VOYAGE TO THE MOON

The moon was full, the sky was clear, and the clock had struck nine when four of my friends and I were on our way home from a house just outside of Paris. The diverse thoughts that were inspired in us by the saffron ball overhead kept us occupied as we made our way. With all eyes immersed in that great celestial body, first one of us called it a window of heaven through which you could see heaven’s glorious felicities. Then another objected that it was the plate on which Diana lays out Apollo’s clerical collars. While a third exclaimed that it could well be the sun itself, which, having shed its rays for the evening, peeked through a hole at what was going on in the world in its absence.

“And as for me,” said I, “though I would like to share your happy fantasies, I must say, without the pleasure of participating in this amusing game of make-believe with which you tweak the time to make it pass more quickly, that the moon is a world like ours, and that ours is its moon.”

My companions greeted this with a huge burst of laughter.

“’It may well be,’” said I, “that the same mocking treatment is given on the moon to someone who alleges that our globe is a world.”

But it did me no good to inform them that Pythagoras, Epicurus, Democritus, and, in our own time, Copernicus and Kepler, had been of this opinion, for that just made them crow all the louder.
This thought, whose audacity satisfied my urge to contradict, took so complete a hold on me that all the rest of the way home I was pregnant with a thousand lunar definitions of which I was unable to relieve myself, and, by dint of supporting this comical notion with serious arguments, I virtually convinced myself. But hearken, reader, to the miracle or accident that Providence or fate employed to confirm me in it.

I was back in my dwelling-place, and, hardly had I entered my bedroom to rest up from the walk, when I found on my table an open book that had not been put there by me. It was one of Cardano’s works,¹ and, though I had no intention of reading it, my eye was drawn as if by some force to a particular story told by that philosopher: he writes that, while studying one evening by candle-light, he saw coming through the closed doors of his chamber two very big old men, and that after numerous questions that he put to them they replied that they had come from the moon, and, having said that, they disappeared.

I was so surprised, not only at seeing a book that had gotten there all by itself, but at the moment and the page at which it lay open as well, that I took this chain of incidents for an act of God who was directing me to reveal to humanity that the moon is a world.

“What!” said I to myself. “After having spent the whole day speaking about something, a book that may be the only one in the world dealing with that very subject flies from my bookshelves to my table, acquires the ability to think, opens by itself to the exact page containing such an incredible adventure, and provides the food for my imagination and for my will the plans to act upon! . . . Most likely,” I continued, “the two old men who appeared to the great philosopher are the very ones who have tampered with my book and opened it to that page, in order to save themselves the trouble of making the same speech to me as they had made to Cardano.”

“But,” I added, “how can I dispel my doubts unless I go up there myself?”
“And why not?” I answered. “Prometheus certainly did no less in his time when he ascended to the heavens and stole fire from the gods.”

These feverish brainstorming sessions were followed by the hope of making such a lovely voyage successfully. To carry out my project I locked myself up in a fairly inaccessible country house where, after giving free reign to my musings on several possible ways of getting there, I shall tell you how I rose up to the heavens.

I attached a large number of dew-filled bottles around my waist, and the heat of the sun, which attracts dew, raised me up so high that I finally found myself above the highest clouds. But, as this attraction made me ascend too rapidly, instead of getting closer to the moon as I intended, it seemed even farther from me than at my lift-off, and I broke several of my bottles until I felt that my weight overcame the attraction and I descended back towards the earth.

My impression was not incorrect, for I landed shortly thereafter, and, counting the length of time from my lift-off, it should have been midnight. Yet I could see that the sun was at its zenith and that it was noon. You can imagine how astonished I was. Yes, I was so much so that, not knowing to what I could attribute this miracle, I had the impudence to think that in honor of my boldness God had hung the sun back up in the heavens so as to illuminate so generous an enterprise.

What increased my befuddlement was not recognizing the country around me, for it seemed to me that I had risen straight up and I should have come down in the same place. Equipped as I was, I made my way towards a hut where I perceived some smoke. I was scarcely a pistol-shot away when I found myself surrounded by savages. They appeared greatly surprised at encountering me, for I must have been the first person they had ever seen dressed in bottles. And to confuse even more all the interpretations they could have come up with for my strange get-up,
they saw that when I walked I hardly touched the ground. Nor could they fathom the fact that at
the first impulsion that I gave my body the heat of the midday sun lifted me and my dew, and
that, if not for the fact that I was wearing fewer bottles, I probably would have risen into the air
before their eyes.

I tried to approach them, but in an instant they had fled into the nearby forest, as if their fright
had turned them into birds. But I did manage to catch one whose stomach had no doubt betrayed
his legs. I asked him with considerable difficulty (for I was out of breath) how far it was from
there to Paris, since when people had gone naked in France, and why they all fled from me in
such a panic. The man to whom I was speaking was an olive-skinned old man who at first threw
himself at my feet, and linking his hands up behind his head, opened his mouth and closed his
eyes. He mumbled to me for quite some time, but I didn’t discern any words coming out of him,
and so I took his language for the hoarse warbling of a mute.

Sometime later I saw a company of soldiers arrive with drums beating, and I saw two of them
leave the rest to reconnoiter me. When they were within earshot I asked them where I was.

“You’re in France,” they replied, “But who the devil left you in that state, and how is it that we
don’t know you? Have the ships arrived? Are you going to inform the governor? And why
have you divided your brandy up into so many bottles?”

To all this I replied that the devil had not left me in this state, that they didn’t know me
for the simple reason that they couldn’t know everyone, that I wasn’t aware that the Seine
could transport ships, that I had no information to give Monsieur de Montbazon, and that I was
not carrying brandy on me.

“Ho-ho!” said they, taking me by the arm. “Are you trying to be a smart aleck? The governor
will know for sure who you are, that he will!”
They led me to their chief while saying these things to me, and I learned from them that I was in France, but not in Europe, for I was in New France. I was presented to Monsieur de Montagny, the viceroy. He asked me my country, my name, and my rank, and, after I had satisfied him by telling him of the pleasant success of my voyage--whether he believed me or just acted as though he did--he was kind enough to give me a room in his apartment. It was my good fortune to meet a man capable of intelligent opinions who was not at all surprised when I told him that the earth must have turned during my ascent, for, having begun to rise just two leagues from Paris, I had fallen in an almost perpendicular line into Canada.

In the evening, as I was about to retire, I saw him come into my room.

“I would not have come in to disturb your rest,” said he, “if I had not thought that a person who had been able to make nine hundred leagues in half a day could do it without getting tired. Besides,” he added, “you can’t imagine the amusing quarrel I’ve just had over you with our Jesuit fathers. They absolutely insist that you are a magician, and the furthest that they are likely to be swayed in your behalf is to label you merely an imposter. And, in truth, isn’t this movement that you attribute to the earth just a nice paradox? What keeps me from believing very strongly as you do is that, although it may well be that you left Paris just yesterday, you could have arrived in these parts today without the earth’s turning at all. If the sun did lift you by means of your bottles, wouldn’t it have necessarily brought you here? For, according to Ptolemy, Tycho-Brahe, and modern philosophers, it travels in the same direction that the earth does according to you. And furthermore, what makes you so sure that the sun is stationary, when we see it move, and that the earth turns on its axis so rapidly, when we feel it so firmly beneath us?”
“Sir,” I replied, “here are the reasons that oblige us to make this judgment. First of all, it is only common sense that the sun has taken its place in the center of the universe, as all the bodies in nature need the primordial fire that dwells in the heart of that realm to be able to satisfy their needs immediately, and that the cause of natural generation should be placed between all bodies equally where it functions best, just as nature in its wisdom has placed the human genital organs, the pits in the center of apples, the core in the center of their fruit; and just as the onion protects its precious germ securely inside of one hundred layers of skin that enclose it and from which ten million others may be born. For an apple is a small universe in itself, and its pit, hotter than the other parts, is the sun that surrounds itself with its globe-preserving heat; and the germ in the onion is the tiny sun of its tiny world, that heats and nourishes the vegetative salts of the mass.

Supposing all this to be true, I maintain that the earth, needing light, heat, and the influence of this great fire, revolves around it in order to receive equally in all its parts the qualities that preserve it. For it would be as ridiculous to think that such a great and luminous body should revolve around a point that’s of no use to it as to imagine, when you see a roasted lark, that, in order to cook it, the fireplace had been turned around it. Otherwise, if it were the sun’s job to act in this way, it would seem that people get sick for the benefit of medicine, that the strong should be bent by the will of the weak, that the great are intended to serve the lowly, and that instead of a vessel’s sailing along the coasts of a land, the land should be made to glide around the vessel.

And if you find it hard to understand how so heavy a mass can move, pray tell me, are the stars and the heavens that you call so solid any lighter? Furthermore, we who are certain that the earth is round can easily deduce its movement from its shape. But why assume that the sky is round when you have no way of knowing, and, just because it doesn’t have that shape, you can be sure that it can’t move? I shall not criticize you for your eccentrics, concentrics, and epicycles,³
though you cannot explain them coherently, and for which my system has no need. Let us just talk about the natural causes of such movement. You people are all obliged to have recourse to an intelligence that moves and governs your globes. But I, without disturbing the repose of the Supreme Being, who has doubtlessly created nature absolutely perfectly and who in his wisdom has done it in such a way, believe that, having accomplished it in that way for one thing, would not have made it imperfect for another. For my part, I find in the earth all the potential for mobility. I therefore say that the sun’s rays, coming with their powers and striking all parts of the earth, make it rotate as we make a globe rotate by slapping it with our hands; or that the vapors evaporating continually from its bosom on the side of which the sun looks down, colliding with the cold of the middle region, glance off it and, being able only to strike it obliquely necessarily make it pirouette in this manner,

The explanation for the other two movements is even less complicated. Please consider . . .

At this point Monsieur de Montagny interrupted me and said, “I would rather save you the trouble—for I too have read some of Gassendi’s books on this subject—on condition that you hear what one of our Christian fathers, who maintained your position, had to say. ‘Indeed,’ said he, ‘I imagine that the earth does turn, not for the reasons alleged by Copernicus, but because the fires of hell, as Holy Scriptures teach us, are confined in the center of the earth, and the damned, who try to flee from the heat of the flames, run in their attempted flight up the curved interior, thus making the earth turn, as a rat enclosed in a wheel makes it turn while running.’”

We both spent some time praising the zeal of the good father, and when his panegyric had ended Monsieur de Montagny told me that he was very surprised, in view of the improbability of the Ptolemaic system, that it had been accepted so widely.
“Sir,” I replied, “most people, who judge only by their senses, have let themselves be
convinced by their eyes; and like the person whose boat is sailing close to the shore and who
thinks that the shore is moving, mankind, turning with the earth around the heavens, has believed
that the heavens themselves were turning around it. Add to this the insufferable arrogance of
humans, who are convinced that nature was made only for them, as if it were more plausible that
the sun, a huge body four hundred and thirty-four times bigger than the earth had been lit just to
ripen its plums and grow its cabbages. For my part, far from acquiescing in the impudence of
such brutes, I believe that every planet of the sun is a world and that the fixed stars are also suns
with planets around them, in other words worlds that we are unable to see because of their small
size and because their reflected light is unable to reach us. For now, in good faith, is it possible
to imagine that such immense globes are just vast empty landscapes, and that simply because we,
a handful of vainglorious rogues, crawl on the surface of ours, it was built to rule over all? Fie!
Do you mean to say that just because our sun measures our days and our years it was built to
keep us from bumping our heads against walls? No, not at all! If that visible God illuminates
mankind, it is by pure accident, as the king’s torch accidentally illuminates the thief who passes
in the street.

“But,” said he, “if, as you maintain, the fixed stars are so many suns, one could conclude that
the universe is infinite, for it’s plausible that the inhabitants of those worlds that surround a fixed
star that you take for a sun would find over their heads still other fixed stars that are invisible to
us, and that this would go on endlessly.”

“Have no doubt about it,” I responded. “Just as God was able to make the soul immortal, so
was he able to make the universe infinite, if it’s true that eternity is no more than a limitless
duration and infinity a limitless dimension. And further, God himself would be finite if the
universe were not infinite, for he could not be where there is nothing, and he could only increase
the size of the universe by adding something to his own dimension and by commencing to be
where he had not previously been. It is therefore necessary to believe that, as we see Saturn and
Jupiter from here, if we were on either of them we would discover many worlds that we can’t
perceive from here and that the universe is eternally conceived in this way.”

“Well I’ll be!” he answered. “Say what you will, I could never comprehend such an infinity.”

“Say! Tell me,” I went on, “do you comprehend any better the nothingness that is farther out?
Certainly not! When you think about that nothingness, you imagine it at least as wind or as air,
in other words as something. But, even if you can’t comprehend infinity in general, you can
conceive of it in its parts, for it’s not hard to visualize earth, fire, water, air, stars, the heavens
themselves. Well now, infinity is no more than a limitless fabric of all these things. If you were
to ask me how all the worlds were made, in view of the fact that Holy Scripture speaks of only
one that God created, my answer is that it speaks only of ours because it’s the only planet that
God would bother to make with his own hands, while all the others, whether or not we see them
hanging in the azure universe, are only the froth of the suns as they were purged. For how could
those great fires subsist without being attached to some matter on which they feed?

Thus, just as fire rejects the ash that could smother it, just as gold in a crucible as it’s refined
becomes separated from the marcasite that diminishes its carat, and just as our hearts are relieved
by the vomiting of the indigestible humors that oppress them, so does the sun disgorge itself
daily and purge itself of the unconsumed matter that feeds its fire. But when it will have fully
consumed the matter that keeps it going, you may be sure that it will reach out on every side to
find additional forage, and that it will snatch up all the worlds that have previously been formed,
particularly those that are closest to it. Then this great fire, scrambling all the bodies, will expel
them pell-mell in all directions as before and, having gradually purified itself, will begin to be a
sun to all the little worlds that it will have engendered by ejecting them from its sphere. That is
surely what caused the Pythagoreans to predict the universal conflagration.

This is not a ridiculous fancy. New France, where we are, provides a convincing example of it.
This vast continent of America is half of the earth, which, despite the fact that our ancestors had
sailed the ocean a thousand times, had not yet been discovered. Evidently it wasn’t yet here,
anymore than many islands, peninsulas, and mountains that have formed on our globe when the
dross, thrown off by the sun as it purged itself, condensed in clusters heavy enough to be
attracted by the core of our earth, possibly very gradually in tiny particles or all at once in a
single mass. This explanation is not so unreasonable that Saint Augustine could not have
approved of it if the discovery of this land had been made in his time, for that great person,
whose genius was illuminated by the Holy Spirit, states with assurance that in his day the earth
was as flat as the pan of an oven and that it floated on water like half of a sliced orange. But, if I
ever have the honor of seeing you in France, I shall show you that, with an excellent spy-glass
that I have, certain dark spots that appear as blurs are worlds that are being formed.”

My eyes began to close as I was finishing this speech, which obliged Monsieur de Montagny to
bid me “Good evening.” On the next day and the following days we had discussions of a similar
nature. But as, a while later, the time-consuming affairs of the province interrupted our
philosophical and scientific, dialogue, I was seriously caught up again in my objective of
traveling to the moon.

I went out as soon as it had risen, conjuring among the trees the method and success of my
endeavor. Finally one day, the day before Saint John’s Day, while a council was being held in
the fort to determine whether aid should be given to the local Indians against the Iroquois, I went off by myself behind our lodge to the top of a small mountain where I did the following:

With a machine that I built that I believed capable of lifting me as high as I wished, I threw myself into the air from the crest of a rock, but, as I hadn’t thought out sufficiently how to go about it, I went head over heels landing hard down the mountain.

All bruised as I was, I went back to my room, but I was not discouraged. I took some beef marrow with which I anointed my whole body, for it was battered from head to toe, and after getting my courage back with a bottle of liqueur, I went back to look for my machine. But I couldn’t find it, for some soldiers, who had been sent into the forest to cut wood to make a scaffolding for a Saint John’s Day fire to be lit that evening, and having by chance found it, had taken it to the fort. After several conjectures over what it might be, and when they had discovered my invented spring, some of them said that they should attach some rockets all around it so that, by rapidly propelling it up high, with a spring causing the wings to flap, there was no one who would not take the machine for a fiery dragon.

I hunted for it for a long time, but I finally found it in the middle of Quebec Square as they were setting it on fire. The pain of seeing my own handiwork in such great danger made me so frantic that I ran and grabbed the arm of the soldier who was lighting the fire. I pulled the torch out of his hands and furiously jumped into my machine to break up the decorative objects with which it was covered, but I’d gotten there too late, for I had hardly stepped into it when I found myself being carried up into the sky.

The unspeakable horror that I felt did not however affect my awareness to the point of not being able to remember everything that happened to me in that instant. Let it therefore be known that one row of rockets (for they had put six rows of six) with a primer on every row, caused the
next one to fire, then another so that the burning saltpeter moved the danger farther and farther away even as it grew bigger. As the fire of the rockets died out, the contraption lost power, and just when I imagined that my head would wind up on some mountain, I felt, without moving a muscle, that I was continuing to climb, and then my machine took leave of me and I saw it fall to earth.

That extraordinary adventure filled me with a joy so unimaginable that, supremely happy to see myself saved from certain disaster, I shamelessly began to philosophize about it. And so, as I tried to see or to figure out what had caused this miracle, I noticed that my skin was swollen and still covered with the marrow that I had smeared on it for the bruises from my fall, I realized that my flight had slowed, then that the moon, accustomed as it was during that quarter to suck the marrow of animals, was swilling the marrow on me with more and more force the closer I got to its orb and that the clouds between us were not weakening its pull.

When, according to calculations I have since made, I had covered more than three-fourths of the distance separating the earth from the moon, I suddenly found myself falling head-first without ever having somersaulted. Still, I would not even have noticed it had I not felt my head bearing the weight of my body. To tell the truth, I was quite certain that I was not falling back towards our world, for, even though I was between two moons and conscious of the fact that I was getting farther from one of them as I neared the other, I was quite sure that the larger was our earth, though, at the end of one or two days of travel, the distant reflections of the sun having blurred the distinctions between the differences of landscapes and climates, it seemed to me to be no more than a great golden disc resembling any other. That gave me the impression that I was falling towards the moon, and I was confirmed in this opinion when I recalled that I had only begun to fall after three-fourths of the journey. “For,” said I to myself, “since its mass is smaller
than ours, its sphere of activity must also be less extensive and therefore it was only later that I’d felt the pull of it core.

After falling a long time, or so I presume, the violence of my fall having kept me from noticing it, the next thing I can recall is finding myself under a tree, tangled in three or four rather thick branches that I had shattered by my fall, with my face smeared with an apple that had smashed into it.

Luckily this place, as you will soon find out, was the earthly paradise, and the tree in which I’d landed was the Tree of Life itself. Thus you may well imagine that, without this miraculous bit of luck, I would have been killed a thousand times over. I have often since reflected on what popular belief accepts, that when falling from a very great height you are suffocated before hitting the ground, and I have concluded from my adventure that that’s not true, or else that the revivifying juice of the fruit that had leaked into my mouth had summoned back my soul, which was not far from my still warm and still viable body.

Indeed, as soon as I was on the ground, the pain left me before it could even leave a mark upon my memory, and the hunger, which had greatly plagued me during my journey, gave way to just a faint recollection of having lost it.

When I was back on my feet, I barely noticed the shore of the widest of four great rivers that feed into a lake that cuts them off, where the invisible spirits and souls of the simples [medicinal plants] that are exhaled in this area regaled my sense of smell. The little pebbles were rough and hard only to the view: they were careful to become soft when you walked on them.

I soon found myself in a circular intersection leading to five avenues where the oak trees surrounding it seemed by their great height to raise a veritable garden of foliage up to the heavens. Raising my eyes from their roots to their tops, then lowering them from top to bottom,
I wondered whether they were borne by the earth or whether they themselves bore the earth hanging from their roots. One could say that their superbly raised heads were being bent over by the weight of the heavenly spheres whose heft they bore with moans, their arms lifted towards the sky seeming to embrace it as a plea to the stars for the beneficence of their powers and to be granted it before losing any of their innocence in the thrall of the elements.

