

Barbara

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4th-8th September 1995

London to Siena to Portofino

Sunday 3rd September : Leamington

Leslie's 84th birthday : thanksgiving.

8.30 am It is a bright, heavenly, still morning - why ever leave? I see a shadow I've never seen before : the tall lampshade on the green settee. The absence of environing traffic and no wind give the day, the new month, a great blessing. September is a threshold month, an intelligent month, with its mingle of the seasons. We are going to prolong the summer.

Two ways in which even the preparation for a holiday exceeds the calibration of the ordinary : more time for light-hearted conviviality and frivolity and - more time for prayer. Lighter and deeper. "Contemplation" as Dostoevsky says, i.e. not distancing reflection, but absorption, may link the two - the world around, the world within. This is what I must practice (leave the critical attitude behind, on my desks).

I would be worried to disturb the stillness, the silence, of this day. Hush, hush - departure.

No 387 Everyman's Library 1941 (1909) James Boswell (Ernest Rhys (ed.) *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*.

10.30 am It is still so quiet I can hear the scraping of my pen : very reassuring (a busy-insect sound).

Four brothers Karamazov:

Dimitri)	
Ivan)	
Alexei (Alyosha))	Fyodorovitch
Smerdyakov)	

Monday 4th September

We have so many melancholy poets:

Johnson
Keats
Coleridge
Hopkins (?)

Park Hotel, Siena

We arrived at 4.30 pm.

I am Miss Rose. Who is she? A haughty girl in pigtails and a pinafore, or a lady spinster fading genteely from lack of libido?

The rooms are deep cerulean blue and gold with four poster beds and chaises longues. Lynn and I have a stately connecting door and a view of

the cathedral tower and dome - the white and black horizontal striations brought right up to our immense windows by the binoculars.

Goats milk ice cream...
Fruit soup with horseradish!

The image of the pearl : nacreous sheen formed around undigested grit is not apt for an precarious human being: for pearls are tough (even though they discolour).

"Pour me into bed", says Lynn.

We pray for a few minutes in the chapel: one candle lights the way. Every room is vaulted with cusped vaults on the four sides.

Praise and thanksgiving for everything (whether in the suitcase or left behind).

Maybe we are all a mix of emotional intelligence and emotional stupidity. James Boswell's *Journal* makes me chortle from time to time. I must find an example. Is it low-brow to prefer his account (which seems to incorporate Johnson's) to Johnson's more anthropological/ethnographical investigations (land-tenure, economy, kinship, marriage-customs, class relations, superstitions)? Boswell's narrative includes all the conversations with their

unlimited range of preoccupations, and it gives you Johnson as ornery animal and as Socrates.

Tuesday 5th September

Mist over Siena and the surrounding hills. The Park Hotel is one mile north-west commanding a panoramic view of the city (I can see the Mangia Tower in the Campo, too).

The colour of the Campo is muted, ancient pallor by comparison with terracotta expectations - of course, it is an overcast day, and by midday it is raining (I wish spelling were as flexible as in Mallory's time. Was spelling standardized between Mallory and Shakespeare?)

There are no windows at the level of the piers in the Cathedral but massive paintings along the aisles. The horizontal green-black marble striping of the massive nave piers give the Cathedral an Egyptian look (Lynn), a pagan temple to the popes clustered above the piers on the cornice above the nave. The Hermes Trismestigus pavement is covered with spongy cardboard: but it is almost impossible to make out the other floor mosaics because it is so dark. No clerestory windows either but areole windows. The inside of the dome forms a steep cone painted bright blue with golden stars - the presbytery is closed off.

The west facade is covered in pink as well as white and green-black marble, with hosts of sculpture - heads of cherubs, free-standing saints, apostles, prophets. Scenes of the Virgin painted on the pediment cusps. The tower with its ascending scale of mullioned windows, one to five.

We walk around the right of the Cathedral past the gigantic, unfinished brick frame for the New Cathedral, past the Museum and debouch unexpectedly on a vertiginously steep flight of stone stairs (later we see a toddler in blue and green mount all the way up the stairs without stopping). Another black and white building seems to have grown out of the myriad levels of the stairway. San Giovanni Square - the Baptistery with three portals. Inside it is well lit, shallow and longitudinal with the famous font in the centre with Donatello's "Herod's Banquet". The frescoes are the thing - the vaults and walls covered with scenes in brilliant colours - different reds, blues, greens, strips of stones, inlays and cusps invite you to sit and contemplate the heavenly feast. There are two side altars: the space as a whole offers its riches and its peace, whereas the Cathedral withheld them - without even a saving chiaroscuro.

The steepness and angles of the streets between the Campo and the Cathedral make it worthwhile to keep looking back over one's shoulder: to see palaces splayed out and moving around corners.

I am caught out in belligerent stubbornness : concerning whether there is air-conditioning in our rooms.

Hotel

The Park retains an aristocratic caution: no shops or selling, the chapel and seventeenth-century portraits instead. The peach stuccoed outer walls are open on one long side, so as you climb the hill, the villa looks like a triptych, the dark brown (siena?) shutters the brooding eyes of the Madonna guarding the valley.

