# *Requiem*

Were I to say that Genevieve possessed a fine clear voice and leave it at that, I might, not without justice, well be charged with understatement. Were I instead to say that she sang like the heavenly God-intoxicated seraphim, then the charge could, once again not without justice, be that of leaning towards hyperbole. Suffice it then to say that hers was the voice that led her to be given the lead soprano role in the *Terpsichore Amateur Society for Music and the Performing Arts* rendering of Mozart's *Requiem*, to which she obtained a seat for me right there in the front tier, the two of us separated solely by the footlights, a microphone and, on his podium, the conductor, the septuagenarian turning octogenarian, Francis X.G. (for Xavier Gerontius) Gray.

I had agreed to go, though not without some misgivings, however privately entertained. Masses, requiems, cantatas, even oratorios — unless they were, say, *Elijah* or *Jephthah* or *Judas Maccabeus* — were, after all, scarcely apt fare for one descended as I had been — to cite my one-time Hebrew teacher, Reverend Granek — "from the most direct, most continuous line of Abraham, may all God's children remain so blessed". Set against this, however, was the consideration that, as a lecturer in philosophy, my period of expertise and deepest empathy being for the Age of Reason spanning Descartes and Newton and Paine and Voltaire, it would have seemed nothing short of tribally insular to have yielded to some exclusive atavistic fealty

to my heritage when all outward adherence to prescribed Mosaic ritual, belief and worship had with me by then not only fallen by the way but, like other religions and other faiths, had come to represent the mere legacy of darker, anachronistic and superstitious, however pious, ages.

O, I knew that attempts had been made, and were continually being made, to bring tradition up to date and to invest it with "meaning for moderns" (to quote Rabbi Nemerov of the *Beth Din*, who was most vocally concerned by the number of defectors, through out-marriage or sheer apathy, from the faith). I was familiar, too, with the names and writings of Buber and Rosenzweig, of Soloveitchik and Fackenheim, and of that arch-sufferer of our time, Elie Wiesel, if only because Father, my father, a *Gymnasium* teacher back home, though a picture-framer in this land of his adoption, had urged me often enough "to look deeply into our own, into *your* own". But try as I might to warm to them, to our own, to *my* own, and be moved, persuaded, excited or inspired by them, they paled repeatedly against the eighteenth-century rationalists who were so much more to my taste, as also against the more recent Kierkegaard, Russell, Camus and Sartre who, along with the more secular humanists and laureated men of science, in this world made much more perfect sense.

But overriding even this was the most basic, the most simple reason of all. I went to the performance of the *Requiem* out of deference to Genevieve; no, I went — why mince words? — I went out of love for Genevieve; I went out of sheer love for her with whom — *pace*, Rabbi Nemerov, *pace* Father, Mother, *pace* Papa and Mama Allan — I was the merest step away from engagement, that last step being both enormously large and yet, if reason — if Reason — alone were guiding illuminating beacon, then at the same time dismissively small: simply — A pox on all that separated men! — different versions of God; my parents' being that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, hers the God that made up one limb of a Trinity that also encompassed the Son and the Holy Ghost.

We ourselves, Genevieve and I — children of light —

accepted neither and, where challenged beneath our roofs, could with total honesty, tell our respective parents that our loved one was different not only from others of their kind but also from whatever image they might have entertained — in the case of the Allans, of Jewish boys, and, in my parents' case, of Catholic girls. We were, in a sense, kindred spirits, whatever our bloodlines. For just as I lectured best on the optimism for mankind that generally characterised my mentors among the *philosophes* and their English, American and German kin, Genevieve's Master's thesis, albeit in literature, had touched upon just this aspect of my philosophical concerns, its very title, *Mind as tabula rasa: Enlightenment formulae towards human perfectibility*, evoking in me a responsive chord that made us of one blood, each of us independently primed but in unison inclined towards the notion that it was through reason, and understanding, and goodwill and human action, rather than through either divine grace or supernatural intervention, that any approximation to perfection would ever be attained. Fittingly enough, we had met at a getaway weekend seminar entitled "Rationalism: a return from Idealistic, Romantic, Nationalistic and Sectarian deviances and mayhem".

