lands and realms of Europe were to be traced solely to his color blindness, which made him unable to tell red from green. The more blood flowed on the battlefield, this Belgian scholar told me, the greener Napoleon thought the grass was growing.

In the evening I walked along the Cours Napoléon, and then sat for two hours in a small restaurant not far from the Gare Maritime with a view of the white cruise ship. Over coffee I studied the advertisements in the local paper and wondered whether to go to the cinema. I like to visit the cinema in foreign towns, but neither *Judge Dredd* at the Empire, *USS Alabama* at the Bonaparte, nor *L'Amour à tout prix* at the Laetitia seemed to me the right way to end this day. At about ten, therefore, I was back in the hotel where I had taken a room late that morning. I opened the windows and looked out over the rooftops of the town. Traffic was still driving down the streets, but suddenly everything fell silent, just for a few seconds, until one of those bombs that frequently go off in Corsica exploded with a short, sharp bang, obviously only a few streets away. I lay down and soon fell asleep, with the sound of the firefighters' sirens howling in my ears.

Campo Santo

My first walk the day after my arrival in Piana took me out on a road that soon begins falling away steeply in terrifying curves, sharp bends and zigzags, leading past almost vertical rocky precipices densely overgrown with green scrub, and so down to the bottom of a ravine opening out into the Bay of Ficajola several hundred meters below. Down there, where until well into the postwar period a community of twelve or so fisher-folk lived in dwellings roughly cobbled together and roofed with corrugated iron, some of which now have their doors and windows boarded up, I spent half the afternoon with a few other tourists from Marseille, Munich, or Milan who had installed themselves with their picnics and assorted items of practical equipment in couples or family groups, at regular distances from each other, and I lay motionless for a long time by the little quicksilver stream that even now, at the end of summer, ran constantly down over the last granite steps of the valley floor, with that

proverbial babble familiar to me from some dim and distant past, only to give up the ghost without a sound on the beach and seep away. I watched the sand martins circling the flame-colored cliffs high above in astonishingly large numbers, soaring from the bright side of the rocks into the shadows and darting out of the shadows into the light again, and once that afternoon, which for me was filled with a sense of liberation and appeared to stretch endlessly away in every direction, I swam out to sea with a great sense of lightness, very far out, so far that I felt I could simply let myself drift away into the evening and so into the night. But as soon as, obeying the strange instinct that binds us to life, I turned back after all and made for the land which, from this distance, resembled a foreign continent, swimming became more and more difficult with every stroke, and not as if I were laboring against the current that had been carrying me on before; no, I was inclined to think that I was swimming steadily uphill, if one can say so of a stretch of water. The view before my eyes seemed to have tipped out of its frame, was leaning toward me, swaying and flickering of its own accord, with the upper rim of the picture skewed several degrees in my direction and the lower rim skewed away from me to the same extent. And sometimes I felt as if the prospect towering so menacingly in front of me was not a part of the real world but the reproduction of a now insuperable inner faintness, turned inside out and shot through with blue-black markings. Even harder than reaching the bank was the climb later up the winding road and the barely

trodden paths which here and there link one curve in the road to the next in a direct line. Although I placed one foot in front of the other only slowly and very steadily, the afternoon heat building up between the rock walls very soon brought sweat running down my forehead, and the blood pulsed in my neck as it did in the throats of the lizards sitting everywhere in my path, frozen in mid-movement with fear. It took me a good hour and a half to climb to Piana again, but once there I could walk as if weightlessly, like a man who has mastered the art of levitation, past the first houses and gardens and along the wall of the plot of land where the local people bury their dead. When I passed through the iron gate, which squealed on its hinges, this proved to be a rather desolate graveyard of the kind not uncommon in France, where you have the impression not so much of an antechamber to eternal life as of a place administered by the local authority and designed for the secular removal of waste matter from human society. Many of the graves standing in untidy rows all over the dry slope, their lines everywhere broken or slightly displaced, have already sunk into the ground, and are partially overlapped by later additions. Hesitantly, and with that touch of reluctance that one feels even today in approaching the dead too closely, I clambered over crumbling plinths and edgings, tombstones shifted out of place, ruinous masonry, a crucifix fallen from its mount and disfigured by rust marks, a leaden urn, an angel's hand—silent fragments of a town abandoned years ago, and not a shrub or a tree to give shade anywhere, no