My legs hurt in three places : the ankles (right worse), backs of the knees, left thigh and hip sore all the time, painful to put fresh weight on, acutely so to bend or to rise from bending. Both knees and thighs massively swollen. New puffiness central right abdomen (in addition to fleshy pouches lower central abdomen).

Wednesday 6th September

The mist is dazzling this morning - like the raiment of the Transfiguration. Praise, Thanksgiving.

The Simone Martini Majesty Fresco, even restored, has a dream-like quality because although the assembly is installed with all the trappings of pomp and glory - golden throne, wide canopy, twenty medallions in the frame, attendance, offerings and obeisance of angels, saints and prophets - yet the

intent heads float above weightless bodies (the luxuriant textiles, reduced to turquoise outer rims around abdominal cavities).

Lorenzetti's *Good Government* and *the Effects of the Good Government in the town and countryside*. The old king dressed in sienese white and black needs a hoot of females to represent the virtues (Lynn). Tyranny looks like a devil, with her feet on a black goat (*Bad Government*), and is said to be a female also. *The Effects of Bad Government* is almost completely effaced. Under Justice, Concord is roped to the scales of Justice and has a heavy rectangular plane across her knees and a crowd of suitors all of whose ambitions she levels. Martini's *Guidoriccio de Fogliano or Guido Riccio* (see postcard) *between the castles of Montemassio[#] and Sassoforte of Maremma* by contrast (1328) has great solidity. Horse and knight caparisoned in matching gold and black diamonds, they enter eternally the palisade of their destination castle on the left, while the castle and camp left behind seem to decamp, forming part of their retinue and bodyguard.

Lynn is overwhelmed by a *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Hall of Pillars. Highly stylized in viciousness and innocence, the painting shows the murdered babes ^m lining the bottom frame, while older children watch nonchalantly from a safe arcade above. Over coffee I suggest that Lynn develop a light carapace, or at least recognize that she has chosen to remain raw, that good intentions can be masked by irony, humour, Machievellian^a

smiles, in a way that is more likely to ensure their effectivity, their indestructibility, than endless brutal sincerity.

Lunch is the finest, most ethereal pizza, bare flakes of dough, with anchovies and capers. Forget American ice-cream with this chocolate, vanilla, lemon sorbet. In spite of drinking red wine, Lynn heroically marches off and reappears *pronto* with a taxi for the one with elephantine legs. I feel much better than I did after our time in the Palazzo Publicio when I had a miserable vision of what it would be like not to have sufficient energy or strength to lead an independent life. Fortunately, one little espresso dissolved such forebodings. And now (3.10 pm), I shall rest again.

4.00 pm The view down the opposite valley is amazingly clear - a miniature hillscape on the other side of flat-roofed villas, nestled among neat orchards, terraces of olive trees, and noble, lanceolate cypress trees.

John Wain's biography of Johnson, fine as it is, I find profoundly annoying. His argument, presupposition, prejudice, explicitly expressed, is that Johnson deposited in his spiritual and religious torments his unease and terror at his tempestuous sexuality. That he failed to marry for the second time, even though he had several eligible relationships - women he respected, was even in awe of, intellectually, and felt most tenderly towards - he never managed to bring together the

sexual and the ethical, but left his emotional turmoil to prayer and to God (except for his exploitation of Mrs. Thrale, his emotional dependency on her and his negligence of her distress).

The common assumption is that spiritual - religious life bears the brunt of unresolved psychic conflict: God as the eros we deny or dampen in our sexual relations. It is the other way round : we manage to produce erotic and sexual situations and relationships which express our unresolved relationship to God. In choice of partner, in perverse connections tolerated far beyond the good, in recognizably repeated patterns of love affairs, we act out the battle of inner demons which we cannot face in solitude and in prayer. (This is not to deny that we grow through bondings, discovering our otherwise hidden difficulties in their histories).

Note: I am implicitly distinguishing between the empirical, specific, contingent, 'religious', relation or, indeed, non-relation to God and THE RELATION TO GOD.

7 pm

Three wispy angel-clouds hold up the canopy of the pale blue sky, a peachy one, a snow-white one and a grey-robed one. There are olive, orange and lemon trees in the hotel park. I have a hard, acid green olive on my writing table gleaned by Lynn.

Thursday 7th September

The cool September continues.

We had Parma ham and melon and pecorino cheese for breakfast in a third dining room with dark sixteenth-century portraits on the walls. At 10 am we are to be driven to San Gimignano, Tuscan hill town, forty minutes to the north west of Siena.

This will have been a perfect day.

OK
50 minutes to San Gimignano through the Tuscan hills. Fields of withered, woeful sunflowers (as throughout Burgundy), their scorched heads drooping, submissive to some invisible power that seems to refuse their harvest of oil (I wish I knew the principles of sunflower horticulture); or are they trying, like the giant Antaeus, to touch the earth and so regain their strength and vigour?

In 1300 Dante came to San Gimignano to persuade the Mayor and the General Council of the necessity of a Guelph League in Tuscany. The chamber of the Mayor's New House where he delivered his address is called "Dante's Hall". It is dominated by a second *Maesta* (Majesty 1317), painted by Lippo Memmi, Simone Martini's brother-in-law. It is clearly a copy: figures effaced in the Siena *Majesty* are fully characterized here. Yet it is

entirely different : the Virgin, also in pale turquoise, looms out of all her frames (canopy, steps, throne), while her companions-in-eternity display gravitas and glory by comparison with the ethereal grace of the Sienese version.