My parents — like Genevieve's, as I was in time to learn — had scarcely been pleased about my going.

"Not enough that you studied with them, that you work with them, that even on Friday nights you go to their parties," Mother had said with no little heat, "you now also have to eat, sleep and breathe with them under one roof". And she had added a coda, by now something of a signature tune aimed at sealing all argument: "Is this what we survived to rear you for?"

Father had been more pithy.

"If you must choose to be an *apikoros*, then remain a Jewish one at least," he said.

The irony was that of the thirty or thirty-five participants at the seminar, I could scarcely turn north, south, east or west without confronting at least one or two other faces descended from that other most illustrious now-timeless *apikoros*, Abra-

ham, that other ancestral heretic hounded some four millennia past for having denounced, demeaned, demolished and devastated the gods of *his* fathers, those effigied, totemed precursor gods of Ur. But paying only lip-service to friendship with an anti-vivisectionist *nudnik* in Reuben Aronowicz and passing over the attentions of a frizz-haired, sharp-chinned and tight-jeaned Rachel Rabechofsky, I plunged instead, like some predatory kingfisher, for Genevieve Allan who with grace — and with what grace! — had taken issue with an assertion I had made, bringing it down from the rarefied realm of flighty hypothesis to a harder reality wholly earthbound.

That, more than anything else, quickly separated her for me from the Elizabeths, Cressidas, Livias and Joannes, as from the Marcuses, Peters, call-me-Bills and Gordons who, too, had come. That exchange had raised Genevieve above the ruck, but when, later, at the evening's extempore *soiree* I heard her sing where others fiddled, trumpeted, recited or raconteured — heard her sing *Una voce poco fa, Che faro senza Euridice*? and the *Carmen* "Habanera" — if anyone else was there sitting, walking, talking, smoking, drinking, laughing, clattering saucers or scraping chairs about me, then truth was that I had become oblivious to them all and dared at concert's end approach her — none too subtly — and say, with admittedly pert if not impertinent bravado, "My, your talents seem nowhere to cease. You really are a most veritable Madame de Stael, what with your feel for sophism, for history, for dialectic and for music, bringing culture — Culture with a capital C — to this simple, Rousseauian, rustic Arcady!"

Such liberties back home would surely have earned me the coldest of cold shoulders. But the balmy clarity of the nocturnal Kalorama air, the near-total pacific ambience of repose, and the dropping of each participant's guard in the wake of close-quartered communality, had led her instead to purse her lips in mirth, bow her head in mock deference, and to return with a most affecting reciprocating perkiness, "A most gracious compliment this, coming as it does from our in-house Johnsonian post-Socratic proto-Platonic crypto-Voltairean heir."

So was the would-be catcher caught — caught by the sharp and chipper quicksilver repartee, by the bell-like tintinnabulation and clarity of her singing voice, by the evidence of a mind not too indolent to think, and by other touches that were patently more physical: the easy way she bore herself with a most savoir faire Toorak-bred elegance; the way, too, she tossed back her head to restore to obedience a wave of rebellious honey-coloured hair; the way her smoothly arching nose twitched whenever she was about to laugh; and the way a little dark mole — more beguiling than any black-pencilled artifice — danced beside her lips whenever she talked, as she usually talked, with zestful animation. I was enthralled by all of these and remained so enthralled that at a later date, and back home, I brought myself to call her "my perfect angel"; upon which she showed me the inturning of her little fingers that I had not noticed before and countered, not without some jollity and patently flattered pleasure, "Oh, no, spare me, I'm not. If I were an angel, you wouldn't have me; while if I were perfect, I'd be a freak."

