

By E. M. Cioran:

Anathemas and Admirations
Drawn and Quartered
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HISTORY

AND

UTOPIA

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Mechanism of Utopia

Whenever I happen to be in a city of any size, I marvel that riots do not break out every day: massacres, unspeakable carnage, a doomsday chaos. How can so many human beings coexist in a space so confined without destroying each other, without hating each other *to death*? As a matter of fact, they do hate each other, but they are not equal to their hatred. And it is this mediocrity, this impotence, that saves society, that assures its continuance, its stability. Occasionally some shock occurs by which our instincts profit; but afterward we go on looking each other in the face as if nothing had happened, cohabiting without too obviously tearing each other to shreds. Order is restored, a ferocious calm as dreadful, ultimately, as the frenzy that had interrupted it.

Yet I marvel still more that some of us, society being what it is, have ventured to conceive another one altogether—a different society. What can be the cause of so much naïveté, or of so much inanity? If the question is normal enough, even ordinary, the curiosity that led me to ask it, on the other hand, has the excuse of being morbid.

Seeking new evidence, and just as I despaired of finding anything of the kind, it occurred to me to consult utopian literature, to steep myself in its “masterpieces,” to *wallow*

in them. There, to my great delight, I sated my penitential longings, my appetite for mortification. To spend months recording the dreams of a better future, of an “ideal” society, devouring the unreadable—what a windfall! I hasten to add that this tedious literature has much to teach, and that time spent frequenting it is not entirely wasted. From the start, one discerns in it the (fruitful or calamitous) role taken, in the genesis of events, not by happiness but by the *idea* of happiness, an idea that explains—the Age of Iron being coextensive with history—why each epoch so eagerly invokes the Age of Gold. Suppose we put an end to such speculations: total stagnation would ensue. For we *act* only under the fascination of the impossible: which is to say that a society incapable of generating—and of dedicating itself to—a utopia is threatened with sclerosis and collapse. Wisdom—fascinated by nothing—recommends an existing, a *given* happiness, which man rejects, and by this very rejection becomes a historical animal, that is, a devotee of *imagined* happiness.

“A new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away,” we read in Revelations. Cross out “heaven,” just keep the “new earth,” and you have the secret and the recipe of all utopian systems; for greater precision, perhaps you should put “city” for “earth”; but that is only a detail; what counts is the prospect of a new advent, the fever of an essential expectation—a debased, modernized Parousia from which arise those systems so dear to the disinherited. Poverty is in fact the utopianist’s great auxiliary, it is the matter he works in, the substance on which he feeds his thoughts, the providence of his obsessions. Without poverty he would be empty; but poverty

occupies him, allures or embarrasses him, depending on whether he is poor or rich; from another point of view, poverty cannot do without him—it needs this theoretician, this adept of the future, especially since poverty itself, that endless meditation on the likelihood of escaping its own present, would hardly endure its dreariness without the obsession of *another* earth. Can you doubt it? If so, it is because you have not tasted utter indigence. Do so and you will see that the more destitute you are, the more time and energy you will spend in reforming everything, in thinking—in other words, in vain. I have in mind not only institutions, human creations: those of course you will condemn straight off and without appeal; but objects, all objects, however insignificant. Unable to accept them as they are, you will want to impose your laws and your whims upon them, to function at their expense as legislator or as tyrant; you will even want to intervene in the life of elements in order to modify their physiognomy, their structure. Air annoys you: let it be transformed! And stone as well. And the same for the vegetal world, the same for man. Down past the foundations of being, down to the strata of chaos, descend, install yourself there! When you haven't a penny in your pocket, you strive, you dream, how extravagantly you labor to possess All, and as long as the frenzy lasts, you do possess that All, you equal God, though no one realizes it, not even God, not even you. The delirium of the poor is the generator of events, the source of history: a throng of hysterics who want another world, here and now. It is they who inspire utopias, it is for them that utopias are written. But *utopia*, let us remember, means *nowhere*.

