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How to Disembark Completely: Annemarie Schwarzenbach's and Ella Maillart's Afghan Journey (1939)

Abstract. In 1939, when the world was but a step away from the irreversible, Ella Maillart and Annemarie Schwarzenbach set out from Engadine, an Alpine valley region in the eastern Swiss Alps, heading for Kabul, Afghanistan. The journey was far from safe; the greatest dangers, though, lurked not so much in the curves and bends of the road as in the recesses of Schwarzenbach's boyishly coiffed head. Through a close reading of Maillart's and Schwarzenbach's memoirs of the trip (*The Cruel Way* and *All the Roads Are Open*, respectively), endeavour to determine whether the journey was a means of escape from the impending doom of the war, especially given that they were both anti-fascists, or whether it was instead an attempt to cure Schwarzenbach of her addictions and help her recuperate after yet another stay at a mental hospital following a suicide attempt. Relying on Joseph Campbell's mythologically-informed concepts of the hero quest and Maureen Murdock's feminist rewriting of Campbell's theory, the article's analysis of the two women's accounts of the journey also aims to probe the question of how they performed themselves and staged their travelling bodies in writing on the shaky scene offered by, on the one hand, the limited space of the speeding car and, on the other, by the seemingly boundless expanses of the route they followed.

Keywords: Joseph Campbell, Ella Maillart, Maureen Murdock, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, hero quest, journey, memoir, travelogue, travel writing, women on the road

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I.

When gathering material for *The Heroine's Journey*, which later became her seminal work, Maureen Murdock asked Joseph Campbell how the woman's journey related to the quest of the hero, but the answer she heard was "deeply unsatisfying":

In the whole mythological tradition the woman *is there*. All she has to do is realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male. (Murdock 2020: 2; original emphasis)

What shocked Murdock was not so much the narrow-mindedness of Campbell's response as his obliviousness to the mere possibility of there being any other options available to women. On top of that, Murdock also found alarming the ease with which Campbell consigned women to the role of sessile Penelopes, waiting—and weaving, and weeping—for the return of their heroes. Baffled and disappointed, Murdock set about mapping the female quest, placing the woman right at the forefront of the journey—as the traveller, not travellee, the subject, never object, and the fighter, not the one fought-over or fought for. That was the year 1981, only six years before Campbell's passing and over thirty after the first publication of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; Campbell was already an esteemed and influential scholar and Murdoch an ambitious novice and his former student. Curiously enough, Murdock's 1981 exchange with Campbell bears some resemblance to a conversation between Ella Maillart (1903-1997), a Swiss-Danish traveller, reporter, and writer, and Carl Gustav Jung, whom Maillart had paid quite a casual visit before she set off in 1939 on a trip to Afghanistan with Annemarie Schwarzenbach (1909-1942), a Swiss writer, journalist and photographer:

I called on C. G. Jung, hoping (very foolishly) that he could give me a key to the mentality of the so-called primitives. I offered him one of my books. He looked at it and asked: "Why do you travel?" "To meet those who know how to live peacefully" was the first answer that came to my lips. But the great man looked at me with suspicion; did I look like a restless lunatic who wants to be cured? (2013: 10)

It is somewhat unsettling to read these two passages which, though separated by some forty years of turbulent history, seem to strike quite similar chords. The question of women's travels and generally of women-as-travellers continues to be a cause for alarm or at least for the furrowing of the brows (spare a thought for Freud's notorious frown); luckily enough, the stories of women like Maillart, Schwarzenbach, and, in fact, staggering numbers of others annul much of the stinging capital of such attitudes. None of them stopped to take heed or wavered in her resolution to travel, be it outwards or

inwards, brought down by instances of advice-giving and gaslighting. In fact, Schwarzenbach and Maillart loom as discordant figures, defying limitations and conventions, appropriating instead the terrains traditionally designated as male-only. What is more, their movements and transitions transcend the superficial divisions and categories—and it is predominantly these traversals that I wish to focus on in the course of the present article. While Maillart seems to be embracing life and adventure, and in this sense embarks on the journey with *jouissance* and enthusiasm, for Schwarzenbach, the trip appears to promise numerous chances to disembark completely in pursuit of self-annihilation, inviting risk, and offering her opportunities to gradually give up on her will to live.

