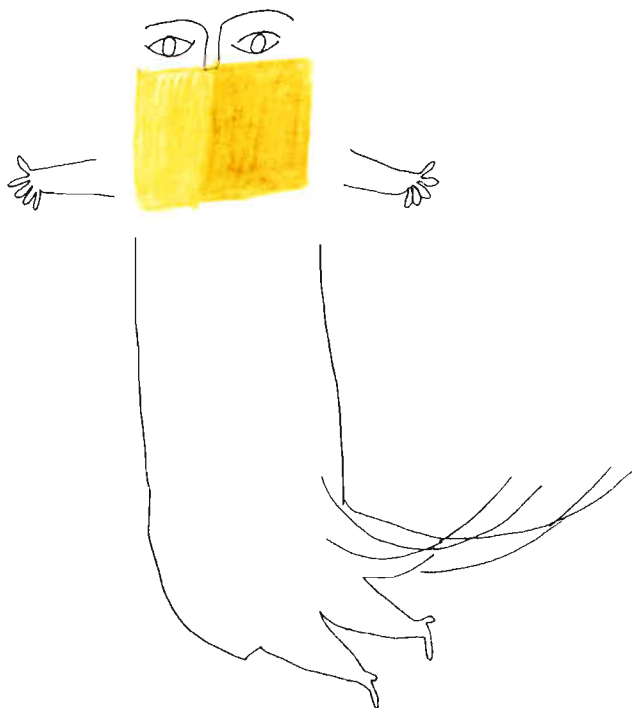


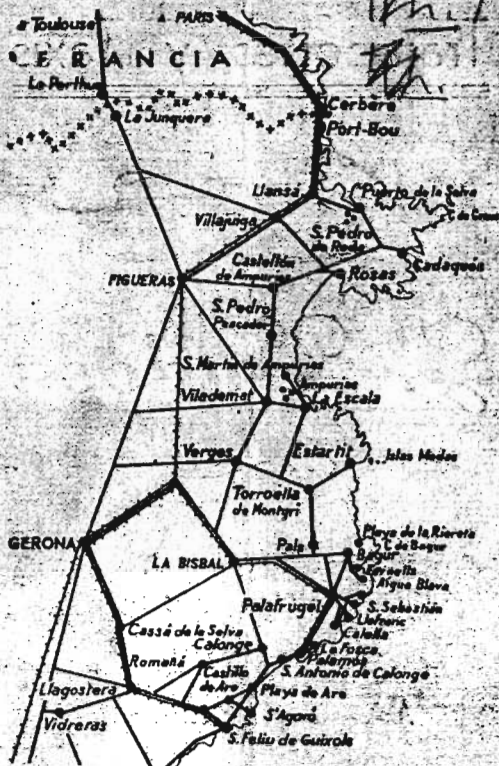
# Cadaquès



**Franciszka Themerson**

**Stefan Themerson**

**Cadaquès**



## Port-Bou - San Feliu de Guixols

(por la COSTA BRAVA)

Población	Dist. parcial Kms.	Dist. total Kms.
Port-Bou	—	—
Liansá	14	14
Puerto de la Selva	9	23
Cadaqués	13	36
Rosas	17	53
Castellón de Ampurias	10	63
San Pedro Pescador	8,5	71,5
Armentera	2,5	74
Empalme carretera a Figueras	4,5	78,5
La Escala	4,5	83
Torroella de Montgrí	13	96
Pals	8	104
Palafrugell	8	112
Palamós	9	121
S'Agaró	11	132
San Feliu de Guixols	2	134

# **Cadaquès**

**Franciszka Themerson, drawings  
Stefan Themerson, text**

**Introduction by Nick Wadley**

**Obscure Publications ■ 2010**



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## **Franciszka Themerson, the Cadaquès sketchbook, May 1957**

These lyrical and entertaining drawings are on the 18 surviving pages of a sketchbook which Franciszka Themerson used during five days that she and Stefan spent in Port Bou and Cadaquès, May 1957. Although there are a few other drawings which are possible to connect to visits she made during her long working life, this book was alone among the papers of her estate in being preserved as a more-or-less intact account of a time and place. Its rarity is significant.

The mood of the images is unlike any of the many other series in her prolific drawn oeuvre, and the manner of their drawing is strikingly different from what came immediately before and afterwards. It's partly a matter of the medium. She didn't normally use coloured crayons (not again, significantly, until some very different, much larger, abstract drawings of the late 1970s). Of course it's a convenient medium for a painter to use on the road: maybe she even bought the crayons there? The particular way she floats coloured shapes around and among the line drawings in this book has a poetry that's distinct enough to tempt us into thinking it may be born from the locale and the moment. Much of the exotic narrative was surely observed by her there, in the flesh, with curiosity and amusement – rituals of

veiled women and uniformed men, the processions, an iconic wine waiter, fleeting architectural detail. She actually draws herself seated at a café table watching the manic netball players on the beach.

There are other self-portraits too – once in the upside-down pose that often served as her autograph view of the world, in paintings as well as drawings. And several reflective images hint at things thought and dreamed as much as things seen. Is it Stefan, that wistful man on the balcony looking down over the bay? Is she one of the women being juggled by a strange allegorical figure? Are the lovers flying hand-in-hand in the final drawing her own thought of herself and Stefan leaving an idyllic retreat?

The London to which they returned held the creative delights and demands of publishing, and of her own art. In February 1957, Gallery One had just given a first major show of her mature paintings. As well as making books and pictures, London life meant the often precarious day-to-day business of making ends meet, and the 1950s were prolific, extending and improvisatory years for Gaberbocchus. This was the decade that realised its standing as an independent avant-garde press, if not its solvency. And then in August 1957 they would launch the Gaberbocchus Common Room.

I didn't come across the sketchbook until it was too late to talk to Franka about it, a year or two after she died. But from the very start I saw it as the journal of a beautiful escape. The images offer repeated glimpses of a magic carpet.

Diary entries about the Spanish trip are unhelpfully minimal. Stefan bought a notebook in Cadaquès, and he wrote an essay in it caricaturing a theological debate he'd had on a hill overlooking the sea with a local priest, who smoked and rode a motorbike. Most likely it had bases in both fact and imagination. The same goes for these pictures.

Apart from trips to Majorca in the 1970s, this was the Themersons' only documented visit to Spain, and a relatively rare holiday journey together (most of their travel was for work, and often separately). They took the Newhaven ferry on May 7<sup>th</sup> and after a few days with friends near Dieppe, travelled via Carnac and Collioure (where they may have met Bertrand Russell?). They arrived in Port Bou on May 18<sup>th</sup> and checked into a seafront hotel, the *Miramar*, for five nights. They left on the 24<sup>th</sup>, via Figueras where they visited Salvador Dalí, arriving back in London on May 30<sup>th</sup>.

