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A Picture,
A Thousand Words

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Contents

A THOUSAND WORDS, A PICTURE

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In conversation, when someone asks me what I do, I tend to get flummoxed. So I've prepared an apparently satisfactory response, or one that at least allows me to stave off further inquiries. I say I was actually intended to be a writer, probably a novelist, but somehow I ended up standing in the wrong line and inadvertently "signed up" to be a visual artist.

You see, I'm completely enamored and envious of the way a truly skilled author can get the reader to somehow know things about the plot or a character without directly stating them. How is it I can know, while reading a great novel in which none of this is explicitly spelled out, that certain characters are liars, that others despise one another, that a love affair is doomed from the start. I've spent countless hours considering how any of this mastery of implication can find some parallel in the work I do, and have devised a term for such a pictorial equivalent — something I call "Visual Innuendo."

Amidst the mulling … Voilà! Along comes Roberto Bolaño's *Labyrinth*, a work that contains all these complex relationships between image and words. The piece begins with a captioned group photograph of French literary figures, which is then followed by a text. Bolaño describes the people sitting around a table in great detail, using their actual names, and then spins off from there. One by one, he absents the characters from this initial locale, and fabricates scenarios about what they do outside and beyond the picture frame. So it's necessary to move between the characters in the narratives and the ones frozen in the photograph. And as we read, we need to keep referring back to the photo. In toggling back and forth, the photo is no longer limited to functioning as an illustration, and the text is promoted beyond operating as a caption.

The text and photograph accompany and modify each other. The picture and words exist in a complex relationship to each other, maybe like the liaison between song and lyrics. They act simultaneously as illustrations, fulcrums, references, starting points, captions, extrapolations, and footnotes, to and for each other.

With this work in mind, I feel encouraged to continue on creating fiction, albeit off the page. I'm bolstered in my inclination to ignore the current obsession with "unpacking" a text or image. How about I just show you the suitcase.

They're seated. They're looking at the camera.
They are captioned, from left to right: J. Henric, J.-J. Goux, Ph. Sollers, J. Kristeva, M.-Th. Réveillé, P. Guyotat, C. Devade, and M. Devade.
There's no photo credit.

"Literature brushes past these literary creatures and kisses them on the lips, but they don't even notice." Roberto Bolaño

LABYRINTH
Roberto Bolaño

They're seated. They're looking at the camera. They are captioned, from left to right: J. Henric, J.-J. Goux, Ph. Sollers, J. Kristeva, M.-Th. Réveillé, P. Guyotat, C. Devade, and M. Devade.

There's no photo credit.

They're sitting around a table. It's an ordinary table, made of wood, perhaps, or plastic, it could even be a marble table on metal legs, but nothing could be less germane to my purpose than to give an exhaustive description of it. The table is a table that is large enough to seat the above-mentioned individuals and it's in a café. Or appears to be. Let's suppose, for the moment, that it's in a café.

The eight people who appear in the photo, who are *posing* for the photo, are fanned out around one side of the table in a crescent or a kind of opened-out horseshoe, so that each of them can be seen clearly and completely. In other words, no one is facing away from the camera. In front of them, or rather between them and the photographer (and this is slightly strange), there are three plants—a rhododendron, a ficus, and an everlasting—rising from a planter, which may serve, but this is speculation, as a barrier between two distinct sections of the café.

The photo was probably taken in 1977 or thereabouts.

But let us return to the figures. On the left-hand side we have, as I said, J. Henric, that is, the writer Jacques Henric, born in 1938 and the author of "Archées," "Artaud Travaillé par la Chine," and "Chasses." Henric is a solidly built man, broad-shouldered, muscular-looking, probably not very tall. He's wearing a plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled halfway up his forearms. He's not what you would call a handsome man; he has the square face of a farmer or a construction worker, thick eyebrows, and a dark chin, one of those chins which need to be shaved twice a day (or so some people claim). His legs are crossed and his hands are clasped over his knee.

Next to him is J.-J. Goux. About J.-J. Goux I know nothing. He's probably called Jean-Jacques, but in this story, for the sake of convenience, I'll continue to use his initials. J.-J. Goux is young and blond. He's wearing glasses. There's nothing especially attractive about his features (although, compared with Henric, he looks not only more handsome but also more intelligent). The line of his jaw is symmetrical and his lips are full, the

lower lip slightly thicker than the upper. He's wearing a turtleneck sweater and a dark leather jacket.

Beside J.-J. is Ph. Sollers, Philippe Sollers, born in 1936, the editor of *Tel Quel*, author of "Drame," "Nombres," and "Paradis," a public figure familiar to everyone. Sollers has his arms crossed, the left arm resting on the surface of the table, the right arm resting on the left (and his right hand indolently cupping the elbow of his left arm). His face is round. It would be an exaggeration to say that it's the face of a fat man, but it probably will be in a few years' time: it's the face of a man who enjoys a good meal. An ironic, intelligent smile is hovering about his lips. His eyes, which are much livelier than those of Henric or J.-J., and smaller, too, remain fixed on the camera, and the bags underneath them help to give his round face a look that is at once preoccupied, perky, and playful. Like J.-J., he's wearing a turtleneck sweater, though the sweater that Sollers is wearing is white, dazzlingly white, while J.-J.'s is probably yellow or light green. Over the sweater Sollers is wearing a garment that appears at first glance to be a dark-colored leather jacket, though it could be made of a lighter material, possibly suède. He's the only one who's smoking.

Beside Sollers is J. Kristeva, Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian semiologist, his wife. She is the author of "La Traversée des Signes," "Pouvoirs de l'Horreur," and "Le Langage, Cet Inconnu." She's slim, with prominent cheekbones, black hair parted in the middle and gathered into a bun at the back. Her eyes are dark and lively, as lively as those of Sollers, although there are differences: in addition to being larger, they transmit a certain hospitable warmth (that is, a certain serenity) which is absent from her husband's eyes. She's wearing a turtleneck sweater, which is very close-fitting, though the collar is loose, and a long V-shaped necklace that accentuates the form of her torso. At first glance she could almost be Vietnamese. Except that her breasts, it seems, are larger than those of the average Vietnamese woman. Hers is the only smile that allows us a glimpse of teeth.

Beside la Kristeva is M.-Th. Réveillé. About her, too, I know nothing. She's probably called Marie-Thérèse. Let's suppose that she is. Marie-Thérèse, then, is the first person so far not to be wearing a turtleneck sweater. Henric isn't, either, actually, but his neck is short (he barely has one at all), while Marie-Thérèse Réveillé, by contrast, has a neck that is long and entirely revealed by the dark garment she is wearing. Her hair is straight and long, with a center part, light brown in color, or perhaps honey blond. Thanks to the slight leftward turn of her face, a pearl can be seen suspended from her ear, like a stray satellite.

Next to Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is P. Guyotat, that is, Pierre Guyotat,

born in 1940, the author of "Tombeau pour Cinq Cent Mille Soldats," "Éden, Éden, Éden," and "Prostitution." Guyotat is bald. That's his most striking characteristic. He's also the handsomest man in the group. His bald head is radiant, his skull capacious, and the black hair at his temples resembles nothing so much as the laurel leaves that used to wreathe the heads of victorious Roman generals. Neither shrinking away nor striking a pose, he has the expression of a man who travels by night. He's wearing a leather jacket, a shirt, and a T-shirt. The T-shirt (but here there must be some mistake) is white with black horizontal stripes and a thicker black stripe around the neck, like something a child might wear, or a Soviet parachutist. His eyebrows are narrow and definite. They mark the border between his immense forehead and a face that is wavering between concentration and indifference. The eyes are inquisitive, but perhaps they give a false impression. His lips are pressed together in a way that may not be deliberate.

Next to Guyotat is C. Devade. Caroline? Carole? Carla? Colette? Claudine? We'll never know. Let's say, for the sake of convenience, that she's called Carla Devade. She could well be the youngest member of the group. Her hair is short, without bangs, and although the photo is in black-and-white, it's reasonable to suppose that her skin has an olive tone, suggesting a Mediterranean background. Maybe Carla Devade is from the South of France, or Catalonia, or Italy. Only Julia Kristeva is as dark, but Kristeva's skin—perhaps it's a trick of the light—has a metallic, bronze-like quality, while Carla Devade's is silky and yielding. She is wearing a dark sweater with a round neck, and a blouse. Her lips and her eyes betray more than a hint of a smile: a sign of recognition, perhaps.

Next to Carla Devade is M. Devade. This is presumably the writer Marc Devade, who was still a member of *Tel Quel*'s editorial committee. His relationship with Carla Devade is obvious: man and wife. Could they be brother and sister? Possibly, but the physical dissimilarities are numerous. Marc Devade (I find it hard to call him Marc, I would have preferred to translate that "M" into Marcel or Max) is blond, chubby-cheeked, and has very light eyes. So it makes more sense to presume that they are man and wife. Just to be different, Devade is wearing a turtleneck sweater, like J.-J. Goux, Sollers, and Kristeva, and a dark jacket. His eyes are large and beautiful, and his mouth is decisive. His hair, as I said, is blond; it's long (longer than that of the other men) and elegantly combed back. His forehead is broad and perhaps slightly bulging. And he has, although this may be an illusion produced by the graininess of the image, a dimple in his chin. How many of them are looking directly at the photographer? Only a few: J.-J. Goux, Sollers, and Marc Devade. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and

Carla Devade are looking away to the left, past Henric. Guyotat's gaze is angled slightly to the right, fixed on a point a yard or two from the photographer. And Kristeva, whose gaze is the strangest of all, appears to be looking straight at the camera, but in fact she's looking at the photographer's stomach, or, to be more precise, into the empty space beside his hip.

The photo was taken in winter or autumn, or maybe at the beginning of spring, but certainly not in summer. Who are the most warmly dressed? J.-J. Goux, Sollers, and Marc Devade, without question: they're wearing jackets over their turtleneck sweaters, and thick jackets, too, from the look of them, especially J.-J.'s and Devade's. Kristeva is a case apart: her turtleneck sweater is light, more elegant than practical, and she's not wearing anything over it. Then we have Guyotat. He might be as warmly dressed as the four I've already mentioned. He doesn't seem to be, but he's the only one wearing three layers: the black leather jacket, the shirt, and the striped T-shirt. You could imagine him wearing those clothes even if the photo had been taken in summer. It's quite possible. All we can say for sure is that Guyotat is dressed as if he were on his way somewhere else. As for Carla Devade, she's in between. Her blouse, whose collar is showing over the top of her sweater, looks soft and warm; the sweater itself is casual, but of good quality, neither very heavy nor very light. Finally, we have Jacques Henric and Marie-Thérèse Réveillé. Henric is clearly not a man who feels the cold, although his Canadian lumberjack's shirt looks warm enough. And the least warmly dressed of all is Marie-Thérèse Réveillé. Under her light, knitted V-neck sweater there are only her breasts, cupped by a black or white bra.

All of them, more or less warmly dressed, captured by the camera at that moment in 1977 or thereabouts, are friends, and some of them are lovers, too. For a start, Sollers and Kristeva, obviously, and the two Devades, Marc and Carla. Those, we might say, are the stable couples. And yet there are certain features of the photo (something about the arrangement of the objects, the petrified, musical rhododendron, two of its leaves invading the space of the ficus like clouds within a cloud, the grass growing in the planter, which looks more like fire than grass, the everlasting leaning whimsically to the left, the glasses in the center of the table, well away from the edges, except for Kristeva's, as if the other members of the group were worried they might fall) that suggest a more complex and subtle web of relations among these men and women.

Let's imagine J.-J. Goux, for example, who is looking out at us through his thick submarine spectacles.

