself with his god, he never makes the mistake of inventing a human law, an absurd and preposterous human law through which he as god would speak. He obeys the divine law in which he was initiated,

and it must be acknowledged that apart from a few excesses here and there, a few pleasantries without importance, Heliogabalus has never abandoned the mystical point of view of a god incarnate, but one who observes the millennial rite of god.

Once arrived in Rome, Heliogabalus banishes men from the Senate and replaces them with women. To the Romans, this is anarchy, but for the religion of the menses, which originated the Tyrian Purple, and for Heliogabalus who administers it, it's only a simple restoration of balance, a logical return to the law, since it is for woman, the firstborn, the first arrival in the cosmic order, to make the laws.

Heliogabalus would have arrived in Rome in the spring of 218, after a strange sexual procession, a dazzling explosion of festivities throughout the Balkans. Now he tears past at breakneck speed in his canvas covered chariot, behind him the ten ton Phallus which follows the train in a sort of monumental cage apparently made for a whale or a mammoth. Now he halts, flaunting his riches, displaying all he can in the way of lavish splendours and largesse, and also of strange parades before stupid and awestruck multitudes. Drawn by three hundred bulls, enraged and harassed by packs of howling but chained hyenas, the Phallus on an immense lowered cart with wheels as wide as elephant thighs, crosses European Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, the Balkans and modern Austria, at the speed of a galloping zebra.

Then, on occasion, the music begins. The procession halts. The covers are removed. The Phallus is mounted on its pedestal, hoisted by ropes, its tip in the air. And the band of pederasts sallies forth, along with actors, dancing girls, castrated and mummified Galli.

For there is a rite of the dead, a rite of sifting through sexes, those objects made from male members stretched, tanned, blackened at their tips like sticks hardened by fire. The members, – fixed to the ends of staves like candles impaled on nails, like the spikes of a mace; hung like bells from arches of hammered gold; stuck to enormous plaques like nails on a shield, – turn in the fire among the bobbing Galli, which men mounted on stilts twirl into dancing like creatures still alive.

And always at the paroxysm, the frenzy, the moment the voices grow hoarse, and turn into a falsetto, physiologically feminine, Heliogabalus, sporting on his pubis a sort of iron spider whose legs tear at his skin and draw blood with each extravagant movement of his thighs dusted with saffron – his member dipped in gold, all gold-covered, immovable, rigid, useless, innocuous – arrives wearing the solar tiara, his cloak jewel-encrusted, blazing.

His entrance has the quality of a dance, a marvellously executed dance step, although Heliogabalus himself was no dancer. A silence, and then the flames rise – the orgy, a harsh orgy, resumes. Heliogabalus draws the cries, orchestrates the genetic and calcined ardour, the ardour of death, the futile rite.

However, these instruments, these jewels, shoes, garments and fabrics, these skirling renditions of music for strings or percussion instruments such as castanets, cymbals, Egyptian tambours, Grecian lyres, sistra, flutes, etc., these ensembles of flutes, sitars, harps and nebel; and also these banners, these beasts, these animal hides, these feathers which fill the chronicles of that age, all this monstrous sumptuousness guarded at its borders by fifty thousand cavalrymen who imagine they are bearing aloft the sun – this lavish piety has a significance. A powerful ritual significance, a significance all the acts of the emperor Heliogabalus have, no matter what History says

of them.

Heliogabalus enters Rome one morning in March 218, at dawn, to coincide almost exactly with the Ides of March. And he enters it backwards. In front of him is the Phallus, drawn by three hundred bare-breasted girls who precede the three hundred bulls – now torpid and tranquil after being given a very powerful soporific during the hours before dawn.

He enters in a variegated iridescence of feathers that flap like flags in the wind. Behind him, the gilded city, vaguely spectral. Ahead of him, the scented throng of women, the drowsy bulls, the Phallus on its gold-barded chariot, glistening under the immense parasol. On either flank, the double column of clickers of castanets, the flautists, pipers, lutanists, the smiters of Assyrian cymbals. And behind these, the litters of the three mothers: Julia Maesa, Julia Soemia and Julia Mamaea the Christian who dozes quite unaware.