Here on all sides the flowers, without any other gardener than nature itself, exhale a wild fragrance that wakens and satisfies the nostrils. Here the delicate pink of a rose on the bush and the brilliant sky blue of a violet in the brambles, leaving nothing to choose between them, make you conclude that each is lovelier than the other. Here all the seasons are like spring. Here no poisonous plant can sprout whose preservation is not betrayed by its birth. Here the brooks relate their travels to the pebbles. Here a thousand little feathered voices make the forest echo with the sound of their songs, and the fluttering assembly of these melodious throats is so general that each leaf in the woods has taken the tongue and the shape of a nightingale. Echo herself takes such great pleasure in their songs that one would think to hear her repeat them, that she wishes to learn them by heart. Beside this wood may be seen two meadows whose stretches of bright green form an emerald as far as the eye can see. The confused mixtures of colors with which the spring daubs a hundred tiny flowers blends their nuances together and the softly windblown flowers seem to chase each other trying to escape the wind’s caresses.

You could take this prairie for an ocean, but because it’s a sea that offers no view of a shore, my eye, horrified at having scanned it so far without discerning a shore, soon called up my reasoning mind, and my mind, doubting that it was the end of the world, tried to persuade itself that such a charming landscape had perhaps forced the sky to come down and join the earth. In the middle of this vast and perfect carpet, a rustic fountain running over with its bubbly, silvery
water, crowns the ground surrounding it with a sward dotted with daisies, ranunculi, violets; and those flowers that squeeze together all around appear to do so to be the first to be seen. One is still in her infancy, for she was just born and her smooth young face shows not a single flaw. The big circles in which she turns a thousand times on herself show how regretful she is about having left her native land, and, as if she were shamed to find herself caressed by her mother, she resisted my playful hand that tried to touch her. The animals that came there to drink, smarter than those of our world, seemed surprised that it was broad daylight on the horizon while gazing at the sun in the other direction, and they were hesitant to bend down over the water for fear of dropping off into the firmament.

I must confess to you that at the sight of so many beautiful things I myself was titillated by those pleasant pains that an embryo, it is said, experiences at the infusion of its soul. My old hair fell out to be replaced by thicker and smoother hair. I felt my youth come alive again, my face become rosy, by body’s heat spread through my humors; finally, I grew about fourteen years younger.

I had made my way about half a league through a forest of jasmine and myrtle when I spied some moving thing lying in the shade of a tree. It was a young adolescent, whose majestic beauty almost made me seem idolatrous. He got up and dissuaded me from it.

“No, it’s not to me!” cried he loudly. ”It’s to God that you owe your obeisance!”

“You see before you a person,” I replied, ”confounded by so many miracles that I don’t know to which one I should first direct my admiration, for, in the first place, coming from a world that you here undoubtedly take for a moon, I thought I’d landed in another that the people of my country also call a moon; and it’s clear that I find myself in paradise at the foot of a god who wishes not to be adored, and a stranger who speaks my language.
“Except for the nature of a god,” he replied, “what you have said is the truth; this land is the moon that you see from your globe, and this place where you’re walking is paradise, but it’s the terrestrial paradise in which only six people have entered: Adam, Eve, Enoch, I who am old, Elijah, Saint John the Evangelist, and you. You certainly know how the first two were banished, but you don’t know how they came from your world. You should therefore know that after they had both tasted the forbidden apple, Adam, who feared that God, irritated by his presence, would impose his punishment on him, decided that the moon, your world, was the only safe place to escape his Creator’s retribution.

As it happens, in those days, the human imagination was so strong, not having yet been corrupted either by debauchery, impure food, or the violent worsening of earthly diseases, that, being impelled by the powerful desire to get to that place of asylum, and his whole body having been made lighter by the fire of that rapture, he was carried off in the same manner as has been seen in philosophers, who, with their imaginations strongly fixed on something, were carried up into the air by what you call their ecstasies. Eve, because her more infirm sex made her weaker and not hot enough, would probably not have had an imagination vigorous enough to overcome by her will alone the obstacle of bodily weight, but because her body had been drawn from a part of his, the attraction of one part to the other drew her towards him when he ascended, as amber attracts straw, as a magnet turns to the north from which it was wrenched, and Adam drew what had been taken from his rib as the ocean draws to it the rivers that come from it.

After arriving on your soil they settled down between Mesopotamia and Arabia. The Hebrews called the man Adam and the idolaters called him Prometheus, their poets pretending that he had stolen fire from heaven for the benefit of the descendants he engendered, endowed with a soul as perfect as his. Thus, to inhabit your world, the first man left this one deserted, but the All-Wise
did not wish to leave such a felicitous dwelling-place without inhabitants. A few centuries later he permitted Enoch, tired of the company of humankind, whose innocence was being corrupted, to entertain the wish to leave it behind. But that holy person did not believe that any place would shield him from the ambitions of his people, who were killing each other over who would own parts of your world, except the happiest land of which, in earlier times, his grandfather Adam had spoken so much to him. But how could he get there? Jacob’s ladder had not yet been invented. The grace of the Almighty came to the rescue, for it let him know that the heavenly fire descended on the holocausts of the just and of those who were good in the face of the Lord, according to his spoken word: ‘The scent of the sacrifices of the just has risen up to me.’

One day when that divine flame was hungry to consume a victim that he was offering to the Immortal One, he sealed hermetically two large vases that he had filled with the vapors that were exhaled and he tied them under his armpits. Immediately the fumes, which tended to rise straight up to God and which could only by a miracle seep through metal, propelled the vases upwards and in that way carried the holy man along with them. When he had risen all the way to the moon and set eyes on this beautiful garden, an almost supernatural burst of joy made him realize that it was the earthly paradise where his grandfather had formerly lived. He quickly untied the vessels that he had attached like birds’ wings around his shoulders and he did this with such great elation that when he was still some twenty-five feet in the air above the moon he took leave of his pectoral fins. He was however still high enough to be badly injured but for the wind billowing in his expansive robe and the heat from the flames of charity that also cradled him. As for the vases, they kept flying up until God enshrined them in the skies and they became what are called the Balance, which shows us every day that they are still full of the odorous vestiges of the
sacrifices of a just, as exemplified by the favorable influence that they exercised on the horoscope of Louis the Just, who was born under the sign of the Balance.

He was however not yet in this garden; he arrived here some time later. It was when the deluge caused the flood, that the waters that swallowed up your world rose to such a prodigious height that the ark floated in the sky near the moon. The humans could see this globe through their window, but the reflection of this great opaque body became dimmer because of their proximity, which drew some of its light from it to them. They all thought that it was a section of the earth that hadn’t been drowned in water. It was only Achab, Noah’s daughter who, perhaps because she was on the lookout while the vessel was rising and approaching this nocturnal star, insisted loudly that it was the moon. In vain did they protest to her that the plumb-line they had dropped measured only fifteen cubits. Her response was that the metal weight must have landed on the back of a whale that they had mistaken for the ground; that by her reckoning, she was certain that it was the moon itself that they were approaching. Finally, as one judges according to one’s peers, all the other women eventually agreed with her. And with that they tossed a skiff out on the sea despite the objections of the men. Achab was the most daring, and so she wanted to be the first to challenge the peril. With agility she launched herself into the boat and all those of her sex followed her in. It was in vain that they were shouted at, repeatedly called lunatics, warned that they would be the cause that one day all women would be accused of being moonstruck; she thumbed her nose at them.

So there she was afloat outside the world. The animals followed her example, for most of the birds that felt their wings strong enough to risk the voyage, impatient of the first prison that had curtailed their freedom, went along. Even some of the quadrupeds, the bravest of them, jumped into the water. Almost a thousand of them got off the ark before Noah’s sons could close the
stable-doors that had been held open by the mass of escaping animals. Most of them did reach this new world, As to the skiff, it would come to rest on a most pleasant hillside where a very stout-hearted Achab got off, and joyful at having found that in fact that land was the moon, did not wish to turn back and rejoin her brothers on board.

She settled down for a while in a cave, and, as she was strolling one day, weighing whether she would be sorry about losing the company of those close to her or whether she would be feeling satisfied about it, she saw a man who was picking acorns. The joy of such an encounter caused her to run to embrace him. He reciprocated, for it had been an even longer time since the old man had seen a human face. It was Enoch the Just. They lived together, and, if the natural impiousness of his children and the pride of his wife, had not obliged him to go back to his woods, they might have been able to spend their days together in all the marital bliss that God bestows on the just.

There, everyday, in the most desolate retreats of those frightful solitudes, that virtuous old man, with an innocent spirit, offered God the holocaust of his heart, until one day, from the Tree of Knowledge that you know is in that garden, an apple fell into the river near where it grows; it was carried out of paradise, at the whim of the flowing waters, to the spot where poor Enoch was catching fish for subsistence. This beautiful fruit was caught in the net; he ate it. Thereupon he knew where the earthly paradise was located, and, through the secrets that you could not imagine if you hadn’t tasted the apple of knowledge as he had, he came here to live.

I must now tell you in what way I got here. I don’t think you’ve forgotten that my name is Elijah, for I just told you so. You should therefore know that I was in your world and that I lived with Elisha, a Hebrew as I was, on the banks of the Jordan, where I spent my life happily enough among books not to regret it, even though it did not last. Nevertheless, the more my knowledge
grew, the more I grew to know of what I had no knowledge at all. Our priests had never enlightened me. Adam, who had possessed the memory of that sublime knowledge, never breathed a word of it to me. I despaired of being able to acquire it until, having one day made a sacrifice to expiate the weaknesses of my mortal being, I fell asleep and the angel of the Lord appeared to me in a dream. As soon as I woke up I began immediately to work on the things that he had prescribed to me: I took a two-foot-square magnet, put it in a furnace, then, when it was purged and dissolved, I drew out the attractive force, calcified it completely, and reduced it to a piece as big as a medium-sized ball.

Following these preparations I had a chariot built of very light-weight iron, and, with all my mechanisms ready after a few months, I climbed into my skillfully devised cart. You will probably ask me of what good was this whole apparatus, won’t you? You should know that the angel told me in the dream that if I wanted to acquire the perfect wisdom that I yearned for, I should climb up to the lunar world, in which I would find Adam’s paradise with the Tree of Knowledge, for, as soon as I tasted its fruit, my spirit would be enlightened on all the verities that a creature of God is capable of knowing. That then is the voyage for which I had built my chariot. Finally, I climbed into it and when I was securely fastened on the seat I hurled the magnetized ball way up in the air. Then the iron machine, which I had contrived with the most massive part purposely in the middle rather than at its extremities, was immediately drawn upwards and with perfect equilibrium, because the middle was the part that was pulled up with the most force. Thus, as soon as I got up to where the magnet had drawn me and was within reach of it, I grabbed it and threw it up again.”

“But,” I interrupted him, “how did you throw your ball so straight above your chariot that it never went off to the side?”
“I don’t think there’s anything miraculous about that adventure,” answered he, “for the magnet, thrown as it was into air, drew the iron to it and so it was impossible for me to miss it. I can confide to you with certainty that even holding my ball in my hand I didn’t stop climbing, because I held it straight above my head, and the chariot kept moving towards it, but the leaping of that iron object to clasp the ball was so strong that it caused me to double over, so that I tried that new maneuver only once. That was certainly a most astonishing sight to see, for the care that I had taken to polish the steely surface of that airborne house reflected it so brightly and so keenly all over that I began myself to believe that I was being carried away by a chariot of fire. Finally, having kept arduously throwing and soaring even after the jolt I’d received, I, like you, reached a point at which I began dropping towards this world; and because at that moment I was holding my ball tightly between my hands, my chariot, whose seat was pressuring me to get to the magnetic object, stayed pinned to me. All that there was left for me to fear was breaking my neck; but to avoid that I threw my ball back up from time to time so that my machine, being naturally attracted to it again and again, slowed down and thus broke the force of my descent. Then, when I found myself at about two or three hundred cubits over the land, I threw my ball from side to side, now here, now there, at the level of the chariot, until my eyes located it. I immediately threw the ball downward, and my machine, having followed it, brought me down until I saw that I was about to crash into the sand, whereupon I tossed it just one foot above my head, and that little trick completely stifled the rapidity of the descent so that my fall was no harder than if I had fallen from my own height.

I shall not describe to you the astonishment that overcame me at the sight of the marvels that are here, because it was fairly similar to the disorientation that I’ve just seen in you. You should
only know that on the very next day I encountered the Tree of Life, by virtue of which I have kept from growing old.”

He quickly consumed and exhaled the serpent in a cloud of smoke.

Responding to his words, “Venerable and holy patriarch,” said I, “I would very much like to know what you mean by this serpent that was consumed.”

With his face wreathed in laughter, he answered me thus:

“I forgot, my dear son, to tell you a secret that you cannot be expected to know. You should therefore be informed that when Eve and her husband had eaten the forbidden apple, God, in order to punish the serpent that had tempted them to do it, relegated it to the body of man. There has since been born no human creature who, as punishment for the crime of the first father, does not nourish a serpent in his belly descending from the first one. You call it the bowels, and you regard them as vital to the bodily functions, but you should know that they are nothing but serpents folded back several times on themselves. When you hear your guts cry out, it is the serpent hissing, who, following the gluttonous nature by which he had formerly incited the first man to overeat, demands to eat as well. For God, who to punish you wanted to make you mortal like the other animals, made you the victim of that insatiable creature, so that, if you give it too much to eat, you will suffocate, or if, when that starveling chews on your stomach with its invisible teeth, you refuse it its pittance, it will scream, it will rage, it will let loose a poison that your doctors call bile, and will inflame you so much by the poison that it spreads in your arteries that you will soon be consumed by it. Lastly, to show you that your bowels are a serpent that you have in your body, remember that, in the tombs of Aesculapius, of Scipio, of Alexander, of Charles Martel, of Edward of England, some were found that were still feeding upon the corpses of their hosts.”
“Indeed,” said I interrupting him, “I have noticed that as this serpent always tries to escape from the body of man, one can see his head and his neck sticking out of the bottom of our bellies. But God also, not wanting to see man alone afflicted, saw to it that it becomes hard against a woman’s body in order to inject its venom into her, and that the swelling lasts nine months after she has been pricked. And to show you that I am speaking according to the word of the Lord, it’s a fact that, to curse the serpent, he told it that it would do no good to make the woman stumble by growing stiff against her, for she would end up making it bow its head.”

I wanted to go on with these idle tales, but Elijah stopped me.

“Remember,” said he, “that this a holy place.”

He was silent for a while, as if he were trying to recall the place where he had lived, he then said the following.

“I take a bite out of the fruit of life only every one hundred years. Its juice has a taste resembling the flavor of wine, like the fruit that Adam must have eaten, the fruit that enabled our forefathers to live such long lives, for it had permeated their sperm with some of its energy until it was dissipated in the waters of the deluge. The Tree of Knowledge is just nearby. Its fruit is covered with a peel that produces ignorance in whoever has tasted it and which, beneath the thickness of that peel, contains the spiritual powers of that enlightening food. God, back then, after having banished Adam from that blessed land, fearing that he might find his way back, rubbed his gums with that peel. He remained for more than fifteen years in a state of feeble-mindedness after that, and completely forgot everything, so that neither he nor his descendants before Moses remembered a thing about the Creation. But the remainder of the particular qualities of that thick peel were finally purged by the warmth and spiritual clarity of that prophet. Luckily I chanced upon one of those apples whose ripeness had caused it to shed its skin, and it
had hardly touched my saliva when I was filled with the knowledge of all things. I had the feeling that an infinite number of little eyes invaded my head and that I knew exactly how to speak to the Lord. When I have since then reflected on that miraculous moment of enlightenment, I have imagined that I would not have been able to overcome, by the hidden powers of a simple, natural body, the vigilance of the seraph that by God’s command stands guard over this paradise. But because he likes to make use of second causes, I believed that he had inspired me with this means of gaining entrance to it, just as he had wanted to use Adam’s ribs to make a woman for him, even though he could have formed her from earth as he had done for him.

I remained in the garden a long time, moving about without any company. As the guardian angel of this place was my only host, I acquired the desire to greet him. I walked for an hour, by the end of which I arrived at an area where a thousand flashes of lightning, all becoming a single one, created a blinding daylight that served only to illuminate the darkness.

I hadn’t yet recovered from that adventure when I perceived a handsome youth in front of me. ‘I am the archangel for whom you are looking,’ said he. ‘I have just learned from God that he has informed you of how to come here and that he wanted you to await his will in this place.’

He spoke to me of many things and among others he said the following: that the light of which I had seemed frightened was nothing to be feared; that it lit up every evening when he made his rounds, because, to secure the place against the surprises of the sorcerers that can get in anywhere without being seen, he was forced to engage in swordsmanship with his flaming rapier all around the earthly paradise and that that glow was due to the lightning flashes that were created by the steel he wielded.
‘Those that you can see from your world,’ he added, ‘are made by me. If at times you see them far away, that is because the clouds of a distant region, being disposed to receive their effect, cause those dimmer fiery sights to flash again within your range of vision, just as vapor in another formation has been able to make a rainbow. I shall not instruct you further, for the apple of knowledge is not far from here. The moment you eat it you shall know all things as I do. But be especially careful not to make a mistake; most of the fruit hanging in this arboreal vegetation is covered with a thick peel, which if tasted will turn you into something less than a man, but if you eat the inside only will raise you as high as an angel.’”

Elijah had said this much regarding the instructions that the seraph had given him when a small man came and joined us.

“This is Enoch, about whom I’ve told you,” said my guide to me in an undertone.

As he said these words Enoch offered us a basket full of some kind of fruit that looked like pomegranates that he had found that same day in a distant grove. I stuffed several into my pockets as Elijah ordered, when the former asked him who I was.

“That’s a story that would take a rather long time,” responded my guide. “This evening, when we retire, he will relate the miraculous details of his voyage to us.”

After this, we arrived at a sort of hermitage made of palm branches ingeniously interwoven with myrtle and orange branches. I found there, stuck in a corner, heaps of a particular floss-silk so white and fine that it could have passed for the ghost of snow. I also saw some distaffs scattered here and there. I asked my guide what they were for.

“For spinning,” he replied. “When our good Enoch wishes to unwind after meditation, he uses this tow either to make clothes, or to spin thread, or to weave cloth to fashion smocks for the eleven thousand virgins. It’s not that you haven’t sometimes seen in your world, around the
sowing season in autumn, something white that flutters in the air; the peasants call it ‘Our Lady’s
cotton’. That is the flock from Enoch’s linen when he cards it.”

We kept talking until it was time to take leave of Enoch, for whom this hut was like a cell, and
what made us have to leave early was that every six hours he took to prayer, and that was the last
thing he did.

I beseeched Elijah to finish the story he had begun of the assumptions of which he’d been
speaking, and I reminded him that he had left off, I believed, at that of Saint John the Evangelist.

“Well, said he, “since you haven’t the patience to wait for the apple of knowledge to teach you
all these things better than I can, I shall be glad to tell them to you. You should know therefore
that God . . .”

At these words, I know not how, the devil got into it to the point that I could not keep from
interrupting him to scoff.

“I remember,” said I. “God found out one day that the soul of that evangelist was so unmoored
that he could keep hold of it only by gritting his teeth; however, the time that he had expected to
carry him up to this place had almost run out, so that, not having enough time to prepare a
machine, he had to rush it but was unable to make it work for him.”

During this entire rant, Elijah looked at me with intent to murder in his eyes, if I had been
susceptible to dying by any other cause than hunger.

“You wretch,” said he while backing away. “You have the impudence to mock the holy
things?” Lucky for you, you will not be punished by the All-Knowing, only because he has
wished to use you as an example of his mercy to all the nations. Go, sinner! Out of here! Go
and spout off in this world and in the other one, for you are predestined to end up there with the
hatred that God bears for non-believers.”
Hardly had he pronounced this curse when he grabbed me and roughly led me to the door, after which we came close to a large tree whose branches, loaded with fruit, were bent almost to the ground.