San Gimignano is renowned for its thirteen square bell-towers. The Tuscan Romanesque of the Collegiate Church or Cathedral, like the Church of St. Augustine, present honey-stoned barge-like exteriors, punctured only by very small circular windows (there are four narrow Gothic windows towards the east end on the right side at St. Augustine's), yet somehow they seem to have achieved the Gothic elimination of the wall. The exterior uniformity is obliterated by the entire covering of the aisles walls - the Collegiate church with frescoes - the Old Testament by Bartola di Fredi; the New Testament by Barna da Siena (14th century).

In the Museum in the Mayor's New House there is a crucifixion by Coppo di Marcovaldo, who may have been Cimabue's teacher. It is remarkable for Christ's luxuriant brown (siena?) hair and beard, the contrapposto of his head jammed into the neck, the long high-lighted nose meeting the full parting lips, elongated eyes surmounted by thick brown eye-brows, the swirl of the cheeks, the longitudinal rib-cage with the vertical sword wound flanked by six pouches of proud flesh....

The guide book refers to it as a “dramatic representation of a tormenting and violent feeling”. Lynn affirms this as the violence of Christ’s executioners. I see it as the violence of the crucifixion - divine violence to save human violence. We discuss the meaning of “glory” after seeing Pintuiccio’s *Madonna in Glory, and the Saints Gregory and Benedict* where the Madonna sits in an ogive circle with a shell-like interior, cherub-angel heads with wings for collars around the outer blue rim and under two pink feet protruding from her blue vestments:

the “glory” ----->

Lynn thinks “glory” means “wonder” or “awe”. I think that it does not have a subjective, anthropological meaning (“the glory of the Lord”). I conjecture that “glory” means the manifestation of God in the world, the work of the Holy Spirit. “Glory” is puzzling because it has a trinitarian resonance. St. Augustine was warned by the “Baby Jesus” : “It is easier to pour the waters of the sea into a puddle” than to grasp the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

We find a perfect place to have lunch in Via dell’Oro, between the Piazza Duomo and Piazza Cisterne. Ristorante Dorando specializes in old Tuscan dishes. It comprises three small halls with vaulted ceilings and stone walls. We start with Cibrèo de Medici, Catherine’s favourite dish, of chicken liver, followed by Florentine steak. It must have been a pound of thick, succulent meat, seared on the outside and pink inside, with oil and lemon. The menu

tells us of the Etruscan esteem for the ducks they hunted - since ducks are able to abscond by the three elements of water, air and earth, avoiding the arrows by swimming, flying or walking. Children used to be punished by being deprived of fruit to end their meal. Jams were made by peasants to eat with "stinginess" during the long and cold winters when they could afford no fresh fruit.

Finally we wait in the Square of St. Augustine for three quarters of an hour for the church to open. I especially want to see the Bonozzo Gozzelis cycle of frescoes depicting incidents from the life of St. Augustine. In particular I am curious how St. Monica, his mother, will be represented. The frescoes are in the sanctuary behind the altar : it seems intrusive to penetrate there, but notices encourage visitors to do so. The church is thronged with the curious; ^{incessantly} heaving ^y banging does not cease for the restoration of St.

Bartholomew's Chapel, yet ~~the church~~ ^{has} the combined aura of business and holiness of a church very much in use - in reception and in action. ^{prevails} In number 10 among the seventeen pictures of St. Augustine, Augustine reads the Epistle of Paul in the presence of his friend Alipio. This pivotal moment (Bk 4 of the *Confessions*) when Augustine turns from friend and fiancée to confession is presented here as inclusive. It makes me muse on how different his path and the Latin tradition might have been ... Monica wears the blues of the Virgin; she is monumental.

Sitting in the back of a chauffeur-driven car, Lynn, inveterate driver, is tense, clutching her handbag. This is the weakness of her strength: "I am a doer" she says. O dear! She is travelling with a contemplative with strong anchorite leanings. Well, we should complement each other - for she will do; and I, I will ponder. Lynn has humour - from the bawdy to the simply hysterical - I am a poor companion there too. I have irony. Holy irony - in the sense of the divine comedy; the awe-ful discrepancy between human ambition and eternal truth; but also, I must confess, intellectual irony - that sinful distance which dissolves sentiment into paradox, a form of supercilious, hypercritical, devilish relish at plain emotion and naive concern (which, of course, also have their manipulative motive).

It has been a perfect day. (Did Winnie ever get to simplify her future perfect?)

Friday 8th September

Two 'small' episodes of *petit mal* - one in the night; second just after rising - third in the shower - two at breakfast, one in the foyer. The terror is largely that these 'episodes' bring me to the limit of language. I don't know how to capture the supernatural conviction of *déjà vue*, ^{déjà}dreamt, ^{déjà}hallucinated, nor the terror that accompanies the minor seizure as it ^{then}courses through you.

The premonitions, the event with its unnatural vision, are triggered by the most banal things. Why the ^{ea}permanence by fear at the very conviction of already having had a portion of experience? What verb tenses are appropriate?

