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WHAT IS LITERATURE?

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Translated from the French

by

BERNARD FRECHTMAN

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FOREWORD

"If you want to engage yourself," writes a young imbecile, "what are you waiting for? Join the Communist Party." A great writer who engaged himself often and disengaged himself still more often, but who has forgotten, said to me, "The worst artists are the most engaged. Look at the Soviet painters." An old critic gently complained, "You want to murder literature. Contempt for belles-lettres is spread out insolently all through your review." A petty mind calls me pigheaded, which for him is evidently the highest insult. An author who barely crawled from one war to the other and whose name sometimes awakens languishing memories in old men accuses me of not being concerned with immortality; he knows, thank God, any number of people whose chief hope it is. In the eyes of an American hack-journalist the trouble with me is that I have not read Bergson or Freud; as for Flaubert, who did not engage himself, it seems that he haunts me like remorse. Smart-alecks wink at me, "And poetry? And painting? And music? You want to engage them, too?" And some martial spirits demand, "What's it all about? Engaged literature? Well, it's the old socialist realism, unless it's a revival of populism, only more aggressive."

What nonsense. They read quickly, badly, and pass judgment before they have understood. So let's begin all over. This doesn't amuse anyone, neither you nor me. But

we have to hit the nail on the head. And since critics condemn me in the name of literature without ever saying what they mean by that, the best answer to give them is to examine the art of writing without prejudice. What is writing? Why does one write? For whom? The fact is, it seems that nobody has ever asked himself these questions.

I

WHAT IS WRITING?

No, we do not want to "engage" painting, sculpture, and music "too," or at least not in the same way. And why would we want to? When a writer of past centuries expressed an opinion about his craft, was he immediately asked to apply it to the other arts? But today it's the thing to do to "talk painting" in the argot of the musician or the literary man and to "talk literature" in the argot of the painter, as if at bottom there were only one art which expressed itself indifferently in one or the other of these languages, like the Spinozistic substance which is adequately reflected by each of its attributes.

Doubtless, one could find at the origin of every artistic calling a certain undifferentiated choice which circumstances, education, and contact with the world particularized only later. Besides, there is no doubt that the arts of a period mutually influence each other and are conditioned by the same social factors. But those who want to expose the absurdity of a literary theory by showing that it is inapplicable to music must first prove that the arts are parallel.

Now, there is no such parallelism. Here, as everywhere, it is not only the form which differentiates, but the matter

as well. And it is one thing to work with color and sound, and another to express oneself by means of words. Notes, colors, and forms are not signs. They refer to nothing exterior to themselves. To be sure, it is quite impossible to reduce them strictly to themselves, and the idea of a pure sound, for example, is an abstraction. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out in *The Phenomenology of Perception,* there is no quality of sensation so bare that it is not penetrated with signification. But the dim little meaning which dwells within it, a light joy, a timid sadness, remains immanent or trembles about it like a heat mist; it *is* color or sound. Who can distinguish the green apple from its tart gaiety? And aren't we already saying too much in naming "the tart gaiety of the green apple?" There is green, there is red, and that is all. They are things, they exist by themselves.

It is true that one might, by convention, confer the value of signs upon them. Thus, we talk of the language of flowers. But if, after the agreement, white roses signify "fidelity" to me, the fact is that I have stopped seeing them as roses. My attention cuts through them to aim beyond them at this abstract virtue. I forget them. I no longer pay attention to their mossy abundance, to their sweet stagnant odor. I have not even perceived them. That means that I have not behaved like an artist. For the artist, the color, the bouquet, the tinkling of the spoon on the saucer, are *things,* in the highest degree. He stops at the quality of the sound or the form. He returns to it constantly and is enchanted with it. It is this color-object that he is going to transfer to his canvas, and the only modification he will make it undergo is that he will

transform it into an *imaginary* object. He is therefore as far as he can be from considering colors and signs as a *language*.[1]

What is valid for the elements of artistic creation is also valid for their combinations. The painter does not want to create a thing.[2] And if he puts together red, yellow, and green, there is no reason for the ensemble to have a definable signification, that is, to refer particularly to another object. Doubtless this ensemble is also inhabited by a soul, and since there must have been motives, even hidden ones, for the painter to have chosen yellow rather than violet, it may be asserted that the objects thus created reflect his deepest tendencies. However, they never express his anger, his anguish, or his joy as do words or the expression of the face; they are impregnated with these emotions; and in order for them to have crept into these colors, which by themselves already had something like a meaning, his emotions get mixed up and grow obscure. Nobody can quite recognize them there.

Tintoretto did not choose that yellow rift in the sky above Golgotha to *signify* anguish or to *provoke* it. It is anguish and yellow sky at the same time. Not sky of anguish or anguished sky; it is an anguish become thing, an anguish which has turned into yellow rift of sky, and which thereby is submerged and impasted by the proper qualities of things, by their impermeability, their extension, their blind permanence, their externality, and that infinity of relations which they maintain with other things. That is, it is no longer *readable*. It is like an immense and vain effort, forever arrested half-way between sky

and earth, to express what their nature keeps them from expressing.

Similarly, the signification of a melody—if one can still speak of signification—is nothing outside of the melody itself, unlike ideas, which can be adequately rendered in several ways. Call it joyous or somber. It will always be over and above anything you can say about it. Not because its passions, which are perhaps at the origin of the invented theme, have, by being incorporated into notes, undergone a transubstantiation and a transmutation. A cry of grief is a sign of the grief which provokes it, but a song of grief is both grief itself and something other than grief. Or, if one wishes to adopt the existentialist vocabulary, it is a grief which does not *exist* any more, which *is*. But, you will say, suppose the painter does houses? That's just it. He *makes* them, that is, he creates an imaginary house on the canvas and not a sign of a house. And the house which thus appears preserves all the ambiguity of real houses.

The writer can guide you and, if he describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and provoke your indignation. The painter is mute. He presents you with *a* hovel, that's all. You are free to see in it what you like. That attic window will never be the symbol of misery; for that, it would have to be a sign, whereas it is a thing. The bad painter looks for the type. He paints the Arab, the Child, the Woman; the good one knows that neither the Arab nor the proletarian exists either in reality or on his canvas. He offers a workman, a certain workman. And what are we to think about a workman? An infinity of contradictory things. All thoughts and all

feelings are there, adhering to the canvas in a state of profound undifferentiation. It is up to you to choose. Sometimes, high-minded artists try to move us. They paint long lines of workmen waiting in the snow to be hired, the emaciated faces of the unemployed, battlefields. They affect us no more than does Greuze with his "Prodigal Son." And that masterpiece, "The Massacre of Guernica," does any one think that it won over a single heart to the Spanish cause? And yet something is said that can never quite be heard and that would take an infinity of words to express. And Picasso's long harlequins, ambiguous and eternal, haunted with inexplicable meaning, inseparable from their stooping leanness and their pale diamond-shaped tights, are emotion become flesh, emotion which the flesh has absorbed as the blotter absorbs ink, and emotion which is unrecognizable, lost, strange to itself, scattered to the four corners of space and yet present to itself.

I have no doubt that charity or anger can produce other objects, but they will likewise be swallowed up; they will lose their name; there will remain only things haunted by a mysterious soul. One does not paint significations; one does not put them to music. Under these conditions, who would dare require that the painter or musician engage himself?

On the other hand, the writer deals with significations. Still, a distinction must be made. The empire of signs is prose; poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture, and music. I am accused of detesting it; the proof, so they say, is that *Les Temps Modernes* publishes very few poems. On the contrary, this is proof that we like it. To be con-

vinced, all one need do is take a look at contemporary production. "At least," critics say triumphantly, "you can't even dream of engaging it." Indeed. But why should I want to? Because it uses words as does prose? But it does not use them in the same way, and it does not even *use* them at all. I should rather say that it serves them. Poets are men who refuse to *utilize* language. Now, since the quest for truth takes place in and by language conceived as a certain kind of instrument, it is unnecessary to imagine that they aim to discern or expound the true. Nor do they dream of *naming* the world, and, this being the case, they name nothing at all, for naming implies a perpetual sacrifice of the name to the object named, or, as Hegel would say, the name is revealed as the inessential in the face of the thing which is essential. They do not speak, neither do they keep still; it is something different. It has been said that they wanted to destroy the "word" by monstrous couplings, but this is false. For then they would have to be thrown into the midst of utilitarian language and would have had to try to retrieve words from it in odd little groups, as for example "horse" and "butter" by writing "horses of butter."[3]

Besides the fact that such an enterprise would require infinite time, it is not conceivable that one can keep oneself on the plane of the utilitarian project, consider words as instruments, and at the same contemplate taking their instrumentality away from them. In fact, the poet has withdrawn from language-instrument in a single movement. Once and for all he has chosen the poetic attitude which considers words as things and not as signs. For the ambiguity of the sign implies that one can penetrate it at

will like a pane of glass and pursue the thing signified, or turn his gaze toward its *reality* and consider it as an object. The man who talks is beyond words and near the object, whereas the poet is on this side of them. For the former, they are domesticated; for the latter they are in the wild state. For the former, they are useful conventions, tools which gradually wear out and which one throws away when they are no longer serviceable; for the latter, they are natural things which sprout naturally upon the earth like grass and trees.

But if he dwells upon words, as does the painter with colors and the musician with sounds, that does not mean that they have lost all signification in his eyes. Indeed, it is signification alone which can give words their verbal unity. Without it they are frittered away into sounds and strokes of the pen. Only, it too becomes natural. It is no longer the goal which is always out of reach and which human transcendence is always aiming at, but a property of each term, analogous to the expression of a face, to the little sad or gay meaning of sounds and colors. Having flowed into the word, having been absorbed by its sonority or visual aspect, having been thickened and defaced, it too is a thing, increate and eternal.

For the poet, language is a structure of the external world. The speaker is *in a situation* in language; he is invested with words. They are prolongations of his meanings, his pincers, his antennae, his eyeglasses. He maneuvers them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world. The poet is outside of language. He sees words

inside out as if he did not share the human condition, and as if he were first meeting the word as a barrier as he comes toward men. Instead of first knowing things by their name, it seems that first he has a silent contact with them, since, turning toward that other species of thing which for him is the word, touching them, testing them, palping them, he discovers in them a slight luminosity of their own and particular affinities with the earth, the sky, the water, and all created things.

Not knowing how to use them as a *sign* of an aspect of the world, he sees in the word the *image* of one of these aspects. And the verbal image he chooses for its resemblance to the willow tree or the ash tree is not necessarily the word which we use to designate these objects. As he is already on the outside, he considers words as a trap to catch a fleeing reality rather than as indicators which throw him out of himself into the midst of things. In short, all language is for him the mirror of the world. As a result, important changes take place in the internal economy of the word. Its sonority, its length, its masculine or feminine endings, its visual aspect, compose for him a face of flesh which *represents* rather than expresses signification. Inversely, as the signification is *realized*, the physical aspect of the word is reflected within it, and it, in its turn, functions as an image of the verbal body. Like its sign, too, for it has lost its pre-eminence; since words, like things, are increate, the poet does not decide whether the former exist for the latter or vice-versa.

Thus, between the word and the thing signified, there is established a double reciprocal relation of magical resemblance and signification. And the poet does not ***utilize***

the word, he does not choose between diverse acceptations; each of them, instead of appearing to him as an autonomous function, is given to him as a material quality which merges before his eyes with the other acceptation.

Thus, in each word he realizes, solely by the effect of the poetic *attitude*, the metaphors which Picasso dreamed of when he wanted to do a matchbox which was completely a bat without ceasing to be a matchbox. Florence is city, flower, and woman. It is city-flower, city-woman, and girl-flower all at the same time. And the strange object which thus appears has the liquidity of the *river*, the soft, tawny ardency of *gold*, and finally abandons itself with *propriety* and, by the continuous diminution of the silent *e*, prolongs indefinitely its modest blossoming.* To that is added the insidious effect of biography. For me, Florence is also a certain woman, an American actress who played in the silent films of my childhood, and about whom I have forgotten everything except that she was as long as a long evening glove and always a bit weary and always chaste and always married and misunderstood and whom I loved and whose name was Florence.

For the word, which tears the writer of prose away from himself and throws him into the midst of the world, sends back to the poet his own image, like a mirror.

*This sentence is not fully intelligible in translation as the author is here associating the component sounds of the word Florence with the signification of the French words they evoke. Thus: FL-OR-ENCE, *fleuve* (river), *or* (gold), and *décence* (propriety). The latter part of the sentence refers to the practice in French poetry of giving, in certain circumstances, a syllabic value to the otherwise silent terminal *e*.—Translator's note.

This is what justifies the double undertaking of Leiris who, on the one hand, in his *Glossary*, tries to give certain words a *poetic definition*, that is, one which is by itself a synthesis of reciprocal implications between the sonorous body and the verbal soul, and, on the other hand, in a still unpublished work, goes in quest of remembrance of things past, taking as guides a few words which for him are particularly charged with affectivity. Thus, the poetic word is a microcosm.

The crisis of language which broke out at the beginning of this century is a poetic crisis. Whatever the social and historical factors, it manifested itself by attacks of depersonalization of the writer in the face of words. He no longer knew how to use them, and, in Bergson's famous formula, he only half recognized them. He approached them with a completely fruitful feeling of strangeness. They were no longer his; they were no longer he; but in those strange mirrors, the sky, the earth, and his own life were reflected. And, finally, they became things themselves, or rather the black heart of things. And when the poet joins several of these microcosms together the case is like that of painters when they assemble their colors on the canvas. One might think that he is composing a sentence, but this is only what it appears to be. He is creating an object. The words-things are grouped by magical associations of fitness and incongruity, like colors and sounds. They attract, repel, and *"burn"* one another, and their association composes the veritable poetic unity which is the *phrase-object.*

More often the poet first has the scheme of the sentence in his mind, and the words follow. But this scheme

has nothing in common with what one ordinarily calls a verbal scheme. It does not govern the construction of a signification. Rather, it is comparable to the creative project by which Picasso, even before touching his brush, prefigures in space the *thing* which will become a buffoon or a harlequin.

> *To flee, to flee there, I feel that birds are drunk*
> *But, oh, my heart, hear the song of the sailors.*
> (*Fuir, là-bas fuir, je sens que des oiseaux sont ivres*
> *Mais ô mon coeur entends le chant des matelots.*)

This "but" which rises like a monolith at the threshold of the sentence does not tie the second verse to the preceding one. It colors it with a certain reserved nuance, with "private associations" which penetrate it completely. In the same way, certain poems begin with "and." This conjunction no longer indicates to the mind an operation which is to be carried out; it extends throughout the paragraph to give it the absolute quality of a *sequel.* For the poet, the sentence has a tonality, a taste; by means of it he tastes for their own sake the irritating flavors of objection, of reserve, of disjunction. He carries them to the absolute. He makes them real properties of the sentence, which becomes an utter objection without being an objection *to* anything precise. He finds here those relations of reciprocal implication which we pointed out a short time ago between the poetic word and its meaning; the ensemble of the words chosen functions as an *image* of the interrogative or restrictive nuance, and vice-

versa, the interrogation is an image of the verbal ensemble which it delimits.

As in the following admirable verses:

Oh seasons! Oh castles!
What soul is faultless?
(O saisons! O châteaux!
Quelle âme est sans défaut?)

Nobody is questioned; nobody is questioning; the poet is absent. And the question involves no answer, or rather it is its own answer. Is it therefore a false question? But it would be absurd to believe that Rimbaud "meant" that everybody has his faults. As Breton said of Saint-Pol Roux, "If he had meant it, he would have said it." Nor did he *mean* to say something else. He asked an absolute question. He conferred upon the beautiful word "soul" an interrogative existence. The interrogation has become a thing as the anguish of Tintoretto became a yellow sky. It is no longer a signification, but a substance. It is seen from the outside, and Rimbaud invites us to see it from the outside with him. Its strangeness arises from the fact that, in order to consider it, we place ourselves on the other side of the human condition, on the side of God.

If this is the case, one easily understands how foolish it would be to require a poetic engagement. Doubtless, emotion, even passion — and why not anger, social indignation, and political hatred? — are at the origin of the poem. But they are not *expressed* there, as in a pamphlet or in a confession. Insofar as the writer of prose exhibits feelings, he illustrates them; whereas, if the poet injects

his feelings into his poem, he ceases to recognize them; the words take hold of them, penetrate them, and metamorphose them; they do not signify them, even in his eyes. Emotion has become thing; it now has the opacity of things; it is compounded by the ambiguous properties of the vocables in which it has been enclosed. And above all, there is always much more in each phrase, in each verse, as there is more than simple anguish in the yellow sky over Golgotha. The word, the phrase-thing, inexhaustible as things, everywhere overflows the feeling which has produced them. How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out? Someone may say, "You're forgetting the poets of the Resistance. You're forgetting Pierre Emmanuel." Not a bit! They're the very ones I was going to give as examples.[4]

But even if the poet is forbidden to engage himself, is that a reason for exempting the writer of prose? What do they have in common? It is true that the prosewriter and the poet both write. But there is nothing in common between these two acts of writing except the movement of the hand which traces the letters. Otherwise, their universes are incommunicable, and what is good for one is not good for the other. Prose is, in essence, utilitarian. I would readily define the prose-writer as a man who *makes use* of words. M. Jourdan made prose to ask for his slippers, and Hitler to declare war on Poland. The writer is a *speaker*; he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, in-

sinuates. If he does so without any effect, he does not therefore become a poet; he is a writer who is talking and saying nothing. We have seen enough of language inside out; it is now time to look at it right side out.[5]

The art of prose is employed in discourse; its substance is by nature significative; that is, the words are first of all not objects but designations for objects; it is not first of all a matter of knowing whether they please or displease in themselves, but whether they correctly indicate a certain thing or a certain notion. Thus, it often happens that we find ourselves possessing a certain idea that someone has taught us by means of words without being able to recall a single one of the words which have transmitted it to us.

Prose is first of all an attitude of mind. As Valéry would say, there is prose when the word passes across our gaze as the glass across the sun. When one is in danger or in difficulty he grabs any instrument. When the danger is past, he does not even remember whether it was a hammer or a stick; moreover, he never knew; all he needed was a prolongation of his body, a means of extending his hand to the highest branch. It was a sixth finger, a third leg, in short, a pure function which he assimilated. Thus, regarding language, it is our shell and our antennae; it protects us against others and informs us about them; it is a prolongation of our senses, a third eye which is going to look into our neighbor's heart. We are within language as within our body. We *feel* it spontaneously while going beyond it toward other ends, as we feel our hands and our feet; we perceive it when it is the other who is using it, as we perceive the limbs of

others. There is the word which is lived and the word which is met. But in both cases it is in the course of an undertaking, either of me acting upon others, or the other upon me. The word is a certain particular moment of action and has no meaning outside of it. In certain cases of aphasia the possibilities of acting, of understanding situations, and of having normal relations with the other sex, are lost.

At the heart of this apraxia the destruction of language appears only as the collapse of one of the structures, the finest and the most apparent. And if prose is never anything but the privileged instrument of a certain undertaking, if it is only the poet's business to contemplate words in a disinterested fashion, then one has the right to ask the prose-writer from the very start, "What is your aim in writing? What undertakings are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing?" In any case this undertaking cannot have pure contemplation as an end. For, intuition is silence, and the end of language is to communicate. One can doubtless *pin down* the results of intuition, but in this case a few words hastily scrawled on paper will suffice; it will always be enough for the author to recognize what he had in mind. If the words are assembled into sentences, with a concern for clarity, a decision foreign to the intuition, to the language itself, must intervene, the decision of confiding to others the results obtained. In each case one must ask the reason for this decision. And the common sense which our pedants too readily forget never stops repeating it. Are we not in the habit of putting this basic question to young people who are thinking of writ-

ing: "Do you have anything to say?" Which means: something which is worth the trouble of being communicated. But what do we mean by something which is "worth the trouble" if it is not by recourse to a system of transcendent values?

Moreover, to consider only this secondary structure of the undertaking, which is what the *verbal moment* is, the serious error of pure stylists is to think that the word is a gentle breeze which plays lightly over the surface of things, which grazes them without altering them, and that the speaker is a pure *witness* who sums up with a word his harmless contemplation. To speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence.

If you name the behavior of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he knows that he is *seen* at the moment he *sees* himself. The furtive gesture which he forgot while making it, begins to exist beyond all measure, to exist for everybody; it is integrated into the objective mind; it takes on new dimensions; it is retrieved. After that, how can you expect him to act in the same way? Either he will persist in his behavior out of obstinacy and with full knowledge of what he is doing, or he will give it up. Thus, by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others *in order* to change it. I strike at its very heart, I transpierce it, and I display it in full view; at present I dispose of it; with every word I utter, I involve myself a little more in the world, and by the same token

I emerge from it a little more, since I go beyond it toward the future.

Thus, the prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. It is therefore permissible to ask him this second question: "What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?" The "engaged" writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition. Man is the being toward whom no being can be impartial, not even God. For God, if He existed, would be, as certain mystics have seen Him, in a *situation* in relationship to man. And He is also the being Who can not even see a situation without changing it, for His gaze congeals, destroys, or sculpts, or, as does eternity, changes the object in itself. It is in love, in hate, in anger, in fear, in joy, in indignation, in admiration, in hope, in despair, that man and the world reveal themselves *in their truth.* Doubtless, the engaged writer can be mediocre; he can even be conscious of being so; but as one can not write without the intention of succeeding perfectly, the modesty with which he envisages his work should not divert him from constructing it *as if* it were to have the greatest celebrity. He should never say to himself "Bah! I'll be lucky if I have three thousand readers," but rather, "What would happen if everybody read what I wrote?" He remembers what Mosca said beside the coach which carried Fabrizio and Sanseverina away, "If the word Love

comes up between them, I'm lost." He knows that he is the man who names what has not yet been named or what dares not tell its name. He knows that he makes the word "love" and the word "hate" *surge up* and with them love and hate between men who had not yet decided upon their feelings. He knows that words, as Brice-Parrain says, are "loaded pistols." If he speaks, he fires. He may be silent, but since he has chosen to fire, he must do it like a man, by aiming at targets, and not like a child, at random, by shutting his eyes and firing merely for the pleasure of hearing the shot go off.

