24. A Woolly-Headed Professor

I started this project with the objective of keeping an eye on why I am what I am as a truthteller and why others are what they are. Errancy seemed to be the appropriate word to describe my course whereas order, system, control, and so on seemed to describe the other way. But now it has become apparent that there was this *other* route I took where I acted more like an Apollonian than a Dionysian. Never did this irony strike me at the time because, after having discovered a new direction in studying literature, it was all I could do to take advantage of it. The Fryean principle of various myths and archetypes structuring literature by placing and displacing themselves in it struck me as being a union between the widest possible order and greatest possible freedom. Certainly it wasn't with a Derridean eye I examined these two ideals and so, even though I no doubt blurred them in practise, I theoretically kept them apart. Refraining then from a critical view that extended itself to a *both-and* and *neither-nor* way of thinking, I had only a limited sense of freedom's being implicated in order and vice-versa. By the same token, I took up Frye's theory with less a sensitivity to how I was adapting it to my own particular bent than the conviction that, following its tenets, I could examine a work objectively.

– It's quite true what you're saying, Theo. Only fact is, as far as I can remember, Halvard Solness cuts a better figure when he goes up the tower than he does before it.

When I look back, what a strange thing it seems to have been in a class that, taught by the least lucid and most obfuscating professor I have ever encountered, put me in the position of being an ardent defender of clarity. Here was a man well-beloved in the community for his humane practises, social activism, and left-wing outspokenness. Who was as amiable and helpful a professor as one could imagine. Who taught a course called *Religious Quest in the Modern Age* that I found intriguing. And who absolutely flabbergasted me with his intellectual dribbling around the court and seldom putting the ball through the hoop.

– I never noticed this statuette before, Andrew.

– A student gave it to me a long time ago.

– Headless as it is right now?

– No, no, of course not.

I can't help but think that my reaction to Carl Ridd, a man whose recent death was the occasion for many tributes, was not much different from the way many philosophers react to those who seem to override all order in thought. Just as I have the urge even now to make the case that he often pretended clarity and understanding where there was little of either, so do others throw up never-ending arguments to repudiate those who challenge the degree and extent of – and who thereby seem to be endangering – these same values. And just as they are likely to temper their discourse even when criticizing the work and thought of those whom they morally frown upon and sometimes even despise, so do I feel the need to be tactful even while, as a retrieval of a situation long past, I take umbrage at Carl Ridd's lack of intellectual rigour. On the other hand, the case against him such as I make it is counterbalanced, mitigated, and perhaps even undone by the fact that, when all is said and done, his intentions were beyond reproach.

– I'll put it away. I just happened to come across it.

– What do you do with it?

– I leave it in my drawer.

– You keep a headless statue in your drawer?

– I don't know what to tell you except it has sentimental value.

With this sort of yes-and-no way of assessing his character (which I don't think he would take issue with except by blunting my sharpest criticism or equivocating more than I could ever tolerate), I will go on to say that Carl Ridd gave me much praise and did his best to win me over. At no time was this more apparent than when he commented on my essay on Franz Kafka's *The Castle.* I described the hero of this rather off-beat novel as a parody of Kierkegaard's knight of faith. By this I meant that, with his continually failing to reach the Castle and its highest official Klamm, the hero K. is a more patently human figure than the one Kierkegaard envisioned as being ordinary in all respects save in the matter of faith. A person, that is, who could pass for a tax collector (Kierkegaard seems to have wanted to emphasize the ordinariness of his outer aspect so as to contrast it with his inner) and yet who, for all that, believes so wholly and intensely in God that he is carried into a one-to-one relationship with Him. Presumably then one who, like the Abraham Kierkegaard took pains to celebrate as the prototype of this knight of faith, is thoroughly rational and normal even while making himself incomprehensible to others by placing this relationship above every

earthly consideration.

– I don't understand you, Andrew.

"Franz Kafka's *The Castle*"

"In the novel there are two worlds or levels of being: the upper one of the Castle and the lower one of the village. Together they make up an absurd and incomprehensible order, an indistinct union of a presumably knowable and familiar realm and one that is ultimately unknowable. K. first enters the village or lower world and then undertakes the impossible task of establishing personal and direct contact with the Castle. Neither numerous setbacks nor the advice given to him by the villagers dissuades him from this self-imposed mission. It is made doubly mysterious by the fact that K., while displaying a mind of unusual lucidity, accepts without further ado the absurdity that haunts these twinned worlds as well as his idiosyncratic struggle to attain the upper one. It is the overriding paradox of the novel that he never loses faith in this quest (though it does seem to slacken at the end) or gives up the attempt of achieving the impossible."