Freak, then, but delectable freak was she, Genevieve, with whom I came daily to lunch at the university and whom I took to the theatre, thereby creating a buzz around the ever-vigilant loquacious witness-bearers to incipient scandal around Judaic Melbourne; with whom, too, I attended the monthly meetings of the Rationalist Society and debated the Rousseauian ideal as manifested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-Century European, English and Russian literature; and whom I went frequently to hear sing, now solo, now in a madrigal ensemble, now in the *Terpsichore* choir, taking her with me in turn to a succession of art-shows, antiquarian stores and book-fairs that had long been my own private passion.

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And the day came when, after a concentrated succession of rehearsals during which I saw less of her, Genevieve took her place on the stage and I mine in the auditorium of the Town

Hall in readiness for the "Terpsi Requiem" as we had come to call Mozart's final work on earth.

On reaching the foyer at the top of the stairs, she had turned to me, squeezed my hand and smiled with uncustomary nervousness. Her palm was faintly cool and moist.

"Wish me luck," she said. "Who knows but that God himself may be listening tonight."

I returned the pressure of her hand.

"That will mark a change," I retorted and watched her disappear through a side-door that led backstage, the while waving her fingers and saying over a shoulder, "Meet you back here after this grand Latinic roundelay, okay? We can then go back to being normal and pagan again. Suits you?"

"Sure," I called after her. "But meanwhile, Gen, good luck!"

If, earlier, she had been nervous, on stage Genevieve was all assurance again. She was in her element, and positively regal, in crisp white blouse frilled beneath her chin, and in ankle-length black skirt, her hair drawn back and tied in an unobtrusive ribbon. She had presence too, and poise, and though I was clearly prejudiced in her favour, she so stood out from the other three soloists beside her and the orchestra and choir behind, that, for me, these others might as well not have been there at all. Only the conductor, Francis X.G.Gray was as much a master unto himself — and that because he walked to the podium so magisterially and bore with such distinction the charisma of grey-haired, gaunt and venerable age.

The lights having been dimmed, all shuffling of feet and coughing having stopped, and the customary hush before a performance having fallen, the first orchestral notes sounded. They were soft, slow and ominous, rising in a steady measured crescendo to a dramatic *forte* that introduced the choir in a full-voiced declamatory and lofty *Requiem aeternam*. I had heard recorded performances of the work before, but never had the back of my neck so tingled with the very hauntingness of those opening bars which, in a peculiar and surely sacrilegious quirk of association, I could in that moment compare only to the *El*

*Malé Rachamim*, ("O Lord Thou Art Full of Compassion"), that Cantor Nussbaum had chanted in this very hall at a commemorative ceremony for the Jewish martyrs of the war. And I tingled even more when soon, very soon, Genevieve herself, in the clearest, most ringing and most crystalline tones, sang her solo couplet, which, as it must have penetrated every recess of the auditorium, also penetrated flesh to heat the blood that coursed beneath.

But something else too struck me then that I had never paid heed to before, no matter how often I had heard the work. True music-lovers would most assuredly have regarded me as heathen, but music to me, even the finest — especially the finest — served more often as background accompaniment to reading, to preparation of lectures and to correction of students' essays than as something to be listened to in its own right. I was always too busy with one or other activity to permit myself the luxury of quiet concentration upon the interplay of themes or elaborations of arpeggios, or the pundit comparisons of symphonies and concerti as conducted by Von Karajan, Klemperer, Solti or Bernstein. But now, in the darkened hall, there being no distractions or duties to divert my attention, my attention indeed being fixed upon one object above all, my Genevieve so elegant and poised up there before me, I let the actual words of the *Requiem* reach me, I let the words reach into me. And although the greater part of the Latin I had so grudgingly learned at high-school had turned to rust, enough had remained for me to gain some meaning from what was being sung. So I made out Genevieve's *Te decet hymnus* most clearly, translating it the while; and where I had reclined most comfortably in my seat to enjoy Mozart in the flesh, as it were, I now sat up and leaned forward, the better to concentrate upon whatever else was still to come. For even as I listened to her sing "A hymn becomes Thee in Sion, O Lord, and a vow shall be paid Thee in Jerusalem", I heard another melody as well, an alternative chant or refrain that, issuing from memory's interstices, returned me to the time when, still attending synagogue with my father, I would hear Rabbi Nemerov before the open Ark

intone in his mighty baritone, "For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem".

