

Eugen Ruge:
Pompeji. Or: The Five Speeches of Jowna

Sample Translation by Lesley Schuldt

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First Scroll. The Speech in the Chicken Coop

It was in the year 830 after the founding of the Eternal City or, according to Pompeian time scales, fifteen years after the Great Quake (which would prove to be a harbinger of the disaster), when a certain Josse, as he was known to his friends, gave a speech in a chicken coop, which would belatedly bring it fame.

A lot has been said about this speech. It should have been brilliant. Like an ax! And yet so refined by sophisticated cunning ... And if it hadn't been buried under the rubble, they could have look it up because Josse wrote down his speech later – from memory. Though he revised it here and there over time, in so doing, it became even more profound. And longer.

In reality, he hadn't choked out more than a sentence at the time. He was, in any case, at the beginning of his career, in no way the gifted speaker, others came to regard him as later. Quite the opposite, he was – despite the secret belief in being called to something higher – taciturn, almost stubborn, which certainly had its basis in the fact that he believed he had to be ashamed of his teeth. He literally didn't open his mouth, bellowed scraps of sentences, if need be, and instead made sure not to expose his teeth.

But who was he really, this Josse? Later he claimed that he came from an entrepreneurial family, even from Pannonian nobility, while, at other opportunities, he stressed he came from the bottom, from the people. The truth is: his father, who went by the name Jasz

(even though he didn't have anything to do with the legendary horsemen), had owned a butcher shop in Pannonia and who, because of the constant border wars between the Jasz and the Dacian tribal leaders, fled with his family first to Raetia and then further on to Campania where he expected to prosper and be safe. That had been five years before the Great Quake or, according to the Roman calendar, in the year 809 after the founding of the Eternal City. From then on, he called himself Jacobus and did his best to be a true Roman: he emulated everything he considered Roman with a passion, never criticized, and valiantly repeated jokes he only partially understood. Until his dying days, he spoke pitiful Latin, but was convinced, he had command of the language and passed it off as Campanian dialect when his son corrected him.

In fact, Jasz did succeed in opening a butcher shop in the – at the time, still prosperous – provincial capital of Pompeii. However, there was no shortage of butcher shops in the city and the people only hesitantly bought from the newcomer when he began to sell off his meat at cost, which contributed to the resentment of the guild. In addition, his business was in a poor location so optimistic calculations soon proved to be obsolete. It took less than three years for him to go bankrupt. He slaved as a bag carrier or henchman for the rest of his life, in order to pay the synagogue his remaining three thousand sesterces debt: chicken feed for someone who had the money, but not for someone who had a hard time feeding his family.

Josse didn't remember Pannonia. He had barely been three years old when his parents left. But he certainly did remember his father's butcher shop in Pompeii. He remembered the smell of the warm blood that was stirred in a large kettle; how his father would sever the hooves from the haunches with an axe; of the screams of the pigs as they were led to slaughter that could be heard through the floor to the room above.

“How do the pigs know they have to die?”

“Instinct tells them,” his father explained.

And Josse pictured instinct as a small figure, invisible like a god, who whispered something into the animal’s ear: the god of the pigs. But did pigs have gods?

Jasz was too busy with his butcher shop to answer such questions. But even later when he only had to pay back the debts which he had accumulated, he barely had any time for his son. He slaved twelve or fourteen hours a day and if he wasn’t able to find work, he lay on the bed with his bones aching and reproached himself.

Josse remembered only one short excursion with his father. It had to have been three or four years before the Great Quake and shortly after Jasz had given up his butcher shop, probably immediately afterward, in that moment of relief that is associated with giving something up – on one of these days, his father took the four-year-old into town to show him where democracy resided, of which he, the new Pompeian, was so proud.

