

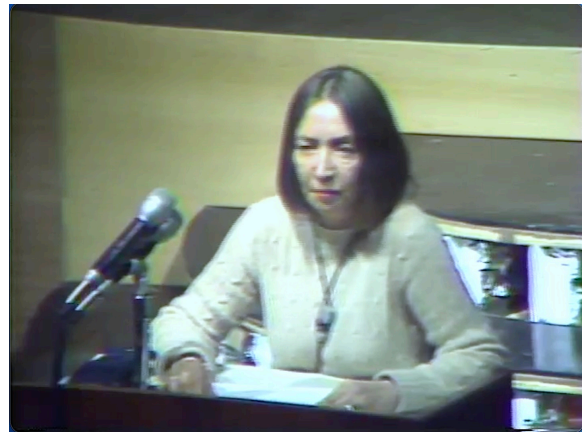
POLITICS

Oriana Fallaci's opening lecture on her week as Writer in Residence at Columbia College Chicago c.1983

Edited text, prepared from Oriana Fallaci's original typescript. Punctuation and English usage lightly corrected for readability; content unchanged.

Thank you, Daryle Feldmayer. Thank you, Mike Alexandroff. Thanks to everybody for being with me tonight.

Since tonight we are going to talk a lot about politics — literature and politics, journalism and politics, writing and politics — let me explain at once that when I say politics, I do not mean what is meant by those who pronounce this word as if it were a dirty word. Let me explain at once that — in spite of the impostors, the opportunists, the liars who make politics for their greedy ambitions, their personal interests, their miserable vanities; in spite of the tyrants who use politics for their evil thirst for power, their abuses, their crimes; in spite of the murderers who use politics for their wars, their massacres, their genocides — I firmly believe that the word politics is a very beautiful word. And politics is a very beautiful thing: one of the noblest activities a human being can perform. Or should I say the container of every other activity, the frame outside which the life of a country and of a citizen becomes impossible. And so it is the dream of making this world a little more decent, a little more dignified, a little more bearable, as my mother once said to me.



You know, like the children I saw slaughtered last summer in Beirut, and like many other children of today, of yesterday and of tomorrow — from San Salvador to Afghanistan, from Indochina to South America, from many parts of Europe to Africa — I was born in a time and in a place where making politics was forbidden, punished. There was Fascism in Italy at that time, and those who made politics as I mean it ended up in a prison cell or in a cemetery grave. In fact, very few dared to. My parents did, and particularly my father, who had started fighting Mussolini at the age of sixteen — without ever getting tired, without ever giving up — and who, in 1943, had become a leader of the Resistance in Florence against the Nazi-Fascist occupation. In February 1944, as a leader of the Resistance, he was arrested, savagely tortured, then thrown into a prison cell with the mice and the cockroaches and the threat of the execution squad. There, on an unforgettable day in March, my mother, my younger sister and I were permitted to see him and bring him some food.

So we went, with a bag full of food that was promptly stolen from us by the guards. We were pushed with the other visitors into a dirty room called the "parlor," where there was a long bench, then a long table. Beyond the table stood a dozen men. Among them was a man with a terribly swollen face full of bruises, terribly swollen violet lips, and one eye totally closed. Since nobody sat down in front of him, we sat in front of him, silently waiting for my father to arrive.

We had been waiting a minute or so when a voice whispered: "Hey, don't you even say hello to me?"

It was the voice of my father, and it came from that disfigured man we had not recognized, so disfigured was he. Then my father said, "Don't worry, everything is fine, everything is going to be fine. I did not talk, they don't know much, they will not execute me — you'll see. They will simply send me to some concentration camp in Germany." (He said "concentration camp in Germany" the way he would say "the best hotel in a resort town.") Then we left — I mean, we were thrown out by the guards who had stolen the food. When we were in the street, I finally burst into tears, grabbed my mother and asked her: "Why, Mamma, why?" And my mother turned her beautiful face to me and fiercely replied: "Because your father makes politics. Because he struggles to make this world a little more decent, a little more dignified, a little more bearable."

Oh, indeed, I have a very high concept of politics. Or, if you prefer, a very naive one. But in that case — and should the label "naive" apply to me, which I doubt — God bless the naive.