And *where* would these cities be that evil never touches, in which labor is blessed and death is never feared? There

one is constrained to a felicity of geometric idylls, of adjusted ecstasies, of a thousand disgusting wonders necessarily offered by the spectacle of a *perfect* world, a fabricated world. In ludicrous detail, Campanella tells us about the Solarians exempt from "gout, rheumatism, catarrh, sciatica, colic, hydropsy flatus. . . ." Everything abounds in the *City of the Sun* "because each man is eager to distinguish himself in what he does. The leader who presides over each thing is called: *King*. . . Women and men, divided into bands, go about their work without ever infringing the orders of their *kings*, and without ever appearing fatigued, as we do. They regard their leaders as fathers or as older brothers." We shall recognize the same twaddle in other works of the genre, particularly in those of a Cabet, a Fourier, or a Morris, all lacking in that touch of rancor so necessary to literary works, and not only those.

To conceive a *true* utopia, to sketch, with conviction, the structure of an ideal society, requires a certain dose of ingenuousness, even of stupidity, which, being too evident, ultimately exasperates the reader. The only readable utopias are the false ones, the ones that, written in a spirit of entertainment or misanthropy, prefigure or recall *Gulliver's Travels*, that Bible of the disabused, quintessence of non-chimerical visions, a utopia *without hope*. By his sarcasms, Swift undeceived a genre to the point of destroying it.

Is it easier to confect a utopia than an apocalypse? Both have their principles and their stereotypes. The former, whose clichés are closer to our deepest instincts, has given rise to a much more abundant literature than the latter. Not everyone can reckon with a cosmic catastrophe or love the language and the style with which it is heralded and proclaimed.

But he who acknowledges and applauds such an idea will read, in the Gospels, with all the enthusiasm of vice, the figures and banalities that will prosper on Patmos: "The stars of heaven shall fall unto the earth, and the moon become as blood . . . all the tribes of the earth shall lament . . . nor shall this generation perish before all these things are come to pass." This presentiment of the incredible, of a capital event, this crucial expectation can turn into an illusion, which will be the hope of a paradise on earth or elsewhere; or else it can turn into anxiety, and this will be the vision of an ideal Worst, a voluptuously dreaded cataclysm.

"And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations." Conventions of horror, routine procedures. Saint John had to go in for them, once he opted for that splendid gibberish, that procession of downfalls preferable, all things considered, to the descriptions of cities and islands where you are smothered by an impersonal bliss, where "universal harmony" crushes you in its embrace. The dreams of utopia have for the most part been realized, but in an entirely different spirit from the one in which they had been conceived; what was perfection for utopia is for us a flaw; its chimeras are our disasters. The type of society conceived by utopia in a lyrical tonality seems to us, in operation, intolerable. Judge from the following sample of Caber's *Voyage en Icarie*: "Two-thousand five-hundred young women (dressmakers) work in a factory, some sitting, some standing, almost all charming. . . . The rule that each worker produces the same object doubles the rapidity of the manufacture and brings it to perfection as well. Thousands of items of the most elegant headware are created each morning by the hands of these lovely workers." Such lucubrations proceed from mental debility or bad taste. And yet Caber

has, in material terms, seen quite accurately; he is mistaken only with regard to the essential. Utterly uninstructed as to the interval that separates *being* and *producing* (we exist, in the full sense of the word, only outside of what we do, only beyond our actions), he could not discern the fatality attached to every form of labor, artisanal, industrial, or otherwise. What is most striking in utopian narratives is the absence of perspicacity, of psychological instinct. Their characters are automatons, fictions or symbols: none is real, none exceeds its puppet status, an idea lost in a universe without reference points. Even the children become unrecognizable. In Fourier's "societary state," they are so pure that they are utterly unaware of the temptation to steal, to "pick an apple off a tree." But a child who does not steal is not a child. What is the use of creating a society of marionettes? I recommend the description of the phalanstery as the most effective vomitive I know.