In an attempt to follow up on these threads, I wish to shed light on modes of departure as deliverance which Schwarzenbach and Maillart negotiated and which marked them as, at once, representatives of the “leisure classes” of old, and harbingers of the tragic heroes of today’s grey zones. Both women kept journals during the trip and published their accounts; for Schwarzenbach, it was actually a way of acquiring extra funds for the journey—she regularly sent out her texts in the form of *feuilletons* and reports to various magazines and journals, which were collected in one volume and published as a complete travelogue under the title *All the Roads Are Open* only as recently as 2000 (in German; first English translation appeared in 2011). Maillart’s *The Cruel Way: Switzerland to Afghanistan in a Ford, 1939* appeared in 1947, and its most recent edition was published in 2013 with a foreword by Jessa Crispin. It feels justified to look more closely at the titles of the respective works. While both are direct quotes from the texts, they refer specifically to only one of the travellers—Annemarie, yielding significant insights into her general disposition throughout the trip. When crossing the Khyber Pass, Schwarzenbach was asked by British customs officers for her passport and car documents. She relates how befuddled they were upon finding out that she had never been there before, given how extensive her travels had been. Annemarie does not feel fit to explain herself to them; rather, she seems to withdraw from the entire scene and give in to her wistfulness, noting mournfully that “certainly, all the roads are open, and lead nowhere, nowhere” (Schwarzenbach 2013: 108). This is just one of the many bursts of despair and regrets she committed along the way—very symptomatic, though. Contrary to what the phrase on its own might appear to mean, this was not an enthusiastic exclamation about the journey and the sense of joy an empty road at one of the world’s great crossroads might give a driver; it was a pronouncement of resignation and sorrow which plagued Schwarzenbach not only during this particular trip but throughout her whole life, tormenting her and frequently sending her over the edge. In this sense, it does actually correlate with Maillart’s choice of title for her work. Maillart, a pragmatic optimist, was experiencing quite profound emotions caused by the circumstances and mused about explaining them to Annemarie in an attempt to prove to her

that one can “bring forth from my being pure and unconditioned joy . . .” (Maillart 2013:72). By then she did, however, know that these thoughts would be lost on Annemarie, and moved by Schwarzenbach’s struggle, she wondered “why again and again she chose the complicated, cruel way of hell. Could it be that she preferred it to an easier mode of living? Did she believe it was a quick way of exceeding the limitations of her individuality?” (Maillart 2013: 72). Thus, “the cruel way” becomes a definition of how Schwarzenbach proceeded in the world, how she went about her life; at the same time, it rings very true with regards to the trip itself and to its larger, mythological even, implications. Bodily movement, while not capable of saving Annemarie from herself entirely, still provided a shield against emotional stasis in that it occupied the senses and busied the muscles as well as the mind, not allowing the traveller to slide into despair and immobilizing self-pity while on the move. In fact, the “crueller” the way, the better it proved for keeping Schwarzenbach in check, which is exactly what Maillart’s work is about. Curiously enough, it tells us next to nothing about Maillart, the author and the traveller, placing the focus quite definitively on her travel companion, who emerges as the main protagonist and the sole subject of both of these accounts. The practice, though rather unpremeditated on the part of Maillart, might distantly echo the devices applied by James Boswell in *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (1785)—the work’s unquestioned hero is Johnson, and the entire text might be read as a “prolegomenon” of sorts to Boswell’s later biography of Johnson. Undoubtedly, the decision to write a travel journal/memoir where the focus is on a protagonist other than the writer is unusual and curious, one that seems to go against the old adage of making a travel account a boastful record of one’s own adventures and triumphs or mishaps and sufferings (think of T. E. Lawrence and the multifarious torments that he so prides himself on actively pursuing).

II.

Lately, the two women travel writers, Schwarzenbach in particular, have been enjoying a renewed interest, and the rediscovery has been fuelled also by fashion and popular culture. Schwarzenbach surely makes for a fitting heroine—her gender ambiguity and striking androgynous appearance, along with a penchant for cross-dressing single her out as a belated icon. In fact, her photographic appeal had already been eagerly explored by many of her peers and companions, Maillart included. In 2018, the house of Givenchy presented a collection inspired by Schwarzenbach, with models sporting high-waisted trousers and shorts, and silk shirts, complemented by hairstyles reminiscent of Schwarzenbach’s hairdo. The 2018 fashion show turned out to be a celebration of inclusivity and difference and a peculiar tribute to Schwarzenbach, though most of the “ugly” parts of her story had been painted over, perhaps quite understandably. Of these there was indeed a-plenty—Schwarzenbach did not in the least bit feel like an “icon” or a role

model of any sort; throughout her whole life, she battled depression, drug addiction, anxiety, and neurosis, which led her to several suicide attempts and multiple stays in recovery clinics. Her hypersensitivity meant that she could never turn a blind eye to any instance of oppression, which in turn thrust her into a deep conflict with her family and did not earn her too many supporters among the social circles within which the Schwarzenbachs moved. In a way, though, these circumstances make her a figure that many young people today can actually relate to and identify with, which perhaps explains the popular attention she has garnered. On top of that, Schwarzenbach was a highly educated and extremely well-read person (with a doctorate in history from Zurich and Paris) whose talents included first and foremost writing, both creative and journalistic, photography, and driving, the latter being one of the passions which brought her close to Maillart, also an avid driver.

