



The Teacher's Demission

drama by Christian Lanciai (2008)

The characters :

Rupert Melchior, teacher
Kirsten, his friend
the university headmaster
a lady of the university board
the father
the mother
Walter, the brother
Rolf Leman, lawyer
Elsa, a prostitute
Laila Roth
Saga, Rupert's wife
a group leader at 'The Fountain'
Roger, Kirsten's ex husband
Laban, writer
Marga, Rupert's sister

The play is a dramatization of Philip Roth's novel "*The Human Stain*"
translocated in Sweden with additions from reality.

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The Teacher's Demission

Act I scene 1.

Rupert And would I not love you, my love, when our love is only so beneficial? What does it matter that I am old while you are young, as love always remains timeless? Who could be so mean as to wish to cause any kind of love any harm?

Kirsten Everyone, Rupert, everyone. There is no one who doesn't envy true love when they see it and may not have it for themselves or share it. They can't stand it when they haven't found it themselves. It's as simple as that.

Rupert And should we therefore be afraid? Who could resist it? If love presents itself with truth, do we not have the right to receive it? Would it not be cowardly to duck the baseness of envy? Do we not on the contrary have the right to be ruthless? You are among the best that ever happened to me after my wife's death, you have made me three decades younger, I can only feel and be and do well in your company, while without you I only tumble down into illness and depression.

Kirsten I am just a simple girl, I have nothing of your education and position and could never match you, but I do still have an instinct, which warns me and us to discretion and great caution. The love that is not seen can not be harmed and is therefore the only safe kind of love in privacy and locked out from the sight of others, and you still have your position as a respected learned man and professor of some local fame, who always was exposed to the jealousy and jaundice of the base. A teacher is always under threat since his position always is exposed to open fire from all sides by the weapons of ridicule, fear, surveillance and criticism.

Rupert I did resign voluntarily and have left all my duties. I have nothing more to do as chancellor of my university. I simply gave them the finger when they chose to mess with me. I left directly. I don't care how they now are circulating rumours about me and backbiting me.

Kirsten We have a worse threat than your envious colleagues.

Rupert Like what?

Kirsten You forget that I have been married before.

Rupert That madman! What does he know except brutality? You just have to take cover when he turns up.

Kirsten He is a wreck still struggling with the storm, tackled and scrapped but still afloat with unsettled business with the whole world for his unjust degradation. He is dangerous.

Rupert He is just a lost soul gone astray, an alcoholic and maniac, many times detoxified and dried up, a rusty barrel that rattles the worse for that. He is under rigorous control. When he shows new signs of berserk rage he will immediately be effectively confined to his institution again.

Kirsten I maintain that he is dangerous. He has been collecting weapons ever since his first military service and is ready to use force at any time. I know him.

Rupert Still I am not afraid of him. I rather feel some sympathy for him as a colleague, discarded like myself, rejected for his stipulated unsuitability and perhaps, like myself, still in love with the loveliest of women.

Kirsten As my husband, he was a devil. I was always scared to death of his incalculable moodiness. He always claims that it was my fault that both our children were burned to death. Why then did he not save them himself? He even tried but failed as the professional bungler he is. He has never succeeded with anything, and he blames me for it. He lives only for his wrath. If he could he would probably murder you.

Rupert And still I am not afraid of him. I am only afraid of losing you.

Kirsten I never could understand how such a great and learned man could fall for a simple silly charwoman like me.

Rupert You were my antithesis. Life can not survive without dualism. Everything lives and works by the tension between contrasts, all power is magnetic with opposite poles, light would be unendurable without darkness, joy is just superficial and despicable without suffering and pain, there is no day without night, you work for me so well just because you are my contrary in everything. If you lack my education, you instead have the more experience of earthal life and its reality, of close and brutal relationships, which I always lacked.

Kirsten (laughs hard) As if that was some credit and merit.

Rupert I love you, and we go well together. That's all that matters.

Kirsten And I have you, you mad teacher, and just for that I don't want to lose you.

Rupert You have me here and now.

Kirsten And thus I will keep you. *(They join hands in tender confidence.)* But tell me now, what actually happened at the university, which made you leave it so suddenly in fury?

Rupert It was just a trifle, that should have been treated as such. When they didn't, I took the consequences. Instead of an honoured chancellor with a confirmed reputation, I became a hated teacher whom they will continue to repress. They will never tire of it, since they never will be able to forget me for me scandalous demission.

Kirsten But what released the crisis?

Rupert I was branded a racist by a macabre misunderstanding.

Kirsten What happened?