Placed at the antipodes of a La Rochefoucauld, the inventor of utopias is a moralist who perceives in us only disinterest, craving for sacrifice, self-effacement. Bloodless, perfect, and nil, thunderstruck by Good, stripped of sins and vices, with neither depth nor contour, utterly uninitiated into existence, into the art of embarrassment, of varying one's shames and torments, such men never suspect the pleasure that our neighbor's despair provokes in us, the impatience with which we anticipate and follow his downfall. This impatience and this pleasure can, on occasion, proceed from a proper curiosity, with nothing diabolical about it. As long as someone rises in the world, we do not know who he is, for—his ascent distancing him from himself—he lacks reality, he does not exist. Similarly, we know ourselves only from the moment when we begin to fail, when any success,

on the level of human interests, turns out to be impossible: a perspicuous defeat by which, taking possession of our own being, we stand apart from the universal torpor. The better to grasp your own collapse or another's, you must pass through evil and, if need be, plunge deep within it: how manage this in those islands and cities from which it is excluded by principle, by *raison d'état*? Here all shadows are forbidden; only light is admitted. No trace of dualism: utopia is by essence anti-Manichean. Hostile to anomaly, to deformity, to irregularity, it tends to the affirmation of the homogeneous, of the typical, of repetition and orthodoxy. But life is rupture, heresy, derogation from the norms of matter. And man, in relation to life, is heresy to the second degree, victory of the individual, of whim, aberrant apparition, a schismatic animal that society—the totality of sleeping monsters—seeks to recall to the *straight and narrow path*. Heretic par excellence, the wakened monster, an incarnate solitude, infraction of the universal order, delights in his exception, isolates himself in his onerous privileges, and it is in *duration* that he pays for what he gains over his “kind”: the more he distinguishes himself from them, the more dangerous and simultaneously the more fragile he will be, for it is at the cost of his longevity that he disturbs the others' peace and that he creates for himself, there in the heart of the city, an *undesirable* standing.

“Our hopes for the future state of the human race can be reduced to these three important points: the destruction of inequality among nations, the progress of equality within one and the same people, and finally the perfecting of humanity.” (Condorcet)

Committed to the description of *real* cities, history, which

always and everywhere asseverates the failure rather than the fulfillment of our hopes, has ratified none of these forecasts. For a Tacitus, there is no *ideal* Rome.

By banishing the irrational and the irreparable, utopia further sets itself against tragedy, paroxysm and quintessence of history. In a perfect city, all conflict would cease; human wills would be throttled, mollified, or rendered miraculously convergent; here would reign only unity, without the ingredient of chance or contradiction. Utopia is a mixture of childish rationalism and secularized angelism.

We are submerged in evil. Not that all our actions are bad; but, when we happen to commit *good* ones, we suffer from them, for having thwarted our spontaneous impulses: the practice of virtue comes down to an exercise of penitence, an apprenticeship to maceration. Fallen angel transformed into a demiurge assigned to Creation, Satan rebels against God and reveals himself, here below, more at ease and even more powerful than He; far from being a usurper, he is our master, a legitimate sovereign who would prevail over the Most High, if the universe were reduced to man. So let us have the courage to acknowledge whom we are responsible to.

The great religions have not been deceived: what Mara offers to Buddha, Ahriman to Zoroaster, the Tempter to Jesus, is the earth and supremacy over the earth, realities well within the power of the Prince of this world. And we are playing his game, cooperating in his enterprise and fulfilling it when we seek to establish a new realm, a generalized utopia or a universal empire, for what he craves above all is that we embroil ourselves with him and that upon his contact we turn away from the light, from the regret for our old felicity.

Closed for five thousand years, paradise was reopened, according to Saint John Chrysostom, at the moment when Christ expired; the thief could enter it now, followed by Adam, repatriated at last, and by a limited number of the Just who were vegetating in the infernal regions, waiting for "the hour of redemption."