More widespread scholarly attention came with English translations—in 2011 Isabel Fargo Cole translated *All the Roads Are Open* (Seagull Books), and in the same year Lucy Renner Jones's translation of *Lyric Novella* appeared, also with Seagull Books; shortly thereafter, in 2012, Renner Jones translated *Death in Persia*, which was published in 2013 again by the same publishing house. All the while, numerous blogs, websites, as well as many Pinterest and Instagram profiles emerged devoted to Schwarzenbach, some of which are still up and running, e.g., *Strange Flowers*, run by James J. Conway, or *The Ravaged Angel*. Importantly, there have also been some substantial academic publications on Annemarie Schwarzenbach, most notable of which are Sofie Decock's and Uta Schaffers's 2011-2012 series of articles (in German) about Schwarzenbach's Asian and African travel journals. One of Decock's articles appeared in English in the 2011 issue of *Women in German Yearbook*, published by the University of Nebraska Press. Uta Schaffers has continued her research into travel writing, and as of summer 2022 has been working on an edited collection of essays (in English), together with Sarah Schäfer-Althaus and Nicole Maruo-Schröder, with some of the confirmed contributions being Sofie Decock's new article on Schwarzenbach. The 2016 *Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, includes a shorter and more survey-like entry about Schwarzenbach by David Farley, who interrogates her works translated into English from the vantage of modernist travel writing, along with authors such as Aime Cesaire and Blaise Cendrars. To date, there is no complete English biography of Schwarzenbach. The lack is quite painful because not only are there no original biographical works in English, but translations of German, Swiss or French ones are also hard to find. A curious case is that of the immensely popular Italian author Melania Mazzucco, whose immersive fictionalized biography of Schwarzenbach (*Lei così amata*, 2000) has been translated into at least ten languages, including Polish (*Tak ukochana*, translated by Monika Woźniak, 2006), but never into English, and, in fact, her only work to have so far appeared in English is the 2002 novel *Vita* (translated by Virginia Jewiss, 2006). In other media, in 2001

Schwarzenbach's Afghan trip with Maillart was turned into an arthouse film, *Journey to Kafiristan*, directed by Fosco and Donatello Dubini, with Jeanette Hain as Schwarzenbach and Nina Petri as Maillart, which, however, only a lukewarm critical and audience reception. Yet another popular culture reference to Schwarzenbach, one perhaps not quite obvious, is Suzanne Vega's 2011 one-woman show *Carson McCullers Talks about Love*, in which Vega uses the writer's own words to sing about McCullers' life and experiences, the author's feelings for Schwarzenbach making up one track in the collection—"Song of Annemarie".

III.

There still remains a lot to explore with regards to Schwarzenbach's life and *oeuvre*, but the primary sources are probably already exhausted—it is unlikely that there should be any new publications by Schwarzenbach because sadly all her letters, journals, and other unfinished projects which may have been prime examples of writing on the move were destroyed by her mother Renee shortly after Schwarzenbach's untimely death. Renee felt they shed unfavourable light on the family, and they probably did because Schwarzenbach was a staunch opponent and merciless critic of Hitler and Nazism, whereas her family, her mother in particular, openly supported the Führer. This might also explain why Schwarzenbach felt the urge to flee her family home and its atmosphere—she could not accept her parents' political sympathies, especially given that the circle of her closest friends included, among many prominent others, the family of Thomas Mann, and a German photojournalist Marianne Breslauer.

However, the strange and somewhat incongruent aspect of that is the fact that her mother was actually openly bisexual, involved in an affair with the opera singer Emily Krueger and others; what is more, Renee raised Annemarie as a boy, styling her hair boyishly and dressing her in boys' clothes, and her daughter's queerness was no secret to Renee but she still tended to use it against Annemarie. Theirs was by all means a toxic and troubled relationship, and as Annemarie admits, part of her drive to constantly depart had to do with attempts to flee her mother's stifling and damaging influence. The lack of positive female role models led her to look for female/motherly affection elsewhere, and this was what partly drew her to Maillart. She may too have had a bit of a crush on Maillart, but perhaps more than any physical intimacy she sought out her warmth and empathy.

