

PREFATORY NOTE

In November 1999, I completed a novella, *L'americaine*, which comprises the first section of this novel *The Knotted Ribbon*. The novella is written in the second person and is addressed to an unnamed woman. The narrator eventually emerges from his telling to become a character in the novella. In the story the woman meets a stranger who challenges the commitments of her mundane life. As the appeals of the stranger start to fade, she recognizes the an all too familiar nightmare. And the stranger continues to dare her in ways far beyond the routine of her lover.

After a friend read the novella, she told me that she would like to write the story from the woman's point of view. I myself made notes to attempt this story myself. But too many things interfered with that endeavor. Instead I got drawn in by a more grandiose project. My novella would be the first section of a four-part novel. Each section would be told from a different point of view. But the sections would not even tell the same story. They would simply sketch intersections of experience. Each of the three characters would construct his or her story.

The second section, *The Accompanist* is told from the woman's point of view. The third section is the narrator's story; *The Ventriloquist's Lament* expresses his wish for the objects of his desire to address him personally. The inevitable failings on the part of the narrator set up the fourth section, *The Occasional Conformist*. In a fuller sense, this section offers the intention of the overall work. The stranger tells his story where his satisfaction of desire is developed and delimited within the walls of his property. Here we see the source of his acquisitiveness.

From a sociological and ideological point of view, an obsession with sex is typical of a layer of the once-radical middle class who, having given up on transforming society in a progressive direction, turns inwards and seek an individualized, "personal" solution to a crisis which is fundamentally social in character. This is a layer that has grown more conservative and cynical the more its stock portfolios have benefitted from the stock portfolios of recent years. (Patrick Martin, "Salon and the decay of liberal American journalism", *World Socialist Web Site*: June 29, 2001)

The epigrams detail this point of view on his part.

Throughout the novel, the characters are deliberately unnamed. They are nameless because in the midst of aliases and shifting identities, they resist naming. They assume the identities of others. The name is what someone else calls them even to their point of direct denial.

"Dear Lee:

I can refund all you money if you send me the credit card receipts.

GINA

—My name is not Lee!" *The Occasional Conformist*