– I'm going out. I've had enough.

"I hope to make it clear that the protagonist, K., is a parody of Kierkegaard's knight of faith and that, furthermore, his quest is an ironic or even satiric treatment of what Kierkegaard calls the second paradoxical movement of faith. Essentially this is the belief in the attainment of the impossible even while keeping it fully in mind that this belief is absurd. Rather than going into this paradox of belief in detail, I will rely on whatever familiarity the reader has with it in accordance with the treatment it receives throughout this essay.

"It might help to start at the beginning. K. introduces himself into the lower world of the village freely and voluntarily. Although he appears to have received an invitation from the Castle authorities, its authenticity is by no means certain. Furthermore, his major preoccupation quickly becomes entering into contact with the Castle for its own sake. With respect to the villagers, there is a great deal less hostility to his claim of being a land surveyor (i.e., the role he initially assumes as a job posting that, oddly enough, carries with it no specific duties) than there is to his various efforts to reach Klamm (i.e., the Castle official who is supposed to have appointed him to this position). This discrepancy, I think, should be understood as the collective experience of the villagers which is a recognition of certain

boundaries and a sort of general knowledge or wisdom pertaining to the undesirability and perhaps even danger of overstepping them.

"Kafka's ironic treatment of the knight of faith extends to what Kierkegaard calls the first movement of faith or the movement of infinite resignation. In simplest terms, it is a conscious renouncement of earthly happiness for the sake of leading a spiritual life. Kierkegaard holds that it is only by a paradoxical movement of thought that defies reason even while holding to it that one can return to a joyful hope of winning back precisely what one has given up. Now with the protagonist, K., it appears that, throughout his quest to reach the Castle, he is caught on the horns of an existential dilemma. Like the author of *Fear and Trembling* (but not the knight of faith), he finds placing the spiritual side of his life above other concerns (and, in this regard, K. gives up his fiancee just as Kierkegaard did his) much easier to accomplish than having a transcendent experience that, while forever being harnessed to a calculating and deliberative mind, delivers the latter over to an absolute and unwavering faith.[1]

"There are several indications in the novel that K. has forsaken a better world so that he might take up his assignment in the village. To begin with, there are two poignant memories he has of his hometown. Both of them are suggestive of a certain naivety and innocence that underlie his generally romantic outlook. On the arm of Barnabas on the way to the Castle, K. recalls a boyhood adventure not extraordinary in itself but significant in its relation to his present undertaking.

> Memories of his home kept recurring and filled his mind. There, too, a church stood in the marketplace, partly surrounded by an old graveyard, which was again surrounded by a high wall. Very few boys had managed to climb that wall, and for some time K., too, had failed. It was not curiosity that had urged them on; the graveyard had been no mystery to them. They had often entered it through a small wicket-gate, it was only the smooth high wall that they had wanted to conquer. But one morning – the empty, quiet marketplace had been flooded with sunshine – when had K. ever seen it like that either before or since? – he had succeeded in climbing it with astonishing ease; at a place where he had already slipped down many a time, he had clambered with a small flag between his teeth right to the top at the first attempt. Stones were still rattling down under his feet, but he was at the top. He stuck the flag in, it flew in the wind, he looked down and round about him, over his shoulder, too, at the crosses mouldering in the

> ground; nobody was greater than he at that place and that moment. By chance the teacher had come past and with a stern face had made K. descend. In jumping down he had hurt his knee and he had found some difficulty in getting home, but still he had been on the top of the wall. The sense of that triumph had seemed to him then a victory for life, which was not altogether foolish, for now so many years later on the arm of Barnabas in the snowy night the memory of it came to succour him.

"Apart from the sharp contrast between this childhood victory and his ill-fated attempt to reach the Castle, the illusory quality of the former, of which K. seems to be partially aware, touches upon a certain underlying egoism which has a great deal to do with his extraordinary ability to concentrate on his objective. I will return to this point later. The other memory of the past occurs earlier that day when he first views the distant prospect of the Castle. In his mind's eye he compares its shabby appearance to his hometown, thinking the latter to be 'hardly inferior to this so-called Castle.' Again we hear him through the narrator saying:

> If it was merely a question of enjoying the view, it was a pity to have come so far; K. would have done better to revisit his native town, which he had not seen for such a long time.