Rupert There were two students who consistently stayed away from my lectures. They were enrolled, everything was in order, but they were never seen. After six weeks I couldn't help asking the class: "Is there anyone who knows anything about these two? Do they exist in reality, or are they spooks?" No one knew anything, but the word went around, and a few weeks later I was called up to the headmaster for some questioning. I had been reported by the very two invisible students for racism. It appeared that they were muslims. I had had no idea of that, and by 'spooks' I had had no thought of any hint at any discrimination. The headmaster let it be and hoped it would be forgotten, but muslims never forget an insult, no matter how unintentional it might have been. A week later I was summoned to the board.

Scene 2. The board.

headmaster What did you really mean by 'spooks'?

Rupert Absolutely nothing else than that they were not visible.

headmaster You must be aware of though that in muslim connections 'spooks' mean fanatical fundamentalists?

Rupert I had not the slightest thought of islam. I am irreligious.

Headmaster The more reason for designating muslims as 'spooks'.

Rupert You try to criminalize me for nothing.

A lady We just want the matter settled with. You must understand that we can't accept any racism at the university and least of all among the teachers.

Rupert Naturally.

The lady It would be proper for you to apologise to the two students.

Rupert Why? I haven't insulted them. They have taken offence for nothing. If you joke with a schizophrenic, and the schizophrenic doesn't understand the joke any better than taking it as a deadly insult and starts attacking you, do I then owe the schizophrenic an apology?

Lady Are you comparing islam with schizophrenia?

Headmaster This is only getting worse all the time. Apologise to the students, Rupert, and we can forget the whole thing.

Rupert I apologise to them? After they boycotted my lectures for six weeks? Am I then the one to owe them an apology?

Headmaster Don't work yourself up. We just want the matter settled with.

Lady It can only be settled by your apology.

Rupert Or else?

Lady We are restructuring the body of teachers, and several will be obliged to resign from their services. We will therefore ask those who wish to resign voluntarily. If the conflict is left open, you might be obliged to join them.

Headmaster Rupert, no one has done more for our university than you. In your time and by your fundamental initiative we have accomplished the greatest expansion in our history and become the greatest university of our country by new buildings and vital improvements of the administration. We don't wish to depart from you by a quarrel about some deplorably petty matter. These muslims refuse to give in on their demand for measures. An apology from you seems to be the only thing that could solve the situation.

Rupert (rises) They are the racists and not I, as they demand others to bow to islam while they themselves are too proud to attend the lectures of a Jewish teacher. You have taken their side. Ladies and gentlemen, I resign with immediate consequences. *(leaves promptly)*

Headmaster (to the others) Are you happy now? *(They all say nothing.)*

Back to first scene.

Kirsten I did not know you were Jewish.

Rupert I never appeared as a Jew and never called or defined myself as one.

Kirsten Why?

Rupert I didn't want to belong to a limited conception of life and race. I wanted to be just a human being among humanity without any special brand. I wanted to be myself and not belong to any social identity. I wanted to be free. Was it wrong?

Kirsten So it was not from fear of any social pressure, complex, fear of being pointed out and the burden of the Jewish heritage?

Rupert It was no escapism, just rationalism and humanism. I wanted to be myself and stand for what I was good for and neither receive anything for nothing by inheritance or birth or have any obligations to any social community or religion which I could only regard as a historical curiosity.

Kirsten So no one ever treated you as a Jew?

Rupert My family did try. It ended by their regarding me as a traitor to the family.

Scene 3. A family dinner about 50 years earlier.

father What are you saying, my son?

Rupert I don't want to be a Jew any more.

father Your mother and I are Jews! You can't shift your blood!

Rupert Blood means nothing, father. It is a matter of form. Jewry is a construction that has survived itself. It served its function in the days of Moses and all the way up to king Solomon, but already Jeremiah realized it was outdated and that its absurdity was a fact.

father Do you realize what you are doing, son?

Rupert It has to be done. I have a life to live. I don't want to become a slave under traditions and superstition like you and mother. I just don't want to belong to the Jewish community. I want to belong to all humanity.

mother The one does not exclude the other.

Rupert I don't want to have any limitations. For me jewry is a limitation.

father (serious) If you deny your Jewish inherence, you separate yourself from your entire family.

Rupert Father, I have no choice. I have a calling, and it is incompatible with jewry. All enlightened Jews have assimilated, especially Stefan Zweig and Arthur Koestler, Einstein, Mahler, Schnitzler, Pasternak, Mendelssohn and even Karl Marx – no Jew with a universal interest has remained within jewry, for the law of Moses is a stifling shell which locks up its slaves in the dulling stagnation of orthodox blindness. I want to be enlightened, not closed in.