Later on we shall try to determine what the goal of literature may be. But from this point on we may conclude that the writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare. It is assumed that no one is ignorant of the law because there is a code and because the law is written down; thereafter, you are free to violate it, but you know the risks you run. Similarly, the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about. And since he has once engaged himself in the universe of language, he can never again pretend that he can not speak. Once you enter the universe of significations, there is nothing you can do to get out of it. Let words organize themselves freely and they will make sentences, and each sentence contains language in its entirety and refers back to the whole universe. Silence itself is defined in relationship to words, as the pause in music receives its meaning from the group of

notes around it. This silence is a moment of language; being silent is not being dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep on speaking. Thus, if a writer has chosen to remain silent on any aspect whatever of the world, or, according to an expression which says just what it means, to *pass over* it in silence, one has the right to ask him a third question: "Why have you spoken of this rather than that, and—since you speak in order to bring about change—why do you want to change this rather than that?"

All this does not prevent there being a manner of writing. One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way. And, to be sure, the style makes the value of the prose. But it should pass unnoticed. Since words are transparent and since the gaze looks through them, it would be absurd to slip in among them some panes of rough glass. Beauty is in this case only a gentle and imperceptible force. In a painting it shines forth at the very first sight; in a book it hides itself; it acts by persuasion like the charm of a voice or a face. It does not coerce; it inclines a person without his suspecting it, and he thinks that he is yielding to arguments when he is really being solicited by a charm that he does not see. The ceremonial of the mass is not faith; it disposes the harmony of words; their beauty, the balance of the phrases, *dispose* the passions of the reader without his being aware and orders them like the mass, like music, like the dance. If he happens to consider them by themselves, he loses the meaning; there remains only a boring seesaw of phrases.

In prose the aesthetic pleasure is pure only if it is

thrown into the bargain. I blush at recalling such simple ideas, but it seems that today they have been forgotten. If that were not the case, would we be told that we are planning the murder of literature, or, more simply, that engagement is harmful to the art of writing? If the contamination of a certain kind of prose by poetry had not confused the ideas of our critics, would they dream of attacking us on the matter of form, when we have never spoken of anything but the content? There is nothing to be said about form in advance, and we have said nothing. Everyone invents his own, and one judges it afterward. It is true that the subjects suggest the style, but they do not order it. There are no styles ranged a priori outside of the literary art. What is more engaged, what is more boring than the idea of attacking the Jesuits? Yet, out of this Pascal made his *Provincial Letters.* In short, it is a matter of knowing what one wants to write about, whether butterflies or the condition of the Jews. And when one knows, then it remains to decide how one will write about it.

Often the two choices are only one, but among good writers the second choice never precedes the first. I know that Giraudoux has said that "the only concern is finding the style; the idea comes afterwards;" but he was wrong. The idea did not come. On the contrary, if one considers subjects as problems which are always open, as solicitations, as expectations, it will be easily understood that art loses nothing in engagement. On the contrary, just as physics submits to mathematicians new problems which require them to produce a new symbolism, in like manner the always new requirements of

the social and the metaphysical engage the artist in finding a new language and new techniques. If we no longer write as they did in the eighteenth century, it is because the language of Racine and Saint-Evremond does not lend itself to talking about locomotives or the proletariat. After that, the purists will perhaps forbid us to write about locomotives. But art has never been on the side of the purists.

If that is the principle of engagement, what objection can one have to it? And above all *what objection has been made to it*? It has seemed to me that my opponents have not had their hearts in their work very much and that their articles contain nothing more than a long scandalized sigh which drags on over two or three columns. I should have liked to know *in the name of what*, with what conception of literature, they condemned engagement. But they have not said; they themselves have not known. The most reasonable thing would have been to support their condemnation on the old theory of art for art's sake. But none of them can accept it. That is also disturbing. We know very well that pure art and empty art are the same thing and that aesthetic purism was a brilliant maneuver of the bourgeois of the last century who preferred to see themselves denounced as philistines rather than as exploiters. Therefore, they themselves admitted that the writer had to speak about something. But about what? I believe that their embarrassment would have been extreme if Fernandez had not found for them, after the other war, the notion of the *message*. The writer of today, they say, should in no case occupy himself with temporal affairs. Neither should he

set up lines without signification nor seek solely beauty of phrase and of imagery. His function is to deliver messages to his readers. Well, what is a message?

It must be borne in mind that most critics are men who have not had much luck and who, just about the time they were growing desperate, found a quiet little job as cemetery watchmen. God knows whether cemeteries are peaceful; none of them are more cheerful than a library. The dead are there; the only thing they have done is write. They have long since been washed clean of the sin of living, and besides, their lives are known only through other books which other dead men have written about them. Rimbaud is dead. So are Paterne Berrichon and Isabelle Rimbaud. The trouble makers have disappeared; all that remains are the little coffins that are stacked on shelves along the walls like urns in a columbarium. The critic lives badly; his wife does not appreciate him as she ought to; his children are ungrateful; the first of the month is hard on him. But it is always possible for him to enter his library, take down a book from the shelf, and open it. It gives off a slight odor of the cellar, and a strange operation begins which he has decided to call reading. From one point of view it is a possession; he lends his body to the dead in order that they may come back to life. And from another point of view it is a contact with the beyond. Indeed, the book is by no means an object; neither is it an act, nor even a thought. Written by a dead man about dead things, it no longer has any place on this earth; it speaks of nothing which interests us directly. Left to itself, it falls back and collapses; there remain only ink spots on musty

paper. And when the critic reanimates these spots, when he makes letters and words of them, they speak to him of passions which he does not feel, of bursts of anger without objects, of dead fears and hopes. It is a whole disembodied world which surrounds him, where human feelings, because they are no longer affecting, have passed on to the status of exemplary feelings and, in a word, of *values*. So he persuades himself that he has entered into relations with an intelligible world which is like the truth of his daily sufferings. And their reason for being. He thinks that nature imitates art, as for Plato the world of the senses imitates that of the archetypes. And during the time he is reading, his everyday life becomes an appearance. His nagging wife, his hunchbacked son, they too are appearances. And he will put up with them because Xenophon has drawn the portrait of Xantippe and Shakespeare that of Richard the Third.

It is a holiday for him when contemporary authors do him the favor of dying. Their books, too raw, too living, too urgent, pass on to the other shore; they become less and less affecting and more and more beautiful. After a short stay in Purgatory they go on to people the intelligible heaven with new values. Bergotte, Swann, Siegfried and Bella, and Monsieur Teste are recent acquisitions. He is waiting for Nathanaël and Ménalque. As for the writers who persist in living, he asks them only not to move about too much, and to make an effort to resemble from now on the dead men they will be. Valéry, who for twenty-five years had been publishing posthumous books, managed the matter very nicely. That is why, like some

highly exceptional saints, he was canonized during his lifetime. But Malraux is scandalous.

Our critics are Catharians. They don't want to have anything to do with the real world except eat and drink in it, and since it is absolutely necessary to have relations with our fellow-creatures, they have chosen to have them with the defunct. They get excited only about classified matters, closed quarrels, stories whose ends are known. They never bet on uncertain issues, and since history has decided for them, since the objects which terrified or angered the authors they read have disappeared, since bloody disputes seem futile at a distance of two centuries, they can be charmed with balanced periods, and everything happens for them as if all literature were only a vast tautology and as if every new prose-writer had invented a new way of speaking only for the purpose of saying nothing.

To speak of archetypes and "human nature" — is that speaking in order to say nothing? All the conceptions of our critics oscillate from one idea to the other. And, of course, both of them are false. Our great writers wanted to destroy, to edify, to demonstrate. But we no longer retain the proofs which they have advanced because we have no concern with what they mean to prove. The abuses which they denounced are no longer those of our time. There are others which rouse us which they did not suspect. History has given the lie to some of their predictions, and those which have been fulfilled became true so long ago that we have forgotten that they were at first flashes of their genius. Some of their thoughts are utterly dead, and there are others which the whole hu-

man race has taken up to its advantage and which we now regard as commonplace. It follows that the best arguments of these writers have lost their effectiveness. We admire only their order and rigor. Their most compact composition is in our eyes only an ornament, an elegant architecture of exposition, with no more practical application than such architectures as the fugues of Bach and the arabesques of the Alhambra.

We are still moved by the passion of these impassioned geometries when the geometry no longer convinces us. Or rather by the representation of the passion. In the course of centuries the ideas have turned flat, but they remain the little personal objectives of a man who was once flesh and bone; behind the reasons of reason, which languish, we perceive the reasons of the heart, the virtues, the vices, and that great pain that men have in living. Sade does his best to win us over, but we hardly find him scandalous. He is no longer anything but a soul eaten by a beautiful disease, a pearl-oyster. The *Letter on the Theater* no longer keeps anyone from going to the theater, but we find it piquant that Rousseau detested the art of the drama. If we are a bit versed in psychoanalysis, our pleasure is perfect. We shall explain the *Social Contract* by the Oedipus complex and *The Spirit of the Laws* by the inferiority complex. That is, we shall fully enjoy the well-known superiority of live dogs to dead lions. Thus, when a book presents befuddled thoughts which appear to be reasons only to melt under scrutiny and to be reduced to heart beats, when the teaching that one can draw from it is radically different from what its author intended, the book is called a message. Rousseau,

the father of the French Revolution, and Gobineau, the father of racism, both sent us messages. And the critic considers them with equal sympathy. If they were alive, he would have to choose between the two, to love one and hate the other. But what brings them together, above all, is that they are both profoundly and deliciously wrong, and in the same way: they are dead.

Thus, contemporary writers should be advised to deliver messages, that is, voluntarily to limit their writing to the involuntary expression of their souls. I say involuntary because the dead, from Montaigne to Rimbaud, have painted themselves completely, but without having meant to — it is something they have simply thrown into the bargain. The surplus which they have given us unintentionally should be the primary and professed goal of living writers. They are not to be forced to give us confessions without any dressing, nor are they to abandon themselves to the too-naked lyricism of the romantics. But since we find pleasure in foiling the ruses of Chateaubriand or Rousseau, in surprising them in the secret places of their being at the moment they are playing at being the public man, in distinguishing the private motives from their most universal assertions, we shall ask newcomers to procure us this pleasure deliberately. So let them reason, assert, deny, refute, and prove; but the cause they are defending must be only the apparent aim of their discourse; the deeper goal is to yield themselves without seeming to do so. They must first disarm themselves of their arguments as time has done for those of the classic writers; they must bring them to bear upon subjects which interest no one or on truths

so general that readers are convinced in advance. As for their ideas, they must give them an air of profundity, but with an effect of emptiness, and they must shape them in such a way that they are obviously explained by an unhappy childhood, a class hatred, or an incestuous love. Let them not presume to think in earnest; thought conceals the man, and it is the man alone who interests us. A bare tear is not lovely. It offends. A good argument also offends, as Stendhal well observed. But an argument that masks a tear — that's what we're after. The argument removes the obscenity from the tears; the tears, by revealing their origin in the passions, remove the aggressiveness from the argument. We shall be neither too deeply touched nor at all convinced, and we shall be able to yield ourselves in security to that moderate pleasure which, as everyone knows, we derive from the contemplation of works of art. Thus, this is "true," "pure" literature, a subjectivity which yields itself under the aspect of the objective, a discourse so curiously contrived that it is equivalent to silence, a thought which debates with itself, a reason which is only the mask of madness, an Eternal which lets it be understood that it is only a moment of History, a historical moment which, by the hidden side which it reveals, suddenly sends back a perpetual lesson to the eternal man, but which is produced against the express wishes of those who do the teaching.

When all is said and done, the message is a soul which is made object. A soul, and what is to be done with a soul? One contemplates it at a respectful distance. It is not customary to show one's soul in society without an imperious motive. But, with certain reserves, convention

permits some individuals to put theirs into commerce, and all adults may procure it for themselves. For many people today, works of the mind are thus little straying souls which one acquires at a modest price; there is good old Montaigne's, dear La Fontaine's, and that of Jean-Jacques and of Jean-Paul and of delicious Gérard. What is called literary art is the ensemble of the treatments which make them inoffensive. Tanned, refined, chemically treated, they provide their acquirers with the opportunity of devoting some moments of a life completely turned outward to the cultivation of subjectivity. Custom guarantees it to be without risk. Montaigne's skepticism? Who can take it seriously since the author of the *Essays* got frightened when the plague ravaged Bordeaux? Or Rousseau's humanitarianism, since "Jean-Jacques" put his children into an orphanage? And the strange revelations of *Sylvie,* since Gérard de Nerval was mad? At the very most, the professional critic will set up infernal dialogues between them and will inform us that French thought is a perpetual colloquy between Pascal and Montaigne. In so doing he has no intention of making Pascal and Montaigne more alive, but of making Malraux and Gide more dead. Finally, when the internal contradictions of the life and the work have made both of them useless, when the message, in its imponderable depth, has taught us these capital truths, "that man is neither good nor bad," "that there is a great deal of suffering in human life," "that genius is only great patience," this melancholy cuisine will have achieved its purpose, and the reader, as he lays down the book, will be able to cry out with a tranquil soul, "All this is only literature."

But since, for us, writing is an enterprise; since writers are alive before being dead; since we think that we must try to be as right as we can in our books; and since, even if the centuries show us to be in the wrong, this is no reason to show in advance that we are wrong; since we think that the writer should engage himself completely in his works, and not as an abject passivity by putting forward his vices, his misfortunes, and his weaknesses, but as a resolute will and as a choice, as this total enterprise of living that each one of us is, it is then proper that we take up this problem at its beginning and that we, in our turn, ask ourselves: "*Why* does one write?"

NOTES

1. At least in general. The greatness and error of Klee lie in his attempt to make a painting both sign and object.

2. I say "create," not "imitate," which is enough to squelch the bombast of M. Charles Estienne who has obviously not understood a word of my argument and who is dead set on tilting at shadows.

3. This is the example cited by Bataille in *Inner Experience.*

4. If one wishes to know the origin of this attitude toward language, the following are a few brief indications.

Originally, poetry creates the *myth,* while the prose-writer draws its *portrait.* In reality, the human act, governed by needs and urged on by the useful is, in a sense, a *means.* It passes unnoticed, and it is the result which counts. When I extend my hand *in order to* take up my pen, I have only a fleeting and obscure consciousness of my gesture; it is the pen which I see. Thus, man is alienated by his ends. Poetry reverses the relationship: the world and things become inessential, become a pretext for the act which becomes its own end. The vase is there so that the girl may perform the graceful act of filling it; the Trojan War, so that Hector and Achilles may engage in that heroic combat. The action, detached from its goals, which become blurred, becomes an act of prowess or a dance. Nevertheless, however indifferent he might have been to the success of the enterprise, the poet, before the nineteenth century, remained in harmony with society as a whole. He did not use language for the end which prose seeks, but he had the same confidence in it as the prose-writer.

With the coming of bourgeois society, the poet puts up a common front with the prose-writer to declare it unlivable. His job is always to create the myth of man, but he passes from white magic to black magic. Man is always

presented as the absolute end, but by the success of his enterprise he is sucked into a utilitarian collectivity. The thing that is in the background of his act and that will allow transition to the myth is thus no longer success, but defeat. By stopping the infinite series of his projects like a screen, defeat alone returns him to himself in his purity. The world remains the inessential, but it is now there as a pretext for defeat. The finality of the thing is to send man back to himself by blocking the route. Moreover, it is not a matter of arbitrarily introducing defeat and ruin into the course of the world, but rather of having no eyes for anything but that. Human enterprise has two aspects: it is both success and failure. The dialectical scheme is inadequate for reflecting upon it. We must make our vocabulary and the frames of our reason more supple. Some day I am going to try to describe that strange reality, History, which is neither objective, nor ever quite subjective, in which the dialectic is contested, penetrated, and corroded by a kind of antidialectic, but which is still a dialectic. But that is the philosopher's affair. One does not ordinarily consider the two faces of Janus; the man of action sees one and the poet sees the other. When the instruments are broken and unusable, when plans are blasted and effort is useless, the world appears with a childlike and terrible freshness, without supports, without paths. It has the maximum reality because it is crushing for man, and as action, in any case, generalizes, defeat restores to things their individual reality. But, by an expected reversal, the defeat, considered as a final end, is both a contesting and an appropriation of this universe. A contesting, because man *is worth more* than that which crushes; he no longer contests things in their "little bit of reality," like the engineer or the captain, but, on the contrary, in their "too full of reality," by his very existence as a vanquished person; he is the remorse of the world. An appropriation, because the world, by ceasing to be the tool of success, becomes the instrument of failure. So there it is, traversed by an obscure finality; it is its coefficient of adversity which serves, the more human insofar as it is more hostile to man. The defeat itself turns into salvation. Not that it makes us yield to some "beyond," but by itself it shifts and is metamorphosed. For example, poetic language rises out of the ruins of prose. If it is true that the word is a betrayal and that communication is impossible, then each word by itself recovers its individuality and becomes an instrument of our defeat and a receiver of the incommunicable. It is not that there is *another thing* to communicate; but the communication of prose having miscarried, it is the very meaning of the word which becomes the pure incommunicable. Thus, the failure of communication becomes a suggestion of the incommunicable, and the thwarted project of utilizing words is succeeded by the pure disinterested intuition of the word. Thus, we again meet with the description which we attempted earlier in this study, but in the more general perspective of the absolute valorization of the defeat, which seems to me the original attitude of contemporary poetry. Note also that this choice confers upon the poet a very precise function in the collectivity: in a highly integrated or religious society, the defeat is masked by the State or redeemed by Religion; in a less integrated and secular society, such as our democracies, it is up to poetry to redeem them.

Poetry is a case of the loser winning. And the genuine poet chooses to lose, even if he has to go so far as to die, in order to win. I repeat that I am talking of contemporary poetry. History presents other forms of poetry. It is not my concern to show their connection with ours. Thus, if one absolutely wishes to speak of the engagement of the poet, let us say that he is the man who engages himself to lose. This is the deeper meaning of that tough-luck, of that malediction with which he always claims kinship and which he always attributes to an intervention from without; whereas it is his deepest choice, the source, and not the consequence of his poetry. He is certain of the total defeat of the human enterprise and arranges to fail in his own life in order to bear witness, by his individual defeat, to human defeat in general. Thus, he contests, as we shall see, which is what the prose-writer does too. But the contesting of prose is carried on in the name of a greater success; and that of poetry, in the name of the hidden defeat which every victory conceals.

5. It goes without saying that in all poetry a certain form of prose, that is, of success, is present; and, vice-versa, the driest prose always contains a bit of poetry, that is, a certain form of defeat; no prose-writer is *quite* capable of expressing what he wants to say; he says too much or not enough; each phrase is a wager, a risk assumed; the more cautious one is, the more attention the word attracts; as Valéry has shown, no one can understand a word to its very bottom. Thus, each word is used simultaneously for its clear and social meaning and for certain obscure resonances — let me say, almost for its physiognomy. The reader, too, is sensitive to this. At once we are no longer on the level of concerted communication, but on that of grace and chance; the silences of prose are poetic because they mark its limits, and it is for the purpose of greater clarity that I have been considering the extreme cases of pure prose and pure poetry. However, it need not be concluded that we can pass from poetry to prose by a continuous series of intermediate forms. If the prose-writer is too eager to fondle his words, the *eidos* of "prose" is shattered and we fall into highfalutin nonsense. If the poet relates, explains, or teaches, the poetry becomes *prosaic*; he has lost the game. It is a matter of complex structures, impure, but well-defined.

II

WHY WRITE?

Each one has his reasons: for one, art is a flight; for another, a means of conquering. But one can flee into a hermitage, into madness, into death. One can conquer by arms. Why does it have to be *writing*, why does one have to manage his escapes and conquests by *writing*? Because, behind the various aims of authors, there is a deeper and more immediate choice which is common to all of us. We shall try to elucidate this choice, and we shall see whether it is not in the name of this very choice of writing that the engagement of writers must be required.

Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a "revealer," that is, it is through human reality that "there is" being, or, to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested. It is our presence in the world which multiplies relations. It is we who set up a relationship between this tree and that bit of sky. Thanks to us, that star which has been dead for millennia, that quarter moon, and that dark river are disclosed in the unity of a landscape. It is the speed of our auto and our airplane which organizes the great masses of the earth. With each of our acts, the

world reveals to us a new face. But, if we know that we are directors of being, we also know that we are not its producers. If we turn away from this landscape, it will sink back into its dark permanence. At least, it will sink back; there is no one mad enough to think that it is going to be annihilated. It is we who shall be annihilated, and the earth will remain in its lethargy until another consciousness comes along to awaken it. Thus, to our inner certainty of being "revealers" is added that of being inessential in relation to the thing revealed.

One of the chief motives of artistic creation is certainly the need of feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world. If I fix on canvas or in writing a certain aspect of the fields or the sea or a look on someone's face which I have disclosed, I am conscious of having produced them by condensing relationships, by introducing order where there was none, by imposing the unity of mind on the diversity of things. That is, I feel myself essential in relation to my creation. But this time it is the created object which escapes me; I can not reveal and produce at the same time. The creation becomes inessential in relation to the creative activity. First of all, even if it appears to others as definitive, the created object always seems to us in a state of suspension; we can always change this line, that shade, that word. Thus, it never *forces itself.* A novice painter asked his teacher, "When should I consider my painting finished?" And the teacher answered, "When you can look at it in amazement and say to yourself '*I'm* the one who did *that*!' "

Which amounts to saying "never." For it is virtually

considering one's work with someone else's eyes and revealing what one has created. But it is self-evident that we are proportionally less conscious of the thing produced and more conscious of our productive activity. When it is a matter of pottery or carpentry, we work according to traditional norms, with tools whose usage is codified; it is Heidegger's famous "they" who are working with our hands. In this case, the result can seem to us sufficiently strange to preserve its objectivity in our eyes. But if we ourselves produce the rules of production, the measures, the criteria, and if our creative drive comes from the very depths of our heart, then we never find anything but ourselves in our work. It is we who have invented the laws by which we judge it. It is our history, our love, our gaiety that we recognize in it. Even if we should regard it without touching it any further, we never *receive* from it that gaiety or love. We put them into it. The results which we have obtained on canvas or paper never seem to us *objective*. We are too familiar with the processes of which they are the effects. These processes remain a subjective discovery; they are ourselves, our inspiration, our ruse, and when we seek to *perceive* our work, we create it again, we repeat mentally the operations which produced it; each of its aspects appears as a result. Thus, in the perception, the object is given as the essential thing and the subject as the inessential. The latter seeks essentiality in the creation and obtains it, but then it is the object which becomes the inessential.

