

Lea Ypi

Can beauty save the world? On historical injustice, reconciliation, and the role of aesthetic education

“Beautiful world, where are you?”, asks Schiller in the poem “The Gods of Greece”. The main philosophical themes of the poem are the same I am going to discuss in this lecture: morality, human nature, alienation, and reconciliation. Schiller and I both write in the shadow of revolutionary upheaval marked by historical injustice: in Schiller’s case the French revolution of 1789; in mine, the Eastern European revolutions of 1989. Both promised freedom and the opening of a new era of justice for humanity. Both are marked by the divisive legacy of the past. And in many ways, both have failed to bring the unity Schiller’s poem longs for. Instead of building humanity, they ended up destroying confidence in it. Instead of inspiring trust in society, they resulted in the worst excesses of individualism. Our world is just as marked by divisions, disenchantment, and the loss of faith in humanity as the one Schiller depicts in “The Gods of Greece”. But there is one difference. In Schiller’s world, there was hope, if not real, at least imagined. That hope came in the form of faith in the redeeming power of art: in its capacity to mediate between feelings and moral imperatives. Exiled gods still lived in the creations of poets, or as Schiller puts it: “nur in dem Feenland der Lieder / Lebt noch deine goldne Spur.” Where do we find reconciliation in the contemporary world?

I am going to address these questions by taking you on a journey, away from the utopia of classical Greek unity that Schiller describes into the dystopia of my next book project: a description and reimagining of the life of a woman, Leman Ypi, who was born in Salonica, Greece, in 1918 a few years before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and died in Tirana, Albania, in 2005, just over a decade after the collapse of communism. I will first read some pages from the book – the pages that introduce the problem of reconciliation, especially in societies divided by the legacy of the past – and say a few more words about the project, before reflecting on the relevance of Schiller’s poem and his philosophical writings more broadly.

BEGINNING OF READING

“I’m looking for the Authority for Information concerning Documentation of the Former State Security Service”, I say, placing myself in front of the first taxi parked on *Komuna e Parisit*, one of the newish busy roads lined up with shops and cafes that connect the centre of Tirana to the outer ring of the city. I hesitate to call it *my* road, even though my family lives there, and it has been my official home address for at least fifteen years. Already when we moved to Tirana, the question, or rather remark “you’re not from here, right?” came up with nagging regularity every time I started one of those casual conversations with strangers that seemed as harmless in the way they started as they risked turning awkward, the longer they lasted. Already then, I resented the unspoken hierarchy between those who acquired the “from here” title by birth, and those who, betrayed by their accents, would have to justify their presence in the city.

Most people who return to Tirana tend to remark how much it has changed in the last few years: there are now more concrete buildings, paved roads, cafes, bars, and cycle paths. For me, it is a place of grief, guilt and counterfactuals. When I visit, I get lost in the small alleyways that run through the city like so many misplaced veins. I’m barely able to orient myself even in the pretentiously named Paris Commune, the neighbourhood that is supposed to be my own. Perhaps a part of me unconsciously wants to be lost, to remind myself that I never fully belonged, and it is now too late to remedy. Or perhaps never knowing my way around is the best hope I have that one day I might learn.

“I’m looking for the Authority for Information concerning Documentation of the Former State Security Service”, I repeat, surprising myself that for the second time I have introduced “the office” in the same formal way it has introduced itself in the email inviting me to the appointment.

The taxi driver does not hear me at first. A grey-haired man in his seventies, with a hollowed-out face covered by thick, dark sunglasses, he wears a checked short-sleeved shirt and a red “Make America Great Again” cap with a US flag printed on the side. There is loud music coming from his yellow Mercedes Benz, a radio station called Top Gold that plays old classics. As I stand in front of the taxi waiting for his reaction, I recognise the sound of The Platters’ *Only You*, struggling to beat Lady Gaga’s *Just Dance* emerging from

the taxi lined up after his. He's not listening to the music -- the station has clearly been chosen to attract a certain kind of customer; instead, he smokes, entirely absorbed in a newspaper that covers the entire surface of the steering wheel.