thujas or cypresses of the kind so often planted in southern cemeteries, whether for comfort or as a sign of mourning. At first sight I really believed that the only reminders in the Piana graveyard of the nature which, we have always hoped, will endure long after our own end, were the artificial purple, mauve, and pink flowers, obviously pressed upon their customers by French undertakers, made of silk or nylon chiffon, of brightly painted porcelain, wire, and metal, appearing not so much a sign of enduring affection as the final emergence of a kind of proof that, despite all assurances to the contrary, we offer our dead only the cheapest substitutes for the diverse beauty of life. Not until I looked more carefully around me did I notice the weeds—the vetch, wild thyme, white clover, yarrow and chamomile, cow wheat, yellow oat grass, and many other grasses with names unknown to me—that had grown around the stones to form actual herbariums and miniature landscapes, still showing some green but already half dead, and far lovelier, I thought to myself, than the ornamental funerary plants sold by German cemetery florists, usually consisting of heathers, dwarf conifers, and pansies of absolutely standard shape, planted in spotless, soot-black soil in strict geometrical rows, as I still see them in unwelcome memories of my now distant childhood and youth in the foothills of the Alps. But here and there among the thin flower stems, the blades and ears of grass in the graveyard of Piana, a departed soul looked out from one of those oval sepia portraits set in thin gilded frames which until the sixties used to be placed on

graves in the Mediterranean countries: a blond hussar in his high-collared uniform tunic; a girl who died on her nineteenth birthday, her face almost extinguished by the sun and the rain; a short-necked man with his tie in a large knot, who had been a colonial civil servant in Oran until 1958; a little soldier, forage cap tilted sideways on his head, who came home badly wounded from the futile defense of the jungle fortress of Dien Bien Phu. In many places weeds already cover the polished marble votive tablets on the newer graves, most of which bear only the brief inscription *Regrets* or *Regrets éternels* in neatly curving characters which might have been copied by a child from a manual of handwriting. *Regrets éternels*—like almost all the phrases in which we express our feelings for those who have gone before, it is not without ambiguity, for not only does the announcement of the everlasting inconsolability of the bereaved confine itself to the absolute minimum, it also sounds, if one stops to consider it, almost like an admission to the dead of guilt, a halfhearted request for forbearance made to those laid in the earth before their time. Only the names of the dead themselves seemed to me clear and free of any ambiguity, not a few of them being as perfect in both significance and sound as if those who once bore them had been saints in their own lifetime, or messengers from a distant world devised by our higher yearnings, visiting this one only for a brief guest performance. Yet in reality they, too, those who had borne the names Gregorio Grimaldi, Angelina Bonavita, Natale Nicoli, Santo Santini, Serafino Fontano, and

Archangelo Casabianca, had certainly not been proof against human malice, their own or that of others'. Another striking feature of the design of the Piana graveyard, and one that revealed itself only gradually as I walked among the graves, was the fact that in general the dead were buried in clans, so that the Ceccaldi lay beside the Ceccaldi and the Quilichini beside the Quilichini, but this old order, founded on not many more than a dozen names, had been forced some time ago to give way to the order of modern civil life, in which everyone is alone and in the end is allotted a place only for himself and his closest relations, a place that corresponds as accurately as possible to the size of his property or the depth of his poverty. If one cannot speak of a wealth of ostentatious funerary architecture anywhere in the small communities of Corsica, even a place like the Piana graveyard has a few tombs adorned with pediments where the more prosperous have found an appropriate final resting place. The next social class down is represented by sarcophaguslike structures made of granite or concrete slabs, depending on the assets of those laid to rest there. Stone slabs lie on the ground above the graves of the dead of even less importance. And those whose means are insufficient even for such a slab must be content with turquoise or pink gravel kept in place by a narrow border around it, while the very poor have only a metal cross stuck in the bare earth, or a crucifix roughly welded from tubing, perhaps painted bronze or with a gold cord wound around it. In this way the graveyard of Piana, a place where until recently only the more or less poverty-stricken lived, now resembles the