He turned to me and said, “This is the Tree of Knowledge whence you could have drawn the most unimaginable knowledge were you not an atheist.”

Before he’d finished saying this, acting as though I was succumbing to weariness, I slumped against a branch from which I slyly plucked an apple. I was shy several strides of setting foot outside of that delightful park, but hunger nagged so strongly that I forgot that I was still within reach of a wrathful prophet. That caused me to pull out one of the apples with which I had stuffed the pouch where I hid my denture, but, instead of taking one of those with which Enoch had regaled me, my hand got hold of the one that I had snatched from the Tree of Knowledge and from which I had unfortunately not removed the peel.

I had barely tasted some of it when utter darkness enveloped my soul: I no longer saw my apple and my eyes could not see, in the entire hemisphere, a trace of the earthly paradise, and, with all that, I could not stop remembering all that had happened to me. When since then I have reflected on that miracle, I’ve concluded that that peel did not completely muddle my head, because my teeth had cut into it and taken some of the juice out of it, which had diminished the power of the peel to do harm.

I was greatly surprised to find myself all alone in a country that I knew not at all. Vainly did I cast my eyes all around me as far as they could see, not a single creature appeared to console them. I finally decided to walk until Dame Fortune might allow me to encounter the presence of some beast or of death. She answered my prayers for, after an eighth of a league, I met two very large animals one of which stopped before me while the other high-tailed it back to the lair.
(That is at least what I thought, because I saw it return a little while later followed by more than seven or eight hundred of the same species that quickly surrounded me.) When I could discern them up close, I saw that they had the same form, proportions and face as we do. This experience made me remember that as a child I had heard my nurse tell of mermaids, fauns, and satyrs. From time to time they would raise such furious hoots, caused I am sure by the surprise of seeing me, that I almost thought I had become a monster.

One of the man-beasts, having seized me by the collar as do wolves when they carry off a lamb, tossed me on his back and took me into their city. I was amazed when I realized that they were actually men, for there was not a one of them who did not go on all fours. When these people saw me coming, seeing how small I was (for most of them are twelve cubits long), and seeing my body supported by only two feet, they were unable to believe that I was a human, for they maintained that nature, having given men as well as beasts two legs and two arms, intended that they use them in the same way. And, indeed, reflecting on this subject, I have come to believe that that bodily position was not at all so outlandish, when I remembered that our babes, when they are as yet taught by nature alone, go on all fours and get up on two only after being coaxcd by their nurses, who keep them erect in small carts and attach straps to them to keep them from falling back down on all fours, which is the only posture in which bodies shaped like ours are inclined to be at rest.

They therefore said, by what I have since had explained to me, that I was the female of the queen’s little animal. And so, in the guise of one thing or another, I was taken directly to the town hall, where I realized, by the buzzing and the gestures of both the people and the magistrates, that they were conferring regarding what I could possibly be. When they had conferred at length, a certain burgher who took care of the animals requested that the magistrates
lend me to him while waiting for the queen to send for me to live with my mate. They readily agreed. This mountebank carried me to his abode, he taught me how to act the buffoon, to turn somersaults, to make faces, and in the evenings he went door to door offering to exhibit me for a fee. Finally, taking pity on my misery and seeing the temple of its master profaned, heaven ordained that one day, as I was attached at the end of a leash with which the charlatan made me jump to amuse some spectators, one of those who was looking on, after peering intently at me, asked me in Greek who I was. I was most astonished to hear someone in that place speaking a language of our world. He questioned me for some time; I answered him and then told him in general terms about the whole project and the success of my voyage. He consoled me and I remember him saying to me:

“Well now, my son, you are finally experiencing the distress of the ills of your world. There is a common mentality here as there that cannot stand the thought of anything to which it is not accustomed. But you must realize that you are only being treated in consequence thereof, and that, if anyone from this world had gone up to yours with the audacity to call himself a man, your learned doctors would have him strangled as a monster or as an ape possessed by the devil.”

He then promised me that he would inform the court of my misfortune. As soon as he had looked me over he added that his heart had told him that I was a man, because he had formerly traveled to the world from which I came, that my land was the moon, that I was a Gaul, and that he had once lived in Greece; that he was called Socrates’ demon; that after the death of that philosopher he had supervised and tutored Epaminondas in Thebes; that afterwards, having gone among the Romans, a sense of justice had caused him to join the party of Cato the Younger; then, that after his death he had offered himself to Brutus. When all these great men had left the
world nothing but the example of their virtues, he had withdrawn with his companions first into
the temples and then into solitary retreats.

Finally, he added this: “The people of your earth became so stupid and so brutish that my
companions and I lost all the pleasure we’d formerly gotten from teaching them. It is not as if
you have never heard mention of us; we were called oracles, nymphs, genies, fairies, hearth
gods, nocturnal spirits, maggots, vampires, brownies, naiads, incubi, shades, manes, ghosts,
phantoms; and we fled your world under the reign of Augustus, shortly after I appeared before
Drusus, son of Livia, who was waging war with the Germans and whom I forbade to go farther.
Not long ago I came back from there a second time. I was commissioned to travel there for a
period of one hundred years; I roamed all over Europe and spoke to people you may have
known. One day, among others, I encountered Cardano, who was then a student; I taught him
many things, and to compensate me he promised that he would bear witness for posterity of who
it was that had revealed to him the miracles that he expected to describe in writing. There I saw
Agrippa, Abbé Tritème, Doctor Faust, La Brosse, Caesar, and a certain coterie of young men
who are commonly called Knights of the Rosy-Cross [Rosicrucians], to whom I taught many
subtle things and natural secrets that undoubtedly caused them to be taken for great magicians. I
also met Campanella⁵; it was I who advised him while he was being examined by the Inquisitors
in Rome to make his face and gestures conform to the grimaces and ordinary postures of those
with whose inner beings he needed to make himself familiar to achieve in himself a parallel set
of ideas that the same situation had evoked in his adversaries, for in that way he could better
control their minds by penetrating them. At my wish he began to write a book that we know as
De Sensu Rerum. In France I was likewise involved with La Mothe Le Vayer⁶ and Gassendi.
The latter is a man who writes as much about philosophy as the former lives with it. I also knew
many other people there who are worshipped in your century, but I found nothing in them but a lot of prattle and a lot of overweening pride.

Lastly, as I crossed from your country to England to study the lives of its inhabitants, I met a man, the shame of his country; for it is certainly a shame for the powerful in your country to know his virtue, which is its epitome, without paying him homage. To be brief in this eulogy, he is all spirit, he is all heart, and if attributing both these two qualities to someone, one of which alone used to be the mark of a hero, were not done by me for Tristan l’Hermite, I can assure you that he would never forgive me for that oversight, but, since I never intend to return to your world, I wish to render this most sincere testimonial to the truth. Veritably, I must avow to you that, when I saw a man of such high virtue, I had great fear that it would not be appreciated; that is why I tried to make him accept three phials: the first was full of talc oil, another of propulsive powder, and the last of potable gold, that is to say, that vegetative salt with which your chemists promise ever-lasting life. But he refused them with as much disdain as did Diogenes for the compliments of Alexander when he visited him at his wine-barrel. To conclude, I cannot add anything more to this encomium to that great man, except that he is the only poet, the only philosopher, and the only completely free man that you have. So much for the estimable persons with whom I conversed; all the others, at least those whom I met, are so far beneath real men, that I saw beasts somewhat higher.

Besides, I am not a native of your earth or this one. I was born on the sun. But, as our world is too populated because of the longevity of its inhabitants, and as it is almost free of wars and diseases, our magistrates occasionally send colonies out into the surrounding worlds. As for me, I was ordered to go to yours and declared chief of the tribe that was sent with me. I have since moved on to this one for the reasons I have given you; and what keeps me from leaving is that
these people are interested in truth, that you don’t see pedants here, that their philosophers can be swayed only by reason, and that neither the authority of a scholar nor the weight of numbers prevail over a thresher of grain if the thresher of grain can reason as powerfully. In short, in this country only the sophists and the speech-makers are considered fools.”

I asked him how long they lived. He replied, “Three or four thousand years.” And he continued as follows:

“To make myself visible, as I am at present, when I feel the cadaver that I’m occupying almost worn out or whose organs no longer function, I slip into a recently deceased young body.

Although the inhabitants of the sun are not as numerous as those of this world, the sun nevertheless pushes some of them out quite often, because the people, being of a very hot temperament, are restless, ambitious, and consume a great deal.

What I am telling you should not be very surprising; although our globe is very vast and yours is small, although we die only after four thousand years, and you after half a century, you should know that there are not as many pebbles as there is land, nor as many insects as plants, nor as many animals as insects, nor as many men as animals, because of the difficulties encountered in the natural perfection of such a complex being.”

I asked him whether they had bodies like ours; he replied that, yes, they had bodies, but not like ours nor like anything that we consider such, for we commonly call “body” what can be touched; and besides, that there was nothing in nature that was not material, and that, although they also were, they were constrained, when they wished to become visible to us, to adopt bodies that were consistent with what our senses are capable of recognizing. I assured him that what had made many people think that the stories that were told of them were just the fantasies of weak minds was all based on the fact that they appeared only at night. He replied that, since they
were forced to incarnate hastily by themselves the bodies that they had to use, they often had no more time than to fashion them in such a way that they were discernible to one sense only, sometimes auditory such as the voices of oracles, sometimes the visible such as fiery apparitions or ghosts, sometimes tactile such as incubi or oppressive nocturnal demons; and that that body, constituted only of a mass of air thickened one way or another, is dissipated by the warmth of daylight, just as fog is dissipated by dilatation.

So many beautiful things he told me made me curious to question him about his birth and his death, whether in the land of the sun individuals were given life by means of procreation and whether they died as a result of physical disorders or by the rupture of their organs.

“There is too little connection,” said he, “between your senses and the explanation of those mysteries. You folks imagine that anything you cannot understand is supernatural, or that it does not exist, the consequence of which is quite false, but it bears witness to the fact that there are in the universe perhaps a million things that, in order to be known, would require you to have a million different organs. I, for example, can conceive through my senses the attraction of the pole on magnets, the ebbing of the ocean, what happens to animals after death. You people would not be up to grasping such lofty conceptions, because the sensory powers requisite for comprehending these miracles are lacking in you, any more than a person who has been born blind would be able to imagine the beauty of a landscape, the coloring of a painting, the hues of the rainbow; rather, he would imagine them either as something palpable, or as having taste, or again as a sound, or finally as a smell. Likewise, if I wished to explain to you what I perceive through senses that are lacking to you, your mind would perceive them as something that can be heard, seen, touched, sniffed, or savored, and yet it is nothing like all that.”
He had gotten that far in his explanation when my mountebank saw that the audience had begun to tire of our strange talk, which they could not understand and which they took for inarticulate grunting. He had begun to tug harder and harder on my cord to make me jump, until the spectators, drunk with laughter and swearing that I was almost as smart as the animals of their country, all went home.

Thus I mitigated the harshness of the poor treatment by my master by the visits that this obliging demon paid me; for to converse with others, besides the fact that they took me for an animal, albeit in the higher category of beasts, and the fact that I did not understand their language, nor did they understand mine, and bearing in mind the disproportion between us, I can tell you that two languages are spoken in that country, one by the upper class and one by the common people.

That of the upper class consists only of different unarticulated tones, somewhat like our music that lacks words. And certainly it is an altogether very useful and very pleasing system, for when they tire of speaking or when they disdain exercising their throats for that purpose, they take either a lute or some other instrument, which serves them as well as their voices to communicate their thoughts, so that there might be as many as fifteen or twenty of them discussing a theological matter or the complexities of a trial with the most harmonious concert that could titillate an ear.

The other, which is in use among the common people, is performed by the agitation of parts of the body, but not as one might imagine, for some parts of the body can signify a whole speech. For example, the movement of a finger, of a hand, of an ear, of a lip, of an arm, of a cheek, can each by itself constitute a whole speech or just one sentence using them all. Others may only serve to designate words, such as a wrinkle on the forehead, certain flexing of muscles, turning
hands over, tapping with the feet, contortions of the arms; so that when they speak, with their adopted custom of going naked, their bodies, accustomed to expressing their ideas by gesticulation, have such quick movements that it doesn’t seem that a man is talking, but rather that his body is trembling.

Almost every day the demon came to visit me and his fabulous stories made me bear up unbothered by the violent treatment in my captivity. Finally, one morning, I saw a man enter my cubicle who, having taken a long time running his tongue all over me, seized me gingerly by an armpit and with one of his paw-like hands with which he was holding me fearing that I might be hurt, he tossed me on his back in such a soft and comfortable sitting position that, despite the hurt that being treated like an animal made me feel, I had no desire to escape, and besides, those men can go so much faster than we that the heaviest of them can catch deer in a chase.

However I felt bad beyond measure at not having any news from my gracious demon, and on the evening of this first change of domicile, having arrived at the house, I walked into the cabaret kitchen hoping that the food was ready, when there was my porter whose face was very young as well as handsome; he came up to me, laughed in my face and threw his arms around my neck.

After I had spent some time looking at him:

“What?” said he in French, “You no longer recognize your friend?”

You can try to guess what happened to me next. My surprise was surely so great that I subsequently imagined that the whole lunar globe, all that I’d experienced there, and all that I’d seen there was no more than an enchantment; and that man-beast who had carried me on his back resumed his conversation with me as follows:

“You promised me that the good services that I performed for you would never be forgotten.”

I, however, protest that I have never seen him.
Finally he says, “I am that demon of Socrates who entertained you during the time of your imprisonment. I left yesterday as I promised you to go and tell the King of your plight and I did three hundred leagues in eighteen hours, for I arrived here at noon to await you, but . . .”

“But,” I cut in, “how can all that be so, seeing that yesterday your body was extremely long and today it’s very short, that yesterday your voice was weak and halting and today it’s clear and strong, and finally, that yesterday you were a hoary old man and that today you are young? What’s this? Instead of proceeding from birth to death, as in my country, do the animals in this one go from death to birth, and do they get younger as they age?”

“As soon as I had spoken to the prince,” said he, “and after I had received the order to bring you, I felt the body that I had inhabited so overcome by lassitude that all its organs refused to function. I asked where the hospital was located; I went there, and as soon as I entered the first room I found a young man who had just given up the ghost. I approached the corpse and, pretending that I had noticed some movement, I insisted to all those present that he was not dead at all, that his illness was not even contagious, and skilfully, while avoiding being seen, I insinuated myself into it with a puff. My old cadaver immediately fell off my back; once inside that youth I got up; the people cried miracle, and, without explaining to anyone, I promptly ran back to your mountebank, where I got hold of you.”

He would have told me more if someone had not come looking for us to come to the table. My guide led me into a beautifully furnished room, but I saw nothing prepared to eat. Such a complete absence of victuals when I was dying of hunger caused me to ask him where the food was set. I did not listen to his reply, for three or four young boys, the host’s children, approached me at that very moment, and, with great civility, stripped me to my undershirt. That novel ceremony surprised me so much that I did not even ask my fair attendants the reason for it,
and I don’t know how it was that, when my guide asked me where I wanted to start, I was able to say just two words: “A porridge.” I was immediately aware of the odor of as succulent a brew as ever tantalized the nostrils of the idle rich. I tried to leave my seat to sniff out the source of that agreeable vapor, but my porter stopped me.

“Where do you want to go?” he asked. “We’ll go for a walk later, but now you’re supposed to be eating. Finish your soup and then we can do something else."

"Well, where in tarnation is that soup.” I shot back at him angrily. “Have you made some kind of bet that you could play tricks on me all day long?”

“I thought,” said he “that you might have seen your master or others in the city we’ve just left taking their meals. That is why I have not briefed you on eating habits in this country. But, as you are still in the dark about it, you should be aware that people here live only on vapor. The art of cooking is to capture in large vessels molded for the purpose the exhalations of the viands, and, having collected several kinds and flavors according to the tastes of those being served, one uncorks the vessel in which that odor is contained, then one uncorks another, and another until the company is completely satiated. Unless you have already lived in this way, you will never believe that a nose, without teeth and without a gullet, can do the job of the mouth in feeding people, but I’m going to let you experience it for yourself.

As he finished making that promise I felt the room fill up with so many enticing vapors, one after another, and so nourishing, that in a few moments I felt my hunger completely appeased.

When we had gotten up he said, “This is not something that should cause you much wonderment, for you cannot have lived as long as you have without observing that in your world the cooks and pastry-makers, who eat less than people in other vocations, are none-the-less much fatter. Where do they get their fat from if not from the vapors of the foods that constantly
surround them, permeate their bodies, and nourish them? Furthermore, the people of this world enjoy a steadier and more robust health, because their nourishment produces almost no excrement, which is the source of almost all illnesses. You were probably surprised when you were undressed before the meal, because that custom is not practiced in your country, but it’s the fashion here and it is done in order for the body to benefit more directly from the vapors.”

“Sir,” I retorted, “what you say is very convincing, and I have just experienced some of it myself, but I must confess to you that, not being able to overcome my bad upbringing so soon, I would really appreciate feeling a piece of solid food in my mouth.”

He made me a promise, but it was for the next day, because, said he, to eat so soon after the meal would give me a touch of indigestion. We continued to exchange ideas for a while, then went up to our rooms to bed.

A man standing up at the top of the staircase introduced himself to us and, having looked us over very attentively, led me into a room whose floor was covered with orange blossoms three feet deep, and my demon into another filled with carnations and jasmine. Seeing that I looked astonished at that magnificence, he explained that it was the style of the beds in that country. We then lay down in our respective cells, and just as soon as I was stretched out on my flowers, I perceived, by the glimmer of thirty fat glowworms enclosed in a crystal—for they don’t use candles—the three or four young boys who had disrobed me for supper, one beginning to tickle my feet, another my thighs, another my sides, and all with such a charming manner and gentle touch that in less than a minute I felt myself drifting off to sleep.

The next day, as the sun rose, I saw my demon come into my room.

“I am keeping my promise,” said he. “You will eat more solidly than you did yesterday.”
When he said that I got up and he led me by the hand behind the garden where one of the innkeeper’s children was waiting for us with a weapon in his hand, almost the same as our rifles. He asked my guide if I wanted a dozen larks, because monkeys (he took me for one) feed on them. I had hardly had time to reply affirmatively when the hunter fired one shot into the air and twenty or thirty larks, all cooked, fell at our feet. “Aha,” thought I. “That’s what is said proverbially in our world about a country where larks fall all roasted! Someone must have returned from here.

“You can begin eating,” said my demon. “They know how to mix together with the poisonous stuff, that can be deadly, and the feathers, the ingredients necessary to season the roasted game.”

I picked some up that I took and ate based on his reassurance, and, truly, never in my life have I ever tasted anything that delicious.

After that meal we prepared to take our leave, and with the thousand grimaces that they employ to show affection, the landlord took a piece of paper from my demon. I asked him whether it was a note of credit for our bill. He answered that it was not, but that it was a poem and that he owed him nothing else. “What do you mean a poem?” I shot back. “You mean innkeepers are interested in rhymes?”

“That,” he replied, “is the money of the country, and the bill that we have just run up in this place happened to be equal to a sextain that I have just given to him. I was not afraid of being short, for even if we feasted here for a week it would not cost us a sonnet, and I have four of them on me, and nine epigrams, two odes, and an eclogue.

“So! Really?” said I to myself. “That’s just the kind of money that Sorel has Hortensius use in his *Fracency*, as I recall. This must be where he got it from. But who in the devil could have
informed him of it? It must have been his mother, for I’ve heard it said that she was moon-

struck.”

Thereupon I asked my demon whether such poems were always usable as currency if they were transcribed. He said that they were not, and he continued as follows: “When they are composed they are taken by their authors to the Monetary Registry where the Royal Board of Poets makes its residence. There the poetry officials put the pieces to the test, and, if they are of sound mettle, their value is assessed, not by their weight but by their wit, and so someone who dies of hunger is nothing but an ass, and people who are smart always eat well.”