Schwarzenbach's life was short, full of drama, not infrequently self-induced, ridden by personal struggles, and marked by family trauma. Despite all that—or perhaps because of that, at least to a degree—she never surrendered in her intellectual, mental, and physical efforts to be a vocal witness to injustice, evil, oppression, and beauty, which sometimes triumphed against the odds. Aware of her own limitations and vices, she persevered in her attempts to see good and hope in the world that she traversed so

tirelessly across all kinds of division lines—geographical, political, religious, and cultural alike. In her struggles, she more often than not failed, at times spectacularly, succumbing to her demons—drugs, unrequited affection, family feuds, physical and mental ailments, the most tragic and ironic being the biking accident near her home in Switzerland, which sent her into a coma she did not recover from. When she died at the age of thirty-four, Schwarzenbach was a half-reformed addict, a published author, an acclaimed journalist and social reformer, a married woman, a seasoned traveller, an experienced driver, and, to quote her friend, Breslauer, “this strange mixture of man and woman . . . not at all like a living being but like a work of art . . . the Archangel Gabriel standing before Heaven” (2012: 132). Breslauer’s comment captures the conflicted nature of Schwarzenbach and the ambiguity she exuded, eluding easy categorizations and definitions, which surfaces acutely in the countless pictures that Breslauer took of her. Breslauer was, in fact, not the only person to compare Schwarzenbach to an angel—so did Thomas Mann and Roger Martin du Gard; Carson McCullers recalled that her face “would haunt [her] for the rest of her life” (Shepland 2021: 36). In the photographs Breslauer took of her, Schwarzenbach rarely smiles; rather, her usual expression seems to be defiance mixed with vulnerability, underrun by a passion for whatever it is that the picture catches her doing. Her energy vibrates but the tremors sometimes send her over the edge.

Such was her condition in 1939, when she and Maillart started planning the Afghan trip. Schwarzenbach, after a prolonged stay at a rehabilitation centre in Yverdon, appeared to have recovered just enough to embark on a new escapade. She knew she had nothing to lose—she had already lost nearly everything, several times at least—and she realized that there was actually quite a lot at stake for her, including the hope of learning to take control of her life, which for long she had felt slipping away from her. Understanding that being on her own she would most probably give in to morphine addiction again, she found the level-headed and compassionate Maillart a perfect companion. Maillart, however, was not immediately convinced, especially given that some of her friends had warned her about Schwarzenbach. Though she tried not to let gossip get to her, she recalls towards the beginning of *The Cruel Way* that she “was not quite easy about our enterprise” (Maillart 2013: 9). Schwarzenbach had her misgivings, too, but they were more about her general malaise and the sense of impending doom she felt encroaching upon her:

I am thirty. It is the last chance to mend my ways, to take myself in hand. This journey is not going to be a sky-larking escapade as if we were twenty—and that is impossible, with the fear of Hitler increasing day by day around us. The journey must be a means towards our end. We can help each other to become conscious, responsible persons. My blind way of life has grown unbearable. What is the reason, the meaning of the chaos that

undermines people and nations? And there must be something that I am to do with my life, there must be some purpose for which I could gladly die or live. (Maillart 2013: 4)

Maillart could not help but be moved by such an ardent plea, to which she responded with a no less passionate “prayer” for Annemarie (whom in her text Maillart calls “Christina” in order to avoid raising objections from Schwarzenbach’s family):

May it be in my power to help you, impatient Christina so irked by the limitations of the human condition, so oppressed by the falsity of life, by the parody of love around us. If we travel together, may it be given me not to fail you, may my shoulder be firm enough for you to lean on. Along the surface of the earth I shall find our way where I have journeyed before; and inwardly, where I have long ago begun to ask myself questions so like yours, may the little that I have found help you to find what each of us has to find by himself. (Maillart 2013: 4)

For Jessa Crispin (also a travel writer and a journalist; author of the memoir-travelogue *Dead Ladies Project*), who wrote the introduction to Maillart’s *The Cruel Way*, it is the bond between the two women that occupies center-stage in Maillart’s account. Indeed, as one gets deeper into the narrative, one cannot help noticing that the entire text—and actually the entire endeavour—was completely about Schwarzenbach. Maillart does not hide it; quite the opposite, she states point blank that her main goals “were to acquire self-mastery and to save my friend from herself” (Maillart 2013: 26). Reading the two accounts side by side, the striking way in which they function might seem dubious at first because whereas Schwarzenbach’s *All the Roads Are Open* offers full-on, painstaking vivisection of herself, *The Cruel Way* provides very little in terms of a similar insight into Maillart’s sensibilities and mindscapes. Rather, what is being revealed are the “bumps” along the road that Schwarzenbach tended to conceal or at least downplay, and which Maillart supplied with background and context, laying bare the true emotional and physical cost of their journey. They are indeed travellers of the “stereoscopic” order as defined by Charles Forsdick, speaking of, interestingly, a different pair of travel companions in which Maillart again was one of the counterparts (Forsdick 2009: 293). In an exploration of the textualisations of Maillart’s and Peter Fleming’s accounts of their 1935 journey to China, Forsdick draws attention to several issues which prove significant also in the case of Maillart’s and Schwarzenbach’s parallel travel narratives—the self-performativity of the travel writer, the narrative representation (or lack thereof) of the co-traveller, and the “anxiety of influence” (Forsdick 2009: 295) that each of the travellers/authors may be subject to.