Everything suggests that paradise has been bolted shut again and that it will remain so for a long time to come. No one can force an entrance there: the few privileged characters enjoying the place have doubtless barricaded themselves inside, according to a system whose wonders they could observe on earth. This paradise has a look of being the real one: in the depths of our prostrations we dream of it and in it long to dissolve. A sudden impulse leads us to it, and we plunge in: do we seek to regain, in a moment, what we have lost forever—suddenly to make up for the sin of being born? Nothing shows more clearly the metaphysical meaning of our nostalgia than its incapacity to coincide with any moment of time whatever; hence it seeks consolation in a remote, immemorial past refractory to the centuries and somehow anterior to becoming. The evil from which our nostalgia suffers—effect of a rupture that dates back to the beginnings—keeps it from projecting the Age of Gold into the future; the golden age it conceives quite naturally is the old one, the primordial one to which it aspires less for pleasure's sake than to swoon there, to lay down the burden of consciousness. If we return to the source of all seasons, of time itself, it is to rediscover the true paradise there, object of all our regrets. On the other hand, the nostalgia from which the earthly paradise derives will be minus precisely the dimension of regret: a nostalgia reversed, falsified, and vitiated, straining toward the future,

obnubilated by "progress," a temporal rejoinder, a jeering metamorphosis of the original paradise. Contagion? Automatism? This metamorphosis has ultimately come to pass within each of us. Willy-nilly we bet on the future, make it into a panacea, and identifying it with the appearance of an altogether *different time* within time, we consider it as an inexhaustible and yet completed duration, a *timeless history*. A contradiction in terms, inherent in the hope of a new kingdom, of a victory of the unsolvable at the heart of becoming. Our dreams of a better world are based on a theoretical impossibility. Hardly surprising if, in order to justify them, we must resort to *solid* paradoxes!

As long as Christianity satisfied men's minds, utopia could not seduce them; once Christianity began to disappoint them, utopia sought to conquer them and to establish itself there. It was already hard at work during the Renaissance, but was not to succeed until two centuries later, in an age of "enlightened" superstitions. Thus was born the Future, vision of an irrevocable happiness, of a maneuvered paradise in which chance has no place, in which the merest fantasy seems like a heresy or a provocation. To describe such a thing would be to enter into the details of the unimaginable. The very notion of an ideal city is a torment to reason, an enterprise that does honor to the heart and disqualifies the intellect. (How could a Plato condescend to such a thing? He is the ancestor, I was forgetting, of all these aberrations, revived and aggravated by Thomas More, the *founder* of modern illusions.) To construct a society where, according to a terrifying ceremony, our acts are catalogued and regulated, where, by a charity carried to the point of indecency, our innermost thoughts are inspected, is to transfer the

pangs of hell to the Age of Gold, or to create, with the devil's help, a philanthropic institution. Solarians, Utopians, Harmonians—their hideous names resemble their fate, a nightmare promised to us as well, since we ourselves have erected it into an ideal.

In preaching the advantages of labor, utopias would take the opposite tack from Genesis. On this point especially, they are the expression of a humanity engulfed in toil, proud of conniving with the consequences of the Fall, of which the gravest remains the obsession with profit. The stigmata of a race that cherishes "the sweat of the brow" and makes it a sign of nobility, that labors *exultantly*—these we bear with pride and ostentation; whence the horror inspired in us, reprobates as we are, by the elect who refuse to toil or to excel in any realm whatever. The refusal we reproach them for is one that only the man who preserves the memory of an immemorial happiness is capable of. Alienated among his kind, he is like them and yet cannot communicate with them; whichever way he looks, he does not feel he is *from hereabouts*; whatever he discerns seems to him a usurpation: the very fact of bearing a name . . . His enterprises fail, he ventures upon them without believing in them: simulacra from which the *precise* image of another world alienates him. Man, once expelled from paradise, in order not to think about it anymore, in order not to suffer from it, is given in compensation the faculty of will, of aspiring to action, of foundering there with enthusiasm, with brio. . . . But the abulic, in his detachment, in his supernatural marasmus—what effort can he make, to what goal can he abandon himself? Nothing induces him to emerge from his . . . absence. And yet he himself does not entirely escape the common curse: he *exhausts himself* in a regret and expends on it more energy than we deploy in all our exploits.