The man I loved, the man I wrote about in my novel "A Man," Alekos Panagulis, used to say that politics is the duty of the citizen: a duty before being a right. He said the same thing about freedom: "Freedom is a duty before being a right." I agree. I agree, first of all, with the symbiosis of the two words, politics and freedom. Can politics be made outside freedom, outside the concept of freedom, outside the search for freedom? (My politics, I mean, not that of the impostors, the tyrants, the murderers.) But even more, I agree with the choice of the word "duty." Because if one does not feel that duty, I tell you, he is not a citizen. He is not even a man; she is not even a woman. He or she is a vegetable, vegetating while waiting to die, to be eaten as a salad or a spinach soufflé by the impostors, the opportunists, the liars, the tyrants, the murderers, the war-makers. For Christ's sake, shall we stay here like vegetables, witnessing their folly while we wait to be slaughtered in their bloody wars — let's say the Third World War, whenever and wherever it starts, here on earth or up there in the sky, as they now daydream?

Of course, there are many ways of being political, of making politics. One does not have to be arrested and tortured and threatened by an execution squad, like my father and like the man I loved, in order to perform that duty. I, for instance, am political — I make politics — through being a writer. That is, through my books, my interviews, my reportage (especially as a war correspondent), and through speaking as I am with you tonight. In other words, through the ideas and beliefs and feelings that derive from my essence and existence as a writer.

Because, you see, people think that being a writer only means writing: the act of writing. But it isn't exactly so; it isn't exactly that. If it were, every politician or movie star who writes his or her memoirs could be called a writer. And that would include people like Richard Nixon, Jane Fonda, the widow of Bing Crosby, the cousin of Marlon Brando, and Henry Kissinger, who keeps writing his memoirs in such a massive way. (Massive indeed. Like Claudius, the Roman emperor, the guy must have spent his White House years taking notes for himself instead of doing the job he was paid for. In any case, after reading the lies he writes about me in those two pages of his first volume, and then the additional lies he writes about me in the second, where he judges an interview I never did — the one with the North Vietnamese Le Duc Tho, whom I never met, never even saw from afar — I cannot take him seriously as a writer. Even less as a historian.)

No, it is not only the act of writing that makes the writer. If anything, it is how the writer writes what he writes. Yet not even this definition seems enough to me, because — I maintain — the act of writing comes as a consequence of being a writer (of being born a writer, if you prefer), and not vice versa. That is — as paradoxical as it may seem — one does not become a writer

because he writes; one writes because he is a writer. But let me explain, as I did for the word politics, what I mean by the word writer. Let me say what, in my opinion, a writer is. And please be patient, because it is not going to be as easy as it was for politics.

Well, the writer is a very particular kind of person. A very strange animal indeed. So strange that I even hesitate to consider him an intellectual, which he usually is. No matter how vast the meaning of the term "intellectual," no matter how many categories of educated and intelligent people it contains, I find it insufficient and almost inexact to describe the writer. In fact, I prefer to call him an artist, like the musician or the painter. Not only because of the creativity (the despair...) he shares with the musician and the painter when he uses words as they use notes and colors, but because — like the musician and the painter — he can see what others don't see (or see much more); feel what others don't feel (or feel much more); anticipate or dream what others neither anticipate nor dream — with a freedom, an independence of mind, that is not necessarily required of other intellectuals. In fact, he does not think like them; even his type of intelligence is different from theirs. It's a complicated mixture of intuition, intellect, imagination (much imagination) and sensitivity, and it cannot be measured or catalogued like the intelligence of others.

Let me give you a personal example. Years ago, at the medical school in San Antonio, Texas, where I had gone to collect material for my book on the space age, "If the Sun Dies," I asked to take the intelligence test they used to give the scientists and the astronauts. (Not a test based on scientific knowledge and technical information, mind you.) The result of the exam was that I had the brain of a newborn monkey. I got 35 where the dullest astronaut got 150, 180, 200. I did not answer 16 of the 20 questions the way I should have. And do you know what turned the situation into my total defeat and shame? The answer I gave when they handed me that damn white sheet of paper and asked: "What is this?"

I answered that it was a field covered with snow, probably a wheat field in Ohio or in Lombardy or in Ukraine. Then I passionately described the little roots of wheat struggling to sprout beneath the snow, and the worry of the farmer, afraid to see the snow turn into ice in the very winter when he had to send his children to college... At this point I was interrupted by a brute who yelled at me: "What the hell? This is a white sheet of paper!" Which I knew, of course. Was I blind? But my type of intelligence saw it as a field covered with snow, et cetera, et cetera. I still see it that way when I think of it. Because I am a writer. And when a writer looks at a naked tree, he does not see — he must not see — only the naked tree. He must see the leaves the tree will have in the spring, and the flowers that will blossom among the leaves, and the fruits that will grow from those flowers, and — when he's blessed — the roots the tree hides under the soil. That is exactly what he does, what he must do, when he looks at a person, at a society, at a country. So that — like a water diviner, a dowser — he perceives what that person is, what that society wants, what that country will become. By instinct. With his instinct rather than his intellect. And only after this mysterious phase as a water diviner, a dowser, will he express himself through the written word. He will give form to the facts that others don't see, to the feelings that others don't have, to the dreams that others don't dream. He will universalize the particular story he tells, in a way that everybody understands, to the point of recognizing himself in it, of finding in it a truth that belongs to him too.