Focusing on a journey undertaken by the “odd couple”, as Maillart and Fleming had been dubbed by Maureen Mulligan (Mulligan 2008: 141), he also looks at the gendered

aspects of the travelling experience and the gender rivalry which also plays a part in how the authors' travelogues were textualized, noting that indeed each seemed to feel compelled to challenge the other, in particular with regards to the "ownership" of the journey (Forsdick 2009: 293) along the lines of the gender divide. The gender rivalry argument does not really hold for Schwarzenbach and Maillart—even if Annemarie's sexual and gender identification was not normative, they were, in essence, "two women alone in Afghanistan" (Schwarzenbach 2018: 89) and had to fight the same battle, at least on this ground. However, questions of their authorial self-performativity, the presence of the co-traveller in each other's travelogues, and the anxiety of influence may have been valid points. Still, perhaps owing to the status of their relationship and their individual predispositions, the case is not so clear-cut. Schwarzenbach surely takes great care of what she puts into her writing, diligently avoiding mentioning any of the crises caused by her recklessness, which may be read as an attempt at preserving the image and impression of a sturdy traveller and a rational and responsible person, but then again she does not hide her depressive moods, ennui, fear, and insecurity, at times allowing herself to wallow in self-pity and painstakingly record her anxieties.

Reading *All the Roads Are Open* leaves one in the dark with regards to what went on "behind the scenes"; Schwarzenbach's mood swings are recorded but she is rather cryptic when it comes to revealing the full picture. This seems to suggest that although she was publishing her journey reports regularly while on the road, she was very careful about how much she actually let on, signalling a very conscious and self-aware authorial persona. Perhaps she kept a more intimate diary or shared the many dramas of the journey in letters to friends; sadly, these would not have survived her mother's censorial hand. Surely the travel experience was shaping her travelogue to a great extent, which had to do with the physical aspect of her engagement in the entire endeavour. What is quite striking, though, is that indeed Schwarzenbach erases nearly all traces of the presence of Maillart, going so far to as to refer to her rather impersonally as "my companion" or "my fellow driver" in the rare instances when she mentions her at all (Schwarzenbach 2018: *passim*). Forsdick suggests that similar practices in Maillart's and Fleming's respective Chinese travelogues exemplified a Romanticist apotheosis of solitary travel (Forsdick 2009: 295) and the cult of the solo traveler who, consequently, becomes a true master of all he surveys. Regarding the Afghan journey, this does not seem to be the case, and the grounds for Schwarzenbach's textual decisions might actually lie elsewhere, in a realm altogether much more personal and symptomatic of her condition. To put it perhaps a bit too bluntly, she might not have been particularly interested in such implications of the journey because she was far too engrossed in her own universe, to the point of sometimes seeming not to be of this world. Focused inwardly, she appears to be devoted to self-vivisection, which does not require her to always consider the bigger picture. Interestingly, while she erased the travel/travail parallel in

her account, Maillart embraced and highlighted it. Thus, it might be argued that Schwarzenbach's *All the Roads Are Open* constitutes a selective, first-person, first-hand account of a heroine's journey, while Maillart's *The Cruel Way* becomes a companion piece to the record of her companion's quest.

Indeed, their Afghan trip possesses many features typical of the hero's quest, both with regards to the reasons why they set off in the first place, and in terms of the particular stages that their journey is made up of. Here, Maureen Murdock's work comes in handy—it is she who built, or expanded, the heroine's journey, extricating it from Campbell's heroic quest. As Murdock puts it:

The journey begins with our heroine's search for identity. This "call" is heard at no specific age but occurs when the "old self" no longer fits. . . . It may simply happen when a woman realizes that she has no sense of self that she can call her own. (Murdock 2020: 5)