As Josse recalled, it had been a holiday, since the magistrate didn’t meet on holidays. But the mood was festive; for a change, his father didn’t wear work clothes, the sun shone mildly, and the white marble floor of the Forum was sparkling clean. Maybe the festiveness stemmed from the men who strode alone or in small groups across the square, talking, shielding themselves from the sun, some with scrolls under their arms. They all wore pure white togas, their faces were clean-shaven, and unlike his father, who was always in a hurry, these people moved almost provocatively leisurely. They strolled to the large building on the corner at the edge of the square and silently disappeared inside. The building was called the Great Basilica. That’s where democracy took place: a game with black and white pebbles were

thrown into an urn, his father explained. The four-year-old was a little surprised that these serious men busied themselves with a throwing game. But what bothered him even more: who was allowed to join?

Josse understood that not his father, at any rate. He differed painfully from these pure white figures. And instead of sharing the holy reverence that his father felt for these men, Josse discovered shame on that day. He began to be embarrassed by his father: by his deplorable accent and by his poverty and by his smell of blood, which he would never be able to get rid of and of which he was as unconscious of as his accent. The older Josse became, the more scornful he became of his father; he even suffered from bouts of hatred and it wasn't until the old man collapsed from exhaustion after he had in fact paid off all his debts, and never stood up again, when he was cremated in a fire of old lumber and the drizzling rain forced down the smoke and Josse believe he inhaled him, his father, only then did the tears run down his cheeks in the face of the complete annihilation of this misery.

He was even embarrassed by his mother. Jadwiga belonged to those women who seemed to have been born old. And yet, she had once been beautiful; without realizing it, Josse had her to thank for his face and his impeccable bearing. But life had made her stooped and etched deep worry lines on her. Unlike her husband, she wasn't inclined toward false optimism, but she didn't complain either; she had gotten used to life being against her. The vast experience of her life showed her that you didn't escape your destiny. She had given up everything, had traveled hundreds of miles; she couldn't tell anyone what it meant to flee, and not only because she had a poor command of the language. The journey, the hunger, the fear; the feeling of being at the mercy of the harsh world. But above all: the loss of her homeland,

the alienation. And what was the point? To lose the rest of their savings in much-heralded Italy. She could have gone crazy, but she grew indifferent. Even toward her husband, who toiled to his death at her side.

If there was one reason that Jadwiga simply didn't quit breathing, it was because of her son Jovna – because that was actually his name; her husband had registered him at school as Josephus, in the mistaken belief it was a Roman name. But Josephus soon became Josse, which Jadwiga felt was crude and piercing. She insisted on continuing to call him Jovna and the soft *v* of her native tongue embraced the word like a caress. She arose every morning because of him, and because of him, she continued through the drudgeries of life, cooking, baking cheese flatbreads on her day off, his favorite dish, and weaving wicker baskets from early until late to at least be able to pay for his school for one or maybe two years, even though she got eczema on her forearms from the peeled rods.

But Josse didn't have any interest in school. He didn't have any desire to get up before dawn. Speaking in a chorus of memorized verses humiliated him. He was too proud to subject himself to the rules of mathematics.

He reluctantly attended classes for a year, more or less regularly, not so much because of the interminable admonitions of his father, but because he couldn't bear the mute disappointment of his mother – until the problem of school solved itself. Namely, one night he was awoken by the sound of objects falling off the kitchen shelves. The next morning, half of the city was destroyed. There was no water, no bread, the streets were blocked by debris. And while everywhere people were busy clearing the debris and the mountain of dead bodies, an era of blissful neglect began for Josse.

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Josse had never thought about why the building, in which the bird conservationists met was called *chicken coop*. The explanation emerged before he could even ask the question. It was June by now, the day was hot. Old fish smells rose from the pores of the building, mingled with the smell of sweat and breath, which apparently only excited arguing philosophers emitted, and the scent of food that was brought along, consumed, crumbled, and tramped down on during the meeting. It smelled like the hutch in which Lucretius kept his sacred chickens. The club members sat on planks that were arranged left and right in ascending order and, while doves coed and fluttered in the rafters, large and small groups debated incessantly, yelled out, proposed, and protested. A chairman of the meeting bounced around and called in vain to those present to come to order, while at the entrance opposite the narrow side, a man stood in front of – yes, in front of what? – a wash basin.