And speaking of universalization: I remember how happy I was when my carpenter, a simple fifty-year-old man whom I had always judged obtuse, said to me: "I have read your book 'Letter to a Child Never Born' four times." "Four?! Why four, Eros?" I asked. (His name, of all names, is Eros. Which means, as you know, love. Physical love.) And in the meantime I wondered what Eros could find in a book like that — a book that is the monologue of a pregnant woman torn by the dilemma of whether or not to give life. "Because..." Eros said, "because... see... I mean, those things she thinks... I mean, I thought those things so many times, though I did not know I was thinking them."

I also remember how stunned I was when, after the publication of "A Man," I received a letter from an eighty-five-year-old grandmother in Milan who wrote to me: "Alekos is me." As much as I can understand Eros, my carpenter, I still don't understand her. What could an eighty-five-year-old grandmother (who, by the way, claimed to be fading away in a squalid existence) have in common with a Greek hero in his thirties, a poet who moved through a fire of dramas and adventures? Maybe the solitude, the sadness, the solitude.)

The reason the writer is capable of this — of catching and expressing what others think and sometimes do not even know they are thinking — lies in the fact that the writer's school is life itself, beginning with his own life. So his main job is to observe life, incessantly, beginning with his own. As a consequence, he never separates life from his work; he is never off duty like other kinds of intellectuals who work from 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. He works — he writes — even when he does not write, when he does not perform the act of writing. He writes when he eats, when he sleeps, when he makes love, when he undergoes surgery, knowing well that sooner or later he will pour that unwritten writing onto a page of written words, like a liquid poured into a bottle. And — here is the point — whatever he writes at that stage (with the particular, peculiar type of intelligence I described) is a Search for the Truth. Not the truth of the daily chronicle, or of the judge who makes you swear on the Bible "to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." A larger truth. The truth about life, the universal truths that serve the ultimate purpose of life: to make this world a little more decent, a little more dignified, a little more bearable. Because that, in the end, is the truth he will pour into his writings, whatever the writing may be: a novel, a poem, a philosophical essay, a nonfiction story, an interview, a journalistic inquiry (if the journalist is not just a reporter who limits himself to the daily chronicle).

In the end, when the moment of material writing arrives — the gorgeous stage of creativity in which reality mixes with abstraction, intuition with logic, sentiment with intellect, and the writer finally walks in the marvelous garden of concepts and swims in the splendid sea of ideas — the search is concluded, and the findings are digested, absorbed, like food digested and absorbed by the stomach. And though this gorgeous stage is also the most difficult (because sometimes the words flow as clean and easy as the waters of a cascade, and sometimes instead they withdraw, like the waters that move away from the mouth of a thirsty Tantalus, and become soundless sounds, invisible colors, while you silently scream like a woman in labor), at the moment of material writing the writer does nothing but repeat what he had already written in his subconscious when he was seeking the truth to make this world a little more decent, a little more dignified, a little more bearable.

Being a writer means this. And if it does not mean this, I don't give a damn about being a writer. I raise my hands in surrender, I change jobs, I go sell ice cream — something that lets me rest from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. and from Friday to Sunday, something that spares me the anguish I described, the labor. And I leave the title of writer to the merchants of words, to the drafters of memoirs like the Hollywood stars and the phony historians.

If, instead, being a writer means what I believe, then tell me: how can a writer avoid being political? Maybe a painter can, or a musician. Or a dentist, a tailor, an architect, a singer, a mathematician, a plumber. (The "maybe" refers to the profession, of course, not to the citizen who practices it.) A writer cannot. Whatever he writes, as I said, whatever his philosophical and moral position. Because writing is a political act: before, during and after the act of writing. Its nature is political, its purpose is political, its consequences are political. Always! As simple as that. And there is no way out. In fact, if you come and tell me that children's stories — let's say fairy tales — are not political, that Agatha Christie's detective stories are not political, that Jules Verne and the science fiction writers are not political, I answer — as exaggerated as it may seem — that even those writings are political in various ways. The fairy tales because they

preach certain principles, Agatha Christie's detective stories because they portray a certain aspect of society, Jules Verne and the science fiction writers because they announce and influence the future with their visions.