I admired with great relish the judicious manner in which that country was run. And he went on: “There are other people who run their taverns very differently. As you leave their places they ask you for a quittance for the other world equivalent to the bill you have run up and, as soon as you have left it with them, in a large record-book that they call God’s ledger, they write something like this: ’Item, the value of so many verses, delivered such and such a day to so-and-so, for which God should reimburse me, as soon as the quittance is received, from the first funds available.’ When they feel that they are ill and in danger of dying, they have those records chopped into small pieces and they swallow them, because they believe that if they weren’t thus digested God couldn’t read them.”

This conversation did not prevent us from continuing our journey, for my four-legged porter was beneath me as I was astride his back. I shall not particularize any further the adventures that we encountered on our way, but we finally arrived at the site of the King’s residence. I was led directly to the palace. The lords received me with less effusive expressions of wonder than the people in the streets. Their conclusion, however, was the same, to wit: that I was probably the female of the Queen’s pet animal. That was the way my guide interpreted it for me, and yet he
himself did not comprehend that enigma, and did not know what that little pet of the Queen was; but we were soon enlightened, for somewhat later the King ordered it to be brought forth. A half-hour later I saw, in the middle of a bunch of monkeys wearing ruffs and breeches, a small man built almost like me, for he walked on two legs. As soon as he saw me he approached me with a “criado de vuestra mercede.” I returned the salutation in roughly the same terms. But, alas, as soon as they had seen us talking together, they all believed their supposition confirmed; and that encounter could produce no other result, for even the member of the audience most vocal in defense of us held that our conversation was a grunting that the joy of being reunited made us utter by natural instinct.

That little man told me that he was European, a native of Old Castile; that he had found a way to have himself transported by birds to the world of the moon where we now found ourselves, that, having fallen into the hands of the Queen, he had been taken by her for a monkey, because, by coincidence, in this country they dress their monkeys like Spaniards, and that, having found him dressed likewise on his arrival, she had not for a moment doubted that he was of the same species.

“It must be admitted,” I replied, “that after having tried all sorts of clothing on them, they could find none more ridiculous, and that was why they deck them out in such a fashion, as they keep these animals for amusement only.”

“That,” said he, “is to misjudge the merits of our nation in whose behalf the universe provides men solely to procure slaves for us, and for which nature was able only to produce objects of mirth.”

He then begged me to apprise him of how I had dared to risk ascending to the moon with the machine of which I had spoken to him. I answered that it was because he had taken away the
birds on which I had intended to ride. He smiled at this jest, and about a quarter of an hour later
the King ordered the monkey-keepers to take us back, with the express direction that we should
be made to sleep together, the Spaniard and I, to make our species multiply in his realm.

The prince’s will was carried out to the letter to my delight, for it afforded me the pleasure of
having someone to talk to in the solitude of my being turned into an animal. One day my male
(for I was taken for the female) related to me that what had really forced him to move from place
to place, and finally to abandon the Earth for the moon, was that he had not been able to find a
single country where the human imagination was free.

“Don’t you see,” said he, “that unless you wear a square bonnet, a cowl, or a cassock,
regardless of what fine things you say, if they are contrary to the robed doctors, you are an idiot,
a madman, or an atheist. In my own country they wanted to subject me to the Inquisition
because I had told the pedants to their beards that there are vacuums in nature and that I knew of
no substance in the world that weighed more than any other.”

I asked him on what basis he entertained such a radical opinion.

“It is necessary,” he replied, “for the sake of brevity, to suppose the there is only one element,
for, while we see water, air, and fire separately, you never find them in a perfectly pure state
without one having some connection to the others.. For example, when you see fire, it is very
tenuous air, air is just diluted water, water is just melted earth, and earth itself is but contracted
water; and thus, to understand matter seriously, you will find that it is all one, that, like an
excellent actress, it plays all kinds of roles down here, with all sorts of costumes. Otherwise, you
would have to believe that there are as many different elements as different bodies, and if you
ask me why then does fire burn and water cool if they were only the same matter, I shall answer
that that matter acts by sympathy, according to the circumstances affecting it at the time that it is
active. Fire, which is nothing other than earth even more dissipated than it is to become air, tries by sympathy to turn whatever it comes in contact with it into it. Hence the heat of charcoal, being the most tenuous form of fire and the most capable of penetrating a body, slips into the pores of our bodily mass, starts by causing us to dilate because it is new matter that infiltrates us, then makes us break out in sweat; that sweat, dissipated by the fire, turns into vapor and finally air; that air, further dissolved by the heat of anti-peristalsis or the celestial bodies that are closest, is called fire, and when earth is devoid of heat and humidity, it becomes earth again. Water, moreover, although it doesn’t differ materially from fire except that it is denser, doesn’t burn us because being denser it causes, by sympathy, bodies that it comes in contact with to tighten, and the cold that we feel is nothing but the effect on our flesh of compressing itself by its proximity to the earth or the water that forces it to conform materially. The result of that is that dropsied people, being full of water, turn everything they eat into water; the result of that is also that bilious people change all the blood flowing from their livers into bile. Let us then suppose that there is only one element; it is absolutely certain that all bodies, each according to its weight, are drawn towards the center of the earth.

If so, you will ask, why then are gold, iron, metals, earth, wood, pulled to the earth’s center faster than a sponge, if it is not because it is full of air, which tends naturally to rise? That is not at all the reason, and here is my reply to you: Although a rock falls faster than a feather, they both tend to make that journey; but a cannon ball, for example, if it pierced the ground, would drive more deeply towards its center than an inflated bladder, and the reason is that that mass of metal is a large amount of earth compressed into a small area, and that the inflated bladder’s very little earth is blown out into a large space; for all the particles of matter that are housed in that iron, as tightly pressed together as they are, increase their force by being united, because,
locked arm in arm, they are a mightier force, being many together against few; since a portion of air the size of a cannon ball is not equal to it in quantity, it therefore, like people, who give way to the weight of a greater number and thrust, buckles and lets the other break through.

Without giving a whole list of reasons to prove this, how do you think a pike, a sword, and a dagger wound us if it is not because their steel is matter in which the particles are tighter together and more embedded within each other than your flesh, whose pores and softness show that it contains a very small amount of earth particles dispersed over a large area; it is thus because their iron tips that stick us, made up of an almost unimaginable amount of matter compared to the lesser matter of flesh, make it yield to their more solid ones, just as a tightly-formed squadron can penetrate an entire battle line that is very spread out, and a piece of hot steel is hotter than a burning stump of wood? Is it not that there is more fire in the smaller piece of steel with its more compressed metallic matter than in the much spongier wooden stump, that consequently contains more empty space, and that that empty space, being a material deprivation, is not as suited to containing fire. ‘But,’ you will object, ‘you assume some empty space without having proved it, and that’s what our argument is all about!’ Well then, I’m going to prove it to you, and although this problem is like a sister to the Gordian knot, my arms are good enough to become its Alexander.11

Let him reply then, I beg of him, that jackass who needs the word of a doctor to know that he is a man. Assuming that there is one element, as I think I have demonstrated, what causes it to become lax and restrained depending on its appetite? What causes a piece of earth that condenses to become a pebble? Is it because the particles of that pebble have squeezed into one another in such a manner that wherever a grain of sand takes its place, another grain of sand occupies the same place? No, that’s not possible, for, by their very nature, bodies do not occupy
the same place as others; but what necessarily happens is that that bit of matter moves toward the
other and, if it please you, gets smaller so as to fit into whatever space remains in the house.

To say that it is not comprehensible that there could be nothingness in the world, that we are
partly composed of nothingness, well, why not? Is the entire world not enveloped by
nothingness? Since you concede that point, admit then that it is just as easy to conceive of a
world with some nothingness within it as around it.

I can very well understand that you should ask me why water confined in ice in a vase causes it
to break, if it is not to prevent it from blocking its need for empty space. Well, my response is
that that happens because the air above, which, eventually, like earth and water, wants to move
down towards the center, and meeting a vacant hostelry on the way through its country, goes to
occupy it; if it finds the pores of that vessel, that is to say, the roads that lead to the empty room
at the inn, too narrow, too long, and too winding, it breaks through to satisfy its impatience to
arrive more quickly at its place of rest.

But, without amusing myself responding to all their objections, I firmly daresay that if there
were no empty space there would be no movement at all, or one must admit that two bodies can
occupy the same place, for it would be too ridiculous to believe that when a flea’s toe moves a
bit of air, that bit pushes back another next to it, that other pushes another, and that, in the same
way, the trepidation of a flea’s toe could cause a bulge on the outer surface of the whole world.
When they have no other argument they resort to rarefaction; but how in heaven do they think
that when a body becomes rarefied, that one particle of the mass could have distanced itself from
another particle, without leaving an empty space? Would it not have required that the two
bodies, having just separated, would have had to be in the same place at the same time as this
other one, and in such an event the three would have had to have become one. I now expect you
to ask me why the water in a pipe, a syringe, or a pump is made to go up against its natural inclination: but I reply that it is forced, and it is not because it is fear of emptiness that causes it to change directions, but rather that, being combined with the slightest whiff of air, it rises with the air that holds it in its embrace.

That is not a very sticky matter to comprehend for anyone who knows the perfect circle and the delicate concatenation of the elements; for, if you look carefully at this clay, which is a wedding of earth and water, you will note that it is no longer earth, it is no longer water, but it is the intermediary in the marriage of those two enemies. Likewise, water with air creates a fog that satisfies the penchant of both to negotiate their peace, and air reconciles itself with fire by means of a mediating exhalation that binds them together.”

I think that he wanted to keep talking, but we were brought our grub, and, since we were both hungry, I shut my ears and he his mouth in order to open our stomachs.

I remember that another time, as we were philosophizing, for neither of us liked to discuss frivolous and vulgar things, he said, “I am dismayed to see a mind of your keenness infected with the errors of the common herd. You should therefore know, in spite of Aristotle’s pedantry, which resonates in every corner of society in that France of yours, that everything is in everything, in other words that, for example, in water there is fire, fire in water, earth in air, and air in earth. Although this opinion causes the eyes of the scholastics to pop out, it is easier to prove than to persuade. I ask them first of all if water doesn’t engender fish; when they deny it, I shall tell them to dig a hole, fill it with a ewer-full of syrupy water, then cover it with a screen if they wish to avoid the objections of the blind, and if they do not find fish sometime later, I shall gladly swallow all the water that they have poured in there, but, if they find some, as I don’t doubt, it is a convincing proof that there is salt and fire. Consequently, finding water in fire is
not a very difficult trick. For, let them choose the fire that is the most foreign to matter such as in comets. They always have some in them, in fact quite a bit, since if that unctuous fluid from which they are created, reduced to brimstone by the heat of the peristalsis that sets them on fire, did not encounter an obstacle to its violent energy in the humid coldness that tempers and combats it, it would swiftly burn up like a flash of lightning. The fact that there is air in the earth is something that they will not refute, otherwise they have never heard of the frightful shaking that has so often rocked the mountains of Sicily. Besides that, we see how porous the earth is even including the grains of sand that compose it. No one up to now, however, has said that these interstices were filled with nothing. And so, there should not be any doubt that it is air that lives there. I must still prove that in air there is earth, but I hardly need to take the trouble, since you must be convinced of it every time you see your head assaulted by those armies of atoms so numerous that they are arithmetically incalculable.

But let us pass from simple to complex bodies; they will provide me with many more examples to show that all things are in all things, not that they change from one to the other, as your Peripatetics warble; for I wish to declare in their faces that elements combine, separate, and recombine again so that what was once made water by the sage Creator of the world shall always be just that. I do not, as they do, suppose something to be true without proving it.

Therefore, please take a tree-stump or some other combustible matter and set it on fire: when it is burning, those people will say that the wood is turning into fire. But to them I declare not so, and there is no more fire now that it is all in flames than there was before a match was taken to it; but what was hidden in the wood that cold and humidity prevented from bursting out and spreading, rallied its forces, assisted by the outside agent, against the serosity that stifled it, and won the battle against the enemy that was dominating it, thus overcoming the obstacle and
triumphing over the jailer. Don’t you see how water leaks out of both ends of the stump, hot and steaming as a result of the combat that engaged it? That flame that you see above it is the most rarefied fire, the most apart from the matter below and thus the most disposed to return home. Be that as it may it comes together in a pyramid up to a certain height, piercing the dense humidity of the air resisting it; but as, while rising, it distances itself from the violent company of its neighbors, it goes its merry way without encountering anything more to interfere with it, and that insouciance often lets it fall into a second prison; for that which runs off by itself will risk being caught in a cloud. If it meets numbers of other fires there large enough to fight it out with the vapor, they join forces, they rumble, they thunder, they rage with lightning, and the death of innocents is often the effect of the animate anger of lifeless things. If, when our fire finds itself trapped in that annoying pollution of the middle region, it lacks the strength to defend itself, it becomes victim to the vagaries of a cloud that, burdened by its own weight, drops down to earth carrying its prisoner down with it, and the miserable thing, confined in a drop of water, will perhaps find itself at the foot of an oak-tree whose own active fire will invite the poor wanderer to move in with it. Thus, there it is, once again saddled with the condition from which it had freed itself just a few days earlier.

But let us see the fortunes of the other elements that were present in that stump of wood. The air retires to its domicile, however mixed with vapor, because the fire brusquely sent them packing pell-mell. So there it is now serving as a wind-filled balloon, assisting the animals with their breathing, filling the empty spaces made by nature, and possibly, if enveloped in a drop of dew, being sucked and digested by the thirsty leaves of that tree into which our fire has found a resting-place. The water, that was chased from its throne by the flame, lifted by the heat up to the playground of the meteors, will fall as rain on one oak-tree or another, and the ground, turned
into cinders, cured of its sterility by the nourishing heat of the fertilizing muck thrown about, by
the vegetative saline of nearby plants, by the fecund river water, may find itself next to that tree,
that, with the heat of its reproductive germ, will draw it in and make it a part of itself.

That then is the way those four elements return to the same condition from which they departed
a few days earlier. That is the way one finds in a man all that is needed to make a tree. That is
the way one finds in a tree all that is needed to make a man. To sum it all up, that is the way all
things exist together in all things, but we need a Prometheus to do that extracting.”

Those more or less are the things with which we spent our time amusing ourselves; and that little
Spaniard truly had a delightful wit. Our conversations took place mainly at night, because from
six in the morning until nightfall a great crowd of people who came to see us at our dwelling
would only have interrupted us; some threw rocks at us, others nuts, others grass. Everywhere
the talk was about the King’s animals.

We were served our meals at the same time every day, and the King and Queen quite often
amused themselves by patting my belly to see whether I was getting bigger, for they were
burning with the extraordinary desire to have a whole family of their little pets. I don’t know
whether it was because I was more attentive than my male to their affected manners and the
particular sounds of their voices, but the fact is that I managed to learn some of their language
and to butcher it a little. The news immediately spread that there had been found two wild men,
smaller than others because of bad nutrition due to living in a solitude that had been imposed on
them and with forelegs too weak to support them because of a defect in their parents’ seed.

That belief was on its way to receiving widespread acceptance as it was repeated from one
mouth to another, except among the priests of the land who opposed it, saying that it was a
terrible sacrilege to believe that not only beasts but freakish creatures belonged to their species.
“It would be much more plausible,” added the less fanatical, “that our domestic animals should partake of the privileges of humanity, and consequently of immortality, because they were born in our country, than a monstrous beast that claims to have been born who knows where on the moon; and besides, consider the obvious difference between them and us. We walk on all fours because God did not wish to entrust so precious an object to a more precarious underpinning. He feared that some misfortune could befall man; that is why he took the trouble himself to set him up on four pillars, so that he could not fall, but, disdaining to be involved in the construction of these two brutes, he abandoned them to the whims of nature, which, not fearing the loss of such an inconsequential object, propped them up on only two legs.”

“Even the birds,” said they, “have not been as badly treated, for they have been given feathers to make up for the weakness of their legs and could take to the air were we to expel them from our land. In contrast, by removing two of these monsters’ feet, nature has left them incapable of escaping from our justice.

Notice also how they have their heads turned towards heaven! It is the deprivation of all things in which God has left them that has situated them in this way, for this supplicant posture bears witness to the fact that they scan the heavens in order to address their grievances to the Creator, and to ask his permission to help themselves to our leavings. But we have our heads turned towards the ground to contemplate the wealth over which we are masters, and because there is nothing in heaven to which our happy condition need aspire.”

From my compartment I heard the priests telling these tales or similar ones every day. They finally dominated the conscience of the public on this subject so completely that it was decreed that I could be considered at the very best a featherless parrot. They confirmed the opinion of
those who insisted that, with only two legs, I was no better than a bird. I was put into a cage by the express order of the Supreme Council.

Every day the Queen’s birdman came there to teach me to whistle as one does with starlings. I was actually happy, for there was no lack of grub in my aviary. However, with all the fiddle-faddle with which the gawks busted my ears, I learned to speak like them. When I was sufficiently versed in the language to express most of my ideas, I told the choicest of them. By then the visitors no longer conversed about anything but the pleasure they got from my witticisms, and the esteem in which my wit was held reached such a point that the clergy was obliged to publish a decree that it was forbidden to believe that I could reason, with a very clear order to all persons regardless of their rank or class to believe that whatever clever things I did, it was pure instinct.

Nevertheless, the definition of what I was split the city into two factions, the party that favored me growing day by day. Finally, despite the anathema and excommunication threatened by the prophets to frighten the people, my supporters asked for an assembly of the Estates\textsuperscript{14} to resolve this religious schism. They spent a long time deliberating on who would decide the issue; but the judges appeased the popular emotions by equalizing the number on each side. I was carried like a trophy into the Hall of Justice, where I was severely treated by the examiners. Among other things, they interrogated me on philosophy.\textsuperscript{15} I revealed to them in all good faith what my tutor had taught me, but they easily refuted it with many truly convincing arguments. Finding myself being completely defeated, I cited as my last resort the principles of Aristotle, which served me no better than the other sophisms, for they pointed out their error to me in short order. Aristotle, they said, based his principles on his philosophy rather than basing his philosophy on principles. Those principles, moreover, needed to be proved at least more credible than those of other sects,
which he was unable to do. That is why the good fellow is better off being idolized for other things.

Finally, when they saw that I could no longer jabber about anything other than that they were no more knowledgeable than Aristotle, and when they had forbidden me to argue with those who denied his principles, they concluded unanimously that I was not a man but possibly some variety of ostrich, seeing that I carried my head erect, and so they ordered the birdman to put me back in a cage. I spent my time there pleasantly enough, for, as I was already well in control of their language, the whole court amused itself by making me prattle. The Queen’s daughters, among others, stuck one thing or other into my basket; and the nicest one of all had gotten rather friendly with me. She was so overjoyed when, in an intimate moment, I revealed the mysteries of our religion to her, and especially when I told her about our bells and our relics, that with tears in her eyes she insisted that if I ever were able to fly back to our world she would gladly follow me.

One early morning I awoke with a start; I saw her beating on the bars of my cage: “Rejoice,” said she. “Yesterday in the Council they decided on war against the great king Mi-do-mi-mi-so. I hope that, amidst the shuffle of preparations while the monarch and his subjects will be departing, I can contrive an opportunity for you to escape.”

“What do you mean ‘war’?” I interjected upon hearing this. “Do the princes of this world get into fights with each other like those of ours? Come now! Please tell me how they fight.”

“When the arbiters,” she began “elected with the consent of the two parties, have set the time admissible for gathering arms, for marching to battle, for the number of combatants, the day and place of battle, and all that in such equal measure that there is not a single man more in one army than the other, the cripples on one side are all formed into a company, and when the armies
clash the field marshals assiduously insure that they are opposed by cripples on the other side, the giants are faced by others of colossal size; the swordsmen, the dexterous; the valiant versus the courageous; the feeble versus the weak; the ailing versus the ill; the robust versus the strong; and if someone dared strike any other than a designated enemy, unless he could justify it as a mistake, he is branded a coward. After the prescribed battle, the wounded, the dead, and the prisoners are counted; as for those who flee, they remain unseen. If the losses are equal on both sides, they draw straws to decide who can claim victory.

