

## VERSION ANGLAISE ET COURT THÈME

### I : VERSION

Father was in the army all through the war – the First War, I mean – so, up to the age of five, I never saw much of him, and what I saw did not worry me. Sometimes I woke and there was a big figure in khaki peering down at me in the candlelight. Sometimes in the early morning I heard the slamming of the front door and the clatter of nailed boots down the cobbles of the lane. These were Father's entrances and exits. Like Santa Claus he came and went mysteriously.

In fact, I rather liked his visits, though it was an uncomfortable squeeze between Mother and him when I got into the big bed in the early morning. He smoked, which gave him a pleasant musty smell, and shaved, an operation of astounding interest. Each time he left a trail of souvenirs – model tanks and Gurkha knives with handles made of bullet cases, and German helmets and cap badges and button-sticks<sup>1</sup>, and all sorts of military equipment – carefully stowed away in a long box on top of the wardrobe, in case they ever came in handy. There was a bit of the magpie about Father; he expected everything to come in handy. When his back was turned, Mother let me get a chair and rummage through his treasures. She didn't seem to think so highly of them as he did.

The war was the most peaceful period of my life. The window of my attic faced south-east. My mother had curtained it, but that had small effect. I always woke with the first light and, with all the responsibilities of the previous day melted, feeling myself rather like the sun, ready to illumine and rejoice. Life never seemed so simple and clear and full of possibilities as then. I put my feet out from under the clothes – I called them Mrs Left and Mrs Right – and invented dramatic situations for them in which they discussed the problems of the day. At least Mrs Right did; she was very demonstrative, but I hadn't the same control of Mrs Left, so she mostly contented herself with nodding agreement.

They discussed what Mother and I should do during the day, what Santa Claus should give a fellow for Christmas, and what steps should be taken to brighten the home. There was that little matter of the baby, for instance. Mother and I could never agree about that. Ours was the only house in the terrace without a new baby, and Mother said we couldn't afford one till Father came back from the war because they cost seventeen and six.

That showed how simple she was. The Geneys up the road had a baby, and everyone knew they couldn't afford seventeen and six. It was probably a cheap baby, and Mother wanted something really good, but I felt she was too exclusive. The Geneys' baby would have done us fine.

Having settled my plans for the day, I got up, put a chair under the attic window, and lifted the frame high enough to stick out my head. The window overlooked the front gardens of the terrace behind ours, and beyond these it looked over a deep valley to the tall, red-brick houses terraced up the opposite hillside, which were all still in shadow, while those at our side of the valley were all lit up, though with long strange shadows that made them seem unfamiliar; rigid and painted.

After that I went into Mother's room and climbed into the big bed.

Frank O'Connor, *My Oedipus Complex*, 1950

<sup>1</sup> Button-stick : petite barrette métallique protégeant le tissu au moment de lustrer les boutons de l'uniforme.  
« Barrette / glissière à lustrer » est une traduction possible.

## II. THÈME

« Je vais me servir d'une comparaison pour me faire bien comprendre. L'œil du rustre aime les couleurs brutales et les tableaux éclatants, l'œil du bourgeois lettré mais non artiste aime les nuances aimablement prétentieuses et les sujets attendrissants ; mais l'œil artiste, l'œil raffiné, aime, comprend, distingue les insaisissables modulations d'un même ton, les accords mystérieux des nuances, invisibles pour tout le monde.

De même en littérature : les concierges aiment les romans d'aventures, les bourgeois aiment les romans qui les émeuvent, et les vrais lettrés n'aiment que les livres artistes incompréhensibles pour les autres.

Quand un bourgeois me parle musique, j'ai envie de le tuer. Et quand c'est à l'Opéra, je lui demande : « Êtes-vous capable de me dire si le troisième violon a fait une fausse note à l'ouverture du troisième acte ? — Non. — Alors taisez-vous. Vous n'avez pas d'oreille. » L'homme qui, dans un orchestre, n'entend pas en même temps l'ensemble, et séparément tous les instruments, n'a pas d'oreille et n'est pas musicien. Voilà ! Bonsoir ! »

Guy de Maupassant, *Mont Oriol*, 1887