Walter He wants to be a teacher, father.

father I know. You want to be a humanist. But do you therefore have to reject your background, kick off your springboard, denounce your family and identity?

Rupert I don't want to share any other identity than the universal one. I love literature and philosophy, music and science, father. For me the Bible is one of the best novels ever written, at least up to the point of Solomon and of exceptional historical value but practically without any religious importance, since the idea of God derailed into an aggressive failure. I love the Iliad and the Odyssey equally much and the entire Greek and Roman classical literature, where Herodotus is

almost on par with the Bible. I love the sumptuous absurdity of the visions of Dante's catholic superstitions and the magnificent dramatic art of Shakespeare as much as Homer and the Bible. And I love the Russian 19th century classical authors of literature from Pushkin to Chekhov, the German romantics, the French 17th century classics, the Renaissance poets, Dickens and Hugo and many others and embrace Stefan Zweig's sincere and completely assimilated humanism with all my heart, and like him I must prefer the whole of humanity to jewry.

father Suit yourself, Rupert, but you will have to accept the consequences. Your roots will still remain in jewry.

Rupert I know, father, but a tree always grows beyond its roots, and the roots remain covered and buried deep in the ground, while the crown of the tree is what lives and shares oxygen to the world. I want to share the tolerance and knowledge of humanism, and in that universalism the Bible is just a book like other imperishable and indispensable classics.

Walter You will never see us again, Rupert, if you stick to your word.

Rupert I can't turn back. If I have grown out of you I can't grow back into you.

mother You take your life into your own hands, Rupert. You have the right to do so as you are of age, and no one has the right to stop you. But not even the world's most gorgeous oaken tree can live without its roots. And we shall always be here.

father Don't deny us, Rupert. Keep us within your tolerance, even if we remain Jews.

Rupert Of course, father. *(The father rises and embraces him tenderly and kisses him, the mother follows suit, and then everyone start embracing and kissing each other in a general party of embraces and kisses and not without tears.)*

Scene 4. A few years later.

mother You didn't come to your father's deathbed, Rupert, and not even to his funeral.

Rupert I am sorry, mother. I was in the middle of my crucial exams.

mother So your career is more important than to see your father one last time?

Rupert Mother, whatever you do, don't accuse me. I have done nothing wrong. Everything could have been better, but we all have our own destinies. What's done is done and cannot be undone.

mother You still dare to call me mother although you have cut all ties?

Rupert Anything wrong with that? Aren't you my mother?

mother You were dismissive to us from the beginning. You even rejected my breast. It was always you who felt us as a limiting burden, but the prisoner was you, Rupert. We were only natural. We were born into jewry and lived within it as was natural. Only you turned it into a prison for yourself which you are still struggling to get out of, but as long as you struggle you will never get out, for your imagined enemy does not exist. You are struggling with imagined ghosts.

Rupert I have managed without jewry ever since my Bar Mitzwah and will continue to do so. I am not struggling. I am only prevailing by standing on my own two feet.

mother What about that girl then, whom you invited home to get acquainted with us who afterwards broke down and left you because we were Jews? I have heard that you now have a new girl. You haven't presented her to us and are not going to, are you?

Rupert No.

mother Does she know of our existence?

Rupert No.

mother I thought so. You are fashioning a suitable marriage for yourself by lying. She is all pure-bred, I expect.

Rupert Mother, don't torture me and yourself. I want to create my own family without anyone else's burdens and strains. Concerning my family life I want to start from zero. I haven't lied. I have only appeared to her as the one I am, completely free and alone without any earlier family burdens of any kind.

mother That means I shall never see my grandchildren. You will never come to visit us. They will never know that they have a Jewish grandmother. Perhaps I could still see them in secret. I could sit on a bench in the park when you happen to pass by. You could hire me some day as a cleaner. I could lower myself to anything just to see them without having you compromised.

Rupert Stop it, mother.

mother Do I have any other choice?

Rupert You could reject me, repress me and eliminate me from your life.

mother Do you think I could be that cruel to myself? Do you think I could double the burden of your cruelty to me by being equally cruel myself? You don't even know your own mother, Rupert. You don't know any woman. You might perhaps not even get to know your own thoroughly pure-bred wife.

Rupert That's enough, mother. I shouldn't have come here.

Walter No, you shouldn't, Rupert. Don't you see what you have done? You have murdered a mother's heart in cold blood! Now you will leave this place, and you must never again get in touch with us. We disown you and remove you as the abscess of pus you are on your family! We remove it by operation! No letters from you will be opened any more, if you call we will hang up, and least of all you may contact our mother in any way. Is that clear?

mother Walter, calm down. He doesn't mean what he is saying, Rupert.

