

COMMENTAIRE COMPOSÉ DE LITTÉRATURE ANGLAISE

Commentez, **en anglais**, le texte suivant :

Of course, all men put their childhood behind them. It is part of discovering a new self in manhood. But I have done so more than other men, I think. The simplicity of those early years at Sulmo fitted so ill with my new role as man about town, as sophisticated poet of the metropolis, that I should have felt only anxiety and some sense of disgust if I had tried to reconcile the two. For the same reason I found it painful to see my father, who remained disappointed in me—even after my literary reputation might have been enough to make up to him a little for my failure to become a man of affairs. He married again and had another family. And that too made it easy for me to keep away. I lived, after the end of my second marriage, as if I had sprung into the world complete with my first book of poems, an entirely new type, the creature of my own impudent views and with no family behind me, no tribe, no country, no past of any kind.

And now it all comes back to me.

Especially, and with feelings of an extraordinary tenderness such as I have not known for so long now that I cannot recall the last time they can have swept over me, certain evenings from my earliest childhood when we were turned over, my brother and I, to the women of the household, the farm servants, to be washed and dressed for bed, along with their own children, boys and girls both, who are of an age with us and are still at this time (since we have not learned to distinguish them as slaves) our playfellows in the farmyard and in the olive groves and orchards beyond.

In these harvest days we are allowed to sleep out in the farmhouse with our nurse. My mother, who is sickly, and whose head aches with hay fever, has retired to her room and never appears. My father goes out each morning with the harvesters, and if the work is far off on the other side of the valley, he will stay out with the laborers overnight. We are put to bed with the others, on huge straw mattresses behind the kitchen, and lie awake while the women tell us stories about wood spirits and demons older than our Roman gods, who live in odd corners of the house and barn and must be placated with lumps of dough (which they come for in the guise of a mouse) or with herbs that only the oldest and wisest of the women know how to gather, high up in the hills.

This is a woman's world, which I will never know again. It smells of soapsuds and dough, of curds, of the raw wool I watch the older women carding on a terrace wall in the sun, with

the fields behind them a glitter of wings. Early in the morning, almost before it is light, we go together in a party, women and children, to the water meadows, to gather big orange-yellow mushrooms. I watch the women, who are barefoot, haul their skirts up in the dew while they squat to piss, their heads upright under the straw panniers, and later, on our way home, look on scandalized when, in the stubbled field, they stop and make mocking obeisance to the scarlet-stained figures of Priapus that are set in the midst of the wheat to scare off birds. Back in the yard, there are eggs to gather from under the hens in their wooden houses. There are pigs to feed. There is grain to be winnowed by shaking it in the air in a basketwork sieve. In the coolness of the kitchen, late in the afternoon, there are millet cakes to bake and to prick afterwards with a straw so that they will soak up honey. And then, after dark, the bathing.

I watch again as one of the girls, her skirt hitched up over her bare legs, her arms gleaming wet, takes my brother by the prick and leads him around the tub like a goose, while all the women throw their heads back and laugh, and the children splash and clap their hands and toss suds in the air. And I realize suddenly, nearly fifty years after the event, that this must be the girl my father is sleeping with. I see her lead my brother, the little heir to all this world, round the sopping kitchen floor while all the women show their gapped teeth and hold their sides and laugh. It is a vision of utter joyfulness; and perhaps I am at the center of it, understanding, for the last time perhaps, a little of its mystery.

It is another world. How strange to find myself back there for odd moments, knowing that I have made nothing of whatever it was that was being revealed to me then—that I went some other way, into a man's world, into the city, into the state, as my brother too went another way, to death.

But stranger still is that all this time it has remained there, untouched, unrecalled, but still brightly new—and so real that I smell the raw cleanness of it still.

I think also, in these quiet hours, of my brother's death during the Parilia, just after our birthdays, which fall on the same day.

We have always been close, though our temperaments are so different; he is serious-minded, and filled with a deep sense of loyalty to things, to my father, to the farm, whose every boundary stone he knows, to the family, which is so closely bound up with the country here, the old tribal lands of the Peligni. He is deeply pious, in a way I respect and envy, but having taken on early my role as the frivolous one, I do as I am expected to do, and tease him about it.

David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (1978).

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