The fact that Heliogabalus enters Rome on the dawn of the Ides of March signifies, not from the Roman point of view but from that of the Syriac priesthood, the indirect implementation of a principle that has become a potent rite. A rite, above all, that from the religious point of view has its own ambiguous meaning, yet from the viewpoint of Roman custom means that Heliogabalus is entering Rome as ruler, but backwards, and that at the outset he's had himself bugged by the whole Roman empire.

The coronation festivities ended – and marked by this profession of pederastic faith – Heliogabalus installs himself, along with his grandmother, his mother and his mother's sister, the perfidious Julia Mamaea, in the Palace of Caracalla.

Heliogabalus doesn't wait to arrive in Rome so as to declare open anarchy, to lend a hand to the anarchy he encounters when that anarchy dresses itself up as theatre and brings about poetry.

Indeed, he has five obscure rebels beheaded who, in the name of their petty democratic individuality, their utterly insignificant individuality, dare claim the royal crown. But he favours the exploit of that actor, that insurgent of genius who, sometimes passing himself off as Apollonius of Tyana, sometimes as Alexander the Great, appears robed in white before the tribes on the banks of the Danube, wearing on his brow the crown of the Scander, which maybe he stole from the emperor's baggage. Far from pursuing him, Heliogabalus delegates to him a portion of his troops and lends him his fleet so he can conquer the Marcomanni.

But all the ships of this fleet are holed, and in the middle of the Tyrrhenian Sea a fire started on his instructions frees him, through a theatrical shipwreck, from the usurper's coup.

Heliogabalus as emperor behaves like a hooligan and an irreverent libertarian. At the first somewhat solemn assembly he bluntly asks the great men of the State, the nobles, the senators in attendance, the legislators of every rank, whether they too have known pederasty in their youth, whether they've practised sodomy, vampirism, been succubi or fornicated with animals and, according to Lampridius, questions them thus in the crudest of terms.

One envisages Heliogabalus rouged, escorted by his minions and his women, there amid the venerable greybeards, as he pats their bellies and asks them if they too got themselves buggered in their youth; and the latter,

pale with shame, bowing their outraged heads, swallowing their humiliation.

Better still, he simulates in public, and with gestures, the act of fornication.

“Going as far”, says Lampridius, “as to represent obscenities with his fingers, accustomed as he was to lampooning all decency in the assemblies and in the presence of the people.”

There’s more to this than childishness, of course; it’s the desire to demonstrate his individuality with violence, also his taste for the basics: nature as it truly is.

It is anyhow easy to ascribe to madness and youth all that in Heliogabalus is merely the systematic disparagement of an order and which befits a desire for orchestrated demoralisation.

I see Heliogabalus not as madman but as rebel.

1st Against the Roman polytheistic anarchy;

2nd Against the Roman monarchy that’s been bugged through him.

But in his person, the two revolts, the two insurrections merge, they direct all his behaviour, they govern all his actions, even the most trivial, during his four-year reign.

His insurrection is systematic and sagacious and he directs it first against himself.

Whenever Heliogabalus dresses as a prostitute and sells himself for forty pence at the doors of Christian churches, at the temples of Roman gods, he’s not only seeking the satisfaction of a vice, but humiliating the Roman monarch.

When he appoints a dancer to head his praetorian guard, he’s thereby establishing a sort of incontestable yet dangerous anarchy. He exposes to ridicule the cowardice of the monarchs, his predecessors, the Antonines and the Marcus Aureliuses, and finds that a dancer’s perfectly fit to

command a bunch of policemen. He calls weakness strength and theatre, reality. He's overturning the received order, ideas, the everyday notions of things. His is a meticulous and dangerous anarchy, since he reveals himself to all eyes. To tell the truth he's risking his own skin. And that's a courageous anarchist.

He continues his enterprise of the debasement of standards, of monstrous moral disorganisation, in choosing his ministers by the enormousness of their members.

"He placed at the head of his night watch", says Lampridius, "the charioteer Gordius, and made chief steward a certain Claudius, who was censor of morals; all other preferments were dependent upon the outstanding size of member of those recommended. He appointed as collectors of the five per cent inheritance tax a muleteer, an athlete, a cook and a locksmith."