When I pilgrimaged to the English Cathedrals (these were probably the only times off over the Howard years), I would always take a work of the English or German mystics (Tauler, *Theologica Germanica*, Julian of Norwich, *Cloud of Unknowing*, etc) as much to witness the formation of the vernacular as to hear the mystic voice. Now I take "Johnsoniana" (Boswell, *Tour Journal*, p.262). Strictly speaking, that refers to Johnson's talk, but I reckon I am using it to refer to works by Boswell as well as Johnson, and to the related literature from the eighteenth-century to today (for I shall read my way through the recent works too). Johnsoniana will cover a good many trips. I have no appetite at lunch (unlike yesterday). So I mustn't generalize. Maybe the chemotherapy is the cause?

This morning we went back to the Cathedral, but not much more was visible or accessible. Then we climbed to Duccio's Hall in the Cathedral Museum. The Majesty (1308-1311) looks much more primitive than the Martini brothers' renderings: the Virgin iconic; the setting filling the space (the wood is not the canvas?) in regular rows, no angels, canopies, or floating or flying accoutrements.

The *Virgin with the Big Eyes* on the second floor (35 more steps), robust full cheeks and knees, with an iconic child-sage, his right hand raised in blessing and two angels in the top corners. The shoulders are set frontally without the usual turn to her left (or right). She wears a deep brown

garment with protuberant knees, the conventional blue reserved for her upper half. The halo is studded with black stones. The artist appears not to be known. She sits on a red and gold bolster on top of what looks like a trunk. Yet the eyes have it: the image is subordinated to their accusatory stare.

We shop for postcards, presents, change money at the bank, then wait for a taxi which doesn't arrive. Lynn dashes uphill to find one but eventually the police organize a car.

My left hand as well as right side of the abdomen is now swollen.

Saturday 9th September 1995

A two-hour car journey from Siena to Portofino, from Tuscany to Liguria.

Lynn is a sublime hypocrite: yesterday morning she knocked on my door c. 9 am and blurted out that she couldn't wait any longer; and then proceeded to cover her honest impatience any number of times by insisting that she'd been worried whether I was alright (after our activities the day before - when I had exhibited endless stamina for walking, climbing and eating!) Not a serious fault but a revealing denial.

Well! The drive from Siena to Liguria was magnificent - through the Tuscan hills past Carrerra's marble, then into Liguria, where the steep hills reach down to the road in vestments of the virgin forest, as if no human hand or

history has every encroached. We drive through Rapallo and Santa
Margharita, the sun glistening on the sea, bays full of boats and narrow
perimeter beaches with, now, sparsely-habited hills wooing the shore. We
round each bay passing many large hotels.

Ah! the *Splendido!* In the black and white marble foyer we are greeted very
warmly with the exclamation, "You are staying for nine days!" The palm
tress wave in welcome, the descent to the sea is almost perpendicular. To
the right of the small bay of Portofino is an island, (Lynn says there are
monks living there) drenched with trees, in the lee of which rest a clutch of
small boats. The weather is glorious - a completely blue sky and a balmy
breeze. Within minutes we are seated at the seaboard of the dining room on
the terrace. I say to Lynn over lunch, "Neither of us has any excuse for not
relaxing totally here." She replies "Yes, you do". What a silly reply - a little
curse among her overwhelming bounty and thoughtfulness. The angles are
so entrancing here: the triangular angles of the island, the forked angle of
Mediterranean (I should say Ligurian) vegetation in front of me, the angle-
splay of the balcony with its green iron furniture on which I am sitting and
writing, overlooking the sea and island to my left, the vegetation in front of
me and to the right. The rooms on the fourth, top floor, have a
Mediterranean aura - cool marbles and delicate woods, white walls. We both
feel that with the pool (below the terrace restaurant) and the olive-tree walks
(above the hotel), we will not need to move far from a world which offers
everything and keeps THE WORLD at bay. Lynn's room is next to mine with

its own balcony (no connecting door). We can communicate from balcony to balcony. Lunch: ravioli filled with sea bass, apple tart (do not translate into English : a round rich pastry with succulent fruit) and cinnamon ice cream. Lynn has gnocchi made with artichokes. The head waiter (as at the Park) looks immensely distinguished, partly bald with a rim of grey hair, a deep, sonorous voice. The sun is beating with the breeze on my face. It is as if we've begun again: have just arrived from England: are finally - on holiday!

My parting prayers in the Chapel of the Park. First, praise and thanksgiving. Then, forgive me my sins: O God, turn me more to you : help me to dwell in poverty of spirit when I am tempted to indulge the depredations of my vanity - face, hair, legs, abdomen, for I know that there will be a lot more to endure. And help me to be accepting of the weaknesses of others (of my own weaknesses I am very tolerant), to allow them their insinuated and explicit aggressions, mendacity, hypocrisy. To remember (I want to say this to Harry) that one goes mad not when one "loses one's reason", but when one is left with nothing else but one's reason (Chesterton?). (Yet I do not believe that God intends us to be stupid or sentimental towards others.)

From the perimeter of the restaurant terrace, the full moon stains the coastal waters, making a wavy silhouette of the steep precipitation of verdura. An hour later Phoebus has sacrificed her sacred angle, moved out to sea, washing the expanse with a silvery sheen.