"I'm looking for the Authority for Information concerning Documentation of the Former State Security Service", I repeat impatiently. I must sound worried, or at least agitated, because the tone of my voice prompts the driver to finally detach his eyes from the newspaper, switch off the radio, toss the butt of the unfinished cigarette outside the car window, and turn towards me with an expression of benign concern.

"Avash avash", he says. "Take it easy. Take a seat. Who's that you're looking for?"

"Oh". I mutter something, confused by the fact that he has not recognised the official name of my destination. "I'm looking for the office with all the files. You know, the former Sigurimi archives".

"You're not from here, right?", he asks, once the car engines are on, and we're making our way through the busy morning traffic.

I smile, trying to conceal my irritation. "I wonder what gave that away..."

"You said you're going to the *former* Sigurimi archives. That's foreigners' talk. There are no formers here. It's all the same people. My kids, they live in Florida, they come once a year, they say it all looks different. Nonsense".

"This has changed though, hasn't it?", I say, pointing at the interminable line of cars stuck in front of a traffic light just before turning onto Four Heroes Street.

"They can't drive them", he replies instantly, with the evident satisfaction of someone prepared to crush such a superficial objection. He breaks the car suddenly and, from the open window, curses the other drivers on the road, trying to force a U turn. We have just passed before Ethem Bey mosque, curved left into George W. Bush Street, and we're about to reach the Jeanne D'Arc Boulevard when he decides to change route. "I just remembered something", he explains once the manoeuvre succeeds. "You want to go to the new office, right, the one where they recently moved to?"

I shrug. "Not sure", I say, pulling out my phone to double check the address. "I have here: unit 4, Skanderbeg Military Garrison". I am starting to find reassuring the formality of the

email, as well as the fact that each time I look at it, the content has not changed: come for an appointment on Tuesday, bring an ID, ensure the fee has been paid in advance. I particularly appreciate going over the names of family members -- my father, my grandmother, my grandfather -- the way the list of names is offered to me like some sort of meal-deal, in a spirit of commercial detachment that is just what I need at this stage. Nothing to feel emotional about, just the secret lives of a random group of people to whom I was assigned at birth, like specific items of food are assigned a discount.

He nods with confidence. "Yes, yes, that's the one. They moved recently. There was some grant from the Swedish Embassy. Are you going there for work or fun?"

To dig into my grandmother's past, I think. To talk to her. To finally bury her. To feel less guilty. To discover how those wartime photos of her, which we had thought were lost forever, appeared on a viral Facebook post. To find the truth. To see if my father was a spy. To write a book. To bury him. To bury her. To see if it's all history, or if it's not history yet. Perhaps I simply must go, without knowing why. To make myself feel better. Or to feel the same.

"For fun", I say.

"Your documents are all there in JPG format". An employee who has introduced herself as Vera shows me a black Dell laptop that has been ceremonially placed on a working desk in the centre of the room. The laptop seems so decrepit I wonder if it was also a present from the Swedes. I'm told this is where "researchers" come, though I can't see any other researchers, only three other employees sipping Turkish coffee on their tables, placed around mine in a semi-circle. One of them offers to order me an espresso. I decline, and seem to upset her, but Vera points out that I am the Marxist author of a book about freedom. This makes her smile and gesture --it clearly explains everything.

“If you need the files printed or if you want to take pdf documents with you, here is a list with the costs. You applied as a researcher, right?”. I nod, distracted by the question I have been mulling over in my head, unsure whether it is appropriate to ask.

“Are there no physical files?” I finally muster the courage to say it. The employee who offered to make me coffee gives me a bewildered expression, as if she is trying to decide whether to categorise my intervention as a provocation or let it go. Eventually she tightens her lips, raises one eyebrow, and directs her index finger to the chair next to “the researcher’s” desk. “Be careful when you sit on that chair”, she says, “it wobbles. Also, the computer is slow, don’t keep pressing buttons or it will die. Just give it some time.”

