

José Leon Machado

DARKENING STARS

A Novel of the Great War



Edições Vercial

José Leon Machado was born in Braga, in the Minho region in northern Portugal, in 1965. He served in the Portuguese Army between 1988 and 1989, having been posted to the Azores Islands as a communications specialist. Returning to Braga, he graduated in Humanities from the Portuguese Catholic University, received an MA in Portuguese Language and Literature from the University of Minho, and a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro in Vila Real, where he is Professor of Semiotics and Portuguese Language and Culture. A prolific scholar and literary critic, he has also written many short stories and ten novels. His first work to appear in English translation, *Darkening Stars. A Novel of the Great War* is about a young law student who was drafted to serve as a platoon commander in the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps sent to Flanders in 1917. What happened to him and the men under his command, the small and great miseries of their life in the trenches, their links with what they left behind and what they lost, and the incomprehension they met upon returning home, are some of the main lines of this moving and historically accurate portrait of one of the most turbulent periods of Portuguese history. It is also a story of love and of a young man's inner struggles and personal growth, his determined search for peace and happiness, along a path strewn with destruction and trampled dreams.

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A NOVEL OF THE GREAT WAR

Translated from the Portuguese with Notes

by

Milton M. Azevedo

and

Karen C. Sherwood Sotelino

Edições Vercial

Title of the Portuguese original: *Memória das Estrelas sem Brilho*

Copyright of the Portuguese original: José Leon Machado, 2008-2012

Title of the English translation: *Darkening Stars – A Novel of the Great War*

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Cover illustration: Paul Driver

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Ed. Vercial, Braga (Portugal), 2012

Internet: <http://alfarrabio.di.uminho.pt/vercial/evercial>

ISBN: 978-989-700-088-1

Legal Deposit:

Printed by Publidisa

For José Saramago

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.

Ecclesiastes, 12:2

In battle the Captain loves the knight who, having fled, returns and attacks the enemy strongly, better than one who never turned his back nor ever performed an honorable action.

St. Gregory

Life should be a simple gesture of withdrawal, like a secondary actor who leaves the stage without saying the last word, which did not belong to him, but just left, no longer needed.

José Saramago

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DARKENING STARS

A NOVEL OF THE GREAT WAR

I

I am staying home with the maid while Aninhas and my mother are spending a few days in Póvoa de Varzim with Aunt Generosa, who is sick and needs some help. Afonso, my eldest son, is in his first year of engineering at Coimbra. Pedro is at the seminary in Braga, studying for the priesthood. And my youngest, Inês, is at a boarding school for young women in Famalicão.¹

My first night alone was uncomfortable. I had more war nightmares. That was why, at dinner, on a sudden and inexplicable impulse – because I do not, nor have ever had any expectation of dallying with the servants – I asked Guiomar to sleep with me.

“Good Lord, sir!” she exclaimed, rather offended, as she set the soup tureen on the table. “I’m a good girl.”

“I know you are, Guiomar. That’s why I’m asking you.”

“I don’t get it, sir. You’re teasing me, or trying to make me look silly.”

“If you’ll sleep with me, I promise not to touch you.”

“And you think you’ll manage that, sir? Wouldn’t that be like playing with fire? And besides, why do you want me to sleep with you, sir?”

“I’m not used to sleeping alone, and I get horrible nightmares all night long. Having someone’s company makes me sleep well. I swear by our Lord Jesus I won’t lay a hand on you.”

“Holy Mary Mother of God! And what if Dona Ana finds out?”²

“Only if you tell her.”

“Even if I don’t, she might easily find a strand of hair in the sheets, or notice my smell, and then she’ll fire me.”

“Well, you can always wash the sheets.”

“I don’t trust that, sir. In these situations women are worse than dogs.”

“You mean they’re perceptive.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Listen here, Guiomar: what if I promise you a new skirt and blouse?”

“Promises, promises, everyone knows they’re as fickle as the wind. Besides, it’s not just Dona Ana finding out. I’m afraid you’ll take advantage of me, sir. You see, sir, no man has ever laid a hand on me, and I plan on keeping it like that all the way to the altar, if I ever meet someone who wants me.”

“Of course you’ll meet someone. A girl like you deserves the best in this world, and in the next too. Come over here, sit down next to me and join me for some soup.”

“Oh no, sir! My place is in the kitchen. I’m going to check the stew on the burner.”