"Coming as early as it does in the novel, this passage seems to foreshadow the frustration and disappointment he will encounter. When he compares the tower of the Castle to the church tower of his hometown, it is the latter which he views most favourably.

> The church tower, firm in line, soaring unfalteringly to its tapering point, topped with red tiles and broad in the roof, an earthly building – what else can men build? – but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling-houses, and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life.

"The qualifying factor in the above with respect to earthly limitations does not detract from the image of the church as an ennobling confirmation of a certain striving and a certain beyond. Indeed, it is by virtue of its being rooted in the community and symbolically pointing to the higher world that it receives this grace and meaning. Juxtaposed to it we have the description of the unattractive Castle and, as it seems, a representation of the same striving for the beyond bereft of its ideality.

"Archetypally speaking, K. descends into an underworld when he crosses the bridge and enters the village. The surface world is not only the world of his past but whatever there is which is outside the wintry domain of the Castle, and which he could return to if he so desired. This surface world is closely linked to the normal pursuit of happiness. It is this attainable world which Frieda, his fiancee, wants to escape to when, lamenting over K.'s obsession with the Castle, she tells him that he must take her away to some far-off place. I will quote the relevant passage since it illustrates the difference in their relationship both to Klamm (that out-of-reach Castle official who nonetheless seems to be everywhere) and to each other.

> Frieda said: "I shan't be able to stand this life here. If you want to keep me with you, we'll have to go away somewhere or other, to the south of France, or to Spain." "I can't go away," replied K. "I came here to stay. I'll stay here." And giving utterance to a self-contradiction, which he made no effort to explain, he added as if to himself: "What could have enticed me to this desolate country except the wish to stay here?" Then he went on: " But you want to stay here too; after all, it's your own country. Only you miss Klamm and that gives you desperate ideas." "I miss Klamm?" said Frieda. "I've all I want of Klamm here, too much Klamm; it's to escape from him that I want to go away. It's not Klamm that I miss, it's you. I want to go away for your sake, because I can't get enough of you, here where everything distracts you, here where everything distracts me. I would gladly lose my pretty looks, I would gladly be sick and ailing, if I could be left in peace with you." K. had paid attention only to one thing: "Then Klamm is still in communication with you?" he asked eagerly; "he sends for you?"

"In the above passage one can discern two potential sacrifices, both of which are already partially realized. Frieda has forsaken her privileged relationship with Klamm to become K.'s fiancee. She shows that she is willing to go further by removing herself entirely from Klamm's sphere of influence. K., on the other hand, has already begun renouncing their engagement by continually affirming the priority of his wanting to reach this mysterious official. Allowing for the quasi-mystical or quasi-religious aspect of their relationship to Klamm, we can translate the two opposite movements into these terms: Frieda moves away from a spiritual state in which Klamm is at the centre to make her love for K. the most important thing in her life. K., on the other hand, moves away from love and happiness to 'concentrate the content of life and the whole significance of reality in one single wish' (*Fear and Trembling*). In this line Kierkegaard is referring to the first movement of

faith, using the example of the young swain who falls in love with a princess and must, by virtue of this love's impossibility, allow it to be 'transfigured into a love for the Eternal Being.' Now with respect to K. understood as a parody of the knight of faith, it is not the unattainable, the princess beloved by the swain, that is given up. It is rather the woman who loves him and is willing to go away with him. Moreover, what proceeds from the sacrifice of her bears little resemblance to what Abraham receives as a divine blessing and benediction.

"Kierkegaard devotes a good part of *Fear and Trembling* to the elucidation of what he calls the teleological suspension of the ethical. Here is one paragraph which sums it up rather well:

> The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual (to recall a dogmatic distinction now rather seldom heard) determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty toward God; for in this relationship of duty the individual as individual stands related absolutely to the absolute. So when in this connection it is said that it is a duty to love God, something different is said from that in the foregoing; for if this duty is absolute, the ethical is reduced to a position of relativity. From this, however, it does not follow that the ethical is to be abolished, but it acquires an entirely different expression, the paradoxical expression – that, for example, love to God may cause the knight of faith to give his love to his neighbour the opposite expression to that which, ethically speaking, is required by duty.

"Ethically speaking, the highest expression for K. would be to treat Frieda not as a means to Klamm (it is the discovery that she is his mistress that proves to be the main reason behind his hooking up with her) but as one who, given his commitment to her as her fiancé, should have her happiness wholly at heart. However, his *other* commitment is such that, when it becomes clear to him that she cannot further him along his way, he goes on to seek other means of making contact with the Castle. Frieda herself recognizes that K. transgresses the ethical when she observes him in conversation with the young schoolboy, Hans.