His space in the photo is momentarily vacant and we see him walking along Rue de l'École de Médecine, with books under his arm, of course,

two books, till he comes out onto Boulevard Saint-Germain. There he turns his steps toward the Mabillon Métro station, but first he stops in front of a bar, checks the time, goes in, and orders a cognac. After a while, J.-J. moves away from the bar and sits down at a table near the window. What does he do? He opens a book. We can't tell what book it is, but we do know that he's finding it difficult to concentrate. Every twenty seconds or so he lifts his head and looks out onto Boulevard Saint-Germain, his gaze a little more gloomy each time. It's raining, and people are walking hurriedly under their umbrellas. J.-J.'s blond hair isn't wet, from which we can deduce that it began to rain after he entered the bar. It's getting dark. J.-J. remains seated, and now there are two cognacs and two coffees on his tab. Coming closer, we can see that the dark rings under his eyes have the look of a war zone. At no point has he taken off his glasses. He's a pitiful sight. After a very long wait, he goes back out onto the street, where he is gripped by a shiver, perhaps because of the cold. For a moment he stands still on the sidewalk and looks both ways, then he starts walking in the direction of the Mabillon Métro station. When he reaches the entrance, he runs his hand through his hair several times, as if he'd suddenly realized that his hair was a mess, although it's not. Then he goes down the steps, and the story ends or freezes in an empty space where appearances gradually fade away. Who was J.-J. Goux waiting for? For someone he's in love with? Someone he was hoping to sleep with that night? And how was his delicate sensibility affected by that person's failure to show up?

Let's suppose that the person who didn't come was Jacques Henric. While J.-J. was waiting for him, Henric was riding a 250-cc Honda motorcycle to the entrance of the apartment building where the Devades live. But no. That's impossible. Let's imagine that Henric simply climbed onto his Honda and rode off into a vaguely literary, vaguely unstable Paris, and that his absence on this occasion is strategic, as amorous absences nearly always are.

So let's set up the couples again. Carla Devade and Marc Devade. Sollers and Kristeva. J.-J. Goux and Jacques Henric. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Pierre Guyotat. And let's set up the night. J.-J. Goux is sitting and reading a book whose title is immaterial, in a bar on Boulevard Saint-Germain; his turtleneck sweater won't let his skin breathe, but he doesn't yet feel entirely ill at ease. Henric is stretched out on his bed, half undressed, smoking and looking at the ceiling. Sollers is shut up in his study, writing (pinkly snug and warm inside his turtleneck sweater). Julia Kristeva is at the university. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is walking along Avenue de Friedland near the intersection with Rue Balzac, the headlights of the cars shining in her face. Guyotat is in a bar on Rue Lacépède, near

the Jardin des Plantes, drinking with some friends. Carla Devade is in her apartment, sitting on a chair in the kitchen, doing nothing. Marc Devade is at the *Tel Quel* office, speaking politely on the phone to one of the poets he most admires and hates. Soon Sollers and Kristeva will be together, reading after dinner. They will not make love tonight. Soon Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Guyotat will be together in bed, and he will sodomize her. They will fall asleep at five in the morning, after exchanging a few words in the bathroom. Soon Carla Devade and Marc Devade will be together, and she will shout, and he will shout, and she will go to the bedroom and pick up a novel, any one of the many that are lying on her bedside table, and he will sit at his desk and try to write but fail. Carla will fall asleep at one in the morning, Marc at half past two, and they will try not to touch each other. Soon Jacques Henric will go down to the underground parking garage and climb onto his Honda and venture out into the cold streets of Paris, becoming cold himself, a man who shapes his own destiny, and knows, or at least believes, that he is lucky. He will be the only member of the group to see the day dawning and the disastrous retreat of the night wanderers, each an enigmatic letter in an imaginary alphabet. Soon J.-J. Goux, who was the first to fall asleep, will have a dream in which a photo will appear, and he'll hear a voice warning him of the Devil's presence and of hapless death. He'll wake with a start from this dream or auditory nightmare and won't be able to get back to sleep for the rest of the night.

Day breaks and the photo is illuminated once again. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Carla Devade look off to the left, at an object beyond Henric's muscular shoulders. There is recognition or acceptance in Carla's gaze: that much is clear from her half smile and gentle eyes. Marie-Thérèse, however, has a penetrating gaze: her lips are slightly open, as if she were having difficulty breathing, and her eyes are trying to fix on (trying, unsuccessfully, to *nail*) the object of her attention, which is presumably moving. The women are looking in the same direction, but it's clear that they have quite different emotional reactions to whatever it is they are seeing. Carla's gentleness may be conditioned by ignorance. Marie-Thérèse's insecurity, her defensive yet inquisitorial glare, may result from the sudden stripping away of various layers of experience.

Any moment now, J.-J. Goux might start to cry. The voice that warned him of the Devil's presence is still ringing, though faintly, in his ears. He is not, however, looking to the left, at the object that has attracted the women's attention, but directly at the camera, and an infinitesimal smile is creeping over his lips, a would-be ironic smile confined, for the moment, to the safer domain of placidity.

When night falls over the photograph again, J.-J. Goux will head

straight for his apartment, make himself a sandwich, watch television for exactly fifteen minutes, not one more, then sit in an armchair in the living room and call Philippe Sollers. The phone will ring five times and J.-J. will hang up slowly, holding the receiver in his right hand, raising his left hand to his lips, and touching them with two fingers, as if to check that he's still there, that the person there is *him*, in a living room that's not too big, not too small, crowded with books, and dark.

As for Carla Devade, having lost her acquiescent smile, she'll call Marie-Thérèse Réveillé, who will pick up the phone after three rings. In a roundabout way, they'll talk about things they don't really want to talk about at all, and arrange to meet in three days' time at a café on Rue Galande. Tonight Marie-Thérèse will go out on her own, to nowhere in particular, and Carla will shut herself in her room as soon as she hears the sound of Marc Devade's key sliding into the lock. But nothing tragic will happen for now. Marc Devade will read an essay by a Bulgarian linguist; Guyotat will go to see a film by Jacques Rivette; Julia Kristeva will stay up late reading; Philippe Sollers will stay up late writing, and he and his wife will barely exchange a word, shut away in their respective studies; Jacques Henric will sit down at his typewriter, but nothing will occur to him, so after twenty minutes he'll put on his leather jacket and his boots and go down to the underground parking garage and look for his Honda; for some reason the lights in the garage don't seem to be working, but Henric can remember where he left his bike, so he walks in the dark, in the belly of that whale-like garage, without fear or apprehension of any kind, until about halfway there he hears an unusual noise (not a knocking in the pipes or the sound of a car door opening or closing) and he stops, without really understanding why, and listens, but the noise is not repeated, and now the silence is absolute.

And then the night ends (or a small part of the night, at least, a manageable part) and light wraps the photo like a bandage on fire, and there he is again, Pierre Guyotat, almost a familiar presence now, with his powerful, shiny bald head and his leather jacket, the jacket of an anarchist or a commissar from the Spanish Civil War, and his sidelong gaze, veering off to the right, as if into the space behind the photographer, as if directed at someone near or at the bar, perhaps, standing or sitting on a stool, someone whose back is turned to Guyotat and whose face is invisible to him unless, and this is not unlikely, there is a mirror behind the bar. It may be a woman. A young woman, perhaps. Guyotat looks at her reflection in the mirror and looks at the back of her neck. His gaze, however, is far less intense than the gaze of this woman, which is plumbing an abyss. Here we can reasonably conclude that, while Guyotat is looking at a stranger,

Marie-Thérèse and Carla are looking at a man they know, although, as is usually (or, in fact, inevitably) the case, their perceptions of him are entirely different.

Let's call these two beyond the frame X and Z. X is the woman at the bar. Z is the man who is known to Marie-Thérèse and Carla. They don't know him very well, of course. From Carla's gaze (which is not only gentle but protective) it could be inferred that he is young, although from Marie-Thérèse's gaze it could also be inferred that he is a potentially dangerous individual. Who else knows Z? No one, or at least there is nothing to suggest that his presence is of any concern to the others. Maybe he's a young writer who at some stage tried to get his work published in *Tel Quel*; maybe he's a young journalist from South America, no, from Central America, who at some point tried to write an article about the group. He may well be an ambitious young man. If he's a Central American in Paris, in addition to being ambitious he may also be bitter. Of the people sitting around the table, he knows only Marie-Thérèse, Carla, Sollers, and Marc Devade. Let's say he once visited the *Tel Quel* office and was introduced to those four. (He also once shook hands with Marcelin Pleynet, but Pleynet's not in the photo.) He has never seen the others in his life, or only (in the cases of Guyotat and Jacques Henric) in author photos. We can imagine the young Central American, hungry and bitter, in the *Tel Quel* office, and we can imagine Philippe Sollers and Marc Devade, wavering between puzzlement and indifference as they listen to him, and we can even imagine that Carla Devade is there by pure chance; she has come to meet her husband, she has brought some papers that Marc forgot on his desk, she's there because she couldn't stand being alone in the apartment a minute longer, etc. What we can't imagine (or justify) in any way at all is Marie-Thérèse's presence in the office. She is Guyotat's partner, she doesn't work for *Tel Quel*, and she has no reason to be there. And yet there she is, and that is where she meets the young Central American. Is she there on that day because of Carla Devade? Has Carla arranged to meet Marie-Thérèse at the office because she knows that Marc will not be coming home with her? Or has Marie-Thérèse come to meet someone else? Let's return, discreetly, to the afternoon when the Central American came to the office on Rue Jacob to pay his respects.

It's the end of the workday. The secretary has already gone home, and when the bell rings it's Marc Devade who opens the door and lets the visitor in without meeting his eye. The Central American crosses the threshold and follows Marc Devade to an office at the end of the corridor. He leaves a trail of drops on the wooden floor behind him, although it stopped raining quite some time ago. Devade is, of course, oblivious of

this detail; he walks ahead, talking about something or other—the weather, money, chores—with that elegance that only certain Frenchmen seem to possess. In the office, which is spacious and contains a desk, several chairs, two armchairs, and shelves full of books and magazines, Sollers is waiting, and as soon as the introductions are over the Central American hails him as a genius, one of the century's most brilliant minds, a compliment that would be par for the course in certain tropical nations on the far side of the Atlantic but which, in the *Tel Quel* office and the ears of Philippe Sollers, verges on the preposterous. In fact, as soon as the Central American makes his declaration, Sollers catches Devade's eye and both of them wonder whether they've let a madman in. Deep down, however, Sollers is eighty per cent in agreement with the Central American's appraisal, so once he has set aside the idea that the visitor might be mocking them the conversation proceeds in an amicable fashion, at least for a while. The Central American speaks of Julia Kristeva (he winks at Sollers as he mentions that eminent Bulgarian), he speaks of Marcelin Pleynet (whom he has already met), and of Denis Roche (whose work he claims to be translating). Devade listens to him with a slightly wry smile. Sollers listens, nodding from time to time, his boredom increasing with every passing second. Suddenly, a sound of footsteps in the corridor. The door opens. Carla Devade appears, wearing tight corduroy trousers, flat shoes, and a disconsolate smile on her pretty Mediterranean face. Marc Devade gets up from his chair; for a moment the couple whisper questions and answers. The Central American has fallen silent; Sollers is mechanically flipping through a British magazine. Then Carla and Marc walk across the room (Carla taking tentative little steps, holding her husband's arm), and the Central American stands up, is introduced, obsequiously greets the newcomer. The conversation immediately resumes, but the Central American's chatter veers off in a new direction, unfortunately for him (he changes the subject from literature to the matchless beauty and grace of French women), at which point Sollers completely loses interest. Shortly afterward, the visit is brought to a close: Sollers looks at his watch, says it's late; Devade shows the Central American to the door, shakes his hand, and the visitor, instead of waiting for the elevator, rushes down the stairs. On the second-floor landing he runs into Marie-Thérèse Réveillé. The Central American is talking to himself in Spanish, not under his breath but out loud. As their paths cross, Marie-Thérèse notices a fierce look in his eyes. They bump into each other. Both apologize. They look at each other again (and this is surprising, the way their eyes meet again after the apology), and what she sees, beneath the expedient mask of bitterness, is a well of unbearable horror and fear.