Walter I do indeed! I am only administering justice! He has condemned himself! Get out of here! (*opens the door to Rupert*)

Rupert (*looks around, everyone is benumbed, Walter is aflame, he takes his hat and leaves at once.*)

Walter Mother, we have a family life to defend. He has never defended us. Don't we have the right to defend ourselves?

mother I don't know which one of you is the worst, Walter.

Act II scene 1. The office of the lawyer.

Leman You must leave her, Rupert. I see no other way.

Rupert You are out of your mind. She is my own rebirth, and you ask me to leave her.

Leman She is less than half your age. She is marked by life, has escaped from home as a child from a stepfather who abused her, she has lost two children in an accident which could have been caused by her own negligence, she is uneducated and has seen the worst sides of life – if this was all it would be no matter. But her divorced husband, a former mercenary who was discharged, a violent psychopath who almost abused her to death, still jealously regards her as his property and keeps hard watch on her and is after the lives of both of you for your sake.

Rupert Should I be afraid of him?

Leman Yes.

Rupert I was never in my life afraid of any human being or could ever be. I have to run it out with her, Rolf. She is my destiny.

Leman You are risking both your lives. And then there are the anonymous letters.

Rupert It's only one. I know who wrote it. It's a former female prefect, young and jealous, who once thought she could get together with me. I have compared the handwritings. There is no doubt about it.

Leman It does not matter who wrote it. It's the content that matters. It's a completely casual content only stating facts.

Rupert "Everyone knows you are abusing a fallen mishandled illiterate woman who is not even half your age." So what?

Leman Could you have it on your conscience if anything happens to her? If her war maniac of a former husband one day in one of his fits batters her to death?

Rupert We have already met. I am not afraid of him. He is afraid of me.

Leman The more insidiously he could attack you.

Rupert The empty barrels rattle the most just because they are so helplessly empty. He is a paper tiger without teeth who only because of that roars the more desperately. He can collect guns and shoot but hardly aim. You can't ask us to take a constantly apprehended maniac seriously who also is an alcoholic?

Leman His incalculability is total.

Rupert My love weighs heavier, and that is also total.

Leman I can only warn you, Rupert.

Rupert Thanks for your warning, Rolf. I answer for what I do myself. (*leaves*)

Leman Is he self-destructive or just naïvely blinded by his own self-deceit as a man growing old?

Scene 2. The young Rupert with the prostitute.

Elsa Why are you coming to me?

Rupert You have to go to someone. The natural urge.

Elsa Can't you do it alone? Then you would avoid the humiliation.

Rupert What humiliation?

Elsa The remorse afterwards. The self-contempt. We are used to it. We do it only for the money. But you are coming to a whore for the first time. I am only trying to make it easier for you.

Rupert I actually only want to get it over with.

Elsa Don't you have any sweetheart??

Rupert I had one.

Elsa Get undressed then. You obviously know at least how it is done. I don't have to educate you.

Rupert I am afraid we never reached that far, but I will probably manage it anyway.

Elsa Sure. It's after all only natural.
(Rupert gets undressed.)
 You might as well put your clothes back on.

Rupert (surprised) Don't you want to?

Elsa You are circumcised.

Rupert Anything wrong with that?

Elsa I don't accept circumcised customers. You will get your money back.

Rupert Are we then less human than others?

Elsa Don't get upset. Take it easy. I just don't accept Jews and Muslims. You have to go to someone else if you insist on your self-humiliation. There are black and Asiatic whores who accept those circumcised.

Rupert I didn't come here for discrimination.

Elsa You are not discriminated. You are spared.

Rupert You reject me for my racial origin, which is the worst anyone could do to me, since I rejected my own race. I am just an ordinary human being and refuse to be charged as anything else.

Elsa I am sorry, but you are and remain circumcised. You will never get rid of that brand. Go now. I don't want to cause you any more pain.

Rupert (gets dressed in a rage and disappears)

Elsa (lights a cigarette) Poor boy. I hope he will soon get married.

Act III scene 1.

Kirsten Don't try to educate me, Rupert. I am too stupid for that.

Rupert I will not even try. What do you think I have been doing all my life? Tried to give and transmit the world of beauty and wisdom which is the only thing that makes life worth living to thousands of indifferent students who seldom have got the least of the point and who only attended my courses to obtain a certificate of a formal education to have a document with which to make a career and make money. What does Homer and Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides mean to them? Only boring Greek unpleasantness. What do they care about humanism as long as they can have their car and house and go for holidays to lie on the beach? They don't care at all about humanity and only care about their own personal temporary comfort as if the future didn't exist. They don't even give a damn about their children if they give them problems and troubles. To such idiots I have tried to communicate and deliver pearls all my life which they only trampled down in the materialistic abyss of environmental destruction. A simple virgin girl like you whom I only love I would not even try to educate.