It didn't prevent his taking personal advantage of this disorder, this shameless slackening of morals, nor of making a habit of obscenity; and into broad daylight, like a maniac and a man obsessed, he brought what is normally kept hidden.

"At banquets," continues Lampridius, "he seated himself by preference beside male prostitutes, taking pleasure in their caresses, and never received from anyone's hand more willingly than from theirs, the goblet from which they had drunk."

All political structures, all forms of government strive, above all, to control the young. And Heliogabalus, too, strives to get his hands on the youth of Rome, but contrary to everyone else, by systematically perverting it.

"He had conceived the scheme", says Lampridius, "of establishing as prefects in each town persons whose trade it is to corrupt youth. Rome was to have fourteen such; and he would have done this, had he lived, determined as he was to elevate and honour whatever is

vilest, and men of the lowest professions.”

Besides, one cannot doubt the profound contempt of Heliogabalus for the Roman world of his day.

“More than once”, Lampridius again notes, “he displayed such contempt for the senators that he called them slaves in togas; the Roman people were to him simply the farmers of a patch of land, and he took no account of the nobility.”

His taste for liberated theatre and poetry manifested itself on the occasion of his first marriage:

He placed beside him throughout the lengthy Roman rite, a dozen or so outlandish drunken freaks who screamed incessantly: “Shove it up, stick it in”, to the great outrage of the hack journoes of the day, who fail to tell us the reactions of his fiancée.

Heliogabalus was thrice married. The first time to Cornelia Paula, secondly to the first Vestal, and the third time to a woman resembling Cornelia Paula; then he divorced her and took back his vestal virgin, only to return finally to Cornelia Paula. It should be noted here that Heliogabalus took the first Vestal, not as some pre-war maharajah might take the principal dancer at the Paris Opera and marry her, but with a blasphemous and sacrilegious intent, which aroused the rage of another historian, Dio Cassius.

“This man”, he writes, “who should have been scourged, flung into prison, hurled down the Gemoniae, brings to his bed the guardian of the sacred flame, and deflowers her amid universal silence.”

I myself maintain that Heliogabalus was the first emperor who dared overthrow this rite of war, the

guardianship of the sacred flame, and who polluted, just as he had to, the climate of the Palladium.

Heliogabalus erected a temple to his god, slap in the centre of Roman piety, to replace the insipid little temple consecrated to Jupiter Palatinus. On the temple's destruction, he built a richer but smaller reproduction of the temple of Emesa.

Yet the zeal of Heliogabalus for his god, his taste for ritual and for theatre, are nowhere better exemplified than in the marriage of the Black Stone to a bride worthy of him. This bride had to be sought throughout the empire. Thus, even in stone, even via the stone, he will have accomplished the sacred rite, he will have demonstrated the effectiveness of the symbol. And what all history regards as one more of his follies and an act of puerile pointlessness seems to me material and rigorous proof of his poetic religiosity.

But Heliogabalus who detests war, and whose reign isn't to be sullied by the sight of a single war, won't, as is suggested to him, donate the Palladium as bride to Elagabalus – the bloodstained Palladium that, in the hands of Pallas who ought rather to be called Hecate, like the night whence she issued, was cradle of future warriors – but does give the Tanith-Astarte of Carthage, whose mild milk flows far from the sacrifices made to Moloch.

Never mind that the Phallus, the Black Stone, bears within its interior a sort of female sex that the gods themselves have incised; Heliogabalus thereby wishes, through this represented coupling, to indicate that the member is active and functions, and it matters little that it's in effigy and in the abstract.

There's a strange rhythm to the cruelty of Heliogabalus; this initiate does everything with art and everything is doubled. I mean that he does everything on two levels. Each of his gestures is double-edged.

Order, Disorder,
Unity, Anarchy,
Poetry, Dissonance,
Rhythm, Discordance,
Grandeur, Childishness,
Generosity, Cruelty.

From the top of the newly erected towers of his temple to the Pythian god, he scatters corn and male members.