Lovely dinner: consommé (no pasta, no cheese), chicken breast with a tiny stuffing of spinach, soufflé with grand marnier, jasmine tea.

Sunday 10th September

The walkways alongside the hotel are honeyed with the sun, flanked by olives, trees and flowering bushes, labelled, from South America and Africa. Ancient, rugged steps lead from one level to another and the paths are flagged, too; tiny lizards dash all around. The weather is *herrlich*, glorious; the sun glistens on the milky, old olives and the sea is spangled in constant variation. Topless sun-bathing around the pool by Junoesque Italians, Germans, Americans. By comparison I feel like a little lizard darting around in my black-trimmed white tent dress covering my thighs - the right thigh is tremendously distorted today. I wonder whether the lymph is the disease rather than a symptom of the disease: whether the failure of lymph drainage in the legs is not linked to the lymphangitis in the lungs rather than to tumour in the pelvic muscle. I have the largest, elongated black plum in my fruit basket, with longitudinal indentation and patches of dusky purple-white bloom over its skin.

The "island" is not an island: it is the right side of Portofino bay, a promontory or isthmus jutting out into the sea, parallel to the coast where the hotel lies, joined by a narrow strip of land with pastel buildings and a tower, out of Shakespeare's Verona. This could be sighted from the walkway this morning.

This passage from Boswell rests in my mind : p.119 "JOHNSON. "Sir, Dr. Cheyne has laid down a rule to himself on this subject, which should be imprinted on every mind : "To neglect nothing to secure my eternal peace, more than if I had been certified I should die within the day#; nor to mind any thing that my secular obligations and duties demanded of me, less than if I have been ensured to live fifty years more.""" This does not provide any indication of how to follow or realize this rule: it states the dilemma of balance as if it were not *the paradox* (SK). Lynn reads this injunction as requiring both completely accepting and completely giving: perfection impossible for human beings.

Lynn has explored Portofino village and found a small Crusader's Church with three gigantic crosses. Tonight the moon was further inland with a scarf of cloud. The President of the Senate, Carlo Conomiglia, came to greet the President of Argentina in a reception on a walkway above the pool. The dark-suited men and bright-suited ladies descend a flight of steps by the pool leaving their conversation among the whispering tall bushes.

Monday 11th September 1995

We will have been abroad for a week. Both Lynn and I agreed yesterday evening that we felt as if we've been here for ever, even though yesterday was only our first full day - first night, first breakfast. Why did we both have that strange conviction at a place where we feel at ease, no ordeal? Maybe

relaxation familiarizes time; pleasure turns the freshest experience into normal expectation (constantly delighted). I have decided to take the mild pain-killers morning and evening.

I don't know anyone like Lynn: she has based her personality on the idea of her own perfect benevolence, and totally rejects the inevitable equivocation of human intention and the consequences of human action. It makes her stupid - not intellectually stupid, but emotionally. It also shows absolutely no understanding of the Christian notion of sin, which does not mean we are intrinsically bad, but that there is no pure human motivation or action, because we are part of meanings, personal and impersonal, individual and collective, which exceed anything we have control of, and yet we are free to turn (repent), or to turn away (to despair). Sin partakes, if you like, of the Greek meaning of 'fate' or 'destiny' for which we take full responsibility.

"Emotionally stupid" because the attitude involves a refusal of discrimination, a licence not to think about what one is saying, or to respond with self-scepticism or irony when other implications are pointed out. Instead Lynn's ever-ready "I was only joking", her total refusal of culpability. Take the "You have [something to stop you relaxing totally, supra]" incident. Lynn insists self-deprecatingly that she was referring to my burden of having her, as my mother, on holiday with me. But at the time it was uttered earnestly and with no explanation. This throws light on the general, chronic problem: that the damage is not necessarily done when things go wrong, but when difficulties are denied: then the damage is

doubled. The notion of 'sin' saves: it does not condemn human beings. Ah!
but I demystify too much; leave the veil drawn.

8.25 am Praise and thanksgiving

Balconies - have I mentioned that our rooms have balconies?

10.30 am: I am sitting on my balcony facing the sun in the east and gazing at the echelons of coast-line towards Rapallo with a wide berth of bleached sea opened out in front of me beyond the Portofino promontory. Keat's *Endymion* is open, too, but I am almost too blissful to read. The balcony's the thing: pure peace and contemplation.

We spent this morning at Portofino harbour with its colour-splashed, tall houses lining the square at the water-front, the cove is crammed with boats of all kinds. First, we visit an oratory ^(not a Crusader Church) with two massive black marble crosses, one of which bears a black marble Christ wearing an elaborate, gold loin cloth. The horizontals terminate in gold and silver work studded with blue and red jewels from which radiate spiky metal representations of flower blooms. The rest of the oratory is plain, with a wooden barrel vault and blue filigree architrave. As we walk around the quay, the mountains come into view across the bay, forming a backdrop and juxtaposition to the pastel houses with their illusionistically painted rustications, pediments and lintels. Waiters or chefs bearing large silver bowls of food, covered with cloths pressed to their aprons or overalls, cross the quay. The scene in its

operatic gusto has no depth: history has been deliberately redesigned for the careless wealth of tourists, Italian and foreign. Even the Portofino Church, up a steep ally in the right-hand corner of the square presents a consistently Baroque *trompe d'oeil space*. With broken pediments in the aisle recesses, painted cusps on the vault, marble-fronted piers, every surface singing arias, staged not sacred. We take lunch in the most comfortable looking restaurant with the vista of quayside and mountains splattered with dwellings. Parma ham and melon, grilled sea-bass, salad, fried potatoes, water and beer, cost over £60.00. A lot to pay for artfulness and artifice. The shops comprising the ground level of the houses purvey Hermes, Armagnani, the most exclusive jewellery, while the free-standing stalls ^{display} sell with rude insistence the cheapest plastic toys, coral necklaces, small items of linen and lace.

