



Tocoming

by Henri Michaux

translated from the French by Dawson F. Campbell

Centuries to come

My true present, always present, obsessively present...

I who was born in the epoch when we still hesitated to go from Paris to Peking, when
the afternoon was advanced for fear of not making it in for the night.

Oh! how I see you, centuries to come.

A little century, breathtaking, brilliant, the 1400th century after J.C., let me tell you.

The problem was sucking the moon from the solar system. A pretty problem. It was during
the autumn of 134957—which was a hot one—that the moon began to recede at such
a pace to have illumined the night like twenty summer suns, parting according
to the calculation.

Infinitely distant centuries.

Centuries of homunculi living from 45 to 200 days, as big as a shut umbrella, and, when
convenient, with wisdom at their disposal,

Centuries of 138 species of artificial men, all or most believing in God—naturally!—
and why not? flying around without harm, whether through the stratosphere or across 20
screens of mustard gas.

I see you,

But no, I don't see you. Young girls of the year twelve-thousand, who, since that age when we gaze at ourselves in the mirror, would have learned to mock us for our rigorous efforts to do harm decoupled from the earth.

You already do me harm.

I would give all my life right away to be among you for a single day.

Alas, not a devil to give it to me.

Anecdotes of airplanes (still gasoline—you know, internal combustion), the profound imbecilities of still-childish social experiences were no longer of interest to us, I assure you. We began to detect a radioelectric echo coming from near Sagittarius, 2 250 000 kilometres away and returning every 15 seconds, and another, much subtler, coming from millions of lightyears away—we didn't know what to do.

You who understands man's hyper-hygiene and the ultra-determinants of mind and character. who understands the nervous systems of great nebulae who would communicate with beings more spiritual than we, if they existed who would live, would travel in interplanetary space, Never, Never, no **NEVER**—try as you might, you'll never realise what a miserable ghetto Earth was.

How we were most miserable and ravenous.

The feeling of prison was omnipresent, I promise you.

Don't trust our musings (the professionals, you know...)

We mystified ourselves however we could, it wasn't funny in 1937—though nothing happened then, nothing but misery and war.

We felt at home, nailed to that century,

And who would go on right up to the end? Not many. Not me...

We felt deliverance dawning—far off, far off—for you.

We cried dreaming of you,

We were very few.

In tears we saw an immense staircase of centuries with you at top, us at bottom,

And we resented you; oh! how we resented you and loathed you—one mustn't believe—we loathed you too, we loathed you.