Kirsten Haven't you ever had a single positive student?

Rupert Yes, there have been exceptions, and only because of that I stayed on and carried on. I always searched for them, every new class of mine I started associating with by searching for the exception, the stranger, the outsider who understood something of the important essentials, the ignored and neglected talent, the unique student who only desired knowledge and not the certificate. How else do you think I could have endured an educational system that only degenerated all the time, that by so called rationalisation sorted out the vital matters of importance, that struck out Shakespeare from the obligatory curriculum, that degraded the classical languages to unnecessary exceptions, that only wanted technologists and rather did away with humanists as superfluous and troublesome, and that fired teachers who dared to question the system? I remember one in particular... (*the scene shifts*)

Scene 2.

Rupert You must not quit, Miss Roth. You are the best teacher we have.

Laila The school board gives me no alternative. I must have order, and they will have disorder. I demand results, and all they want is statistics. I want to teach the students something, and they only want to get the students through the curriculum. They want to remove all grades, but I consider it important for the student to know where he stands concerning his merits. I want to help a student in trouble and to encourage a good student, while they only wish to get rid of the bad students by ousting them to special schools while they forbid encouraging promising students as favoritism. The collision course between me and them is total.

Rupert The loss of you would be irreplaceable. I always considered you the ideal teacher. You regarded the teaching profession as a calling and had the right spirit of idealism.

Laila Why then did they always place me in the worst problem schools to teach the most difficult pupils and most hopeless cases of labour boys and asocial criminal delinquents? Why was I never allowed to become the teacher I wanted to be?

Rupert You were over-qualified. That's the worst thing you can be in our country. Then you are subjected to sabotage and trials and Herculean labours. You were lucky to only get the last, and you managed it. That's why you are here. We have come this far. Don't let it go now.

Laila I can't serve a system that has transformed the mainstream education of the whole country into socialist indoctrination.

Rupert Neither can I, for I stick to subjects that no rotten policies can reach, like linguistics and literature. So could you.

Laila And watch how my colleagues bend their backs like kind sheep accepting to be used as instruments of brainwash? No, I will leave this country and become a private teacher. I always dreamt of working as a tutor in England.

Rupert The interference of politics in the educational system has always been a problem for education and will always continue being that sabotaging disturbance. I doubt that you even would get around it in England.

Laila I will from now on stay out of every governmental educational form, and I will clinically avoid being a robot for indoctrination any more. The only education that works is the communication of culture.

Rupert I totally agree with you. That's why we don't want to lose you. The future needs people like you in particular.

Laila I will have to come back in the future then. Farewell, chancellor Melchior. You were the only authority here at the university that I could respect. *(offers her hand and leaves)*

Rupert Such teachers don't grow on trees. They are the only real teachers. How could we get more of them, if the school system allows politics to just run them over?

(back to scene 1)

Kirsten So you took me on just as a replacement for all your miserable students, the least educational of them all.

Rupert You were so intact. Life had done everything to ruin you but without success, and you were quite uncorrupted by educational pride and academic prejudice.

Kirsten You had a wife. What happened to her?

Rupert She died.

Kirsten How?

Rupert It was after my demission. She couldn't accept it.

Scene 3. Rupert's fashionable home.

Saga You can't do that, Rupert. You are not just ruining your own life but also mine. You remove the ground from under my feet.

Rupert I can't apologise for something I did not do, Saga, and if the university board demands that I do so, it's the seal on their rotten regime, which I suffered all my life and endured with difficulty until now, when it finally went too far. They demand this for the sake of their political line, which is to clinically eliminate every trace of racial discrimination. The problem in my case is that I have been accused of racial discrimination without being guilty. They refuse to accept that they committed a mistake, and the two shirking students refuse to cancel their report. The whole matter has been twisted into a kind of reverse racism. To conceal their own racism, they accuse innocent anti-racists of racism. To take such an accusation seriously is to accept an informing system. No thank you, Saga. If they attack an old man who stayed on three years after his pension they will have to do without him.

Saga But your reputation! Your scandalous demission is considered a refusal of apology, and you will be branded a racist, not only now but for obviously always having been so!

Rupert That's their problem. I have nothing more to do with them. To spread false rumours is the dirtiest thing you can do, and if they want to do it, it's their funeral.

Saga But your children, Rupert! It will affect them as well!