There were, in fact, also women there, as Mugo announced. Women cajoled, argued, fanned themselves with their skirts, exposing their calves. But it was clear, that nothing salacious was going on; there wasn't any party here, no orgy underway. But then, what was it? What was it about?

Josse sat mutely with his companions on the floor close to the entrance. It took a while before he understood, that the man standing in front of the wash basin was giving a lecture. Though he spoke much too softly. Josse put his hands behind his ears like a sound funnel, trying to catch the man's words: *ground ... stone ... Mount Somma ...* And then suddenly this word: *volcano*. Or had he misheard? Only later did Josse learn who this man was and why the

bird conservationists had invited him. It wasn't the first time in the chicken coop that an outside expert tried to explain the cause of the general bird mortality. On this day, a mining expert who had worked in the Julian lead mines spoke. The initiative to invite him came from the Epicureans, or to be more precise: from their hedonistic faction which was an important difference because the Epicureans were enemies among themselves in the worst possible way. At issue was whether the core of the Epicureans were hedonists or their complete opposites, ascetics. The majority, led by a sanguine person named Diablo (whom we'll get to know later), was inclined toward hedonism, while the meager remnant still resentfully fought to clear Epicurus from the usual accusations of the pursuit of pleasure and obscenity, which represented, in turn, according to the perception of hedonism, an "ass-kissing conformity to Roman moralism" (Diablo) Though the ascetics had read Epicurus just as little as the hedonists had, they were still correct, if we may say so: Epicurus had been, as all historical documents confirm, a humorless, dyspeptic man whose entire efforts were directed more towards pleasure than towards pain prevention. His philosophy was sickly and cautious, designed for a world in which the powerful were all too powerful and the powerless, all too impotent. The old Epicurus thought every passion was risky, every commitment, dangerous. And if he spoke of pleasure, then he meant that modest state of equilibrium that a ruminant may feel between two digestive processes.

Please excuse this small digression, but it was in some ways just this misinterpretation – the misunderstood Epicurus – that set our story in motion, because the so-called hedonists indulged, in addition to other secret passions, in the consumption of delicious quail and blackbirds too, which is why not for academic and philosophical reasons, they were so eager to

prove that only a small portion of the flying animals fell victim to consumption. They collected dead birds to document that there was no bird glue to be found in the majority of the plumage, and gradually discovered on their expedition to Mount Somma more and more other dead animals: lizards, insects, once even a wild boar.

Until one day, even two Club members, who were on an expedition to Mount Somma, were found dead. There were no recognizable signs of acts of violence. The deceased had lain next to a spring as if sleeping. The head of one of the hikers rested on his pack; the other hiker lay on his stomach in the grass. And in the surrounding area, so it was said, it smelled like sulfur. The Epicureans felt validated by the tragic findings – But for what actually? What had the two died from?

As usual, a passionate discussion broke out among the local Pompeian philosophers. The radical Platonists, who were themselves inclined toward brutal approaches, suspected a political murder and called for action. The Aristotelians urged for calm and were accused of collaboration by the radical Platonists. The Sophists saw several possibilities. The Cynics, even here there were some, stressed their indifference to death. A few disciples of Heraclitus argued with a few disciples of Parmenides about the eventfulness of what occurred – or didn't occur. The Pythagoreans were torn. The Separatist faction, surrounding a man called Maras, was in agreement with the Fundamentalists, who were led by a woman named Dito, and wanted to blame not nature, but in any case, the Roman aristocracy. Only the Epicureans, or more precisely, Diablos' hedonistic faction, stood unwaveringly behind the hypothesis that gases that were known from mining, had been the cause of the tragic accident as well as the deaths of the birds and commissioned a mining specialist to examine the matter.