Guiomar dashed out of the dining room. It took her a while to bring me the tureen of stew. She set it down on the table, cleared away the soup plate and stood there, waiting. I helped myself to a chicken thigh, some collard greens, and half a potato. In fact, I was not very hungry.

While I dined, I watched her out of the corner of my eye. She was nearly twenty five and somewhat clumsy, the result of her upbringing and the rustic atmosphere of her childhood. Her skin was very fair and she had big, blue eyes. Her brown hair fell in two long braids. She was solidly built, with wide hips and a generous bosom. Because she was such a good cook, Aninhas had hired her when she was still in her teens.

I ate some of my chicken thigh, a leaf of collard greens, and the potato. After drinking a glass of wine I stood up from my chair.

“Won’t you have no more, sir?” she asked.

“No, Guiomar. I’m not really hungry.”

“But you barely ate...”

“I’m feeling a little under the weather. I’m going to my study to do some reading.”

“Shall I bring along some tea in a little while, sir?”

“Yes, please do.”

I sat down in one of the armchairs in the study, next to the warm fire where the Boche bronze insignia with an eagle and the motto, *Mit Gott für Koenig und Vaterland* – a war trophy I had brought from Flanders – hung over the mantelpiece. I took up Raul Brandão’s novel, *Húmus*, and resumed my reading.³ An hour later Guiomar came in with the tea tray. I set my book aside and asked her to sit down in the armchair opposite me. Out of respect for Aninhas, who usually sat there, she refused. She poured my tea with three teaspoons of sugar and handed it to me. That was usually Aninhas’s role, but since she was away, Guiomar felt it was her duty to take her place.

“You know, sir, I was thinking about what you asked me,” she said, somewhat embarrassedly, wringing her hands in her apron.

“And...?” I said, taking a sip of my tea.

“If you promise that you won’t take advantage of me, sir, I’ll let you sleep in my bed. It’s small, and the room’s a bit cold. But if we settle in, we’ll fit, and it ain’t so cold with an extra blanket.”

“Guiomar, you’re a good girl. I promise I won’t lay a hand on you. You’ve already earned your new skirt and blouse.”

“All right then, if you’ll excuse me, sir, I’ll make up the room.”

“Well, don’t go overboard. Just tuck yourself in and I’ll be along shortly.”

“Don’t forget to turn off the lights and put out the fire, sir. The last thing we need is some kind of disaster.”

As she walked toward the door I studied her figure from behind. She was really not a seductive woman, but still, I was not indifferent to her rustic looks.

I took up the book once again and read, “Only insignificance allows us to carry on with life. Without it, the screaming lunatic inside us would have taken over the world. Boundless

strength is concentrated in insignificance.” It was a depressing book. I made another valiant effort to finish the last paragraph of the chapter, “We are all here, waiting for death!” I closed the book and sat for a while, staring at the Boche insignia.

When I knocked on Guiomar’s door in the attic, she asked me to come in, but without turning on the light. I stripped down to my skivvies in the dark, dropped my clothes on the floor, and climbed into bed. Although it was not big, it accommodated the two of us perfectly. The room was indeed cold.

“Get cozy,” she said, tucking the blankets around us.

Then we both were silent. I managed to fall asleep, but in the middle of the night I had a nightmare. I dreamed that thousands of Boche soldiers were coming at me. Someone next to me was firing a Lewis machine gun. The bullets were like water and the enemy troops did not fall, but kept on coming, getting closer and closer. We ran out of ammunition and one of them charged with his bayonet pointing at me and stuck it into my arm. I hollered out in pain and Guiomar held me by the shoulders anxiously, “What happened, sir? Are you all right?”

When I heard her voice, just like in similar situations with Aninhas, the Boche soldiers turned into mist and the nightmare was over.

“It’s nothing, Guiomar,” I said, still half asleep and rubbing my injured arm. “It was just a dream.”

“About the war, right?”

“Yes.”

“My godfather, he was in the war too, and he used to have bad dreams. Go back to sleep, don’t be afraid, I’m right here next to you.”

We went back to sleep and I did not have the nightmare again.