Rupert When did I last hear from them? Do they know me any more? One of them has turned a fanatical Zionist and refuses to have any further contact with me. My daughter always believed all false rumours about me although she is a teacher herself. Frederick hangs up if I call him, for he can't stand me.

Saga I can't take this, Rupert. You are turning my life and yours and your family's into ruins!

Rupert No, I take the consequences of reality and save my integrity. Is that a crime?

Saga It is recklessly inconsiderate towards us!

Rupert Read Ibsen's 'Brand', Saga, and you will perhaps understand what I mean.

Saga No! *(has an attack)*

Rupert Saga! Saga! *(She pants and has obviously had a stroke. After a quick examination he gets the phone and calls)* The hospital! My wife! An ambulance! At once! *(hangs up and stays with Saga, tenderly caressing her)*

(bitterly) This is no one's fault but theirs who forced my resignation.

(back to scene 1)

Kirsten So you even blame your wife's death on the treason by your school against you and everything you stood for.

Rupert Without hesitation.

Kirsten Do you intend to revenge yourself in some way?

Rupert The world is enough loaded with vicious circles of violence and hatred for me to wish to share and contribute to its mess of quarrelsome turbulence. Any kind of vengeance can only make bad matters worse. If the evil is allowed to go on without remedy it is bad indeed, but I will die soon anyway. Let the old quibbler go under with his unbalanced old man's rage. All fires must go out anyway. May I warm myself by the glow of my wrath as long as it lasts, so that you then can be rid of me. I only did what was right, and that was my only fall.

Kirsten Rupert, you are pathetic.

Rupert I know. That's why I have you for someone to understand it. No one else understood anything.

Kirsten Let me warm your frozen heart in bed.

Rupert That's all I need to get well at least for the time being.

Kirsten Let's go then. *(gets up and takes Rupert by the hand and brings him along with her.)*

Act IV scene 1. The university assembly hall.

Headmaster (lecturing) I have invited you all to this special lecture more to straighten out some overburdened question marks than to honour the memory of our recently departed controversial and remarkable colleague Rupert Melchior, whom I am almost tempted to claim that he gave his life for our university. His sudden and enigmatic death has namely not only given rise to a surge of grotesque rumours

completely dominated by falsity but also a weed jungle of discussions on the web and above all in speculations without end. It is my duty to make clear what can be made clear, which hasn't been easy. I want to begin with the origin of the discussions on the web, a shameful anonymous letter which without any basis at all insinuates that Melchior drove himself to death because of lack of concentration when his girlfriend necked with him. According to the police report they had no more contact with each other when the accident occurred than that they were sitting in the front seats of the same car. Not even any trace of any intimate contact between them could be found. There has been an allegation that someone forced them over the railing, but this can unfortunately impossibly be proved even if it should have been true.

Thereby I have reached the main issue, namely the reason for our colleague's tragedy. Three years ago he was accused of racism, the board took the allegation seriously although he categorically refuted it, someone suggested to him that it was an appropriate moment for him to resign since he was overage anyway whereupon he resigned immediately. His wife appeared to have taken this so hard that she had a stroke and died. In his loneliness he then sought the company of a simple girl less than half his age, which resulted in the spreading of false rumours and anonymous letters. Finally we have the accident which we don't know if it was an accident or a premeditated murder committed by the girl's former husband, a chronic mental case.

I have to bring up the issue of his racism, which triggered the tragedy. I wish to throw some light on his racism by reading his own instructions for his own funeral. He belonged to a pious Jewish family who had their given seats in the synagogue which they attended regularly, while he never bothered about his Jewish identity, as if he never had it. Later I have learned that he in fact detached himself from his Jewish inheritance.

Here are his funeral instructions. (*unfolds a paper*)

"It is my wish concerning my funeral expressed in full possession of my wits and senses on October 1st 2007 to be opened after my death by my sons and my daughter, who are my sole heirs, in three copies and two with my lawyer and the headmaster of my university.