So the Central American, Z, is there in the café when the photo is taken, and Carla and Marie-Thérèse have recognized him, they've remembered him; perhaps he has just arrived, perhaps he walked past the table at which the group is sitting and greeted them, but, except for the two women, they had no idea who he was; this happens quite often, of course, but it's something that the Central American still can't accept with equanimity. There he is, to the left of the group, with some Central American friends, or waiting for them, maybe, and deep within him there's a seething anger nourished by affronts and grudges, fuelled by bitterness and the chill of the City of Light. His appearance, however, is equivocal: it makes Carla Devade feel like a protective older sister or a missionary nun in Africa, but it catches at Marie-Thérèse Réveillé like barbed wire and triggers a vague erotic longing.

And then night falls again and the photo empties out or disappears under a scribble of lines traced by the mechanism of night, and Sollers is writing in his study, and Kristeva is writing in her study next door—soundproofed studies, so that they can't hear each other typing, for example, or getting up to consult a book, or coughing or talking to themselves—and Carla and Marc Devade are leaving a cinema (they've been to see a film by Rivette), not talking to each other, although a couple of times Marc and then Carla, who's more distracted, greet people they know, and J.-J. Goux is preparing his dinner, a frugal dinner consisting of bread, pâté, cheese, and a glass of wine, and Guyotat is undressing Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and throwing her onto the sofa with a violent thrust that Marie-Thérèse intercepts in midair as if she were catching a butterfly of lucidity in a lucidity net, and Henric is leaving his apartment, going down to the parking garage, and he stops again as the lights go out, first the ones near the metal roller door that opens onto the street, and then the others, till there is only the light down at the far end, illuminating his multicolored Honda, flickering helplessly, and then it fails as well. And it occurs to Henric that his motorcycle is like an Assyrian god, but for the moment his legs refuse to walk on into the darkness, and Marie-Thérèse shuts her eyes and opens her legs, one foot on the sofa, the other on the carpet, while Guyotat pushes into her, the panties still around her thighs, and calls her his little whore, his little bitch, and asks her what she did during the day, what happened to her, what streets she wandered down, and J.-J. Goux is sitting at the table and spreading pâté on a piece of bread and lifting it to his mouth and chewing, first on the right side, then on the left, unhurriedly, with a book by Robert Pinget open beside him to page 2 and the television switched off but the screen reflecting his image, a man on his own with his mouth closed and his cheeks full, looking thoughtful and absent, and

Carla Devade and Marc Devade are making love, Carla on top, illuminated only by the light in the corridor, a light they usually leave on, and Carla is groaning and trying not to look at her husband's face, his blond hair a mess now, his light eyes, his broad and placid face, his delicate, elegant hands, devoid of the fire she's longing for, ineffectually holding her hips, as if he were trying to keep her there with him, but he has no real sense of what she might be fleeing from or what her flight might mean, a flight that goes on and on like torture, and Kristeva and Sollers are going to bed, first her, she has to lecture early the next day, then him, and both of them take books that they will leave on their bedside tables when sleep comes to close their eyes, and Philippe Sollers will dream that he is walking along a beach in Brittany with a scientist who has discovered a way to destroy the world; they will be walking westward along this long, deserted beach, bounded by rocks and black cliffs, and suddenly Sollers will realize that the scientist (who is talking and explaining) is himself and that the man walking beside him is a murderer; this will dawn on him when he looks down at the wet sand (with its souplike consistency) and the crabs skittering away to hide and the prints the two of them are leaving on the beach (there is a certain logic to this: identifying the murderer by his footprints), and Julia Kristeva will dream of a little village in Germany where years ago she participated in a seminar, and she'll see the streets of the village, clean and empty, and sit down in a square that's tiny but full of plants and trees, and close her eyes and listen to the distant cheeping of a single bird and wonder if the bird is in a cage or free, and she'll feel a breeze on her neck and her face, neither cold nor warm, a perfect breeze, perfumed with lavender and orange blossom, and then she'll remember her seminar and look at her watch, but it will have stopped.

So the Central American is outside the frame of the photograph, sharing that pristine and deceptive territory with the object of Guyotat's gaze: an unknown woman armed only, for the moment, with her beauty. Their eyes will not meet. They will pass each other by like shadows, briefly sharing the same hazardous ambit: the itinerant theater of Paris. The Central American could quite easily become a murderer. Perhaps, back in his country, he will, but not here, where the only blood he could possibly shed is his own. This Pol Pot won't kill anyone in Paris. And actually, back in Tegucigalpa or San Salvador, he'll probably end up teaching in a university. As for the unknown woman, she will not be captured by Guyotat's asbestos nets. She's at the bar, waiting for the boyfriend she'll marry before long (him or the next one), and their marriage will be disastrous, though not without its moments of comfort. Literature brushes past these literary creatures and kisses them on the lips, but they don't even notice.

The section of restaurant or café that contains the photo's nest of smoke continues imperturbably on its voyage through nothingness. Behind Sollers, for instance, we can make out the fragmentary figures of three men. None of their faces can be seen in their entirety. The man on the left, in profile: a forehead, one eyebrow, the back part of his ear, the top of his head. The man on the right: a little piece of his forehead, his cheekbone, strands of dark hair. The man in the middle, who seems to be calling the shots: most of his forehead, traversed by two clearly visible wrinkles, his eyebrows, the bridge of his nose, and a discreet quiff. Behind them, there is a pane of glass and behind the glass many people walking about curiously among stalls or exhibition stands, bookstands perhaps, mostly facing away from our characters (who have their backs to them in turn), except for a child with a round face and straight bangs, wearing a jacket that may be too small for him, looking sideways toward the café, as if from that distance he could observe everything going on inside, which, on the face of it, seems rather unlikely.

And in a corner, to the right: the waiting man, the listening man. His face appears just above Marc Devade's blond hair. His hair is dark and abundant, his eyebrows are thick, he is thin. In one hand (a hand resting listlessly against his right temple) he is holding a cigarette. A spiral of smoke is rising from the cigarette toward the ceiling, and the camera has captured it almost as if it were the image of a ghost. Telekinesis. An expert could identify the brand of cigarette that he's smoking in half a second just by the solid look of that smoke. Gauloises, no doubt. He's gazing off toward the photo's right-hand side—that is, he's pretending not to notice that the photo is being taken, but in a way he, too, is posing.

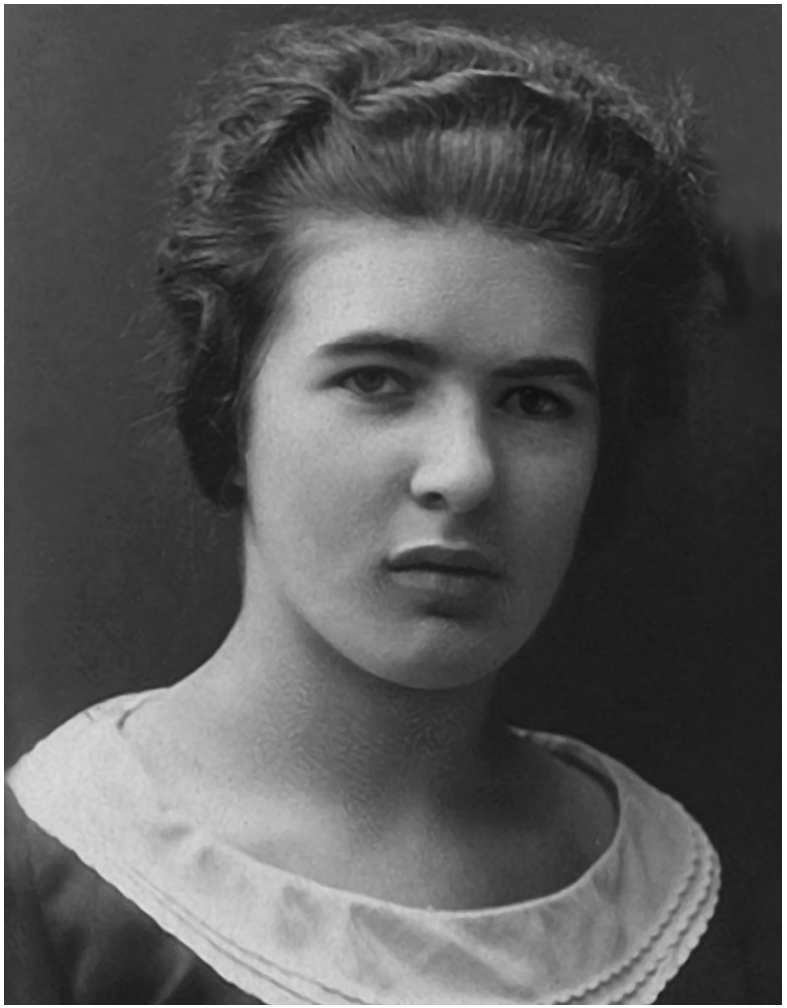
And there is yet another person: careful examination reveals something protruding from Guyotat's neck like a cancerous growth, which turns out to be made up of a nose, a withered forehead, the outline of an upper lip, the profile of a man who is looking, with a certain gravity, in the same direction as the smoking man, although their gazes could not be more different.

And then the photo is occluded and all that is left is the smoke of a Gauloise floating in the air, as if the viewfinder had suddenly swung to the right, toward the black hole of chance, and Sollers comes to a sudden halt in the street, a street near Place Wagram, and feels in his pockets as if he had left his address book behind or lost it, and Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is driving on Boulevard Malesherbes, near Place Wagram, and J.-J. Goux is talking on the phone with Marc Devade (J.-J.'s voice is unsteady, Devade isn't saying a word), and Guyotat and Henric are walking on Rue Saint-André des Arts, heading for Rue Dauphine, and by chance

they run into Carla Devade, who says hello and joins them, and Julia Kristeva is coming out of class surrounded by a retinue of students, quite a few of whom are foreign (two Spaniards, a Mexican, an Italian, two Germans), and once more the photo dissolves into nothingness.

Aurora borealis. Terrible dawn. As they open their eyes, they are almost transparent. Marc Devade, alone in bed, snug in gray pajamas, dreaming of the Académie Goncourt. J.-J. Goux at his window, watching clouds float through the sky over Paris and comparing them unfavorably with certain clouds in paintings by Pissarro or the clouds in his nightmare. Julia Kristeva is sleeping and her calm face seems an Assyrian mask until, with a very slight wince of discomfort, she wakes. Philippe Sollers is in the kitchen, leaning on the edge of the sink, and blood is dripping from his right index finger. Carla Devade is climbing the stairs to her apartment after having spent the night with Guyotat. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is making coffee and reading a book. Jacques Henric is walking through a dark parking garage, which echoes to the sound of his boots on the concrete.

A world of forms is unfolding before his eyes, a world of distant noises. The possibility of fear is approaching, the way wind approaches a provincial capital. Henric stops, his heart speeds up, he tries to orient himself. Before, he could at least glimpse shadows and silhouettes at the far end of the garage; now it seems hermetically black, like the darkness in an empty coffin at the bottom of a crypt. So he decides to keep still. In that stillness his heartbeat gradually slows and memory brings back images of the day. He remembers Guyotat, whom he secretly admires, openly pursuing little Carla. Once again, he sees them smiling and then he sees them walking away down a street where yellow lights scatter and regroup sporadically, without any obvious pattern, although Henric knows deep down that everything is determined in some way, everything is causally linked to something else, and human nature leaves very little room for the truly gratuitous. He touches his crotch. He is startled by this movement, the first he has made for some time. He has an erection and yet he doesn't feel sexually aroused in any way.