Who had pilfered from whom? I found myself wondering; or, if it was not a case of pilfering, from what common source then had these seemingly parallel verses arisen, or to what common end could they in ecumenical thrust be turned? On returning home I would trace their origin.

Genevieve's solo part was for the moment brief. The choir inundated her, supervening with a fervent *Exaudi orationem* and *Kyrie eleison*, as fervent as the pleas of my own people beseeching God — O God! — to hear their prayer in the *Shema koleinu* and forgive them, forgive them, "*k'rov rachameicha El*", according to the abundance of his tender mercies. And then the *Sequentia* followed, and the *Rex tremendae*, and the *Recordare*, a cascade of melody and resonance and beauty tumbling in such profligate richness and fluid luxuriance that, were I to listen to the music alone, I might, in its thrall, have made ready to disown every truth of that sensible and sober reason I so prized, and accept, yes, even accept, the very possibility of a deity supernal and sublime.

But O the words, the words, and the concepts, the abstractions, the primitively benighted gobbledy-gook that the Mozartian musical incandescence was set to and wasted upon: Judge, King, Throne, and Book of Judgement, doom, resurrection, retribution, absolution — words and concepts and abstractions which I had long before turned my back on in my own inheritance, but which now, in the most unwonted, most incongruous of circumstances, returned to me in another guise. And in that moment, I recalled, wholly unbidden, an admonition tendered to me by my mother: "Remember who your grandparents were; remember where they are now; remember the kind who tore them from you", and recalled too a wry remark made by my father: "One bed can sleep two people, but never will it accommodate two peoples."

And yet to those very kind was I now paying obeisance! I was bending the knee in offerings of tribute that were not for me to give. What had I let myself in for? What was I doing here? If I

had little time or patience for my own liturgy, what was I doing lapping at another's? What did I want of Marys and St.Michaels and sweet Lord Jesuses, I, most probably the sole Jew in that hall? Was I not by my very presence committing, if not desecration of the Name — for, to me, there was no Name — then desecration of a people, of my people, and of their memory and their history, extending from the generation that was Abraham's through to my very own? To be free-thinking was one thing; to be accepting of others, also. But that did not mean the forsaking of the worship of one's own people's imputed God to go whoring after the gods of those others. Had I let my head be so sorely turned?

Ah, love! love! love! — that scapegrace obfuscator that would scramble all sensibleness, wisdom, sobriety and poise.

And what of Genevieve? What was she doing there? Genevieve; she who had herself till now denied the canons of her own Catholic nurturing and yet was now singing as if she were wholly rapt, wholly transported, wholly possessed, giving seemingly inspired utterance to words that transgressed everything we shared — the belief in a world liberated from the shackles of doctrinal superstition, which served as obstacle supreme to every prophetic vision of the lion lying with the lamb and the turning of weapons into ploughshares and dogmas into universal accord.

Genevieve!

Up there on the stage before me, so elegant, so gaunt, so animated and galvanised.

Genevieve!

Was she slipping away?

Genevieve!

I wanted to call out: "Come down! Come down!"

But she sang on, as did her companion soloists, and the choir, through section after section, through "*Salva me*!" and "*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*!" and "*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*", myself the while rendering the alien into the more familiar, rendering it into the synagogal forms I had left behind, into "*Hoshiah na*!" and "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*!" and "*Baruch haba*

*b'Shem Adonai*"; "Save me!" and "Holy, holy, holy!" and "Blessed be he that comes in the name of the Lord!"