If instead you set aside Jules Verne and Agatha Christie and challenge me to make my point with purely political writers and writings, then — without mentioning the Bible, about which the debate would become too hot, because I see it as the most political book of them all — I will demonstrate to you that there is more politics in the history of literature than in the whole history of politics itself. Each chapter of that history proves that it is always the writer who shapes the political course of a country; it is always the writer who raises the political consciousness of a society; it is always the writer who provokes the changes, who prepares the revolutions. This rule is so steady that when I rummaged through my memory to choose the divine names I will list, I got lost. Wherever I put my finger, I found enough divine names to fill this speech with names and nothing else.

Just think of the ancient Greeks: Aristotle, Aristophanes, Plato, Xenophon, Thucydides. (All of them, by the way, deeply engaged in active politics as citizens, not only in my kind of politics as writers.) Think of the Latins: Tacitus, Cicero, Suetonius, Sallust. (Cicero was killed by politics, remember?) Think of the Middle Ages: Saint Augustine, who shaped the line of the Catholic Church — that is, of the political force of that time. Then think of Saint Thomas. Think of Dante Alighieri, whose "Divine Comedy" is the most political masterpiece one can think of, and who, because of his deep participation in political affairs, had to flee Florence and die in exile in Ravenna. Then, moving on a couple of centuries, more or less, think of Machiavelli: the slandered, misunderstood, moralist Machiavelli. Then, still moving on and staying for a moment in my country, think of Guicciardini, of Pietro Verri, later of Beccaria, later still of Mazzini and the makers of the Risorgimento, and later on of Benedetto Croce and Gramsci. Now move to France and, to make it short, start in the 1700s with Diderot. Then think of Rousseau, of Voltaire, of the Enlightenment thinkers who nursed the men who would make the French Revolution. Moving on another century, think of Victor Hugo and Émile Zola. Coming to our own time, think of Sartre, of Camus. (Oh, there are so many that it is unfair even to select!) Let's move to England and — without mentioning Shakespeare, because here too the debate would be hot; I maintain that nobody has ever drawn such a complete and profound political portrait of political power — let's think of Locke and of the great writers of the 1700s: Milton (though he would later become the courtesan of Oliver Cromwell), Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison. Let's think of novelists like Henry Fielding: oh, how political are his "Tom Jones" and "Jonathan Wild"! Moving on, let's think of Byron, who went so far in his consistency that he died for the freedom of another country, Greece. Think of Dickens! Moving on, think of Bernard Shaw. Think of the magnificent Bertrand Russell, of people like H.G. Wells or George Orwell. Now let's move to Spain and pick Cervantes, because if you deny that "Don Quixote" is a political book and that Cervantes was a political man, then I give up. Let's move to Germany in the 1800s and think of Goethe, of Schiller, of a certain writer called Karl Marx. Now let's move to Russia, to those who were the conscience of that country long before the Revolution, and look what I give you: Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. (More political than them...)

For Christ's sake, do I need to support my point in a country that was born out of a revolution conceived, wanted, shaped and realized by writers? A country that became a nation thanks to the vision and the dream of people — men of letters — like Thomas Paine, Jefferson and Madison, and where the Declaration of Independence is one of the most beautiful pieces of literature ever written?

You know, sometimes — for instance, when I reread that Declaration of Independence — I even wonder whether it is really the writers who make politics, or whether it is politics that makes the writer. It's a dilemma that has puzzled me in these days too, while I was translating the political poems with which I will conclude my working week at Columbia College: the

poems of Alekos Panagoulis, the poems of the Vietcong during the war in Vietnam, the poems that come to us from the gulags of the Soviet Union, the poems we receive from the prisons of Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, or some other inferno. Because, almost always, those poets are not established poets, men of letters, professional writers. They are not even educated people! Yet, under the pressure of political motivation, pushed by the dream of a world that can be (and therefore must be) a little more decent, a little more dignified, a little more bearable, they write things no less beautiful than the established works of literature.

It's the same when I read the letters of those condemned to death in the European Resistance, or the letters of Sacco and Vanzetti. Oh, Sacco and Vanzetti...

Does any American college use those letters for educational purposes — I mean, to nourish the soul and the intellect of its students? Well, someone should. It would serve the cause much more than the crocodile tears of the governors of Massachusetts, with their Soviet tribe tactic. Especially when you read Vanzetti, it's hard to believe he made his living as a fishmonger. He writes like an angel, he knows much more than many professors, and his vision is no less noble than the vision of the Founding Fathers. In addition, he fully demonstrates that if literature cannot do without politics, politics cannot do without literature.