Christine Papin († March 8, 1905)

Léa Papin († September 15, 1911)

SISTERS IN CRIME

The sisters Christine Papin (March 8, 1905) and Léa Papin (September 15, 1911) grew up in villages south of Le Mans, France. Both of them spent time in institutions as a result of the breakdown of their parents' marriage. As they grew older, they worked as maids in various Le Mans homes, preferring, whenever possible, to work together. From about 1926, they worked as live-in maids in the home of Monsieur and Madame Lancelin, and their adult daughter. The two maids were extremely quiet and retiring young women, who kept to themselves, and appeared to have no interests but each other.

On February 2, 1933, Monsieur Lancelin was supposed to meet his wife and daughter for dinner at the home of a friend. When they did not arrive, he was concerned and went back to their home. He was unable to get into the house, as the doors were locked from the inside, but he could see the glow of a candle through the window of the maids' room.

The police gained access to the house by climbing over the back wall. Inside, they found the bodies of Madame and Mademoiselle Lancelin. They had both been beaten to the point of being unrecognizable. Madame Lancelin's eyes had been gouged out and were found in the folds of the scarf around her neck, and one of the daughter's eyes was on the floor nearby. The women's thighs had been methodically sliced with kitchen knives. The two maids confessed to killing the two women in the course of a dispute over housework. They had then returned to their attic bedroom to undress and await the police naked in bed together.

An air of mystery hung over the scene of the crime in what has come to be called "the Papin Affair": with the victims its only witnesses and the sisters reticent at their trial, the court officials and medical experts whose testimony convicted them were hard-pressed to construct a plausible account of the murders.

The trial of the "maids of Le Mans" established little about the reasons for the Papin sisters' wrath or about the nature of their presumed psychosis. Instead, the trial and the resulting flurry of literary, journalistic, and psychoanalytic discussion signaled a "crisis of meaning" that "stymied accepted definitions of sanity, femininity, rebellion, and delirium." The Papin Affair thus becomes important as an event that can be interrogated in the service of understanding the impasses faced by the social, juridical, and intellectual institutions through which it is represented.

The Affair was thought of as symbolic of class and gender struggle, and had a significant influence on French intellectuals who sought to analyze it.

THE PAPIN AFFAIR AS SEEN BY ...

Jean-Paul Sartre:
"I've seen the photos of these two pretty girls, these servants who killed and battered their mistresses. I've seen the photos before and after. "Before," their faces hovered like two docile flowers above their lace collars. They radiated clean living and appetizing honesty. A discreet curling iron had crimped their hair in a similar manner. And, even more reassuring than their waved hair, their collars and their air of being on a visit to the photographer, was their resemblance as sisters, the self-righteous resemblance that immediately brought blood ties and the natural roots of the family group to the fore. "After," their faces glowed like a blaze. They had the bare necks of the future beheaded. Wrinkles everywhere, horrible wrinkles of fear and hatred, folds, holes in the flesh as if a clawed beast had roamed round and round on their faces. And those eyes, those same big, dark and bottomless eyes . . . And yet, they no longer looked alike. Each, in her own way, bore the memory of their common crime."

Simone de Beauvoir:
"In its broad outline, the tragedy of the Papin sisters was immediately clear to us. In Rouen, as in Le Mans, and perhaps even among the mothers of my pupils, there were no doubt women who deducted the cost of a broken plate from their maid's wages, who put on white gloves to find forgotten specks of dust on the furniture: in our eyes, the older women deserved death a hundred times over. With their wavy hair and their white collars, how sensible Christine and Léa Papin seem in the old photo that some papers published! How had they become those haggard furies offered up to public condemnation in the photos taken after the drama? One must accuse their childhood orphanage, their serfdom, the whole hideous system set up by decent people for the production of madmen, assassins and monsters. The horror of this all-consuming machine could only be rightfully denounced by an exemplary act of horror: the two sisters had made themselves the instruments and martyrs of a somber form of justice . . . For two bourgeois women hacked to pieces, a bloody atonement was required. The killer wasn't judged. He acted as a scapegoat."

Jean Genet:
"I must specify one thing: this is not a petition for the case of servants. I suppose that there is a union for household employees—that is none of our concern. During the first production of this play, a theater critic made

the remark that real maids don't speak like the ones in my play. What does he know? I claim the contrary, for if I were a maid, I'd speak like they do. Some evenings. For maids only speak like this on some evenings: you have to catch them unawares, either in their loneliness or in that experienced by everyone on earth."

Hélène Cixous::
"The maid is the repressed of the mistress of the house."

Jean Genet:
"Madame likes us like she likes her armchairs. And maybe not that much! Like the pink china of her lavatory. Like her bidet. And we are not allowed to love each other . . . Madame can call me Mademoiselle Solange. Precisely. It's because of what I've done."

Doctor Louis Le Guillant:
"As a psychiatrist says: 'I'm asked to cure human beings but, three-quarters of the time, I'm totally ineffective. I would need to cure their lives too.' It was all but impossible to 'cure the lives' of the Papin sisters."

Paul Eluard and Benjamin Peret:
"The Papin sisters were raised in a convent at Le Mans. Then their mother placed them in a 'bourgeois' home in the town. For six years, in total submission, they put up with remarks, demands and insults. Fear, exhaustion and humiliation slowly nourished the hatred within them, this sweet liquor that secretly consoles with its promise of blending violence with physical force sooner or later. When the day came, Léa and Christine Papin paid evil back in its own coin, a coin struck with a red-hot iron. They literally massacred their employers, tearing out their eyes and smashing their skulls. Then they went to bed. The lightning had struck, the wood had burned and the sun had gone out for good."

Jacques Lacan:
"Christine and Léa were genuine Siamese souls. Between them, the two sisters couldn't even find the distance needed to wound each other . . .
Christine must have gone through such torture before the desperate experience of crime tore her from her other self and allowed her, after the first hallucinatory fit in which she thought she saw her sister dead, to cry the words of blatant passion: 'Yes, say yes!'"

Sophia Loren and Anthony Perkins in Paris, France, 1962. Photograph by Elliott Erwitt.

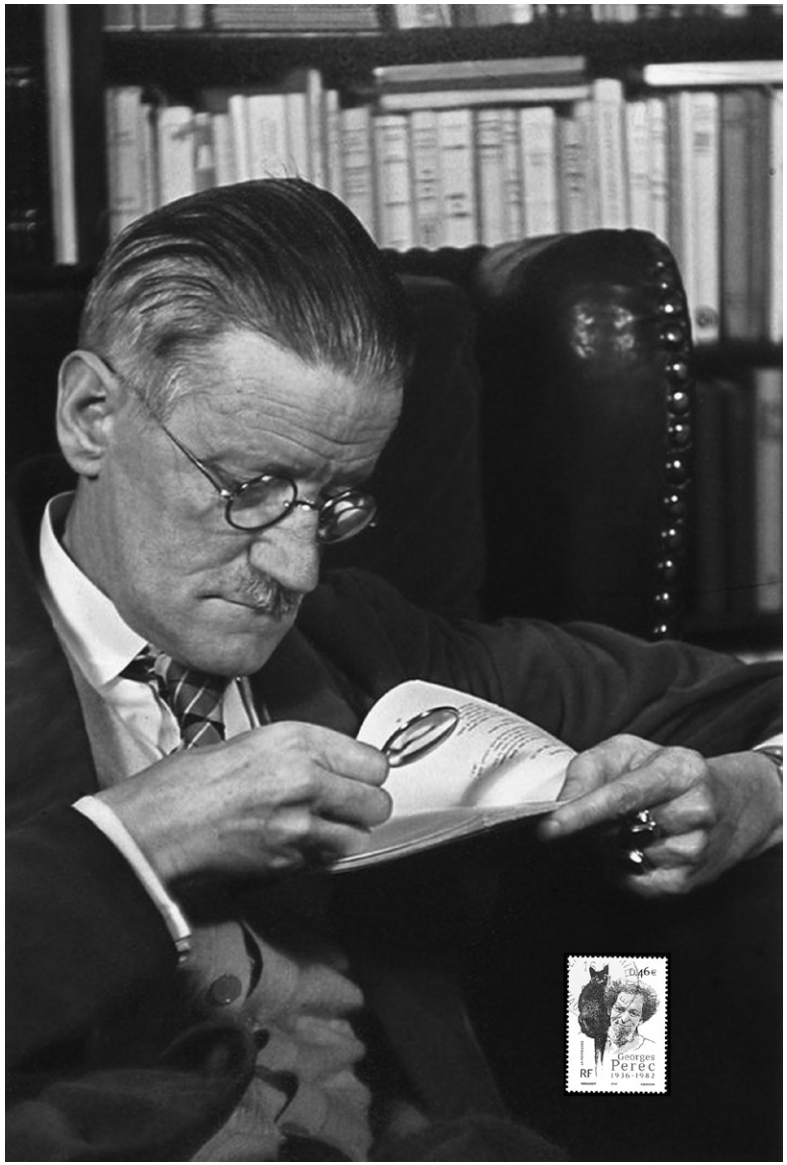
FIVE MILES TO MIDNIGHT

John Haskell

Sophia Loren and Anthony Perkins were in Paris, filming the movie *Five Miles to Midnight*. Tony is older than Sophia but in the publicity photos he looks younger. In the movie he plays the part of her boyish and innocent husband who's not completely innocent because, after escaping from an airplane crash, he manipulates his wife into helping deceive and defraud the insurance company. Sophia is the only one who knows he's not dead, that he's only pretending to be dead, and in the movie she makes it clear that she no longer loves him, that in fact she's repulsed when she looks up and there he is, but because he's agreed to leave her alone once he's collected the money she goes along with his ruse. The movie was made in 1962 and the French title, *Le Couteau dans la plaie*, means literally *the knife in the wound*, and the very first scene of the movie has him, skinny and awkward, not quite believable as a citizen of Paris, slapping her across the face. Later, near the end of the movie, as Sophia waits in her car, we see Perkins in her rearview mirror, the kind of dashboard mirror they had on old Peugeots or Citroëns, and he's smaller in the mirror than he is in real life, getting bigger as he comes into focus, walking to the car, holding a suitcase filled with the money, and like a bad imitation of a nervous criminal he slides into the passenger seat and tells her to drive. And she does. Past the scene of an accident. A bicyclist has been hit by a bus and they both must have seen it but he tells her to keep going, and she's tired of this dance she's dancing with him but the dance isn't over. Sophia thought she was driving him to a bus station or a train depot but when he tells her he's changed his mind, that he's attached to her now, that he's going to stay with her like a shadow, because she's become an accomplice to the crime, she has no choice but to stay with him. Perkins made *Psycho* a few years earlier, and here too, his limbs akimbo, his hair falling over his forehead, he's slightly psychotic. And I don't know what song was playing at that moment but I remember the soundtrack was jazzy, following them as they drive all day and into the night and finally when Perkins falls asleep, when Sophia sees the detour sign pointing in one direction, although at first she dutifully follows it, when the sign appears again, instead of following the deviation she turns in a different direction. Whether the wound is hers or the knife is hers doesn't matter. She stops the car on a deserted part of the road and when Tony wakes up she tells him the car has a flat. For some reason he rolls down his window, and his movement is jerky as he opens

the door, and when he gets out of the car to have a look, instead of looking at the tire he comments on the road sign. Seven kilometers to the border, it says, and it's almost midnight, so it's about five miles to midnight, and that's when she puts the car in reverse. And we think she might drive away, driving back to what seems to her a more solid, familiar world, leaving him in his own distorted world, but there's the wound. The wound is her inability to extricate herself from a situation that confuses her, and she hates it, and because the situation is Tony's obsession, the only way to stop it is to put the car in gear, step on the gas pedal. And it doesn't register to him what's happening. He looks up, caught in the middle of whatever gesture he was making and, Honey? He's standing in front of the camera, his hands not quite shielding his eyes from the beam of the headlights and, Honey? He calls her *Honey*. What are you doing? His acting still has a trace of Norman Bates, the gangly motelier in *Psycho*, still a little crazy as he half-waves to her in the car, and we see him through the glass of the car's windshield when she runs him over. When she backs up we see him on the ground, his body twisted, his arm raised, and then she comes at him again, the small sedan running over his writhing body, and because the director, Anatole Litvak, shot the scene several times Tony was run over several times, and he's still on the ground, still wiggling in the dirt, not like a worm but he's looking up, his hand still raised, and anyone would be dead so we assume he must be dead when, early in the morning, she drives to the edge of a river, a slow-flowing river, and when she drags his body out of the car, whether it's his knife in the wound or her knife, either way, at the end of the movie, looking off into the reflective water of the river, she starts to go crazy.