This dialectic is nowhere more apparent than in the art of writing, for the literary object is a peculiar top which exists only in movement. To make it come into

view a concrete act called reading is necessary, and it lasts only as long as this act can last. Beyond that, there are only black marks on paper. Now, the writer can not read what he writes, whereas the shoemaker can put on the shoes he has just made if they are his size, and the architect can live in the house he has built. In reading, one foresees; one waits. He foresees the end of the sentence, the following sentence, the next page. He waits for them to confirm or disappoint his foresights. The reading is composed of a host of hypotheses, of dreams followed by awakenings, of hopes and deceptions. Readers are always ahead of the sentence they are reading in a merely probable future which partly collapses and partly comes together in proportion as they progress, which withdraws from one page to the next and forms the moving horizon of the literary object. Without waiting, without a future, without ignorance, there is no objectivity.

Now the operation of writing involves an implicit quasi-reading which makes real reading impossible. When the words form under his pen, the author doubtless sees them, but he does not see them as the reader does, since he knows them before writing them down. The function of his gaze is not to reveal, by stroking them, the sleeping words which are waiting to be read, but to control the sketching of the signs. In short, it is a purely regulating mission, and the view before him reveals nothing except for slight slips of the pen. The writer neither foresees nor conjectures; he *projects.* It often happens that he awaits, as they say, the inspiration. But one does not wait for himself the way he waits for others. If he hesitates, he knows that the future is not

made, that he himself is going to make it, and if he still does not know what is going to happen to his hero, that simply means that he has not thought about it, that he has not decided upon anything. The future is then a blank page, whereas the future of the reader is two hundred pages filled with words which separate him from the end. Thus, the writer meets everywhere only *his* knowledge, *his* will, *his* plans, in short, himself. He touches only his own subjectivity; the object he creates is out of reach; he does not create it *for himself*. If he rereads himself, it is already too late. The sentence will never quite be a thing in his eyes. He goes to the very limits of the subjective but without crossing it. He appreciates the effect of a touch, of an epigram, of a well-placed adjective, but it is the effect they will have on others. He can judge it, not feel it. Proust never discovered the homosexuality of Charlus, since he had decided upon it even before starting on his book. And if a day comes when the book takes on for its author a semblance of objectivity, it is that years have passed, that he has forgotten it, that its spirit is quite foreign to him, and doubtless he is no longer capable of writing it. This was the case with Rousseau when he reread the *Social Contract* at the end of his life.

Thus, it is not true that one writes for himself. That would be the worst blow. In projecting his emotions on paper, one barely manages to give them a languishing extension. The creative act is only an incomplete and abstract moment in the production of a work. If the author existed alone he would be able to write as much as he liked; the work as *object* would never see the light of day and he would either have to put down his pen or

despair. But the operation of writing implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative and these two connected acts necessitate two distinct agents. It is the conjoint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others.

Reading seems, in fact, to be the synthesis of perception and creation.[1] It supposes the essentiality of both the subject and the object. The object is essential because it is strictly transcendent, because it imposes its own structures, and because one must wait for it and observe it; but the subject is also essential because it is required not only to disclose the object (that is, to make *there be* an object) but also so that this object might *be* (that is, to produce it). In a word, the reader is conscious of disclosing in creating, of creating by disclosing. In reality, it is not necessary to believe that reading is a mechanical operation and that signs make an impression upon him as light does on a photographic plate. If he is inattentive, tired, stupid, or thoughtless, most of the relations will escape him. He will never manage to "catch on" to the object (in the sense in which we see that fire "catches" or "doesn't catch"). He will draw some phrases out of the shadow, but they will seem to appear as random strokes. If he is at his best, he will project beyond the words a synthetic form, each phrase of which will be no more than a partial function: the "theme," the "subject," or the "meaning." Thus, from the very beginning, the

1. The same is true in different degrees regarding the spectator's attitude before other works of art (paintings, symphonies, statues, etc.)

meaning is no longer contained in the words, since it is he, on the contrary, who allows the signification of each of them to be understood; and the literary object, though realized *through* language, is never given *in* language. On the contrary, it is by nature a silence and an opponent of the word. In addition, the hundred thousand words aligned in a book can be read one by one so that the meaning of the work does not emerge. Nothing is accomplished if the reader does not put himself from the very beginning and almost without a guide at the height of this silence; if, in short, he does not invent it and does not then place there, and hold on to, the words and sentences which he awakens. And if I am told that it would be more fitting to call this operation a re-invention or a discovery, I shall answer that, first, such a re-invention would be as new and as original an act as the first invention. And, especially, when an object has never existed before, there can be no question of re-inventing it or discovering it. For if the silence about which I am speaking is really the goal at which the author is aiming, he has, at least, never been familiar with it; his silence is subjective and anterior to language. It is the absence of words, the undifferentiated and lived silence of inspiration, which the word will then particularize, whereas the silence produced by the reader is an object. And at the very interior of this object there are more silences—which the author does not tell. It is a question of silences which are so particular that they could not retain any meaning outside of the object which the reading causes to appear. However, it is these which give it its density and its particular face.

To say that they are unexpressed is hardly the word; for they are precisely the inexpressible. And that is why one does not come upon them at any definite moment in the reading; they are everywhere and nowhere. The quality of the marvelous in *The Wanderer* (*Le Grand Meaulnes*), the grandiosity of *Armance,* the degree of realism and truth of Kafka's mythology, these are never given. The reader must invent them all in a continual exceeding of the written thing. To be sure, the author guides him, but all he does is guide him. The landmarks he sets up are separated by the void. The reader must unite them; he must go beyond them. In short, reading is directed creation.

On the one hand, the literary object has no other substance than the reader's subjectivity; Raskolnikov's waiting is *my* waiting which I lend him. Without this impatience of the reader he would remain only a collection of signs. His hatred of the police magistrate who questions him is my hatred which has been solicited and wheedled out of me by signs, and the police magistrate himself would not exist without the hatred I have for him via Raskolnikov. That is what animates him, it is his very flesh.

But on the other hand, the words are there like traps to arouse our feelings and to reflect them toward us. Each word is a path of transcendence; it shapes our feelings, names them, and attributes them to an imaginary personage who takes it upon himself to live them for us and who has no other substance than these borrowed passions; he confers objects, perspectives, and a horizon upon them.

Thus, for the reader, all is to do and all is already done; the work exists only at the exact level of his capacities; while he reads and creates, he knows that he can always go further in his reading, can always create more profoundly, and thus the work seems to him as inexhaustible and opaque as things. We would readily reconcile that "rational intuition" which Kant reserved to divine Reason with this absolute production of qualities, which, to the extent that they emanate from our subjectivity, congeal before our eyes into impermeable objectivities.

Since the creation can find its fulfillment only in reading, since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun, since it is only through the consciousness of the reader that he can regard himself as essential to his work, all literary work is an appeal. To write is to make an appeal to the reader that he lead into objective existence the revelation which I have undertaken by means of language. And if it should be asked *to what* the writer is appealing, the answer is simple. As the sufficient reason for the appearance of the aesthetic object is never found either in the book (where we find merely solicitations to produce the object) or in the author's mind, and as his subjectivity, which he cannot get away from, cannot give a reason for the act of leading into objectivity, the appearance of the work of art is a new event which cannot *be explained* by anterior data. And since this directed creation is an absolute beginning, it is therefore brought about by the freedom of the reader, and by what is purest in that freedom. Thus, the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work.

It will doubtless be said that all tools address themselves to our freedom since they are the instruments of a possible action, and that the work of art is not unique in that. And it is true that the tool is the congealed outline of an operation. But it remains on the level of the hypothetical imperative. I may use a hammer to nail up a case or to hit my neighbor over the head. Insofar as I consider it in itself, it is not an appeal to my freedom; it does not put me face to face with it; rather, it aims at using it by substituting a set succession of traditional procedures for the free invention of means. The book does not serve my freedom; it requires it. Indeed, one cannot address himself to freedom as such by means of constraint, fascination, or entreaties. There is only one way of attaining it; first, by recognizing it, then, having confidence in it, and finally, requiring of it an act, an act in its own name, that is, in the name of the confidence that one brings to it.

Thus, the book is not, like the tool, a means for any end whatever; the end to which it offers itself is the reader's freedom. And the Kantian expression "finality without end" seems to me quite inappropriate for designating the work of art. In fact, it implies that the aesthetic object presents only the appearance of a finality and is limited to soliciting the free and ordered play of the imagination. It forgets that the imagination of the spectator has not only a regulating function, but a constitutive one. It does not play; it is called upon to recompose the beautiful object beyond the traces left by the artist. The imagination can not revel in itself any more than can the

other functions of the mind; it is always on the outside, always engaged in an enterprise. There would be finality without end if some object offered such a set ordering that it would lead us to suppose that it has one even though we can not ascribe one to it. By defining the beautiful in this way one can — and this is Kant's aim — liken the beauty of art to natural beauty, since a flower, for example, presents so much symmetry, such harmonious colors, and such regular curves, that one is immediately tempted to seek a finalist explanation for all these properties and to see them as just so many means at the disposal of an unknown end. But that is exactly the error. The beauty of nature is in no way comparable to that of art. The work of art *does not have* an end; there we agree with Kant. But the reason is that it is an end. The Kantian formula does not account for the appeal which resounds at the basis of each painting, each statue, each book. Kant believes that the work of art first exists as fact and that it is then seen. Whereas, it exists only if one *looks* at it and if it is first pure appeal, pure exigence to exist. It is not an instrument whose existence is manifest and whose end is undetermined. It presents itself as a task to be discharged; from the very beginning it places itself on the level of the categorical imperative. You are perfectly free to leave that book on the table. But if you open it, you assume responsibility for it. For freedom is not experienced by its enjoying its free subjective functioning, but in a creative act required by an imperative. This absolute end, this imperative which is transcendent yet acquiesced in, which freedom itself adopts as its own,

is what we call a value. The work of art is a value because it is an appeal.

If I appeal to my readers so that we may carry the enterprise which I have begun to a successful conclusion, it is self-evident that I consider him as a pure freedom, as an unconditioned activity; thus, in no case can I address myself to his passivity, that is, try to *affect* him, to communicate to him, from the very first, emotions of fear, desire, or anger. There are, doubtless, authors who concern themselves solely with arousing these emotions because they are foreseeable, manageable, and because they have at their disposal sure-fire means for provoking them. But it is also true that they are reproached for this kind of thing, as Euripides has been since antiquity because he had children appear on the stage. Freedom is alienated in the state of passion; it is abruptly engaged in partial enterprises; it loses sight of its task which is to produce an absolute end. And the book is no longer anything but a means for feeding hate or desire. The writer should not seek to *overwhelm;* otherwise he is in contradiction with himself; if he wishes to *make demands* he must propose only the task to be fulfilled. Hence, the character of pure presentation which appears essential to the work of art. The reader must be able to make a certain aesthetic withdrawal. This is what Gautier foolishly confused with "art for art's sake" and the Parnassians with the imperturbability of the artist. It is simply a matter of precaution, and Genet more justly calls it the author's politeness toward the reader. But that does not mean that the writer makes an appeal to some sort of abstract and conceptual freedom. One certainly creates the aes-

thetic object with feelings; if it is touching, it appears through our tears; if it is comic, it will be recognized by laughter. However, these feelings are of a particular kind. They have their origin in freedom; they are loaned. The belief which I accord the tale is freely assented to. It is a Passion, in the Christian sense of the word, that is, a freedom which resolutely puts itself into a state of passivity to obtain a certain transcendent effect by this sacrifice. The reader renders himself credulous; he descends into credulity which, though it ends by enclosing him like a dream, is at every moment conscious of being free. An effort is sometimes made to force the writer into this dilemma: "Either one believes in your story, and it is intolerable, or one does not believe in it, and it is ridiculous." But the argument is absurd because the characteristic of aesthetic consciousness is to be a belief by means of engagement, by oath, a belief sustained by fidelity to one's self and to the author, a perpetually renewed choice to believe. I can awaken at every moment, and I know it; but I do not want to; reading is a free dream. So that all feelings which are exacted on the basis of this imaginary belief are like particular modulations of my freedom. Far from absorbing or masking it, they are so many different ways it has chosen to reveal itself to itself. Raskolnikov, as I have said, would only be a shadow, without the mixture of repulsion and friendship which I feel for him and which makes him live. But, by a reversal which is the characteristic of the imaginary object, it is not his behavior which excites my indignation or esteem, but my indignation and esteem which give consistency and objectivity to his behavior.

Thus, the reader's feelings are never dominated by the object, and as no external reality can condition them, they have their permanent source in freedom; that is, they are all generous — for I call a feeling generous which has its origin and its end in freedom. Thus, reading is an exercise in generosity, and what the writer requires of the reader is not the application of an abstract freedom but the gift of his whole person, with his passions, his prepossessions, his sympathies, his sexual temperament, and his scale of values. Only this person will give himself generously; freedom goes through and through him and comes to transform the darkest masses of his sensibility. And as activity has rendered itself passive in order for it better to create the object, vice-versa, passivity becomes an act; the man who is reading has raised himself to the highest degree. That is why we see people who are known for their toughness shed tears at the recital of imaginary misfortunes; for the moment they have become what they would have been if they had not spent their lives hiding their freedom from themselves.

Thus, the author writes in order to address himself to the freedom of readers, and he requires it in order to make his work exist. But he does not stop there; he also requires that they return this confidence which he has given them, that they recognize his creative freedom, and that they in turn solicit it by a symmetrical and inverse appeal. Here there appears the other dialectical paradox of reading; the more we experience our freedom, the more we recognize that of the other; the more he demands of us, the more we demand of him.

When I am enchanted with a landscape, I know very

well that it is not I who create it, but I also know that without me the relations which are established before my eyes among the trees, the foliage, the earth, and the grass would not exist at all. I know that I can give no reason for the appearance of finality which I discover in the assortment of hues and in the harmony of the forms and movements created by the wind. Yet, it exists; there it is before my eyes, and I can make *there be* being only if being already *is*. But even if I believe in God, I can not establish any passage, unless it be purely verbal, between the divine, universal solicitude and the particular spectacle which I am considering. To say that He made the landscape in order to charm me or that He made me the kind of person who is pleased by it is to take a question for an answer. Is the marriage of this blue and that green deliberate? How can I know? The idea of a universal providence is no guarantee of any particular intention, especially in the case under consideration, since the green of the grass is explained by biological laws, specific constants, and geographical determinism, while the reason for the blue of the water is accounted for by the depth of the river, the nature of the soil and the swiftness of the current. The assorting of the shades, if it is willed, can only be something *thrown into the bargain;* it is the meeting of two causal series, that is to say, at first sight, a fact of chance. At best, the finality remains problematic. All the relations we establish remain hypotheses; no end is proposed to us in the manner of an imperative, since none is expressly revealed as having been willed by a creator. Thus, our freedom is never *called forth* by natural beauty. Or rather, there is an appearance of

order in the ensemble of the foliage, the forms, and the movements, hence, the illusion of a calling forth which seems to solicit this freedom and which disappears immediately when one regards it. Hardly have we begun to run our eyes over this arrangement, than the call disappears; we remain alone, free to tie up one color with another or with a third, to set up a relationship between the tree and the water or the tree and the sky, or the tree, the water and the sky. My freedom becomes caprice. To the extent that I establish new relationships, I remove myself further from the illusory objectivity which solicits me. I *muse* about certain motifs which are vaguely outlined by the things; the natural reality is no longer anything but a pretext for musing. Or, in that case, because I have deeply regretted that this arrangement which was momentarily perceived was not offered to me by somebody and consequently is not *real,* the result is that I fix my dream, that I transpose it to canvas or in writing. Thus, I interpose myself between the finality without end which appears in the natural spectacles and the gaze of other men. I transmit it to them. It becomes human by this transmission. Art here is a ceremony of the *gift* and the gift alone brings about the metamorphosis. It is something like the transmission of titles and powers in the matriarchate where the mother does not possess the names, but is the indispensable intermediary between uncle and nephew. Since I have captured this illusion in flight, since I lay it out for other men and have disengaged it and rethought it for them, they can consider it with confidence. It has become intentional. As for me, I remain, to be sure, at the border

of the subjective and the objective without ever being able to contemplate the objective ordonnance which I transmit.

The reader, on the contrary, progresses in security. However far he may go, the author has gone farther. Whatever connections he may establish among the different parts of the book — among the chapters or the words — he has a guarantee, namely, that they have been expressly willed. As Descartes says, he can even pretend that there is a secret order among parts which seem to have no connection. The creator has preceded him along the way, and the most beautiful disorders are effects of art, that is, again order. Reading is induction, interpolation, extrapolation, and the basis of these activities rests on the reader's will, as for a long time it was believed that that of scientific induction rested on the divine will. A gentle force accompanies us and supports us from the first page to the last. That does not mean that we fathom the artist's intentions easily. They constitute, as we have said, the object of conjectures, and there is an *experience* of the reader; but these conjuctures are supported by the great certainty we have that the beauties which appear in the book are never accidental. In nature, the tree and the sky harmonize only by chance; if, on the contrary, in the novel, the protagonists find themselves in a *certain* tower, in a *certain* prison, if they stroll in a *certain* garden, it is a matter both of the restitution of independent causal series (the character had a certain state of mind which was due to a succession of psychological and social events; on the other hand, he betook himself to a determined place and the layout of the city required him to

cross a certain park) and of the expression of a deeper finality, for the park came into existence only *in order to* harmonize with a certain state of mind, to express it by means of things or to put it into relief by a vivid contrast, and the state of mind itself was conceived in connection with the landscape. Here it is causality which is appearance and which might be called "causality without cause," and it is the finality which is the profound reality. But if I can thus in all confidence put the order of ends under the order of causes, it is because by opening the book I am asserting that the object has its source in human freedom.

If I were to suspect the artist of having written out of passion and in passion, my confidence would immediately vanish, for it would serve no purpose to have supported the order of causes by the order of ends. The latter would be supported in its turn by a psychic causality and the work of art would end by re-entering the chain of determinism. Certainly I do not deny when I am reading that the author may be impassioned, nor even that he might have conceived the first plan of his work under the sway of passion. But his decision to write supposes that he withdraws somewhat from his feelings, in short, that he has transformed his emotions into free emotions as I do mine while reading him; that is, that he is in an attitude of generosity.

Thus, reading is a pact of generosity between author and reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much as he demands of himself. For this confidence is itself generosity. Nothing can force the author to believe that his reader

will use his freedom; nothing can force the reader to believe that the author has used his. Both of them make a free decision. There is then established a dialectical going-and-coming; when I read, I make demands; if my demands are met, what I am then reading provokes me to demand more of the author, which means to demand of the author that he demand more of me. And, vice-versa, the author's demand is that I carry my demands to the highest pitch. Thus, my freedom, by revealing itself, reveals the freedom of the other.

It matters little whether the aesthetic object is the product of "realistic" art (or supposedly such) or "formal" art. At any rate, the natural relations are inverted; that tree on the first plane of the Cézanne painting first appears as the product of a causal chain. But the causality is an illusion; it will doubtless remain as a proposition as long as we look at the painting, but it will be supported by a deep finality; if the tree is placed in such a way, it is because the rest of the painting *requires* that this form and those colors be placed on the first plane. Thus, through the phenomenal causality, our gaze attains finality as the deep structure of the object, and, beyond finality, it attains human freedom as its source and original basis. Vermeer's realism is carried so far that at first it might be thought to be photographic. But if one considers the splendor of his texture, the pink and velvety glory of his little brick walls, the blue thickness of a branch of woodbine, the glazed darkness of his vestibules, the orange-colored flesh of his faces which are as polished as the stone of holy-water basins, one suddenly feels, in the pleasure that he experiences, that the finality is not

so much in the forms or colors as in his material imagination. It is the very substance and temper of the things which here give the forms their reason for being. With this realist we are perhaps closest to absolute creation, since it is in the very passivity of the matter that we meet the unfathomable freedom of man.

The work is never limited to the painted, sculpted, or narrated object. Just as one perceives things only against the background of the world, so the objects represented by art appear against the background of the universe. On the background of the adventures of Fabrice are the Italy of 1820, Austria, France, the sky and stars which the Abbé Blanis consults, and finally the whole earth. If the painter presents us with a field or a vase of flowers, his paintings are windows which are open on the whole world. We follow the red path which is buried among the wheat much farther than Van Gogh has painted it, among other wheat fields, under other clouds, to the river which empties into the sea, and we extend to infinity, to the other end of the world, the deep finality which supports the existence of the field and the earth. So that, through the various objects which it produces or reproduces, the creative act aims at a total renewal of the world. Each painting, each book, is a recovery of the totality of being. Each of them presents this totality to the freedom of the spectator. For this is quite the final goal of art: to recover this world by giving it to be seen as it is, but as if it had its source in human freedom. But, since what the author creates takes on objective reality only in the eyes of the spectator, this recovery is consecrated by the ceremony of the spectacle

— and particularly of reading. We are already in a better position to answer the question we raised a while ago: the writer chooses to appeal to the freedom of other men so that, by the reciprocal implications of their demands, they may re-adapt the totality of being to man and may again enclose the universe within man.