In the morning I woke up with Guiomar facing me. There was enough light coming through the slits of the small oval window for me to see. I admired her as she slept, her

fresh face, her eyes still shut, and a faint smile on her lips. I touched her forehead and hair. She sighed softly, opening her eyes. Then she grimaced briefly at finding me next to her, and quickly recovered her sense of reality. In a soft, lazy voice, she said, "Good morning, sir. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, Guiomar, I did. Thank you for the company."

I got up, gathered my clothes from the floor, and left the room.

On the following days, we kept sleeping together, without ever mentioning it as we went on with our daily lives. At nighttime, she would go to her room and I would meet her there a little later. We fell asleep side by side and would invariably wake up in each other's arms. I had no more nightmares.

Several days later, when I was checking the white wine barrels in the cellar with Delmiro, one of my day laborers, I asked him nonchalantly, "So, when are you going to get married, young man? It's high time."

"Well, sir, to get married, a man's got to have someone to get married to."

"And can't you see your way clear to winning over one of the local girls?"

"There ain't too many available, sir. And those there is, they want a man with a situation, or with a little something of his own. And as you well know, sir, I ain't got neither."

"Well, Guiomar's a good girl, and she wouldn't say no," I said, testing him.

"Guiomar?" he said, surprised.

"Yes, Guiomar."

"But she's my parents' goddaughter. She's like kin."

"What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong, sir? Well, godchildren ain't supposed to marry their godparents' children."

"That's news to me."

"Well, sir, you just ask Father Ruas. He says it's written in the books."

“You mean in Canon Law.”

“That’s right. The Church forbids that kind of marriage ’cause it’s assestuous.”

“You mean it’s incestuous.”

“Something like that. Anyways, it’s like we was brother and sister. Before God, that is.”

“I see. But Civil Law, which carries more weight than Canon Law, does allow that kind of marriage, you know. Therefore, there’s no legal impediment. The priest’s got to marry you, whether he likes it or not.”

“That may well be, sir. You ought to know, ’cause you’ve read the Law, and I can barely read. But what really matters is if she likes me.”

“And who told you she doesn’t? She’s got her eyes glued on you when you walk by.”

“Is that so?”

“Like I’m telling you. The other day, when I sent you on an errand and it got dark before you came back, she was worried to death.”

Delmiro kept silent while he inserted a tap into the barrel.

“So she likes me?” he said finally, as if to himself.

“When you have a chance, talk to her and ask her to be your girl. I’m sure she’ll agree.”

“Do you really think so, sir?”

“I certainly do. But listen to me,” I added, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “no hanky-panky around here, do you hear? Let’s keep things decent. And as soon as she agrees to be your sweetheart, you’ll talk to the priest and marry her.”

He laughed and promised he would not touch a strand of her hair until the priest had blessed them. To help start him out in married life so he would have the means to support his wife and their children, I promised to put him in charge of my best estate. He was ecstatic at the news and swore that, by Christmas, he would drum up enough courage to talk to Guiomar.

“And why not now?” I challenged him.

“You know, sir, I got to feel my way first. To go about it slowly, like I don’t mean nothing. Otherwise the bird’ll fly away. And at Christmas I can always give her a gift. That’s how you catch women, with gifts. They all go crazy about a hat or a handkerchief.”

“I see you know a lot about women.”

“Not that I got much experience, sir. But you know, sir, I’ve learned a lot from my sisters. Having two sisters at home can come in very handy at times.”

“Let it be by Christmas, then. Let’s hope you won’t let the bird fly the coop. Mind you, another hunter might come by.”

“Don’t you worry, sir. That bird won’t fly away. May I go blind if I let that happen.”

And he sealed his promise by kissing his thumb crossed against his index finger.

Two days later the mailman delivered a telegram from Aninhas, asking me to fetch her in Póvoa do Varzim. Her aunt was better.

“Tomorrow I’m going to pick up Dona Ana,” I told Guiomar at dinner time.

“Yes, sir,” she said, a little disappointed at the news.

“Please get some flowers for the house, will you? There must be chrysanthemums in the garden. They’re in season.”

“Chrysanthemums, sir?”

“Yes, why not?”

“They’re dead folks’ flowers. They go on tombstones.”

“But it seems to me that right now we have no other flowers. And I’d like the house to be cheerful to receive Dona Ana.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“And as to our deal, Guiomar, let’s keep it confidential.”

“Confidential, sir?”

“Mum’s the word, girl. We haven’t done anything wrong. But even so, Dona Ana wouldn’t like to know you’ve been sharing your bed with me.”