The man's name was Georgios, he came from Syracuse and had spent half his life at the foot of Mount Etna – which would prove crucial. Georgios thoroughly examined the matter for a week, speaking little, questioning farmers and shepherds, making notes, brushing off rock samples now and then, and letting the soil from the vineyards trickle through his fingers with a crazy smile. Then he climbed Mount Somma with a device for measuring angles and distances, even hiking to the Phlegraean Fields. He sampled the water from the wells in the villages at the foot of the mountain. More than once, he lay on the ground for hours so some might have thought, he had been the victim of toxic fumes too. After exactly one week, he announced to his clients without emotion, that they were living on a volcano – and let himself be persuaded, to report his findings to the association of bird conservationists.

Even though Georgios appeared outwardly modest, he assumed that his message would generate great interest and that the results of his investigations would be met with respect and amazement. At most, he was prepared for bewilderment or for an irrational defensive reaction, and when he learned that women also belonged to the association, he even advised excluding them from the lecture, to be on the safe side (which was acknowledged with a smirk). When he entered the chicken coop, he didn't fare much differently than Josse. He was already suspicious of the figures who crowded the room because of their appearance: costumes such as those for Saturnalia, necklaces, little hats, embroidery, beards, and long hair. You have to know he abhorred any outward abnormalities. He was a man of systematics and empiricism, not unlike the emperor. He was someone who had snapped shut Homer after he encountered discrepancies in dates and ages. In short, even though he was Greek, his character was more that of a Roman. And this here smelled rather un-Roman; it smelled of disorder and opposition.

Disgusted by the horde, disturbed by the unrest and the bickering in the rows of seats, repulsed by the lack of respect in the lecture hall, he wound up his lecture. He didn't care whether anyone followed him, whether anyone understood him. He wanted to be done, wanted to disappear as quickly as possible before he suffocated and fell over, or before, who knows, the guards came and arrested all these anarchists. He didn't bother to shout over the noise, spoke softly and in a monotone, worked stubbornly through his key points – and you had to *want* to listen to him in order to understand him.

And Josse wanted to. He had immediately forgotten about the purpose of the visit. Wide-eyed and with his ears enlarged by his palms, he listened to the amazing trains of thought of the man, and every word, every sentence, embedded itself deeply onto his blank mind; not even a pair of aqua-blue eyes that buzzed at him from somewhere out of the rows of benches, could distract him.

The man explained it could already be seen by the kinds of vegetation. Especially on the soil and on the rock that he had carefully examined. The spring water in the mountains had a distinctive aftertaste. And with the help of a plumb bob and cross pieces, he determined that the peak of Mount Somma arose from a crater. This region was undoubtedly *volcanic* – just like the region in his homeland of Syracuse at the foot of Mount Etna. What you're standing on here, what makes the wine thrive so splendidly, is nothing other than volcanic ash, which was hurled from the ground by a powerful eruption and buried every living thing around it. The tuff on which the houses were built, the surface on which you walk, is nothing other than cooled lava. For a few hundred, maybe even for a thousand years, the volcano has apparently been dormant and allowed life time to renew itself. But since the so-called Great Quake, the man

said, as he made a schematic drawing in the sand, the signs for another eruption increased.

You have to picture a volcano like a spring, he explained, except that water doesn't come from it, but rather lava. It pushes outwards. The pressure, which you could observe when a volcano erupts, would be correspondingly enormous. Before it erupts, the ground would begin to move. Sometimes it could barely be felt. But the constant damage to the large drinking water supply, which resulted again and again in the disruption of the water supply to Pompeii and Misenum, would be clear proof; as well as apparently inexplicable cracks in walls that people had reported to him. Such cracks would occur not only in buildings and aqueducts but also in the ground itself. And the sulfurous gas that escapes from these places is, in fact, able to poison animals – though usually only domestic animals which lack the natural instinct for flight or which are locked up. That's why he's not sure whether the volcanic gas has anything to do with the bird mortality in Campania. As far as the volcano is concerned, he is sure about one thing: The old giant was reawakened by the Great Quake fifteen years ago and the question isn't whether there will be another eruption, but – when. Though he personally believed in an imminent eruption, the man said, and turned to the water bowl which he had set before him. That is, if you fill a container of a certain size with a certain amount of water and set it on the damp, clay ground, you could, if you were lucky, see the quavering disturbance of the earth on the surface of the water. Josse stared at the water bowl and really believed he could see the water rippling on the surface. “In Syracuse,” the man said, “we call this the cry of the volcano.”