Literature only? With journalism it's quite the same — if not more, much more — ever since journalism has existed. You see, journalism was not born as a business, an industry to entertain people with gossip about the jet set or to help someone win elections. Journalism was born as an act of rebellion, as a political struggle. Now I'll tell you when, where and by whom: in the 1500s, in Italy, by a group of courageous scribes — writers — who had had enough of the arrogance and cruelty imposed by the feudal lords, the princes, the rulers. So they finally decided to write about them, then to patiently copy each text onto several identical parchments, and every Saturday they rode on horseback to sell those parchments in the various cities and towns of the fiefdoms. They were called "menanti," which in the Italian of that time meant "wanderers, news-wanderers." And because of their political guts, and the political consequences of those guts, they were hunted, persecuted, punished. At the first arrest, by cutting off the right hand; at the second, by cutting out the tongue; at the third, by cutting off the head. Or they were hanged by the neck, or impaled, as that not very pious bastard called Pope Pius V liked to do. But the more they were persecuted, mutilated, decapitated, hanged and impaled, the more they multiplied, setting the fashion and spreading from Italy to Germany and France. Only Gutenberg's invention, the printing press, put them out of a job.

However, not even a machine could change the road the heroic menanti had traced. Printed journalism continued to be an instrument of freedom and protest: a political engagement, a political act. Political was the first paper ever printed, the "Nieuwe Tijdingen," in 1605, in Antwerp. Not by chance, it had a leading role in the Brabant Revolution. Political was the first paper printed in France, in 1611: the "Gazette de France" of Théophraste Renaudot. And it bore fruit: in 1789, when the Bastille was taken by the insurgents, there were 14 political newspapers in France; they soon became 62, and by the time of Marat there were 750.

Now, England. The "Weekly News," the first newspaper printed in England, in 1621, was so political that to prove it I only have to mention the names of its staff: John Milton, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele. (All people whom, I bet, nobody ever asked, as they do today: "Do you consider yourself a writer or a journalist?") Addison and Steele later also founded "The Tatler," which was so political that in 1711 it was forced to stop publication because it had heavily attacked rich Londoners and the prime minister, Robert Harley. But at that time the "Spectator" was born, so the voice of protest was not silenced, and journalism maintained its glorious tradition. All over Europe. Just think of the role certain newspapers played in the Italian Risorgimento. In my country, that glorious tradition didn't stop until the day a certain journalist called Benito Mussolini took power and sent his Black Shirts to

burn the newspapers that opposed him. Then he enlisted a generation of mercenaries, merchants of words, courtesans, to remake those newspapers — as always happens when a dictatorship comes.

But since I have touched on this sad subject, let me anticipate a legitimate question: "What about the mercenaries, the merchants of words, the courtesans? Aren't they writers too?" No, they are not. They are just what I said: mercenaries, merchants of words, courtesans — no matter how well they sometimes write from a technical point of view. Why? For the simple reason that they miss the point: the search for the truth that serves Life. For the simple reason that they kill Life instead of preserving it. Look, they are like certain mushrooms that seem good to eat (in fact, they have all the physical appearance of good mushrooms, and sometimes they are even beautiful to look at), but when you eat them you get poisoned and end up in the hospital with vomiting and convulsions, if you do not die. Or, to stay in the field of cooking (which I like), they are like cooks who offer you an elegant dinner, apparently well done, well prepared, yet cooked with rotten food that poisons like those mushrooms. And what kind of food is food that poisons me and makes me die? Food is to keep me alive, not to make me die! Yes, yes, yes: it is so, and I don't even want to discuss it.

I'm ready to discuss, instead, another legitimate question: "Aren't you portraying the writer in too flattering a way? The search for truth, the better world, freedom, the good food that keeps us alive... Come on! Are you really that noble, that good, the repository of all morality and virtue?"

Oh, no! We are not, I promise you, we are not! Including the great ones, I mean the divine names of the past I listed before. Of course, as in every other profession, every human category, you will find decent people among us. Of course. Honest people. At times, exceptional people. But you will also find the meanest, nastiest bastards you can think of. If nothing else, envious, jealous, malevolent, unfair! Personally, I have been hurt and mistreated by writers and journalists much more than by the most evil politicians. In fact, you will rarely see me having dinner with a writer or a journalist, and when I am invited to a party, I always ask: "Will there be journalists?" If there are, I usually don't go. Because if I go and find one of them, I may awaken the temptation that constantly sleeps in my hands and that my brain generally controls: the temptation to break their nose.

In other words, we are far from being heroes or saints. Besides, if we were, we couldn't participate in life as we do. We couldn't observe it as we do, beginning with our own lives. As heroes, we would die very soon; as saints, we would retire to some monastery like Saint Francis or to some cave like Merlin the Wizard (where we would be able to write only about the angels who sing the glory of God). No... definitely, the reason the writer is so devoted to the search for Truth, the cause of freedom, the dream of a better world, is not to be found in the fact that he or she is a better person than others.