Left: Perkins and Loren in a publicity shot from *Five Miles to Midnight*, 1962.
Above: Loren and Perkins in Paris, France, 1962. Photographs by Elliott Erwitt.



James Joyce examining a text with a loop.
A .46 € commemorative stamp depicting Georges Perec, issued in France, 2002.

THE IDEAL HOME
(Nested)
James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*

In James Joyce's *Ulysses,* houses—real and imagined—have a prominent place. The house at 7 Eccles Street carried its narrative inscription on the map of Dublin, which structures the wanderings of the book's characters. In the Ithaca chapter, the protagonist Leopold Bloom describes in exacting detail the layout and surroundings of his utopian dream house, called "Flowerville."

> Not to inherit by right of primogeniture, gavelkind or borough English, or possess in perpetuity an extensive demesne of a sufficient number of acres, roods and perches, statute land measure (valuation £42), of grazing turbary surrounding a baronial hall with gatelodge and carriage drive nor, on the other hand, a terracehouse or semidetached villa, described as Rus in Urbe or Qui si Sana, but to purchase by private treaty in fee simple a thatched bungalowshaped 2 storey dwellinghouse of southerly aspect, surmounted by vane and lightning conductor, connected with the earth, with porch covered by parasitic plants (ivy or Virginia creeper), halldoor, olive green, with smart carriage finish and neat doorbrasses, stucco front with gilt tracery at eaves and gable, rising, if possible, upon a gentle eminence with agreeable prospect from balcony with stone pillar parapet over unoccupied and unoccupyable interjacent pastures and standing in 5 or 6 acres of its own ground, at such a distance from the nearest public thoroughfare as to render its houselights visible at night above and through a quickset hornbeam hedge of topiary cutting, situate at a given point not less than 1 statute mile from the periphery of the metropolis, within a time limit of not more than 5 minutes from tram or train line (e. g., Dundrum, south, or Sutton, north, both localities equally reported by trial to resemble the terrestrial poles in being favourable climates for phthisical subjects), the premises to be held under feefarm- grant, lease 999 years, the messuage to consist of 1 drawingroom with baywindow (2 lancets), thermometer affixed, 1 sittingroom, 4 bedrooms, 2 servant's rooms, tiled kitchen with close range and scullery, lounge hall fitted with linen wallpresses, fumed oak sectional bookcase containing the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *New Century Dictionary*, transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons, dinner gong, alabaster lamp, bowl pendant, vulcanite automatic telephone receiver with adjacent directory, handtufted Axminster carpet with cream ground and trellis border loo table with pillar and claw legs, hearth with massive firebrasses and ormolu mantel chronometer clock, guaranteed timekeeper with cathedral chime, barometer with hygrographic chart, comfortable lounge

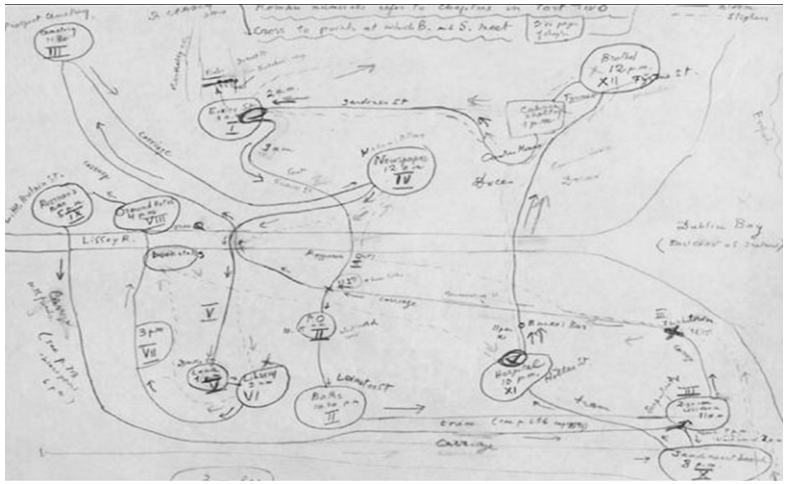
settees and corner fitments, upholstered in ruby plush with good springing and sunk centre, three banner Japanese screen and cuspidors (club style, rich winecoloured leather, gloss renewable with a minimum of labour by use of linseed oil and vinegar) and pyramidically prismatic central chandelier lustre, bentwood perch with a fingertame parrot (expurgated language), embossed mural paper at 10/- per dozen with transverse swags of carmine floral design and top crown frieze, staircase, three continuous flights at successive right angles, of varnished cleargrained oak, treads and risers, newel, balusters and handrail, with steppedup panel dado, dressed with camphorated wax, bathroom, hot and cold supply, reclining and shower: water closet on mezzanine provided with opaque singlepane oblong window, tipup seat, bracket lamp, brass tierod brace, armrests, footstool and artistic oleograph on inner face of door: ditto, plain: servant's apartments with separate sanitary and hygienic necessaries for cook, general and betweenmaid (salary, rising by biennial unearned increments of £2, with comprehensive fidelity insurance annual bonus (£1) and retiring allowance (based on the 65 system) after 30 years' service), pantry, buttery, larder, refrigerator, outoffices, coal and wood cellarage with winebin (still and sparkling vintages) for distinguished guests, if entertained to dinner (evening dress), carbon monoxide gas supply throughout.

In Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*, the apartment house at 11 rue Simon-Crubellier, Paris, included the "multi-storyed" narrations apartment after apartment. Perec referred to his book as "not a novel, but a novelistic configuration." In chapter twenty-three we learn that Madame Moreau's apartment (to which this chapter is devoted) was decorated by a certain Mr. Henry Fleury, an interior decorator with a Bloomy name and an undeniable artistic flourish and a knack for literary reference. His decorating pièce de résistance is a little doll's house that is in fact a near exact replica, or literary scale model, of Leopold Bloom's imagined "Flowerville" dream house.

> … a doll's house, parallepipedal, three feet high, two feet nine inches wide, and two feet deep, dating from the late nineteenth century and representing a typical English cottage down to the smallest detail: 1 drawing room with bay windows (2 lancets), thermometer affixed, 1 sitting room, 4 bedrooms, 2 servants' rooms, tiled kitchen with close range and scullery, lounge hall fitted with linen wallpresses, fumed oak sectional bookcase containing the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *New Century Dictionary*, the transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons, dinner gong, alabaster lamp, bowl pendant, vulcanite automatic telephone receiver with adjacent directory, hand-tufted Axminster carpet with cream ground and trellis border, loo table with pillar-and-claw legs, hearth with massive firebrasses and ormolu mantel chronometer clock, guaranteed

> timekeeper with cathedral chime, barometer with hygrographic chart, comfortable lounge settees and corner fitments, upholstered in ruby plush with good springing and sunk centre, three banner Japanese screen and pyramidically prismatic central chandelier lustre, bentwood perch with its tame parrot, and hundreds of everyday objects, baubles, crockery, clothes, all reproduced almost microscopically with manic accuracy: stools, lithos, cheap champagne bottles, capes on coat hangers, socks and stockings drying in the scullery, and even two minute copper pot-holders, tinier than thimbles, with greenery sprouting from them…

Similar to the way in which Joyce uses cryptic references, such that whole characters and sequences from one book enter a book of his own, the presence of this doll's house allows *Ulysses* as a whole to enter *Life: A User's Manual*. Its presence opens up a vertiginous series of mirror plays and nested reflections. And in this diminutive context we can imagine that the dreams of Leopold Bloom, who in *Ulysses* lacked what we might call "follow-through," have come true in *Life: A User's Manual*, albeit on a scale-model level.

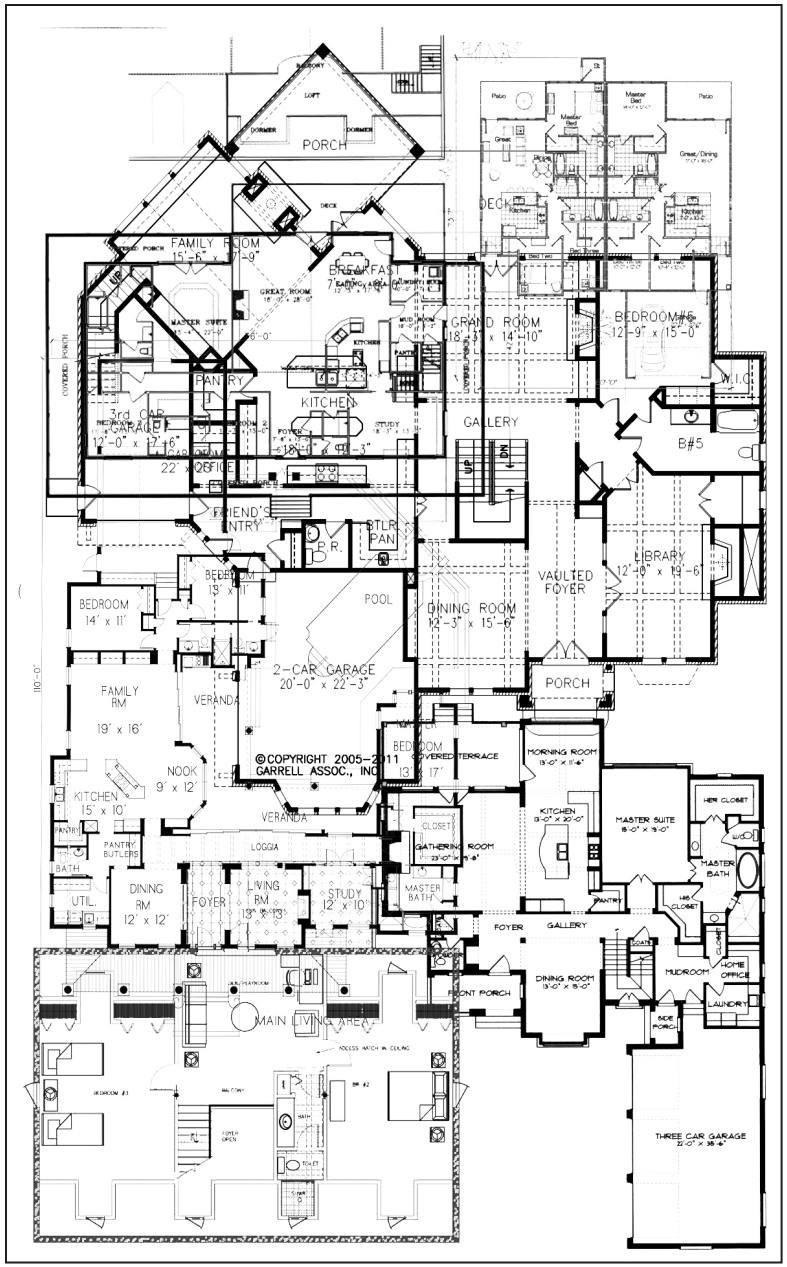


Drawing by V. Nabokov of Joyce's Dublin with Bloom's wanderings clearly traced.