As soon as the Greek finished speaking, a noisy discussion ensued. Josse listened in amazement as a wide variety of topics were argued in a dizzying manner and for the most part, even at the same time. On the right side, the question was debated with hostile intensity, as to

whether nature conservation could also be regarded as protection *from* nature. On the left, a shaggy man argued with another shaggy man about whether the theory of the fragility of the earth's crust was compatible with the perfection of the world. A tall red-haired woman with a bellowing voice demanded the immediate termination of the debate and was supported by a stick figure, thin and with a large head, who didn't want to see anything in the lecture as a diversion from the – Josse didn't understand entirely – *debauchery* or the *perfection* of the Roman aristocracy. And when someone directed the scornful question to the lecturer as to what political conclusion could be drawn from what was said, the man realized that the Greek had disappeared. General bafflement, the torrent of words died down, and something akin to silence fell. Josse used this moment with a determination and presence of mind that he could only have learned in the Palaestra: concentration! His fear was great, the adversary powerful. These people read books, studied rhetoric. They switched effortlessly into Greek, dropped innuendos he didn't understand, quoted authorities he wasn't familiar with. He felt uneducated, lost. His heart pounded; his throat was dry. But at the same time, he felt secretly superior to these people. He didn't have their words and means of expression, but he had the feeling he was the only one who had comprehended something here. And it was, in fact, a bright moment as we have to admit; maybe the brightest of his life?

He stood up. His boys instinctively did likewise. The sound of the seven almost simultaneously getting up coursed impressively through the room and Josse even managed to wait the seconds for the last puzzled look to find him; then he bellowed in a strained, commanding voice with barely parted lips that clumsy sentence which would later be transfigured to his first great speech: “In summary, when you look at this as only we as

outsiders can, and that would be that we, then ... uh ... as those affected, since the mountain can hardly be moved from its place, nothing remains other than for us to move from our place.”

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Eleventh Scroll: The Art of Speech

Rhetoric is still valued in the empire as the highest and most important discipline for those who, as they say, want to become something – it is ranked ahead of history and mathematics, to say nothing of philosophy.

Livia thought highly of rhetoric, even though she didn't make any speeches and certainly didn't listen to any speeches. When she was a child, she hated the rhetoric lessons, but pupils like to think more of their strictest teachers and so Livia liked to think about her old rhetoric teacher and sent Epiphanes to him with the request to teach Josse.

His name was Protagoras, he was – of course - Greek and lived below the northern necropolis in a small, two-story house. It had taken a generous surcharge to get him to even accept Josse. He actually had enough students for every day of the week, except market day which he took off, even though he never went to the market. At least once a week, he wanted to get away from his students, since he basically couldn't stand them. They were usually children of rich parents, well-fed weaklings, who got their hair cut. They were polite and attentive, but meek. They did what he demanded of them, but they were lacking the rage, the desire, the indignation. They were lacking everything necessary to develop a talent. Protagoras had already sensed that Josse was different when he entered. He didn't give any indication,

remained, as usual, seated in his large armchair, stirring his sweetened herbal tea, and looking casually at some papers on the desk next to him – while he watched from the corner of his eye as Josse looked in vain for someplace to sit: Protagoras thought that speech was best learned standing up.

“What do expect from my lessons?” was his first question.

“No idea,” responded Josse. “Livia believes I could improve my style of speech. Even though she doesn’t even know my style of speech in that sense.”

“In what sense?”

“Excuse me?”

“You said, ‘my style of speech, in that sense’. In what sense?”

“In the sense that she doesn’t know it.”