When Christ promised that the "kingdom of God" was neither "here" nor "there," but within us, he doomed in advance the utopian constructions for which any "kingdom" is necessarily *exterior*, with no relation to our inmost self or our individual salvation. So deeply have utopias marked us, that it is from outside, from the course of events or from the progress of collectivities that we await our deliverance. Thus was devised the Meaning of history, whose vogue would supplant that of Progress, without adding anything new to it. Yet it was necessary to shelve not a concept, but one of its verbal translations, which had been abused. In ideological matters, we are not easily renewed without the help of synonyms.

Various as are its disguises, the notion of perfectibility has made its way into our manners: to it subscribes even the man who questions it. That history just unfolds, independently of a specified direction, of a goal, no one is willing to admit. "A Goal—surely it has one, races toward it, has all but reached it," proclaim our doctrines and our desires. The more heavily an idea is burdened with immediate promises, the greater likelihood it has of triumphing. Unable to find "the kingdom of God" within themselves, or rather too cunning to want to seek it there, Christians placed it in the course of events—in becoming: they perverted a teaching in order to ensure its success. Furthermore, Christ himself sustained the ambiguity; on one hand, answering the insinuations of the Pharisees, he recommended an interior kingdom, remote from time; and on the other he signified to his disciples that, salvation being imminent, they and the "present generation" would witness the consummation of all things. Having understood that human beings accept martyrdom for a chimera but not for a truth, he came to terms with their weakness. Had he acted otherwise, he would have

compromised his work. But what in him was concession or tactic is in the utopianists postulate or passion.

A great step forward was made the day men understood that, in order to torment one another more effectively, they would have to gather together, to organize themselves into a society. If we are to believe the utopias, they succeeded in doing so only by halves; the utopias therefore offer to help them, to furnish them a context appropriate to the exercise of a complete happiness, while requiring, in return, that men abdicate their freedom or, if they retain it, that they use it solely to proclaim their joy amid the sufferings they inflict upon each other. Such seems the meaning of the infernal solicitude the utopias show toward men. Under these conditions, how can we fail to envisage a reverse utopia, a liquidation of the infinitesimal good and the enormous evil attached to the existence of any social order whatever? The project is alluring, the temptation irresistible. How put an end to so vast an amount of anomalies? It would require something comparable to the *universal dissolvent* sought by the alchemists and whose efficacy would be tested not on metals but on institutions. Until the formula is found, let us note in passing that in their positive aspects, alchemy and utopia coincide: pursuing, in heterogeneous realms, a dream of transmutation that is related if not identical, one attacks the irreducible in nature, the other the irreducible in history. And it is from one and the same spiritual vice, or from one and the same hope, that the elixir of life and the ideal city derive.

Just as a nation, in order to set itself apart from the others, in order to humiliate and overwhelm them, or simply in order to acquire a unique physiognomy, needs an extrava-

gant idea to guide it, to propose goals incommensurable with its real capacities, so a society evolves and asserts itself only if ideals are suggested to it, or inculcated in it, out of all proportion to what it is. Utopia fulfills, in the life of collectivities, the function assigned to the notion of "mission" in the life of peoples. Hence ideologies are the by-product and, in a sense, the vulgar expression of messianic or utopian visions.