But even if a king defeats his enemy in a fair fight, it is not over, for there are other small armies of scholars and men of wit on whose face-offs the veritable triumph or enslavement of States depend entirely.

One scholar is challenged by another scholar, one wit by another, and one judge by another. Moreover, the victory of a State in these kinds of contests counts for three times that of one of the violent encounters. When a nation is declared the victor, its Assembly is dissolved, and the triumphant people choose as their king either their enemy’s or their own.”

I couldn’t restrain my laughter over this punctilious manner of conducting battles, and I proposed as an example of a much stronger political rule the customs of our Europe, where the monarch never considered not taking every advantage in order to conquer; and this is what she said to me:

“Tell me, do your princes claim anything but force of arms as their right?”

“Certainly,” I replied, “the justice of their cause.”

“Why then,” she continued, “do they not choose impartial judges to weigh them in the balance? And if it is deemed that their rights are equal, should they not remain as they were, or they might play a game of piquet16 for the disputed city or province? And yet they make four
million men, who are more worthy than they are, bash each other’s heads, while they are in their quarters bantering about the events causing the massacre of those poor dupes. But I am wrong to blame the valor of your good subjects: it is admirable of them to die for their country; it is an important affair, for it is all about being the vassals of a king who wears a ruff or one who wears a clerical collar.”

“But you people,” I retorted, “why all those complications in your way of doing battle? Is it not enough for the armies to have the same number of men?”

“You have hardly any idea of justice,” replied she. “Do you honestly think that, having triumphed over the enemy, man to man, on the field of battle, your victory was fair if you had body armor and he did not, if all he had was a dagger and you a long sword; lastly, if he were one-armed and you had two arms?”

“Just the same,” said I, “with all the equality that you tout so much for your gladiators, they are never equal in battle, for one will be big and the other small; one will be skillful, the other will never have had a sword in his hand; one will be strong, the other weak; and even were those inequalities avoided and they would be equally big, equally skillful, and equally strong, they will still not really be equal, because one of them will perhaps be braver; and without the knowledge that a certain brute will be undaunted by danger, that he will be choleric, that his blood will be thicker, that his heart will be stronger, with all these qualities that go into courage, as if that were not as advantageous as a sword, a weapon that his opponent lacks, he is enabled to fling himself madly at him, to terrify him, and to kill that poor soul who perceives danger, whose body heat is stifled in the pituitary, whose heart is too big to unify all the spirits necessary to melt that ice labeled cowardice. Thus you praise this man who, having an advantage, kills that man, and,
praising him for boldness, you praise him for a crime against nature, for boldness leads him
towards destruction.”

“You should know,” she replied, “that several years ago a protest was made to the Council of
War to bring a more discerning and conscientious regulation of warfare, for the philosopher who
made the recommendation spoke as follows:

‘You imagine, Gentlemen, that you have equalized the advantages of the two warring parties
when, in fact, you have picked two unbending enemies, both big, both skillful, both full of
courage; but that is still not enough, since the victor can only triumph by strength, by skill, or by
luck. If it was by skill, he must have struck his adversary in a place that took him by surprise, or
faster than could be expected, or, pretending to aim at one side, he attacked the other. All that is
craftiness, it is trickery, it is treachery. But craftiness, trickery, treachery should not merit the
esteem due to a true hero. If he triumphed by greater strength, is his enemy truly defeated just
because he has been the victim of violence? No, of course not, no more than you would say that
a man has suffered defeat by being crushed by the collapse of a mountain, because he had no
chance of winning. In that case the latter has not been mastered, because at that particular
moment in time he was not prepared to resist the onslaughts of his adversary. If the victor has
felled his enemy by luck, it is Lady Fortune and not he who should be crowned—he had nothing
to do with it; and finally the loser is no more blameworthy than a thrower of dice, who instead of
seventeen throws an eighteen.’

They all admitted that he was right, but held that it was impossible, given human limitations, to
improve on it, and that it was better to suffer a small inconvenience than to subject themselves to
a thousand greater ones.”
She did not continue the discussion any further this time because she was afraid to be found all alone with me, and so early in the morning. It is not that immodesty is a crime in this country; on the contrary, except for convicted criminals, any man has the right to possess any woman, and a woman may likewise take any man to court for refusing her. But she did not dare keep me company publicly, she said, because at the last sacrifice the priests had accused the women especially of spreading the belief that I was a man in order to conceal by this pretext the abominable lust to have intercourse with animals that consumed them, and shamelessly to commit sins against nature with me. For that reason I was unable to see her or any other member of her sex for a long time.

However, it was inevitable that someone should rekindle the quarrels over what sort of creature I was, for just as I was resigned to spending the rest of my life in a cage, they came to fetch me again to hear my case. And so, in the presence of a large number of courtiers, I was questioned on several points of physics, and my answers satisfied no one, for, in a magisterial tone of voice, the presiding judge explained very thoroughly to me his opinions about the structure of the world. They struck me as being ingenious, and, if he had not gone all the way back to its origin, that he maintained was eternal, I would have found his scientific system far more sensible than ours. But no sooner had I heard him advocating a fantasy so completely contrary to what our faith teaches us, I then asked him how he could respond to the authority of Moses, the great patriarch, who had expressly said that God had created it in six days. The ignoramus burst out laughing instead of answering me. I then could not refrain from saying to him that, since he gone that far, I was beginning to believe that their world was a moon. “But,” they all responded to me, “do you not see land, forests, rivers, seas? What do you think all that is?”
That is not important,” I retorted. “Aristotle assures us that this is only a moon, and if you had said the contrary in the classes I attended, you would have been jeered.”

When they heard this they all burst out laughing. There is no point asking whether it was because of their ignorance; and I was taken back to my cage.

But the priests were informed that I had dared to say that the moon that I had come from was a world, and that it was their world that was only a moon. They believed that that furnished them with a sufficiently good pretext for having me condemned to death by water, which was their way of exterminating atheists. They go in a body to bring their complaint to the king, who promises them justice. It is ordered that I be put in the dock.

And so, there I was out of my cage for the third time. The Great Pontiff opened the session and pleaded against me. I don’t remember his speech, because I was too terrified to register the sounds of his voice coherently, and also because in his declamation he had used an instrument whose noise rattled my brain: it was a trumpet that he had purposely chosen so that the blaring of its martial sound should inflame their minds towards wanting my death, and by stirring up their emotions prevent their judgment from doing its job, as is the case in our armies, where the din of the trumpets prevents the soldier from thinking about the importance of his life.

When he had finished speaking, I arose to speak in my defense, but I was spared by an occurrence that you will now hear about. As I had my mouth open to speak, a man who had great difficulty getting through the crowd came forth, fell at the King’s feet, and writhed for some time on his back. That kind of behavior did not surprise me, for I had known for some time that that was the posture they assumed when they wished to speak in public. I just sealed my lips, and this is the speech that came from his:
“Men of justice, hear me! You should not condemn this man, this monkey, this parrot, just because he said that the moon from which he came is a world, for, if he is a man, even were he not from the moon, every man being free, is he not free to imagine whatever he wishes? What is this? Can you force him to have only your thoughts? You may force him all you want to say that he believes your moon is not a world, but he really won’t believe you; for, in order to believe something, it must present in one’s mind greater appearances of being so than of not; thus, unless you show him its plausibility or it comes to his mind by itself, he will surely tell you that he believes it, but, for all that, he will not believe it.

I am now going to prove to you that he should not be condemned if you classify him as an animal. For, assuming that he is an animal without the ability to reason, what reason do you yourselves have for accusing him of having sinned against it? He has said that the moon was a world, but animals act only by natural instinct; thus it is nature that says it and not he. To suppose then that an expert nature that has made both the moon and the world does not itself know what those things are, and that you, who know only what you have gotten from it, know them with greater certainty, that is what would really be ridiculous. But even, sacrificing your basic principles to passion, were you to assume that nature did not govern the animals, should you not be ashamed of being disturbed by the antics of a mere beast? Truly, gentlemen, if you met a grown man who was watching an anthill either slap an ant that knocked its mate down, or confine one that stole a grain of wheat from its neighbor, or haul before a court another that had abandoned its eggs, would you not consider it senseless to get involved in things so beneath you and to try to hold animals to a standard of reasoning that is not within their capacity? What then, venerable pontiffs, would you call the interest you take in the antics of this little animal? Men of justice, I have had my say.”
As soon as he had finished, a great chorus of applause sounded in the hall; and, after the arguments had been debated for fully a quarter of an hour, this is what the King decreed: that henceforth I should be considered a man and as such set free, and that the drowning sentence should be commuted to a public admission of shame (for in this country there are none such that involve honor17), in which I was required to disavow my doctrine that the moon was a world, because of the scandalous effect that that opinion might have had on weaker minds.

That verdict having been pronounced, I am taken out of the palace; I am ignominiously dressed up in the most magnificent clothing; I am carried on the platform of a superb chariot; and drawn as I was by four princes who had been harnessed to it, I was obliged to announce at every square in the city: “People, I declare to you that this moon is not a moon but a world, and that that world up there is not a world but a moon. That is what the priests think you should believe.”

After I had shouted the same thing in the five great city squares, I noticed my advocate holding out his hand to help me get down. I was very surprised when I had gotten a good look at him, to realize that it was my old demon. We spent an hour embracing each other.

“Now come away to my place with me,” said he, “for if you returned to the court after a public admission of shame you would not be looked upon with friendly eyes. Furthermore, I must tell you that you would still be with the monkeys, along with your friend the Spaniard, had I not touted in public gatherings the vigor and force of your mind, and intrigued in your favor for protection by powerful people against the prophets.”

After I had thanked him we went into his apartment. Until our meal he explained the strings he’d pulled to rein in the priests, despite all the specious considerations with which they had muddled the consciences of the people about letting me be heard by them. We were seated by a
big fire, for the season was a cold one, and I think he was going to continue telling me all that he’d been doing while I had not seen him, but we were told that supper was ready.

“I invited,” he went on, “two professors of the academy in this city to come and share a meal with us this evening. I shall get them to address the philosophy that they teach in this world; likewise you will see my host’s son. He is a young man of as much intelligence as I have ever encountered and he could be a second Socrates if he could focus his mind and not destroy in vice the graces that God continually bestows on him, and not ostentatiously keep flaunting his impiety. I have taken up residence here to try to find opportunities to instruct him,

He stopped speaking as if to let me have a chance to speak, then he signaled that someone should come and divest me of the shameful ornaments with which I was still embellished.

The two professors whom we awaited soon entered. Together the four of us went into a small room where we found the boy of whom he had spoken busy eating. They bowed down before him and treated him with a respect as profound as that of a slave for a master. I asked my demon the reason and he told me that it was due to his age, because in that world the aged owe all kinds of honor and deference to the young. Moreover, fathers obeyed their children as soon as the Senate of Philosophers certified that they had attained the age of reason.”

“You are surprised,” he continued, “at a custom so contrary to that of your country? However it is in no way at odds with common sense; for, tell me honestly, when a spirited young man is ready enough to have some ideas, to judge, and to execute, is he not more capable of governing a family than an enfeebled sexagenarian? That poor dotard, whose imagination has been frozen by sixty-years of snows, guides himself by the example of some happily successful affairs, and yet it is luck that made them so in spite of all the rules and economics of human prudence. As for judgment, he does not have much, in spite of the fact that popular prejudice in your world
regards it as an attribute of age; and to discredit it, it should be known that what is called prudence in an old man is nothing but a panic apprehension, an obsessively rabid fear of undertaking anything. And so, my son, when he did not risk the danger that was capable of destroying a young man, it is not that he foresaw the catastrophe, but that he did not have enough fire to kindle the noble impulses that make us dare to take chances, and the boldness of that young man was like a promise of the success of his endeavor, for the ardor required for the speed and the ease of executing it was what motivated him to undertake it. As for executing it, I would be insulting your intelligence by going to the trouble of persuading you with examples. You know that only the young are fit for action, and if you are not completely persuaded of it, tell me please, when you respect a courageous man, is it not because he can avenge you of your enemies or of your oppressors? Why then bother with him, if not by habit, when a battalion of seventy Januaries has frozen his blood and with its cold killed all the noble enthusiasms that heat up the passions of youth for justice? When you defer to a man of strength, does he not owe you a victory that you would not be able to begrudge him? Why then should you submit to him when indolence has sapped his muscles, enfeebled his arteries, evaporated his wits, and sucked the marrow from his bones? If you adored a woman, was it not because of her beauty? Why then continue your genuflections when old age has made a phantom of her fit to threaten the living with death? Lastly, when you honored a man endowed with intellect, it was because the quickness of his superior intelligence enabled him to get to the bottom of a complicated affair and work it out, that he rewarded the assemblage of his brightest listeners with his wise speech, that he mastered science with the slightest effort, and whom no good soul ever did not harbor a powerful desire to emulate. Yet you continue paying him homage when his diminished faculties
leave him mentally weak and slow, and when in company, by his silence, he has a greater resemblance to the statue of a god of the hearth than to a man capable of thinking rationally.

Acknowledge thereby, my son, that it is better that the young should be in charge of the family affairs than the old. You would certainly be ill-guided to believe that Hercules, Achilles, Epaminondas, Alexander, and Caesar, all of whom died before the age of forty, were people to whom were due only common honors and that a dotty old man deserves to be idolized just because the sun has shone on ninety of his harvests.

‘But,’ you will say, ’all the laws of our world carefully foster the respect due to the old.’ That is true, but it is also true that all those who have introduced the laws have been old men who were afraid that the young might usurp the authority that they themselves had arrogated, and, like the arbiters of false religions, they have made a mystery of what they were unable to prove.

‘Yes,’ you say, ‘but that old man is my father and heaven promises me a long life if I honor him.’ Oh my son, if your father commands of you nothing contrary to the inspirations of the Almighty, I grant you it; otherwise walk on the belly of the father who begot you, trample on the breast of the mother who conceived you, for I see no reason to believe that the cowardly respect that wicked parents have wrung from your weakness is so dear to heaven that it will keep your rockets firing any longer for it. I do not at all see any evidence of it. What! Does your doffing of the hat that pleases and nourishes your father’s hauteur puncture an abscess that you have in your side, does it restore your vital juices, does it cure a sword-thrust in your stomach, does it pulverize a gallstone? If that is so, the doctors have it all wrong: instead of infernal potions that bedevil people’s lives, for small-pox let them prescribe three bows on an empty stomach, four ‘thank you very muches’ after dinner, and twelve ‘good nights, dear father and mother’ before going to bed. You counter that without your father you would not exist. That is true, but he too,
without your grandfather, would never have existed either, nor your grandfather without your
great-grandfather, nor without you would your father have grandsons. When nature brought him
into the world, it was on condition that he give back what she had lent him, so that when he
begot you he did not give you anything; he paid a debt! Moreover, I would really like to know
whether your parents were thinking of you when they had you. Not a bit, alas! And yet you
think that you are obligated to them for a gift that they gave you without intending it. What!
Just because your father was so lustful that he could not resist some creature’s lovely eyes, that
he paid the price to indulge a passion, and that you are the monument that has risen from their
play, you revere that libidinous man like one of the seven sages of Greece! What! Because
some miser acquired his wife’s wealth by making her a child, that child must kneel when he
addresses him? Truly, it was a good thing that your father was lustful and the other gentleman
niggardly, for otherwise neither you nor that man’s son would ever have existed; but I should
very much like to know that, were your father certain that his pistol would bag a rat, he would
still have fired the shot. Good God! What a gullible bunch are the people of your world.

All you have, o my son, is the body of your mortal architect; your soul comes from heaven that
could have slipped it into another sheathe. Your father could as likely have been born your son
as you born his. How do you know whether he did not actually prevent you from inheriting a
crown? Your spirit could have left heaven destined to embody the Emperor of the Romans in the
belly of the Empress; but on the way, by chance, it was side-tracked by your embryo; but to
curtail its journey, it moved in there. No, no, God would not have erased you from the tally of
human beings he had projected, even had your father died a little boy. But who knows whether
you would not today be the son of a valiant captain, who would have endowed you with his glory
as well as with his wealth? Thus you are perhaps less obligated to your father for the life he gave
you than you would be to the pirate that put you in chains, because he fed you. And I believe that even had he given you birth as a king, a present has no value when it is given without the desire of the recipient. Caesar was given death, as likewise was Cassius; Cassius, however, is obligated to the slave of whom he solicited it, unlike Caesar toward his assassins, because they forced it on him. Did your father ask for your consent when he embraced your mother? Did he ask you whether you preferred to see this particular country or to wait for another, whether you would be satisfied to be the son of a fool or if you were ambitious for a better man to sire you? Alas! You, who were alone concerned by it all, you were the only one whose opinion was not sought! Perhaps if you had then been lodged in other than the matrix that nature devised for you, if your birth had given you an option, you would have said to Miss Destiny: ‘My dear damsel, take someone else’s spindle; I have long been in this state of nothingness and I’d rather remain that way for a hundred years more than to be something today and regret it tomorrow!’ But you had to go through that; it would have done you no good to bawl that you wanted to return to that long, dark house from which you were snatched, it would have been claimed that you were pleading for the teat.

Those then, o my son, are more or less the reasons on which the respect fathers should show for their sons is based. I realize full well that I have leaned towards the children’s side more than justice demands, and that I have spoken in their favor a little against my conscience. But, wishing to correct that insolent pride with which fathers confront the weakness of their young, I was obliged to do as those do who wish to straighten a twisted tree: they bend it back the other way, so that it can become straight again between the two contortions. Thus have I gotten fathers to make restitution for the deference that their tyranny had usurped, and have stolen from them much that they had in their possession, so that they should again be content with what is
rightfully theirs. I know full well that by this apologia I have shocked all the old men, but let
them remember that they were sons before being fathers, and it is impossible for me to speak
strongly in their favor, for they were not found under the heads of cabbages. But, after all is said
and done, whatever happens, even were my enemies to go to war with my friends, I am bound to
come out all right, for I have served all men, and badly served only half of them.”

Having said all that he stopped talking and the son of our host then began to speak.

“In view of the fact,” he replied, “that I have, by your kindness, learned about the origin, the
history, the customs, and the beliefs of this little man’s world, permit me to add something to
what you have said, and to prove that children are not obligated to their fathers who begat them,
because their fathers were obligated in good conscience to engender them.

The philosophy of their world boils down to the belief that it is more desirable to die than not
to exist at all, but to die it is necessary to have lived. And so, since by not giving being to that
non-being, I leave him in a state worse than death, I am guiltier by denying him birth than by
killing him. You would think, my little man, murdering your child unworthy of forgiveness; it
would truly be heinous; however, it is far more loathsome to not give life to whoever can receive
it; for at least the child whose life you take away has had the satisfaction of enjoying it for a little
time. Besides, we know that he has lost it for only a few centuries; but those forty little nothings,
of whom you could make forty good soldiers for your king, are maliciously prevented by you
from seeing the light of day and are left to rot in your loins at the risk of an apoplectic attack that
will suffocate you in the end.