“Word parasites are a terrible nuisance,” said Protagoras. “They suck the blood out of a speech. You know that your voice is too high, don’t you?”

“Not really.”

“Not really? So not true? Or, do you mean: not actually? What is your speech supposed to be about?”

“About a volcano,” said Josse.

“About which volcano?”

“Mount Somma”

“What’s Mount Somma?”

“You’ve never heard of it?”

“Of what?”

Is this guy playing dumb, Josse wondered? What kind of game is he playing? “So here, a bit north of town, there is a mountain called Mount Somma. It’s presumably a volcano.”

“You’re breathing too late,” responded Protagoras. “You have a tendency to empty your lungs when you speak. You mumble the consonants. Your vowels sound a little dull. We can fix that, but: we’ve already been talking for five minutes and you still haven’t made it clear to me what your speech is about.”

“But I told you. About a volcano.”

“So, you want to convince the people that this Mount Somma is a volcano.”

“The people are already convinced of that.”

“Then you want to convince them otherwise?”

“No, I want to convince them to stay here in town.”

“You want to make it difficult for me,” said Protagoras and moaned. “You want to convince the people to stay, *even though* this Mount Somma appears to be a volcano. This path seems somewhat complicated, young man. Why don’t you convince the people that this Mount Somma *isn’t* a volcano? Then no one would come up with the idea of wanting to leave town, right?”

“That’s true,” Josse had to admit. “The problem is just that I have already convinced the people that Mount Somma is a volcano.”

“And now you’ve changed your mind?”

“Not really,” said Josse. “Strictly speaking, it’s that I want to convince the people to stay, despite the volcano.”

“At last, I understand,” said Protagoras. He slurped his herbal tea, pulled on his beard,

which looked as if he had already plucked half of it out over the years. “You do understand ... what did you say your name was?”

“Josse.”

“You do understand, Josse, that you have resolved to do something challenging? I respect people who resolve to do something challenging. But you will have to work hard. Do you want to do that? You are arrogant, dear friend. That will hamper you, it can be seen in your sentence structure. It can be heard in your breathing. You’re standing in your own way. Between you and me: some delusion of grandeur is good. But, as in all things, you shouldn’t overdo it.”

Lastly, he gave Josse some homework:

“Make three sentences that begin with the words: Protagoras is a wise man because ...”

And when Josse had already turned toward the door, he added: “Or, for all I care: Protagoras is a fool because ... It doesn’t matter. You choose.”

Josse trudged to town, through the necropolis. “Protagoras is a fool because he’s a fool!” he blurted out.

His heart hammered; he panted.

“A fool! A mop! A conceited frog!”

He stopped, out of breath. It had suddenly gotten warm, the sun shone and allowed the foliage from the past year which lay between the tomb monuments, to once again light up.

Here lie his bones, read Josse. He lived 40 years. Use your time.

No, he wouldn’t let this fool reprimand him again, he decided. He would be better off

going to the Palaestra as slow as he was. Not that he would get fat!

For the next lesson, he brought the following sentences with him:

Protagoras is a fool because he thinks he's smart.

Protagoras is a fool because he is human.

Protagoras is a fool because his pupil says that he is a fool because: either the pupil is right and Protagoras is a fool, or, his pupil is wrong and Protagoras is a poor teacher and therefore a fool.

Protagoras praised the first, passed over the second, and criticized the third.

“The third sentence,” he explained, “is the best from a logistical point of view. It’s suitable for a treatise. But it’s too complicated for a speech, too rich in content. The speaker doesn’t convince people through logic or acumen. On the contrary, that makes him suspicious. So how can you prove that Protagoras is a fool? I would say to you: you can’t prove it. Though, we can’t prove most of the issues we discuss. Of course, you know that Caesar conquered Gaul. Prove it!”

“It might be in Herodotus?”

“Herodotus? Herodotus lived four hundred years before Caesar. But let’s say you went to a library, not right in Pompeii, to find something by Titus Livius about Caesar. You would have to have copies made. Someone would have to legitimize these copies. So, you would come to me and I would tell you: I don’t believe that. Now what?”