I demand a civil funeral since I never embraced any faith. I will be cremated, and my ashes shall be scattered by the wind, leaving nothing behind. After the ashes have been spread, the urn may be recycled and be returned to the cremation bureau. If my children in some way still would erect some memory of me, which I doubt, that will be entirely up to them. Gravestone, memorial grove, a plaque and trash like that is refused entirely. Even if I never took any stand for atheism, I always consistently denounced all ideologies and communities of faith, which throughout history only have been politically and selfishly abused. Even atheism has during the last 100 years been established as a political ideology of the most egoistic and powermad kind. My ideal in education and instruction was always absolute neutrality and objectivity. I found partiality and subjectivity only admissible in the love of art and literature concerning beauty and humanity. I regretted the political manipulation of the university when it appeared, when it came to making resistance against central manipulation by government or state I was always the first to take a stand on the barricades, while I detached myself with horror from the aggressiveness of the fanatical left during the 70s. As a resigning colleague once told me: The only vital

meaning of education is to transmit knowledge and culture. Students who act disturbingly in class I therefore considered myself having the right to remove, and students who boycotted my teachings I should rather have ignored than treated as non-existent. I always knew what I was talking about when I lectured, I was very careful about never speaking empty and meaningless nonsense, which is why I chose such for my subjects that I considered the most significant for human culture, that is literature and history, and whatever I may have failed in, I don't think I was a complete failure as a teacher. My demission was regrettable, I could have gone on for another three years without difficulty, but an accusation of what I least of all had made myself guilty of during my 50 years as a teacher I just could not accept. I apologise to the university for that the situation that occurred made everything else impossible than to resign. I view it as a case of 'reverse racism' and hope that someone will learn something from it.

Now this piece of writing turned more extensive than I had thought, like a sort of complement to my concrete testament, but considering that I from the start renounced all Jewish inherence and refused to deal with any other faith, religion or ideology and remained consistent in this complete detachment all my life, I must insist on as strict a civil funeral as possible. Music may be allowed but absolutely no speech at all. Thanks for my life, signed Rupert Melchior, with two signed witnesses."

To this I have only a few formal words to add. I don't think I am exaggerating when I present the hypothesis that probably no one has done more for our university in modern times than our departed colleague. During his time as chancellor there were so considerable rationalisations accomplished in structure and administration with such a dynamic expansion for a consequence that we nowadays have even more students than Lund. He was controversial as a teacher by his consistent refusal to compromise with his ideals. The most sacred thing of all was to him the beauty, power, dynamics and drama in the classical literature he always enjoyed lecturing on, and he could not accept any limitations or questioning in that field. He strived for a consistently more efficient education, and he has been compared with Sven Stolpe as a teacher. As chancellor he was the most competent we ever had. He could have resigned when he reached his ripe age as a pensioner, like most of us do, but still he chose to go on as a regular teacher. Since he actually never gave up I must conclude this talk by asserting, that never did a teacher deserve a more unfair and regrettable demission.

(The headmaster folds up his paper again, removes his spectacles with hands trembling in emotion, and climbs down from the pulpet.)

Scene 2. The Fountain.

supervisor Yes, he is here. You have come to the right place. It is positively only here that you can be certain to find him. He likes it here since he is treated like a human being, and we keep watching him so that doesn't do anything stupid again, like starting to drink and take drugs. He used to make himself a life threat on the roads,

since he could not control himself when drinking. Here he is. Roger, someone wants to give you an interview.

Roger (to Laban) I know who you are. You are that writer who used to hang out with that professor. What do you want from me?

Laban Just talk.

Roger About what?

Laban About that professor, of course, and his friend, since you knew her.

Roger She was my wife!

Laban I know. But you could never let her go.

Roger On the contrary. I could never get rid of her. I could never get over our failure, because it was my and her children. She let them burn because she fucked with my replacement, a married man, while I tried to save the children from the fire but failed. We both failed in every way. Perhaps that's why it all went to hell for both of us. I failed as a mercenary, and she failed again and again as herself, raped by her stepfather, ran away from home at 14, her first abortion at 16, and so on, until she met the most miserable failures of all, myself, direct from the war, posttraumatised by grenade shocks for the rest of his life, and war was yet the only thing I was good for. At home I was only destructive and in the way of everybody. I could never control myself, as I got into a rage for nothing, trying to suppress myself with loads of alcohol and drugs. It was the fault of the war, which was my life's great unhappy love. Like everyone else you must believe that I drove them to death. Why would I have done such a thing?

Laban You were going that way that evening.

Roger That is no motive. It was raining. The sight was dim. I met hundreds of cars. How could I have recognized any of them?

Laban Did you then like the professor?

Roger Are you kidding? He was an idiot. I despised him, and I despised her for finally falling for a loser of a dirty old man. She couldn't have found anyone worse, an old impotent dry washout, bald at that, the driest snob of the high school. Had I not then been a failure enough for her, so that she had to fall for an even greater loser? I could never understand them. I didn't give a damn for them, but you are right, I used to watch her. I didn't want anyone to do them more harm than I already had done. I used to sit in my combi car outside her house when he was there to fuck her, and he was aware of it. He didn't bother about me, and I didn't bother about him, but I never could stop bothering about her. You are right. She was innocent. He was the one at the wheel. Imagine if I really met them there in the curve and saw them turn in a panic and go down the slope without me doing anything else than just going on? No one can prove it. I regret that she went down, but no one will be likely to miss him. All teachers terrorize their pupils who therefore remember them all their lives with fear, hoping to never see them again. There was only one good thing about the professor: he dared to be racist and stand for it.