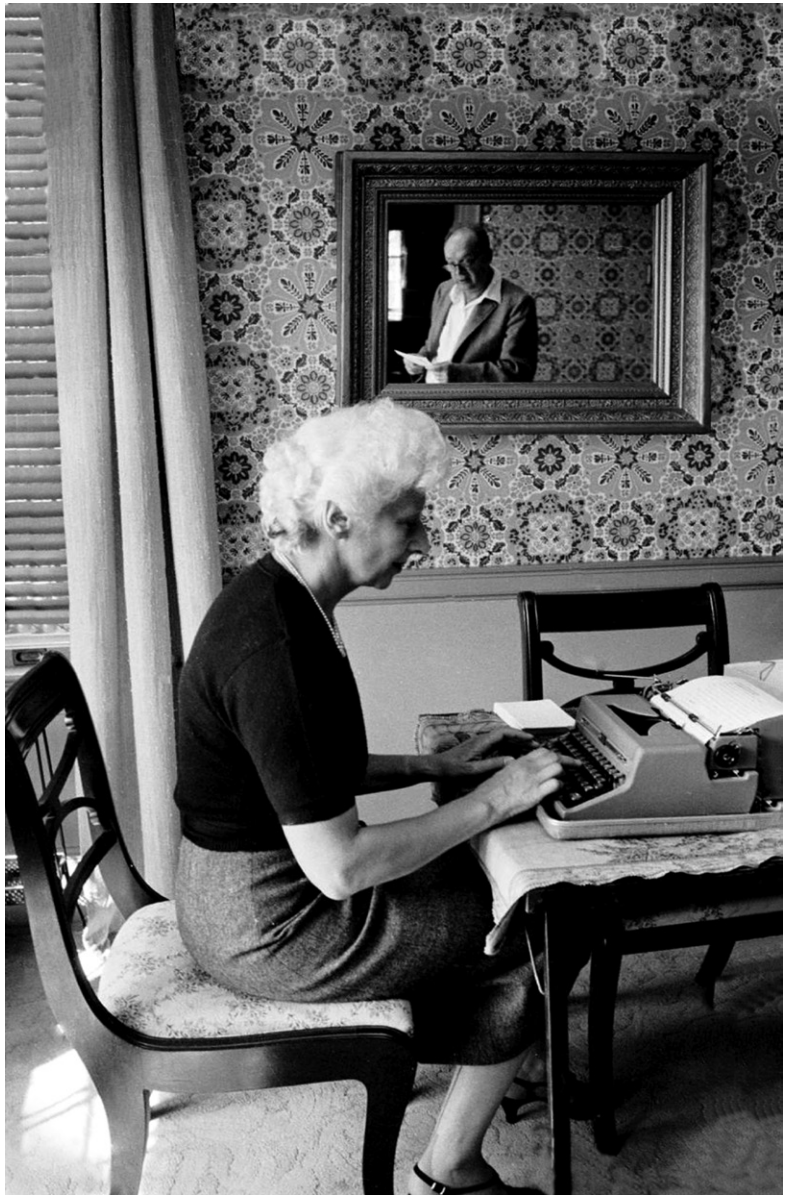
Drawing of a house in Laguna Beach, California, June 1956, by Morton J. Bloom.

For "An Ideal Home," I had planned to draw Leopold Bloom's dream house from *Ulysses*, the one also found again at a dimiutive scale in *Life: A User's Manual*. The drawing was to be my imgined version of the house and its environs. I toyed with the idea of rendering part of the house again very small, and nesting that version somewhere within the larger drawing.

While working on this exhibition and book, I have temporarily lost the use of my right hand, and am unable to make a drawing. So I am substituting this sketch by another Bloom, my father, made one summer when I was a small child. Perhaps it was a depiction of his ideal home.



Layered depitions of the Ideal Home.



Véra Nabokov with reflection of her husband Vladimir Nabokov at their home in Ithaca, New York, 1958.
Photograph by Carl Mydans.

MRS. AND MR. V.N.

Stacy Schiff

She was her husband's first reader, she smoothed the prose—when it was "still warm and wet"—though later, when scholars questioned this, she generally shrugged off any involvement. Still, her handwriting is there, and it is difficult not to see Véra as the fictional Clare [in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*], lifting the edge of a page in the typewriter and declaring, " 'No, my dear. You can't say it so in English . . . And if for instance,' she would say—and then an exact suggestion would follow." (Twenty-six years later, her husband described Véra's role in his literary life in nearly identical words, as if quoting from his own novel.) She submitted her husband's work to publishers; she typed and researched his lectures. At one point, she stepped in as de-facto curator of lepidoptera at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. Months after Nabokov's arrival, after he placed his first poem with *The New Yorker*, he talked about his "horrible difficulties and distress in wielding a language new to me." In this same time, Mrs. Nabokov's English grew steadier, more fluent, though it would always be a little stiff, even when it was the language she claimed to write most easily, the language in which she answered her Russian correspondents.

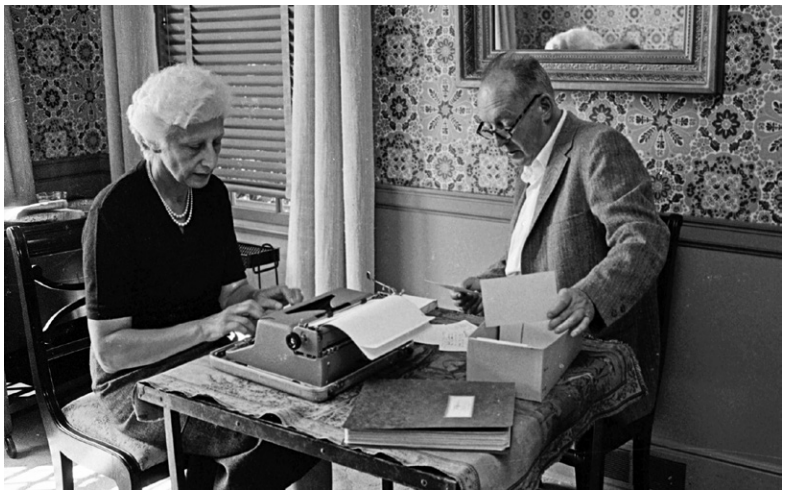
Within a few years of their arrival in America, she was single-handedly dealing with publishers. In part, this was because Nabokov was spreading butterflies at the museum or lecturing at Wellesley; in larger part, it was by design. (From a list of the things Nabokov bragged about never having learned to do—type, drive, speak German, retrieve a lost object, answer the phone, fold maps, fold umbrellas, give the time of day to a philistine—it is easy to deduce what Mrs. Nabokov spent her life doing.) A great many letters opened like this: "Vladimir started this letter but had to switch to something else in a hurry, and asked me to continue on my own." She did all she could to see to it that her husband existed not in time, only in art, and thus spared him the fate of so many of his characters, imprisoned by their various passions. The genius went into the work, not into the life—something Mrs. Nabokov had to explain regularly to family members, whose letters to her husband were turned over to her to be answered. This resulted in understandable confusion about authorship, which grew worse over the years.

In a perfectly Nabokovian way, the two identities began to blur on the page. Letters came addressed to all sorts of entities: "Dear VVs,"

"Dear VerVolodya," "Dear Author and Mrs. Nabokov." Many of the hallmarks of Nabokov's fiction—the doppelgängers, the impersonators, the Siamese twins, the mirror images, the distorted mirror images, the reflections in the windowpane, the parodies of self—manifested themselves in the routine the Nabokovs developed for dealing with the world, a routine that could leave a correspondent feeling as the books can: humbled by a knotty, magnificent inside joke.

In the nineteen-fifties, Véra wrote to a close Wellesley friend of theirs, "V. was asked to suggest a candidate for [a Guggenheim] and I think I composed a very adequate letter listing your high qualifications. V. signed the letter, of course, and [the] reaction was enthusiastic." This tango, or tangle, of pronouns was used to exceedingly good effect. With two voices at their disposal, the Nabokovs could temper a remark or render it twice as cutting. Mrs. Nabokov could write to a publisher that her husband thought she might hint that they take out some ads—big ads, lots of ads. And at the same time she could render him more distant, his judgments more divine: "My husband asks me to say that he thinks ULYSSES by far the greatest English novel of the century but detests FINNEGAN'S WAKE." When she needed a more neutral voice, she wrote as J. G. Smith, a fictional Cornell secretary, who shared Mrs. Nabokov's handwriting.

Often, she would write and sign her husband's letters for him, but it was generally clear when she had done so. Nabokov masqueraded as Véra, however many letters were drafted by him in the third person, in his



Véra Nabokov and Vladimir Nabokov. Ithaca, New York, 1958. Photograph by Carl Mydans.

wife's driest tone, and left for Mrs. Nabokov to type and sign. He would borrow her identity, though she never made an attempt to borrow his. Because his wife was at his side, he could speak in the first-person plural. And, because so frequently the correspondence is not with Nabokov but about Nabokov, a whole other being is created—a monument called VN, someone who is not even Nabokov. He delighted in explaining that the living, breathing, breakfast-eating Nabokov was but the poor relative of the writer, and was only too happy to refer to himself as "the person I usually impersonate in Montreux." In many ways, this distant, unapproachable VN was Véra Nabokov's construct. How else could Nabokov have established this statuesque other self? With the assistance of Véra, the real Vladimir Nabokov disappeared; it was as if Thomas Pynchon were to enter the federal witness-protection program. All this sleight of hand culminated in another delusional mirror trick, one worthy of *Despair*: the word in Montreux was that Véra Nabokov was her husband's ghostwriter, because she was always seen by tradespeople at her desk, and he—who wrote in bed, or standing at his lectern, or in the bath—never was.

Where is Véra Nabokov in the literature? Everywhere and nowhere. She was clearly more muse than model: her influence rather than her image hovers over the page. She is less in evidence as author than as inspiration and instigation; she is named in the original title of *Speak, Memory*—"Conclusive Evidence," with the two "V"s Nabokov liked so much—and, of course, on the dedication page of nearly every novel. The guiding hand is easier to document than her presence as muse.

Bruce Davidson's photograph of (L-R) Simone Signoret, Yves Montand, Marilyn Monroe, and Arthur Miller, at a dinner party in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, 1960.

A Mexican standoff in glances.

FOURSOME
John Haskell

In the summer of 1960, at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Bruce Davidson came to the bungalow of Simone Signoret and her husband, Yves Montand, to take some publicity photos. Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller were living next door. Monroe was starring with Montand in the George Cukor movie *Let's Make Love*, and Davidson, who wanted to capture the two couples acting like regular people, told them to act natural. But because they weren't regular people, because they were famous personalities, what did it mean *to act natural* ? Miller had already written his greatest plays and Signoret was a movie star, she'd just made *Room at the Top*, and Montand was a crooner and sex symbol, and Marilyn was Marilyn, and now they were supposed to be friends, and they were friends, but how do you act what you already are? If Monroe and Montand hadn't already started their affair, they would soon, and the choreography began when Davidson started snapping the photos. And it helped to have something to drink, a little wine or a cocktail, and what they wanted to do was forget who they were, and who they were pretending to be, and you'd think, being actors, they'd be able to act, but what were the parts they were playing? Themselves. Which is why they'd become actors in the first place. To avoid being themselves.