> But in reality everything has changed since I've listened to you talking with that boy. How innocently you began asking about the

> family, about this and that! To me you looked just as you did that night when you came into the taproom, impetuous and frank, trying to catch my attention with such a child-like eagerness. You were just the same as then, and all I wished was that the landlady had been there and could have listened to you, and then we should have seen whether she could stick to her opinion. But then quite suddenly – I don't know how it happened – I noticed that you were talking to him with a hidden intention. You won his trust – and it wasn't easy to win – by sympathetic words, simply so that you might with greater ease reach your end, which I began to recognize more and more clearly. Your end was that woman. In your apparently solicitous inquiries about her I could see quite nakedly your simple preoccupation with your own affairs. You were betraying that woman even before you had won her. In your words I recognized not only my past, but my future as well.

"When the landlady calls K. 'the most ignorant person in the village,' she does so with the certainty of recognizing that Klamm's relationship with the denizens of the lower world is ambiguous, arbitrary, and unilateral. K. acknowledges this and thereby implies that he has no rational way of accounting for his efforts to reach him. But unlike the knight of faith whose situation he approximates, unlike the individual who resides in the security of a one-to-one relationship with the absolute, K., precisely because he cannot establish this relationship, is incomprehensible not only to others but to himself.

> Klamm was far away. Once the landlady had compared Klamm to an eagle, and that had seemed absurd in K.'s eyes, but it did not seem absurd now; he thought of Klamm's remoteness, of his impregnable dwelling, of his silence, broken perhaps only by cries such as K. had never yet heard, of his downward-pressing gaze, which could never be proved or disproved, of his wheelings, which could never be disturbed by anything that K. did down below, which far above he followed at the behest of incomprehensible laws and which only for instants were visible – all these things Klamm and the eagle had in common.

"Despite the absurdity of trying to communicate with this eagle that seems to have as much in common with the *abysmal* as with the absolute, with the end of possibility as with divine omnipotence, K. never stops affirming the latter. It is precisely the first, however, that escapes the analysis of the absurd (as Kierkegaard gives it to us).

> The absurd is not one of the factors which can be discriminated within the proper compass of the understanding: it is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. At the moment when the knight made the act of resignation, he was convinced, humanly speaking, of the impossibility. This was the result reached by the understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it. On the other hand, in an infinite sense it was possible, namely, by renouncing it; but this sort of possessing is at the same time a relinquishing, and yet there is no absurdity in this for the understanding, for the understanding continued to be in the right in affirming that in the world of the finite where it holds sway this was and remained an impossibility. This is quite as clear to the knight of faith, so the only thing that can save him is the absurd, and this he grasps by faith. So he recognizes the impossibility, and that very instant he believes the absurd.

"Now in order to deal with this matter of the abysmal being glossed or eliminated (and at the same time draw the ironic distinction between Kafka's hero and Kierkegaard's knight of faith), it must first be noted that the young swain who is in love with a princess and whose movements of faith Kierkegaard likens to Abraham's – this young swain believes the absurd only with reference to what is really an *improbability*. In other words, the situation is such that only highly unfavourable circumstances bar him from his heart's desire. As a consequence then, his renouncement of the princess and his paradoxical belief that he will yet have her are bound up in a conception of the impossible that is not absolute. The same may be said of Abraham's situation as Kierkegaard portrays it. Here the belief that it is impossible to do other than carry out God's command has as its backdrop a supreme being who can alter or annul his own command. Since God does in fact intervene to prevent the catastrophe (i.e., the sacrifice of Isaac) and since Kierkegaard's knight of faith only becomes justified or glorified on the basis of this intervention, the movement of faith that he describes is not so much paradoxical as teleological. This notion of a perfect faith that has God both at the beginning and end seems to be what David F. Swanson is addressing below.

> Hence there exists no paradox for faith in its perfection, but for the human individual who is in the process of becoming, the paradoxical cannot be avoided without arbitrarily limiting the spiritual process. Kierkegaard's insistence upon the paradoxical is a consequence of a deep-seated predilection for apprehending the spiritual life in process, and hence ethically, rather than

> aesthetically, in a foreshortened perspective, or altogether in static terms.

"In the case of K., however, we do not have a 'faith in its perfection.' The absolute as represented by the Castle gives little indication that it will ever satisfy the desire for a personal relationship. It can only be then that K.'s ever-failing attempts to establish this relationship constitute a genuine paradox that leaves the issue of faith a question mark.