If we wish to go still further, we must bear in mind that the writer, like all other artists, aims at giving his reader a certain feeling that is customarily called aesthetic pleasure, and which I would very much rather call aesthetic joy, and that this feeling, when it appears, is a sign that the work is achieved. It is therefore fitting to examine it in the light of the preceding considerations. In effect, this joy, which is denied to the creator, insofar as he creates, becomes one with the aesthetic consciousness of the spectator, that is, in the case under consideration, of the reader. It is a complex feeling but one whose structures and condition are inseparable from one another. It is identical, at first, with the recognition of a transcendent and absolute end which, for a moment, suspends the utilitarian round of ends-means and means-ends[1], that is, of an appeal or, what amounts to the same thing, of a value. And the positional consciousness which I take of this value is necessarily accompanied by the non-positional consciousness of my freedom, since my freedom is manifested to itself by a transcendent exigency. The recognition of freedom by itself is joy, but this structure of non-thetical consciousness implies another: since, in effect, reading is creation, my freedom

1. In *practical life* a means may be taken for an end as soon as one searches for it, and each end is revealed as a means of attaining another end.

does not only appear to itself as pure autonomy but as creative activity, that is, it is not limited to giving itself its own law but perceives itself as being constitutive of the object. It is on this level that the phenomenon specifically is manifested, that is, a creation wherein the created object is given *as object* to its creator. It is the sole case in which the creator gets any enjoyment out of the object he creates. And the word enjoyment which is applied to the positional consciousness of the work read indicates sufficiently that we are in the presence of an essential structure of aesthetic joy. This positional enjoyment is accompanied by the non-positional consciousness of being essential in relation to an object perceived as essential. I shall call this aspect of aesthetic consciousness the feeling of security; it is this which stamps the strongest aesthetic emotions with a sovereign calm. It has its origin in the authentication of a strict harmony between subjectivity and objectivity. As, on the other hand, the aesthetic object is properly the world insofar as it is aimed at through the imaginary, aesthetic joy accompanies the positional consciousness that the world is a value, that is, a task proposed to human freedom. I shall call this the aesthetic modification of the human project, for, as usual, the world appears as the horizon of our situation, as the infinite distance which separates us from ourselves, as the synthetic totality of the given, as the undifferentiated ensemble of obstacles and implements — but never as a demand addressed to our freedom. Thus, aesthetic joy proceeds to this level of the consciousness which I take of recovering and internalizing that which is non-ego par excellence, since I trans-

form the given into an imperative and the fact into a value. The world is *my task,* that is, the essential and freely accepted function of my freedom is to make that unique and absolute object which is the universe come into being in an unconditioned movement. And, thirdly, the preceding structures imply a pact between human freedoms, for, on the one hand, reading is a confident and exacting recognition of the freedom of the writer, and, on the other hand, aesthetic pleasure, as it is itself experienced in the form of a value, involves an absolute exigence in regard to others; every man, insofar as he is a freedom, feels the same pleasure in reading the same work. Thus, all mankind is present in its highest freedom; it sustains the being of a world which is both *its* world and the "external" world. In aesthetic joy the positional consciousness is an *image-making* consciousness of the world in its totality both as being and having to be, both as totally ours and totally foreign, and the more ours as it is the more foreign. The non-positional consciousness *really* envelops the harmonious totality of human freedoms insofar as it makes the object of a universal confidence and exigency.

To write is thus both to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader. It is to have recourse to the consciousness of others in order to make one's self be recognized as *essential* to the totality of being; it is to wish to live this essentiality by means of interposed persons; but, on the other hand, as the real world is revealed only by action, as one can feel himself in it only by exceeding it in order to change it, the novelist's universe would lack thickness if it were not dis-

covered in a movement to transcend it. It has often been observed that an object in a story does not derive its density of existence from the number and length of the descriptions devoted to it, but from the complexity of its connections with the different characters. The more often the characters handle it, take it up, and put it down, in short, go beyond it toward their own ends, the more real will it appear. Thus, of the world of the novel, that is, the totality of men and things, we may say that in order for it to offer its maximum density the disclosure-creation by which the reader discovers it must also be an imaginary engagement in the action; in other words, the more disposed one is to change it, the more alive it will be. The error of realism has been to believe that the real reveals itself to contemplation, and that consequently one could draw an impartial picture of it. How could that be possible, since the very perception is partial, since by itself the naming is already a modification of the object? And how could the writer, who wants himself to be essential to this universe, want to be essential to the injustice which this universe comprehends? Yet, he must be; but if he accepts being the creator of injustices, it is in a movement which goes beyond them toward their abolition. As for me who read, if I create and keep alive an unjust world, I can not help making myself responsible for it. And the author's whole art is bent on obliging me to *create* what he *discloses,* therefore to compromise myself. So both of us bear the responsibility for the universe. And precisely because this universe is supported by the joint effort of our two freedoms, and because the author, with me as medium, has attempted

to integrate it into the human, it must appear truly *in itself,* in its very marrow, as being shot through and through with a freedom which has taken human freedom as its end, and if it is not really the city of ends that it ought to be, it must at least be a stage along the way; in a word, it must be a becoming and it must always be considered and presented not as a crushing mass which weighs us down, but from the point of view of its going beyond toward that city of ends. However bad and hopeless the humanity which it paints may be, the work must have an air of generosity. Not, of course, that this generosity is to be expressed by means of edifying discourses and virtuous characters; it must not even be premeditated, and it is quite true that fine sentiments do not make fine books. But it must be the very warp and woof of the book, the stuff out of which the people and things are cut; whatever the subject, a sort of essential lightness must appear everywhere and remind us that the work is never a natural datum, but an *exigence* and a *gift.* And if I am given this world with its injustices, it is not so that I might contemplate them coldly, but that I might animate them with my indignation, that I might disclose them and create them with their nature as injustices, that is, as abuses to be suppressed. Thus, the writer's universe will only reveal itself in all its depth to the examination, the admiration, and the indignation of the reader; and the generous love is a promise to maintain, and the generous indignation is a promise to change, and the admiration a promise to imitate; although literature is one thing and morality a quite different one, at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imper-

ative. For, since the one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of his opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men. And since readers, like the author, recognize this freedom only to demand that it manifest itself, the work can be defined as an imaginary presentation of the world insofar as it demands human freedom. The result of which is that there is no "gloomy literature", since, however dark may be the colors in which one paints the world, he paints it only so that free men may feel their freedom as they face it. Thus, there are only good and bad novels. The bad novel aims to please by flattering, whereas the good one is an exigence and an act of faith. But above all, the unique point of view from which the author can present the world to those freedoms whose concurrence he wishes to bring about is that of a world to be impregnated always with more freedom. It would be inconceivable that this unleashing of generosity provoked by the writer could be used to authorize an injustice, and that the reader could enjoy his freedom while reading a work which approves or accepts or simply abstains from condemning the subjection of man by man. One can imagine a good novel being written by an American Negro even if hatred of the whites were spread all over it, because it is the freedom of his race that he demands through this hatred. And, as he invites me to assume the attitude of generosity, the moment I feel myself a pure freedom I can not bear to identify myself with a race of op-

pressors. Thus, I require of all freedoms that they demand the liberation of colored people against the white race and against myself insofar as I am a part of it, but nobody can suppose for a moment that it is possible to write a good novel in praise of anti-Semitism.[1] For, the moment I feel that my freedom is indissolubly linked with that of all other men, it can not be demanded of me that I use it to approve the enslavement of a part of these men. Thus, whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist, or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject — freedom.

Hence, any attempt to enslave his readers threatens him in his very art. A blacksmith can be affected by fascism in his life as a man, but not necessarily in his craft; a writer will be affected in both, and even more in his craft than in his life. I have seen writers, who before the war, called for fascism with all their hearts, smitten with sterility at the very moment when the Nazis were loading them with honors. I am thinking of Drieu la Rochelle in particular; he was mistaken, but he was sincere. He proved it. He had agreed to direct a Nazi-inspired review. The first few months he reprimanded, rebuked, and lectured his countrymen. No one answered

1. This last remark may arouse some readers. If so, I'd like to know a single good novel whose express purpose was to serve oppression, a single good novel which has been written against Jews, negroes, workers, or colonial people. "But if there isn't any, that's no reason why someone may not write one some day." But you then admit that you are an abstract theoretician. You, not I. For it is in the name of your abstract conception of art that you assert the possibility of a fact which has never come into being, whereas I limit myself to proposing an explanation for a recognized fact.

him because no one was free to do so. He became irritated; he no longer *felt* his readers. He became more insistent, but no sign appeared to prove that he had been understood. No sign of hatred, nor of anger either; nothing. He seemed disoriented, the victim of a growing distress. He complained bitterly to the Germans. His articles had been superb: they became shrill. The moment arrived when he struck his breast; no echo, except among the bought journalists whom he despised. He handed in his resignation, withdrew it, again spoke, still in the desert. Finally, he kept still, gagged by the silence of others. He had demanded the enslavement of others, but in his crazy mind he must have imagined that it was voluntary, that it was still free. It came; the man in him congratulated himself mightily, but the writer could not bear it. While this was going on, others, who, happily, were in the majority, understood that the freedom of writing implies the freedom of the citizen. One does not write for slaves. The art of prose is bound up with the only regime in which prose has meaning, democracy. When one is threatened, the other is too. And it is not enough to defend them with the pen. A day comes when the pen is forced to stop, and the writer must then take up arms. Thus, however you might have come to it, whatever the opinions you might have professed, literature throws you into battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are engaged, willy-nilly.

Engaged in what? Defending freedom? That's easy to say. Is it a matter of acting as guardian of ideal values like Benda's clerk before the betrayal,[1] or is it concrete,

1. The reference here is to Benda's *La Trahison des clercs*, translated into English as *The Treason of the Intellectuals*.—Translator's note.

everyday freedom which must be protected by our taking sides in political and social struggles? The question is tied up with another one, one very simple in appearance but which nobody ever asks himself: "For whom does one write?"

III

FOR WHOM DOES ONE WRITE?

At first sight, there doesn't seem to be any doubt: one writes for the universal reader, and we have seen, in effect, that the exigency of the writer is, as a rule, addressed to *all* men. But the preceding descriptions are ideal. As a matter of fact the writer knows that he speaks for freedoms which are swallowed up, masked, and unavailable; and his own freedom is not so pure; he has to clean it. It is dangerously easy to speak too readily about eternal values; eternal values are very, very fleshless. Even freedom, if one considers it *sub specie aeternitatis*, seems to be a withered branch; for, like the sea, there is no end to it. It is nothing else but the movement by which one perpetually uproots and liberates himself. There is no given freedom. One must win an inner victory over his passions, his race, his class, and his nation and must conquer other men along with himself. But what counts in this case is the particular form of the obstacle to surmount, of the resistance to overcome. That is what gives form to freedom in each circumstance. If the writer has chosen, as Benda has it, to talk drivel, he can speak in fine, rolling periods of that eternal freedom which National Socialism, Stalinist communism,

and the capitalist democracies all lay claim to. He won't disturb anybody; he won't address anybody. Everything he asks for is granted him in advance. But it is an abstract dream. Whether he wants to or not, and even if he has his eyes on eternal laurels, the writer is speaking to his contemporaries and brothers of his class and race.

As a matter of fact, it has not been sufficiently observed that a work of the mind is by nature *allusive*. Even if the author's aim is to give the fullest possible representation of his object, there is never any question as to whether he is telling *everything*. He knows far more than he tells. This is so because language is elliptical. If I want to let my neighbor know that a wasp has gotten in by the window, there is no need for a long speech. "Watch out!" or "Hey!" — a word is enough, a gesture — as soon as he sees it, everything is clear. Imagine a phonograph record reproducing for us, without comment, the everyday conversations of a household in Provins or Angoulême — we wouldn't understand a thing; the *context* would be lacking, that is, memories and perceptions in common, the situation and the enterprises of the couple; in short, the world such as each of the speakers knows it to appear to the other.

The same with reading: people of a same period and collectivity, who have lived through the same events, who have raised or avoided the same questions, have the same taste in their mouth; they have the same complicity, and there are the same corpses among them. That is why it is not necessary to write so much; there are key-words. If I were to tell an audience of Americans about the German occupation, there would have to be a great deal of

analysis and precaution. I would waste twenty pages in dispelling preconceptions, prejudices, and legends. Afterward, I would have to be sure of my position at every step; I would have to look for images and symbols in American history which would enable them to understand ours; I would always have to keep in mind the difference between our old man's pessimism and their childlike optimism. If I were to write about the same subject for Frenchmen, we are "entre nous." For example, it would be enough to say: "A concert of German military music in the band-stand of a public garden;" everything is there; a raw spring day, a park in the provinces, men with shaven skulls blowing away at their brasses, blind and deaf passers-by who quicken their steps, two or three sullen-looking listeners under the trees, this useless serenade to France which drifts off into the sky, our shame and our anguish, our anger, and our pride too. Thus, the reader I am addressing is neither Micromégas nor L'Ingénu; nor is he God the Father either. He has not the ignorance of the noble savage to whom everything has to be explained on the basis of principles; he is not a spirit or a *tabula rasa.* Neither has he the omniscience of an angel or of the Eternal Father. I reveal certain aspects of the universe to him; I take advantage of what he knows to attempt to teach him what he does not know. Suspended between total ignorance and all-knowingness, he has a definite stock of knowledge which varies from moment to moment and which is enough to reveal his *historicity.* In actual fact, he is not an instantaneous consciousness, a pure timeless affirmation of freedom, nor does he soar above history; he is involved in it.

Authors too are historical. And that is precisely the reason why some of them want to escape from history by a leap into eternity. The book, serving as a go-between, establishes a historical contact among the men who are steeped in the same history and who likewise contribute to its making. Writing and reading are two facets of the same historical fact, and the freedom to which the writer invites us is not a pure abstract consciousness of being free. Strictly speaking, it *is not*; it wins itself in a historical situation; each book proposes a concrete liberation on the basis of a particular alienation. Hence, in each one there is an implicit recourse to institutions, customs, certain forms of oppression and conflict, to the wisdom and the folly of the day, to lasting passions and passing stubbornness, to superstitions and recent victories of common sense, to evidence and ignorance, to particular modes of reasoning which the sciences have made fashionable and which are applied in all domains, to hopes, to fears, to habits of sensibility, imagination, and even perception, and finally, to customs and values which have been handed down, to a whole world which the author and the reader have in common. It is this familiar world which the writer animates and penetrates with his freedom. It is on the basis of this world that the reader must bring about his concrete liberation; it is alienation, situation, and history. It is this world which I must change or preserve for myself and others. For if the immediate aspect of freedom is negativity, we know that it is not a matter of the abstract power of saying no, but of a concrete negativity which retains within itself (and is completely colored by) what it denies. And since the freedoms

of the author and reader seek and affect each other through a world, it can just as well be said that the author's choice of a certain aspect of the world determines the reader and, vice-versa, that it is by choosing his reader that the author decides upon his subject.

Thus, all works of the mind contain within themselves the image of the reader for whom they are intended. I could draw the portrait of Nathanaël on the basis of *Les Nourritures terrestres*: I can see that the alienation from which he is urged to free himself is the family, the real-estate he owns or will own by inheritance, the utilitarian project, a conventional moralism, a narrow theism; I also see that he is cultured and has leisure, since it would be absurd to offer Ménalque as an example to an unskilled laborer, a man out of work, or an American negro; I know that he is not threatened by any external danger, neither by hunger, war, nor class or racial oppression; the only danger is that of being the victim of his own milieu. Therefore, he is a white rich Aryan, the heir of a great bourgeois family which lives in a period which is still relatively stable and easy, in which the ideology of the possessing class is barely beginning to decline, exactly the Daniel de Fontanin whom Roger Martin du Gard later presented to us as an enthusiastic admirer of André Gide.

To take a still more recent example, it is striking that *The Silence of the Sea*, a work written by a man who was a member of the resistance from the very beginning and whose aim is perfectly evident, was received with hostility in the émigré circles of New York, London, and sometimes even Algiers, and they even went so far as to tax its author with collaboration. The reason is that Ver-

cors did not aim at *that* public. In the occupied zone, on the other hand, nobody doubted the author's intentions or the efficacy of his writing; he was writing for us. As a matter of fact, I do not think that one can defend Vercors by saying that his German is real or that his old Frenchman and French girl are real. Koestler has written some very fine pages about this question; the silence of the two French characters has no psychological verisimilitude; it even has a slight taste of anachronism; it recalls the stubborn muteness of Maupassant's patriotic peasants during another occupation, *another* occupation with other hopes, other anguish, and other customs. As to the German officer, his portrait does not lack life, but, as is self-evident, Vercors, who, at the time, refused to have any contact with the army of occupation, did it "without a model," by combining the probable elements of this character. Thus, it is not in the name of *truth* that these images should be preferred to those which Anglo-Saxon propaganda was shaping each day. But for a Frenchman of continental France Vercors' story, in 1941, was *effective*. When the enemy is separated from you by a barrier of fire, you have to judge him as a whole, as the incarnation of evil; all war is a Manicheism. It is therefore understandable that the English newspapers did not waste their time distinguishing the wheat from the chaff in the German army. But, vice-versa, the conquered and occupied populations, who mingled with their conquerors, relearned by familiarization and the effects of clever propaganda to consider them as men. Good men and bad men; good *and* bad at the same time. A work which in '41 would have presented the German soldiers to them

as ogres would have made them laugh and would have failed in its purpose.

As early as the end of '42 *The Silence of the Sea* had lost its effectiveness; the reason is that the war was starting again on our soil. On one side, underground propaganda, sabotage, derailment of trains, and acts of violence; and on the other, curfew, deportations, imprisonment, torture, and execution of hostages. An invisible barrier of fire once again separated Germans and Frenchmen. We no longer wished to know whether the Germans who plucked out the eyes and ripped off the nails of our friends were accomplices or victims of Nazism; it was no longer enough to maintain a lofty silence before them; besides, they would not have tolerated it. At this turn of the war it was necessary to be either for them or against them. In the midst of bombardments and massacres, of burned villages and deportations, Vercors' story seemed like an idyll; it had lost its public. Its public was the man of '41 humiliated by defeat but astonished at the studied courtesy of the occupant, desiring peace, terrified by the spectre of Bolshevism and misled by the speeches of Pétain. It was in vain to present the Germans to this man as bloodthirsty brutes. On the contrary, you had to admit to him that they might be polite and even likable, and since he had discovered with surprise that most of them were "men like us," he had to be re-shown that even if such were the case, fraternizing was impossible, that the more likable they seemed, the more unhappy and impotent they were, and that it was necessary to fight against a régime and an ideology even if the men who brought it to us did not seem bad. And, in short, as one

was addressing a passive crowd, as there were still rather few important organizations, and as these showed themselves to be highly precautious in their recruiting, the only form of opposition that could be required of the population was silence, scorn, and an obedience which was forced and which showed it.

Thus, Vercors' story defined its public; by defining it, it defined itself. It wanted to combat within the mind of the French bourgeoisie of 1941 the effects of Pétain's interview with Hitler at Montoire. A year and a half after the defeat it was alive, virulent, and effective. In a half-century it will no longer excite anyone. An ill-informed public will still read it as an agreeable and somewhat languid tale about the war of 1939. It seems that bananas have a better taste when they have just been picked. Works of the mind should likewise be eaten on the spot.

One might be tempted to accuse any attempt to explain a work of the mind by the public to which it is addressed for its vain subtlety and its indirect character. Is it not more simple, direct, and rigorous to take the condition of the author himself as the determining factor? Ought one not be satisfied with Taine's notion of the "milieu"? I answer that the explanation by the milieu is, in effect, *determinative*: the milieu *produces* the writer; that is why I do not believe in it. On the contrary, the public calls to him, that is, it puts questions to his freedom. The milieu is a *vis a tergo*; the public, on the contrary, is a waiting, an emptiness to be filled in, *an aspiration*, figuratively and literally. In a word, it is the *other.* And I am so far from rejecting the explanation of the

work by the situation of the man that I have always considered the project of writing as the free exceeding of a certain human and *total* situation. In which, moreover, it is not different from other undertakings. Étiemble in a witty but superficial article writes,[1] "I was going to revise my little dictionary when chance put three lines of Jean-Paul Sartre right under my nose: 'In effect, for us the writer is neither a Vestal nor an Ariel. Do what he may, he's in the thick of it, marked and compromised down to his deepest refuge.' To be in the thick of it, up to the ears. I recognized, in a way, the words of Blaise Pascal: 'We are embarked.' But at once I saw engagement lose all its value, reduced suddenly to the most ordinary of facts, the fact of the prince and the slave, to the human condition."

That's what I said all right. But Étiemble is being silly. If every man is embarked, that does not at all mean that he is fully conscious of it. Most men pass their time in hiding their engagement from themselves. That does not necessarily mean that they attempt evasions by lying, by artificial paradises, or by a life of make-believe. It is enough for them to dim their lanterns, to see the foreground without the background and, vice-versa, to see the ends while passing over the means in silence, to refuse solidarity with their kind, to take refuge in the spirit of pompousness, to remove all value from life by considering it from the point of view of someone who is dead, and at the same time, all horror from death by fleeing it in the banality of everyday existence, to per-

1. Etiemble: "Happy the writers who die for something." *Combat*, January 24, 1947.

suade themselves, if they belong to an oppressing class, that they are escaping their class by the loftiness of their feelings, and, if they belong to the oppressed, to conceal from themselves their complicity with oppression by asserting that one can remain free while in chains if one has a taste for the inner life. Writers can have recourse to all this just like anyone else. There are some, and they are the majority, who furnish a whole arsenal of ruses to the reader who wants to go on sleeping quietly.