Usually, the sense of lack, confusion, stasis, and pointlessness goes as far back as the archetype of the mother and the heroine's urge to separate from it to find a truer self that would be fuller and individual. This entails the separation of a woman from her actual mother and the deeper, more complex split required of her to perform at the level of the unconscious, involving body and mind. According to Murdock, "geographical separation may be the only way at first to resolve the tension between a daughter's need to grow up and her desire to please her mother" (2020:20). Having managed to acquire some safe distance, the heroine may brace herself for tackling the archetypal mother and her dual expressions—that of the good Great Mother, and the Terrible Mother, who embodies stasis, stagnation, and whose hold on the daughter petrifies her, ultimately threatening her with death. Renee's actions are frequently hostile, but Annemarie, at least half aware of their detrimental effect on her health, self-esteem, and well-being finds herself helpless and all-too-exposed to their impact. She confides in Maillart that she thought "it was very foolish of me to be always acting against my mother—the person who knows me better than anyone else. I had no hope of freeing myself from her, no hope of ever being simply myself" (Maillart 2013:15). Maillart, while sensing Schwarzenbach's fear of her mother, noticed as well that her companion might just have been as ready as one can get to break the circle and split herself from Renee, in an act of defiance akin to taking the sword of her truth and using it to protect herself along the path of her own destiny. The first step has been made—Schwarzenbach takes to the wheel of their Ford, but does she have enough stamina and courage to keep at it? Alone with her baggage—probably not; with an ally at her side, the chances of success grow.

Thus, in an attempt to—as noted earlier—“save Christina² from herself”, Maillart accepts the role of the guardian and nourisher, providing Schwarzenbach with models of femininity that are powerful but not threatening, unfurling before her a path which, while still full of traps, allows her to learn to use her inner strength to manoeuvre the pitfalls.

IV.

It remains a road of trials, with calamities and losses on the way. The second most dangerous “ogre”, after the fear of the mother, has always been Schwarzenbach’s fragile sobriety and the temptations offered by places they pass by, especially cities such as Sofia, Budapest, and Constantinople, or their final destination, Kabul. In Sofia, Maillart was at first totally at a loss with regard to what might have happened; when she discovered a broken ampule in the bathroom, she quickly understood what was going on:

She had succumbed once more She had done what she pretended to abhor. My presence, my confidence in her, the fear of displeasing me had no effect. What did it mean? What were we to do? (2013: 24)

The transgression leaves Schwarzenbach seriously incapacitated—a fact we learn, however, from Maillart because Annemarie’s account includes only a couple of cursory remarks on Bulgaria, quite evasive in tone and devoted to landscapes, roads and, the availability of amenities such as fresh bread (Schwarzenbach 2018: 4-7). It is Maillart who reveals the gravity of the situation, but fortunately, she was not one to break down and lose her head in a crisis; even though at this particular moment she felt betrayed and dismayed, her fear over Annemarie’s health and life prevailed, and she set about making sure this would not happen again. To this end, they made a pact, an unwritten but binding contract, according to which Schwarzenbach gave herself over to Maillart: “I give you complete power day and night. Don’t leave me alone. If it happens again, I leave the car with you and go back” (Maillart 2013: 34). Profound though these pronouncements were, at the end of the day they were only words, and unfortunately, Schwarzenbach lost to temptation yet again, but that time her condition was even graver. The second crisis hit towards the end of their journey when they were already in Kabul. At first, Schwarzenbach seemed to be coming down with bad flu, but despite a high fever and severe cough, she refused to see a doctor. As her state worsened, Maillart found herself feeling more and more suspicious of the whole thing, especially given that her travel companion did not want to talk to her, either. Maillart noted with alarm that “she was ill but would not admit it; she would not relax or submit herself to the laws of

² This is the way she refers to Schwarzenbach in her narrative.

nature” (Maillart 2013: 197); what she found yet more unsettling was the gnawing anxiety that she had let Schwarzenbach down:

I failed Christina. According to our pact I was not to leave her alone whatever she might say or do. But the intensity of my desire to help her had spoiled my intention. That intensity had brought with it a kind of effort that had tired me. (Maillart 2013: 198)

When Annemarie finally speaks, it is “a confession of her total wretchedness” (Maillart 2013: 199). She admitted to having been lying all the time, going out of her wicked way to procure morphine ampules whenever they were in the vicinity of any bigger town. Maillart lost it, though somehow it does not feel entirely convincing that she really had no inkling whatsoever of what Annemarie had been up to, especially seeing that she forgives again, even though this was such a blatant breach of their contract which jeopardized not just the journey but their friendship and Annemarie’s life, too.