"With respect to this ironic treatment of a perfect faith that is no doubt easier to imagine, simulate, and expound upon than to experience as a rationally framed phenomenon, *The Castle* is a penetrating examination of the individual who can never quite get clear of exigencies which interfere with as much as promote his higher endeavour. In other words, the latter is not unadulterated, not completely separate from the baser elements of the human condition. The further one gets into the novel, the more it seems that K.'s striving to reach the Castle has greater significance for him than the goal itself. An intimation of this comes after he has made one of his failed attempts.

> The Castle above them, which K. had hoped to reach that very day, was already beginning to grow dark and retreated again into the distance. But as if to give him a parting sign till their next encounter, a bell began to ring merrily up there, a bell that for at least a second made his heart palpitate, for its tone was menacing, too, as if it threatened him with the fulfilment of his desire.

"His upward striving, in other words, is both the content and meaning of his life, and if it were to come to an end, his identity – the recognition of himself as the one who strives for the highest – would likewise come to an end. Since K. examines everything except, with a few notable exceptions, his own thoughts, one only catches glimpses of this.

> Of course I'm ignorant, that's an unshakeable truth and a sad truth for me, but it gives me all the advantage of ignorance, which is greater daring, and so I'm prepared to put up with my ignorance, evil consequences and all, for some time to come, so long as my strength holds out.

"Another passage revealing an underlying pride, egoism, or self-glorification comes during the interview with the Castle official, Momus.

> It was not Klamm's environment in itself that seemed to him worth striving for, but rather that he, K., he only and no one else, should attain to Klamm, and should attain to him not to rest with him, but to go on beyond him, farther yet, into the Castle.

"It is left to Hans, a young boy who wishes to be like K., to express what are probably K.'s own thoughts.

> [Hans had] the belief that though for the moment K. was wretched and looked down on, yet in an almost unimaginable and a distant future he would excel everybody. And yet it was just this absurdly distant future and the glorious developments that were to lead up to it that attracted Hans; that was why he was willing to accept K. even in his present state. The peculiar childish-grownup acuteness of this wish consisted in the fact that Hans looked on K. as on a younger brother whose future would reach farther than his own, the future of a very little boy.

"It is the child in K. which makes him want to succeed with the Castle in the way that he did with the wall in his youth. This much is understood by such people as the landlady and Frieda who draw attention to it on more than one occasion.[2]

"Opposed to crossing over from a lower to a higher world as self-elevation or self-exaltation is the dissolution of the self in the former. Psychologically speaking, however, the hero yearns for the one as much as the other. Both are movements away from temporal being: one relates to the ideal while the other relates to the buffets and blows of life that wear one down. Death of course is the ultimate loss of self but oblivion may also be sought in passion, drunkenness, and sleep. Elements of all three emerge in the novel and, with respect to K.'s quest, distract and hinder him. His first sexual encounter with Frieda graphically illustrates this.

> Three hours went past, hours in which they breathed as one, hours in which K. was haunted by the feeling that he was losing himself or wandering in a strange country, farther than ever man had wandered before, a country so strange that not even the air had anything in common with his native air, where one might die of strangeness, and yet whose enchantment was such that one could only go on and lose oneself further. So it came to him not as a shock but faint glimmer of comfort when from Klamm's room a deep, authoritative voice called for Frieda.

"The most obvious recurring pattern in the novel is the weakening effect his body has upon his will the closer he seems to get to his objective. The first instance of this comes when he tries to reach the Castle on foot. Weariness and sleepiness overcome him as they do when, for example, he waits for Klamm in the Herrenhof courtyard. The warmth of Klamm's coach and the sweet-smelling brandy act upon him as a drug, dulling the urgency of his mission.

> His arms spread out, his head supported on pillows, which always seemed to be there, K. gazed out of the sleigh into the dark house. Why was Klamm such a long time in coming? As if stupefied by the warmth after his long wait in the snow, K. began to wish that Klamm would come soon. The thought that he would much rather not be seen by Klamm in his present position touched him only vaguely as a faint disturbance of his comfort.

"But the greatest example of the body gaining the upper hand over the mind comes when K., upon being called to the Herrenhof for an interview with the Castle secretary, Erlanger, stumbles into the office-bedroom of another official, Bürgel, who is desirous of promoting K.'s case.