necropolises of our great cities in reflecting all gradations of the social hierarchy as marked by the unequal division of earthly riches. The biggest stones are usually rolled over the graves of the richest people, for it is to be feared that they are the most likely to begrudge their progeny their inheritance and to try to take back what they have lost. The mighty blocks of stone erected above them for the sake of security are, of course, with self-deluding cunning, disguised as monuments of deep veneration. Significantly, such expense is unnecessary on the death of one of our lesser brethren, who can perhaps call nothing his own at the hour of his death other than the suit in which he is buried—or so I thought as I gazed out over the highest-standing row of graves, looking across the Piana cemetery and the silver crowns of the olive trees beyond the wall, and so on to the Gulf of Porto shining up from far below. Something that particularly surprised me about this resting place of the dead was that not one of the funerary inscriptions was more than sixty or seventy years old. I discovered some months later that the reason lay in one of those strange Corsican situations involving blood feuds and banditry, finding this information in what I consider in many respects a model study by Stephen Wilson, one of my professional colleagues, who presents the extensive material he has assembled during many years of research to his readers with the greatest imaginable care, clarity, and restraint.* The ab-

**Feuding Conflict and Banditry in Nineteenth-Century Corsica* (Cambridge University, 1988).

sence of any dates of death going back even to the early twentieth century was not, as I had at first suspected, to be accounted for by the now very usual practice of successively abandoning old graves, nor could it be explained by the existence of an earlier graveyard somewhere else; rather, the reason was simply that graveyards in Corsica were made official burial places only around the middle of the nineteenth century, and even then it was a long time before the population accepted them. In an account dating from 1893, for instance, we hear that no one used the Ajaccio town cemetery apart from the poor and the Protestants, who were known as *luterani*. To all appearances, the bereaved were unwilling to remove the dead who owned a piece of land from their hereditary property, or else they dared not do so. For centuries, the usual form of Corsican burial, on land inherited from the forefathers of the dead, was like a contract affirming inalienable rights to that land, a contract between every dead man and his progeny and tacitly renewed from generation to generation. You therefore find little dwellings for the dead everywhere, *da paese a paese:* burial chambers and mausoleums, here under a chestnut tree, there in an olive grove full of moving light and shade, in the middle of a pumpkin bed, in a field of oats or on a hillside overgrown with the feathery foliage of yellow-green dill. In such places, which are often particularly beautiful and have a good view over the family's territory, the village, and the rest of the local land, the dead were always in a way at home, were not sent into exile, and could continue to

watch over the boundaries of their property. I also read, in a source which I cannot now place, that many old Corsican women used to go out to the dwellings of the dead after the day's work was done, to listen to what they had to say and consult them on the cultivation of the land and other matters to do with the correct conduct of life. For a long time, when landless people died—shepherds, day laborers, Italian farmworkers, and other indigent folk—they were simply sewn into sacks and thrown down a shaft with a lid over it. Such a communal grave, where the corpses probably lay all jumbled up like cabbage and turnips, was called an *arca,* and in many places it might alternatively be a stone house without any windows or doors, the dead being pushed down inside it through a hole in the roof, which could be reached by stairs going up the outside wall. And in the Campodonico near Orezza, Stephen Wilson tells us, those who owned no land were just thrown down a ravine, a practice which the bandit Muzzarettu, who died in 1952 at the age of eighty-five, said was still usual even when he lived in Grossa. But this custom, dictated by both the division of property and social order, by no means implies that the poorer among the dead were slighted or despised. They, too, received signs of respect, as far as the means available would allow. Corsican funeral rites were fundamentally extremely elaborate and of a highly dramatic character. The doors and shutters of the house afflicted by misfortune were closed, and sometimes the whole façade was painted black. The corpse, washed and freshly dressed, or in the not