He feeds a castrated people.

There are certainly no theorbos, no tubas, no orchestras of citharas accompanying the castrations he decrees, but which he decrees each time like so many personal castrations, and as if it were Elagabalus Himself being castrated. Sacks of male sexes are cast from the tops of the towers with the cruellest abundance on the day of the festival of the Pythian god.

I couldn't swear to it, but an orchestra of citharas or squeaky-stringed, hard-bellied nebelns might have been concealed somewhere in the darkest cellars of the spiral towers, so as to drown the shrieks of the parasites being castrated; but these shrieks of martyred men almost simultaneously match the acclamations of a rejoicing populace to whom Heliogabalus distributes the equivalent of several fields' worth of corn.

Good, evil, blood, sperm, rose-wines, embalming oils, the costliest perfumes, all create, alongside the generosity of Heliogabalus, innumerable irrigations.

And the music that emerges from this bypasses the ear, to reach the mind without instruments, without orchestra. I mean that the cheap refrains, the themes of sickly orchestras are nothing beside this ebb and flow, this tide which comes and goes with strange dissonances, from his generosity to his cruelty, from his taste for disorder to the quest for an order inapplicable to the Latin world.

I repeat furthermore that apart from the assassination of Gannys, the sole crime that can be imputed to him, Heliogabalus put to death only the cronies of Macrinus, who was himself a traitor and an assassin, and he was on all occasions most economical with human blood. There is throughout his reign a flagrant disproportion between blood spilt and men actually killed.

The exact date of his coronation is not known, but we do know what his largesse cost the empire's treasury upon that day. It was of sufficient magnitude to compromise his own material security, and to sink him in debt for the remainder of his reign.

He does not cease to want to make the munificence of his largesse equal his own idea of a king.

He puts an elephant in the place of a donkey, replaces a dog with a horse, puts a lion where a tabby cat would have done, and the whole school of sacerdotal dancing girls where all that was expected was a procession of foundlings.

Everywhere prodigality, excess, abundance, immoderation. The purest generosity and compassion meeting to counterbalance a spasmodic cruelty.

While walking through the markets he weeps over the poverty of the masses.

But at the same time he has the empire scoured for sailors with members at the ready, Nobs as he dubs them, and for jailbirds, former murderers who'll give as good as they get in the course of his sexual onslaughts, and who season with their dreadful crudities the turbulence of his feasts.

He inaugurates with Zoticus the nepotism of the prick!

“A certain Zoticus was so powerful during his reign that all the other high-ranking officials treated him as if he were the husband of his master. Moreover, this same Zoticus, abusing his right of familiarity, gave importance to all the words and actions of Heliogabalus. Aspiring to the greatest wealth, making threats to some and promises to others, deceiving everyone, and when leaving the presence of the prince, seeking out this or that person so as to inform them: ‘I said such and such on your behalf, here’s what I heard said about you; this is how it’ll turn out for you’, as is usual with such types, those who, admitted by princes to an excessive familiarity, sell the reputation of their master, whether he be good or bad; and thanks to the foolishness or inexperience of emperors who notice nothing, wallow in the pleasure of divulging infamies...”

He weeps like the child he is over the treachery of Hierocles; yet far from directing his cruelty against this low-class charioteer, it is against himself that he turns his rage, and he punishes himself by getting himself flogged till the blood flows, for having been betrayed by a charioteer.

He gives the people everything that is important to them:

BREAD AND GAMES.

Even when he feeds the people, he feeds them with lyricism, he provides them with that leaven of exaltation which is at the heart of all true magnificence. And the people are never touched, never broken by his bloody tyranny that never mistakes its aim.

Everyone Heliogabalus sends to the galleys, castrates or orders to be flogged, he takes from among the aristocrats, the nobles, the pederasts of his personal court, the parasites of the palace.

He systematically pursues, as I've said, the perversion and destruction of all value and all order, but what is admirable and proves the irremediable decadence of the Latin world, is the fact that for four successive years, and with everyone's knowledge, he could continue this work of systematic destruction without anyone protesting: and his fall is of no more significance than a mere palace revolution.