“Don’t you worry about that, sir.”

I took three twenty escudo⁴ bills from my wallet and handed them to her.

“This is for your new skirt and blouse. If anyone asks you where you got the money, just say you saved it.”

“But that’s too much, sir.”

“You can always buy a hat and some shoes.”

“Even so, there’ll be some to spare.”

“Well then, keep it for your trousseau.”

Guiomar held the bills in silence for a few moments.

“For my trousseau?”

“That’s right, for your trousseau. Every girl ought have a trousseau, right? Wouldn’t it be a shame if a young man asked a girl to marry him and it turned out she’d forgotten to get bed sheets for their new home?”

She seemed happy with the idea. She pocketed the bills and, after some hesitation, said, “Forgive my asking, sir, but tonight you’ll also...”

“Oh yes, Guiomar, if you don’t mind, I’ll be coming to your room.”

“Oh, I don’t mind, sir. I don’t mind at all.”

And she went to the kitchen, wobbling like a turkey, to fetch the grilled steak for me.

When, two hours later, I said good night to Raul Brandão and went up to the attic, I found Guiomar’s room softly lit by the full moon rays seeping through the cracks in the oval window. I lay down next to her and, unlike the previous nights, she turned to me and covered my face with kisses. While she kissed me, I felt her tears. I tried to calm her down with kind words and caresses. But the young woman was beside herself with excitement and my self-control began to waver. She grabbed one of my hands and guided it to one of her breasts. When I resisted, she asked, “Don’t you like me, sir?”

I told her I did, but that I wasn’t there to take advantage of her. And I started to get up to leave.

“Don’t go away, sir, stay with me. It’s our last night. Make

me happy. I know I'll never meet nobody that'll like me. It's just a dream. I'm too ugly for any man to like me."

"You are a pretty girl. You'll certainly meet a good man who'll make you happy."

She sat on top of me, let down her hair, and, in spite of the cold, took off her nightgown. I kissed her large breasts and lingered on her nipples, while caressing her back, shoulders, and neck. Meanwhile, she rubbed her sex on my loins forcefully, as if possessed by a sneaky devil. I slid my hand under her thighs and felt her, wet and throbbing. Guiomar sighed and wept, I do not know whether from pleasure or sadness, though surely not out of pain, as I had not yet penetrated her. I asked her gently to lie on her back, and let my mouth and hands go all over her body. I licked her pubis, nibbled her clitoris, taking in her scent and moistness. As I did this, I felt her hands caressing my hair. She had stopped weeping and I heard her sighs, broken by cries, "Oh my God! Jesus! I'm in heaven!"

I knew that moment could be dangerous. The young woman was excited and, if I got carried away, I might get her pregnant. I entered her slowly, controlling my natural impulse. Her excitement made penetration easy. If she was a virgin, I did not notice the difference. Nor did I notice any blood to indicate she was. Might she have lied about it? Perhaps. But the fact that there was no blood, as a physician friend had once explained to me, did not mean anything. Some women do not bleed. I was not thinking about it at the time. I played my role as best I could and, after the young woman had cried three or four times, I pulled out without ejaculating and lay down on my back. I was afraid to impregnate her and mess up her life. And mine, to be sure. We lay like that for a while, looking at the ceiling, catching our breath. Then she turned to me, with a smile of happiness, pressed her nipples on my chest, and whispered, "If this wasn't a sin, I'd swear I was in heaven."

"This is no sin, Guiomar."

"But Father Ruas, at church, says it is."

"Priests do it with their maids whenever they get a chance."

“That’s true. The priest at Esmoriz⁵ has three children. Everybody knows it.”

“See?”

“Oh, sir, I never thought it could be so good. I’ve always heard the older women say it hurts and only the men have a good time.”

“When people like each other it’s good for both of them.”

“But you don’t seem very happy, sir.”

“I didn’t want to make you pregnant, Guiomar. That’s why I pulled out before I felt the way you did.”

“So you didn’t feel anything, sir?”

“Seeing you feel it was enough for me.”

She did not seem convinced and asked what she could do to console me. I told her it was not worth worrying about. I felt fine. She started kissing me, and insisted she did not want me to be disappointed. I said if she felt like it, she could caress my penis and kiss it, if that did not bother her. She must have remembered I had felt no qualms about sucking her juice and smelling her, and she went at it eagerly, and in a little while I burst into a swell of fire and pleasure.