I shall say that a writer is engaged when he tries to achieve the most lucid and the most complete consciousness of being embarked, that is, when he causes the engagement of immediate spontaneity to advance, for himself and others, to the reflective. The writer is, par excellence, a mediator and his engagement is mediation. But, if it is true that we must account for his work on the basis of his condition, it must also be borne in mind that his condition is not only that of a man in general but precisely that of a writer as well. Perhaps he is a Jew, and a Czech, and of peasant family, but he is a Jewish *writer*, a Czech *writer* and of rural stock. When, in another article, I tried to define the situation of the Jew, the best I could do was this: "The Jew is a man whom other men consider as a Jew and who is obliged to choose himself on the basis of the situation which is made for him." For there are qualities which come to us solely by means of the judgment of others. In the case of the writer, the case is more complex, for no one is obliged to choose himself as a writer. Hence, freedom is at the origin. I am an author, first of all, by my free project of writing. But at once it follows that I become a man

whom other men consider as a writer, that is, who has to respond to a certain demand and who has been invested whether he likes it or not, with a certain social function. Whatever game he may want to play, he must play it on the basis of the representation which others have of him. He may want to modify the character that one attributes to the man of letters in a given society; but in order to change it, he must first slip into it. Hence, the public intervenes, with its customs, its vision of the world, and its conception of society and of literature within that society. It surrounds the writer, it hems him in, and its imperious or sly demands, its refusals and its flights, are the given facts on whose basis a work can be constructed.

Let us take the case of the great negro writer, Richard Wright. If we consider only his condition as a *man*, that is, as a Southern "nigger" transported to the North, we shall at once imagine that he can only write about Negroes or Whites *seen through the eyes of Negroes.* Can one imagine for a moment that he would agree to pass his life in the contemplation of the eternal True, Good, and Beautiful when ninety percent of the negroes in the South are practically deprived of the right to vote? And if anyone speaks here about the treason of the clerks, I answer that there are no clerks among the oppressed. Clerks are necessarily the parasites of oppressing classes or races. Thus, if an American negro finds that he has a vocation as a writer, he discovers his subject at the same time. He is the man who sees the whites from the outside, who assimilates the white culture from the outside, and each of whose books will show the alienation of the black race within American society. Not objec-

tively, like the realists, but passionately, and in a way that will compromise his reader. But this examination leaves the nature of his work undetermined; he might be a pamphleteer, a blues-writer, or the Jeremiah of the Southern negroes.

If we want to go further, we must consider his public. To whom does Richard Wright address himself? Certainly not to the universal man. The essential characteristic of the notion of the universal man is that he is not involved in any particular age, and that he is no more and no less moved by the lot of the negroes of Louisiana than by that of the Roman slaves in the time of Spartacus. The universal man can think of nothing but universal values. He is a pure and abstract affirmation of the inalienable right of man. But neither can Wright think of intending his books for the white racists of Virginia or South Carolina whose minds are made up in advance and who will not open them. Nor to the black peasants of the bayous who can not read. And if he seems to be happy about the reception his books have had in Europe, still it is obvious that at the beginning he had not the slightest idea of writing for the European public. Europe is far away. Its indignation is ineffectual and hypocritical. Not much is to be expected from the nations which have enslaved the Indies, Indo-China, and negro Africa. These considerations are enough to define his readers. He is addressing himself to the cultivated negroes of the North and the white Americans of good-will (intellectuals, democrats of the left, radicals, C.I.O. workers).

It is not that he is not aiming through them at all men but it is *through them* that he is thus aiming. Just as

one can catch a glimpse of eternal freedom at the horizon of the historical and concrete freedom which it pursues, so the human race is at the horizon of the concrete and historical group of its readers. The illiterate negro peasants and the Southern planters represent a margin of abstract possibilities around its real public. After all, an illiterate may learn to read. *Black Boy* may fall into the hands of the most stubborn of negrophobes and may open his eyes. This merely means that every human project exceeds its actual limits and extends itself step by step to the infinite.

Now, it is to be noted that there is a fracture at the very heart of this *actual public.* For Wright, the negro readers represent subjectivity. The same childhood, the same difficulties, the same complexes: a mere hint is enough for them; they understand with their hearts. In trying to become clear about his own personal situation, he clarifies theirs for them. He mediates, names, and shows them the life they lead from day to day in its immediacy, the life they suffer without finding words to formulate their sufferings. He is their conscience, and the movement by which he raises himself from the immediate to the reflective recapturing of his condition is that of his whole race. But whatever the good-will of the white readers may be, for a negro author they represent the *Other.* They have not lived through what he has lived through. They can understand the negro's condition only by an extreme stretch of the imagination and by relying upon analogies which at any moment may deceive them. On the other hand, Wright does not completely know them. It is only from without that he conceives their

proud security and that tranquil certainty, common to all white Aryans, that the world is white and that they own it. The words he puts down on paper have not the same context for whites as for negroes. They must be chosen by guesswork, since he does not know what resonances they will set up in those strange minds. And when he speaks to them, their very aim is changed. It is a matter of implicating them and making them take stock of their responsibilities. He must make them indignant and ashamed.

Thus, each work of Wright contains what Baudelaire would have called "a double simultaneous postulation;" each word refers to two contexts; two forces are applied simultaneously to each phrase and determine the incomparable tension of his tale. Had he spoken to the whites alone, he might have turned out to be more prolix, more didactic, and more abusive; to the negroes alone, still more elliptical, more of a confederate, and more elegiac. In the first case, his work might have come close to satire; in the second, to prophetic lamentations. Jeremiah spoke only to the Jews. But Wright, a writer for a split public, has been able both to maintain and go beyond this split. He has made it the pretext for a work of art.

The writer consumes and does not produce, even if he has decided to serve the community's interests with his pen. His works remain gratuitous; thus no price can be set on their value. Their market value is fixed arbitrarily. In some periods he is pensioned and in others he gets a percentage of the sales of the book. But there is no more common measure between the work of the mind

and percentage remuneration in modern society than there was between the poem and the royal pension under the old régime. Actually, the writer is not paid; he is fed, well or badly, according to the period. The system cannot work any differently, for his activity is *useless.* It is not at all *useful*; it is sometimes *harmful* for society to become self-conscious. For the fact is that the useful is defined within the framework of an established society and in relationship to institutions, values, and ends which are already fixed. If society sees itself and, in particular, sees itself as *seen*, there is, by virtue of this very fact, a contesting of the established values of the regime. The writer presents it with its image; he calls upon it to assume it or to change itself. At any rate, it changes; it loses the equilibrium which its ignorance had given it; it wavers between shame and cynicism; it practises dishonesty; thus, the writer gives society *a guilty conscience*; he is thereby in a state of perpetual antagonism toward the conservative forces which are maintaining the balance he tends to upset. For the transition to the mediate which can be brought about only by a negation of the immediate is a perpetual revolution.

Only the governing classes can allow themselves the luxury of remunerating so unproductive and dangerous an activity, and if they do so, it is a matter both of tactics and of misapprehension. Misapprehension for the most part: free from material cares, the members of the governing élite are sufficiently detached to want to have a reflective knowledge of themselves. They want to retrieve themselves, and they charge the artist with presenting them with their image without realizing that he will then make

them assume it. A tactic on the part of some who, having recognized the danger, pension the artist in order to control his destructive power. Thus, the writer is a parasite of the governing "élite." But, functionally, he moves in opposition to the interests of those who keep him alive.[1] Such is the original conflict which defines his condition.

Sometimes the conflict is obvious. We still talk about the courtiers who made the success of the *Marriage of Figaro* though it sounded the death-knell of the régime. Other times, it is masked, because to name is to show, and to show is to change. And as this activity of contestation, which is harmful to the established interests, ventures, in its very modest way, to concur in a change of régime, as, on the other hand, the oppressed classes have neither the leisure nor the taste for reading, the objective aspect of the conflict may express itself as an antagonism between the conservative forces, or the real public of the writer, and the progressive forces, or the virtual public.

In a classless society, one whose internal structure would be permanent revolution, the writer might be a mediator *for all*, and his contestation on principle might precede or accompany the changes in fact. In my opinion this is the deeper meaning we should give to the notion of *self-criticism*. The expanding of the real public up to the limits of his virtual public would bring about within his mind a reconciliation of hostile tendencies. Literature, entirely liberated, would represent *negativity* insofar as it is a necessary moment in reconstruction. But

1. To-day his public is spread out. He sometimes runs into a hundred thousand copies. A hundred thousand copies sold, that makes four hundred thousand readers. Thus, for France, one out of a hundred in the population.

to my knowledge this type of society does not for the moment exist, and it may be doubted whether it is possible. Thus, the conflict remains. It is at the origin of what I would call the writer's ups and downs and his bad conscience.

It is reduced to its simplest expression when the virtual public is practically nil and when the writer, instead of remaining on the margin of the privileged class, is absorbed by it. In that case literature identifies itself with the ideology of the directing class; reflection takes place within the class; contestation deals with details and is carried on in the name of uncontested principles. For example, that is what happened in Europe about the twelfth century; the clerk wrote exclusively for clerks. But he could keep a good conscience because there was a divorce between the spiritual and the temporal. The Christian Revolution brought in the spiritual, that is, the spirit itself, as a negativity, a contestation, and a transcendence, a perpetual construction, beyond the realm of Nature, of the *anti-natural* city of freedoms. But it was necessary that this universal power of surpassing the object be first encountered as an object, that this perpetual negation of Nature appear, in the first place, as nature, that this faculty of perpetually creating ideologies and of leaving them behind along the way be embodied, to begin with, in a particular ideology. In the first centuries of our era the spiritual was a captive of Christianity, or, if you prefer, Christianity was the spiritual itself but *alienated.* It was the spirit made object. Hence, it is evident that instead of appearing as the common and forever renewed experience of all men, it manifested itself at first

as the specialty of a few. Medieval society had spiritual needs, and, to serve them, it set up a body of specialists who were recruited by co-optation. To-day we consider reading and writing as human rights and, at the same time, as means for communicating with others which are almost as natural and spontaneous as oral language. That is why the most uncultured peasant is a potential reader. In the time of the clerks, they were techniques which were reserved strictly for professionals. They were not practised for their own sake, like spiritual exercises. Their aim was not to obtain access to that large and vague humanism which was later to be called "the humanities." They were means solely of preserving and transmitting Christian ideology. To be able to read was to have the necessary tool for acquiring knowledge of the sacred texts and their innumerable commentaries; to be able to write was to be able to comment. Other men no more aspired to possess these professional techniques than we aspire to-day to acquire that of the cabinet-maker or the palaeographer if we practice other professions. The barons counted on the clerks to produce and watch over spirituality. By themselves they were incapable of exercising control over writers as the public does to-day, and they were unable to distinguish heresy from orthodox beliefs if they were left without help. They got excited only when the pope had recourse to the secular arm. Then they pillaged and burned everything, but only because they had confidence in the pope, and they never turned up their noses at a chance to pillage. It is true that the ideology was ultimately intended for them, for them and the people, but it was communicated to them orally by preachings, and

the church very early made use of a simpler language than writing: the image. The sculpture of the cloisters and the cathedrals, the stained-glass windows, the paintings, and the mosaics speak of God and the Holy Story. The clerk wrote his chronicles, his philosophical works, his commentaries, and his poems on the margin of this vast illustrating enterprise of faith. He intended them for his peers; they were controlled by his superiors. He did not have to be concerned with the effects which his works would produce upon the masses, since he was assured in advance that they would have no knowledge of them. Nor did he want to introduce remorse into the conscience of a feudal plunderer or caitiff; violence was unlettered. Thus, for him it was neither a question of reflecting its own image back to the temporal, nor of taking sides, nor of disengaging the spiritual from historical experience by a continuous effort. Quite the contrary, as the writer was of the Church, as the Church was an immense spiritual college which proved its dignity by its resistance to change, as history and the temporal were one and spirituality was radically distinct from the temporal, as the aim of his clerkship was to maintain this distinction, that is, to maintain itself as a specialized body in the face of the century, as, in addition, the economy was so divided up and as means of communication were so few and slow that events which occurred in one province had no effect upon the neighboring province and as a monastery could enjoy its individual peace, like the hero of the *Acharnians,* while its country was at war, the writer's mission was to prove his autonomy by delivering himself to the exclusive contemplation of the Eternal. He incessantly affirmed the

Eternal's existence and demonstrated it precisely by the fact that his only concern was to regard it. In this sense, he realized, in effect, the ideal of Benda, but one can see under what conditions: spirituality and literature had to be alienated, a particular ideology had to triumph, a feudal pluralism had to make the isolation of the clerks possible, virtually the whole population had to be illiterate, and the only public of the writer could be the college of other writers. It is inconceivable that one can practise freedom of thought, write for a public which coincides with the restricted collectivity of specialists, and restrict oneself to describing the content of eternal values and *a priori* ideas. The good conscience of the medieval clerk flowered on the death of literature.

However, in order for writers to preserve this happy conscience it is not quite necessary that their public be reduced to an established body of professionals. It is enough for them to be steeped in the ideology of the privileged classes, to be completely permeated with it, and to be unable even to conceive any others. But in this case their function is modified; they are no longer asked to be the *guardians* of dogma but merely not to make themselves its detractors. As a second example of the adherence of writers to established ideology, one might, I believe, choose the French seventeenth century.

The secularization of the writer and his public was in process of being completed in that age. It certainly had its origin in the expansive force of the written thing, its monumental character, and the appeal to freedom which is hidden away in any work of the mind. But external circumstances contributed, such as the development of

education, the weakening of the spiritual power, and the appearance of new ideologies which were expressly intended for the temporal. However, secularization does not mean universalization. The writer's public still remained strictly limited. Taken as a whole, it was called *society,* and this name designated a fraction of the court, the clergy, the magistracy, and the rich bourgeoisie. Considered individually, the reader was called a "gentleman" (*honnête homme*) and he exercised a certain function of censorship which was called *taste.* In short, he was both a member of the upper classes and a specialist. If he criticized the writer, it was because he himself could write. The public of Corneille, Pascal, and Descartes was Mme. de Sévigné, the Chevalier de Méré, Madame de Grignan, Madame de Rambouillet, and Saint-Évremonde. To-day the public, in relation to the writer, is in a state of passivity: it waits for ideas or a new art form to be imposed upon it. It is the inert mass wherein the idea will assume flesh. Its means of control is indirect and negative; one can not say that it gives its opinion; it simply buys or does not buy the book; the relationship between author and reader is analogous to that of male and female: reading has become a simple means of information and writing a very general means of communication. In the seventeenth century being able to write already meant really being able to write well. Not that Providence divided the gift of style equally among all men, but because the reader, if not strictly identical with the writer, was a potential writer. He belonged to a parasitical élite for whom the art of writing was, if not a profession, at least the mark of its superiority. One read because he could write; with a

little luck he might have been able to write what he read. The public was active; productions of the mind were really *submitted* to it. It judged them by a scale of values which it helped maintain. A revolution analogous to romanticism is not conceivable in this period because there would have to have been the concurrence of an indecisive mass, which one surprises, overwhelms, and suddenly animates by revealing to it ideas or feelings of which it was ignorant, and which, lacking firm convictions, constantly requires being ravished and fecundated. In the seventeenth century convictions were unshakeable; the religious ideology went hand in hand with a political ideology which the temporal itself secreted; no one publicly questioned the existence of God or the divine right of kings. "Society" had its language, its graces, and its ceremonies which it expected to find in the books it read. Its conception of time, too. As the two historical facts which it constantly pondered — original sin and redemption — belonged to a remote past, as it was also from this past that the great governing families drew their pride and the justification of their privileges, as the future could bring nothing new, since God was too perfect to change, and since the two great earthly powers, the Church and the Monarchy, aspired only to immutability, the active element of temporality was the past, which is itself a phenomenal degradation of the Eternal; the present is a perpetual sin which can find an excuse for itself only if it reflects, with the least possible unfaithfulness, the image of a completed era. For an idea to be received, it must prove its antiquity; for a work of art to please, it must have been inspired by an ancient model. Again we

find writers expressly making themselves the guardians of this ideology. There were still great clerks who belonged to the Church and who had no other concern than to defend dogma. To them were added the "watchdogs" of the temporal, historians, court poets, jurists, and philosophers who were concerned with establishing and maintaining the ideology of the absolute monarchy. But we see appearing at their side a third category of writers, strictly secular, who, for the most part, *accepted* the religious and political ideology of the age without thinking that they were bound to prove it or preserve it. They did not write about it, they accepted it implicitly. For them, it was what we called a short time ago the context or the ensemble of the presuppositions common to readers and author which are necessary to make the writings of the latter intelligible to the former. In general, they belonged to the bourgeoisie; they were pensioned by the nobility. As they consumed without producing, and as the nobility did not produce either but lived off the work of others, they were the parasites of a parisitic class. They no longer lived in a college but formed an implicit corporation in that highly integrated society, and to remind them constantly of their collegiate origin and their former clerkship the royal power chose some of them and grouped them in a sort of symbolic college, the French Academy. Fed by the king and read by an élite, they were concerned solely with responding to the demands of this limited public. They had as good or almost as good a conscience as the twelfth-century clerks. It is impossible to speak of a virtual public as distinguished from a real public in this age. La Bruyère happened to speak *about*

peasants, but he did not speak *to* them, and if he took note of their misery, it was not for the sake of drawing an argument against the ideology he accepted, but in the name of that ideology: it was a disgrace for enlightened monarchs and good Christians. Thus, one spoke about the masses above their heads and without even conceiving the notion that one might help them become self-conscious. And the homogeneity of the public banished all contradiction from the authors' souls. They were not pulled between real but detestable readers and readers who were virtual and desirable but out of reach; they did not ask themselves questions about their role in the world, for the writer questions himself about his mission only in ages when it is not clearly defined and when he must invent or re-invent it, that is, when he notices, beyond the élite who read him, an amorphous mass of possible readers whom he may or may not choose to win, and when he must himself decide, in the event that he has the opportunity to reach them, what his relations with them are to be. The authors of the seventeenth century had a definite function because they addressed an enlightened, strictly limited, and active public which exercised permanent control over them. Unknown by the people, their job was to reflect back its own image to the élite which supported them. But there are many ways of reflecting an image: certain portraits are by themselves contestations because they have been made from without and without passion by a painter who refuses any complicity with his model. However, in order for a writer merely to conceive the idea of drawing a portrait-contestation of his real reader, he must have become conscious of a contradiction between

himself and his public, that is, he must come to his readers *from without* and must consider them with astonishment, or he must feel the astonished regard of unfamiliar minds (ethnic minorities, oppressed classes, etc.) weighing upon the little society which he forms with them. But in the seventeenth century, since the virtual public did not exist, since the artist accepted without criticism the ideology of the élite, he made himself an accomplice of his public. No unfamiliar stare came to trouble him in his games. Neither the prose-writer nor even the poet was accursed. They did not have to decide with each work what the meaning and value of literature were, since its meaning and value were fixed by tradition. Well integrated in a hierarchical society, they knew neither the pride nor the anguish of being "different"; in short, they were *classical.* There is classicism when a society has taken on a relatively stable form and when it has been permeated with the myth of its perenniality, that is, when it confounds the present with the eternal and historicity with traditionalism, when the hierarchy of classes is such that the virtual public never exceeds the real public and when each reader is for the writer a qualified critic and a censor, when the power of the religious and political ideology is so strong and the interdictions so rigorous that in no case is there any question of discovering new countries of the mind, but only of putting into shape the *commonplaces* adopted by the élite. in such a way that reading — which, as we have seen, is the concrete relation between the writer and his public — is a ceremony of *recognition* analogous to the bow of salutation, that is, the ceremonious affirmation that author and reader are of

the same world and have the same opinions about everything. Thus, each production of the mind is at the same time an act of courtesy, and style is the supreme courtesy of the author toward his reader, and the reader, for his part, never tires of finding the same thoughts in the most diverse of books because these thoughts are his own and he does not ask to acquire others but only to be offered with magnificence those which he already has. Hence, it is in a spirit of complicity that the author presents and the reader accepts a portrait which is necessarily abstract; addressing a parasitical class, he can not show man at work or, in general, the relations between man and external nature. As, on the other hand, there are bodies of specialists who, under the control of the Church and the Monarchy, are concerned with maintaining the spiritual and secular ideology, the writer does not even suspect the importance of economic, religious, metaphysical, and political factors in the constitution of the person; and as the society in which he lives confounds the present with the eternal he can not even imagine the slightest change in what he calls human nature. He conceives history as a series of accidents which affect the eternal man on the surface without deeply modifying him, and if he had to assign a meaning to historical duration he would see in it both an eternal repetition, so that previous events can and ought to provide lessons for his contemporaries, and a process of slight degeneration, since the fundamental events of history are long since *passed* and since, perfection in letters having been attained in Antiquity, his ancient models seem beyond rivalry. And in all this he is once again fully in harmony with his public which considers

work as a curse, which does not *feel* its situation in history and in the world for the simple reason that it is privileged and because its only concern is faith, respect for the Monarch, passion, war, death, and courtesy. In short, the image of classical man is purely psychological because the classical public is conscious only of his psychology. Furthermore, it must be understood that this psychology is itself traditionalist, it is not concerned with discovering new and profound truths about the human heart or with setting up hypotheses. It is in unstable societies, when the public exists on several social levels, that the writer, torn and dissatisfied, invents explanations for his anguish. The psychology of the seventeenth century is purely descriptive. It is not based so much upon the author's personal experience as it is the aesthetic expression of what the élite thinks about itself. La Rochefoucauld borrows the form and the content of his maxims from the divertissements of the salons. The casuistry of the Jesuits, the etiquette of the Précieuses, the portrait game, the ethics of Nicole, and the religious conception of the passions are at the origin of a hundred other works. The comedies draw their inspiration from ancient psychology and the plain common sense of the upper bourgeoisie. Society is thoroughly delighted at seeing itself mirrored in them because it recognizes the notions it has about itself; it does not ask to be shown what it is, but it asks rather for a reflection of what it thinks it is. To be sure, some satires are permitted, but it is the élite which, through pamphlets and comedies, carries on, in the name of its morality, the cleansings and the purges necessary for its health. The ridiculous marquis, the litigants, or

the Précieuses are never made fun of from a point of view *external* to the governing class; it is always a matter of eccentrics who are inassimilable in a civilized society and who live on the margin of the collective life. The Misanthrope is twitted because he lacks courtesy, Cathos and Madelon, because they have too much. Philaminte goes counter to the accepted ideas about women; the bourgeois gentleman is odious to the rich bourgeois who have a lofty modesty and who know the greatness and the humbleness of their condition, and, at the same time, to the gentlemen because he wants to push his way into the nobility. This internal and, so to speak, physiological satire has no connection with the great satire of Beaumarchais, P.L. Courier, J. Vallès, and Céline; it is less courageous and much more severe because it exhibits the repressive action which the collectivity practices upon the weak, the sick, and the maladjusted. It is the pitiless laughter of a gang of street-urchins at the awkwardness of their butt.