But if Heliogabalus goes from woman to woman as he goes from charioteer to charioteer, he goes also from jewel to jewel, from robe to robe, from feast to feast and from ornament to ornament.

By means of the colour and feel of the jewels, the fall of the robes, the arrangement of the feasts, of the gems that even gash his skin, his mind makes strange voyages. It is here that we see him grow pale, see him tremble, seeking a flash of illumination, a harshness to which he clings, when faced with the dreadful flight of everything.

Here it is that a form of superior anarchy manifests itself, wherein his profound unease catches fire; he hastens from jewel to jewel, from outburst to scandal, from form to form and from flame to flame, as if he were running from soul to soul in a mysterious interior odyssey that no one

after him ever again made.

I see a dangerous monomania, both for others and for him who surrenders to it, in the fact of changing one's robe every day and of placing upon each robe a jewel, never the same, which corresponds to the star-signs. There is in this much more than a taste for expensive luxury, a propensity for pointless waste – there's evidence of an immense, insatiable fever of the mind, of a soul athirst for emotions, upheavals, displacements, and which has the taste for metamorphoses. Whatever the price to be paid for them and the risk thus incurred.

And in the fact of inviting cripples to his table and of varying every day the form of their infirmities I denote a disquieting taste for disease and discomfort, a taste that will go on growing towards the pursuit of sickness on the largest possible scale; that is, for a sort of perpetual contagion of epidemic range. And this too is anarchy, but spiritual and specious, and all the more cruel, all the more dangerous for being cruel and concealed.

That he spends a day eating a meal means he is introducing space into his alimentary digestion and that a meal begun at dawn ends at sunset, after passing through the four cardinal points.

For hour by hour, dish by dish, house to house, and from orientation to orientation, Heliogabalus is on the move. And the end of the meal indicates that he's come full circle, closed the circle in space and that, within this circle, he has set the two poles of his digestion.

Heliogabalus pushed towards paroxysm the pursuit of art, the pursuit of ritual and poetry amid the most absurd magnificence.

“The fish that he had served were always cooked in a sauce tinted blue as seawater, and they retained the

colour natural to them. For a while he took baths in rose-wine, with roses. There he drank with all his cronies and scented the bath-houses with nard. He put balm instead of oil in the lamps. Never did any woman, except his wife, receive his embraces twice. He established in his house brothels for his friends, favourites and servants. Dining, he never spent less than a hundred sesterces. In this respect he outdid Vitellius and Apicius. He used oxen to haul fish from the fisheries. One day he happened to weep over the public's poverty while he crossed the market. He used to enjoy attaching his minions to a millwheel and by rotation plunging them sometimes into the water and sometimes hauling them back aloft: then he would call them his sweet Ixions."

Not only the Roman world but the land of Rome and the Roman countryside were utterly disrupted by him.

"It is reported", Lampridius continues, "that he staged naumachia on lakes dug by human hand and filled by him with wine, and that the cloaks of the combatants were steeped in essence of enanthem; that he drove to the Vatican chariots harnessed with four elephants, after having had the tombs which hindered his passage destroyed; that in the Circus, for his own personal spectacle, he had chariots harnessed with four camels abreast."

His death was the coronation of his life; and if from the Roman point of view it was fitting, it was also fitting from the point of view of Heliogabalus. Heliogabalus died the ignominious death of a rebel, but of one who died for his ideas.

Faced with the general vexation occasioned by this outburst of poetic anarchy, and clandestinely cultivated by the perfidious Julia Mamaea, Heliogabalus allowed

himself a double. He confided in, took on as coadjutor, a poor imitation of himself, a sort of second-string emperor, little Alexander Severus, the son of Julia Mamaea.

But if Elagabalus is man and woman, he isn't two men at once. In this there's a material duality that for Heliogabalus is a fundamental insult, and one which Heliogabalus cannot accept.

He rebels a first time, yet instead of inciting against the young virgin emperor the populace that loves *him*, Heliogabalus – that rabble profiting from his generosity, and over whose poverty he has been seen to weep – he tries to have Alexander Severus assassinated by his Pretorian Guard, still being led by a dancer, and of whose overt rebellion he's unaware. It is against himself that his own police then try to turn their weapons; and Julia Mamaea encourages them; but Julia Moesa intervenes. Heliogabalus makes a timely escape.