Let no one contradict me with fine panegyrics on virginity; that virtue is nothing but humbug,
for, when all is said and done, all those encomiums with which the masses idolize it are nothing
but opinions, even amongst yourselves. But not to kill, not to make your son more pitiful than
the dead by not making him at all, both of these are commandments. What surprises me so much, in view of the fact that continence is so preferable in the world whence you come to carnal propagation, is why God did not see to it that you be born in the dewdrops of May like mushrooms, or at the least, like crocodiles from the rich silt of earth cooked by the sun. But he does not send you any eunuchs, except by accident; he does not rip out the genitals of your monks, of your priests, nor of your cardinals. You can tell me that it was nature that gave them to them; yes, but he is nature’s master, and if he had known that that appurtenance were bad for their health, he would have ordered that it be cut off, as well as the foreskin that the Jews cut off according to their ancient law. But such imaginings are ridiculous. Honestly, is there any place on your body more sacred or more unholy than any another? Why would I be sinning when I touch the part in the middle and not when I touch my ear or my heel? Is it because it tickles? Then I should not relieve myself on the pot, for that cannot be done without a kind of sensual pleasure; nor should the devout exalt themselves in the contemplation of God, for that fills their imagination with great pleasure. Verily, I marvel, seeing to what degree the religion of your country is in conflict with nature and jealous of all human contents, that your priests should have made scratching oneself a crime because of the pleasant ache that one feels. All that being said, I have noticed that a provident nature has inclined all great men, the valiant and the clever, towards the delights of love, as witness Samson, David, Hercules, Caesar, Hannibal, Charlemagne. Was it so that they should harvest their organ of pleasure as a harvester does with the swipe of a scythe? Alas, she even went under a tub to debauch a skinny, ugly, and lice-infested Diogenes, and to constrain him to heave sighs for Laïs with his breath smelling of carrots. She doubtlessly did so out of fear that there might be a shortage of honest people in the world. Let us then conclude from this that your father was obligated in good conscience to bring
you into the world, and that when he thought he had put you greatly in his debt for making you
while enjoying the tingle in his loins, he has really given you no more than an ordinary bull gives
the calves ten times a day for his pleasure.”

“You are wrong,” interrupted my demon, “to try to limit God’s wisdom. It is correct that he
has forbidden us to have an excess of pleasure, but how do you know that he did not wish it so,
so that the difficulties we would have in combating that passion might make us worthy of the
glory he is preparing for us? Or how do you know that it is not to sharpen our appetites by
prohibition? Or how do you know that he has not foreseen that by abandoning the young to the
excitements of the flesh, too frequent intercourse would debilitate their seed and would augur the
end of the world for the great-grandnephews of the first man? Or how do you know that he did
not want to avoid having more hungry mouths than the fertility of the land could feed? Lastly,
how do you know that he has not wished to behave contrary to all apparent reason expressly in
order to reward those who, contrary to all apparent reason, will have shown trust in his word?”

I do not believe that this reply satisfied the young host, for he wagged his head at it several
times; but our common mentor stopped speaking, because the meal was impatient to take flight.

We then stretched out on some very soft mattresses, covered with large mats where the fumes
reached us as previously at the inn. A servant took the eldest of our two philosophers to direct
him to a separate little dining room and: “Come back and join us here as soon as you have
finished eating!” my mentor cried to him.

He promised us that he would.

That notion of his to eat separately made me curious about the cause.

“He does not like the smell of meat,” I was told, “nor even that of vegetables, if they haven’t
died a natural death, for he believes them capable of feeling pain.”
“It’s not so surprising to me,” I replied, “that he abstains from meat and all other things that have sensation while alive; for in our world the Pythagoreans, and even some of the anchorite holy men, followed that regimen; but, for example, not risking cutting a cabbage for fear of making it suffer sounds laughable to me.”

“And as for me,” replied the demon, “I find his attitude quite reasonable, for, tell me, that cabbage that you bring up, is it not as much a creature of God as you? Have you not both equally for father and mother God and privation? Has God not bent his mind for all eternity as much to its birth as to yours? It seems even that out of necessity he attended more to that of vegetal than to intelligent life, since he handed the generation of a man over to the capriciousness of his father, who could at his pleasure either bring him into this world or not bring him into this world, a power that he however did not bestow upon the cabbage; for, instead of leaving for its father the decision on whether or not to generate a son, out of fear perhaps that the race of cabbages might be more likely than men to perish, he constrains them, for better or for worse, to give each other life, and unlike men, who can engender no more than about twenty in a lifetime, they by themselves produce some four hundred thousand per head. However, saying that God liked men more than cabbages is what tickles us and makes us laugh. Being incapable of emotions, it, the cabbage, is able neither to hate nor to love anyone; and, were it capable of love, it would show its affection more likely for that cabbage you are holding, which could not hurt it, than for the man, whose threatening abuses are manifest to it. Add to that the fact that he, the man, could not be born without a crime on his head, being descended from the first man with the latter’s guilt; but we very well know that the first cabbage never offended its Creator in the earthly paradise.
Will it be said that we are made in the image of the Sovereign Being, and cabbages are not?

Even were it true, we, by defiling our souls, the very place where we resembled him, have erased that resemblance, for there is nothing so contrary to God than sin. If therefore our souls are no longer in his image, we no more resemble him in our hands, in our feet, in our mouths, in our brows, and in our ears than the cabbage in its leaves, in its flowers, in its stem, in its stump, and in its head. Do you not really think that if that poor plant could speak when it is being cut would not say, ‘Man, my dear brother, what have I done to you to deserve death? I grow only in your gardens, and am never found in untamed places where I could live in security. I disdain being cultivated by other hands than yours, but hardly am I left alone before I’m back in them. I rise up from the ground, I open up, I extend my arms to you, I offer you my children’s seeds, and as a reward for my courtesy, you chop off my head!’

That is the speech that the cabbage would give were it able to express itself. Come now! Just because it would not be able to complain, is that a reason to make it suffer so much pain that it is powerless to prevent? If I find a wretch all tied up, can I kill him without it being a crime, since he cannot defend himself? On the contrary, his weakness makes my cruelty all the worse; for no matter how poor and how lacking in all our advantages that wretched creature may be, he does not deserve to die for it. What? Of all the benefits of being alive, it has only that of vegetating, and we take that away from it. The sin of slaughtering a man is not as great, for he will live again some day, whereas by cutting up a cabbage and taking its life away from it, it has no other to look forward to; but by killing a man you are only changing his dwelling-place; and I shall say much more: since God, the common Father of all things, cherishes all his works alike, is it not reasonable that he should have doled out his beneficence equally between us and the plants. It is true that we were born first, but in God’s family there is no right of seniority. Therefore if
cabbages did not share in the grant of immortality, they were surely given some other advantage
great enough to compensate for its brevity, perhaps a universal intellect, a perfect knowledge of
the causes of all things; and it is perhaps for that also that the Wise Mover did not design their
organs in the same way as ours, which have, ultimately, only a weak and simple ability to
exercise reason, often deceiving, but other organs, more ingeniously designed, stronger, and
more numerous, that serve us in the execution of our speculative ventures. You will perhaps ask
me what they have ever made known to us of those great insights. But, I’d like to know what the
angels have ever taught us any more than they have. Since there is no comparison, no
relationship, no consonance between the stupid faculties of man and those of such divine
creatures, those intelligent cabbages would strive in vain to make us comprehend the hidden
cause of all the incredible phenomena; we lack the sensory apparatus to receive such exalted
notions.

Moses, the greatest of all the philosophers, who looked, as you say, for knowledge of nature in
the source of nature itself, imparted that truth when he spoke of the Tree of Knowledge; he
wanted us to know through this enigma that plants exclusively possessed the ultimate
philosophy. Remember then--o you most arrogant of all the animals!—that, even though a
cabbage that you slash does not say a word to you, that does not mean that it does not think. But
the poor plant has not the organs to scream as we do; it has not any to frolic about, nor to weep;
it does, however, have some that enable it to complain of the ugly things that you do to it, by
which it brings the vengeance of heaven upon you. And if you ask me how I know that cabbages
have those lovely thoughts, I ask you how you know that they do not, and that that creature, in
imitation of you, for example, does not say, on going to bed: “I am, Mister Curly Cabbage, your
very humble servant, Puffy Cabbage..."
At that point in his discourse the young fellow who had gone out with the philosopher brought him back.

“So! Already had dinner?” cried my demon.

He replied that they had, just about, as much as the physiognomist had permitted them to have a taste of ours. The young host did not expect me to ask him to explain that mystery:

“I can see,” said he, “that this mode of living surprises you. Know then that, although in your world less care is taken as regards health, the regimen in this one is not to be scorned.

There are in all houses publicly subsidized physiognomists, who are what you would call doctors, except that they take care only of healthy people, and they decide how we should be treated only by the proportions, shape, and harmony of the parts of our bodies, by the contours of the face, the color of the flesh, the tenderness of the skin, the agility of the whole body, the sound of the voice, the complexion, the strength and firmness of the hair. Have you not noticed a short man who was looking you over intently a while ago? That was the house physiognomist. You may be sure that, depending upon how he apprised your complexion, he diversified the vaporization of your meal. Notice how different is the mattress you have been given from our beds; he doubtlessly judged your temperament to be very different from ours, for he feared lest the odors emanating from those little spigot cocks and reaching your nose should reach us, or that ours should waft towards you. You will see him this evening choosing flowers for you with the same considerations.”

During this entire allocution I signaled my host that he should try to prevail on the philosophers to talk about some aspect of the science they professed. He was too good a friend of mine than not to bring up the subject promptly. I shall not waste your time with either the speeches or the pleas that the negotiator of this treaty made; besides, the nuance between parody
and sincerity was too subtle to be imitated. In any event, the last to arrive of those doctors, after
saying other things, continued thus:

“I still have to prove to you that there are infinite worlds in an infinite world. Just think of the
universe as a great animal; the stars, which are worlds as are the animals in them, which in their
turn serve as worlds to other species, such as to us, to horses, to elephants, and as we again are
worlds to certain smaller folk, such as cankers, lice, worms, and mites; the latter are whole
worlds for other imperceptible ones. Thus, as we appear to be a great world to those small folk,
maybe our flesh, our blood, and our brains are nothing but a network of tiny animals that sustain
each other, give us our ability to move by theirs, and let themselves be led blindly by our will—
which to them is like a coachman—make us function, and produce all the actions that we call
life.

For, pray tell, is it so hard to conceive that a louse could take your body for a world, and that
when one of them has traveled from one of your ears all the way to the other, its friends might
say that it has traveled to the two ends of the earth or that it has gone from one pole to the other?
Yes, surely these tiny folk take your hair for the forests of their country, your sweaty pores for
fountains, your buboes and blisters for lakes, your abscesses for seas, your secretions of fluid for
deluges; and, when you comb your hair backwards and forwards, they take this violent stirring
for the ebb and flow of the ocean.

Does itching not prove my point? Is that itch-mite that causes it anything else but one of those
tiny animals that has abandoned civil society to become the tyrant of its country? If you ask me
what has caused them to be bigger than the other tiny imperceptible animals, I ask you why
elephants are bigger than we are, and the Scots than the Spanish. As regards that blister and that
scab whose cause puzzles you, they must come either from the decaying carrion of the enemies
that those little Goliaths have slain, or from the fact that the plague, brought on by the need of
food on which those seditionists have gorged themselves, has left heaps of dead bodies from
their campaigns to rot; or that that tyrant, after beating off his allies whose bodies plugged our
bodies’ pores, gave passage to the pituitary fluids that have decomposed after having erupted
from our blood’s circulatory orbit. You will ask me why one itch-mite engenders one hundred
others. That is not so difficult to fathom; for, just as one revolt wakens another, in the same way
each of these tiny people, instigated by the bad example of their seditious cohorts, aspires to the
command, thus causing the break-out of wars, massacres, and hunger. But, you will say, certain
people are less susceptible to itching than others. Nevertheless, each one is equally covered with
these tiny animals, because it is they, as you say, that produce life. That is a fact. We also see
that phlegmatic people are less susceptible to scabies than choleric people, because people living
in a more moderate climate are calmer in their cool bodies than others who live in warmer
climates and are enervated, fidgety, and unable to remain still. Thus the choleric is much less
resistant than the phlegmatic, because, with more parts of his body being stirred up, and since
his soul is activated by those tiny beasts, he is made sensitive in all the places where that
livestock scurries about, in places where the phlegmatic is not hot enough to provoke animation.

And to prove this universal “scabiality” further, you just have to consider when you are
injured how the blood rushes to the wound. Your doctors say that it is directed by a provident
nature that desires to give aid to the affected areas—but oh, what lovely fantasies! So, besides
the mind and soul there would be a third intellectual dimension that would have its separate
organs. It is far more credible that those tiny animals, feeling themselves under attack, send for
help from their neighbors, and that having come from all sides, and there not being enough room
for so big a crowd, they die of asphyxiation or of hunger. Their deaths occur when the
impostume is ripe; for, as evidence that those creatures’ lives are extinct, the decayed skin loses its sensitivity. If very often the blood-letting that is prescribed to divert the swelling is effective, it is that, having lost too many in the cavities that those little animals tried to plug up, they refused to help their allies, having been left with diminished forces to defend themselves on their own turf.”

He concluded on that note. And when the second philosopher perceived that our eyes, all turned towards his, exhorted him to take his turn speaking:

“Men,” said he, “seeing you anxious to teach this puny animal, our fellow human, something of the science that we profess, I am currently dictating a treatise that I shall be very happy to produce for him because of the light it sheds on the rationale of our physics; it is the explanation of the eternal origins of the world. But, as I am pressed to start my bellows working, for tomorrow without fail the city is departing, I hope you will excuse me this time, with the promise that as soon as it has settled down again I shall satisfy you.”

At those words, the son called his father, and when he arrived the company asked him the time. The fellow replied, “Eight o’clock.” His son, very angered, shouted:

“Hey, come here lout! Did I not give you orders to call us at seven? You know that the houses are leaving tomorrow, that the walls have already left, and your sloth has put a padlock on your mouth.”

“Sir,” replied the fellow, since you sat down to eat it was announced that it is expressly forbidden to leave before the day after tomorrow.”

“That makes no difference,” he shot back giving him a kick. “You must obey blindly, without questioning my orders, and remembering only what I have commanded you to do. Quickly, go fetch your effigy.”
When he had brought it, the young buck seized it by one arm and whipped it for a good fifteen minutes.

“Now then, you good-for-nothing,” he continued, “as punishment for your disobedience, I want you to be the laughing-stock of the company today, and for that I command you to walk on just two legs for the rest of the day.”

The poor old man went out weeping uncontrollably, and his son went on:

“Gentlemen, I beg you to excuse the knavishness of the old cry-baby. I had hoped to make something decent of him, but he has taken advantage of my good nature. For my part, I think that that oaf will be the death of me. In truth, he has already brought me a dozen times to the verge of laying a curse on him.”

Though I bit my lips, I had a hard time keeping from laughing out loud at this topsy-turvy world. It is for that reason that, to put an end to that farcical lesson that probably would finally have made me explode, I begged him to tell me what he meant by the city traveling, to which he had just referred, and whether the houses and walls could walk. This was his reply:

“Our cities, dear friend, are divided into mobile and stationary; the mobile, as for example the one in which we are now are built as follows:

The architect constructs each palace, as you can see, of very light wood and installs four wheels underneath. In a thick part of one of those walls he sets a number of big bellows whose nozzles rest in a horizontal row across the top story from one gable to another. In that way, when we wish to move the cities to another location—for they get a change of air every season—everyone unfurls a number of broad sails facing the bellows on one side of his house; then, after winding up a spring to make them work, with the constant blowing of air that those wind
monsters cough up into the billowing canvas, their houses are carried farther than one hundred leagues in less than a week, if so desired.

Now for the architecture of the second kind, which we call stationary. The houses are very similar to your towers, except that they are made of wood and pierced in the center with a big strong jackscrew running through them from the cellar to the roof to enable them to be raised or lowered at will. Also, the earth is dug out to a depth equal to the height of the building, and this is all constructed in such a way that, as soon as the frosty weather begins to chill the atmosphere, the houses are lowered by being screwed down into the pit, and, by means of particularly large pelts with which both the tower and surrounding houses are covered, the people remain safe from the inclemency of the weather. But as soon as the gentle breath of spring comes to warm it up again they rise to the light of day by means of the great jackscrew I have described to you.”

At that that point I believe that he wanted to rest his lungs and I began to speak.

“Verily, sir, I’d have trouble believing that such an expert builder can be a philosopher if not for your example of it. That is why, since you are not yet leaving today, you will surely have the time to explain the eternal origins of the world to us, about which you were edifying us a while ago. I promise you, as compensation, that as soon as I shall have returned to the moon, from which my mentor (I pointed to my demon) can testify that I have come, I shall advertise your glory, by relating there all the marvelous things that you’ll have told me. I see very well that you are laughing at this promise, because you don’t believe that the moon is a world, and even less, that I am an inhabitant of that world; but I can also assure you that the people of that world, who consider this one no more than a moon, will laugh at me when I say that their moon is a world, that the landscapes here are of earth and that you are humans.”

He answered me with no more than a smile; then he began to speak in this manner:
“Since, when we wish to go back to the origins of the Great All, we are bound to run into three or four absurdities, it is quite sensible to follow the path with the fewest pitfalls. The first obstacle in our way is the eternity of the world, and since the minds of men are too puny to comprehend it and are unable to conceive that so great a universe as this, so beautiful and well-ordered, could have made itself, they thus have recourse to the Creation. But, like a man who jumps into a river to avoid getting wet in the rain, they elude the grasp of a dwarf and end up at the mercy of a giant. Nor have they solved anything, for the eternity that they deny the world, not being able to fathom it, they attribute to God, as if it were easier to conceive it in one than in the other. The absurdity, therefore, or this giant of whom I have spoken, is the Creation, for, tell me truthfully, has anyone ever understood how something can be made from nothing? Alas! Between nothing and a mere atom the distance is so infinite that the sharpest mind could not explain it; hence, to escape from this inexplicable maze you are forced to admit matter’s eternal existence with God, and, in that case, you no longer have to involve a God at all, for the world could have existed without one. ‘But,’ say you, ‘even were I to grant you the notion of the eternity of matter, how could the chaos have achieved some order by itself?’ Ha! Let me explain it to you, my little animal.

After mentally dissecting each tiny visible body into an infinite number of tiny, invisible bodies, you must imagine that the infinite universe is made up of nothing but those infinite atoms, all very solid, very impervious, and very simple, some of which are cube-shaped, others like parallelograms, others angular, others round, others pointed, others pyramidal, others hexagonal, others oval, all of which act differently, each according to its shape. And this being so, place a very round ivory ball on a very smooth surface: however lightly you touch it, it will roll for seven or eight minutes without coming to rest. Consequently, if it were so perfectly
round as are those atoms I mentioned, it would roll forever. If then human hands can make an
object approximate perpetual motion, what is there to stop us from thinking that nature can do it?
The same is true for the other shapes. One, for example the cube, wants perpetual rest, others a
lateral movement, others a shaky movement like a trepidation; and the round one, whose nature
is to move, by combining with the pyramidal one, probably gives us what we call fire, because
not only does fire never stop moving, but it easily pierces and penetrates.

Fire has besides that other effects that differ in proportion to the number of open spaces and
angles, as where the round-shaped atom combines with it, so that the hotness of pepper is
different from the hotness of sugar, the hotness of sugar from the hotness of cinnamon, that of
cinnamon from that of cloves, and the latter from that of a fagot. Well, fire, which is the builder
and destroyer of both the parts and the whole of the universe, has coaxed and gathered in an oak
tree the number of shapes necessary to constitute an oak tree. ‘But,’ say you, ‘how can pure
chance have assembled in one place all the elements necessary to produce an oak tree?’ My
answer is that it is no wonder that matter so disposed formed a tree, but the wonder would rather
have been, if all this matter were so disposed, an oak tree had not been formed; a little less of
certain shapes and it would have been an elm, a poplar, a willow, an elder, heather, or moss; a
little more of certain other shapes, it would have been a sensitive plant, an oyster and its shell, a
worm, a fly, a frog, a sparrow, a monkey, a man. When three dice are thrown on the table and
they all come up deuces, or threes, fours, fives, or deuces, sixes, and aces, would you say, ‘Oh,
what a miracle!’? All the dice come up with the same number, with so many others possibly
coming up! ‘Oh, what a miracle!’ Three dice are thrown and come up with consecutive
numbers. ‘Oh, what a miracle!’ There are two sixes up and a six under the third die: I am quite
certain that, being an intelligent man, you will not react that way; for, since the dice have only a
certain amount of numbers, it is impossible that one of those combinations not come up.