uncommon case of a violent death left in its bloodstained condition, was laid out in the parlor, which was usually less a room intended for the use of the living than the domain of dead members of the family, who were known as the *antichi* or *antinati*. This was where, after the introduction of photography, which in essence, after all, is nothing but a way of making ghostly apparitions materialize by means of a very dubious magical art, the living hung pictures of their parents, grandparents, and relations either close or more distant, who although or even because they were no longer alive were regarded as the true heads of the family. The wake was held beneath their uncompromising gaze, and on such occasions the women, otherwise condemned to silence, assumed the leading roles, singing laments and wailing all night, tearing their hair and scratching their faces like the Furies of old, particularly when the body was that of a murdered man, and to all appearances were quite beside themselves with blind rage and pain, while the men stood out in the dark entrance to the house or on the steps, pounding the floor with their rifle butts. Stephen Wilson points out that eyewitnesses present at such wakes in the nineteenth century, and up to the interwar period, thought it remarkable that while the wailing women worked themselves up into a trancelike state, were overcome by dizziness, and fainted away, they gave no impression at all of being overwhelmed by genuine emotion. Many accounts, says Stephen Wilson, even speak of a striking lack of feeling or rigidity in which the singer sheds not a single tear, even

though her voice breaks convulsively with passion in the highest registers. In view of such apparently icy self-control, some commentators have been inclined to regard the laments of the *voceratrici* as a hollow sham, a spectacle prescribed by tradition, and this idea is supported by the observation that merely getting a chorus of mourners together will have called for a considerable amount of practical organization in advance and rational direction of the singing itself. In truth, of course, there is no discrepancy between such calculation and a genuine grief which actually makes the mourners seem beside themselves, for fluctuation between the expression of deeply felt sorrow, which can sound like a choking fit, and the aesthetically—even cunningly—modulated manipulation of the audience to whom that grief is displayed has perhaps been the most typical characteristic of our severely disturbed species at every stage of civilization. Anthropological literature contains many descriptions by writers such as Frazer, Huizinga, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, and Rudolf Bilz of the members of early tribal cultures who, while celebrating their rites of initiation or sacrifice, retained a very precise and ever-present subliminal awareness that the compulsive extremes to which they went, always connected with the infliction of injury and mutilation, were in essence mere playacting, even though the performance could sometimes approach the point of death. Those in severe psychological conditions also have a clear idea somewhere, in their inmost hearts, that they are literally acting body and soul in a play. More-

over, the pathological state of mind of the Corsican *voceratrici,* characterized by both total collapse and the utmost self-control, was probably not fundamentally different from that of the somnambulists who have fallen into carefully rehearsed paroxysms of hysteria on the stages of opera houses evening after evening for two hundred years or more. But in any case the lamentations in the dead person's darkened house, illuminated only by the flickering light of a single candle, were followed by the funeral feast. The expense to which the bereaved had to go for the sake of their own and the dead man's honor in this feast, which often lasted several days, was so great that it could ruin a family if bad luck brought several murders or fatal attacks in quick succession, perhaps as part of a blood feud. Mourning was worn for five years or longer; on her husband's death, a widow stayed in mourning for the rest of her life. It is not surprising that the high-necked black dress and black headscarf, or the black corduroy suit, seemed to be Corsican national costume until well into the twentieth century. According to the accounts of earlier travelers, there was an aura of melancholy about those black figures seen everywhere in the streets of villages and towns and out in the country, an aura that even on the brightest sunlit days lay like a shadow over the green and leafy world of the island, and was reminiscent of the pictures of Poussin, for instance those depicting the massacre of the innocents or the death of Germanicus. Remembrance of the dead never really came to an end. Every year on All Souls' Day, a table was es-

