

One is never able to overcome it completely . . .

Adriana Bórquez

Dear Sir,

I would like to apologise for my behaviour yesterday. Maybe if I try to explain . . . Would you be able to understand the real meaning of what lies behind these words? Will you . . .? I am not asking for pity or sorry; I am not even asking for sympathy for myself. I ask you only to know, to be aware, and to respond before it is too late.

Why YOU? I do not know with certitude; it is a mixture of elements: that's you, Sir, as you have emerged from nothingness into my soul: somebody I do not know, and somebody I know so well, so well . . . Somebody I feel I want to cling to, somebody I have to run away from.

The other day . . . that stupid tooth of mine once again came loose and I was quite disappointed to have to go back to the surgery: I do not like dentists, you know. Anyway, anticipating a big row with the surgeon who had made that botched job, I felt encouraged to hurry there. However, it wasn't the blond one in the clinic, it was you: a big guy, somewhat fat, young, with lots of self-confidence, but, at least, approachable; in some way aggressive, but then . . . willing to be friendly. Tall, powerful, steady; a young professional with a whole life ahead to be enjoyed . . . you reminded me of "the other one", long ago. So similar you and he . . .! Even your hands! Even that polite aggressiveness! That smile of yours . . . of his . . . the way you looked at me . . . he looked at me . . . and said: "Sh! do not worry little one, do not be afraid. Sh! Little one, little one . . . Sh!" He was leaning on his side on the upper deck of the bunk. He was covered with a shawl made of different-coloured pieces of knitted squares, his cheek resting on his hand. His eyes were friendly, so gentle. A sunbeam was entering the room. I could perceive a misty garden throughout the half-open curtains. My eyes were blinking, injured by the light, touched by his regard. I was so tired, so tired . . . so desperate, that tears were running from them, and I did not notice it.

He sat on his bunk and said calmly, in a murmur, intimately: "Who are you? Who are you? Oh, God . . . What have THEY done

to you . . . ! Oh, little one . . .” And he kept staring at me, the warmth of the entire humankind in his pupils. I felt comforted, sheltered, cosy, protected by his eyes and his voice . . . In the same way I felt the other day and yesterday, Sir.

Of course, by the time I met him, he wasn't the fatish young confident professional he used to be. He was by then a desperate, suffering, “disappeared prisoner” of the military junta which tyrannises my people nowadays.

He talked to me in the way one talks to a small wounded child, or a delicate wounded bird: calming, comforting, sweetly, lovingly, sharing, understanding. He was called Bill. That one has STILL to be Bill! Even if he is still “disappeared”, he HAS still to be alive! It's not possible that THEY can have closed those eyes with a bullet, or erased his sad smiling with a gibbet. They wouldn't have been able to stop the warm pulsations of his heart by a monstrous stab!

But, then, what . . . if he is still alive? what have THEY done to him? What has he become? Has he been able to keep the warmth of his eyes, his smile, his humanity, his dignity, his decency? What have THEY done to him . . . ? The motto on his family arms was: “Garde ta foi”. Has that faith been strong enough to help him to survive?

He had . . . he has a very English name: William, Bill. (What's your name, Sir?) His family is rooted in your own homeland soil. There is somewhere, up in the North-West, a big entrepreneur living in a big mansion, who is an uncle of his — (Yes, the same one who used to send a single parcel with some delicacies once a year to Bill's mother and sister's family, as a material aid and moral support to their immense tragedy, while they were staying in exile in England, some time ago). Bill was a “British passport holder”. His father had been born here. The son of a Judge, Bill grew up a spoiled child of the upper middle-class. He did not need to struggle in life, or for life: he simply lived what he was offered. He never questioned what he got, he never thought about it. Bill belonged to a social class in which one never looks down, and where you do not need to look up. Surely, that is your own position, Sir: a young professional, taking his first steps under the family umbrella, at your relative's clinic. You look that kind of person; confident, because you have been kept ignorant, apart, in your social sphere, where your social status must be kept. Right?

But, then, Bill, the Bill I met — the one I learnt to know throughout 42 days of confinement, of being side by side, day and night, talking in a whisper or in silence, facing each other, or turning our backs to one another, fraternally loving or disconcerted, communicating in that indefinable way, or isolated, away from the

world, or feeling our belonging to it, with our looks transfixed, or dimmed by our suffering, always caring, always, the one for the other . . . since fate had brought us together in that room, in those circumstances, in that monstrous situation: being “disappeared persons” – the Bill I will tell about, had changed, was somebody different: somebody aware: now he knew, he was no more ignorant . . .

He climbed down from his bunk and stood by my side, touching with his fingertips my hair, in a sort of soft caress. He looked at my swollen features and infected eyes and he pressed me to his chest: “Do not worry, little one, nothing more will THEY do to you. Here THEY do not torture any more, at least, not nowadays. This is a place of transit, to recuperate physically before they can release you. There is no more torture here, little one. Here you may recover and wait. I, myself, I’m waiting to be released at any moment. Do not be frightened, little one. I will help you, I will teach you what to do, how to behave, when . . . Oh, I am happy you are here . . . ! Sh! do not speak now. Go into your cubicle, do what THEY say. And rest, little one. Here, take my shawl. From now onwards it is yours, Hey? I give it to you. I’m glad to have this shawl to offer you. Now, try to rest. I promise, nothing will happen to you here; nothing, at least for a while. I promise . . .”