You are surprised that matter, scrambled up pell-mell, can have combined to produce a man, in
view of the fact that there were so many needed for his formation, but what you do not know is
that the one hundred million times that this matter, on its way to becoming a man, was
interrupted to form on one occasion a stone, on another lead, on another coral, on another a
flower, on another a comet, among the too many or too few combinations that were or were not
needed to form a man. That being so, it is no wonder that amongst an infinite quantity of
matter that moves and changes incessantly, it happened to form the few animals, vegetables,
minerals that are visible to us; nor is it any more a wonder that in one hundred throws of the dice
there should be a clean sweep. It is also quite impossible that all that stirring would not create
something, and that that thing would come to be admired by a hare-brained individual who
would never know how little it would have taken for that thing not to have materialized. When
the great river of Do-so-mi-do makes a mill work, sets the springs of a clock in motion, and when
the little brook of Do-mi-so-so just flows and sometimes overflows, you would not say that the
river knows what it is doing, for you know that it has been subject to things that have made it
perform all those wonderful exploits; for, if a mill were not located on it, it would not have
ground the wheat; if it had not had contact with the clock, it would not have kept the time; and if
the little brook I spoke of had had those same circumstances, it would have performed the same
miracles. That goes as well for that fire that moves by itself; for, having found the elements
necessary to set it in motion and to decide to do something, it made that decision; when it found
those inducing only sensing, it sensed; when it found those that caused growing, it grew; and that
being the case, if you bash the eyes of a certain man whose fire and consciousness has allowed
him to see, he will cease seeing, just as our great river will no longer keep the time if you smash
the clock.

Finally, those original and indivisible atoms form a circle on which the most perplexing
difficulties of physics spin uninterruptedly. It is not too much so with the workings of the
senses, that no one has yet been able to grasp, but that I may explain quite simply with my tiny
bodies. Let us begin with vision: as the most incomprehensible, it merits our first sally.

It is realized, as I imagine, when the integuments of the eye, whose canals are similar to those
of glass, transmit that fiery dust that we call visual rays so that it comes in contact with opaque
matter that causes it to be reflected back. When all that happens, encountering the image of
some object that comes into its path and that has blocked it, that image, being just an infinite
number of tiny bodies that continually evaporate in the same pattern as in the subject being
looked at, it is thrust into our eye.

You will surely object that glass is an opaque and very compressed body, which, however,
instead of turning back those other tiny bodies, allows them to penetrate it. But my answer to
you is that the pores in glass are molded in the same shape as those fire atoms that penetrate it,
and just as a wheat sieve is not useful as an oat sieve, nor an oat sieve useful as a wheat sieve, a
box made of pine, despite its thinness, that lets sound pass through, does not do so for sight; and
a piece of crystal, although transparent, thus letting sight pass through it, can not be penetrated
by sound.”

I was unable to keep myself from interrupting him.

“But how, sir,” I replied, “given those ideas, do you explain the way we see our image in a
mirror?”
“That is very easy,” said he; “for imagine that those fires of our eye, having gone through the looking-glass and run into a non-diaphanous body that reflects them, then go back out though where they came in; and finding those tiny bodies that we had projected moving about in their original pattern on the whole surface of the mirror, they convey them back to our eyes; and our imagination, hotter than the other faculties of our conscience, draws in the most elusive with which it creates a picture in miniature within it.

The operation of the sense of hearing is no more difficult to comprehend. For the sake of brevity, let us just consider it in harmonics. Here is a lute plucked by the fingers of a master of the art. You ask me how it is possible for me, as far as I am from it, to sense something I cannot see at all. Do my ears have protruding sponges that soak up the music so that I can receive it, or does the performer conjure up in my head another tiny performer with a tiny lute having orders to sing me the same tunes? No, but this miracle is caused by the fact that the plucked string, by striking the tiny bodies of which the air is made up, drives them into my brain, gently penetrating it with those tiny corporeal nonentities; and as the string is drawn tauter the sound is higher, because it drives the atoms more forcefully; and the organ of hearing thus penetrated, furnishes enough of what is needed to create an image in a fantasy-inspired mind; if it is not enough, the result is that because our mental perception has not yet been able to create an image, to do it we are forced to repeat the same sound, so that from the sounds that provide it with, for example, the bars of a saraband, it sneaks off with enough to complete the image of that saraband.

But that operation is almost inconsequential; the marvel occurs when, by its instrumentality, we are moved now to joy, now to rage, now to pity, now to reverie, now to sorrow. I imagine that that happens if the movement that those tiny bodies are subjected to encounter within us other tiny bodies moving in the same direction, or that their own shapes make them susceptible
to a strong sympathetic reaction; for then the new arrivals excite their hosts to move as they do. And, in that way, when a violent sound meets that fire in our blood inclined to the same arousal, it causes that fire to thrust its way out, and that is what we call ‘the flame of the spirit.’ If the sound is softer and strong enough to ignite only a slighter, more mobile flame, since that matter is more volatile as it rides along the nerves, the membranes, and the passages in our flesh, it excites that titillation that we call ‘joy.’ It is the same with the ebullience of the other emotions according to how those tiny bodies are hurled more or less violently at us, according to the movement they are given upon encountering other moving bodies, and according to what they are able to move in us. So much for hearing.

Now, the demonstration of touch is no more difficult. Of all tangible matter, perpetually emitting tiny bodies whenever we touch them, and giving off even more of their tiny bodies when we press on a palpable object, like water when we squeeze a sponge, the hard ones make you feel their solidity, the supple ones their softness, the rough ones their harshness, the burning ones their heat, the frozen ones their iciness. And be that as it may, we are not sensitive enough to discern this when touching with hands beaten by labor, for with their thickening from calluses and by being neither porous, nor vibrant enough, they emit less easily those exhalations of matter.

One of you will wish to learn where the sense of touch is located. In my view, it is spread throughout the surface of a mass, since it is felt through the intervention of the nerves, of which our hides are but imperceptible and continuous tissues. I imagine, however, that the closer a body part is to the head, the faster we react to it. That can be tested when with closed eyes we slide a finger over it, for we recognize it right away; and if, contrarily, we feel it with the foot we have a hard time identifying it. That comes from the fact that, since our skin is riddled with tiny
holes, our nerves, whose mass is not more compressed than theirs, lose a lot of those tiny atoms on their way through the minute apertures in their fibers before reaching all the way to the brain, where their voyage ends.

I still have to prove that smell and taste are sensed by the action of those same tiny bodies.

Tell me then, when I taste a fruit, is it not through the humidity in the mouth that dissolves it? Acknowledge, therefore that, there being more salinity there, and that being dissolved reduces it to tiny bodies of a shape different from those that constitute the taste of a plum, they necessarily strike our palate very differently, just as the pain of a wound from an iron pike that cuts through me is not the same as that from the bullet of a pistol that hits me, and, likewise, as the pain the pistol-shot would make me feel compared to that inflicted on me by a steel clothes-iron.

About the sense of smell I have no need to speak, since even your natural philosophers admit that it is the result of a continuous emission of tiny bodies that get detached from their source and strike our noses as they pass by.

Based on this set of ideas, I shall now go on to explain the creation, the harmony and the influence of celestial bodies with the unalterable variety of meteors.”

He intended to continue, but the old inn-keeper came in just then, which made our philosopher decide to take his leave. The former had glass-containers filled with glowworms to light the room, but, as this short-lived insect loses much of its brilliance when it is not freshly gathered, these, ten days old, hardly glowed any more.

My demon did not wait till the guests were inconvenienced; he went up to his room and immediately came back down with two bowls of fire so bright that everyone was amazed that he did not burn his fingers.
“These non-scorching torch-lights,” said he, “will serve us better than your platoon of glowworms. These are sunrays that I have purged of their heat, otherwise the corrosive qualities of their fire would have hurt your vision by their dazzle. I have regulated the light and enclosed it in these transparent bowls that I am holding. That should not give you great cause to marvel, for it is not harder for me, born on the sun as I was, to condense the sunrays, the dust of that world, than for you to gather up the dust or atoms that are the pulverized earth of this one.”

When they had finished extolling this sun-child, the young host had his father take the philosophers away with a dozen bowls of glowworms hanging from his four legs, as it was late. For the rest of us, the young host, my mentor, and I all went to bed as ordered by the physiognomist.

This time he put me in a bed-chamber with violets and lilies and sent for someone to tickle me as usual for me to fall asleep; and the next day at nine o’clock I saw my demon enter to tell me that he was coming from the palace where Do-mi-so-ti-mi-do, one of the Queen’s maids, had sent for him, that she had asked about me, and sworn that she was as determined as ever in her plan to keep her word to me, meaning that she would willingly accompany me if I wished to take her with me to the other world.

“What impressed me the most,” he continued, “was to recognize that the principal motive for her voyage is based only on her desire to become a Christian. And so I promised her that I would do all in my power to assist her in her intention, and, to that end, to invent a machine capable of carrying three or four people, in which you will be able to go together. From this day forth, I shall seriously apply myself to the execution of that project. Therefore, to keep you busy while I am gone, I am leaving you this book. I brought it long ago from my native land; it is entitled *The States and Empires of the Sun.* I am also giving you this other one that I treasure
even more; it is *The Great Work of the Philosophers*, written by one of the most powerful minds on the sun. In it he proves that all things are true, and postulates the method for physically uniting the truths of each opposite pair, as for example that black is white and white is black, that one can be and not be at the same time, that there can be a mountain with no valley, that nothingness is something, and that all things that are, are not. But notice that he proves these unimaginable paradoxes without a single captious or sophistic argument. When you are tired of reading, you may go for a walk or converse with our host, your young friend--his mind has great charm. What I dislike in him is his impiety; but if he should happen to scandalize you or make your faith waver with his ideas, do not fail to bring them to me immediately so that I can clear them up for you. Someone else would order you to stay shy of him when he wants to philosophize on those subjects; but as he is extremely vain, I am sure that he would take that retreat as a defeat, and would imagine that your beliefs were untenable if you refused to expose yourself to his. Strive to live as a free man.”

He left me right after that last statement, for that is the way one says “Goodbye” when one takes leave of someone in that country, just as “Good morning” or “At your service, sir” are expressed by the greeting “Love me, sage, for I love you.” As soon as he was out of sight I began to study my books heedfully. Their boxes, that is to say, their covers, struck me as admirable for their richness; one was hewn from a single diamond, incomparably more brilliant than ours; the second appeared to be nothing but a monster-sized pearl split in half. My demon had translated the books into the language of that world, but, as I have not yet told about their printing, I shall explain how the two volumes were fashioned.

Upon opening the box I found something out of metal somewhat similar to our clocks, full of an infinite number of tiny springs and undistinguishable machines. It’s a book in fact, but it’s a
marvelous book with neither pages nor lettering; to be brief, it’s a book for which, in order to learn, eyes are of no use; one needs only ears. When one wants to read he winds up the machine with a great number of all kinds of keys, then he turns the needle to the chapter he wishes to hear, and at that time, out of that shell, there come, as if from the mouth of a man or from a musical instrument, all the distinct and different sounds that serve as language amongst the great moon-people.

When I had thought deeply about that incredible ingenuity in making books, I was no longer surprised to see that young men in that country had more knowledge at sixteen to eighteen years of age than the greybeards in ours; for by learning to read as soon as they speak, they are never at a loss for reading matter. In their rooms, while out walking, while traveling, on foot, on horseback, they can have, in their pockets or hanging from the bow of their saddles, thirty or so of those books in which they have only to wind a spring to hear a single or several chapters, or, if they are in the mood, a whole book. Thereby, you always have around you all the great men, living and dead, who are speaking to you audibly.

That present kept me occupied for more than an hour, and after that, hanging it from my ears like a pair of earrings, I went for a walk in the city. I had not quite gone as far as the end of the street facing our home when I encountered a large group of mourners.

Four of them were carrying some kind of coffin draped in black on their shoulders. I asked a spectator what was the significance of that procession that was similar to the funerals in my country; he told me that the wicked Do-mi-so-do, who, being accused by the people with a tap on the right knee and convicted of covetousness and ingratitude, had died the day before, and Parliament had sentenced him twenty years ago to death in his bed of natural causes and to be
buried after his death. I had to laugh at that explanation; and when he asked me why, I answered:

“You astonish me by saying that what is a mark of benediction in our world, such as a long life, a peaceful death, a fastuous burial, serves as an exemplary punishment in this one.”

“What! You take burial as a mark of benediction?” replied the man. “Say! Can you honestly imagine anything more terrible than a corpse rolling on worms that infest it, at the mercy of toads that chew its cheeks; lastly, a plague wearing the body of a man? Good God! Just the idea of his face entangled in a sheet, despite his being dead, and on his mouth a pile of earth, leaves me breathless! That wretch that you see being borne, in addition to the disgrace of being thrown into a ditch, was condemned to be assisted in his funeral train by one hundred and fifty of his friends, and they ordered to be present at his funeral with sad faces, as punishment for having had affection for a coveter and an ingrate; and if the judges had not had pity, attributing his crimes to his lack of intelligence, they would have ordered them to weep. Outside of criminals, everyone else is cremated; the fact is that it is a very decent and sensible custom, for we believe that, when fire has separated the pure from the impure and with its heat has reconstituted by attraction the natural heat inherent in the soul, it gives it the power to rise up again, all the way up to one of the stars, to a land of people more incorporeal than are we, more intellectual, because their temperament must harmonize with and function in the purity of the globe they inhabit, and that that fundamental flame, having reached even greater perfection through the influence of the elements of that world, reforms itself in the person of a respectable denizen of that fiery world.

That, however, is not our most glorious way of ceremoniously disposing of the dead. When one of our philosophers has come to us at an age when he feels that his mental capacity is diminishing and the icy hand of time is numbing his spirit, he gathers his friends for a sumptuous
banquet; then, having revealed the motives for his decision to take his leave of nature, having little hope left of adding anything to his worthy efforts, one either grants him a favor, that is, of ordering his death, or harshly commands him to live on. And so, when, by a plurality of votes, his fate has been left for him to decide, he informs his dearest friends of the day and the place. The latter purify themselves and fast for twenty-four hours; then, having arrived at the sage’s home, after sacrificing to the sun, they enter the room where the altruist is waiting for them propped up in bed in a ceremonious decor. Each one, according to his rank, runs to embrace him, and when it is the turn of the one who loves him the most, after kissing him tenderly, the sage holds him to his breast, and with their lips pressed together, he stabs himself with a dagger to the heart. The lover keeps his lips pressed to those of the loved one until he feels that he is dead; he then withdraws the weapon from his breast, and, while covering the wound with his mouth, he drinks his blood and keeps sucking until he can drink no more. Then another takes his place and is carried to the bed. When the second has drunk his full he is made to lie down in order to make room for the third. Finally, after four or five hours, when they have all done likewise, a girl sixteen or seventeen years old is brought to each of them to spend four or five days making love and all the while they are fed nothing but the dead man’s body, which they have to eat uncooked, so that, if one of the girls gives birth, they will be certain that it their friend that is reborn.”

I did not have the patience to hear that man go on anymore, and so I left him standing there and continued my walk.

Although I didn’t walk very far, the time that I spent observing the different spectacles in the various places that I visited caused me to arrive two hours after the dinner that had been prepared. I was asked why I had arrived so late.
“It wasn’t my fault,” I replied to the cook who was upset about it. “I asked several people in the street what time it was, but their only response was opening their mouths, gritting their teeth, and twisting their lips in a grimace.’

“What!” they all cried. “You don’t know that they were showing you the time?”

“’Pon my soul!” I retorted. “It was no use to me that they turned their noses to the sun without my knowing why.”

“That is a convenience that lets them do without clocks, for they make such an accurate sundial with their teeth that all they have to do to tell you the time is separate their lips, and the shadow of the nose that appears there gives the answer like the shadow on a sundial. Now, so that you should know why everyone in this country has a big nose, I shall inform you that as soon as a woman gives birth, the matron takes the baby to the prior of the seminary, and after exactly one year the experts are assembled. If the nose is found to be shorter than a certain measure in the custody of the syndic, he is declared pug-nosed and handed over to the priests who castrate him. You may ask the cause of this barbarous custom and how it can be that amongst us, to whom virginity is a crime, celibacy is forcibly imposed on such people. For your information, we do it only after thirty centuries of observing that a big nose is like a sign over our doors that says, ‘Herein lives a man of wit, prudence, refinement, affability, generosity, and liberality’; and a small nose is a sign of the opposite vices. That is why we make eunuchs of the pug-nosed, for the Republic would rather not have children who resemble them.”

He was still speaking when I saw a completely naked man enter the room. I immediately sat down and put on my hat to pay him my respects, for those are the greatest marks of it that can be shown to a person in that country.
“The kingdom,” said he, “would like you to give notice to the magistrates before leaving for your country, because a mathematician has just promised the Council that, in the event that when you have returned to your world you should want to build a machine, he can teach you how it could correspond to another that he will have ready here so that yours can communicate with ours and create a link to our world.”

A soon as he’d left I turned to the young host.

“Say!” said I, “Would you please tell me what that bronze object shaped like an unmentionable body part hanging from that man’s waist signifies?”

I had seen many of them at court at the time that I was living in a cage, but, as I was almost always surrounded by the Queen’s maids, I was wary of violating the respect due to their sex and station by drawing attention to such an indecent matter in their presence.

“Our females here, no more than males, are so ungrateful as to blush at the sight of the thing that formed them, and our virgins are not ashamed to adore, in honor of their mother Nature, the only thing on us that represents her.

You should therefore know that the sash honoring that man, from which a medallion in the form of a virile member hangs, is the symbol of a gentleman, and the mark that distinguishes the nobleman from the commoner.”

I must confess that that paradox seemed so outlandish to me that I couldn’t refrain from laughing at it.

“That custom seems most extraordinary to me,” said I to my young host, “for in our world the mark of nobility is in wearing a sword.”

But he, without any sign of emotion, exclaimed, “Oh, my little man! How mad the lords of your world are to wear with pride an instrument that designates an executioner, that is forged
only to kill, the sworn enemy of all living things, while, on the other hand, they hide an object without which none of us would be here, the Prometheus of all the animals, and the tireless restorer of nature’s weaknesses! Miserable country, where the signs of procreation are ignominious and those of annihilation are honorable. And yet you call that member a shameful part, as if there were anything more glorious than giving life and anything more ignominious than taking it!”

During this entire speech we never stopped eating; and once we had gotten up from our beds we went out to the garden to get some air.

The activities and the beauty of the garden diverted us for a while; but, as the noblest desire that nagged at me was to convert to our religion a soul so superior to that of the common herd, I urged him a thousand times not to sully with material things that beautiful mind with which heaven had endowed him, but that he should distance that mind of his, capable of the vision of God, from the mass of animals; and lastly that he should seriously consider seeking some day to secure felicity rather than suffering in the afterlife.

“What!” he replied breaking out in laughter, you consider your soul immortal above and beyond that of the animals? Seriously, my dear friend, your ego is insolence itself! And where, pray tell, do you get the idea of an immortality unavailable to animals? Would it be because we are capable of reason and they not? First of all, I do not concede that to you, and whenever you wish I shall prove to you that they can reason just as we do. But, even were it true that reason was granted to us as our lot, and that it was a privilege reserved only for our species, does it necessarily follow that God add the benefit of immortality just because he has already lavished reason on us? I should therefore, on that basis, give that poor man a ten-franc coin today because I gave him a three-franc coin yesterday? You can see for yourself the false logic of that, and
that, on the contrary, if I am just, rather than give fifteen francs to that man, I should give three francs to another, since he has received nothing from me. We must conclude, my dear friend, that God, a thousand times more just than we are, would not have given everything to some and nothing to others. To cite the example of first-born sons in your world, who come away in their inheritance with almost all the family wealth, that is a foible of their fathers, who, wishing to perpetuate their names, have feared lest it be lost or squandered to the point of impoverishment. But God, who is not capable of error, has not taken the precaution of bestowing so much on just one, and so, since in God’s eternity there is no before or after, the last-born are no younger than the first-born.”