The computer desktop is bare, deep blue with no icons on the dock other than the three files containing the information I have requested. They are labelled: “Form File 531 Leman Ypi”, my grandmother “Inquisitive Judicial File 1355 Xhaferr Ypi”, my father, “Inquisitive Judicial File 1384 Asllan Ypi”, my grandfather. I click on the mouse to open the first document and wait for what appears to be an eternity but since nothing happens, I move on to the second, then the third, and repeat the action. Eventually I give up pretending everything is going according to plan and look helplessly towards Vera who is intensely studying the bottom of her coffee cup. I wait a few moments, then start pressing CTRL+ALT+DEL to restart the programme. “Avash, avash”, she says when she notices, making a sign which I interpret as an order to vacate the chair.

“Which file do you want first?”, she asks, once the computer has been restarted and the deep blue of the screen is back. I shrug. “Whichever you manage to open”, I say. She nods, visibly satisfied. She continues to click competently until a yellow page appears. At the centre of it, I recognise my grandmother’s name, handwritten in black pencil.

Top left of the page: “Interior Ministry, directorate of State Security and the People’s Police, Section of Internal Affairs”. Top right, and almost faded, “EXTREMELY SECRET”. Further down, a more recent annotation: “Fully declassified with decision nr. 15 taken on 30.05.2022 by the Authority for Information on the Documents of the Former State Security”. Several unintelligible words scribbled by hand, in grey pencil. “Archive nr. 531”, circled in red. Two lines with generalities: Name / Surname: Leman Ypi. Further down: “Pseudonym”.

That line is empty, and though I can't be entirely certain of its meaning, for a split second my body stops shaking and I can hear myself breathing a sigh of relief. Then immediately after, I start to feel cold again, and my teeth are chattering. "Is there air-conditioning on", I ask the employees, "it's so cold here". They look at me as if the question were rhetorical, a statement uttered mainly out of a desire to communicate something, anything, simply to break the silence. Vera makes a clicking sound with her tongue. "It was on this morning", she replies apologetically, "but we turned it off because the director said we need to save energy now that we are at war".

I must look perplexed. "Well, we're in NATO", she corrects herself. "Same thing".

I nod in sign of understanding, then return to the page. I notice a drawing in the middle, a doodle, the shape of a perfect parallelepiped filled with small circles, drawn around something that reads like "sect" followed by a roman number that looks like VII. Then my attention is caught by a single word that appears in the middle of the page and has been underlined three times: "*Greek*". It makes no sense, and I continue to scroll, until the same word appears again in the next page, where other generalities are recorded.

Citizenship: *Greek*.

Name and Surname (again):

Leman Ypi.

Place of Birth: *Salonica*.

Ethnicity: *Albanian*.

Profession: *Employee of the Education Ministry*.

Religion: *Muslim*.

Registered: *29.12.1952*.

Name of referent who performed the registration: *Mayor Hajredin Qinami*.

Reason for registration: *Suspected as foreign agent*.

On page 6 of the file, the strange word -- Greek -- recurs again. "Leman Ypi, born in Salonica, of Greek citizenship". A series of handwritten instructions also appear: "Check

if someone with this name and Greek citizenship is registered in File Collection I and File Collection II". Followed by another handwritten note: "There is nothing here", with "here" underlined in pencil, and signed Vice-colonel DB.

Citizenship: *Greek*. Greek citizenship, I repeat to myself, then scroll back to the first page with the doodle where the word "Greek" has been written separately under the parallelepiped and followed by "proposal to categorise as II B".

It's bizarre to think of my grandmother as "Greek". She spoke French to me most of the time, and although I knew she was born in Salonica, I hardly thought of Salonica as a place, let alone as a Greek city. She always referred to it as *Salonique la Magnifique*, but *Salonique la Maginfique* has always been for me a site of the mind rather than a location on earth, not space but time, a time lost before I could know it. Or a gallery of mental images: the painting of a stern old man with deep blue eyes, faded photographs in black and white capturing people I did not know, and with whom casual resemblances of people I did know were pointed out. Most of the time *Salonique la Magnifique* was a combination of sounds – from French, Albanian, Turkish, Ladino, Italian -- and yes, Greek, but only in small part.