Bourgeois in origin and mores, more like Oronte and Chrysale in his home life than like his brilliant and restless confrères of 1780 or 1830, yet accepted in the Society of the Great and pensioned by them, slightly unclassed from above, yet convinced that talent is no substitute for birth, docile to the reprimands of the clergy, respectful of the royal power, happy to occupy a modest place in the immense structure of which the Church and the Monarchy are the pillars, somewhat above the merchants and the scholars, below the nobles and the clergy, the writer practises his profession with a good conscience, convinced

that he has come too late, that everything has been said, and that the only proper thing to do is to re-say it agreeably. He conceives the glory which awaits him as a feeble reflection of hereditary titles and if he expects it to be eternal it is because he does not even suspect that the society of his readers may be overthrown by social changes. Thus, the permanence of the royal family seems to him a guarantee of that of his renown.

Yet, almost in spite of himself, the mirror which he modestly offers to his readers is magical: it enthralls and compromises. Even though everything has been done to offer them only a flattering and complying image, more subjective than objective and more internal than external, this image remains none the less a work of art, that is, it has its basis in the freedom of the author and is an appeal to the freedom of the reader. Since it is beautiful, it is made of glass; aesthetic distance puts it out of reach. Impossible to be delighted with it, to find any comfortable warmth in it, any discrete indulgence. Even though it is made up of the commonplaces of the age and that smug complacency which unite contemporaries like an umbilical cord, it is supported by a freedom and thereby another kind of objectivity. It is *itself,* to be sure, that the élite finds in the mirror, but itself as it would see itself if it went to the very extremes of severity. It is not congealed into an object by the gaze of the Other, for neither the peasant nor the working-man has yet become the *Other* for it, and the art of reflective presentation which characterizes the art of the seventeenth century is a strictly internal process; however, it pushes to the limits each one's

efforts to see into himself clearly; it is a perpetual *cogito.* To be sure, it does not call idleness, oppression, or parasitism into question, because these aspects of the governing class are revealed only to observers who place themselves outside of it; hence, the image which is reflected back to it is strictly psychological. But spontaneous behavior, by passing to the reflective state, loses its innocence and the excuse of immediacy: it must be assumed or changed. It is, to be sure, a world of courtesy and ceremony which is offered to the reader, but he is is already emerging from this world since he is invited to know it and to recognize himself in it. In this sense, Racine was not wrong when he said in regard to *Phèdre* that "the passions are presented before your eyes only to show all the disorder of which they are the cause". On condition that one does not take that to mean that his express purpose was to inspire a horror of love. But to paint passion is already to go beyond it, already to shed it. It is not a matter of chance that, about the same time, philosophers were suggesting the idea of curing one's self of it by knowledge. And as the reflective practice of freedom when confronted by the passions is usually adorned with the name of *morals,* it must be recognized that the art of the seventeenth century is eminently a moralizing art. Not that its avowed aim is to teach virtue, nor that it is poisoned by the good intentions which produce bad literature, but by the mere fact that it quietly offers the reader his own image, it makes it unbearable for him. Moralizing: this is both a definition and a limit. It is not moralizing *only;* if it proposes to man that he transcend the psychological toward the

moral, it is because it regards religious, metaphysical, political, and social problems as solved; but its action is none the less "orthodox." As it confounds universal man with the particular men who are in power, it does not dedicate itself to the liberation of any concrete category of the oppressed; however, the writer, though completely assimilated by the oppressing class, is by no means its accomplice; his work is unquestionably a liberator since its effect, within this class, is to free man from himself.

Up to this point we have been considering the case in which the writer's potential public was nil, or just about, and in which his real public was not torn by any conflict. We have seen that he could then accept the current ideology with a good conscience and that he launched his appeals to freedom within the ideology itself. If the potential public suddenly appears, or if the real public is broken up into hostile factions everything changes. We must now consider what happens to literature when the writer is led to reject the ideology of the ruling classes.

The eighteenth century was the palmy time, unique in history, and the soon-to-be-lost paradise, of French writers. Their social condition had not changed. Bourgeois in origin, with very few exceptions, they were unclassed by the favors of the great. The circle of their real readers had grown perceptibly larger because the bourgeoisie had begun to read, but they were still unknown to the "lower" classes, and if the writers spoke of them more often than did La Bruyère and Fénelon, they never addressed them, even in spirit. However, a profound upheaval had broken their public in two; they had to satisfy contradictory de-

mands. Their situation was characterized from the beginning by *tension.* This tension was manifested in a very particular way. The governing class had in fact lost confidence in its ideology. It had put itself into a position of defense; it tried, to a certain extent, to retard the diffusion of new ideas, but it could not keep from being penetrated by these ideas. It understood that its religious and political principles were the best instruments for establishing its power, but the fact is that as it saw them only as instruments, it ceased to believe in them completely. *Pragmatic* truth had replaced revealed truth. If censorship and prohibitions were more visible, they covered up a secret weakness and a cynicism of despair. There were no more *clerks;* church literature was empty apologetics, a fist holding on to dogmas which were breaking loose; it was turning against freedom; it addressed itself to respect, fear, and self-interest, and by ceasing to be a free appeal to free men, it was ceasing to be literature. This distraught élite turned to the genuine writer and asked him to do the impossible, not to spare his severity, if he was bent on it, but to breathe at least a bit of freedom into a wilting ideology, to address himself to his readers' reason and to persuade them to adopt dogmas which, with time, had become irrational. In short, to turn propagandist without ceasing to be a writer. But it was playing a losing game. Since its principles were no longer a matter of immediate and unformulated evidence and since it had to *present* them to the writer so that he might come to their defense, since there was no longer any question of saving them for their own sake but rather of maintaining order, it contested their validity by its very effort to re-establish

them. The writer who consented to buttress this shaky ideology at least *consented* to do so, and this voluntary adherence to principles which, in the past, had governed minds without being noticed now freed him from them. He was already going beyond them. In spite of himself he was emerging into solitude and freedom. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, which constituted what in Marxist terms is called the rising class, was trying at this same time to disengage itself from the ideology that was being imposed upon it and to construct one better suited to its own purpose.

Now, this "rising class," which was soon to claim the right to participate in affairs of State, was subject only to *political* oppression. Confronted with a ruined nobility, it was in process of very calmly attaining economic preeminence. It already had money, culture, and leisure. Thus, for the first time an oppressed class was presenting itself to the writer as a real public. But the conjunction was still more favorable; for this awakening class, which was reading and trying to think, had not yet produced an organized revolutionary party which would secrete its own ideology as did the Church in the Middle Ages. The writer was not yet wedged, as we shall see that he was later to be, between the dying ideology of a declining class and the rigorous ideology of the rising class. The bourgeoisie wanted light; it felt vaguely that its thought was alienated, and it wanted to become conscious of itself. One could probably find some traces of organization: materialist societies, groups of intellectuals, free masonry. But they were chiefly associations for inquiry which were waiting for ideas rather than producing them. To be sure, a form

of popular and spontaneous writing was spreading, the secret and anonymous tract. But this literature of amateurs did not compete with the professional writer but rather goaded and solicited him by informing him about the confused aspirations of the collectivity. Thus, the bourgeoisie—as opposed to a public of half-specialists, which with difficulty held on to its position and which was always recruited at the Court and from the upper circles of society—offered the rough draft of a mass public. In regard to literature, it was in a state of relative *passivity* since it had no experience in the art of writing, no preconceived opinion about style and literary genres, and was awaiting everything, form and content, from the genius of the writer.

Solicited by both sides, the writer found himself between the two hostile factions of his public as the arbiter of their conflict. He was no longer a clerk; the ruling class was not the only one supporting him. It is true that it was still pensioning him, but it was the bourgeoisie which was buying his books. He was collecting at both ends. His father had been a bourgeois and his son would be one; one might thus be tempted to see in him a bourgeois more gifted than others but similarly oppressed, a man who had attained knowledge of his state under the pressure of historical circumstances, in short, an inner mirror by means of which the whole bourgeoisie became conscious of itself and its demands. But this would be a superficial view. It has not been sufficiently pointed out that a class can acquire class consciousness only if it sees itself from within and without at the same time; in other words, if it prof-

its by external competition; that is where the intellectuals, the perpetually unclassed, come into the picture.

The essential characteristic of the eighteenth-century writer was precisely an objective and subjective unclassing. Though he still remembered his bourgeois attachments, yet the favor of the great drew him away from his milieu; he no longer felt any concrete solidarity with his cousin the lawyer or his brother the village curé because he had privileges which they had not. It was from the court and nobility that he borrowed his manners and the very graces of his style. Glory, his dearest hope and his consecration, had become for him a slippery and ambiguous notion; a fresh idea of glory was rising up in which a writer was truly rewarded if an obscure doctor in Bruges or a briefless lawyer in Rheims devoured his books almost in secret.

But the diffuse recognition of this public which he hardly knew only half touched him. He had received from his elders a traditional conception of fame. According to this conception, it was the monarch who consecrated his genius. The visible sign of his success was for Catherine or Frederick to invite him to their table. The recompense given to him and the dignities conferred from above did not yet have the official impersonality of the prizes and decorations awarded by our republics. They retained the quasi-feudal character of man to man relations. And since he was, above all, an eternal consumer in a society of producers, a parasite of a parasitic class, he treated money like a parasite. He did not *earn* it since there was no common measure between his work and his remuneration; he only *spent* it. Therefore, even if he was poor, he lived in

luxury. Everything was a luxury to him, including, and in fact particularly so, his writing. Yet, even in the king's chamber he retained a rough force, a potent vulgarity; Diderot, in the heat of a philosophical conversation, pinched the thigh of the Empress of Russia until the blood flowed. And then, if he went too far, he could always be made to feel that he was only a scribbler. The life of Voltaire, from his beating, his imprisonment, and his flight to London, to the insolence of the King of Prussia was a succession of triumphs and humiliations. At times the writer enjoyed the passing favors of a marquise, but he married his maid or a bricklayer's daughter. Hence, his mind, as well as his public, was torn apart. But this did not cause him to suffer; on the contrary, this original contradiction was the source of his pride. He thought that he had no obligations to anyone, that he could choose his friends and opponents, and that it was enough for him to take his pen in hand to free himself from the conditioning of milieu, nation, or class. He flew, he soared, he was pure thought, pure observation. He chose to write to vindicate his unclassing which he assumed and transformed into solitude. From the outside, he contemplated the great with the eyes of the bourgeois and the bourgeois with the eyes of the nobility, and he retained enough complicity with both to understand them equally from within. Hence, literature, which up to then had been only a conservative and purifying function of an integrated society, became conscious in him and by him of its autonomy. Placed by an extreme chance between confused aspirations and an ideology in ruins—like the writer between the bourgeoisie, the Court, and the Church—literature suddenly asserted

its independence. It was no longer to reflect the commonplaces of the collectivity; it identified itself with Mind, that is, with the permanent power of forming and criticizing ideas.

Of course, this taking over of literature by itself was abstract and almost purely formal, since the literary works were not the concrete expression of any class; and as the writers began by rejecting any deep solidarity with the milieu from which they came as well as the one which adopted them, literature became confused with Negativity, that is, with doubt, refusal, criticism, and contestation. But as a result of this very fact, it led to the setting up, against the ossified spirituality of the Church, the rights of a new spirituality, one in movement, which was no longer identified with any ideology and which manifested itself as the power of continually surpassing the given, whatever it might be. When, in the shelter of the structure of the very Christian monarchy, it was imitating wonderful models, it hardly fussed about truth because truth was only a very crude and very concrete quality of the ideology which had been nourishing it; for the dogmas of the Church, to be true or, quite simply, to be, was all one, and truth could not be conceived apart from the system. But now that spirituality had become this abstract movement which cut through all ideologies and then left them along the wayside like empty shells, truth, in its turn, was disengaged from all concrete and particular philosophy; it was revealed in its abstract independence; it became the regulating idea of literature and the distant limit of the critical movement.

Spirituality, literature, and truth: these notions were

bound up in that abstract and negative moment of becoming self-conscious. Their instrument was analysis, a negative and critical method which perpetually dissolves concrete data into abstract elements and the products of history into combinations of universal concepts. An adolescent chooses to write in order to escape an oppression from which he suffers and a solidarity he is ashamed of; as soon as he has written a few words, he thinks he has escaped from his milieu and class and from all milieus and all classes and that he has broken through his historical situation by the mere fact that he has attained reflective and critical knowledge. Above the confusion of those bourgeois and nobles, locked up in their particular age by their prejudices, he has, on taking up his pen, discovered himself as a timeless and unlocalized mind, in short, as *universal man.* And literature, which has delivered him, is an abstract function and an a priori power of human nature; it is the movement whereby at every moment man frees himself from history; in short, it is the exercise of freedom.

In the seventeenth century, by choosing to write a man embraced a definite profession, with the tricks of the trade, its rules and customs, its rank in the hierarchy of the professions. In the eighteenth century, the molds were broken; everything remained to be done; works of the mind, instead of being put together according to established norms and more or less by luck, were each a particular invention and were a kind of decision of the author regarding the nature, value, and scope of Belles Lettres; each one brought its own rules and the principles by which it was to be judged; each one aspired to engage

the whole of literature and to cut out new paths. It is not by chance that the worst works of the period are also those which claimed to be the most traditional; tragedy and epic were the exquisite fruits of an integrated society; in a collectivity which was torn apart, they could subsist only in the form of survivals and pastiches.

What the eighteenth-century writer tirelessly demanded in all his works was the right to practise an anti-historical reason against history, and in this sense all he did was to reveal the essential requirements of abstract literature. He was not concerned with giving his readers a clearer class consciousness. Quite the contrary, the urgent appeal which he addressed to his bourgeois public was an invitation to forget humiliations, prejudices, and fears; the one he directed to his noble public was a solicitation to strip itself of its pride of caste and its privileges. As he had made himself universal, he could have only universal readers, and what he required of the freedom of his contemporaries was that they cut their historical ties in order to join him in universality.

What is the origin of this miracle by which, at the very moment he was setting up abstract freedom against concrete oppression and Reason against History, he was going along in the very direction of historical development? First, the bourgeoisie, by a tactic which was characteristic of it and which it was to repeat in 1830 and 1848, joined forces, on the eve of taking power, with those oppressed classes which were not in a condition to push their demands. And since the bonds which united social groups so different from one another could only be very general and very abstract, it aimed not so much at acquiring a clear

consciousness of itself, which would have opposed it to the workmen and peasants, as to have its right to lead the opposition recognized on the grounds that it was in a better position to let the established powers know the demands of universal human nature. On the other hand, the revolution being prepared was a *political* one; there was no revolutionary ideology and no organized party. The bourgeoisie wanted to be enlightened; it wanted the ideology which for centuries had mystified and alienated man to be liquidated. There would be time later on to replace it. For the time being, it aimed at freedom of opinion as a step toward political power. Hence, by demanding *for himself* and *as a writer* freedom of thinking and of expressing his thought, the author necessarily served the interests of the bourgeois class. No more was asked of him and there was nothing more he could do. In later periods, as we shall see, the writer could demand his freedom to write with a bad conscience; he might be aware that the oppressed classes wanted something other than that freedom. Freedom of thinking could then appear as a privilege; in the eyes of some it could pass for a means of oppression, and the position of the writer risked becoming untenable. But on the eve of the Revolution he enjoyed an extraordinary opportunity, that is, it was enough for him to defend his profession in order to serve as a guide to the aspirations of the rising class.

He knew it. He considered himself a guide and a spiritual chief. He took chances. As the ruling élite, which grew increasingly nervous, lavished its graces upon him one day only to have him locked up the next, he had none of that tranquillity, that proud mediocrity, which

his predecessors had enjoyed. His glorious and eventful life, with its sunlit crests and its dizzying steeps, was that of an adventurer. The other evening I was reading the dedication of Blaise Cendrars' *Rum*: "To the young people of today who are tired of literature, to prove to them that a novel can also be an act," and I thought that we are quite unfortunate and quite guilty, since we have to prove what in the eighteenth century was self-evident. A work of the mind was then doubly an act since it produced ideas which were to lead to social upheavals and since it exposed its author to danger. And this act, whatever the book we may be considering, was always defined in the same way; it was a *liberator.* And, doubtless, in the seventeenth century too, literature had a liberating function, though one which remained veiled and implicit. In the time of the Encyclopedists, it was no longer a question of freeing the gentleman from his passions by reflecting them back to him without complaisance, but of helping with the pen to bring about the political freedom simply of man. The appeal which the writer addressed to his bourgeois public was, whether he meant it or not, an incitement to revolt; the one which he directed to the ruling class was an invitation to lucidity, to critical self-examination, to the giving up of its privileges. The condition of Rousseau was much like that of Richard Wright's writing for both enlightened negroes and whites. Before the nobility he *bore witness* and at the same time was inviting his fellow commoners to become conscious of themselves. It was not only the taking of the Bastille which his writings and those of Diderot and Condorcet were preparing at long range; it was also the night of August the fourth.

And as the writer thought that he had broken the bonds which united him to his class of origin, as he spoke to his readers from above about universal human nature, it seemed to him that the appeal he made to them and the part he took in their misfortunes were dictated by pure generosity. To write is to give. In this way he accepted and excused what was unacceptable in his situation as a parasite in an industrious society; this was also how he became conscious of that absolute freedom, that gratuity, which characterize literary creation. But though he constantly had in view universal man and the abstract rights of human nature, there is no reason to believe that he was an incarnation of the clerk as Benda has described him. Since his position was, in essence, *critical,* he certainly had to have *something* to criticize; and the objects which first presented themselves to criticism were the institutions, superstitions, traditions, and acts of a traditional government.

In other words, as the walls of Eternity and the Past which had supported the ideological structure of the seventeenth century cracked and gave way, the writer perceived a new dimension of temporality in its purity: the Present. The Present, which preceding centuries had sometimes conceived as a perceptible figuration of Eternity and sometimes as a degraded emanation of Antiquity. He had only a confused notion of the future, but he knew that the fleeting hour which he was living was unique and that it was his, that it was in no way inferior to the most magnificent hours of Antiquity, since they too had begun by being the present. He knew that it was his chance and that he must not waste it. That was why he

considered the fight he had to wage not so much as a preparation for the society of the future but rather as a short-term enterprise, one of immediate efficacy. It was *this* institution that had to be denounced and right now, *that* superstition that had to be destroyed immediately, *that* particular injustice that had to be rectified. This impassioned sense of the present saved him from idealism; he did not confine himself to contemplating the eternal ideas of Freedom or Equality. For the first time since the Reformation, writers intervened in public life, protested against an unjust decree, asked for the review of a trial, and, in short, decided that the spiritual was in the street, at the fair, in the market place, at the tribunal, and that it was by no means a matter of turning away from the temporal, but, on the contrary, that one had to come back to it incessantly and go on beyond it in each particular circumstance.

Thus, the overthrow of his public and the crisis of the European consciousness had invested the writer with a new function. He conceived literature to be the permanent practice of magnanimity. He still submitted to the strict and severe control of his peers, but below him he caught a glimpse of an unformed and passionate waiting, a more feminine, more undifferentiated kind of desire which freed him from their censorship. He had disembodied the spiritual and had separated his cause from that of a dying ideology; his books were free appeals to the freedom of his readers.

The political triumph of the bourgeoisie which writers had so eagerly desired convulsed their condition from

top to bottom and put the very essence of literature into question. It might be said that the result of all their efforts was merely a preparation for their certain ruin. There is no doubt that by identifying the cause of belles-lettres with that of political democracy they helped the bourgeoisie come to power, but by the same token they ran the risk of seeing the disappearance of the object of their demands, that is, the constant and almost the only subject of their writing. In short, the miraculous harmony which united the essential demands of literature with that of the oppressed bourgeoisie was broken as soon as both were realized. So long as millions of men were burning to be able to express their feelings it was fine to demand the right to write freely and to examine everything, but once freedom of thought and confession and equality of political rights were gained, the defense of literature became a purely formal game which no longer amused anyone; something else had to be found.

Now, at the same time writers had lost their privileged position whose origin had been the split which had torn apart their public and which had allowed them to have a foot in both camps. These two halves had knitted together; the bourgeoisie had absorbed the nobility or very nearly. Authors had to meet the demands of a unified public. There was no hope of getting away from their class of origin. Born of bourgeois parents, read and paid by bourgeois, they had to remain bourgeois; the bourgeoisie had closed around them like a prison. It was to take them a century to get over their keen regret for the flighty and parasitic class which had indulged them out of caprice and whom they had remorselessly undermined in their

role of double agent. It seemed to them that they had killed the goose which laid the golden eggs. The bourgeoisie introduced new forms of oppression; however, it was not parasitic. Doubtless, it had taken over the means of work, but it was highly diligent in regulating the production and distribution of its products. It did not conceive literary work as a gratuitous and disinterested creation but as a paid service.

The justifying myth of this industrious and unproductive class was *utilitarianism*; in one way or another the function of the bourgeois was that of intermediary between producer and consumer; it was the *middle term* raised to omnipotence. Thus, in the indissoluble yoke of means and end, he had chosen to give primary importance to the means. The end was implied; one never looked it in the face but passed over it in silence. The goal and dignity of a human life was to spend itself in the ordering of means. It was not *serious* to occupy oneself without intermediary in producing an absolute end. It was as if one aspired to see God face to face without the help of the Church. The only enterprises to be credited were those whose end was the perpetually withdrawing horizon of an infinite series of means. If the work of art entered the utilitarian round, if it hoped to be taken seriously, it had to descend from the heaven of unconditioned ends and resign itself to becoming useful in its turn, that is, to presenting itself as a means of ordering means. In particular, as the bourgeois was not quite sure of himself, because his power was not based on a decree of Providence, literature had to help it feel bourgeois by divine right. Thus, after having been the bad conscience of the privileged in the

eighteenth century it ran the risk in the nineteenth century of becoming the good conscience of an oppressing class.