I did not hide that fact that that argument shook me up.

“You’ll have to excuse me from saying any more regarding this mystery, because I don’t feel strong enough to answer you. I shall leave you to try to get the answer to this dilemma from our common mentor.”

Without waiting for him to reply, I went up to the room of that shrewd demon, and, without beating around the bush, I told him how I’d been contradicted on the question of the immortality of our souls, and this is how he answered me:

“My son, that hare-brained young fellow enjoyed persuading you that it makes no sense to believe in the immortality of the human soul because God would be unjust, he who is regarded as the common father of all beings, in having favored one species and generally consigned all the others to oblivion or to misfortune; therein his reasoning is a bit too clever. And although I could ask him how he knows that what seems just to us is also just to God, how he knows that God measures with our yardstick, how he knows that our laws and our customs, instituted as remedies for our disorders, serve as well to shape the elements of God’s limitless power, I shall
skip all those things and all the responses that your Holy Fathers have made on that subject, and I shall reveal to you a mystery that has not yet been uncovered.

You know, my son that from the earth a tree comes forth, from the tree a pig, from the pig a man. Are we therefore not justified in believing, since all things in nature tend towards the more perfect, that they aspire to become men, for that state of being is the realization of the finest and best conceived synthesis that exists in the world, the only one that forms a link between the beasts and the angels. One would have to be a pedant to deny that such metamorphoses occur.

Do we not see how an apple tree, with the heat of its sprouts acting like mouths, sucks up and digests the surrounding turf; how a pig devours the fruit so that it becomes a part of itself; and how a man eating the pig, gives heat to the dead flesh, makes it a part of himself, and brings that animal back to life in a higher species? So it is that the highest pontiff, whom you see with the miter on his head, was, not sixty years ago, but a clump of grass in my garden. To conclude, as God is the common father of all his creatures, if we presume that he loves them all equally, is it not plausible that, by this metempsychosis that makes more sense than Pythagorianism, after everything that feels, after everything that grows, after all matter passes through man, then the great Day of Judgment shall arrive when the secrets of the prophets’ philosophies shall be exposed.”

Very satisfied, I went back down to the garden and I began to repeat to my companion what our master had taught me, when the physiognomist arrived to take us to our meal and to our sleeping quarters. I shall omit the details, for I was fed and bedded down as on the previous day.

The next day, as soon as I was wakened, I went to get my antagonist out of bed.

“It’s as great a miracle,” said I as I approached him, “to find a mentality as strong as yours lost in sleep as to see fire without movement.”
He smiled at this dubious compliment.

“But,” he cried with anger as intense as love, will you ever desist from cluttering your mouth as well as your reason with such imaginary terms as miracles? You should know that such terms sully the name of philosophy. As the sage sees nothing in the world that he cannot conceive or that he judges not capable of conception, he must renounce the use of such expressions as miracles, marvels, unnatural happenings, that mindless people have invented to excuse the weaknesses of their brains.”

I then felt obliged in good conscience to speak up and disabuse him.

“Well,” I replied, “just because you don’t believe in miracles doesn’t mean they don’t happen, and often. I have seen some with my own eyes. I have known more than twenty sick people miraculously cured.”

“You may say,” he broke in, “that those people were cured by miracles, but what you do not know is that the power of the imagination is capable of combating all illnesses because of a certain natural balm running throughout our bodies that contains all the substances that are antidotes to every disease that can attacks us; and our imaginations, alerted by the pain, go looking wherever it is located for the specific remedy that fights the poison, and cures us. It is with that in mind that the most talented physician in our world advises the patient to get an ignorant doctor that he believes to be very skilled, rather than a very skilled doctor that he believes very ignorant, because he figures that our imaginations work to the benefit of our health, however little it is aided by nostrums, and can cure us; but even the most potent would be too weak if the imagination did not assist them! Does it not surprise you that the earliest people in your world lived for so many centuries without having any knowledge of medicine? Their constitutions were strong; that universal balm was not dissipated by the drugs that you are filled
with by your doctors. To regain their health they had only to wish it strongly and believe that they were getting better. Then their fancy, clear, vigorous, and unbending, would immerse itself into that vital oil, make it active when it was passive, and, almost in the blink of an eye, there they were, as healthy as ever. However, even today there still continue to be those astonishing cures, but the common folk attribute them to miracles.

As for me, I do not believe in them at all, and my reason is that it is easier for all those talkers to fool themselves than for them not to; and so I put it to them this way: ‘That feverish man who has just gotten better, while ill wished mightily, as could be expected, to find himself cured; he vowed it to be so. Now, it necessarily had to be that he would either die, remain ill, or be cured; if he died, one will say that God wished to compensate him for his suffering; or one will maliciously equivocate, saying that, because of his prayers, God rescued him from all his troubles; if he remained in his sickly state, one would have said that he lacked faith; but, because he has gotten well, it is an obvious miracle. Is it not altogether more likely that his imagination, energized by his powerful hopes for his health, was responsible for that outcome? Yet, though I hope that many of those good men get better with their prayers, how many more do we see who have died miserably with theirs?’"

“But all the same,” I replied, “if what you say about that balm is true, it’s a mark of the inherent rationality of our minds, for, even if we don’t resort to the tools of the mind, or empower ourselves with the help of our will power, it knows by itself, as if it were outside of us, to activate the passive. Therefore, if it thinks outside of us, it necessarily follows that it is spiritual; and if you admit it is spiritual, my conclusion is that it is immortal, for death happens to animals only through the bodily changes of which matter alone is capable.”
The young man, sitting upright on his bed and making me assume the same position, began a speech that went something like this:

“As for the soul of an animal, which is corporeal, I am not surprised that it dies, for it is probably just the harmony of the four elements, a force of the blood, an interaction of organs in perfect equilibrium; but what really surprises me is that ours, being non-corporeal, intellectual, and immortal, should be made to leave our bodies due to the same conditions that cause an ox’s to perish. Has it made a pact with our body, when it has a sword thrust into the heart, a lead bullet in the brain, a musket-shot through the body, to immediately abandon its riddled house? If so, it seems often to renege on its contract, for some people die of a wound from which others recover; one would suppose that each soul makes its own deal with its body. Really, as smart as it is, from what we’ve been told, it is terribly eager to leave a home when it sees that from then on it will have an apartment in hell set aside for it. And if that soul were spiritual, and therefore rational, as they say, as capable of thought when separated from our bodies as when housed in them, why would people who are born blind, with all the powers of that intellectual soul, not be able even to imagine what it means to see? Why do the deaf not hear anything? Is it because they are not yet deprived by death of all their senses? Come now! I would not be able to use my right hand because I also have a left? To prove that it could act without the senses, even though being spiritual, they cite the example of a painter who would be unable to produce a picture if he had no brushes. Yes, but that is not to say that the painter who cannot work without a brush, could do a better job if he had a brush but not his paint, his crayons, his canvas, and his paper. Certainly not! The more the obstacles there are that frustrate his work, the more impossible it will be for him to paint. Yet they claim that the soul, which can only act imperfectly because of the loss of one of its tools in the course of life, will be able to work to perfection when after
death it has lost them all. If they come to me harping on the notion that it does not need those
utensils to carry out its functions, I shall harp back at them that they should then flog the patients
of the Quinze-vingts Hospital for pretending to see nothing at all.”

“But,” said I, “if our souls died, as I clearly see that you choose to conclude, the Resurrection
that we look forward to could then be no more than a fantasy, for God would have to recreate
them, and so it would not be a resurrection.”

He interrupted me with a shrug:

my house-keeper resuscitated?”

“It’s not just a tale for amusement,” I retorted. “It’s an indubitable fact that I shall prove to
you.”

“And I,” said he, “shall prove you the opposite. To begin then, let us suppose that you were
eating a Mohammedan; you were changing him into yourself! Is it not true that when digested
that Mohammedan becomes a part of your flesh, a part of your body, a part of your sperm? You
have intercourse with your wife and from the semen all derived from the Mohammedan’s corpse
you mold a handsome, little Christian. I ask you: will the Mohammedan have his body?
Supposing the earth gives it back to him, the little Christian will no longer have his; God will
therefore be giving back to the Mohammedan only what the little Christian got from the
Mohammedan. Thus it is absolutely inevitable that one or the other will be without a body!
You will perhaps respond that God will recreate more matter to make the one who lacks it whole
again. All right, but another difficulty arises, which is that with the Mohammedan, who is
damned, being resuscitated, and with God furnishing him with a brand new body because his
was stolen by the Christian, the body by itself, just as the soul by itself, does not make a man, but
one and the other joined together do, for the body and soul are both equally integral parts of what is a man; thus if God contrives a body other than the one he had for the Mohammedan, it is no longer the same person. And so God is damning a man other than the one who belonged in hell, other than the one who lived in sin, other than the body that criminally abused all its faculties; and God, to punish that body, throws another to the fire, one that is chaste, one that is pure, and that has never lent its flesh and bones to the slightest criminal behavior. And what would be even more ridiculous is that that body would have merited heaven and hell at the same time; for, as a Mohammedan the man must be damned; as a Christian he must be saved; so that God could neither send him to heaven without committing an injustice, rewarding with glory the damnation that he had deserved, nor throw him down to hell without also committing an injustice, rewarding with eternal oblivion the consummate bliss he had merited as a Christian. It would therefore require, if he wished to be just, that he damn and bless that man eternally.”

I then spoke up:

“Well, I have nothing to say in reply to your sophistical arguments against the Resurrection, for God has affirmed it, God who cannot lie.”

“Not so fast,” he replied. “You are now giving me the “God said” line. You should first prove that there is a God, for I personally deny it flat out.”

“I shall not entertain myself by enumerating to you the evident proofs that philosophers have used to confirm it,” said I. “I would have to repeat everything that sensible men have ever written. I would just like to know what your problem is about believing it. I am certain that you are not able to provide a single one. Since it is impossible to derive anything but benefit from the idea, why not let yourself be persuaded? For if there is a God, besides the fact that in not
believing it you will be mistaken, you shall have disobeyed the precept that commands us to believe; and if there is none you will be no better off than we are!”

Oh yes,” he replied, “I shall be better off than you, for, if there is none, you and I shall be all even, and, on the other hand, if there is one I shall not have been able to offend what I did not think existed, for to sin one must either know it or intend it. Can you not see that a man, even minimally intelligent, would take no offense at being cursed by a thief if the thief did not realize that it was wrong, if he had taken him for someone else, or if had been the wine that had loosened his tongue? All the more reason to ask whether a completely unflinching God will get mad at us for not knowing him, for it is he, after all, who has not given us the means to do so. But honestly, my little critter, if the belief in God were so necessary for us, if we really needed it for eternal life, would God himself not have infused in all of us a luminosity as bright as the sun, which hides from no one? For to pretend that he has chosen to play a game of hide-and-seek with humanity, to behave like a child--“Peek-a-boo, I see you!’--in other words, one time hiding his face, disguising it for some people, and then exposing it to others, is to invent a God who is either simple-minded or malicious, seeing as how, if it is through my intellectual superiority that I have come to know him, he deserves the credit and not I, for he could just as easily have given me a soul or organs too feeble to recognize him. And consequently, if he had given me an intellect incapable of comprehending him, it would not have been my fault, but his, for he had it in his power to grant me one strong enough to know him.”

Such diabolical and ridiculous opinions caused a shudder to run through my whole body; I then began to examine this man with a little closer attention and I was flabbergasted to discover something frightful on his face that I had not noticed at all before then: his eyes were small and sunken, his complexion was swarthy, his mouth big, his chin hairy, his fingernails black. “Oh
"Lord!" thought I immediately. “The wretch is damned from this life on and may well be the Antichrist who is so frequently spoken of in our world.”

I did not, however, wish to expose my thought to him because of the esteem I had for his intellect, and, truly, the circumstances with which nature had favored him at birth made me feel some friendship towards him. Yet I could not contain myself enough to keep from bursting out in imprecations that warned him of a sorry end. But he, causing me greater anger, cried out, "Yes, by death . . .!“ I don’t know what he had intended to say, for, at that instant, there was a knock on the door of our room and I saw a big, hairy black man enter. He approached us and, seizing the blasphemer around the body, he carried him up the chimney.

The pity that I felt for that unfortunate soul impelled me to grab him in order to pull him from the clutches of the Ethiopian, but the latter was so powerful that he carried both of us up, so that in a twinkling we were both in the sky. It was no longer the love of one’s fellow-man that obliged me to hold on to him tightly, but the fear of falling. After I don’t know how many days we spent darting through the heavens without knowing what would happen to me, I could see that I was heading for our world. I could already distinguish Europe from Asia and Asia from Africa. My eyes were already unable, because of my descent, to see even beyond the span of Italy when my heart told me that this devil was probably carrying my host to hell, body and soul, and that it was probably for that reason that he was heading towards earth, since hell is in the center of it. However, I forgot about that and all that had happened to me since the devil had become our vehicle, with the fright I experienced at the sight of a flame-covered mountain that got nearer and nearer to me. The appearance of that fiery spectacle caused me to cry out, “Jesus and Mary!” I had barely finished the last syllable when I found myself stretched out in the heather at the crest of a small hill, with two or three shepherds around me reciting litanies and
speaking Italian to me. “Oh!” I then shouted. “Praise God! I have finally found Christians in the world of the moon. Say! Tell me, my friends, in which province of your world am I now?” “In Italy,” they replied. “How’s that?” I interjected. “Is there also an Italy in the world of the moon?” I had as yet so little reflected on this fortuitous occurrence that I was not even conscious of the fact that they were speaking Italian to me and that I was answering likewise.

And so, when I was finally set straight and when I was no longer unable to appreciate the fact that I was back in this world, I let myself be led wherever those peasants wanted to go with me. But I had not even reached the gates of . . . when all the dogs in the town set upon me, and, if I had not dashed into a house where I could bar the door between us I would surely have been devoured.

A quarter of an hour later, as I was resting in that place of refuge, I began to hear what sounded to me like an uproar of all the dogs in the kingdom; they could all be seen, from mastiffs to lap-dogs, howling with a more frightful fury than if they had been celebrating the anniversary of their first Adam.

That adventure caused no little awe in all the people who saw it; but as soon as I had begun to think about that situation, it occurred to me that those animals were after me because of the world from which I had come, for, said I to myself, as they are in the habit of barking at the moon in the distress that it causes them from afar, they probably wanted to throw themselves on me because they were probably disturbed by the smell of the moon that was still on me.

To purge myself of that foul air, I lay naked in the sun on a terrace. I toasted myself there for four or five full hours, at the end of which I came down, and the dogs, no longer sensing the odor that had made me their enemy, returned one by one to their homes.
I inquired at the port when a vessel would be leaving for France and, when I was on board, my mind could entertain no other thoughts than reflections on the wonders of my journey. I marveled a thousand times at God’s providence, which had isolated those inherently ungodly men in a place where they could not corrupt those he cherished, and had punished them for their pride by leaving them to their own devices. I have no doubt also that he put off till now sending anyone to preach the gospel to them, because he knew that they would respond to it abusively and that their resistance would only make them merit an even harsher punishment in the other world.
Notes

1. Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), Italian mathematician, philosopher, and alchemist. He was the author of *De Subtilitatum Rerum* (1551) and *De Rerum Varietate* (1557).

2. New France was founded by Samuel Champlain at what is now the city of Quebec on July 3, 1608.


4. Abbé Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655), French mathematician and philosopher, famous for his rejection of Aristotelian physics in favor of Epicurean atomistic materialism, which he tried to reconcile with Christianity. Cyrano became his disciple.

5. Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), Italian naturalistic philosopher and empiricist, imprisoned for twenty-seven years for heresy. His *primalities* anticipated Descartes and influenced Cyrano’s doctrine of the power of mind, manifested especially in his *Empires of the Sun*. His *Civitas Solis* (1623) proposed a communist-type utopian society.

6. François de La Mothe-le-Vayer (1588-1672), a notorious skeptic and friend of Gassendi.

7. François Tristan l’Hermite (1601-1655), tragedian, novelist, poet, and freethinker exiled from France.

8. *The Comic Story of Francion* (1623) by Charles Sorel 1597-1674) was a French burlesque novel with strongly naturalistic, philosophic overtones.
9. Cyrano is not always consistent in his use of capitalization. In an earlier reference to her he did not capitalize “queen,” although it may have been a printer’s error in the edition I used; and he capitalized “king,” but not “prince.”

10. This Spanish salutation contains a misspelling: *mercede* for *merced*. The salutation may be translated as “At your service, sir.” The Spaniard, a character that Cyrano borrowed from Bishop Francis Godwin’s earlier work *The Man in the Moone* (1638), was named Domingo Gonsales. Cyrano was fascinated by it and it possibly gave him the idea for this book.

11. An oracle had foretold that whoever would untie the Gordian knot would be master of all of Asia. Alexander cut it.

12. This is the theory of spontaneous generation that was embraced by Christian philosophers, based on Aristotle’s synthesis of a belief that held sway for two millennia until disproved by Louis Pasteur in the 19th century.

13. The myth of Prometheus tells of his stealing or extracting fire belonging to the gods for the benefit of mankind, after making a man and woman out of earth and water.

14. In France the Estates General, convened the first time in 1302 by King Philip IV, represented the three governing orders: the clergy, the nobility, and the bourgeoisie.

15. The term “philosophy,” in Cyrano’s day, could signify either what we call philosophy or what we call science today.

16. A card game.

17. This is a play on the expression *faire amende honorable*, a sentence imposed by French courts before the French Revolution. It involved a public confession of error, usually
imposed for opinions contrary to Church doctrine. In Italy Galileo had recently been
forced to recant publicly.

18. Diogenes (412-323 B.C.), the legendary Greek Cynic philosopher, reputed to have
withdrawn from society to live in poverty under a tub, took as a lover the Sicilian-born
courtesan Laïs. He was believed to have a foul-smelling breath of carrots.

19. I am puzzled by this assertion by the demon, for in the King James and Douay Bibles,
one of which Cyrano must have seen, the creation of plants preceded that of man.

20. Cyrano jokingly invents the word *cironalité* from *cirons* or scabies in English.

21. This and *Voyage to the Moon* are the two parts of a larger work of fiction by him
entitled (*L’Autre Monde (The Other World)*).

22. Note the similarity of this argument to Pascal’s famous “wager,” written more than ten
years later in his *Pensées (Reflections)*.
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1. French Text

Cyrano de Betrgerac, Savinien de, *Voyage dans la lune*, «Introduction» by Maurice Laugaa.

2. Other References


3. Referenced Translation

Leon Schwartz was born in Boston in 1922 where he lived for three years, then in New York for five years, and in Rhode Island for ten years. He was interested in languages at an early age and he studied Latin, French, and German in high school and French in college, practicing to speak that language with his French-Canadian neighbors. After two years at Providence College he accompanied his parents to Los Angeles, California, intending to continue his studies at the University of California, but World War II temporarily derailed his plans and, after enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Force, he was assigned to the 100th Bomb Group of the 8th Air Force in England, flying thirty-five missions as the navigator of a Flying Fortress. At war’s end he finally enrolled at UCLA, being awarded the bachelor of arts degree in French in spring 1948. He then went to France, studied at the Sorbonne until the end of winter 1949, and remained in France, where he was married, until the summer. Back in the U.S., he earned a teaching credential and a master’s degree in French, then taught for eight years in public schools while he worked on a doctor’s degree at the University of Southern California. In 1959 he was hired to teach French language and Literature at what was then Los Angeles State College, later renamed California State University, Los Angeles. He was a full-time professor until 1987 and a part-time emeritus professor until 2003, specializing in the French writers of the Enlightenment as well as in French poetry.


He is married with a son in Paris, a daughter in Maryland, and five granddaughters and a step-granddaughter scattered from California to France.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the memories of my parents Celia and Charles Schwartz and my dear wife Jeanne’s parents Rose and Maurice Gurtat, who taught us both that a life is worth living only if we make an effort to do some good for others.

L.S., Altadena, California