I keep reading the word "Greek" and it is hard to associate it to my grandmother. Instead, my mind wanders to my first exam at university in Rome, and the wobbly chair on which I was sitting then too, staring at the open page of *Metaphysics* Book Zeta, struggling with the question. "*Signorina*, can you remember what Aristotle's term for essence in Greek is?". The essence of an entity is what makes that entity be what it is, but how does Aristotle define it exactly? An embarrassing silence follows. "Come on, *signorina*, everyone knows this, we covered it in class, and you also know it from the last year of high school". It seems inappropriate to point out that in my country, in my last year of high school there was a war, and everything was shut. And that we never studied Aristotle. Back then Aristotle was just the name of my next door Greek orthodox neighbour. If I really had to think of someone famous called Aristotle, only the second husband of Jackie Kennedy would occur. I roll my eyes, stare outside the window, and decide to count the tiles on the floor. I think that if I fail, the worse that can happen is that I will lose my scholarship and return to where I came from. "*Insomma signorina*, the Greek term for essence is *to ti en einai*, "what it is to be", which must be corrected -- the examiner insists -- to "what it was

to be”, since the present tense has crept in later day translations and misled entire generations of Aristotle’s commentators. Right, I say. It’s important, the examiner insists. So was the husband of Jackie Kennedy, I think. Now it turns out that my grandmother’s *to ti en einai* is also in her past. It turns out her essence, her what it is, or was, to be is “Greek”.

I continue to scroll down the file, and up again but at this point my brain has decided to play a trick on me. I am only able to read the sentences where the term “Greek” appears. The rest is entirely unintelligible, it might as well have been written in the language of Aristotle. There it is again, at the top of page 7: “On the basis of evidence concerning oppositional activity against the people, and suspicions of being an agent for foreign intelligence services, in particular Greek ones, we propose to categorise as II-B and to prepare a preliminary investigation on citizen Leman Ypi, born in Salonica, of Albanian ethnicity and Greek citizenship”.

“You always speak Greek when you have a secret!”. I must have been five or six the first time I uttered those words in anger. It was New Year’s Eve and my grandmother’s cousin Cocotte, who used to visit us during the winter, had just arrived on the evening train. “*Mais non ma cherie*” she replied, “we were trying to remember the lyrics of a lullaby we used to sing when we were little girls like you, it just feels strange to translate it”. And she sang it in Greek and again in Turkish, except that the word for “kanarini”, “canary” in Turkish was “bulbuli”, the same as nightingale in Albanian, and the song felt comforting, not threatening, like the chirping of birds on a balmy summer evening.

“Greek”, I think. Greek not like Aristotle, more like “kanarini mougliko”. The chair has stopped wobbling, I am no longer shaking. I have enough confidence to concentrate again on the open file on my computer, where another report appears, typeset and signed by some Vice Colonel D.B.

“The reason and the material we dispose for a preliminary investigation around the possible categorisation as II.B”, the vice Colonel writes, “are the following”:

- 1) *The fact that even though Leman Ypi has been living here a long time, she continues to carry Greek citizenship and is always hoping to be able to return to Greece.*
- 2) *The fact that even though she has been privately advised to apply for Albanian citizenship, she has not only rejected the option but in the presence of the elements she trusts most, she has expressed hatred towards the People’s Republic, and the*

Party in Power. On the other hand she has praised life in Greece, and the freedom enjoyed by people there, making comparisons between Greece and Albania.

3) *Based on her contacts with our collaborator "The Tribune there are suspicions that she must be an agent of the Greek intelligence service. This for the following reasons ..."*

I stop reading. The chills on my spine are gone but I've now started to feel nauseous. It must be the yellow colour of those typeset sheets, or the persistent scrolling on the blue screen, or the fact that I've not had breakfast or the fact that the canaries have disappeared, replaced by Metaphysics Zeta. "In the presence of the most trusted elements...", I read again, then turn impatiently to the employees in the office. "Who is the Tribune", I ask. "And what does II. B mean?"

"Excuse me?", Vera asks.