I felt I trusted him . . . even if I knew nothing about him, not even who he was.

As days went on and on, that first fraternal caring strengthened between us. Little by little he told me of his life and circumstances. He had recently got his degree in Economic Sciences, and had been working in an important bureau in Santiago. He lived in a comfortable bachelor’s flat in the posh area of the city; he had his motor-bike, his car, his yacht near Vīna del Mar, in the exclusive beach resort of Renaca. He used to go dancing with beautiful girls to the discos in Las Condes and El Golf . . . And now he was there in that secret house of the security forces, already eight months “disappeared”, since he was kidnapped by the Chilean Junta’s political police at Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires, when he was on his way to Europe, seeking personal safety and a secure economic future, since his family had been feeling the pressures of a furtive surveillance.

A sister of his – the youngest, fragile and sweet – was attached to one of the most wanted men in the country, the leader of a revolutionary group. She had been forced to go into hiding, and the police kept an eye on the family, expecting to trace the fugitives through an occasional contact they might establish. And so it happened: Bill met his sister to say goodbye before leaving; the police were informed. He was detained at Ezeiza and returned sec-

retly to Chile to be interrogated so as to make him give information to the military. He suffered the most terrible tortures; he never betrayed his sister. Thus, he was kept as hostage to make her surrender; then, the police would have been able to hunt the leader.

Bill had never cared about the revolutionary movement, nor did he know anything about the class struggle or politics. He had been only a sort of creole Chilean play-boy. At 27 years of age, he was discovering a world he had never dared to imagine; for the first time he was aware of a society divided between oppressors and oppressed; and he was suffering the regime of terror, initiated to safeguard the power of a class (his own!) to the detriment of another one. He still didn't know, or at least, he had not the slightest idea of what it means to be poor, deprived and oppressed, in our society; but now he knew, painfully, what repression and injustice meant and the violation of the most basic of the human rights: the right to live, and the right to be free; the right to love one's own; the right to feel and the right to think. However, once he said to me: "Chica, now I understand what your struggle is all about. I wouldn't be able to live indifferent or superficially from now onwards . . ."

This young man helped me with his kindness and his care. He healed my wounds, he helped me to walk and advised me on the exercises I should practise to recover. He watched over my restless sleep, and he protected me from the abuses of our guards. He shared his food and his clothing with me; and we talked and played silly games to shorten the time. Because of him I regained my human condition and my self-respect, and I was able to endure what was still to come after he was taken away one night.

Since that night there has not been any news of his whereabouts. I was the last person to see him alive. After some time I was released; I "appeared". He is still one of the 2,500 "disappeared prisoners" of the dictatorship of my country.

So, imagine, Sir, the shock when I saw you the other day: in you my fellow prisoner was back from my past, in another country, in another language, in a different situation and position, but with his same attitude, with such a physical likeness . . .!

On the other hand, you performed another painfully remembered ritual: the dental treatment you had to carry out has so many similarities to the actual tortures I was subjected to. Even if I tried to dissociate this situation from the other, my troubled soul wouldn't obey my reason. And I saw you there, at one moment, not as the somebody who was treating my teeth, but as the torturer who applied the electrode to my gums and teeth and tongue to make me reveal the names of my comrades. And you even said: "When you may want me to stop because of the pain,

lift your hand . . .” THEY also ordered then: “When you decide to speak, you damned . . . lift your finger . . .” It was truly difficult to place myself in the present reality.

I tried to explain to you, I wanted to explain, but the words did not come. There are no words to explain suffering – the suffering which, passing through the personal level, reaches a social expression in the human being – when the interlocutor has no idea of its profound meaning. I looked at you – I think, with eyes of a wounded animal – and you were smiling kindly and comforting . . . with the very same Bill’s smile, the day we met.

I am ending this apology to you, one week later. Today I went back to the clinic to finish the treatment. You said: “I am afraid I have to give you an injection”. And I answered, anticipating an explanation of my irrational behaviour to come: “I hate them . . . I hate them!” “Yes, I know” – you said softly, and with gentleness and care you went ahead. When you had finished, you whispered reassuringly: “That’s all, my girl, that’s all.”

I am not a girl now . . . years have passed. What made you say that, Sir? – and in the same tone as Bill used to do when he comforted me? Do you know . . . already?

Tragedy and the Soul’s Conquest of Evil

Kenneth Surin

In an interesting and important essay entitled ‘The Soul’s Conquest of Evil’.¹ Professor W. W. Bartley III argues that it is virtually impossible for man to overcome or subdue his own evil will. Bartley claims that it is a *conditio sine qua non* of man’s conquest of evil that he possess self-knowledge, but he is pessimistic about man’s capacity to gain the self-knowledge needed to triumph over his evil will. Bartley quotes with approval the words of C. G. Jung:

The individual who wishes to have an answer to the problem of evil, as it is posed today, has need, first and foremost, of self-knowledge, that is, the utmost possible knowledge of his own wholeness. He must know relentlessly how much good he can do, and what crimes he is capable of, and must beware