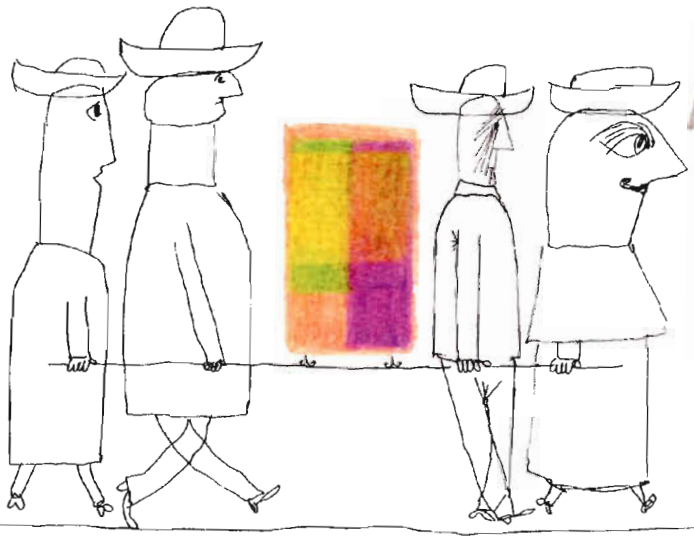
Nick Wadley, May 2010.