"There is someone called the Tribune mentioned here who has made allegations that my grandmother was a Greek spy. I'm not sure this file is hers".

"It must be an informant's pseudonym", she says. "We don't know the real names. If you look carefully in the file, there must be a list".

I scroll up until a page appears entitled: "List of Collaborators with Pseudonyms". It contains only three lines, handwritten in fountain pen, with numbers appended to each of them and a line for "notes" next to each, which has been left empty.

I read the pseudonyms out loud. The informants' names sound like objects. 1. *The Tribune*. 2. *White Chewing-Gum*. 3. *Wind of March*. The employees laugh. They're all like that, they say, the pseudonyms of collaborators, one wonders who came up with them.

"If you file a request for further information as a family member, you can find the real names of the informants", Vera, who has noticed my distress, points out. "Then you'll know who was behind the whole thing".

"Was?", I think. Is it all in the past? Her what it was to be? I look at the screen again, and again I am unable to read past the word "Greek".

“Do you want to find out who it was?”, Vera insists. “I can show you how to fill the forms. Here’s a list with the fees”.

END OF READING

Part philosophical text, part political history, and part family saga my new book INDIGNITY is an effort to explore the moral and political meanings of dignity in connection to questions of truth, reconciliation, historical injustice, and the relationship between facts and fiction. I follow the first thirty-five years in the life of a main character: Leman Ypi (Leskoviku) who appears in my latest book FREE: COMING OF AGE AT THE END OF HISTORY as my grandmother (Nini) where she embodies a distinct idea of freedom, different from the standard (positive and negative) interpretations of the concept: freedom is a form of awareness about moral agency regardless of material constraints. With INDIGNITY, I continue this analysis of freedom by exploring further this capacity for moral agency, how it forms the core of human dignity, and how it is reflected (and distorted) in clashing individual and political projects all of which seek to build new institutions that renegotiate the legacy of the past and leave an imprint on the politics of the present.

The main character of the book is Leman Ypi, née Leskoviku. Born in 1918, the youngest granddaughter of Ibrahim Pasha, beylerbey of Rumelia, one of the larger provinces of the Ottoman Empire. She grew up in Salonica, where Ibrahim Pasha had been exiled by Sultan Abdul Hamid. She was of Albanian origin, but at home she spoke French, as all aristocrats did in those days, and she had never visited Albania. As a matter of fact, in the year she was born, it was not even a state: Serbia had annexed the North, Greece the South, France and Italy controlled a few scattered towns in the West, Bulgaria and Austro-Hungary contended the rest.

She was sent to study in the Lycée Français de Salonique, the only girl in a school with mostly Sephardic Jews. They taught her to sing in Ladino and to roll her first cigar. At the

age of twenty she travelled to Albania, by then an independent state, or at least recognised as such by the League of Nations. The first woman to work in the Albanian administration, she was very likely also the first woman to propose marriage to a man. It happened at King Zog's wedding, where she met my grandfather, Asllan Ypi, a law graduate from Sorbonne, the son of a prominent fascist politician, and a card-carrying socialist who sympathised with Léon Blum and campaigned for the Popular Front.

In 1946, after the war was over, she took up Albanian citizenship and participated in the elections for the Constituent Assembly: the first elections in which women could vote, and the last in which non-communist candidates ran for office. Within a few weeks, Asllan was arrested, charged for agitation and propaganda, and sentenced to fifteen years of prison. A year later, a file on her was opened by the Security Service branch of the Interior Ministry of the Socialist People's Republic of Albania and she was placed under strict surveillance, suspected of being a Greek spy. She was deported before reaching the age of thirty. At thirty-two, she started working in labour camps. By forty, she had lost both parents, many of her relatives in Albania had been executed or committed suicide, and those who survived had ended up in mental hospitals or in exile. Twice a year, she would visit her husband in prison. Four times a year, she would be summoned to the security offices, with an offer to become an informant.

In the book, I tell the story of Leman by relying on two distinct temporal narratives which are interspersed. There is a first-person narrative in which I talk about the experience of searching for the truth of my grandmother's life by narrating a series of visits to the communist secret service archives and opening the files related to my family.