Laban Why do you think he was a racist?

Roger Everyone knew about it. That was the reason he had to leave his high school. Some damned niggers from Algeria found out his racism and blew it up. He refused to retract it, and then he was fired. Kirsten told me about the whole thing, as if it would be a crime for a Jew not to be directly fond of muslims.

Laban Thanks for the conversation, Roger. It was interesting to meet you, but I don't think we have to see each other any more, since I despair of ever being able to convince you that he was absolutely no racist.

Roger I know what I know. I knew Kirsten. He never did. That's why he became dependent on her, and that's why things turned out as they did. You can never implicate me for murder.

Laban I haven't the slightest intention to. You have murdered enough. Like all professional soldiers you are just a professional massmurderer whom no one can bring you to court for what you are. You are hammered so hard and cold by all your wars that your lack of sensitivity is total even when you murder. For you murder is just a technicality. Your only mitigating circumstance is that you never let Kirsten out of sight. Didn't you know that she was in the car with the old man?

Roger (considers) It was raining. The sight was bad. I saws nothing. How could I have known?

Laban You knew everything about her. You were the only one who did. Thanks, Roger. We'll probably never see each other again. *(rises and leaves)*

Roger (after him) Did what? *(Laban has left.)*

Act V scene 1.

Marga What do you want to know?

Laban You alone of all his family came to his funeral, and your likeness to him betrayed that you were his sister. I thought he had broken with all his family.

Marga Only formally. He never did.

Laban I don't understand.

Marga Only Walter, our brother, broke with him and forbade him to ever contact us, but he always kept in touch with me. He never let us down. He could deny his religion and identity but not his blood.

Laban And what about your mother?

Marga To deny him any contact with her was the worst thing Walter could have done, and he did it out of blind bias, the very thing that Rupert denounced most of all. Mother always continued to talk about Rupert and to worry about him. Even when she was dying she expressed her worries about her lost child in her very last words. To Walter he was a traitor against us, his family, his race and his cultural tradition, but Rupert never detached himself except from the Jewish ideology and partiality. He pursued justice and humanistic neutrality and balance most of all and a rational and objective judgement, all that which you never find in any religion and ideology and perhaps least of all in jewry. He renounced the Jewish obsession, as he called it, but never renounced us.

Laban So his open detachment from his own jewry was a mask and an affected roleplay while his heart still remained Jewish?

Marga He could deny everything except his own blood. No one can deny his own blood, for it always remains and keeps us alive. We are born with a complete identity which we carry all through our life and which it is our life's task to use and develop. He did it in his own way by embracing an idealistic universal humanism

which in the name of justice had to exclude all religious, political and ideological commitment. He could not deny his Jewish inheritance, though, when Islam came knocking on his door.

Laban Do you mean that 'spooks' was intentional?

Marga Of course it was. It was a word play, but Islam is without a sense of humour, so the word play could not be appreciated by the two Muslims who felt implicated and instead took it so dead serious like a deadly insult. 'Spooks' can mean two things: men who are not seen because of darkness, and Muslim fanatical fundamentalists. Those two took it personally because of the second meaning, and the school wished to avoid ideological racial conflicts at any price and therefore asked the only part that could apologise since the other part was impossible. But Rupert was a Jew. We Jews have humbled ourselves and given way through all history. The Muslims never did so. They have never learned what humility is. When they immigrate to non-Muslim countries they make conditions and demand of the societies they move into to fall in and adapt to their rules, instead of doing in Rome as the Romans do. It doesn't work. They challenge all liberalism and tolerance and push the right wing racist mills to race on to take power. There Rupert put his foot down and left immediately. Could he have acted in any other way? Only if he hadn't been a Jew.

Laban Thanks, Marga, for your enlightenment. Perhaps we will one day learn to understand him better, as we only misunderstood him while he lived.

Marga Try to do him justice, like he only lived for justice. Write a book about him or at least a play.

Laban At least I could try.

Marga Trying is good enough. If you just get started the rest will probably come by itself.

Laban Thanks, Marga.

Marga Thanks for nothing. Thank his friend, who in spite of all her simplicity yet made his personality flourish enough to leave a lasting impression both after his demission and after his all too romantic departure.

(smiles. Laban responds to her smile, and they understand each other.)

The End.

Leh, 14.8.2008,
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