In itself an ideology is neither good nor bad. Everything depends on the moment when it is adopted. Communism, for example, acts upon a virile nation like a stimulant; it impels it onward and favors its expansion; on a tottering nation, its influence may be less happy. Neither true nor false, it precipitates matters, and it is not *because* of it but *through* it that Russia acquired its present vigor. Would it play the same part, once established throughout the rest of Europe? Would it be a principle of renewal? One would like to hope so; in any case, the question admits of only an indirect, an arbitrary answer, inspired by analogies of a historical order. Let us reflect upon the effects of Christianity at its beginnings: it delivered a fatal blow to ancient society, paralyzed it, finished it off; on the other hand, it was a blessing to the Barbarians, whose instincts were enhanced upon contact. Far from regenerating a decrepit world, it regenerated only the regenerated. In the same fashion, communism will bring about, *in the immediate future*, the salvation of only those who are already saved; it cannot provide a concrete hope to the moribund, still less can it reanimate corpses.

After having denounced the absurdities of utopia, let us deal with its merits, and, since men accommodate social arrangements so well and scarcely distinguish from them the

evils immanent within them, let us do as they do, let us unite ourselves with their unconsciousness.

We shall never praise the utopias sufficiently for having denounced the crimes of ownership, the horror property represents, the calamities it causes. Great or small, the owner is corrupted, sullied in his essence: his corruption is projected onto the merest object he touches or appropriates. Whether his "fortune" is threatened or stripped from him, he will be compelled to a consciousness of which he is normally incapable. In order to reassume a human appearance, in order to regain his "soul," he must be ruined and must consent to his ruin. In this, the revolution will help him. By restoring him to his primal nakedness, it annihilates him in the immediate future and saves him in the absolute, for it liberates—inwardly, it is understood—those whom it strikes first: the haves; it *reclassifies* them, it restores to them their former dimension and leads them back to the values they have betrayed. But even before having the means or the occasion to strike them, the revolution sustains in them a salutary fear: it troubles their sleep, nourishes their nightmares, and nightmare is the beginning of a metaphysical awakening. Hence it is as an agent of destruction that the revolution is seen to be useful; however deadly, one thing always redeems it: it alone knows what kind of terror to use in order to shake up this world of owners, the cruelest of all possible worlds. Every form of possession, let us not hesitate to insist, degrades, debases, flatters the monster sleeping deep within each of us. To own even a broom, to count anything at all as *our* property, is to participate in the general infamy. What pride to discover that nothing belongs to you—what a revelation! You took yourself for the last of men, and now, suddenly, astonished and virtually en-

lightened by your destitution, you no longer suffer from it; quite the contrary, you pride yourself in it. And all you still desire is to be as indigent as a saint or a madman.

When we are exasperated by traditional values, we necessarily orient ourselves toward the ideology that denies them. And it is by its force of negation that utopia seduces, much more than by its positive formulas. To desire the overthrow of the social order is to pass through a crisis more or less marked by communist themes. This is true today, as it was true yesterday and will be true even tomorrow. Everything suggests that, since the Renaissance, men's minds have been attracted on the surface by liberalism, and in depth by communism, which, far from being a product of circumstances, a historical accident, is the heir of utopian systems and the beneficiary of a long subterranean labor; initially a caprice or a schism, it was ultimately to assume the character of a destiny and an orthodoxy. At the present time, our consciousness can waken to only two forms of revolt: communist and anticommunist. Yet how can we fail to realize that anticommunism is equivalent to a furious, horrified faith in the future of communism?

When an ideology's moment has come, everything contributes to its success, even its enemies; neither polemics nor police can check its expansion or delay its success; it seeks, and it is able, to realize itself, to incarnate itself; but the better it succeeds, the greater risk it runs of exhausting itself; once established, it will be drained of its ideal content, will extenuate its resources, compromising the promises of salvation it possessed, only to degenerate at the end into a bugbear or humbug.

The career reserved for communism depends on the rate

at which it expends its utopian reserves. So long as it possesses them, it will inevitably tempt all societies that have not experienced such a thing; retreating here, advancing there, invested with virtues no other ideology possesses, it will circle the earth, replacing defunct or declining religions, and everywhere offering the modern crowd an absolute worthy of its nothingness.