Well and good, if the writer could have kept that spirit of free criticism which in the preceding century had been his fortune and his pride. But his public was opposed to that. So long as the bourgeoisie had been struggling against the privileges of the nobility it had given assent to destructive negativity. But now that it had power, it passed on to construction and asked to be helped in constructing. Contestation had remained possible within the religious ideology because the believer referred his obligations and the articles of faith back to the will of God. He thereby established a concrete and feudal person to person bond with the Almighty. This recourse to the free divine arbiter introduced, although God was perfect and chained to His perfection, an element of gratuity into Christian ethics and consequently a bit of freedom into literature. The Christian hero was always Jacob wrestling with the angel; the saint *contested* the divine will even if he did so in order to submit to it even more narrowly. But bourgeois ethics did not derive from Providence; its universal and abstract procedures were inscribed in things; they were not the effect of a sovereign and quite amiable but personal will, they rather resembled the increate laws of physics. At least, so one supposed, for it was not prudent to look at them too closely. The serious man kept from examining them precisely because their origin was obscure. Bourgeois art would either be a means or would not be; it would forbid itself to lay

hands on principles, for fear they might collapse[1], and to probe the human heart too deeply for fear of finding disorder in it. Its public feared nothing so much as talent, that gay and menacing madness which uncovers the disturbing roots of things by unforeseeable words and which, by repeated appeals to freedom, stirs the still more disturbing roots of men. *Facility* sold better; it was talent in leash, turned against itself, the art of reassuring readers by harmonious and expected discourse, in a tone of good fellowship, that man and the world were quite ordinary, transparent, without surprises, without threats, and without interest.

There was more: as the only relationship which the bourgeois had with natural forces was through intermediaries, as material reality appeared to him in the form of manufactured products, as he was surrounded as far as the eye could see by an already humanized world which reflected back to him his own image, as he limited himself to gleaning on the surface of things the meaning that other men had put forward, as his job was essentially that of handling abstract symbols, words, figures, plans, and diagrams for determining methods whereby his employees would share in consumer's goods, as his culture, quite as much as his trade, inclined him to consider ideas, he was convinced that the universe was reducible to a system of ideas; he dissolved effort, difficulty, needs, oppression, and wars into ideas; there was no evil, only pluralism; certain ideas lived in a free state; they had to be

1. Dostoievsky's famous "If God does not exist, all is permissible" is the terrible revelation which the bourgeoisie has forced itself to conceal during the one hundred fifty years of its reign.

integrated into the system. Thus, he conceived human progress as a vast movement of assimilation; ideas assimilated each other and so did minds. At the end of this immense digestive process, thought would find its unification and society its total integration.

Such optimism was at the opposite extreme of the writer's conception of his art; the artist needs an unassimilable matter because beauty is not resolved into ideas. Even if he is a prose-writer and assembles signs, his style will have neither grace nor force if it is not sensitive to the materiality of the word and its irrational resistances. And if he wishes to build the universe in his work and to support it by an inexhaustible freedom, the reason is that he radically distinguishes things from thought. His freedom and the thing are homogeneous only in that both are unfathomable, and if he wishes to readapt the desert or the virgin forest to the Mind, he does so not by transforming them into ideas of desert and forest, but by having Being sparkle as Being, with its opacity and its coefficient of adversity, by the indefinite spontaneity of Existence. That is why the work of art is not reducible to an idea; first, because it is a production or a reproduction of a *being*, that is of something which never quite allows itself to be *thought*; then, because this being is totally penetrated by an *existence*, that is, by a freedom which decides on the very fate and value of thought. That is also why the artist has always had a special understanding of Evil, which is not the temporary and remediable isolation of an idea, but the irreducibility of man and the world of Thought.

The bourgeois could be recognized by the fact that he

denied the existence of social classes and particularly of the bourgeoisie. The gentleman wished to command because he belonged to a caste. The bourgeois based his power and his right to govern on the exquisite ripening which comes from the secular possession of the goods of this world. Moreover, he admitted only synthetic relationships between the owner and the thing possessed; for the rest, he demonstrated by analysis that all men are alike because they are invariant elements of social combinations and because each one of them, whatever his rank, completely possesses *human nature*. Hence, inequalities appeared as fortuitous and passing accidents which could not alter the permanent characteristics of the social atom. There was no proletariat, that is, no synthetic class of which each worker was a passing mode; there were only proletarians, each isolated in his human nature, who were not united by internal solidarity but only by external bonds of resemblance.

The bourgeois saw only *psychological* relations among the individuals whom his analytical propaganda circumvented and separated. That is understandable: as he had no direct hold on things, as his work was concerned essentially with men, it was purely a matter, for him, of pleasing and intimidating. Ceremony, discipline, and courtesy ruled his behavior; he regarded his fellow-men as marionettes, and if he wished to acquire some knowledge of their emotions and character, it was because it seemed to him that each passion was a wire that could be pulled. The breviary of the ambitious bourgeois was "The Art of Making Good;" the breviary of the rich was "The Art of Commanding." Thus, the bourgeoisie considered

the writer as an expert. If he started reflecting on the social order, he annoyed and frightened it. All it asked of him was to share his practical experience of the human heart. So, as in the seventeenth century, literature was reduced to psychology. All the same, the psychology of Corneille, Pascal and Vauvenargues was a cathartic appeal to freedom. But the merchant distrusted the freedom of the people he dealt with and the prefect that of the sub-prefect. All they wanted was to be provided with infallible recipes for winning over and dominating. Man had to be governable as a matter of course and by modest means. In short, the laws of the heart had to be rigorous and without exceptions. The bourgeois bigwig no more believed in human freedom than the scientist believes in a miracle. And as his ethics were utilitarian, the chief motive of his psychology was self-interest. For the writer it was no longer a matter of addressing his work as an appeal to absolute freedoms, but of exhibiting the psychological laws which determined him to readers who were likewise determined.

Idealism, psychologism, determinism, utilitarianism, the spirit of seriousness, that was what the bourgeois writer had to reflect to his public first of all. He was no longer asked to restore the strangeness and opacity of the world, but to dissolve it into elementary subjective impressions which made it easier to digest — nor to discover the most intimate movements of his heart at the very depths of his freedom, but to bring his "experience" face to face with that of his readers. All his works were at once inventories of bourgeois appurtenances, psychological reports of an expert which invariably tended to ground the

rights of the élite and to show the wisdom of institutions, and handbooks of civility. The conclusions were decided in advance; the degree of depth permitted to the investigation was also established in advance; the psychological motives were selected; the very style was regulated. The public feared no surprise. It could buy with its eyes closed. But literature had been assassinated. From Émile Augier to Marcel Prévost and Edmond Jaloux, including Dumas *fils*, Pailleron, Ohnet, Bourget, and Bordeaux, authors were found to do the job and, if I may say so, to honor their signature to the very end. It is not by chance that they wrote bad books; if they had talent, they had to hide it.

The best refused. This refusal saved literature but fixed its traits for fifty years. Indeed, from 1848 on, and until the war of 1914, the radical unification of his public led the author to write on principle *against all his readers.* However, he sold his productions, but he despised those who bought them and forced himself to disappoint their wishes. It was taken for granted that it was better to be unknown than famous, that success — if the writer ever got it in his lifetime — was to be explained by a misunderstanding. And if, by chance, the book one published did not offend sufficiently, one added an insulting preface. This fundamental conflict between the writer and his public was an unprecedented phenomenon in literary history. In the seventeenth century the harmony between the man of letters and his readers was perfect; in the eighteenth century the author had two equally real publics at his disposal and could rely upon one or the other as he pleased. In its early stages, romanticism had been

a vain attempt to avoid open conflict by restoring this duality and by depending upon the aristocracy against the liberal bourgeoisie. But after 1850 there was no longer any means of covering up the profound contradiction which opposed bourgeois ideology to the requirements of literature. About the same time a virtual public was beginning to take form in the deeper layers of society; it was already waiting to be revealed to itself because the cause of free and compulsory education had made some progress. The Third Republic was soon to sanction the right of all men to read and write. What was the writer going to do? Would he choose the masses over against the élite, and would he attempt to recreate for his own profit the duality of publics?

At first sight, it seemed so. By means of the great movement of ideas which from 1830 to 1848 were brewing in the marginal zones of the bourgeoisie, certain writers had the revelation of their virtual public. They adorned them, under the name of "The People," with mystic graces. It would be the instrument of salvation. But, as much as they loved it, they hardly knew it and above all they did not come from it. Sand was Baronne Dudevant; Hugo, the son of a general of the Empire; even Michelet, the son of a printer, was still far removed from the silk-weavers of Lyons or the textile-weavers of Lille. Their socialism — when they were socialists — was a by-product of bourgeois idealism. And then the people were much rather the subject of certain of their works than their chosen public. Hugo, to be sure, had the rare fortune of penetrating everywhere. He was one of the only, perhaps *the* only one of our writers who was really popular. But the

others had incurred the hostility of the bourgeoisie without creating a working-class public in compensation. To convince oneself of this fact all one need do is compare the importance which the bourgeois University accorded to Michelet, an authentic genius and a prose-writer of great class, and to Taine, who was only a cheap pedant, or to Renan, whose "fine style" offers all the examples you want of meanness and ugliness. This purgatory in which the bourgeois class let Michelet vegetate was without compensation; the "people" that he loved read him for a while, and then the success of Marxism pushed him into oblivion. In short, most of these authors were the losers in a revolution that didn't come off. They attached their name and their destiny to it. None of them, except Hugo, really left their mark on literature.

The others, all the others, backed away from the perspective of an unclassing from below which would have made them sink straight down as if a rock had been tied around their necks. They had no lack of excuses: the time wasn't ripe, there was no real bond which attached them to the proletariat, that oppressed class couldn't absorb their work, it didn't know how much it needed them; their decision to defend it had remained abstract; whatever their sincerity might have been, they had "brooded" over miseries which they had understood with their head without feeling them in their heart. Fallen from their class of origin, haunted by the memory of an affluence which they should have refused to accept, they ran the risk of forming "a white-collar proletariat" on the margin of the real proletariat, suspect to the workers and spurned by the bourgeois, whose demands had been dictated by

bitterness and resentment rather than large-mindedness and who had ended by turning against both groups.[1]

Besides, in the eighteenth century, the necessary liberties required by literature were not distinguished from the political liberties which the citizen wanted to win; all that was necessary for the writer to become a revolutionary was to explore the arbitrary essence of his art and to make himself the interpreter of its formal demands; when the revolution which was in the making was bourgeois, literature was naturally revolutionary because the first discovery which it made of itself revealed to it its connections with political democracy. But the formal liberties which the essayist, the novelist, and the poet were to defend had nothing in common with the deeper needs of the proletariat. The latter was not dreaming of demanding political freedom, which, after all, it did enjoy, and which was only a mystification.[2] As for freedom of thought, for the time being the proletariat was not concerned with it. What it asked for was quite different from these abstract liberties. It wanted the material improvement of its lot, and more deeply, and more obscurely too, the end of man's exploitation by man. We shall see later that these demands were of the same kind made by the art of writing conceived as a concrete and historical phenomenon; that is, as the particular and timely appeal which, by agreeing to historicize himself, a man launches in regard to all mankind to the men of his time.

1. This was somewhat the case of Jules Valles, though a natural magnanimity constantly struggled within him against bitterness.

2. I am not unaware that workers defended political democracy against Louis Napoleon Bonaparte much more than did the bourgeois, but that was because they thought that by means of it they would be able to bring about structural reforms.

But in the nineteenth century literature had just disengaged itself from religious ideology and refused to serve bourgeois ideology. Thus, it set itself up as being, in principle, independent of any sort of ideology. As a result, it retained its abstract aspect of pure negativity. It had not yet understood that it *was itself* ideology; it wore itself out asserting its autonomy, which no one contested. This amounted to saying that it claimed it had no privileged subject and could treat any matter whatever. There was no doubt about the fact that one might write felicitously about the condition of the working class; but the choice of this subject depended upon circumstances, upon a free decision of the artist. One day one might talk about a provincial bourgeoise, another day, about Carthaginian mercenaries. From time to time, a Flaubert would affirm the identity of form and content, but he drew no practical conclusion from it. Like all his contemporaries, he drew his definition of beauty from what the Winckelmanns and Lessings had said almost a hundred years earlier and which in one way or other boiled down to presenting it as multiplicity in unity. It was a matter of capturing the iridescence of the various and imposing a strict unity upon it by means of style. The "artistic style" of the Goncourts had no other meaning. It was a formal method of unifying and embellishing any materials, even the most beautiful. How could anyone have then conceived that there might be an internal relationship between the demands of the lower classes and the principles of the art of writing? Proudhon seems to have been the only one to have surmised it. And of course Marx. But they were not men of letters. Literature, still com-

pletely absorbed by the discovery of its autonomy, was to itself its own subject. It had passed to the reflective period; it tried out its methods, broke its former molds, and tried to determine experimentally its own laws and to forge new techniques. It advanced step by step toward the current forms of the drama and the novel, free verse, and the criticism of language. Had it discovered a specific content, it would have had to tear itself away from its meditation on itself and derive its esthetic norms from the nature of this content.

At the same time, by choosing to write for a virtual public, authors would have had to adapt their art to the capacities of the readers, which would have amounted to determining it according to external demands and not according to its own essence. It would have had to give up some of the exquisite forms of narrative, poetry, and even reasoning, for the sole reason that they would be inaccessible to readers without culture. It seemed, therefore, that literature would be running the risk of relapsing into alienation. Hence, the writer, in all honesty, refused to enslave literature to a public and a determined subject. But he did not perceive the divorce which was taking place between the concrete revolution trying to be born and the abstract games he was indulging in. This time it was the masses who wanted power, and as the masses had no culture or leisure, any would-be literary revolution, by refining its technique, put the works it inspired out of their range and served the interests of social conservatism.

Thus, he had to revert to the bourgeois public. The

writer tried hard to break all relations with it, but by refusing to be unclassed from below, his break was condemned to remain symbolic; he played at it tirelessly; he showed it by his clothes, his food, the way he furnished his home, and the manners he adopted, but he did not do it. It was the bourgeoisie which read him. It was the bourgeoisie alone which maintained him and decided his fame. In vain did he pretend that he was getting perspective in order to consider it as a whole. Had he wanted to judge it, he would first have had to leave it, and there was no other way to leave it than by trying out the interests and way of life of another class. Since he did not bring himself to do this, he lived in a state of contradiction and dishonesty since he both knew and did not want to know *for whom* he was writing. He was fond of speaking of his *solitude*, and rather than assume responsibility for the public which he had slyly chosen, he concocted the notion that one writes for himself alone or for God. He made of writing a metaphysical occupation, a prayer, an examination of conscience, everything but a communication. He frequently likened himself to one possessed, because, if he vomited forth words under the sway of an inner necessity, at least he was not *giving* them. But that did not keep him from carefully polishing his writings. And moreover, he was so far from wishing harm to the bourgeoisie that he did not even dispute its right to govern.

Quite the contrary. Flaubert recognized its right and mentioned it by name, and his correspondence after the Commune, which frightened him so, abounds in disgrace-

ful abuse of the workers.[1] And, as the artist, submerged in his milieu, was unable to judge it from without, as his rejections were ineffectual states of mind, he did not even notice that the bourgeoisie was an oppressing class; in fact, he did not at all consider it as a class, but rather as a natural species, and if he ventured to describe it, he did so in strictly psychological terms.

Thus the bourgeois writer and the damned (*maudit*) writer moved on the same level; their only difference was that the first practised white psychology and the sec-

1. I have so often been accused of being unfair to Flaubert that I cannot resist the pleasure of quoting the following texts which anyone can verify in the correspondence:

"Neo-catholicism on one hand and socialism on the other have stultified France. Everything moves between the Immaculate Conception and the workers' lunch-boxes" (1868).

"The first remedy would be to put an end to universal suffrage, the shame of the human mind" (September 1871).

"I'm worth twenty Croisset voters" (1871).

"I have no hatred for the communards for the reason that I don't hate mad dogs" (Croisset, Thursday, 1871).

"I believe that the crowd, the herd, will always be hateful. The only ones important are a small group of spirits, always the same, who pass the torch from hand to hand" (Croisset, September 8, 1871).

"As to the Commune, which is on its last legs, it's the last manifestation of the Middle Ages."

"I hate democracy (at least what it is taken to mean in France), that is, the exaltation of grace to the detriment of justice, the negation of law, in short, anti-sociability."

"The Commune re-instates murderers."

"The people is an eternal minor, and it will always be at the bottom of the scale since it is number, mass, the unbounded."

"It's not important for a lot of peasants to know how to read and no longer listen to their priest, but it's infinitely important that a lot of men like Renan or Littré live and be listened to. Our salvation is now in a *legitimate aristocracy*. I mean by that a majority which will be composed of something other than mere figures." (1871).

"Do you believe that if France, instead of being governed, in short, by the mob, were in the power of the mandarins, we would be in this mess? If, instead of having wanted to enlighten the lower classes, we had been concerned with educating the upper ones?" (Croisset, Wednesday, August 3rd, 1870).

ond, black psychology. For example, when Flaubert declared that he called "anyone who thought basely bourgeois," he was defining the bourgeois in psychological and idealistic terms, that is, in the perspective of the ideology which he pretended to reject. As a result, he rendered a signal service to the bourgeoisie. He led back to the fold the rebellious and the maladjusted, who might have gone over to the proletariat, by convincing them that one could cast off the bourgeois in himself by a simple inner discipline. All they had to do was to practice high thinking in private and they could continue to enjoy their goods and prerogatives with a peaceful conscience. They could still live in bourgeois fashion, and enjoy their incomes in bourgeois fashion, and frequent bourgeois drawing-rooms, but that would all be nothing but appearance. They had raised themselves above their kind by the nobility of their feelings. By the same token he taught his confrères the trick which could allow them, at any rate, to maintain a good conscience; for magnanimity finds its most fitting practice in the practice of the arts.

The solitude of the artist was doubly a fake: it covered up not only a real relationship with the great public but also the restoration of an audience of specialists. Since the government of men and goods was abandoned to the bourgeoisie, the spiritual was once again separated from the temporal. A sort of priesthood once again sprang up. Stendhal's public was Balzac, Baudelaire's was Barbey d'Aurevilly; and Baudelaire, in turn, made himself the public of Poe. These literary salons took on a vague collegiate atmosphere; one "talked literature" in a hushed voice, with an infinite respect; one debated whether the

musician derived more aesthetic joy from his music than the writer from his books. Art again became sacred to the extent that it turned aside from life. It even set up for itself a sort of communion of saints; one joined hands across the centuries with Cervantes, Rabelais, and Dante. One identified himself with this monastic society. The priesthood, instead of being a concrete and, so to speak, geographical organism, became a hereditary institution, a club, all of whose members were dead except one, the last in point of time, who represented the others upon earth and who epitomized the whole college.

These new believers, who had their saints in the past, also had their future life. The divorce of the temporal and spiritual led to a deep modification of the idea of glory. From the time of Racine on, it had been not so much the revenge of the misunderstood writer as the natural prolongation of success in an immutable society. In the nineteenth century it functioned as a mechanism of overcompensation. "I shall be understood in 1880," "I shall win my trial on appeal;" these famous words prove that the writer had not lost the desire to practise a direct and universal action within the framework of an integrated collectivity. But as this action was not possible in the present, one projected into an indefinite future the compensatory myth of a reconciliation between the writer and his public. Moreover, all this remained quite vague; none of these lovers of glory asked himself in what sort of society he would be able to find his recompense. They merely took pleasure in dreaming that their great-nephews would profit from an internal betterment for having come at a later time into an older world. That was the way

Baudelaire, who didn't worry about contradictions, often dressed his wounded pride, by considering his posthumous renown, although he held that society had entered a period of decadence which would end only with the disappearance of the human race.

Thus, for the present, the writer relied on an audience of specialists; as for the past, he concluded a mystic pact with the great dead; as to the future, he made use of the myth of glory. He neglected nothing in wrenching himself free from his class. He was up in the air, a stranger to his century, out of his element, damned. All this playacting had but one goal: to integrate himself into a symbolic society which would be like an image of the aristocracy of the old régime. Psychoanalysis is familiar with these processes of identification of which artistic thinking offers numerous examples: the sick person who needs the key of the asylum in order to escape and finally comes to believe that he himself is the key. Thus, the writer, who needed the favor of the great to unclass himself, ended by taking himself for the incarnation of the whole nobility, and as the latter was characterized by its parasitism it was the ostentation of parasitism which he chose for his style of living. He made himself the martyr of pure consumption. As we have pointed out, he saw no objection to using the goods of the bourgeoisie, but on condition that he was to spend them, that is, transform them into unproductive and useless objects. He burned them, so to speak, because fire purifies everything. Moreover, as he was not always rich, and as he had to live well, he composed a strange life for himself, both extravagant and needy, in which a calculated improvidence symbolized the

mad liberality which was denied him. Outside of art, he found nobility in only three kinds of occupation. First, in love, because it is a useless passion and because women, as Nietzsche said, are the most dangerous game. Also in travel, because the traveler is a perpetual witness who passes from one society to another without ever remaining in any because as a *foreign* consumer in an industrious collectivity, he is the very image of parasitism. Sometimes, in war too, because it is an immense consumption of men and goods.

The contempt with which trade was regarded in aristocratic and warlike societies was again met with in the writer. He was not satisfied with being useless, like the courtiers of the Old Régime; he wanted to be able to trample on utilitarian work, to smash it, burn it, damage it; he wanted to imitate the unconstraint of the lords who had their hunting parties ride across the ripe wheat. He cultivated in himself those destructive impulses of which Baudelaire has spoken in *The Glass-maker.* A little later he was to have a particular liking for instruments which were defective, worthless or no longer in use, half retrieved by nature, and which were like caricatures of instrumentality. It was not a rare thing for him to consider his own life as a tool to be destroyed. In any event, he risked it and played to lose: alcohol, drugs, everything served his purpose. The height of uselessness, of course, was beauty. From "art for art's sake" to symbolism, including realism and the Parnassians, all schools agreed that art was the highest form of pure consumption. It taught nothing, it reflected no ideology, and above all, it refrained from moralizing. Long before Gide wrote it,

Flaubert, Gautier, the Goncourts, Renard, and Maupassant had in their own way said that "it is with good sentiments that one produces bad literature."