Things calm down. – Heliogabalus could have accepted the *fait accompli*, could have endured the presence of this pale emperor of whom he was jealous and who, though he had not the people's love, did at least have that of the soldiery, the police and the nobility.

Yet now it is, on the contrary, that Heliogabalus shows everything he's made of; a spirit undisciplined and fanatical, a real king, a rebel, a crazed individualist.

To accept, to submit, is to gain time; it's to sanction his downfall without ensuring the tranquillity of his life, since Julia Mamaea is at work, and he well knows she will not abdicate. Between absolute monarchy and her son remains but a single great heart in a single breast – one for which this so-called christian has only hatred and contempt.

A life for a life, it's a life for a life! That of Alexander Severus or his own. This, anyway, is what Heliogabalus clearly felt. And in his own heart he decides

that it will be the life of Alexander Severus.

After this first warning, the praetorians have quietened down; everything reverts to order, but Heliogabalus takes it upon himself again to rekindle the conflagration and disorder, and so to prove that he stays steadfast in his conduct!

Whipped up by emissaries, a mob of commoners – charioteers, artists, beggars, mountebanks – attempts to invade that part of the palace where on a certain night in February 222 Alexander Severus is resting, right by the room in which Julia Mamaea sleeps. But the palace is full of armed guards. The sound of swords drawn, the loud clash of shields, of the war cymbals rallying the troops hidden inside every palace room, is enough to rout a rabble that is almost unarmed.

It is then that the armed guards turn against Heliogabalus, whom they hunt all over the palace. Julia Soemia has perceived the agitation; she comes running. She finds Heliogabalus in a sort of secluded corridor, she screams to him to flee. And she accompanies him in his flight. From all sides resound the shouts of the pursuers rushing about, their heavy running makes the walls shake, a nameless panic seizes Heliogabalus and his mother. They sense death on all sides. They emerge within the gardens that slope down toward the Tiber under the shade of the tall pines. In one remote corner, behind a thick stand of fragrant box and ilex, extend the soldiers' open-air latrines, their trenches like furrows ploughed into the soil. The Tiber is too far. The soldiers too close. Heliogabalus, fear-crazed, with one leap hurls himself into the latrines, he plunges into the excrement. It is the end.

The troops, who have seen him, catch up with him; and already his own praetorians grab hold of his hair. It turns into a scene from the meat-stall, a disgusting butchery, an ancient tableau of the slaughterhouse.

Excrement mingles with blood, splashes up with the blood on the swords that forage in the flesh of Heliogabalus and his mother.

Then their carcasses are pulled out, carted off by torchlight, dragged through the town before the terrified populace, in front of the houses of the patricians, who open their windows to applaud. An immense crowd surges toward the Tiber's quays in the wake of these lamentable lumps of flesh already drained of blood, yet besmeared.

"To the sewer," now howls the populace that has profited from the largesse of Heliogabalus but has digested it all too well.

"To the sewer, both corpses, the corpse of Heliogabalus to the sewer!"

Sated with blood and the obscene sight of these two bodies – stripped naked, ravaged and exposing all their organs, even the most private – the mob tries to stuff the body of Heliogabalus into the first available sewer hole. But, slender though it be, it's still too wide. Best think again.

To Elagabalus Bassianus Avitus, otherwise known as Heliogabalus, has already been added the nickname Varius, since he was spawned by multiple seedings and born of a prostitute. He was later given the names Tiberian and Draggle-tail, because he was dragged along and thrown into the Tiber after they'd tried shoving him down the sewer; but when they reached the sewer, since his shoulders were too broad, they tried to trim him to fit. Thus they removed the skin, laying bare the skeleton, which was to be left intact; and they might then have added two epithets, The Trimmed and The Polished. But after whittling, he was evidently still too wide, and they tipped his body into the Tiber, which tugged it out to sea; close in its backwash followed the corpse of Julia Soemia.