There was no reaching her. She was wholly a part of the orchestra and choir. Francis X.G.Gray had rehearsed them well. And as I listened, as I heard Genevieve, after a brief lyrically pastoral orchestral lead-in, launch with patent passion into the *Lux aeterna* bidding eternal light to shine upon the dead for God was merciful, God was merciful, God was merciful, I writhed in my seat; I leaned forward, I leaned back; and to the consternation of my neighbours left and right, I bent a leg under my thigh, straightened it out again, picked up the programme notes I had dropped to the floor and felt the need to clear my throat.

"Genevieve!" I wanted to cry out again. "Genevieve! Do you know what you are doing? Don't you see... Can't you see you're singing a lie? A lie! A huge and monstrous fabricated dressed-up lie!"

She sang on.

"Genevieve! Have you been so taken in by the music's guile? So seduced by it that you would even deny your truest self?"

The choir joined her, echoing her prayer.

> *Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine*
> Let eternal light shine upon them, O Lord

"Genevieve! Who is this God you're singing to? *What* is this God?"

The auditorium resonated with the music that flowed smoothly and mellifluously, leading towards tranquillity — the ultimate tranquillity which, on earth, was to be had only through the eternal repose and silence and oblivion of death. No-one moved; no-one as much as twitched; breathing itself may have been suspended, save my own that, wise to music's treachery, seethed now as though stirred in a boiling cauldron.

*Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es*
With Thy saints forever, for Thou art merciful

"Genevieve! Haven't we talked about this, talked about it, time without number? Decided that God is but an invention of blind benighted man? A confabulation of an over-extended mind? An oriental delusion born of a sun-and-desert-addled brain! Have you forgotten?. . ."

The *Requiem* was nearing its end. My jaws were locked. My every muscle was knotted to tautness. I held my hands, my fists, clasped between my knees.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine*
Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord

"And what delusion, Genevieve! And what delusion! The most lethal of all which, like nettles gone wild, comes to possess and set men at odds, the most predatory among them sanctifying in His name the spilling of blood, the most God-inebriated even now, somewhere, in some corner, with some pious prayer upon his tongue perpetrating or perpetuating some new and dastardly form of evil. . ."

The *Requiem* was steadily moving towards its final denouement. The music was exquisite, it was noble, it was — and in different circumstances, it could even for me have been — exalting. But I was not yet done. Even as all voices on stage were united in singing "*et lux perpetua luceat eis*", I was not yet done.

For I wanted still to cry out — and would have cried out, had public spectacle been in my nature:

"You sing hosannas," I would have cried, "all of you, you too now Genevieve, you too now Genevieve, to that fabricated universal object of delusion, singing so sublimely of absolution, resurrection and eternal light!"

The choir had reached its coda:

*Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum*
With Thy saints forever

"But who are to be the absolved? Those who killed even as they sang their hosannas or those who *were* killed with their own hosannas on their lips?"

The refrain recurred.

*Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum*
With Thy saints forever

"And who will be the resurrected? The murderers or the murdered?"

And again the same:

*Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum*
With Thy saints forever

"And who are the ones destined to eternal light and who the ones doomed to darkness eternal?"

And the refrain rose for a last reprise, attended now by its concluding seal:

*Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, quid pius es*
With Thy saints forever, for Thou art merciful —

to which I offered up my own response, my own cadenza: "Are we not *all* doomed, *all* of us so long as we cling to dogmas and mythologies and to hoary fossilised primeval tribalisms? Even you, Genevieve, even you, kindred spirit, even you, who through your art have just perpetuated those very farragos we have so consistently debated, decried, denied?"

With the close of the *Requiem* on the sustained note of "*pius es*", the auditorium remained silent for a protracted moment, then erupted into keen applause. If, earlier, I had in that assembly felt myself apart, I was now more than ever isolated,

alone. I could not goad myself to bring my own hands together in plaudit, but made ready to move towards the foyer even though I was in full sight of Genevieve who glanced at me with the most wan and exhausted of smiles which, even that, I could not return.

I was itching for confrontation.