Land of motor bikes and scooters: it sounds like a continuous cavalcade as the bikes accelerate up the winding cliff road in front of the hotel; noise pollution replacing exhaust pollution, as these drill-drone machines are substituted for vehicles banned from city centres.

We reach the limits of our knowledge rapidly when, travelling, we extend our curiosity to the natural world: do green olives become black olives? When are they harvested? How can oil be extracted from withered sunflowers? Why is the moon hanging so much further inland on succeeding nights? What is the name of the *yellow* butterfly? Why are Bellinis, peach juice and

① champagne, so named? What made Catherine of Siena a saint? ^{NL} *senz altro*,
immediately, of course.

^{NL} Pronto, prompt, ready; ^{NL} hallo (phone) *subito*, at once, immediately
non lo so, I don't know.

Perfect daily pattern: a long breakfast on the terrace, then a short room retirement, then morning activity together (walk, excursion, etc) and lunch. Afternoons solitary, resting, reading, lazy on the balcony in the sun; meeting again at eight for drinks, dinner, spending the long hours of the night alone.

② A margherita is a pearl, a snow-ball flowering bush, a cocktail, salt-rimmed with lemon. Five dishes - olives, pistachios, mini-pizza, filberts, peeled and salted, and crisps - accompany our aperitifs. (Lynn's request to note this)

Tuesday 12th September

③ I feel balmy and good: the pain killers provide a short-lived "lift", although they do not seem to assuage the stiffness of the thighs or the sensation of wires tightened around my ankles. But I can put my weight equally on both legs. I brought the Keats down to breakfast to peruse when Lynn left, but she liked the idea and disappeared to her room deliberately so that I could read. It is difficult with Keats (unlike Johnson, *supra*) not to feel that his chastity killed him. (Like the heroine in Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne*;

Tuberculosis, the “cancer” of the nineteenth century, in that the meaning and progression of the disease and its symptoms depends on the emotional and spiritual condition of the sufferer). Difficult not to read (*Endymion* Bk 11) of embracing suddenly “a naked waist”, “the honey’d tongue”, pressed on honeyed tongue, “the fondling and kissing every doubt away”, followed by intense grief, “Long time ere soft caressing sobs began/To mellow into words”, as Keats’ own yearning for and grief over the impossibility of tender sexual contact. For while I believe the erotic and sexual always expresses the God-relation, I also think that to be able to share sexual intimacy, to be tenderly close to another, is a fundamental challenge of human existence (not achieved in so many otherwise passionate love affairs). Keats intimates and veils the intercourse of Endymion and Arethusa; and I cannot help musing over this poet who had never known another in this way. Now (Bk III) the old man, who Endymion is to save, relates how Circe, “vulture-witch”, fated him to cling around *the dead waist* of Scylla. My musing intensifies at the inexperienced poet who can imagine the tenderest touch of a female spirit-creature, and the most vile and threatening curses of a supernatural, magian female. Maybe it would be more accurate to say not that Keats died of his chastity, but of fear strangling desire, sexuality stifled by horror, from which his cult of Apollo, physician and poet, could not heal or save him.

The pool has a continuous artificial splash - peaceful, predictable, ambient rhythm after the roar of scooter-vehicles. We spend the morning in a sunny

nook, with a sequestered perspective on the water and swimmers and the wide-angled cypress, palm and boated seascape rising to the horizon. For pre-lunch drinks, Lynn treats us to “Bellinis” - fresh peach juice and champagne, beautiful pale rose concoction.

Sleep and sorrow seem the main preoccupation of Endymion and his companions: full of enigma concerning the instantaneous event and end of love. “Dark Paradise” (Bk IV p.144) where, also instantaneously, the passage from the fire of hell to the cool draught of ice turns “native hell” into this “Cave of Quietude,” does not purgate. The resonance of heaven and hell recall^s Dante, but the conjuration of vast spaces, myriad choirs and classical apostrophes, have a Miltonic magnitude. Lacking the Christian virtues, Endymion, shepherd-prince, devoted to Cynthia (who is she?), loses his second, dark-tressed Indian love, and he vanishes as they do. Only Peona Endymion’s sister, remains to tell the tale. I really need the *Longman Annotated Keats* to follow all this in detail.

Tonight the sea and sky are one in dusty^k blue, and the mystic promontory is setting sail for distant shores.

Keats’ *Hyperion*, Bk II is clearly modelled on *Paradise Lost* Bk I, the Conference of Lucifer and his followers in Pandemonium: Keats has the sorrowful exchange of the overthrown Titans with Hyperion’s ambiguous

statuses between sun and earth, sovereignty and degradation, Thea and Apollo.