Yves:
It's hard to just stand, without having anything to do, and get your photograph taken. It helps to have something to occupy your mind or your hands and that's why Yves suggested he and Arthur look at his music, his collection of record albums. That's what the men had in common, judgments and opinions, and that's the mode that Yves reverted to. He's a singer so he knows about music and about records, and his watch, I don't know what brand of watch he's wearing but it's probably a good one. His shirt is open, his undershirt visible, his cuffs rolled up over the strong forearms, and how can Miller, an American, born in Brooklyn, match the Frenchman's confidence and savoir faire? That's what Yves is showing the photographer. Although he occasionally glances at Miller, by focusing on the records he's focusing his attention on himself, engaged in the act of being Yves, and Miller, holding a milk carton in one hand, a bottle of gin in the other, looks dumbfounded. He's like a prop, and although they seem like friends, Miller isn't really a friend, he's the husband of a friend,

although no one on a movie set is a friend. They're acquaintances. In *Let's Make Love*, Yves plays a millionaire who pretends to be an actor, an actor in Monroe's revue, and when he makes her acquaintance he doesn't tell her he's the millionaire because he wants to make love, and although he's telling Miller about the quality of long-playing albums, he's really saying, in effect, let's not look too closely at what we want. And Miller, holding either gin or vodka, because he's not a movie star, because he's a writer, has nothing do to except start talking.

Marilyn:
In the photograph of them, sitting at the table, Marilyn is paying attention to her husband, the man she had been attracted to, and wants to be attracted to, and the photo was taken in what was known as the Montand bungalow, meaning the room Signoret shared with Montand. It was a hotel room so it didn't have much personality, but there was a typewriter on the desk, and was it Signoret's? Or perhaps Montand had a typewriter? Miller probably had his own typewriter in his own room, the one he used for writing his plays, and what did Marilyn have? What were the words that she was going to write? Before they actually ate their dinner, someone had to prepare the dinner and serve the food, and that's what Marilyn is doing, holding a wine glass in one hand, the meat on the plate she was holding was either lamb or pork, some kind of chop, and the straps of her dress are falling off her shoulders. That's the style. The straps were decorative, not functional, and she's had a few cocktails before the wine, and we don't know how many cocktails but when you have a few drinks you tend to revert to the known. You're too busy feeling the dizziness of inebriation to figure out how to act and so Marilyn, as she would with the men in the room, or with the one man, the one she's interested in, approaches Signoret in the way she knows, the way of seduction, and Signoret puts her hand to her belly, protecting herself or defending herself from this creature, this beautiful woman who, for all the sadness behind her exuberance, and because of the sadness, wants to be friends.

Arthur:
The wine glasses are half full, the desserts half eaten, and Arthur has been talking. That's what he's good at—he's a writer—and everyone seems to be looking at him, Monroe and Signoret and Montand, and I say *seems to be looking* because at a certain point, although Signoret is facing Arthur, she's eyeing her husband. And Monroe, who has heard the stories before, is starting to feel bored. It's only Montand who seems to be interested in whatever Arthur is saying, or pretending to say, letting Arthur have his

moment, that's what men were supposed to do then, pay attention, not to the women but to each other, their talk distracting them and distracting everyone, from what's really happening. And of course I can't know what's really happening but Monroe, with her distain, expresses it, and Signoret, with her suspicion, expresses it, and Arthur would like to keep talking forever, protecting himself with the words that ought to express himself and expose himself and his eyes can't help but look and see in the faces the fact he's trying to avoid, the fact that he's failed to become the man he imagined he would be, the man he would like to be but can't be, and so he keeps talking.

Simone:
Simone is French, and because she's supposed to know how to cook, and because the kitchen is in her bungalow, she takes the lead. She takes out the pots and pans and she fries up the meat they're going to eat. She's got everything under control except not quite everything because something on the stove begins boiling over. But Simone knows how to handle it. The food she can handle, and with one hand she's controlling the food and with her other hand she's explaining to Monroe the reason she's in this position, a slightly awkward position of not quite making everything perfect, and she wants to be perfect. If she had her own pots and pans instead of these rented, these American, these aluminum things, and she doesn't want to compare herself to anyone. Monroe, having offered to help, is standing at the side of the stove, younger than Simone, innocent in a way that Simone can never be, and Montand is Italian, and Miller is a writer, and Simone is too, or was, and now she's in the kitchen, cooking for the men, and for this woman, this creature wearing a low cut dress, and Simone wears sensible clothes, a black sweater, her sensible plaid pants, stylish but casual, and yes, she's already been drinking, as they all have, and she's attempting to control the damage and salvage the dinner but the stove is hot and her hands are wet, with grease or water, and after Monroe died, after her affair with Montand had long ended, Simone famously said about Monroe, *She will never know how much I didn't hate her*.

More photographs by Bruce Davidson of an evening of rather staged intimacy and frivolity.

Eve Arnold photograph of Joan Crawford in her dressing room, Hollywood, 1959.

THE BEST OF EVERYTHING
Eve Arnold

All through the fifties in the United States, I continued with portraiture. It was usually part of a reportage done for magazine publications or as an assignment for a film production like *The Misfits*, which also included magazine assignments. One of the most intriguing of these was a pure publicity puffball done for *The Woman's Home Companion*. It was intended to publicize *Autumn Leaves*, a movie starring Joan Crawford.

A Hollywood publicist had dreamed up a scenario. Miss Crawford was to come to New York with sixteen-year-old Christina, her adopted daughter. She was faced with a dilemma: should Christina, who wanted to be an actress like Mommie, plan to go to college and take up drama there while going on with her education, or should she come to New York to try to take the direct path to an acting career?

Since Miss Crawford knew no one in New York who could help, I mapped out a plan of action. We would go to the theater and supper afterward at Sardi's every night for a week. This would give Joan maximum coverage to be seen, and it would also (theoretically) give Christina a chance to see real theater and give her a more concrete idea of her chosen métier. During the days there would be talking to people in the theater who might be helpful: drama school heads, producers, directors and a young actress, Susan Strasberg, currently starring in *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Let me describe our first day's outings. We met at Tina Leser, the dress designers, where Miss Crawford and her daughter were to buy clothes. Joan swept in, her square-shouldered suit and very-high-heeled clear plastic shoes making her appear tall (she was in reality only five feet four). On her wrists were the tiniest of dogs—one pissing poodle as a cuff on each. If she put her hands together there was a muff. As she handed the dogs (Mommie's darlings) to her secretary, she kissed each on the mouth, then kissed me on the mouth (we had never met before). She then proceeded to the dressing room, where an entire wardrobe awaited her. She ignored the fact that Christina had not arrived and started to strip. When she was completely nude she imperiously told me to start photographing.

It was obvious that she had been drinking, and it was also obvious that there was something that impelled her to behave the way she did, something I only dimly began to understand years later when I had learned more about her.

At any rate, there she was nude—but sadly, something happens to flesh after fifty. I knew she would not be happy with the pictures she kept insisting I take. I tried playing for time. Shouldn't we wait for Christina? No, we should not, emphatically not. So I picked up the camera and started to photograph. By the time I had finished a roll of thirty-six exposures, Christina arrived. I breathed more easily. Joan put on her undergarments. Christina took off her outer clothes, they both started to put on the lovely Leser clothes, and I began to take pictures. Late in the afternoon I staggered out of the dressing room.

I had been a fool to let her terrorize me into taking the nudes, and—bad news—I had exposed them on color film; I had been too nervous to notice that I had color film in the camera in anticipation of the colorful frocks I expected her to pirouette in. I realized there was no one I could trust to process the film; the risk was too great that it would be copied and exploited. Then what? I would have to process it myself, and I had never processed a roll of color film. I raced to the nearest camera shop and bought a manual on basic color development and the necessary chemicals, and asked for a short course from the clerk who served me.

I hurried home, mixed up the chemicals, and dressed for the evening's revels. In our party at *The Diary of Anne Frank* were the Crawford ladies; Joan's husband, Al Steele, chairman of the board of Pepsi-Cola; two young actors whose names escape me; and a man built like a Quonset hut who was Steele's chauffeur and drinking buddy. It was his job to find out where the best bar nearest the theater was located, and to set up the drinks so that at intermission, Mr. Steele and his guests could get straight to their tipples.

Of course, Joan made a last-minute entrance for the first act, but by the beginning of the second act she was fortified by her favorite 140-proof vodka (a good choice—vodka has no odor). Just before the curtain was raised she made her slow entrance down the aisle, then paused, turned and stood at her seat blowing kisses at the audience. The curtain had to be held for ten minutes while she took her bows. I should have photographed this spectacle, but the play was so serious and disturbing that it would have been sacrilege to have raised the camera at that moment. At dinner at Sardi's later, Joan said she had done it for me and she hoped I appreciated it. I gulped and said nothing.

The entrance into Sardi's was a triumphal procession. People craned their necks, applauded, asked for autographs. Joan seated us all, ordered our meals without asking us what we wanted, and then, without apparent cause, started to berate Christina, accusing her of behaving like a harlot. I made a few token shots, excused myself and rushed home to process the

roll of color film. Intuition told me that when my subject sobered up in the morning, she might demand the roll of film. Hallelujah, the chemicals brought forth images—not great technically or photographically, but still passable; a weapon with which to placate my adversary.

Next morning, early, I called the Columbia Pictures publicist whose job it was to deal with Joan and the story we were involved in. I told her Miss Crawford might call her to say that during the dress session I might have taken some questionable pictures. Well, they were now processed by me, no one else had seen them—and they were ready for her. All she needed to do was ask and they were hers.

Berenice, the publicist, was mystified but said okay when I told her it would be breaking trust to tell her more. Fifteen minutes later she was back on the phone. Yes, Miss Crawford had phoned—how had I known she would call? Laughter from my end.

The saga continued for the rest of the week and Joan did not ask for the questionable transparencies that were ready in my camera bag. The day after the photography was finished, she phoned me herself. Command performance: lunch at "21." This time I made the late entrance. She was waiting for me, hand outstretched—I put the little yellow box of transparencies into it. She held up the transparencies one by one to the light. She sighed, leaned across the table, kissed me, raised her vodka glass and said, "Love and eternal trust—always."

I had reason to remind her of this toast five years later when at my suggestion *Life* magazine assigned me to a photo-essay on her. She was working on a film called *The Best of Everything*, she was recently widowed, she had four adopted children, she was still echt-Hollywood, and she was on the board of Pepsi-Cola, a mix that should yield interesting pictures.

I called her at Pepsi-Cola in New York, and within half an hour she was back on the phone to me from California. Yes, she would love to be in *Life*; yes she would love to be photographed by me; but there was one small favor—she would like to go into the darkroom with me the way Marilyn Monroe had with Richard Avedon. Translated, this meant that she wanted editorial control, and this I felt neither the magazine nor I should permit. I said I would ask the magazine and that we would get back to her.

At eight o'clock the next morning, Ed Thompson, a harassed managing editor of *Life*, phoned. During the night his employer, Henry Luce, the publisher of Life, had had a wild call from Miss Crawford complaining that that Arnold woman was trying to withhold her (Crawford's) editorial right to say which pictures were to be used. The editor thought we should agree to her terms so Mr. Luce could get his sleep. I suggested

Eve Arnold photograph of Joan Crawford in her dressing room, 1959.

"If a photographer cares about the people before the lens and is compassionate, much is given. It is the photographer, not the camera, that is the instrument." Eve Arnold

we drop the story, then played a hunch that we wait until twelve o'clock New York time on the chance that in the sober light of day she might back down. At eight o'clock her time, she called me. I reminded her that she had trusted me once before; perhaps she would again. "Yes," came her dulcet tones, "I agree," and still in that sweet voice, "but if I don't like what you do," and here Mrs. Steele's steely voice came through, "you'll never work in Hollywood again."

It was not the best way to start an assignment, but when I arrived in Hollywood she was welcoming. We discussed the story line—she wanted to show how dedicated she was to hang on to the top of the cliff of success for thirty years. We started with nothing off-limits and wound up after eight weeks the same way. In fact, so inventive was Joan (she would simply dream up situations and go ahead waiting for the camera to follow her) that we could have filled an encyclopedia instead of the twelve pages at our disposal.

The research about her was revealing. Joan had adopted her four children during the Hollywood days when it was easy to do so. She was between husbands, and the little blond heads beside her own in the current *Screen Gems* or other movie magazines made perfect copy for her. She is said to have stopped the show when she was attending the wedding of a former lover with all four of them being ushered into the church with her.