Thus ended Heliogabalus, without inscription and

without tomb, but with atrocious funeral rites. He died a coward, yet in a state of open rebellion; and such a life, crowned by such a death, needs, I think, no conclusion.

APPENDIX I

THE SCHISM OF IRSHU

Fabre d'Olivet in his Philosophical History Of The Human Race, discusses at some length a primitive separation of essences which needs to be comprehended simultaneously on the divine and the human spheres. The latter area being only the reflection and, as it were, the historical repercussion of the former: the heavenly agency which, at the origin of everything, brings only the purest forces to bear.

Nevertheless, long after the Hindus established themselves in the lands of Pallisthan, the races – great enthusiasts of the metaphysical – began to quarrel with each other over a question of principles that has caused more bloodshed than all the modern wars, and for a far longer period.

Whereas in barbarous times – like those in which we live – the loftiest spiritual matters go no further than the means of redistributing surplus food among malnourished races and those who are literally dying of hunger, prehistory has known times glorious for mankind, in which the latter could still wage war for its ideals.

For those interested in such matters, and those to whom metaphysics are something more exciting than the search for the most favourable positions for physical love – i.e. those for whom the mind, thereby only following its own organic law, is still capable when necessary of rising to principles through due process of abstraction – it may be said (and here I only echo Fabre d'Olivet) that men have long believed in the existence of a single principle, a spiritual nature, upon which everything depends.

But one day those same men, taking the study of music as a basis, make a startling discovery. They discover that the origin of things is double, when they thought it single; and that the world, far from being descended from a single principle, is the product of a conjoined duality. Impossible to doubt it: the facts are there; the facts, i.e. the transcendent analysis of music, or rather, of the origin of sounds. As far back as one delves into the formation of sounds one finds two parallel principles that obtain, uniting in order to produce vibration. And beyond that there's only pure essence, unanalysable abstraction, the indeterminate absolute, 'The Intelligible', finally, as Fabre d'Olivet calls it.

And between 'The Intelligible', and the world, nature, creation, there's rightly harmony, vibration, the acoustic that is the first transition, the subtlest and most malleable, uniting the abstract and the concrete.

More than taste, sight, touch, more than sexual emotion, more than the soul's exaltation on the purest of pretexts, it is sound, acoustic vibration that accounts for taste, sight and the uplifting effect of the sublimest passions. If the origin of sounds is double, all is double. And here panic begins. And anarchy which breeds war, and the massacre of adherents. And if there are two principles, one is male and the other female.

Yet – and here's the reason for war: the partisans of the Male do not believe in the coexistence of principles, and for them the intelligible Male remains alone, at the origin of everything.

And in a country like India where they believe in the pre-eminence of a single principle of a male nature, the schism of Irshu, in a prehistoric era, represents the revolt of the partisans of woman, led by Irshu, against the adherents of man, led by Irshu's brother, Tarak'hyan.

The war ends with the crushing of woman – whose adherents surge in disarray across an immense area and end up around the Mediterranean seaboard.

In time their name changes; and from their original Pali (palefaces or Shepherds), they become Yoni (the vagina), and finally Pinkshas (the Redheaded), after the menses they share between them in unmentionable feasts.

Red, altered from the yellowness in menstrual humours, that's the origin of Tyrian purple, famous throughout antiquity.

APPENDIX II

THE RELIGION OF THE SUN IN SYRIA

And here finally is my interpretation of the temples, their opposing cults – the life within stones, bloody mutilations, the racing Galli, the baying of the oracles, the roaring of the heavens, – and two hundred years after Christ all this divine clamour made by the Syria of Heliogabalus, whose quasi-satanic rut quivers in the midst of the blood-rites.

The religion of Emesa is magical because it preserved in concrete fashion the notion of the great principles. And Paganism in its initiatory and superior sense is the preoccupation with the great principles that still continue to flow and exist within the blood of individuals. And the notion of principles is the notion of that war which, since the beginning, those principles have had to wage so as to stabilise creation.

Paganism, in its rites and festivals, reproduces the first complete Creation myth of which Christianity – exalting the Redemption, celebrates only one part, and that only on the historical level – while Paganism celebrates it totally and within its principle.