Despite Maillart’s disappointment, they trudged on, though Schwarzenbach was fragile and mentally and physically weak. Neither was she the easiest of convalescents—she vehemently refused to see a doctor and at times seemed to take a peculiar tormented pleasure in wallowing in her afflictions. Maillart, who saw through all this, began to lose patience, only to backtrack on any nascent criticism of her friend, starting instead to look for explanations and reasons why Annemarie was that way. The level of her compassion is astounding; it is also at this moment, after Annemarie wore out nearly all of Maillart’s goodwill and care, that Maillart utters what may very well be one of the most moving and saddest remarks on Annemarie: “She was a sober violin whose cords had been made of her own heart-strings: while she played she was wearing herself out” (2013: 73).

No reflection of these crises finds expression in Schwarzenbach’s account, but one may detect her fear and internal turmoil in the violent mood swings she succumbs to. Describing one of the villages they stop by, she resorts to a language of loss, defeat, and death; the settlement comes across to her as “gripped by the inexorable destruction like a contagious disease” (2018: 65); all around she sees ghosts and ruins of things that had once been and are no more:

And I look about, and nothing remains, the bells are buried, the cisterns caved in, the altars cold. In this merciless land, one is tempted to believe the earth is on the verge of extinction. (2018: 66)

A moment later, though, she lets herself be gripped by the nearly all-consuming beauty of their surroundings, the kindness of the people they encounter, and their humility and respect for the timeless rites of their land:

And when you see a white or a light blue turban, a women's red veil by day in the fields, or at noon the men who have gathered to pray outside the little mosque, or in the evening, at the entrance to the bazaar, the first warm glow of a samovar, you believe the course of a well-ordered day is assured, a well-ordered life according to laws devised for our protection, for our needs, and you feel almost sheltered. (2018: 70)

Another day on the road brings a new storm, unease, and listlessness from which she “wanted to break away, not knowing exactly from which fate, seeming to grasp only that I had been struck by calamity” (2018: 100-1). Not only does she feel drained mentally; she ponders withdrawing from professional activity, too—writing becomes “a perpetual mirror of our drenched existence, which I was so loath to accept and endure” (2018: 101). The torments of travelling and writing, draining the author of the *élan vital* necessary to keep going, both text- and distance-wise, were perhaps best expounded upon by T. E. Lawrence, although despite the masochistic urges he so often succumbed to, he managed to write *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* before giving in to the death drive. Elaborating on Lawrence and his opus magnum, Zbigniew Białas raises a crucial issue in his *Body Wall*. Lawrence, when describing his writing method, says: “I tie myself into knots trying to re-enact everything, as I write it out. It's like writing in front of the looking-glass” (Lawrence, qtd. in Białas 2006: 73). The condition of being “tied into knots” surely is an uncomfortable one; when applied to the process of textualizing one's narrative account of the trials and tribulations of travel, it becomes even more symptomatic of how the author's inclinations might exhaust him. Of course, Lawrence makes it yet more problematic because he relishes in all prospects of even a hint of victimization and suffering, which to an extent might be said of Schwarzenbach, too, who after all also sought pain and frequently gave in to self-destructive impulses. The resemblance, however, seems to end here—Lawrence pursued sexual gratification and was masochistically attracted to degradation of the body and spirit, which brought him release and satiation; Schwarzenbach's masochistic tendencies were always about the annihilation of the ego, which she saw as her greatest nemesis.

From a different angle, Lawrence's accounts of travels in the Middle East during the Great War do share some affinity with Schwarzenbach's narrative, fraught with the undercurrent tensions of the encroaching Second World War. Both of them moved and wrote under liminal circumstances, painfully aware of the potential consequences of the war in a global, as well as personal dimension. Perhaps, however, the causes of Schwarzenbach's spleen in this instance had to do with having stayed in Afghanistan too long, allowing herself to soak in the place and its circumstances—an occasion which always got to her because it seemed to foreshadow growing some roots, committing to a place and to a people, and in effect becoming “immobile” and giving in to the stasis that

she so feared. Maillart, now already an expert at diagnosing Schwarzenbach's states, noted the mood swings with alarm:

One day working hard, announcing joyfully that she was rid of her obsessive fear; the next confessing that she could not live much longer in such dismal unhappiness—it was obvious that she was not nearing a well-balanced state.

Further on, Maillart confirms what Schwarzenbach revealed in her outbursts, namely that “she could not bear the thought of remaining inactive, for then she felt like dying. She was afraid of immobility” (Maillart 2013: 197).

V.