"Why did you let yourself be drawn into that web of fictions, deceits and taradiddle?" I burned to ask. "After all, you weren't singing "Three blind mice" or "Oranges and lemons" or "Old Mother Hubbard" who went to her cupboard. Those very same who wove such paeans and sang melodies so sublime, in their time also killed, killed, killed!"

But wherein lay the gain in such confrontation, and what might not be the loss? Was it not in fact more meet, for the sake of continuing accord, to tell myself she had indeed been singing nursery rhymes and keep the rest inside, swallow it, take her by the shoulder, kiss a cheek and even praise her performance when she came out into the foyer? Reason and sensibleness dictated that this was the better thing to do.

But Genevieve did not come out.

Nor did I find her when I returned to the auditorium in search of her, learning from one of the musicians as he packed away his tuba that she had phoned for a taxi to take her home.

I hurried out, pushed my way past the last of the stragglers departing down the stairs and sprinted to my car in a nearby parking lot. I drove through the darkness, accelerated through amber lights before they changed, weaved between seemingly crawling lanes of cars and reached her home in St George's Road just as a taxi — hers — was drawing away and Genevieve was passing through her gate.

"Genevieve!" I called, briskly getting out of my car.

She could not have heard, or had perhaps elected not to hear. Her heels continued to clatter along the path to her door.

"Genevieve!" I called again.

This time she did stop. Under the light of a streetlamp, I saw her pause, partly turn, kick the point of a shoe into the ground

in indecision, and then approach, albeit slowly, haltingly, almost grudgingly.

"Genevieve!" I said a third time. "What's happened?"

Before me was not the Genevieve I knew, self-assured, buoyant, quick. Her shoulders were normally straight and sure; now, a weight seemed to weigh them down.

"I would have phoned you tomorrow, apologised, explained," she said. "But tonight, I couldn't face you back there. I needed to be alone."

"Oh?" I said.

"I had to sort myself out."

"So suddenly?" I asked.

She hesitated; she seemed to be reaching for speech.

"Perhaps it was the music, perhaps the words. Or the sanctity of the work which even during rehearsals I had written off; or the reverential solemnity that pervaded the auditorium, or Francis Gray's total adoration of the work and utter conviction of its truth; or the way every note burrowed into the soul, or that which is given the name of 'soul'. Whatever it was, whatever it was, something in me changed."

"All this on account of a single evening with Mozart?" I said in an attempt, feeble as it was, at levity.

Genevieve tossed her head between a confirming nod and a negating shake.

"Mozart was only part of it. The other was you. For when I saw you, at the end, not so much as acknowledging the performance, let alone my part in it, I knew that something had happened to you too. And I came to see that for all we had earlier held in common, in such matters as reach beyond the realms of reason, we were, you and I, in fact light-years apart."

"We need not be," I said. "Maybe, Genevieve, we can forget this evening ever happened."

She placed a hand upon my arm, then removed it.

"Listen," she said, "Till now, we've held religion to be delusion. . ."

"Which it is! It is!"

"But isn't the notion of universal reason or the belief in it but another such delusion? Can we really with any feasible hope believe that the Swedes and Chinese, say, or the Koreans and Scots, Mexicans and Basques, Aborigines and Hottentots, not to begin even to mention our own kind, Catholics on one hand and Jews on the other, will ever agree upon a single all-uniting universal truth dictated solely by disinterested reason, goodwill and common sense?"

"Are we therefore to give up trying?" I interposed.

The opportunity to speak had patently restored her to her more customary self-mastery, directness and poise.

"Asher, Asher, believe me. If as much as the possibility of it existed, then I would be ready, yes, even willing, in the name of Reason, to burn as others through the centuries burned for their doctrinal impieties. If I still had hopes that love, our love, might indeed bring near the day of Reasonable Man, I should cling to you still and look forward to that nest of little Gershovs we planned who would continue our work after us."

She plucked a leaf from a shrub that grew beside the gate and contemplated it.