pecially laid for them in Corsican houses, or at least a few cakes were put out on the windowsill as if for hungry birds in winter, since it was thought that they visited in the middle of the night to take a morsel of food. And a tub of cooked chestnuts was left outside the door for the vagabond beggars who, in the minds of the settled population, represented restless wandering spirits. Since the dead are known to be always cold, people took care not to let the fire on the hearth go out before day dawned. All this indicates both the lasting grief of the bereaved and the fear they could barely assuage, for the dead were thought of as extremely touchy, envious, vengeful, quarrelsome, and cunning. Given the least excuse, they would infallibly take their displeasure out on you. They were not regarded as beings forever at a safe distance in the world beyond the grave, but as family members still present, although in a different condition, and forming a kind of solidarity in the *communità dei defunti* against those who were not yet dead. About a foot shorter than they had been in life, they went around in bands and groups, or sometimes followed a banner along the road, drawn up in regiments. They were heard talking and whispering in their strange piping voices, but nothing they said to each other could be understood except for the name of whomever they intended to come for next. There are many stories of their appearances and the methods they used to announce their presence. Until the very recent past, there were people living who had seen pale lights above a house in which someone was soon to die, who

heard a dog howling at the wrong time, or the squealing of a cart that stopped outside the gate after midnight, or the beat of drums from the darkness of the *maquis*. There, in that vast space still almost untouched by human hand, was the abode of the armies of the dead, and clad in the full, billowing cloaks of the brotherhood of corpses, or the colorful uniforms of fusiliers who had fallen on the battlefields of Wagram and Waterloo, they set out from the *maquis* to ensure that they received the share of life due to them. They were known from time immemorial as the *cumpagnia,* the *mumma,* or the *squadra d'Arozza,* and they were believed to be bent on entering their former dwellings or even the churches, to say a blasphemous rosary as they prayed for a new recruit. And the power of the squadrons of the dead, increasing in numbers and strength year by year, was not all that must be feared: there were also individual restless ghosts intent on revenge, lying in wait by the roadside for travelers, suddenly emerging from behind a rock or manifesting themselves on the road itself, usually during the sinister hours of the day—at noon, when everyone was usually at table, or after the Angelus was rung, when pale shadows discolored the earth in the brief space of time between sunset and nightfall. And a man might often happen to return from working in the fields with the eerie news that in the middle of the empty countryside, where you usually knew everyone in your own or the next village by his bearing and his gait, he had seen a crook-backed stranger, if not the *falcina* in person, the Reaper with sickle in hand. Dorothy

Carrington, who frequently visited Corsica in the fifties and spent long periods there, says that a certain Jean Cesari, whom she had met in London and regarded as an enlightened man perfectly familiar with the principles of scientific thinking, and who later introduced her to the mysteries of his native Corsica, was firmly convinced of the real presence of ghosts, and indeed swore by his eyesight that he had seen and heard them himself. When he was asked in what form the ghosts appeared, and if you might meet dead friends and relations among them, Cesari said that at first glance they seemed to be like normal people, but as soon as you looked more closely their faces blurred and flickered at the edges, just like the faces of actors in an old movie. And sometimes only their upper bodies were clearly outlined, while the rest of them resembled drifting smoke. Over and beyond such stories, which are also handed down in other popular cultures, there was still a widespread belief in Corsica, until well into the decades after the last war, that some special people were in a way in the service of death. These *culpa morti, acciatori,* or *mazzeri,* as they were called, men as well as women, who were reliably said to come from every class of the population and outwardly differed not at all from other members of the community, were believed to have the ability to leave their bodies at home by night and go out hunting. Obeying a compulsion that came over them like a sickness, they were said to crouch in the darkness by rivers and springs, ready to strangle some creature, a fox or a hare, when it came to quench its thirst, and in the animal's