And the pederastic religion of Heliogabalus, which is the religion of the separation of the principle, is repugnant only because it lost that transcendent notion so as to sink into the eroticism of the creation, as acted out and sexualised.

APPENDIX III

THE ZODIAC OF RAM

The twelve houses of the Zodiac of Ram number 12 because that is the number of nature, in the Pythagorean tradition. It is indeed curious to note that 12 is the number of the juxtaposition of the two principles: God, Nature; Mind, Matter; Man, Woman, – but in their inert state, when they are not yet operative, and are still the numbers 1 and 2.

But 12 in its turn is obtained by multiplying 3 and 4: 3, in the principle, by 4 in the tangible. And it may thus be said that the 4 great races of mankind respond like organic echoes to the divisions of the Zodiac of Ram, handed down by God.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

“His memory”, wrote Gibbon of the notorious, short-lived teenage Emperor Heliogabalus, “was branded with eternal infamy by the senate; the justice of whose decree has been satisfied by posterity.”

Antonin Artaud's highly distinctive, poetic 'biography' of the weirdly androgynous Sun-king was first published by Denoël & Steele, Paris in April, 1934, with 6 illustrations by André Derain. Initially commissioned by Robert Denoël, Artaud warmed to his task. He researched in libraries, reading voraciously and working all day, as he informed Anaïs Nin at the time, and ended up dictating this book with considerable thespian relish.

Indeed, the year after its appearance, Artaud would write: “The life of Heliogabalus is theatrical. But his theatrical way of conceiving existence strives to create a true magic of the real. Indeed, I do not conceive of theatre as separate from existence.”

As far as I know, mine is the first complete English translation of this fascinating mystico-historical essay – based upon the definitive version later published by Gallimard as one separate volume among its author's substantial *Collected Works*.

I have generally preserved Artaud's often idiosyncratic punctuation (e.g. a comma or semi-colon followed by a dash), along with certain of his habits of diction, such as beginning sentences and whole paragraphs with a resoundingly Biblical 'And'. The author's use of lower- and upper-case may also seem eccentric sometimes to the casual reader (if there can exist any 'casual reader' of *Heliogabalus!*), yet there is method in his madness.

As to this last issue, I wasn't previously aware of the extent either of Artaud's Greekness or of his madness.

But through personal experience of and empathy with, both these states, I've keenly enjoyed the challenge of trying to convey to Anglophone readers something of the flavour of a singular book and an extraordinary vision.

Alexis Lykiard

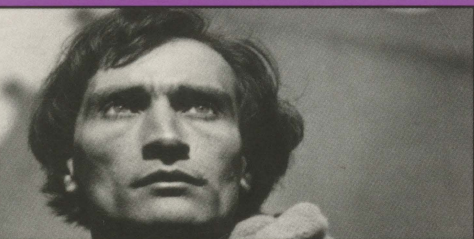
“The world must be destroyed” –Antonin Artaud, 1933

Antonin Artaud’s novelised biography of the third-century Roman Emperor Heliogabalus is simultaneously his most accessible and his most extreme book. Written in 1933, at the time when Artaud was preparing to stage his legendary Theatre of Cruelty, *Heliogabalus* is a powerful concoction of sexual excess, self-deification and terminal violence.

Reflecting its author’s preoccupations of the time with the occult, magic, Satan, and a range of esoteric religions, the book shows Artaud at his most lucid as he assembles an entire world-view from raw material of insanity, sexual obsession and anger. Artaud arranges his account of Heliogabalus’s reign around the breaking of corporeal borders and the expulsion of body fluids, often inventing incidents from the Emperor’s life in order to make more explicit his own passionate denunciations of modern existence.

No reader of Artaud’s most inflammatory work – translated into English here for the very first time – will emerge unscathed from the experience.

Translated by Alexis Lykiard (acclaimed translator of Lautréamont’s *Maldoror*) and with an introduction by Stephen Barber (author, *Artaud: The Screaming Body* and *Artaud: Blows & Bombs*).



Antonin Artaud c.1928

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