Wednesday 13th September

- 8 a.m. The most violent storm all night and continuing this morning: lightening, thunder growling continuously, endless rain, wind shouting up and down the scale and rattling the balcony doors, darkness at dawn. The palm trees have turned into monstrous insects throwing their antennae in different directions at the wind.
- 9 a.m. No sign of abatement. A long pencil of lightening right across the sky, followed immediately by three cannon of thunder.
- 11.30 a.m. The storm has relaxed; the air brightened. The wind is still high: the heads of the palms are now primitive creatures of the sea bed, their tentacles restlessly competing for passing prey.

Lunch: malt whiskey, consommé, luigini pasta Genovese (with pesto), cucumber salad with lemon, a large quantity of black and white grapes, which I wash, wrap in the large, matt pink, linen table napkin and convey to my room. They settle immediately into my fruit basket.

Over lunch Lynn says that she would “come back as a man” “a rich man” spending power (above all), opportunity, fulfilment and high income. It is interesting, not surprising, I suppose, that the “success” of her two eldest

daughters makes no impression on her idea of her next-life prospects. By “success” I suppose I mean independence and creativity, but, in addition, “success” could be reckoned in more worldly terms as financial security, professional status, celebrity, influence. Lynn’s projections are fixed in her era and in her sense of opportunities actually destroyed by her parents against whom she could not rebel.

The wild weather seems to have eliminated the motor scooters.

9.30 The sun is beating down again and the residents have started to emerge from their rooms. I can see guests clad in the hotel’s roomy and thick, blue towelling dressing gowns with white trim, taking tea on the terrace four flights below me. It is easy to think of this as a rest-home, a Magic Mountain, a Ligurian Davos, for the abominably wealthy. I would like it if the terraces of walkways, with exotic plants from all over the world, were the Terrestrial Paradise, or at least the lower cornices of Purgatory. But somehow I am doubtful: the bearing of the waitors indicates both the quality of their service and the potential viciousness of the wealth they face to face. There is no love of the neighbour here: with any slight cause for complaint, the clientele turn on the hotel staff with unrestrained fury. The terraces may well be circles of hell, the olive trees growing horizontally over the path, hiding the implanted souls of the

avaricious, the gluttonous, the carnal, who disported themselves as if their privilege were a true human nobility, a species of superior virtue. The two head waiters divide this burden between their carriage and character: the distinguished older man whose whole body bends graciously towards whoever he is addressed by, addresses, serves, and the younger, dark-haired man with the strong, cruel features, whose being is completely absent from his suave smiles and hard posture.

11 p.m. Well I underestimated Luca, the 'cold *maitre d'*'. He revealed a spleen at the British, occasioned by Michael Winner's churlish article ^{about the Splendido} in last Sunday's *Sunday Times*. Lynn and I plan to write a response and have it faxed by the Hotel to the *Sunday Times*.

Thursday 14th September 1995

The damp and rainy but windless morning has been taken up with meeting the Manager, Maurizio Saccani, and sending the fax replying to Michael Winner to *The Sunday Times*.

I am loving the syntax and vocabulary of Cary's translation of Dante's *Purgatory* (encouraged by Pite's excellent argument that the enjambment created by the syntax forms some kind of equivalent, or analogy, to Dante's *terza rima*).

In this inhospitable weather the hotel is barricaded by the Avenging Angel: the corridors resound with loud footsteps and voices; the guests, swathed in heavy clothes, spend the morning in the elegant lounges with rough paperbacks held in front of bespectacled faces, wrinkled in disdain at reading and rain; the foyer is filled with volleys of animated Italian. A superficial community of strangers is forged as the restriction of the daily devotions to sun, air and water make a crowded railway carriage out of this spacious leisure palace. How to break the hold of the Angel?

I have climbed from Purgatory to Paradise. Goose liver (*foie gras*) and fillet steak for dinner.

Friday 15th September

It promises to be a clear and fresh day: resplendent wide-angled sea. We plan to visit Santa Margherita Ligure (named after the white-flowering bush). I seem to have less and less conversation, even desire to speak, taciturnity together with my loss of appetite: I could barely eat breakfast, normally my "best" meal. Poor Lynn: such a companion! She needs someone fit and active, who enjoys newspapers and television, and who chats breezily about whatever comes into their head. Luca regales us now with winks punctuating his sentences: one side of his face contorts to produce a fold around the right eye so that he can press together forehead and cheek. We must accept his gifts for they are the return for our gesture to *The Sunday Times*. He is preparing calves' liver specially for me this evening. This, a

man whose features form a set facade for the buried soul, produces a Grand Guignol - in gratitude for our response to communicated damage. He has become a short story to me: someone with acclaimable looks and urbane nonchalance, who would be incapable of forming personal connections, and who would disappear into the air when the guests are not there (Henry James has a short story, I seem to remember, along those lines).