distorted countenance such people, victims of this murderous form of noctambulism, would recognize the image of some inhabitant of their village, sometimes even a close relation, who from that terrible moment on was doomed to die. What lies behind this extremely bizarre superstition, something that we can hardly imagine today and is obviously entirely untouched by Christian doctrine, is the awareness, arising from the family's shared suffering of an endless series of the most painful experiences, of a shadow realm extending into the light of day, a place where, in an act of perverse violence, the fate we shall finally meet is predetermined. But the people whom Dorothy Carrington called dream-hunters, the *acciatori,* now almost extinct, were not just the spawn of an imagination ruled by profound fatalism; they could also be cited as evidence for Freud's psychological theory—as enlightening as it is impossible to prove—that to the unconscious mind even those who die a natural death are victims of murder. I remember very well how, as a child, I stood for the first time by an open coffin, with the dull sense in my breast that my grandfather, lying there on wood shavings, had suffered a shameful injustice that none of us survivors could make good. And for some time, too, I have known that the more one has to bear, for whatever reason, of the burden of grief which is probably not imposed on the human species for nothing, the more often do we meet ghosts. On the Graben in Vienna, in the London Underground, at a reception given by the Mexican ambassador, at a lockkeeper's cottage on the

Ludwigskanal in Bamberg, now here and now there, without expecting it, you may meet one of those beings who are somehow blurred and out of place and who, as I always feel, are a little too small and shortsighted; they have something curiously watchful about them, as if they were lying in wait, and their faces bear the expression of a race that wishes us ill. Not long ago, when I was queuing at the supermarket checkout, a very dark-skinned man, almost pitch-black in color, stood in front of me with a large and, as it turned out, entirely empty suitcase into which, after paying for them, he put the Nescafé, the biscuits, and the few other things he had bought. He had probably arrived in Norwich only the day before from Zaire or Uganda to study, I thought, and then forgot him, until toward evening of the same day the three daughters of one of our neighbors knocked on our door bringing the news that their father had died before dawn of a severe heart attack. They are still around us, the dead, but there are times when I think that perhaps they will soon be gone. Now that we have reached a point where the number of those alive on earth has doubled within just three decades, and will treble within the next generation, we need no longer fear the once overwhelming numbers of the dead. Their significance is visibly decreasing. We can no longer speak of everlasting memory and the veneration of our forebears. On the contrary: the dead must now be cleared out of the way as quickly and comprehensively as possible. What mourner at a crematorium funeral has not thought, as the coffin moves into the

furnace, that the way we now take leave of the dead is marked by ill-concealed and paltry haste? And the room allotted to them becomes smaller and smaller; they are often given notice to leave after only a few years. Where will their mortal remains go then, how will they be disposed of? It is a fact that there is great pressure on space, even here in the country. What must it be like in the cities inexorably moving toward the thirty million mark? Where will they all go, the dead of Buenos Aires and São Paolo, of Mexico City, Lagos and Cairo, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Bombay? Very few of them, probably, into a cool grave. And who has remembered them, who remembers them at all? To remember, to retain and to preserve, Pierre Bertaux wrote of the mutation of mankind even thirty years ago, was vitally important only when population density was low, we manufactured few items, and nothing but space was present in abundance. You could not do without anyone then, even after death. In the urban societies of the late twentieth century, on the other hand, where everyone is instantly replaceable and is really superfluous from birth, we have to keep throwing ballast overboard, forgetting everything that we might otherwise remember: youth, childhood, our origins, our forebears and ancestors. For a while the site called the Memorial Grove recently set up on the Internet may endure; here you can lay those particularly close to you to rest electronically and visit them. But this virtual cemetery, too, will dissolve into the ether, and the whole past will flow into a formless, indistinct, silent mass. And leaving a pres-

ent without memory, in the face of a future that no individual mind can now envisage, in the end we shall ourselves relinquish life without feeling any need to linger at least for a while, nor shall we be impelled to pay return visits from time to time.

Campo Santo

W. G. SEBALD

TRANSLATED BY ANTHEA BELL

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New York