> K. was asleep, it was not real sleep, he heard Bürgel's words perhaps better than during the former dead-tired state of waking, word after word struck his ear, but the tiresome consciousness had gone, he felt free, it was no longer Bürgel who held him, only he sometimes groped toward Bürgel, he was not yet in the depths of sleep, but immersed in it he certainly was. No one could deprive him of that now.

"From this point on until the end of the uncompleted novel, K. never regains the intensity which characterizes his earlier efforts. It is as if he comes to accept the drift towards dissolution, the death by exhaustion which Kafka's literary executer, Max Brod, tells us would have ended this work. Before the novel breaks off, K. appears to be gravitating towards an acceptance of Pepi's humble invitation to join her and her two friends in a dark and sensual place. And before I conclude this essay, I would like to cite the passage, coming as it does in K.'s conversation with Pepi, which shows a belated recognition.

> And self-seeking? One might rather say that by sacrificing what she had and what she was entitled to expect, she has given us both the opportunity to prove our worth in higher positions, but that we

> have disappointed her and are positively forcing her to return here. I don't know whether it is like this, and my own guilt is by no means clear to me; only, when I compare myself with you something of this kind dawns on me: it is as if we have both striven too intensely, too noisily, too childishly, with too little experience, to get something that for instance with Frieda's calm and Frieda's matter-of-factness can be got easily and without much ado. We have tried to get it by crying, by scratching, by tugging – just as a child tugs at the tablecloth, gaining nothing, but only bringing all the splendid things down on the floor and putting them out of its reach forever.

"An Apologetic Conclusion"

"I am forced against my will to break off at this point, not having achieved what I initially set out to do. It was my hope that this essay might be a fairly comprehensive study of the novel. But, like K. (and perhaps even Kafka), I am guilty of overreaching. Time and circumstance do not permit me to explore other important features. What I have given at least provides an overview based on my conception of the novel as an esoteric work which demands from the reader a knowledge and understanding of Kierkegaard's knight of faith."

– Now what're we getting?

– You can't say he isn't getting flattered here, Theo. He starts off: "Well, I'm in awe and gratitude for this piece of work."

– Who's in awe and gratitude of what?

– Professor Ridd that's marking this paper on Kafka.

– Are you talking about this student's assignment that's been thrust upon us and dinning in our ears for half an hour?

– Oh my goodness, the comments are rather woolly.

– Andrew, about that Golden Boy statue in your drawer. Does it have anything to do with —

– I'm going to read them out loud. I think they might be interesting despite their woolliness. "While throughout it I have been (occasionally) unclear

about what you meant, and occasionally clear (as I thought) but finding you not to be quite clear in what you 'clearly' meant...

– What're you reading me?

– "...nevertheless I find this to be an exceptionally rich, accurate, proven work. It's very much the kind of conclusion to which I also have come after some years of reading (and teaching) the novel. I came to it more from within the novel itself as illuminated by my understanding of Western intellectual history; you came to it from the novel as illuminated by your study of SK – who is, after all, an important moment in Western intellectual history. No wonder we came to the same conclusion; though I do not mean at all to imply by this identity that there was nothing new here to me. In a sense, 'everything' was new to me. Therefore I hope it doesn't simply trigger again a hopeless (barren) feud that has erupted between us from time to time all year, if I go on to say – as a result of this quite marvellous, subtle, paradoxically clear paper...

– Is he marking it or setting him up for the Nobel prize?

– ...that when I or W. H. Auden or some member of the class say in class a rich, difficult, subtle thing that everyone sees or should, it is frustrating to have a hard voice saying from the back of the room in a rejecting tone, 'I don't see that at all; would you please tell me precisely what you mean by ...' And I get mad, then, for the class's sake, for truth's sake, for my and your sake. It would be like me saying of this quite amazing essay, 'I don't see it that way at all; you're being very inconsistent, not to say mystical; kindly speak it plainly.' But I don't say that. Can't. I say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' Not a servant of me, or even of the class; but of Kafka, of 'truth,' of 'reality.' Or something like that. And I say, 'Thank you.' C. R."

– Turn it off! Turn it off! Where's the switch?

– There is no switch, Theo.

– What is this? Why is this happening? Andrew, we have to keep our wits about us. We have to find other things to talk about. Now that statue in your drawer. It reminds me of that young fellow who —

– The man just died.

– Yes, yes, of course. He died in a car accident. I remember that quite well.

– I'm not talking about him. I'm talking about Carl Ridd.