My notes about her early history were interesting too. She claims to have grown up as a prostitute in her mother's establishment (note: this is completely fabricated; from all accounts, her mother ran a laundry); she started her film career doing pornographic films. She spent the next ten years of her professional life as an actress trying to buy back the ever proliferating blue movies, but they eluded her. Where there was a positive someone would make a negative and from that negative a positive—all in a never-ending chain. In Germany someone said they are still on sale, but I have never seen one. In California, a director said he was present when she and a brand-new husband had a dinner party. For entertainment the groom had ordered some blue films, and one of them turned out to star his bride. True or not I do not know. But she was the stuff legends are built around.

She was the last of the queen bees. She would arrive at the Twentieth Century-Fox studio lot in her limousine. Her chauffeur would follow her in carrying a large thermos box marked "Pepsi-Cola" (in which, packed in ice, was her 140-proof vodka) and a smaller elegant black alligator case in which were her jewels. She insisted upon wearing real gems in the film, the idea being that their authenticity gave her a great sense of authority (about authority: she kept repeating that she had "balls"). Her precious

gems were in matched sets like costume jewelry: necklace, two clips, a pair of earrings, two bracelets and a ring of black pearls, emeralds, topazes, rubies, aquamarines, diamonds, or whatever precious gems. As clasps on a pair of diamond bracelets there were priceless baguette diamonds—one from the engagement ring given to her by Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and the other given to her by Franchot Tone.

It was remarkable to see her on the set made up and ready for a scene, surrounded by her retinue of hairdresser, makeup artist, wardrobe mistress, secretary, chauffeur and stand-in. They would line up beside the Pepsi-Cola dispenser Joan kept outside her dressing room. She would stand nervously, clutching her fingers and repeating her lines to herself. For big emotional moments the director would arrange for her to literally run into a scene. She would take off twenty feet from the lighted set, run, hit her mark perfectly and start to emote for the camera.

Every other day or so her twelve-year-old twins, Cathy and Cindy, would be brought to the set all dressed up—ruffles, beribboned and awkward. They would sit, legs crossed at the ankles, in the shadows, drinking Pepsi-Cola and waiting for Mommie to summon them. When she did, all that could be heard from them was a litany of "Yes Mommie, yes Mommie." Weekends we would spend at her house in Bel-Air photographing. Those would be her days for having her nails done, her hair colored, her legs waxed, her eyebrows dyed; all of which she wanted me to record on film, to show her devotion to her public.

In the mornings she would come down the stairs slowly, pause midway at the niche in the stairwell where the spotlighted Oscar she had won for *Mildred Pierce* was housed, genuflect and continue to the bottom. Only then could the day's work begin.

The more I saw of her, the more complex she seemed and the more perplexed I became. Hollywood is a parochial town where everyone knows everyone else's business. When word got around that I was doing a *Life* story on her, people got in touch with me to tell me Joan Crawford stories—everybody from clapper boys to executives. Mainly they were stories that had to do with the children and her cruelty to them.

After six weeks the picture was finished and we returned to New York, where Joan wanted to be shown at work for Pepsi-Cola. (She had been made a member of the board after her husband's death.) She was hostess at a party in her triplex on Fifth Avenue for two members of the West Nigerian trade delegation who had contracted for ten Pepsi-Cola plants. Normally guests in her house were asked to leave their shoes at the door and walk around on her white carpet in their stocking feet. Her cleanliness fetish also dictated that all her white upholstered furniture be

covered in clear plastic, which looked like giant condoms. For the party she relented: the covers were removed from the furniture, the guests could keep their shoes on, but the waiters—who came from "21," the restaurant which catered the party—had to cover their shoes with the kind of socks provided by airlines for first class travel.

Midway through the evening, when the party was beginning to sag, Joan suddenly spilled something down her dress. People gathered round; napkins were produced to clean up the mess. Joan made her way up the dramatic staircase in the middle of the triplex, followed by me. She changed into the garment she had prepared for this emergency. When she made her entrance the party seemed to have a new lift.

Joan had invited me to spend the night, because the party ended quite late. When I woke at nine the next morning I was locked in my bedroom. She heard me calling and banging, and came and unlocked the door, protesting that she had no idea how it had happened. I could never decide whether she thought I was going to steal something!

That day while we were at breakfast, a lovely Picasso drawing of the Cubist period was delivered as a thank-you gift from one of the guests who had been at the party the evening before. The picture puzzled and bothered Joan. She told me that when she had gone to Paris with Al Steele she had brought back some French paintings—she pointed to them on the wall. She had found an artist who for twenty-five dollars would copy "that guy Utrillo," and she, Joan, had improved on Utrillo. She had her man straighten up the streets. She looked at me for a moment seriously and said she didn't understand "modern art"; could I explain it to her?

I thought for a beat trying to figure out a way that would be right to her. Then I said that if you think of modern art like sex in all its forms—heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, multipartnered, bestial, whatever, with absolutely no holds barred and with everything available and permissible—that would be "modern art." I felt rotten after I'd said it: it was a cheap shot. But she was delighted with the analogy. She laughed and said that at last she understood what "modern art" was about.

Joan was fond of telling about her days—her heydays—when she was at Warners. She talked about Bette Davis at Warners but would end up by saying that she, Joan, had been the "baby of the lot," implying that Miss Davis was much older. Actually, Joan saw Miss Davis as her formidable rival. When the *Life* story appeared, she cabled me and again said, "Love and eternal trust always." It was a tough intimate story, but she had wanted it that way. When next I heard from her it was perhaps a year later and she wanted me to come and work on her next

film, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*? She said she would be starring with Miss Davis and that I should be able to do some wonderful things. They hadn't been together since Joan had been "the baby" on the Warners lot. I had to decline. I was living in England, my son was in school there, and I didn't want to leave him. About three months later, Joan called in the middle of the night. She was ecstatic. The film was finished. She said, "You would have been so proud of me. I was a lady, not like that cunt Bette Davis."

Eve Arnold photograph of Joan Crawford on the set of *The Best of Eveyrthing*, 1959.

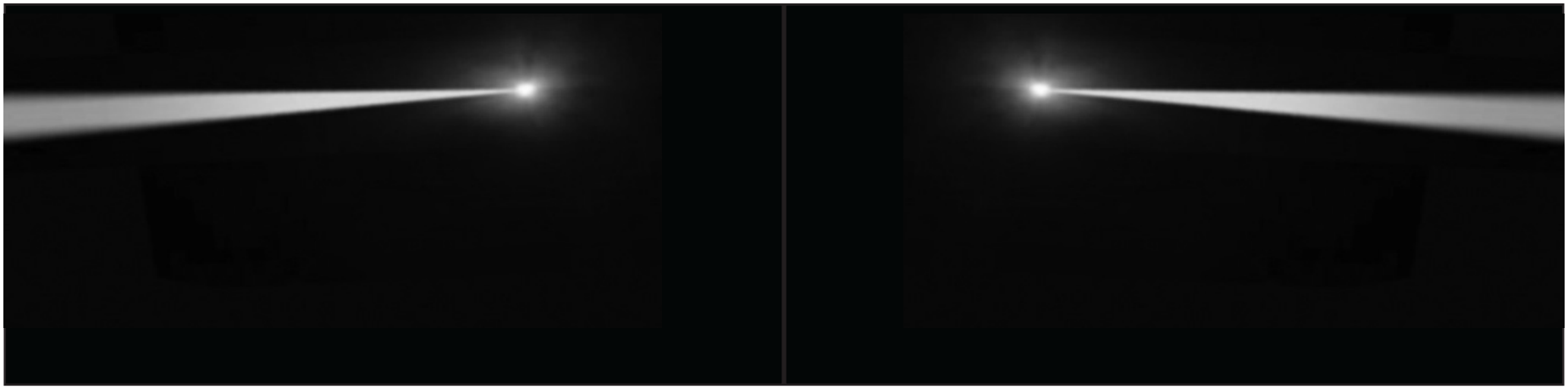
Eve Arnold. Contact sheet showing Joan Crawford applying makeup, 1959.

Eve Arnold photo of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor at a pub in Shepperton, UK, 1963.

BEACONS

John Haskell

In 1969 Richard Burton gave Elizabeth Taylor the then most expensive diamond ever sold. It was a ring originally, but she needed to cover the scar of her recent tracheotomy and so she made it into a necklace. He'd given her other diamonds, she must have liked diamonds, and he chose big ones. The 33 carat Krupp diamond, which he bought for her in 1968, which was mounted on a ring, had a whitish color, and the Taylor-Burton diamond—that's what it came to be called—was clear. And I won't say it was clear like her eyes because Liz Taylor was famously rumored to have had violet eyes. They were actually dark blue, but the myth that grew around her celebrity focused on her eyes, made them lucid and clear like diamonds, or like windows, or like light itself. And it's hard to imagine what a 69 carat diamond looks like. It's smaller than a grape, but for a jewel it's big, and it's not just size. It's the idea of big. And part of it was power. The Sanskrit word for diamond is also the word for thunderbolt, and when she met Richard Burton, during the filming of *Cleopatra*, she was married, as was he, and she played the role of the powerful queen who, at the beginning of the story, is not yet queen, only in line to be queen, but she wanted to be queen and with Richard's help she becomes what she wanted. The story of Cleopatra has an unhappy ending for both of them, but in her life Elizabeth followed the dictates of love and the direction of love, divorced her husband, the singer Eddie Fisher, married Burton, and his eyes were pretty good too. He was Welsh, and his eyes, like emeralds, were green, sharp and piercing and famous for the passion that seemed to emanate from them. It was said, apocryphally, that he could see his way across a darkened stage with only his eyes lighting the way, and although their eyes had brought them together, and kept them together during the filming of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,* they eventually got divorced. But only temporarily. They were re-married about a year later, divorced again, and whatever permutation their conjugality took they stayed friends, or so they said, and even now, according to Google search, "Elizabeth Taylor's eyes" are the most Googled eyes in the world. Those were the eyes in *National Velvet*, and the eyes in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and they were also in an episode of Here's Lucy, the television show. Mainly the episode was about her diamond ring. In the sit-com plot, Lucy thinks Richard Burton, disguised as a plumber to avoid the paparazzi, is the plumber she's been calling to fix her sink, and when she finds the ring in his overalls, blinded



by its beauty, she tries it on the ring gets stuck on her finger. That's when Liz shows up, knocking on the door and demanding what's hers, and the situation is a comedy because Liz and Dick are famous, and the diamond they struggle with is famous. People have lined up in front of the Cartier window to see it, and the power of the diamond is the power to make the people who see the diamond see themselves, just as Liz must have seen herself and made herself into the person who, sitting with Dick in the Shepperton pub, looked up, flashing her eyes, the eyes we've seen in thousands of photographs, and his eyes too, looking out, usually at a camera, sometimes an audience, the looking meant to inspire in us the desire and intensity he obviously felt, and still seems to feel, and they both still feel it because, although the photograph is part of history, because it's a photograph, it's happening now. And why aren't they looking at each other? The photograph was taken during the making of *The VIPs*, a movie in which Liz played a woman who was leaving her husband, played by Dick, and we can imagine an argument or imagine another interest, and of course they had affairs, that was part of their right, as royalty, and Egyptians, or some ancient people, after making a statue, after carving it or sculpting it, affixed two diamonds where the eyes would be.

Above: Beacons
Right: The Taylor-Burton diamond displayed in New York in 1969.

Credits

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	The Maids; Comments on The Maids, Jean Genet, 1947
	Quote attributed to Hélène Cixous
	The Papin Sisters Affair, Dr. Louis Le Guillant, 1963
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	Motives of Paranoiac Crime, from "Le Minotaure" No. 3-4, Jacques Lacan, 1933
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