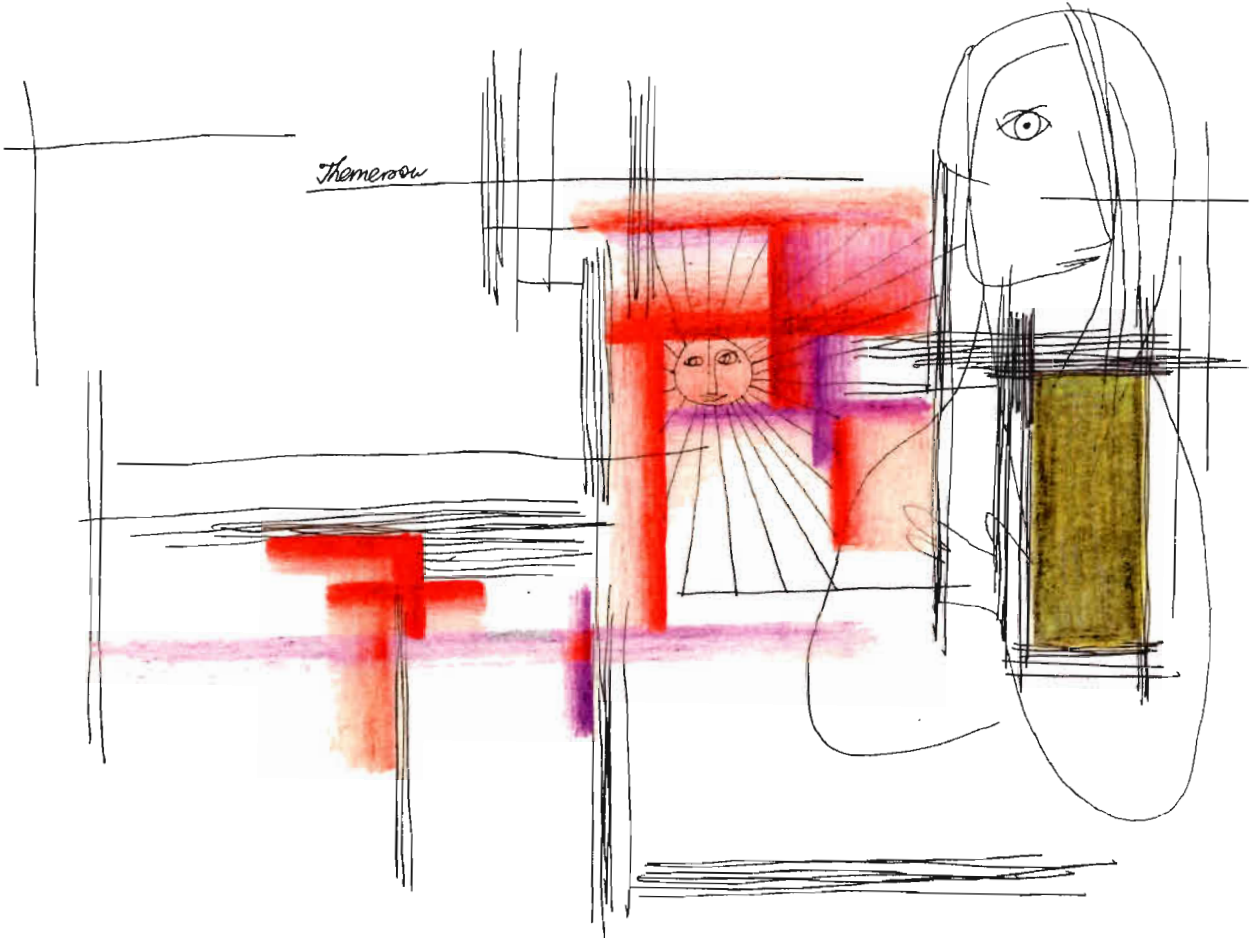
**Cadaquès**

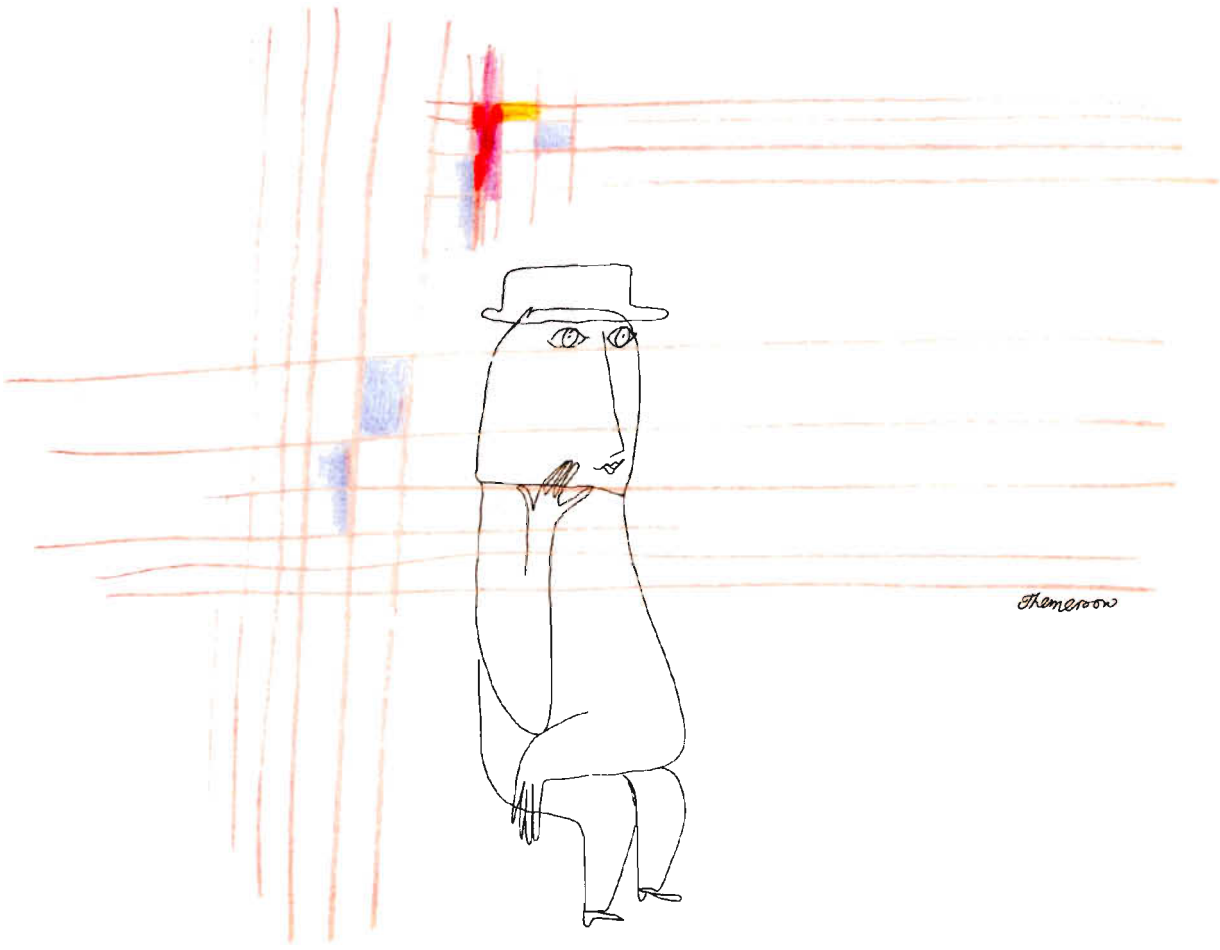


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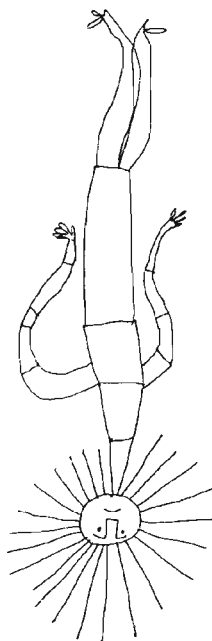
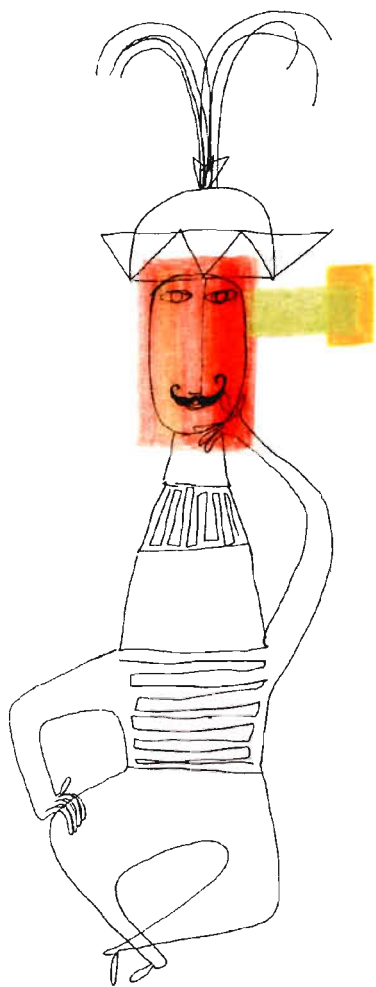




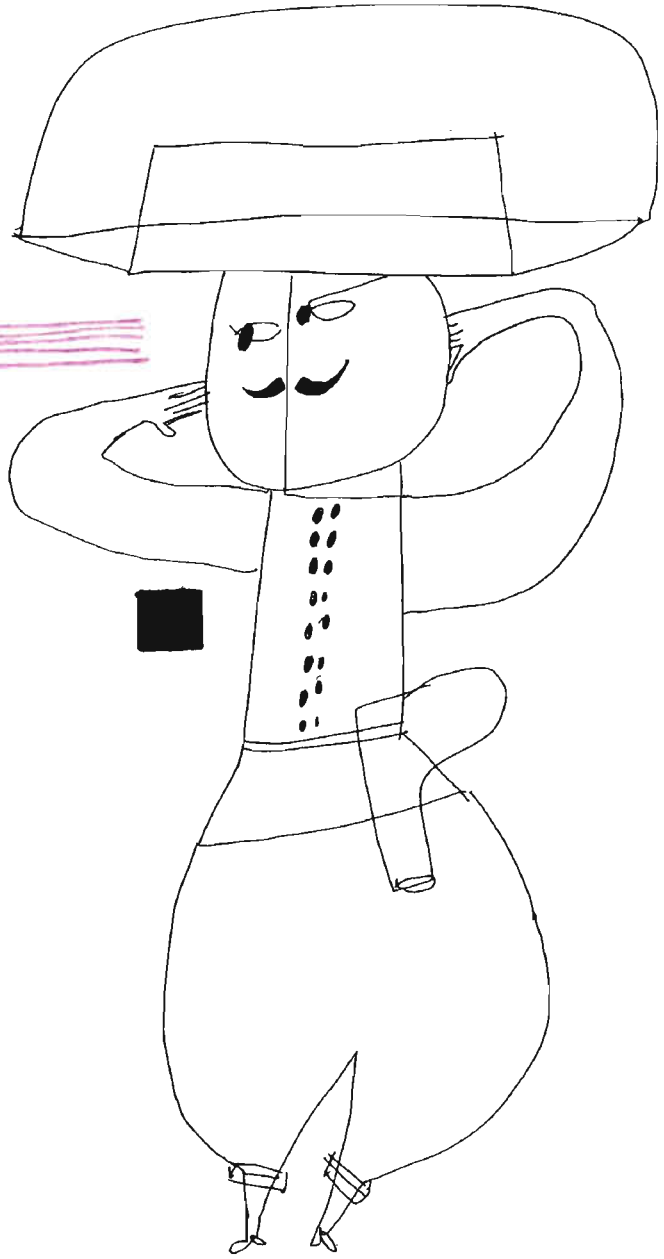
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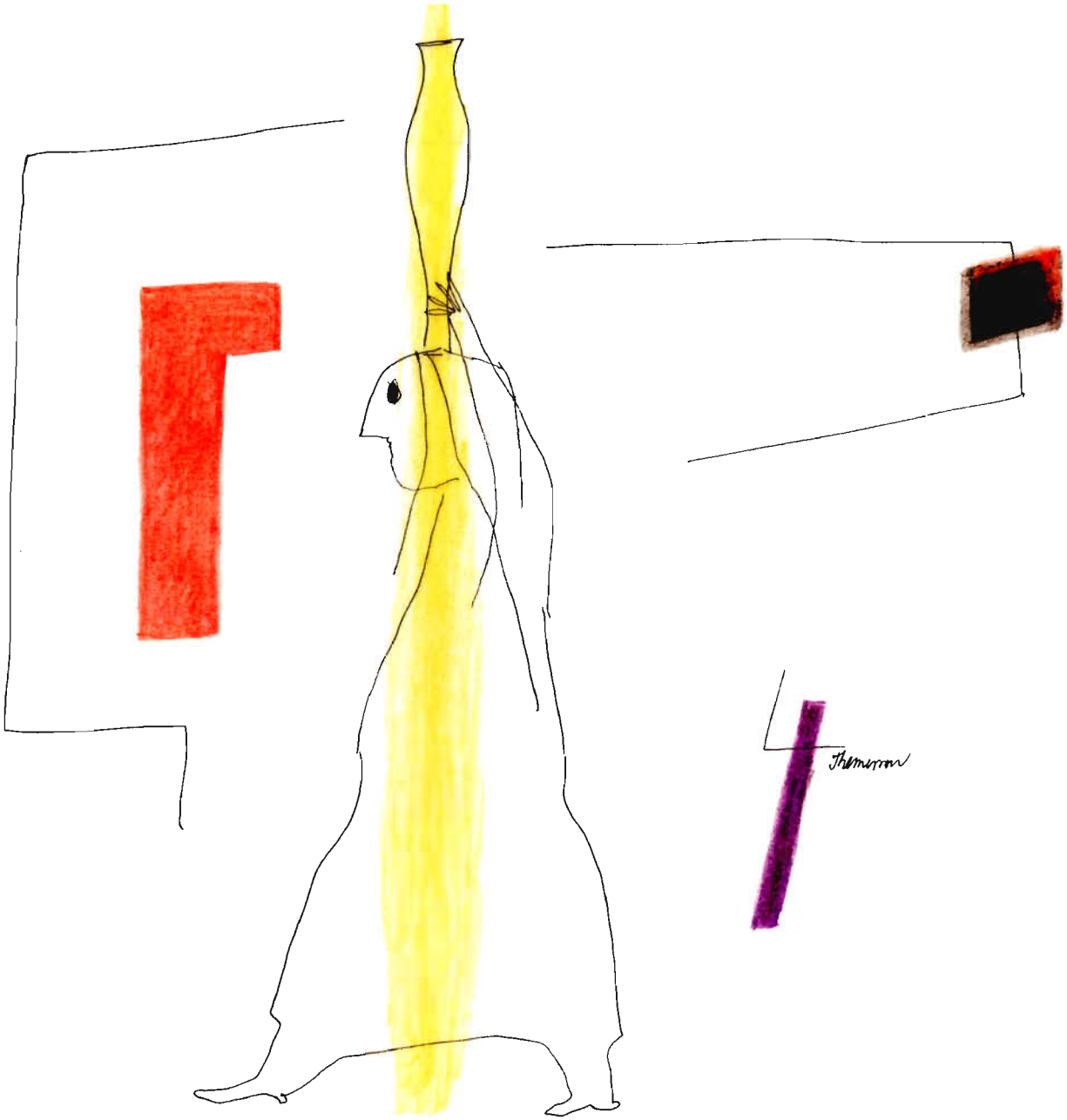