Then there is a second, third-person narrative. in which Leman's life is reconstructed with the help of family records, but also with the help of other historical material such as letters, memoirs, newspaper articles, history books, government documents, and diaries of the period. The text reads like a historical novel; the plot and characters are instrumental to reconstructing the context, to explain why Leman found herself at the mercy of authorities at that point in time, how she ended up betrayed by a state in which she had invested.

From the first point of view, Leman is seen through the eyes of the state: we find her in the reports of the spies who followed her, in court depositions of family members and other relatives who were taken to trial, and in the bureaucratic documents that the narrator pieces together to make sense of a series of mysteries concerning her grandmother's life. In the second case, we see the same central character in context, in dialogue with her contemporaries, as she herself comes to terms with the major events of the 20th century and their impact on her life. The first perspective is situated in the present (2022-3) and the reader travels backwards, it is also all written in the present tense. In the second perspective, events start immediately after the end of the first World War (1918) and move forward, and the story is told in the past tense.

At the end of the book the two perspectives converge and lead to a more general philosophical discussion on the problem of dignity in its relationship to moral agency, and of the relationship of facts to literary imagination.

Initially I was planning to write only in the third person and thought of the project as a historical novel inspired by the story of my grandmother. The book would centre on questions of state and nation-building in the Balkans, discussing topics of individual and collective identity in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and in relation to the Interwar period and WW2.

When I started working on the book proposal, I travelled to Albania to visit various archives and gather as much information as I could. During my first visit to the secret service archives, I came across several mistakes in the files, and struggled to make sense of them. Most puzzling of all, was the fact that my grandmother was reported as a widow (there were no references to her having a child) and that the file was closed with her own death certificate dated 1953. When I asked experts about this, I was told that these are common mistakes found in the files and that secret service collaborators were themselves under pressure and often invented information just to have something to report on. My mother had a different interpretation: she suggested that, following my grandfather's arrest, my grandmother might have declared her husband dead to avoid repercussions from being associated to him. She also suggested that a relative of hers, who was close to Enver Hoxha, and who she often asked for assistance, might have used

an informant to insert a false death certificate in the files to save her from being constantly under state surveillance.

In the end both interpretations turned out to be dubious. Doing more research, I discovered that *another* Leman Ypi, born in Salonica roughly in the same years, from the same social background, and who had moved to Albania exactly at the same time as my grandmother, was also under surveillance. Since the information I was reading seemed sometimes highly accurate and sometimes completely off the mark, the most reliable explanation was that there was a filing error in the system and that some informants were reporting on one woman (my grandmother) and some on the other Leman. (This was later confirmed in the trial of one of the informants, the Tribune, as the book discusses towards the end). I had gone to the archives to find the truth about my grandmother, but discovered another layer of interpretation, and with it another character. I also found that the other Leman died alone and left no descendants. She had no granddaughters who could record her life and reflect on its meaning and on her dignity. But her life also deserved to be recorded somehow, and so I decided to adopt her, to imagine what her life might have been, to give her the dignity of memory. Since the two characters were similar enough to confuse the spies, I decided that instead of cancelling one and immortalising the other, I would carry over to the rest of the book the blurring of characters that I found in the archives. And instead of having to choose whether the book would be more fiction or more fact, I would use this incident as way to explicitly thematise a philosophical theme like dignity with reference to both what we know and what we imagine, and articulating the relationship between facts and interpretation. And I would try to find a way through the book of tracing the continuity of history in literature, and of literature in history.