The reason is of another kind altogether: purely selfish and practical. Here it is. Without the search for truth we cannot function, because we lack the main ingredient we need to cook: healthy food. Without the dream of a better world we cannot operate, because we lose our landmark; we give up our ultimate reason to exist. Without freedom we are quickly out of a job, because if we don't use the independence of mind that only freedom can give, the wings of our imagination get cut, the genitals of our creativity get castrated, and the doors of our discoveries get closed. Moreover, let us not forget that each time freedom is suppressed, we are the first to be imprisoned or exiled or hanged by the neck. So we also have our personal safety to protect. Listen to me: we are obliged to be dreamers. We are obliged to be moralists. We are obliged to preach new ideas, to favor change for a hopefully better world. We have no choice. For us, it's a matter of survival. And this matter of survival, this lack of choice, is the best guarantee we can offer to others. Even when we are bad.

In that noble, self-flattering list, I also included the expression "to preach new ideas, to favor change for a hopefully better world." Well, Yevgeny Zamyatin — the Soviet novelist who had believed so deeply in the Russian Revolution and taken part in it, and who was (of course!) wiped out by it in 1927 with a campaign mounted by the courtesans against his book "We," so that he had to leave Moscow and go into exile in Paris — used to say that "writing is like a carrot we put in front of a lazy donkey, so that the donkey has to move in order to catch it and eat it." But, he added, once the donkey has eaten that carrot, we have to put another carrot in front of him. Otherwise he stands motionless again.

Holy words. It is always the writer, as I said before, who prepares the revolutions. (I mean the change of a system, the turning of an era.) Not the politicians. Not the men of action. Not the crowds that take the Bastille or the Winter Palace. (The politicians, the men of action, and the people who follow the politicians and the men of action come later, after the vision of the writer.) But when the revolution has taken place, it is always the writers who question it, who denounce its mistakes, who condemn its betrayals. I mean, when the Napoleon or the Stalin or the Khomeini arrives — the new oligarchy, the new oppressor — and sits down on the throne of the old oppressor to repeat the same crimes or worse, it is always the writer who is the first to raise his moralist voice. It is always the writer who speaks the truth again, preaching against the new masters as he had done against the king, the Czar, the Shah — without caring that he is slandered with the accusation of a "volte-face," without fearing to be lapidated by those who define themselves as revolutionaries (and who now call him a reactionary). Yes, the kings and the Czars and the Shah always call us "subversive" and punish us as such. But for the very same reasons, the Robespierres and the Napoleons, the Lenins and the Stalins, the Khomeinis and the God-knows-whos call us "reactionary" and punish us in the very same way. I like this very much. The writer welcomes the stones: indisputable recognition of his independence.

In my own small way... (I don't say "small" out of hypocritical modesty; I say "small" because I haven't been punished so heavily yet. I have been beaten by the police of two or three countries, I got a couple of Mexican bullets in my body, but that was in the process of testifying to the truth, and, let's face it, I have not been in prison yet.) So, in my own small way, I welcome the stones. For instance, after hitting the Shah over the head with an interview that became a sort of flag for the insurgents who died in the streets of Tehran, I hit Khomeini over the head with another notorious interview. And I was very happy when the old fool thundered against me from the loudspeakers of Qom, or when his servants published my photo torn down the middle. I even went back to Tehran — as stupid as that challenge really was. The same in Vietnam. For years I risked my skin in Vietnam to preach against that war and tell the shit I saw in Saigon — on the side of the Americans, I mean. But when, in 1969, the North Vietnamese rewarded me with an invitation to Hanoi, my being against the Americans in Vietnam did not prevent me from telling the shit I found in Hanoi: the dreadful Stalinism, the oppression, the fear, the injustice, the way they treated the Vietcong of the South, the imperialism they would spread to Cambodia after their victory. I was the only person, the only one, who wrote the truth about Hanoi right away. All the others who went there with me, or before me, or after me, saw exactly the same things: the same people and the same things. But they did not write it. Not a word.

And was I lapidated for that! Oh, was !! Even by that Hollywood star and gymnast who went soon after me, then came back to her jet-set privileges to say that everything was perfect up there, and that Fallaci had written those shameful things about Hanoi because she was a servant of the American government. Oh! The little imbecile, the lousy hypocrite, who now admits her "mistake" — in quotes — yet last summer went to Jerusalem to kiss Begin on both cheeks and say that his troops had every right to be in Lebanon, to bomb Beirut. How do you tell certain people they had better confine themselves to keeping their bodies in shape with gymnastics?