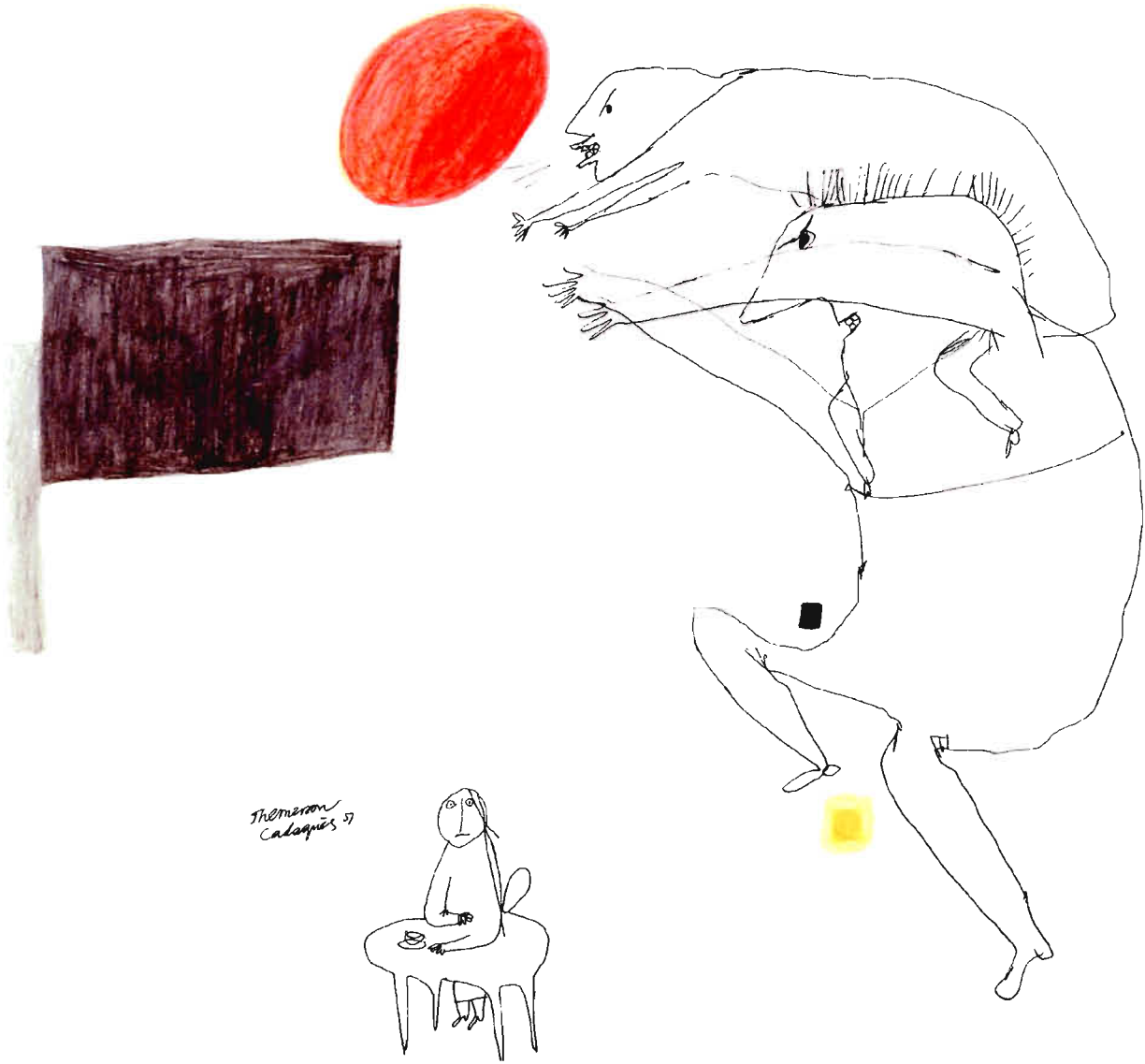
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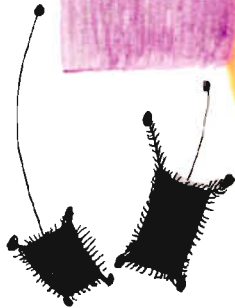
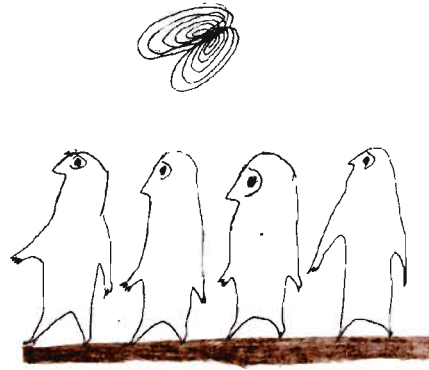
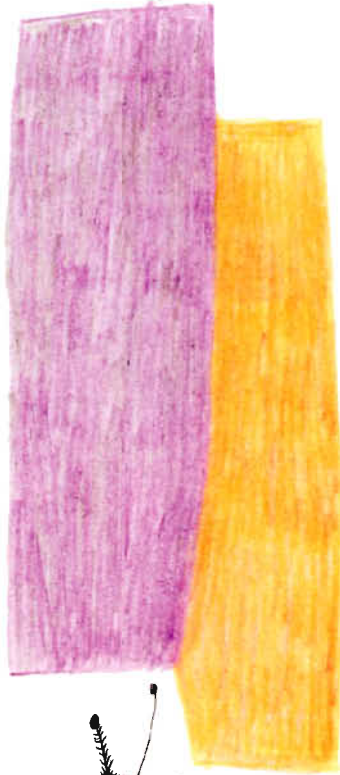
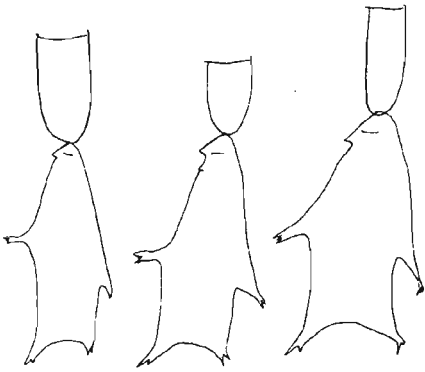