And so, this hybrid character, Leman, part fictional and part not, is an interesting figure through which to explore the particular themes of historical injustice and reconciliation, but also more generally the question that Schiller raises in the “*Gods of Greece*”, how to engage with division and conflict in the present and where to look for reconciliation. The political identity with which she is born is one of a unit that no longer exists. She is a woman in a men’s environment, a secularist in a Muslim society, a cosmopolitan in a nation-building world, a progressive from a reactionary background, a sceptic who finds

strength in her doubts. She is the ultimate outlier and the ultimate enemy. She is a reminder of how dignity lies in choosing one's commitments freely, however much circumstances end up shaping them for us. As Schiller puts it in his essay, *On Dignity* "an animal cannot do otherwise than free itself from the pain, but a human being can decide to suffer". Leman does suffer and, when she dies, none of the things she has fought for has been achieved. Morality is revealed in the human struggle with external constraints, with the efforts to resist power, ideology, the compromises that destroy principles, the choices that on further scrutiny are determined by threats. Throughout the book Leman makes moral decisions. But those decisions have costs, and come with very little reward, except for knowing that she has done the right thing. This is also why, to her enemies, to those who try to convince her that everything is relative, that there is no right and wrong, that it is all about the will to power, she is the ultimate threat. They cannot win until she is defeated, not simply as an individual, but as an alternative model of thinking about the human being. For as long as she exists, there is inner freedom, and for as long as there is inner freedom there is hope and the possibility of change. Her life is not a happy one, it is a life of suffering and sacrifice. But the very existence of that struggle suggests that reason can afford to elevate itself over instinct, and find the power to fight manipulation, ideological distortion, even sheer coercion. This, Schiller tells us, this "rule of instincts by moral force is the emancipation of the mind ". And the expression by which this force presents itself into the world, Schiller continues, is called dignity".

This takes me back to the central theme of my book: the possibility of reconciliation under conditions of present injustice. My dilemma is the same as Schiller's. "All improvement in the political sphere is to proceed from the ennobling of the character—but how, under the influence of a barbarous constitution, can the character become ennobled?", he asks in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Humanity*. The modern world, Schiller describes is one of loss and disenchantment, a world ruled by friendlessness and inequality, in which the gods are deemed "useless". Schiller's world is a world very much like ours, a world that apparently obeys only "the strictest laws of an ungodly nature" (*entgotterte Natur*), a world marked by conflict and polarisation, where nature is no longer admired but exploited, and in which it is impossible to find harmony. What is the role of politics in a world such as this? Can an unjust state bring reconciliation? Through what mechanisms can moral ideals provide political orientation?

If Schiller and I are right, the interpretation of facts is always the result of ideology and vulnerable to propagandistic manipulation. So where do we find hope? My suggestion is to turn to art, to the power of imagination in reorienting human beings towards morality. Does it really matter who exactly Leman is? What weight should we ascribe to facts? What matters are not the facts about Leman, but the interpretation of those facts, the story they tell, the moral light they shed on the world, the orientation they provide. Leman is a generic character, half-existent, half-constructed, a real presence and influence on my life but also a product of a writer's imagination, a particular human being that connects to the universal of humanity that lives inside every one of us. Reconciliation is not about reaching the end of a process but finding a way to engage with the conflicts of the present; it is not about what truth one finds but what relations one constructs with other humans while looking for that truth. Alienation is a persistent feature of our contemporary world. "Compelled to disburden itself of the diversity of its citizens by means of classification, and to receive humanity only at second hand, by representation", Schiller says, "the governing section finally loses sight of it completely, and the governed cannot help receiving coldly the laws which are addressed so little towards themselves." This is why we cannot expect reconciliation with the help of politics, because the state "as it is now constituted, has brought about the evil, and the State as Reason conceives it in idea, instead of being able to establish this better humanity, must first be itself established by it". A state in which injustices persist in the present cannot resolve the conflicts of the past.

What is the alternative? My answer is the same as Schiller's: "the instrument of political education is art, because as he argues, "art, like Science, is free from everything that is positive or established by human conventions, and both of them rejoice in an absolute immunity from human lawlessness". Art rather than politics can bring reconciliation because as Schiller knew, "the political legislator can enclose their territory, but cannot govern within it. He can proscribe the friend of truth, but Truth endures; he can humiliate the artist, but Art he cannot debase". If Schiller is right, and art is the only sphere that can free itself from political manipulation, we can better understand why the truth about Leman's life, and the ultimate meaning of her dignity, lies only in part in the reconstruction of the historical truth about her. Equally important is the vindication of her humanity through literature and philosophy.