I have a wonderful writing chair in my room. It has a very low splayed seat, with a rich tan wooden frame and complicated pattern of pale, criss-cross thatching. The front of the seat has straight sides with a central bow rim. The narrow concave back has two cross supports, the upper one inlaid with an elaborate bronze representation of two long-beaked birds backing onto an urn over a swag or festoon of material. Best of all, this ancient chair is broken in two places: at the top left shoulder, a jagged crack in the wood; but the lower back horizontal is completely severed on the right. A venerable piece of furniture, this wounded companion is utterly at odds with the immaculate marble floors, lamps and console tables, which grace the public circulation. (How weak are words.) I'd like to take this chair with me. The secret of writing *freely with discipline* is the same as speaking a foreign language: one should not try to translate (here one's impressions into words), but draw on the idiomatic resources of the second language (here: language as such) to capture something special which you want to describe (ideally ^{or} altogether).

Santa Margherita: another facade-town, with a large esplanade lined with hotels and restaurants and a dramatic view beyond the harbour of the Ligurian coast travelling south. The food shops gives us more of a sense of Italian life: meats, breads, cheeses. The motor-scooters drone away everywhere, backdrop to the Baroque Basilica, with gold inlay piers and illuminated vault; and lugubrious aisle paintings, framed with pediments so broken they have turned into volutes. This is a heretical church, surely, its presentation of heavenly beauty forgetful of the humanity of Christ crucified (Lynn). We have an excellent pizza for lunch, and taxi back to the Hotel. The combination of seaside resort and Counter-Reformation is prodigiously disorienting.

Have I mentioned that Lynn goes on afternoon excursions, exploring the different routes around and up and down the steep coast? The hotel is populated by couples, often two couples together, older people on the whole. The main shape of doorways and windows is the high round arch against the dark pink walls with green iron balconies and shutters on four floors.

Over lunch, Lynn, quite fairly, asks if, or, rather, tells me that, "You haven't achieved much in Santa Margherita". What was I meant to achieve? I certainly enjoyed strolling around. It is a reasonable comment on my minimalism.

Oh, the romantic melancholy of the hotel room in the early evening light:
the Italian version by comparison with Hopper's American version.

Prayer: O Lord, forgive me my sins (- the same two categories as before, only
in reverse priority): help me to accept others; relieve me of my vanity.

Wonderful dinner: consommé with a host of little stars (stelline), calves liver
seared, roasted vegetables, cassata.

Saturday 16th September

Why, why does Dante give St. Bernard the last word? Can this be the
meaning of "Comedy"? - so contradictory a figure epitomising and
summarizing all the "lower" juxtapositions of worldly vainglory and eternal
love? What was Dante's view of the Crusades? Do we know? Would he
have read St. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, or, especially, his
treatises on Mary (etc.)? How well known were Bernard's works (as opposed
to his life - his preaching of the Second Crusade)?

We take the walkway at midday to Portofino Harbour: a flagged pavement
with a wet stone retaining wall to the right overhung with brilliant purple
bougainvillaea. The changing view over harbour, bay and the sheer cliffs
with the hotel and other colourful hotels lower down, ^{almost} right at the final drop
to the sea, is refreshing and easy. The restaurants in the harbour are fully
booked, but we find a comfortable table in an unpretentious one, and relish
tomatoes, anchovies, niçoise (so named after Nice - Lynn), the best pizza

dough with “smashed” olives (olive paste). The solid woman who serves us provides a casual and earthy contrast to the form and uniforms at the Hotel. The peasant women selling linen, lace, coral, at stalls charge exorbitant prices, which vary hugely and can be bargained down, but their faces are set and faded, indicating the long, tough life beyond the merry-go-rounds of the fairground of Portofino.

There are certainly wasps in the Terrestrial Paradise (Nabokov, *Ada*). I have almost achieved a languid indolence this slow, deliciously warm afternoon on the balcony, but the air is ravished for two hours by what sounds like a giant’s lawn-mower; and the scooters seen to be racing each other up the cornice. I love the sound of the tennis balls firmly lopped back over the net in lengthy valleys, (which means, of course, that the players are not seeking over exertion or competitive excitement (Lynn)). A life devoted to sensual pleasure - sun, food, drink - reduces people to their lowest common denominator. Does it? Dogs bark across the hillside in the dusk, another bane to bear in this Terrestrial Paradise.

Dinner: consommé with *stelline* (“little stars”), baked sea bass with pinenuts and black olives, boiled Italian rice, bitter chocolate mousse in a bark of madeleine, sailing in a vanilla sea with a deep sea swell of apricot, jasmine tea. (T.S. Eliot)

Sunday 17th September

It is quiet, still, peaceful, this Sunday morning (no scooters). We sit at a table in the warm air at breakfast, and the gentle sun comes to share the repast. How I like sitting up at a table; it makes me alert and receptive. Lynn will go to the service at the Church of Divo Martini in Portofino. I will not join her: I could not bear being a tourist (religiously speaking) at a truly sacramental Church. I am very reluctant to leave Breakfast : it holds the day in its generous embrace.

I love the argent glistening of the rippling sea; it seems to suggest a subaqueous Beloved who receives the repeated caress.

Tall Bordeaux glasses for old wine; gigantic glasses with a huge bulbous swelling for old Burgundian wine.

Walnuts individually peeled by hand for a Lugurian pasta sauce.

The sunset is dappled deep pink and violet at the horizon: it bids us an emphatic farewell.

Monday 18th September

L The sun in the east over Santa Margherita pours its ice-gold over the drifting sea.

Praise and Thanksgiving.

I return with all the gifts - places, sins, irony.