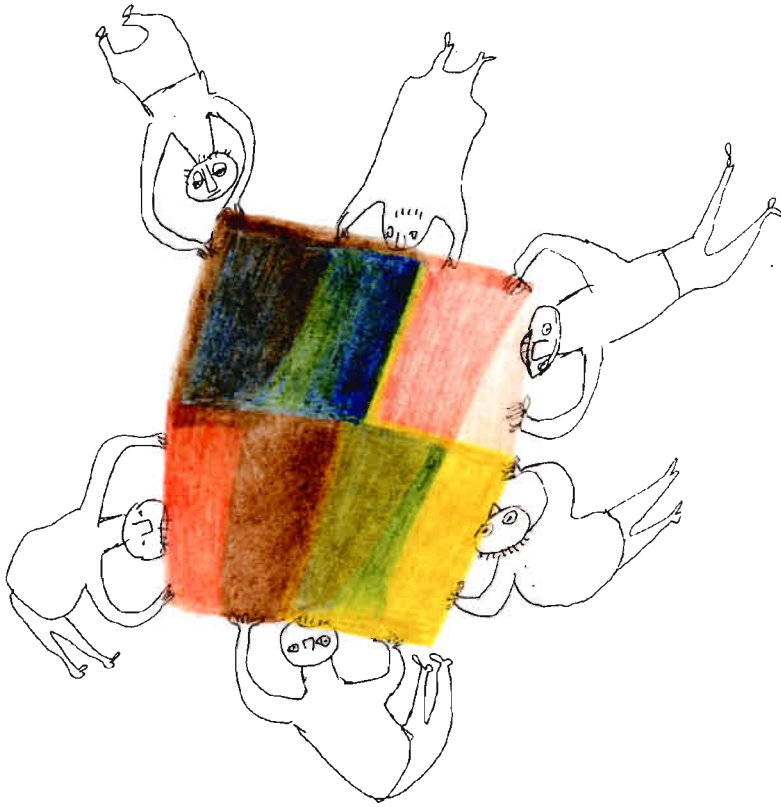




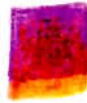
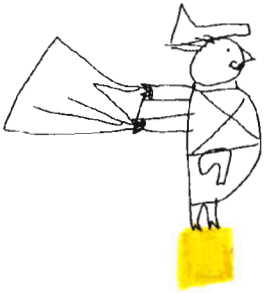
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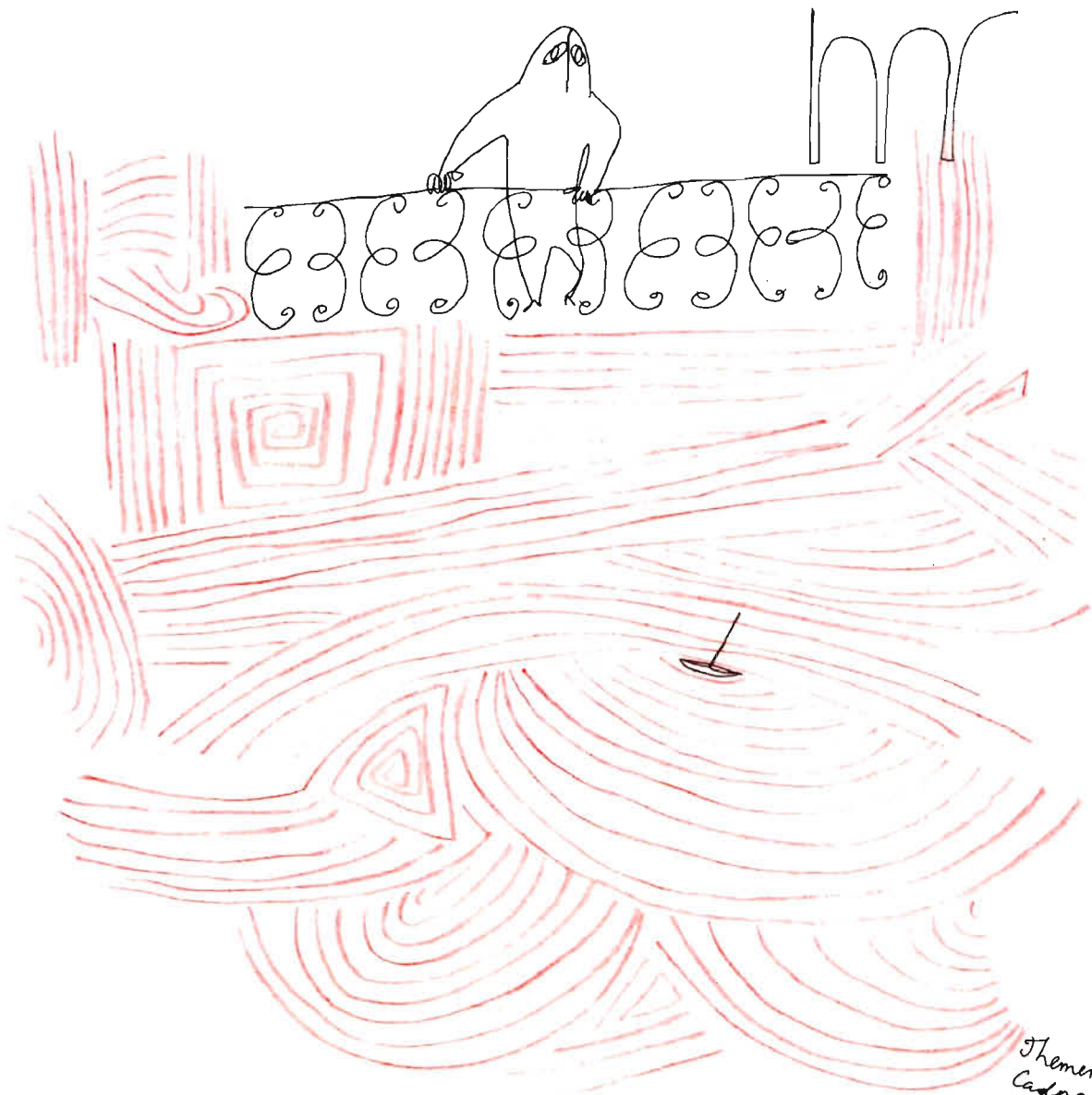