Josse didn’t know anymore.

“It is very simple, dear friend. You just have to understand that it isn’t about proof, but

about trust. Once you understand that, it isn't that difficult. Authentic appearance, you yourself are the proof! Your voice has to fit. Your vowels have to ring. Your bearing has to be convincing. Don't fidget, no petty gestures. Everything is one unit. The whole person speaks. And that's why you'll strengthen the credibility of your claims about Protagoras by one hundred percent if you precede the simple, naïve sentence with: *I know Protagoras*. Try it! Repeat after me: *I know Protagoras. He is a fool because he thinks he's smart.*"

"I know Protagoras," said Josse. "He is a fool because he thinks he's smart."

"Do you feel it?"

Josse felt it. And was impressed.

"An increase in this, shall we say, advertising of trust, is the ultimatum of trust. It's blackmail in a friendly disguise that says: *You know me!* You can add to that: *You certainly know that I'm not a liar*. In other words: *Do you think I'm a liar?*"

Josse was amazed.

"But you can even take it a step further," explained Protagoras, "by calling out the authority of others: *I recently spoke with So-and-so about Protagoras*. Preferably, make it specific. Let the conversation take place the day after the meeting of the magistrate on the market in front of the Building of Eumachia or under an apple tree in your garden."

Josse was amazed.

"A variation of the proof of authority, is the claim of a specialist. It consists of you claiming, before you say what you're going to say, that you are a specialist in this. *I have dealt with Protagoras' statements for years*. Or: *I have studied rhetoric with Quintilian*. You didn't study with Quintilian? Well, the proof that something *didn't* happen, is one of the most difficult

problems of logic. Whoever says you didn't study with Quintilian would have to know all Quintilian's students from every semester and prove that you weren't among them. Do you know someone who can do that?"

Protagoras stirred his tea and snickered. Yes, when he got going, he could become emotional. For homework this time, Josse had to make three obviously preposterous theses believable: firstly, that people are free. Secondly, that dogs have a soul. And thirdly, that Africa should be a continent. Josse handled it with good grace.

In the third lesson, Protagoras dealt with the *rhetorical question*.

"Do you give a speech," he asked, "that makes the listeners think? Or do you speak so that he thinks what we think? That was, I hope you noticed, a rhetorical question."

In the fourth lesson, he spoke about the apparent insistence to be applied if you have made a mistake.

"Never say, I made a mistake!" he admonished Josse. "Find something that you were right about. Make that which you were mistaken about, a minor matter, and inflate what you were right about. Remind them of your adversary's stupidities. Extol your own honesty and insist: *I've always said that!*"

In the fifth lesson, he elucidated on the empty promise (not to be confused with the false promise!).

In the sixth lesson, he spoke about purposeful oversimplification.

In the seventh lesson, he explained how you treated failures as merits.

The eighth lesson was about the unifying power of the stereotypes of enemies.

And in the ninth and final lesson, they devoted themselves to the slogan.

“Imagine,” said Protagoras, “that you are going through Pompeii with a bucket of paint and a brush. What would you write on the walls? I call that a slogan. Every speech needs a slogan. It belongs at the end. It is what the people will carry home in their hearts. It doesn’t mean anything. It doesn’t convey any meaning. But it expresses something! It is short, it is simple. And under no circumstances, does it contain a comma!”

On parting, he said the following: “I have taught you how to mislead people, how to strengthen your impact or create consensus. But I can’t teach you the most important thing: that which you actually want to say. The content, the core of your speech. I teach you the pure form. You, dear Josse, have to complete it yourself.”

He stirred his tea: suddenly an old man. A minute ago, he had been full of energy, now he slumped down. Josse had the feeling that it would be impossible for him to go now.

Protagoras looked up from his tea. “Why are you still standing around?” he asked irritably. “Your lessons are already paid for. You are dismissed.”