Considered in itself, communism appears as the only reality to which one might still subscribe, if one harbors even a wisp of illusion as to the future: this is why, to various degrees, we are all communists. . . . But is it not a sterile speculation to judge a doctrine apart from the anomalies inherent in its practical realization? Man will always anticipate the advent of justice; for justice to triumph, he will renounce freedom, which he will afterward regret. Whatever he undertakes, this impasse haunts his actions and his thoughts, as if it were not its final term but its point of departure, its condition, and its key. No new social form is in a position to safeguard the advantages of the old: a virtually equal amount of disadvantages is encountered in all types of society. A cursed equilibrium, an irremediable stagnation, from which individuals and collectivities suffer alike. Theories can do nothing about it, the depths of history being impermeable to the doctrines that mark its appearance. The Christian era was quite a different thing from Christianity; the communist era, in its turn, cannot evoke communism as such. There exists no event that is naturally Christian, or naturally communist.

If utopia was illusion hypostasized, communism, going still further, will be illusion decreed, imposed: a challenge to the omnipresence of evil, an *obligatory* optimism. A man will

find it hard to accommodate himself to it if he lives, by dint of ordeals and experiments, in the intoxication of disappointment and if, like the author of Genesis, he is reluctant to identify the Age of Gold with the future, with becoming. Not that he scorns the fanatics of "infinite progress" and their efforts to make justice prevail here on earth; but he knows, to his misery, that justice is a material impossibility, a grandiose meaninglessness, the only ideal about which we can declare quite certainly that it will never be realized, and against which nature and society seem to have mobilized all their laws.

These factions, these conflicts are not uniquely those of a solitary. With more or less intensity, we too endure them, all the rest of us: are we not at the point of longing for the destruction of this very society, even while knowing the misadventures reserved for us by the one that will replace it? A total overthrow, however useless, a revolution *without faith* is all we can still hope for from a period in which no one is sufficiently honest to be a true revolutionary. When, tormented by the frenzy of the intellect, we give ourselves up to that of chaos, we react like a madman in possession of his faculties, a lunatic superior to his lunacy, or like a god who, in a fit of lucid rage, delights in pulverizing his work and his being.

Our dreams of the future are henceforth inseparable from our fears. Utopian literature, at its beginnings, rebelled against the Middle Ages, against the high esteem in which they held Hell and against the taste they professed for doomsday visions. It seems as if the reassuring systems of a Campanella or a More were conceived with the sole purpose of discrediting the hallucinations of a Saint Hildegard. Today, reconciled with the terrible, we are seeing a contamination

of utopia by apocalypse: the heralded "new earth" increasingly assumes the aspect of a new Hell. But this Hell is one we are waiting for, we even make it a duty to precipitate its advent. The two genres, utopian and apocalyptic, which once seemed so dissimilar to us, interpenetrate, rub off on each other, to form a third, wonderfully apt to reflect the kind of reality that threatens us and to which we shall nonetheless assent with a correct and disabused yes. That will be our way of being *irreproachable* in the face of fatality.

The Golden Age



I

"In those days, men lived like gods, free of care, knowing neither labor nor pain. Old age and its miseries never visited them, and retaining the strength of their hands and limbs as long as they lived, they feasted in delight, shielded from all harm. Men died as if they fell asleep, overcome by no more than drowsiness. Every good was theirs; the fertile land afforded plentiful nourishment of itself, and men ate and drank at their pleasure. . . ."

Hesiod's portrait of the golden age matches that of the biblical Eden. One is as conventional as the other: unreality cannot be dramatic. At least they share the merit of defining the image of a static world where identity ceaselessly contemplates itself, ruled by an eternal present, that tense common to all visions of paradise, a time forged in opposition to the very idea of time. In order to conceive and aspire to it, we must execrate all becoming, having endured its weight, its calamity; we must long to wrest ourselves free of it at any cost. This longing is the only one a feeble will is capable of, a will eager to rest, to dissolve . . . elsewhere. Had we adhered without reservation to the eternal present, history