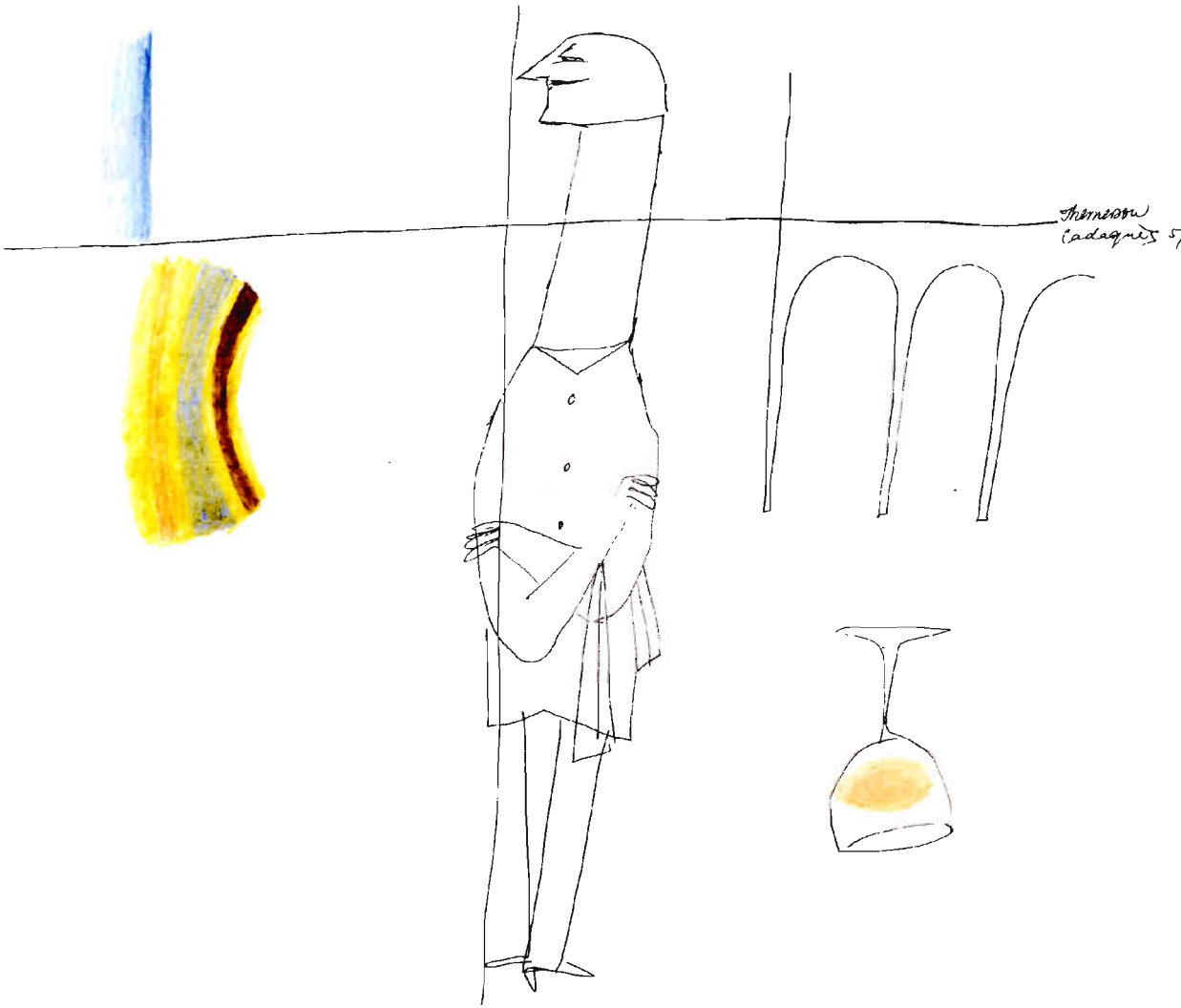
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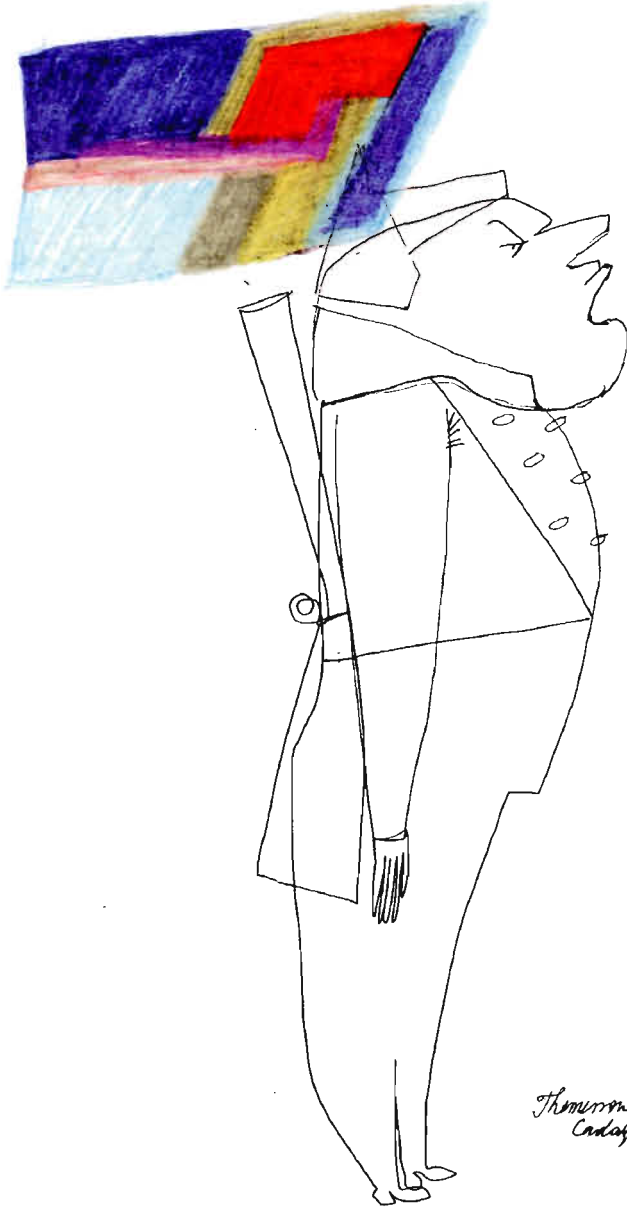
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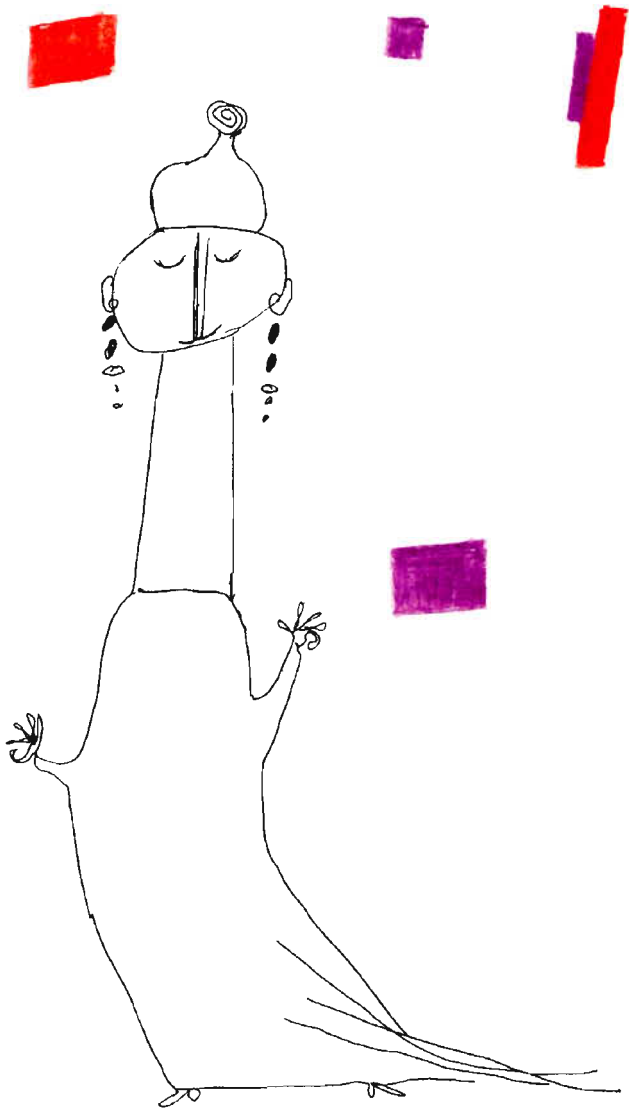