The fact is that we writers wave many carrots in front of the donkey, but the donkey refuses them. And not always because the donkey is an opportunist, a hypocrite, but because he is shortsighted or blinded by fanaticism.

I mean, when I interview Arafat and write that Arafat is no good, that he is a liar who plays double games, as vain as a Hollywood star; when I say (as I said in the seventies) that his terrorism trains terrorism of every color in every part of the world, including the one in my country — since I've had enough of being blackmailed with the story of the Palestinian Risorgimento, enough of being blackmailed with the injustice they suffer — I wave a carrot. But the donkey doesn't see it, or says that I am a supporter of Israeli expansionism, the mistress of General Sharon. When I go to Beirut and stay under Sharon's bombs and see his slaughters, then interview him and call him a killer, a butcher; when I accuse his soldiers of behaving like Nazis — since I've had enough of being blackmailed with the Holocaust, as I continually am through the movies, the TV serials, the press, enough of the lie that the others did not die in the concentration camps, as if they had to be the sole and exclusive monopoly of every Nazi horror — I wave a carrot. But the donkey refuses to see it, or answers that I am a niece of Hitler. When I get angry at the hypocrisies of our democracy and say that in the name of freedom the most scandalous injustices, the most unjustifiable abuses, can be committed, I wave a carrot. But the donkey remains still, or answers that I welcome the gulags of Siberia. When I cry that Socialism has failed, that in the name of social justice it commits the same misdeeds as Capitalism, if not worse (so there must be something wrong at the roots of that beautiful dream), I wave a carrot. But the donkey ignores it, or shouts that I am the girlfriend of Rockefeller. When I write that I don't buy the demagoguery of attributing every fault to the powerful and justifying the people for every wrong — because it is not true that the people are always innocent, dammit; it is the sons of the people who make arrests on behalf of the dictator, dammit; it is the sons of the people who torture on behalf of the tyrant, dammit; it is the sons of the people who make up the execution squad, dammit, and to hell with the phrase "Sorry, I-obey-orders" — I wave a carrot. But the donkey is blinder than ever (since I'm talking about him) and locks himself in silence. At most, he whispers that I am an anarchist.

Fair enough. In the end, every writer is an anarchist, even when he holds, or seems to hold, conservative positions. Because he is the epitome of individualism, the enemy of every canonized ideology, of every fanaticism, the very symbol of the refusal of dogma. Besides, I don't dislike at all the idea of being placed in the company of Sacco and Vanzetti! And too bad if my telephone gets tapped even better for this.

Not only in dictatorships of both colors, you see, is life hard for us. In the open societies too, which claim to need our independence of thought, our criticism, we are considered a pain in the neck. There we are accepted, yes, sometimes respected, yes, and we can say more or less what we want. But if we go too far, if our words become a threat to Power, to the system, they resort to a thousand subtle tricks to torment us, to blackmail us, to scare us — that is, to silence us through self-imposed censorship. They love us only when we agree to be their advisors, their accomplices, their courtesans: for instance, when we write their speeches and make them appear well informed, witty. But even then they conceal an unconfessed hostility. Do you remember what Eisenhower said about intellectuals? He said: "An intellectual is a person who takes more words than necessary to say more than he knows." And do you remember what Truman said before him? He said: "Oh, yeah! Intellectuals in government are great. As long as there is an old pro to tell them what to do."

And I don't want to know what Nixon said about us. Please don't tell me. I don't care to know what Carter said about us. Though I do wonder what Reagan says about us, because I recently found out that his advisors don't like books very much. Let me tell you the story. You know, when I want to thank someone for having behaved graciously toward me, I usually don't send

flowers; I send books. During some meetings about a project that (I now understand) will never materialize, a couple of White House advisors behaved rather graciously toward me, so at Christmas I sent them two books with my best wishes inscribed on the first page. Not my books, mind you! Nor any other book to read, mind you too! Books to look at: art books. Well, one of the two advisors didn't even answer. The other sent it back to me with a note implying that my little gift was an attempt at corruption. (So I had to answer him with a note that said: "Dear Sir, how good for us writers to discover that at the White House our work is as precious as a Japanese watch or a ten-thousand-dollar tip. In Europe, alas, it is not: we use books as an intellectual exchange among people who hold culture in some respect and have something to say to each other. Which, I understand, is not your case.")