"But there are things that are stronger in this world than common sense and reason, even if they are less true. And I discovered something else tonight. Even if we stayed together and married and had those little Gershovs about us, I would never be sure of myself, you could never be sure of me, I could never be sure of you, whatever you might say now."

I wanted to prove her wrong. I wanted also to reach out, to take her hands, to hold her and keep her from breaking away. But even without physically moving, she was in another sense clearly receding.

"What you're saying, then" I ventured instead, "is that East is East and West is West; for us, Moses will ever remain Moses and Jesus Jesus. . ."

She nodded, not with the satisfaction that came with discovery, but acquiescently, resignedly, yieldingly.

"Yes," she said. "Even when people have forgotten how to spell Kant or Voltaire, Locke or Sartre, Russell or Marx. . ."

"And so you are returning to live by your lies and telling me to return to mine. . ."

"If you want to put it that way. . ."

"Even if in reality it's a return to darkness?. . ."

"At least for me it's my own, in which, like the beaver or the bear, I may most surely be at home."

Genevieve shivered momentarily as a gust of wind kicked up around us, and she rubbed her arms.

"And now, if you will let me, I'd like to go inside, I'm getting cold out here. Good night, Asher. Don't think too ill of me. I've tried to make this easy for both of us. But the truth is. . ."

She leaned over towards me, sought out my hand, squeezed it, and kissed me on a cheek. But the kiss was fleeting. It was without passion, without lust. It was a kiss such as one gave a loved one before a departure. I tried to embrace her in turn, but she slipped from my grasp and turned away, heading more resolutely towards her door.

"Genevieve," I said after her, unable wholly to let go.

"Yes?" she said, pausing.

"Why did you have to sing tonight? And why the *Requiem* of all things? And why did you ask me to come? I was so perfectly happy before, believing I was working towards bringing light into the darkness, while now. . . while now I'm suddenly lost."

"Perhaps, Asher," she said, "that's God's way of showing us where we truly belong."

With that she was gone — up the path, her tread swift, sure and firm now, crackling on gravel, then clacking on the stone of her portico, and through the door.

I walked back to my car, sat there musing while looking into the unruffled darkness around, then, resolved, struck the steering-wheel once, a second time, a third, switched on the ignition and drove away.

From memory's deeper recesses, Father's counsel returned. "If you must choose to be an *apikoros*, then remain a Jewish one at least". And with that his urgings to "look deeply into our own, *your* own" also returned.

Yes, our own, *my* own.

"Genevieve," I wished I could say then by way of having the last word. "I love you, I hope never to have cause to cease loving you. I do. But I thank you too for a denouement neither of us could have foreseen. You may well say that, in my lostness, I am opting for an easy option. But come Saturday morning, I propose to attend the synagogue. I do not know what I might discover, or what I might *re*cover there. At this very moment, it doesn't matter. But if I am to live in the midst of fictions and farragos and confabulations as we have seen fit till now to call them, then for me too they may as well be those of my own. And if I am to listen to "Holy, holy, holy!", then I may as well choose Rabbi Nemerov's "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*!" above your own "*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*", however sublime and exquisite and resplendent it be. In this, however, I have not given up the claims of Reason. Even in the midst of those pious invented hand-me-downs of my people, I can still with ease continue to live by Reason's light. For Reason, Genevieve, is a private virtue; it is strictly an individual one. It is only in the collective, as you yourself indicated — and as an historian, I should have known it better than most — that it is an impossibility. And so I will make peace with that impossibility; and peace with the fact; and peace with the world; and peace with myself, yes, peace with myself, this peace above all having, in the end, to precede all wider, human, universal peace. And for leading me to recognise this, Genevieve, I thank you, I thank you, I do."

With that, I came to my street, turned into my driveway and stopped outside the door. Getting out of the car, I looked, as if with vision restored, at the house which had been the place of my growing up; I looked with different eyes upon those things that had for so long been familiar — the walls and windows and sunshades and shrubs and patterned door, aging all — and felt more than ever the balmy warmth of coming home.