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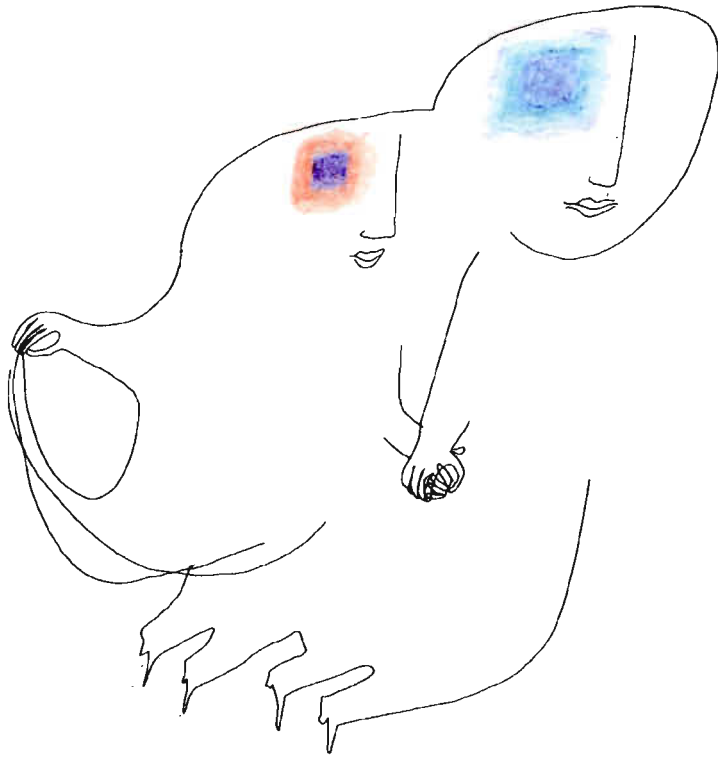
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*Therapsid  
Catalpa 57*



## Cadaquès

On the top of a hill in Cadaquès, there is a church with a sundial on which you can read the words:

*Jo sense sol,  
tu sense Fe,  
no valem res.*

One summer afternoon I met a priest there who, after a preliminary conversation about *mucho viento*, asked me what my religion was. On the spur on the moment I told him I was a logical positivist. As he had never heard of such a denomination and it was now too late for me to back out, I had to tell him something about it. I mentioned Russell as its Spring and Forefather, and Ayer as its Thomas Aquinas. I'm afraid he didn't know the first two names. He was most anxious to learn whether logical positivism was a christian denomination or not, and relaxed visibly when told it was not – if it was not christian then, thank God, it was ignorant of the Truth and therefore there was no room for heresy in it. He sat beside me on the low, white, sun-hot wall, some hundred feet above the level of the sea. "And what does your teaching say about the immortality of the soul?" he asked.

Well, there I was, invited to drink down the brew I had inadvertently prepared for myself. "We," I said, not feeling at all

at my ease, firstly because I had labelled myself one of the clan of logical positivists, and secondly because I was usurping the role of their spokesman. "We don't particularly mind what kind of signs people use to draw a map of the world so long as it helps them to find their place in it. If they choose to give a certain set of circumstances the name of 'soul', I don't see why they shouldn't."

"A certain set of circumstances?" he repeated, lifting up his thick black brows and taking the heavy Spanish cigarette out of his mouth. "How can 'a certain set of circumstances' be immortal?"

"Well," I said, "why not? After all, what *is* the duration of a set of circumstances? When does it begin, when does it end? Doesn't what we think of its duration depend on the meaning we human beings give to its temporal identity? The keyword is 'continuity'. If we don't accept the notion of continuity, any duration is no longer than, let's say, of a second, if that: and if we do accept the notion of continuity, 'mortality' will be more difficult to understand than 'immortality'."

"What I am asking is," he said, "whether you believe that your set of circumstances will survive your death?"

"Well," I said, "what we have so far agreed to is that it is not non-sensical to say that there is continuity between that set of circumstances which you would prefer to call 'my soul at 3.30 p.m. today', and, let's say, that set of circumstances which you would prefer to call 'my soul at 3.30 p.m. tomorrow'. The question you are asking now is: will it still make sense to talk about that 24-hours' portion of continuity if I happen to die at midnight? But surely the answer to that question depends on the standards employed by the inquirer, and the standards he employs depend on the purpose of his inquiry. If he doesn't say

‘any change (however small) in the set of circumstances discontinues it’, then he must choose what the amount of change would be that would allow us to regard the set as discontinued. And that choice is arbitrary, it depends on him, on his purpose. He may regard my soul before I met you half an hour ago as so different from what it will have become in, say, another half hour, as to warrant him to regard them as two different things. On the other hand, for some different purpose, he may regard the set of circumstances of today and that of tomorrow as one continuous thing, even if I die in the meantime.”

He squashed between his fingers the burning end of the cigarette he was smoking, and said: “The important thing is that you admit that it makes sense to say that the set of circumstances exists and undergoes changes. Don’t you?”

“Indeed I do”, I said.

“Then,” he asked, “wouldn’t you and your logical positivists agree that if it changes it ought to change for the better?”

I reflected for a moment. Then I answered: “I think it would be correct for me to say that all the logical positivists I have happened to come across were trying to change for the better those of their sets of circumstances which you would call their souls. None of them, however, would or could demonstrate an argument showing that they *ought* to do so.”

“Never mind the arguments,” he said. “The point is that if it moves towards good then, surely, it comes from evil.”

“I don’t like your terms”, I objected, “‘evil’ is a word that has personal . . .”

“Now, now,” he interrupted me, “haven’t you noticed that whenever you wanted to be understood clearly, you yourself have been using my terms and not yours? When you wanted to

make clear what kind of set of circumstances you were talking about in your terms, you used *my* terms and you said (as you had to say), – ‘soul’. You used *my* terms, and you had to use them. You had nothing against using the word ‘soul’ when you wanted to make clear what you were talking about, neither did you shrink from the expression ‘change for the better’.”

“Touché,” I said.

“This is not a duel,” he said.

“Touché again,” I said, and felt foolish. “Sorry,” I said. “Of course this is not a duel.”

“Let’s resume our positions,” he said. “We seem to have agreed that the set of circumstances which I call the soul is capable of changing into what you don’t mind calling goodness, and therefore it is changing from what I, with your permission, call evil. Therefore as we seem to agree that it holds in itself some goodness at the end of the journey which you may call an evolutionary process, and some evil at its beginning . . .”

“Wait a moment,” I said. “You talk about evil as if it were a bit of an insect embedded in a lump of solid amber. I haven’t agreed to that. I don’t think that what we call ‘evil’ is in what we call ‘soul’. On the contrary. I think it is around it. It is in the fabric of the whole world, the living world, and not in those particular sets of circumstances which you call ‘the soul’.”