I got up early, climbed onto the Ford and drove to Póvoa de Varzim to fetch Aninhas. During the trip I promised myself that my bedroom trysts with Guiomar were over. It was bad for the young woman’s future and it would be worse for my relationship with my wife and children, if word got out. Besides, with a little push, we would soon have a wedding.

I did not think marital unfaithfulness, categorically condemned by contemporary morality, is any more important than a boy’s prank. Love is to be given and to be received. Everything else is sheer prejudice. Furthermore, I did not love my wife any less because of that episode. I may be accused of machismo for saying it, but deep inside, I would not like to find out she was also promiscuous, and that instead of visiting her sick aunt, she had been spending a few days with some dandy.

II

There are four kinds of men: guileless, like Rato and the soldiers I commanded in Flanders; ordinary, like Captain Rebelo and the other two second lieutenants in my company; demagogues, like the politicians who sent us to war to fight for their interests in the name of the fatherland; and enlightened. I consider myself an enlightened man, with a sense of responsibility, even though, like anyone else, I am given to passions which, in the course of my life, have often left me in awkward situations. I have tried to do good; not hypocritical Christian good works, in hopes of some reward after death, but acting selflessly and cutting no deals with some almighty god.

The war ended twenty years ago today. For me, it is still not over. Actually, for the last twenty years, in my mind I have been crawling through the mud of the trenches, taking cover from bullets and shells, hearing the heavy guns booming and the machine guns rattling. Sometimes I wake up drenched in sweat, clutching Aninhas.

I have a recurring dream that leaves me with a taste of blood in my mouth. I blow my whistle and lead my platoon over the top, aiming my pistol at no man's land. We slosh forward in the mud and through the shell holes, after the guns on our side have gone silent. The Boche machine guns and rifles start singing. Bullets crack overhead and beside me. We all hit the dirt and nobody knows if the man next to him is dead or alive. The wounded moan, the only ones that show any sign of life. There is a pause in the sound of the enemy weapons. The Boche are conserving their ammunition. Since I am the platoon commander, I force myself to stand up and blow my whistle, signaling a new charge and pointing toward a crater-like hole. About half of my men stand up and move forward. The weapons start singing again. That is when, racing ahead, I feel lead piercing my chest, tearing up my heart, coming out

my back, as if a lance had run through me. I fall down slowly, my hands on my chest, my eyes wide open in the darkness, feeling excruciating pain and the life oozing out of me with my blood.

It is an odd dream, all the more so because I never took part in any attack or raid against enemy lines. I can only explain it by the dread everyone felt that some day we might get orders for a raid. But that would have been unusual, because the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in Flanders was primarily charged with holding its positions, rather than attacking or raiding the enemy's. Still, the commander of our division, keen on impressing the English, would sometimes order a raid. The purpose was almost always the same: to capture prisoners and check out the enemy trenches. It was a rare occasion when we had no wounded or dead brought back on stretchers. And we wondered what for. The soldiers captured were privates or low-ranking, noncommissioned officers who knew little or nothing about offensives and counter-offensives. Like us, they just followed orders. And the enemy lines were not much different from ours: muddy holes protected against bombardments by sand bags, forming a tangled maze dotted with machine gun posts and pools of stinking water.

Maybe the only difference was that the signs in our trenches were in English, which most of us could not understand anyway, while their signs were in German. I once suggested to the Captain of our company that he might recommend to the Major of our battalion to tell the Colonel of our brigade to mention to the General of our division to suggest to the General commanding the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps that, in meeting with the English generals, they might decide to have the signs displayed all over our trenches translated into Portuguese. Captain Rebelo gave me an amused look and said he had already thought of that but had put it on the back-burner when he realized that, by the time the proposal reached proper channels, the war would likely be over. I said he was too

optimistic about the end of the war. He laughed, "Come on, Vasques, don't you get it? I know this war's going to last. The big brass are having fun playing with their little colored flags, tin soldiers, and painted cardboard trenches. When the war's over they won't even notice."

The Captain was very encouraging. Fortunately he only talked like that to the officers, or to some of the more reliable sergeants. In front of the troops, his talk was always cheerful, "Hang in there, boys, this war will soon be over. A couple more weeks and the Boche will surrender, and then we'll get our marching orders to go home."