– Carl Ridd? What do I care about Carl Ridd? It's not Carl Ridd I want to talk about. Andrew, you had a thing going with him.

– With great fanfare he was buried with many honours and tributes.

– I don't mean to meddle but, now that you've come out of the closet, I must tell you there was talk about that young man and a certain amount of favouritism going on.

Perhaps it is time for me to recognize that, despite my antipathy to his effusive, fawning way with me, his excessive good will that betrayed a fear of being rigorously challenged and tested, and his habitual use of the word truth as if it were butter that could be spread everywhere, Carl Ridd's way of thinking was closer to mine than I perhaps ever realized. To be sure, I had no liking for the quasi-Berkeleian metaphysics he introduced at the beginning of the course and that informed his view of literature no less than life. The role it gave to the mind as a kind of super projector throwing up a world like a feature film on an immense and nebulous screen was no more to my liking than the contrary one that treated the mind as a blank slate upon which the world wrote down the ABC of itself.

– Is this his way of slamming both traditions?

– It's a shame we can't get a movie on this computer.

– Running down our profession, Andrew? Is this what it's all about?

– I can't get anything to work. Even the phone is out of order.

– Would you like to have someone like this in your class?

– It might be possible to catch someone's attention from the window.

– Andrew, I don't see anything wrong with causality. It's a principle that's always given us the best results.

– It's not working, Theo. People just ignore me.

So what am I to make of this proximity to him? Can I deny that I'm in some sense saying that truth is all over the place? And what is this "*in some sense*"? Is it just a rhetorical move or does it possess great significance? How does my present outlook compare to the theoretical one I had of literature in the past? Doesn't it seem that, as soon as one has in one's sights the truth about something, one is forced to mark it off from so much else? And isn't this often the case even when one is trying to appropriate the one by the other? That is, the "so much else" by the "truth about something"? Which can only mean that truthtelling is always going back to the human all too human even while extending itself so heroically. Granting itself the freedom to range wider and further than it has ever done before, it nonetheless adopts a protectionist policy when, as a more or less settled thing, it resonates as a field of vested interests.

– Heavens, he's treading on —

– What?

I said at the beginning of this essay that I must resist as much as I must allow for such presumably negative traits as uncertainty, hesitation, contradiction, and equivocation. This goes hand in hand with the fact that truthtelling includes these elements as much as the attempt to expel them. That the latter arises in accordance with the degree to which truth is separated from the telling of it strikes me as being inadvertently admitted by Aristotle's principle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. When it is allowed that a subject cannot be gone into with the greatest precision, when it is said that it has such a nature as to call for a less schematic and more tentative approach than is the case with other subjects, then much that goes by the name of opinion and interpretation is ineluctably taken up as part of knowledge-seeking. As part of truthtelling then and, as much as this may be admitted or not admitted, as much as it may be underplayed or overplayed, it forever inhabits it as its other. In the case of literary criticism and in the case of Carl Ridd as literary critic, I was sensitive to a tendency to minimize or reduce the literary work in its objectivity by overplaying the subjective side of things.

– Oh, rot! Heavens! Let me hear no more!

– The conflict of interpretations, Theo. You can't just sweep aside everything that doesn't fall into the natural sciences.

– I don't sweep it aside. I simply refuse to recognize it as consolidating

knowledge.

– But there's that knowledge that every generation has and while it may not be consolidated, it's what grasps and gives meaning to your kind of knowledge.

– It's not knowledge, Andrew. It's opinion. What Plato called opinion and we shouldn't mix the two so we can't distinguish one from the other.

– I don't know, Theo. Words can be prejudices.

– Oh, really? How neat! How convenient! How simplifying! Every word is a prejudice. Isn't that what the great immoralist said?

– I take it those were his words.

– Well, why should I pay attention to his words? Aren't they – each and every one of them – a prejudice?

– But if prejudice is irreducible and present at least to some degree in discussion, then there must be some tolerance of it.

– The type of discussion you're talking about is not in the realm of knowledge.

– Well, with respect to what we're doing right now —

– Quite right. It's claptrap. One should get on with the work of doing science and let the results speak for themselves.

No, Carl Ridd wasn't a great scholar but he was a good man whose occasional intellectual dishonesty, I'm sure, only sprang up as his way of trying to keep afloat in an intractable sea of scholarship. Every class he flooded us with handouts that were supposed to enlighten us on the novels we were reading. Strangely enough, this practise didn't extend to his treatment of *The Castle*. Nor did he talk about this novel at any length. I can only assume then that he had never found a satisfactory way of doing so and that, for professional or personal reasons, he was prevented from admitting it.