“My son,” he said, “you think you are very far from the faith. In fact, you are very near it.”

“Father,” I answered, “you are making a mistake. I am as far from your faith as you are from my views. We may be no more than two feet apart, but there is a wall between us, and it may be easier to go round the earth and meet somewhere on the antipodes than to pierce that wall. You believe that we possess our moral code because it was given to us, or imposed on us, by

an Outside Power. I think that we have found ourselves in possession of it because dead bodies stink.”

“They do,” he said.

“And men don’t like the stink of dead bodies.”

“True,” he replied, and added reflectively:

“A slight whiff of the smell they may like, especially if mixed with the smell of incense. But there is a limit to it, I agree.”

“So there we are,” I said. “Beyond the limit you mention, man’s nose happens to be negatively chemotropic to the stimulus of that kind of smell. It turns away from, and tries to escape and not to be caught by, the gaseous molecules and minute solid particles emanating from dead bodies. However, the world around man’s nose, the world around his hungry stomach, is such that he finds it necessary to kill and produce dead bodies. I don’t say that he minds killing. I say that he doesn’t like smelling. This is the essence of his conflict. He was in the position of a child who held his nose when taking a spoonful of cod liver oil. It was to hold his nose against the offensive smell of putrefaction that man invented his Religions and his Ethical Codes. If he could eat all of his kill before it got decomposed, if he himself always died in the odour of sanctity, he would never have invented any of your Ten Commandments. Why should he? We can invent reasons why he should, but we are the result of what he had already done. He had no reason to invent the reasons we can invent for him now. No reason at all. Except that smell. Is that not why our civilizations come from Mediterranean and other stinking lands where putrefaction happens to be favoured by the climate? In hotter parts you have hosts of insects and small animals who undertake the job, and you have aerobic processes that oxidize the remains. At the

North Pole you have natural refrigeration. Yet in Madrid, in Rome, in Athens, in Mecca, in Jerusalem, in Calcutta, proteins split into dust by an anaerobic process, with the formation of foul-smelling, incompletely oxidized products of bacteria and fungi. Listen, Father. At the beginning of civilization a new type of nervous system mutated into being. Like all the other nervous systems that had been crowding the earth, it still possessed a positive reaction to food. At the same time, however, and unlike the others, it had a negative reaction to the minute quantities of incompletely oxidized molecules radiating from the decomposed proteins. To help itself in this conflict of positive and negative tropisms appearing simultaneously, the upper part of the nervous system invented Civilization, at the end of which it invented not only refrigeration to retard the decomposition of dead bodies, but also hermetically sealed gas chambers, flame throwers oxidising proteins *in vivo*, and smellless, clean, atomic bombs. Thus civilization has invented the means of suppressing what once upon a time gave it its birth. Don't you see that we make less fuss today about the hygienically liquidated, smellless millions than Agamemnon did about the single body of his daughter, which would have to start smelling before the sun had reached the meridian? No, it is by Deodorizing Death, and not by Atheism that our Civilization is in the process of committing suicide."

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"A leg-pull that is consistent is a serious matter," I said. "More serious than a philosophical or theological system that lacks consistency. Do you not see that by my trying to show that, meek as they are, physical factors *are* capable of producing ethical values, I aim at building up the Rock where, so far, we have nothing better than the authority of your conviction?"

“Well,” he said, ‘but even if I accept your theory, you still won’t be able to disprove that the giving of those two, positive and negative, reflexes to the nervous system was the means God chose to teach the nervous system His Ethics.”

“Look, Father,” I said, at the same time realising that he could have been my son – “Please don’t think that I am so keen on disproving your God. I am no more interested in disproving Him than in disproving a neutrino. You try to explain some bits of wood by the shape of a ‘chair’. You explain bricks by describing houses, houses for you are bits of towns, kingdoms explain the existence of your towns, the gestalt of the earth explains the gestalt of your kingdoms, and God explains the earth. Scientists do exactly the same things, only they go in the opposite direction. For them, bits of wood explain the chair they sit on, molecules explain the bits of wood, atoms explain the molecules, and particles or packets of energy explain the atoms. It may be that scientists predict better where the moon will rise again, and that you predict better what the man you have just confessed will do tomorrow. Nevertheless you both try to explain, describe, give an account of, the universe. You both want to be logical, want your story to be consistent, and try to use Occam’s razor. *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*. There you seem to be even more efficient than your opposite number, the scientist. He can’t reduce the number of his fundamental constants below seven; you have succeeded in reducing them to four.”

“Four?” he interrupted.

“Four,” I said. “True, a long time ago you made a mental effort in reducing the number to one fundamental constant, God. But you saw that the system wasn’t consistent and you had to admit a second, the Devil; but the system wasn’t consistent and



you had to admit the Son; but the system wasn't consistent and you had to admit the Holy Spirit. I don't say that the system has become consistent, but I admit that it gave you some freedom of manipulation. Nevertheless, whatever is the origin of the Foul Odor we are talking about, wherever it comes from, whether it comes from God sitting on the top of your ladder or from the scientist's molecules, it is not its origin but it itself that is responsible for our inventing the things we call moral codes, or ethics."

He came nearer. We were again sitting on the white wall at the top of the precipice, and for a moment I thought that he intended to push me over it. Alone as we were there, in the village of Cadaquès he would have had thirty witnesses to prove his innocence. Instead, he stood up, bent over me and said:

"Sir," he said, 'even if it were true, as I don't think it is, even if our ethics came not from God but from the offensive odour of dead bodies, we should go on making people think that it came from Above. Wherever it came from, we two, you and I, we like it, our moral code, don't we? Now, if we go on making people think what I believe is true, namely that it came from Above, it will have a chance to survive. After all, my system, inefficient as it may be, I admit, does still work.

"On the other hand, if you tell people that their Ethics comes from where you think it does . . . Lord Jesus! You don't know what scientists are! They will invent a universal anti-stink. And what shall we do with our souls?"

"We shall have none," I said. "Negative tropisms, the fact of possessing a nervous system which makes us flee from the stink produced by decomposing proteins, shortly: The Dislike of The Smell of Dead Bodies, is a necessary part of the definition of Man. If scientists ever change that property of our nervous

system, if we ever come to like the smell, we shall be men no more. And then you will not need to worry about us any more than you do about hyenas or hedgehogs. And don't look at me like that, please," I said. "It is not I who invented the world as I find it."

The bright, fiery sun was burning above our heads, the stinking ruins of the village fell away down the slope of the hill towards the blue of the sea. On the other side of the bay, Salvador Dalí was waxing his moustaches in a whitewashed room asphyxiated with the pungent smell of fifty, fully-open, yellow-centred white lilies.

"What you say is horrid," the priest said.

"I know it is," I said.

"How can you carry the burden of such a philosophy without being comforted by the thought of . . ."

I interrupted him: "The thought of there being one *more* Person who died for me would only add weight to the burden."

"But he did die for you." This time the priest didn't sound sincere, and I kept silent.

"Whenever you want to come," – he pointed to the door of the church – "I will be there, waiting."

"Not before I lose my battle," I said, "and sink into the mood in which any acquired truth that gives peace is welcome," and in all decor our dialogue didn't sound operatic at all, or perhaps I should say that it did, but that that wasn't out of place in the circumstances.

He jumped on to his motor bike, gave it a kick, made the sign of the cross, and went off.

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This edition is limited to 60 copies.

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