And the soldiers believed him, or pretended to, and then they would put more effort into cleaning and maintaining their equipment and the trenches.

I do not like to talk about the war. At home everyone knows that and the subject is rarely brought up. Sometimes an unsuspecting guest, having heard I went to war and got wounded in one arm, asks a question. I get into a bad mood and clam up. Some have found that offensive. But you simply cannot discuss the war with someone who did not go through it. No matter in how much detail you tell about the horror we went through, they never fully understand it. Some look at you in disbelief, as if such atrocities were not possible. They think we exaggerate just to show off our courage. They think we went to war as if on vacation, for a government-paid holiday in France. We can only share the horror with someone who was also there and saw the dying men's bloody wounds and heard their shouts, someone who buried his head in the mud to dodge the shells and saw human body parts scattered on the ground with rats crawling all over them. No matter how much I wish to forget, it is the stench of the trenches that fills my nose when I take a walk in the country after the rain. In a tree felled by the wind I see that soldier with his leg severed by a shell fragment. The moment I heard his shouts I ran toward him. His comrades were around him, one of them holding the leg like a useless

object. I came up to the soldier and he grabbed my tunic and cried, "Sir! Tell me I won't die, sir!"

And I, maybe more scared than he was, kept on saying he wouldn't die, that it was just a scratch. He died like that, clutching my uniform, as if a lightning bolt had struck him. The others had to help unclench his fingers from my tunic. I saw seven of my men die, two shot by snipers while smoking a cigarette, three killed by shell fragments, another shot dead when a comrade accidentally pulled the trigger, and one frozen to death while on guard duty on a trench parapet.

The soldier I watched dying while clutching my uniform was from a nearby village. When I came back I called on his wife to offer my sympathy, even though the War Ministry had already sent her an official letter of condolence. The family was poor and the soldier had left three children behind. The woman came to the door of their hut. She was dressed in black and did not ask me in. I started giving her my condolences. She cut me off brusquely and told me to go away, yelling insults at me, "Thief! You stole my husband from me!" I left in a hurry, before she could throw a pan at me. I did not visit the relatives of the other dead soldiers.

In the trenches, habit eventually made me indifferent to everything – the smell of excrement, rotten flesh, gas, burned gunpowder, mud, dampness, cold, the constant booming of the heavy guns. Our strategists used to explain such indifference as the result of our military instruction before going to the trenches, and of the war experience itself. When I came back, everything and anything – the smell of manure, a shot fired by a dove hunter, a firecracker on a holiday – would annoy me and suddenly drag me back to that scene of horror.

You just cannot talk about war with someone who has never been there. In the last twenty years, I have kept my memories to myself. Every year the veteran officers and sergeants of my old battalion hold a luncheon. Once they even organized an excursion to Flanders to revisit the place where, for about two

years, they watched their youth drift away and their friends and acquaintances die. I did not go on the excursion, and I went to only one luncheon, at Captain Rebelo's insistence. I hear that every year fewer veterans show up at these reunions, because so many of them have died from lung diseases caused by mustard gas, tuberculosis, and wounds that have sapped their health.

Since my return, my contact with the war has been through memoirs published by one veteran or another, which I collect. I have a few dozen, of variable value either as literature or as documentation. Some are more jingoistic and praise the courage, bravery and valor of the Portuguese soldiers. Others are more critical, either of the performance of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in Flanders, or of our politicians' decision to drag the country into the war. A few books, written by junior officers, limit themselves to describing daily life in the trenches. These I have read with interest, feeling that somewhere out there, someone has been suffering as much as I have. Finally I lost interest in those books and stored them away in the attic, not so much out of fear of being tempted to leaf through them again, but so that no guest would come across them in the library and bring up the subject.

It may sound contradictory for me to say that I find it painful to talk or hear about the war when I am in the middle of recalling it. Actually, I have read somewhere that writing about what torments you is a way of exorcising it and rendering it harmless. Except for some doggerel written when I was a student, I make no claim to being a writer. While in the Army I wrote service reports, and since then I have been writing legal briefs. It would just not do to become a writer now that my hair has turned gray. You have to make room for the youth. And insofar as I have learned from the few magazines and journals that come my way, there is no dearth of people keen on turning the world upside down with literature. As for me, I will content myself with filling out a few folios that I will probably burn after the exorcism has been completed.