– Andrew, way back in high school I remember reading a play by Sartre. There were three characters in it who had died and were in a sort of hell

they effectively created for themselves.

– It's called No Exit*.*

– That's our situation.

– Theo, you know I've always been one who's faded into the background.

– Yes, except now it seems you're voicing your opinion with uncharacteristic zeal.

– Well, I —

– And the fact is it's not in keeping with the cordial relationship we've always enjoyed in the past.

– Theo!

– In the meantime this voice – wherever it's coming from – is assaulting our ears with all sorts of rude noise.

– But I'm not —

– And to make the situation worse, I've got work to do.

– I'm not responsible for this.

– You seem to be encouraging it. If we both just clammed up and ignored him — Klamm! I like that name! — he wouldn't be able to get away with so much.

Should I be stricken because my path is windy? Should I be rushed along because I have a multitude of opinions to deliver and no consolidating body of knowledge? Should I in effect be tempted to throw it all over as not worth doing because already laid up as a secret in every human heart? It is the recesses and shadows of the intellectual soul I'm trying to bring to light as if transparency – immediate access to all parts of this soul – were not as impossible to attain as Kafka's castle. Enormous communities and vested interests proceed precisely by shunning what I'm after and, from their range and perspective, scorn as insignificant. In some sense this means I'm left with only the attempt as the important thing: the statement that here, even here, aspiring to truthhood means not running away, not turning one's back,

not invoking a taboo, not measuring consequences and calculating results to determine whether the game is worth the candle.

– Oh, brave new world!

– What did you say, Andrew?

– Uh, Shakespeare. The Tempest*. I played — you wouldn't believe!*

– Who did you sympathize for? Prospero or Caliban?

– Well, my goodness!

– I tend to think the latter got the worse deal.

– Caliban was a monster.

– A native indian.

– I certainly didn't play him that way.

– Well, then you didn't go for the subtext. He's on an island. His land's taken away from him. He's reduced to slavery. And he becomes the white man's burden.

– He betrayed Prospero. He was going to violate Miranda.

– Yes, and people the island with little Calibans. But, after all, the island was his. It was taken from him. And perhaps this was his heathenish way of striking back.

– Oh, very well but the fact is the text is Eurocentric. After all, Shakespeare wasn't writing for a twentieth century audience.

– Didn't Ben Jonson say that Shakespeare was for all time?

– Yes.

– And Montaigne? Isn't there something there too?

– By God, you're right.

– You're probably wondering how I got to know Shakespeare so well.

– Well, I've never heard you speak about him before.

– It's been a long time and I remember taking a very business-like approach. I read him from top to bottom and even some commentary starting with A. C. Bradley, Coleridge, and going right up to — oh, what the devil is his name?

Carl Ridd was a good man and no doubt hundreds of people attended his funeral. It is enough to make me dwell on the fact that values collide or at least some take precedence over others and that telling the truth usually comes in varying degrees and doses. When I was young, I was less tolerant of this state of affairs and tended to look down on those who esteemed the good in some way or other while falsifying this or that about it. Since then I have learned not to be so unilateral in my judgements and, with the recognition of such hard truths as that hundreds of people won't turn up at my funeral, be more tolerant of the other in his ethical otherness. When one is like Carl Ridd and fights on many fronts and when one assumes roles, tasks, and responsibilities that require more in the way of practical reason than scrupulous reflection, one sacrifices a bit of one's spiritual freedom. Carl Ridd's battle was not the lone struggle of someone like Soren Kierkegaard and so, as much as he admired and respected this thinker and paid unusual and, as I think now, heartfelt tribute both to him and me, he was less the poet or thinker of the knight of faith than an acting knight of faith himself.

– O. J. Simpson or something like that. Anyway, what the devil was I talking about?

– You were claiming that Caliban was a victim who deserved pity.

– In moderation. I don't mean to overstate the matter. It's like, well, take The Merchant of Venice. It's the same thing there. Shylock's a monster, if you will. He wants his pound of flesh from Antonio right to the very end. On the other hand, Shakespeare shows how much he's been brutalized and knocked down by society.

*

1 Although it could be argued that being absolutely related to God need not imply the elimination of all doubt and uncertainty, it could hardly be without *moments* of such elimination.

2 These occasions, along with other references to .K.'s child-like behaviour, are to be found on pages 66, 198, 202, 314, 397, and 403 of *The Castle* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1974).