Should we then be surprised that writers never reach the top of Power as political leaders, heads of state, decision-makers? Today as well as in the past. In our times an incredible number of lawyers, scholars, even teachers — various kinds of intellectuals, I mean — have become presidents or prime ministers or party leaders, or at least secretary of state. Writers, never. Like the musicians and the painters, the writers have always remained at the foot of the mountain. Churchill was not a writer, though he wrote his memoirs. De Gaulle was not a writer, though he wrote his memoirs. (Besides, I told you what I think of politicians who want to play historian and write their memoirs. When I read their books, I am always afraid of finding the analysis of an interview with Le Duc Tho that never took place.) Hitler was not a writer, though he wrote that despicable "Mein Kampf." Mussolini was not a writer, though he started his career as an adventurer as a journalist. (A bad journalist, by the way, I am told.) Stalin was not a writer; he didn't even write his memoirs, thank God! Gandhi was not a writer, Nehru was not a writer, Tito was not a writer, Golda Meir was not a writer, Mao Tse-tung was not a writer, in spite of his poems. Castro is not a writer, Indira Gandhi is not a writer, Margaret Thatcher is not a writer, Andropov is not a writer, Reagan is not a writer — you will admit that. Mitterrand likes to be considered a writer, but I would really hesitate to grant him that title because — though he writes very well — it seems to me that writing is not his main interest. Should I be wrong, that would explain why he is in such trouble.

Listen: in order to be a political leader, a head of state, a man of Power, the writer would have to undergo a brain transplant. Because political leadership squeezes him like a tight jacket, an undersized pair of pants. It doesn't fit his type of intelligence. It handcuffs his independence of mind, his search for truth, even his need and his right to doubt everything. And this rule applies to almost every case of a writer who makes politics as a politician, who enters active politics. In active politics, in fact, writers have always failed, as history demonstrates — from Plato to Cicero, from Dante Alighieri to Karl Marx. The only exception remains your Founding Fathers, which — you will admit this too — did not last very long and is now totally forgotten. (I mean, it does not seem to me that your party leaders and your congressmen or senators shine as men of letters. I don't see divine names among them, and after meeting a few of them in recent years, my suspicion is that at the medical school in San Antonio, Texas, they would do even worse than I did.)

As a member of a parliament, and even as a party member, a writer — an artist — doesn't last. Either he is chased out or he must leave. Unless he gives up his independence of judgment, his right to doubt, his imagination, his personal freedom, his intelligence. A few nights ago I met Luigi Barzini in New York. I told him about this lecture; I told him what I would tell you. He jumped up with a shout: "You're damn right!" Then he told me what happened to him when he was elected to the Italian Parliament with the Italian Liberal Party, which is by far the most tolerant we have. Well, he had to resign. Because every time he voted in Parliament according to his own judgment and not the party line, he was shouted at like a naughty kid. He was shouted at even when he wrote an article (an article!) about the war in Vietnam that did not reflect the party line on the subject.

Poor Barzini, he had forgotten to refresh his memory, to check history. To avoid those disappointments, it would have been enough for him to read what John Brademas — the Democrat who sat for a while in your Congress and now heads New York University — wrote on the subject: "The intellectual who becomes a member of Congress must remember that he is just that: a member of Congress and not a member of a debating society. He must remember that he belongs to a legislative body with business to do, that he is not someone who simply voices his opinions." How dreadful! You see why I have never agreed to belong to a party, not even to a parliament. Oh, I have been invited many times to accept a candidacy for the Italian Senate, but I have always answered "No!" "But you would undoubtedly be elected, with a magma of votes!" they said. "That's why," I answered. "Because afterward you would use that magma of votes through me!" Should I stop being smart some day, in a moment of folly I do not foresee, and become a senator, please come and check what I do. And if, during the short time I remain in that seat, I don't give them hell, please spit in my face and call me a clown.

So let me finish and conclude with a question and an answer: what is left for us to do, then? But it's simple! What we have always done! What we are good at, what we are born for! That is — from a practical point of view — to anticipate events, to provoke them, to participate in them by denouncing them, condemning them. To be uncomfortable, without fear of having our telephones tapped, our private lives blackmailed, our freedom suppressed with some subtle trick, or with jail, or the gulag. To intervene like a mosquito that bites all the time, until they itch all over their bodies and go crazy. To offer the dinner of our ideas with good food — not poisoned food, not poisonous mushrooms! To stay on the side of humanity, to shape the course of the future, to fall in love with change. And when things have changed, to go looking again for what is wrong, to bite again like a mosquito, whatever the political color of the new oppressor, whatever the shape of the new regime, of the new canonized philosophy, of the new Napoleon or Stalin or Khomeini! Thus setting in motion another revolution, in an endless process, in our endless role as troublemakers. And never mind if we lose; never mind if we are hanged by the neck. As Alekos Panagulis says in the poem he dedicated to his dead brother:

"This was your destiny, brother...
my destiny as well.
This is our destiny, brother...
And we don't curse it,
and we love it"

Thank you, and good night.