That Maillart endured all the disappointments and betrayals speaks volumes about her as a person of deep compassion and empathy; however, given that *The Cruel Way*, in contrast to *All the Roads Are Open*, was published in 1947—nearly eight years after the trip and five after Schwarzenbach's death—Maillart's pensive mood might also signify her wistfulness at the course of events. Schwarzenbach was publishing her travel impressions and reports all the time during the trip, submitting them to various magazines and journals without allowing herself much time to revise and edit; Maillart worked on her travelogue on and off until its publication and surely benefited from hindsight, at least with regards to how she viewed her companion's struggle. Schwarzenbach's biking accident in Sils in 1942, coma, and ensuing death shook Maillart deeply, which may have had an impact on how she looked at her friend and what she actually put into her work. Certainly, she did arrive at an empathetic understanding of Schwarzenbach, the kind that neither her smokescreen homosexual husband Claude Clarac, nor her mother achieved. She saw Annemarie's death drive, her pursuit of suffering and drug abuse for what they were worth, i.e., tragic attempts at what Schwarzenbach called “lessening the small ego” (Maillart 2013: 205)—overcoming suffering through confronting it head-on, seeking it out so as to defeat it, or at least numb it so as to make it bearable. Perhaps Schwarzenbach found deliverance in this; if not, then surely not damnation, either.

If escape—total ‘disembarkation’—was what Schwarzenbach was after, travel (and travel writing) proves to be a fitting practice to become engaged in. According to Karen Lawrence, “travel writing reveals a set of alternative myths or models for women's space in society—against the myths of dependency, women's inferiority, and romantic love”, which is achieved—and achievable—only when women shirk off the preassigned roles of “beloveds” or “homemakers” (1994: xi). That, however, does not have to mean the straightforward ‘either/or’ because in their performance of the parts of travellers and storytellers, women can embody this seemingly exclusive duality. Through what Jacques Derrida calls “breaking the law of boundaries”, a woman in transit—on the go—in

passage is at once “a weaver [and an] unweaver, a constructor [and a] deconstructor” (1982: 10). This new realm has been cleared for women specifically by the options that travel writing opens up through providing “discursive space for women who sometimes left home in order to write home, discovering new aesthetic as well as social possibilities” (Lawrence 1994: 18). Lawrence does have a point here, one which Schwarzenbach and Maillart prove in their respective works: both women have managed, in their unique ways, to appropriate and shape the genre so as to make it fit their own experience and answer to their own goals, in the process creating what Lawrence defines as a “permeable membrane of possibilities” granted by the unknown (1994: 18), be it a concrete geographical territory or a more ‘ephemeral’ realm or inner landscape (or, in fact, all of these at once). Each of them seized on the chance to approach that which had been repressed—in Schwarzenbach’s case, the archetypal mother and her physical emanation in the figure of Renee; for Maillart, the long-unvoiced but yearned-for taming of the monstrous, constantly craving ego. Naturally, success in acquiring equilibrium cannot be guaranteed and thus should not be taken for granted; many traps lurk along the way and threaten to send the seeker—the traveller—back to square one, as it were, or worse – to have her choke on the desired object and give in to melancholia, neurosis or irreconcilable grief. Still, the risk is (probably) worth taking.

Schwarzenbach was never one to avoid risk; quite the contrary, she recklessly pursued it and invited it to lead her down many a shadow-cast valley. In all honesty, she hardly ever celebrated an all-round success in her endeavours, more often than not falling prey to the perils with which the paths she chose had been strewn. Yet, again and again, she rose, no matter how deep the bottom she had hit. Having come precariously close to death on the Afghan trip with Maillart, she rebounded and came to a new reckoning with herself which she eagerly shared with Maillart, proclaiming with confidence: “I know now, smoke or dope are useless . . . the drug . . . was the fatal desire to kill life, to wipe out pain and joy, the tension-source of human activity” (Maillart 2013: 206). Maillart cheered for her, albeit cautiously, but appeared to dare to believe this was it, the sought-for boon of success, saving Annemarie from herself:

Her eye was once more filled with light, her body poised, the past not weighing on her. She was thinner than ever but healthy. . . . The past had lost its bitterness. (Maillart 2013: 202)

Maillart closes her account here, leaving Schwarzenbach with her new-found balance and peace of mind. However, writing in 1947, she carried the full burden of hindsight over the later vicissitudes of Annemarie’s fate. The irony could not be bitterer. In a song she dedicated to Schwarzenbach, Suzanne Vega aptly remarks: “Annemarie . . . terror, pity, love” (Vega 2011), and the order needs no reconfiguring—pity, yes; terror—constantly; love—hopelessly, recklessly, always.

And Schwarzenbach? She concludes *All the Roads Are Open* with a poignant observation that “what staggers us, over and over again, is the morning splendour of departure” (2018: 120). Touché.

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