For some, literature was subjectivity carried to the absolute, a bonfire in which the black vines of their sufferings and vices writhed and twisted. Lying at the bottom of a world as in a dungeon, they passed beyond it and dispelled it by their dissatisfaction, which revealed other worlds to them. It seemed to them that their heart was different enough so that the picture of it which they drew might be resolutely barren. Others set themselves up as the impartial witnesses of their age, but nobody noticed that they were testifying. They raised testimony and witness to the absolute; they offered to the empty sky the tableau of the society about them. Circumvented, transposed, unified, and caught in the trap of an artistic style, the events of the universe were neutralized and, so to speak, put in parentheses; realism was an "epoché." Here impossible truth joined hands with inhuman Beauty "beautiful as a marble dream." Neither the author, insofar as he wrote, nor the reader, insofar as he read, any longer belonged to this world: they were transformed into pure beholding; they considered man from without; they strove to see him from the point of view of God, or, if you like, of the absolute void. But after all, I can still recognize myself in the purest lyricist's description of his particularities. And if the experimental novel imitated science, was it not utilizable as science was? Could it not likewise have its social *applications*?

The extremists wished, for fear of being serviceable, that their works should not even enlighten the reader

about his own heart; they refused to transmit their ex perience. In the last analysis the work would be entirel gratuitous only if it were entirely inhuman. The logica conclusion of all this was the hope of an absolute crea tion, a quintessence of luxury and prodigality, not utiliza ble in this world because it *was not of the world* and be cause it recalled nothing in it. Imagination was conceive as an unconditioned faculty of *denying* the real and th *objet d'art* was set up on the collapsing of the universe There was the heightened artificialism of Des Esseintes the systematic deranging of all the senses, and finally th concerted destruction of language. There was also si lence: that icy silence, the work of Mallarmé—or th silence of M. Teste for whom all communication was im pure.

The extreme point of this brilliant and mortal liter ature was nothingness. Its extreme point and its deepe essence. There was nothing positive in the new spiritual ity. It was a pure and simple negation of the temporal In the Middle Ages it was the temporal which was th Inessential in relation to spirituality; in the nineteenth century the opposite occurred: the Temporal was pri mary and the spiritual was the inessential parasite which gnawed away at it and tried to destroy it. It was a ques tion of denying the world or consuming it. Of denying it by consuming it. Flaubert wrote to disentangle himself from men and things. His sentence surrounds the object, seizes it, immobilizes it and breaks its back, changes into stone and petrifies the object as well. It is blind and deaf, without arteries; not a breath of life. A deep silence sep arates it from the sentence which follows; it falls into the

void, eternally, and drags its prey along in this infinite fall. Once described, any reality is stricken from the inventory; one moves on to the next. Realism was nothing else but this great gloomy chase. It was a matter of setting one's mind at rest before anything else. Wherever one went, the grass stopped growing. The determinism of the naturalistic novel crushed out life and replaced human actions by one-way mechanisms. It had virtually but one subject: the slow disintegration of a man, an enterprise, a family, or a society. It was necessary to return to zero. One took nature in a state of productive disequilibrium and one wiped out this disequilibrium; one returned to an equilibrium of death by annulling the forces with which he was confronted. When, by chance, he shows us the success of an ambitious man, it is only appearance; Bel Ami does not take the strongholds of the bourgeoisie by assault; he is a gauge whose rise merely testifies to the collapse of a society. And when symbolism discovered the close relationship between beauty and death, it was merely making explicit the theme of the whole literature of a half century. The beauty of the past, because it is gone; the beauty of young people dying and of flowers which fade; the beauty of all erosions and all ruins; the supreme dignity of consumption, of the disease which consumes, of the love which devours, of the art which kills; death is everywhere, before us, behind us, even in the sun and the perfumes of the earth. The art of Barrès is a meditation on death: a thing is beautiful only when it is "consumable," that is, it dies when one has enjoyed it.

The temporal structure which was particularly appropriate for these princely games was the moment. Because

it passes and because in itself it is the image of eternity, it is the negation of human time, that three dimensional time of work and history. A great deal of time is needed to build; a moment is enough to hurl everything to the ground. When one considers the work of Gide in this perspective, one cannot help seeing in it an ethics strictly reserved for the writer-consumer. What is his gratuitous act if not the culmination of a century of bourgeois comedy and the imperative of the author-gentleman: Philoctète gives away his bow, the millionaire squanders his banknotes, Bernard steals, Lafcadio kills and Ménalque sells his belongings.

This destructive movement was to go to its logical consequence: "The simplest surrealist act," Breton was to write twenty years later, "consists of going down into the street, revolver in hand, and firing into the crowd at random as long as you can." It was the last term of a long dialectical process. In the eighteenth century literature had been a negativity; in the reign of the bourgeoisie it passed on to a state of absolute and hypostasized Negation. It became a multicolored and glittering process of annihilation. "Surrealism is not interested in paying much attention . . . to anything whose end is not the annihilation of being and its transformation into an internal and blind brilliance which is no more the soul of ice than it is of fire," writes Breton once again. In the end there is nothing left for literature to do but to contest itself. That is what it did in the name of surrealism. For seventy years writers had been working to consume the world; after 1918 one wrote in order to consume literature: one squandered literary traditions, hashed together words,

threw them against each other to make them shatter. Literature as Negation became Anti-literature; never had it been more *literary*: the circle was completed.

During the same time, the writer, in order to imitate the lighthearted squandering of an aristocracy of birth, had no greater concern than that of establishing his irresponsibility. He began by setting up the rights of genius which replaced the divine right of the authoritarian monarchy. Since Beauty was luxury carried to the extreme, since it was a pyre with cold flames which lit up and and consumed everything, since it was fed by all forms of deterioration and destruction, in particular suffering and death, the artist, who was its priest, had the right to demand in its name and to provoke, if need be, the unhappiness of those close to him. As for him, he had been burning for a long time; he was in ashes; other victims were needed to feed the flames. Women in particular: they would make him suffer and he would pay them back with interest. He wanted to be able to bring bad luck to everyone around him. And if there were no means of setting off catastrophes, he would accept offerings. Admirers, male and female, were there so that he might set fire to their hearts or spend their money without gratitude or remorse. Maurice Sachs reports that his maternal grandfather, who had a fanatical admiration for Anatole France, spent a fortune furnishing the Villa Saïd. When he died, Anatole France uttered this funeral eulogy: "Too bad! He was decorative." By taking money from the bourgeois, the writer was practising his priesthood, since he was diverting a part of their wealth in order to send it up in smoke. And by the same token

he placed himself above all responsibilities: whom could he be responsible to? And in the name of what? If his work aimed at constructing, he could be asked to give an accounting. But since it declared itself to be pure destruction, it escaped judgment.

At the end of the century all this remained somewhat confused and contradictory. But when literature, with surrealism, made itself a provocation to murder, one saw the writer, by a paradoxical but logical sequence, explicitly setting up the principle of his total irresponsibility. To tell the truth, he did not make his reasons clear; he took refuge in the bushes of automatic writing. But the motives are evident: a parasitic aristocracy of pure consumption, whose function was to keep burning the goods of an industrious and productive society, could not come under the jurisdiction of the collectivity he was destroying. And as this systematic destruction never went any further than *scandal*, this amounted in the last analysis, to saying that the primary duty of the writer was to provoke scandal and that his inalienable right was to escape its consequences.

The bourgeoisie let him carry on; it smiled at these monkey shines. What did it matter if the writer scorned it? This scorn wouldn't lead to anything since the bourgeoisie was his only public. It was the only one to whom he spoke about it; it was a secret between them; in a way, it was the bond which united them. And even if he won the popular audience, what likelihood was there of stirring up the discontent of the masses by showing that bourgeois thinking was contemptible? There was not the slightest chance that a doctrine of absolute consumption

could fool the working classes. Besides, the bourgeoisie knew very well that the writer secretly took its part: he needed it for his aesthetic of opposition and resentment; it provided him with the goods he consumed; he wanted to preserve the social order so that he could feel that as a stranger there he was a permanent fixture. In short, he was a rebel, not a revolutionary.

As for rebels, they were right in the bourgeoisie's line. In a sense, it even became their accomplice; it was better to keep the forces of negation within a vain aestheticism, a rebellion without effect; if they were free, they might have interested themselves on behalf of the oppressed classes. And then, bourgeois readers understood, in their way, what the writer called the *gratuity* of his work; for the latter this was the very essence of spirituality and the heroic manifestation of his break with the temporal; for the former a gratuitous work was fundamentally inoffensive; it was an amusement. They doubtless preferred the literature of Bordeaux and Bourget but they did not think that it was bad if there were useless books; they distracted the mind from serious preoccupations; they provided it with the recreation it needed for its general well-being. Thus, even while recognizing that the work of art could serve no purpose, the bourgeois public still found means of utilizing it.

The writer's success was built upon this misunderstanding; as he rejoiced in being misunderstood, it was normal for his readers to be mistaken. Since literature had become in his hands an abstract negation which fed on itself, he must have expected them to smile at his most cutting insults and say "it's only literature;" and since it

was a pure contestation of the spirit of seriousness, he must have been pleased that they refused on principle to take him seriously. Thus, they found themselves, even though it was with scandal and without quite realizing it, in the most "nihilistic" works of the age. The reason was that even though the writer might have put all his efforts into concealing his readers from himself, he could never completely escape their insidious influence. A shame-faced bourgeois, writing for bourgeois without admitting it to himself, he was able to launch the maddest ideas; the ideas were often only bubbles which popped up on the surface of his mind. But his technique betrayed him because he did not watch over it with the same zeal. It expressed a deeper and truer choice, an obscure metaphysic, a genuine relationship with contemporary society. Whatever the cynicism and the bitterness of the chosen subject, nineteenth-century narrative technique offered the French public a reassuring image of the bourgeoisie. Our authors, to be sure, inherited it, but they were responsible for having perfected it.

Its appearance, which dates from the end of the Middle Ages, coincided with the first reflective meditation by which the novelist became conscious of his art. At first he told his story without putting himself on the stage or meditating on his function because the subjects of his tales were almost always of folk or, at any rate, collective origin, and he limited himself to making use of them. The social character of the matter he worked with as well as the fact that it existed before he came to be concerned with it conferred upon him the role of intermediary and was enough to justify him; he was the man who knew

the most charming stories and who, instead of telling them orally, set them down in writing. He invented little; he gave them style; he was the historian of the imaginary. When he himself started contriving the fiction which he published, he found himself. He discovered simultaneously his almost guilty solitude and unjustifiable gratuity, the subjectivity of literary creation. In order to mask them from the eyes of others and from his own as well, in order to establish his right to tell these stories, he wanted to give his inventions the appearance of truth. Lacking the power to preserve the almost material opacity which characterized them when they emanated from the collective imagination, he pretended that at least they did not originate with him, and he managed to give them out as memories. To do that he had represented himself in his works by means of a narrator of oral tradition and at the same time he inserted into them a fictitious audience which represented his real public, such as the characters in the *Decameron* whom their temporary exile puts curiously in the position of learned people and who in turn take up the role of narrator, audience, and critic. Thus, after the age of objective and metaphysical realism, when the words of the tale were taken for the very things which they named and when its substance was the universe, there came that of literary idealism in which the word has existence only in someone's mouth or on someone's pen and refers back in essence to a speaker to whose presence it bears witness, where the substance of the tales is the subjectivity which perceives and thinks the universe, and where the novelist, instead of putting the reader directly into contact with the object, has become con-

scious of his role of mediator and embodies the mediation in a fictitious recital.

Since that time the chief characteristic of the story which one gives to the public has been that of being already thought, that is, achieved, set in order, pruned, and clarified; or rather, of yielding itself only through the thoughts which one retrospectively forms about it. That is why the tense of the novel is almost always the past, whereas that of the epic, which is of collective origin, is frequently the present.

Passing from Boccaccio to Cervantes and then to the French novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the proceedings grow complicated and become episodic because the novel picks up along the way and incorporates the satire, the fable, and the character sketch.[1] The novelist appears in the first chapter; he announces, he questions his readers, admonishes them, and assures them of the truth of his story. I shall call this "primary subjectivity." Then, secondary characters intervene along the way, characters whom the narrator has met and who interrupt the course of the plot to tell the story of their own misfortunes. These are the "secondary subjectivities" supported and restored by the primary subjectivity. Thus, certain stories are re-thought and intellectualized to the second degree.[2] The readers never experience the direct

1. In *The Devil on Two Sticks*, for example, Le Sage *novelizes* the characters of La Bruyere and the maxims of La Rochefoucauld; that is, he binds them together by the slender thread of a plot.

2. The procedure of writing the novel in the form of letters is only a variation of what I have just indicated. The letter is the subjective recital of an event; it refers back to the one who wrote it and who becomes both actor and witnessing subjectivity. As to the event itself, although it is recent, it is already re-thought and explained: the letter always supposes a lag between the fact (which belongs to a recent past) and its recital, which is given subsequently and in a moment of leisure.

onrush of the event; if the narrator has been surprised by it at the moment of its occurrence, he does not *communicate* his surprise to them; he simply *informs* them of it. As to the novelist, since he is convinced that the only reality of the word lies in its being said, since he lives in a polite century in which there still exists an art of conversation, he introduces conversationalists into his book in order to justify the words which are read there; but since it is by words that he represents the characters whose function is to talk, he does not escape the vicious circle.[1]

Of course, the authors of the nineteenth century brought their efforts to bear on the narration of the event. They tried to restore part of its freshness and violence, but for the most part they again took up the idealistic technique and adapted it to their needs. Authors as dissimilar as Barbey d'Aurevilly and Fromentin make use of it constantly. In *Dominique*, for example, one finds a primary subjectivity which manipulates the levels of a secondary subjectivity and it is the latter which makes the tale. The procedure is nowhere more manifest than in Maupassant. The structure of his short stories is almost invariable; we are first presented with the audience, a brilliant and worldly society which has assembled in a drawing-room after dinner. It is night-time, which dispels fatigue and passion. The oppressed are asleep, as are the rebellious; the world is enshrouded; the story unfolds. In a bubble of light surrounded by nothing there remains this élite which stays awake, completely occupied with its

1. This is the reverse of the vicious circle of the surrealists who try to destroy painting by painting. In this case one wants to have literature's letters of credit given by literature.

ceremonies. If there are intrigues or love or hate among its members, we are not told of them, and desire and anger are likewise stilled; these men and women are occupied in *preserving* their culture and manners and in *recognizing* each other by the rites of politeness. They represent order in its most exquisite form; the calm of night, the silence of the passions, everything concurs in symbolizing the stable bourgeoisie of the end of the century which thinks that nothing more will happen and which believes in the eternity of capitalist organization. Thereupon, the narrator is introduced. He is a middle-aged man who has "seen much, read much, and retained much," a professional man of experience, a doctor, a military man, an artist, or a Don Juan. He has reached the time of life when, according to a respectful and comfortable myth, man is freed from the passions and considers with an indulgent lucidity those he has experienced. His heart is calm, like the night. He tells his story with detachment. If it has caused him suffering, he has made honey from this suffering. He looks back upon it and considers it as it really was, that is, *sub specie aeternitatis*. There was difficulty to be sure, but this difficulty ended long ago; the actors are dead or married or comforted. Thus, the adventure was a brief disturbance which is over with. It is told from the viewpoint of experience and wisdom; it is listened to from the viewpoint of order. Order triumphs; order is everywhere; it contemplates an old disorder as if the still waters of a summer day have preserved the memory of the ripples which have run through it. Moreover, had there even been this disturbance? The evocation of an abrupt change would

frighten this bourgeois sociey. Neither the general nor the doctor confides his recollections in the raw state; they are experiences from which they have extracted the quintessence, and they warn us, from the moment they start talking, that their tale has a moral. Besides, the story is explanatory; it aims at producing a psychological law on the basis of this example. A law, or, as Hegel says, the calm image of change. And the change itself, that is, the individual aspect of the anecdote, is it not an appearance? To the extent that one explains it, one reduces the entire effect to the entire cause, the unforeseen to the expected and the new to the old. The narrator brings the same workmanship to bear upon the human event as, according to Myerson, the nineteenth-century scientist brought to bear upon the scientific fact. He reduces the diverse to the identical. And if, from time to time, he maliciously desires to maintain a slightly disquieting tone in his story, he dispenses the irreducibility of the change most carefully, as in those fantastic tales in which, behind the inexplicable, the author allows us to suspect a whole causal order which will restore rationality in the universe. Thus, for the novelist who is a product of this stabilized society change is a non-being, as it is for Parmenides, as Evil is for Claudel. Moreover, even should it exist, it would never be anything else than an individual calamity in a maladjusted soul.

It is not a question of studying the relative movements of partial systems within a system in motion — society, the universe — but of considering from the viewpoint of absolute rest the absolute movement of a relatively isolated partial system. That is, one sets up absolute

landmarks in order to determine it, and consequently one knows it in its absolute truth. In an ordered society which meditates upon its eternity and celebrates it with rites, a man evokes the phantom of a past disease, dispels it with a wave of his magic wand and order, makes it glitter, embellishes it with old-fashioned graces, and at the moment when he is about to cause unsubstitutes for it the eternal hierarchy of causes and laws. In this magician who frees himself from history and life by understanding them and who is raised above his audience by his knowledge and experience we recognize the loftly aristocrat whom we spoke about earlier.[1]

If we have spoken at some length about Maupassant's narrative procedure it is because it constituted the basic technique for all the French novelists of his own generation, of the succeeding one, and of all the generations since. The internal narrator is always present. He may reduce himself to an abstraction; often he is not even explicitly designated; but, at any rate, it is through his subjectivity that we perceive the event. When he does not appear at all, it is not that he has been suppressed like a useless device; it is that he has become the *alter ego* of the author. The latter, with his blank sheet of paper in front of him, sees his imagination transmuted into experiences. He no longer writes in his own name but at the dictation of a mature and sober man who has witnessed the circumstances which are being related.

1. When Maupassant writes *Le Horla*, that is, when he speaks of the madness which threatens him, the tone changes. It is because at last something — something horrible — is going to happen. The man is overwhelmed, crushed; he no longer understands; he wants to drag the reader along with him into his terror. But the twig is bent; lacking a technique adapted to madness, death, and history, he fails to move the reader.

Daudet, for example, obviously had the mind of a drawing-room raconteur who infuses into his style the twists and friendly casualness of worldly conversation, who exclaims, grows ironical, questions, and challenges his audience: "Ah! how disappointed Tartarin was! And do you know why? You won't guess in a million years!" Even realistic writers who wished to be the objective historians of their time preserved the abstract scheme of the method; that is, in all their novels there is a common milieu, a common plot, which is not the individual and historical subjectivity of the novelist but the ideal and universal one of the man of experience. First of all, the tale is laid in the past: the ceremonial past, in order to put some distance between the events and the audience; the subjective past, equivalent to the memory of the storyteller; the social past, since the plot does not belong to that history without conclusion which is in the making but to history already made.

If it is true, as Janet claims, that memory is distinguished from the somnambulistic resurrection of the past in that the latter reproduces the event, whereas the former, indefinitely compressible, can be told in a phrase or a volume, according to need, it can well be said that novels of this kind, with their abrupt contractions of time followed by long expansions, are precisely memories. Sometimes the novelist lingers to describe a decisive moment; at other times he leaps across several years: "Three years flowed by, three years of gloomy suffering..." He permits himself to shed light on his characters' present by means of their future: "They did not think at the time that this brief encounter was to have fatal conse-

quences. . ." And from his point of view he is not wrong, since this present and future are both past, since the time of memory has lost its irreversibility and one can cross it backward and forward.

Besides, the memories which he gives us, already worked upon, thought over, and appraised, offer us an immediately assimilable teaching; the feelings and actions are often presented to us as typical examples of the laws of the heart: "Daniel, like all young people . . .," "Eve was quite feminine in that she . . .," "Mercier had the nasty habit, common among civil-service clerks . . ." And as these laws cannot be deduced *a priori* nor grasped by intuition nor founded on experimentation which is scientific and capable of being universally reproduced, they refer the reader back to a subjectivity which has produced these recipes from the circumstances of an active life. In this sense it can be said that most of the French novels of the Third Republic aspired, whatever the age of their real author and much more so if the author was very young, to the honor of having been written by quinquagenarians.

During this whole period, which extends over several generations, the plot is related from the point of view of the absolute, that is, of order. It is a local change in a system at rest; neither the author nor the reader runs any risk; there is no surprise to be feared; the event is a thing of the past; it has been catalogued and understood. In a stable society which is not yet conscious of the dangers which threaten it, which has a morality at its disposal, a scale of values, and a system of explanations to integrate its local changes, which is convinced that it is beyond

historicity and that nothing important will ever happen any more, in a bourgeois France tilled to the last acre, laid out like a checkerboard by its secular walls, congealed in its industrial methods, and resting on the glory of its Revolution, no other fictional technique could be possible. New methods that some writers attempted to introduce were successful only as curiosities or were not followed up. Neither writers, readers, the structure of the collectivity, nor its myths had any need of them.[1]

Thus, whereas literature ordinarily represents an integrating and militant function in society, bourgeois society at the end of the nineteenth century offers the unprecedented spectacle of an industrious society, grouped around the banner of production, from which there issues a literature which, far from reflecting it, never speaks to it about what interests it, runs counter to its ideology, identifies the Beautiful with the unproductive, refuses to

1. Among these procedures I shall first cite the curious recourse to the style of the theatre that one finds at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one in Gyp, Lavedan, Abel Hermant, etc. The novel was written in dialogue form. The gestures of the characters and their actions were indicated in italics and parenthetically. It was evidently a matter of making the reader contemporaneous with the action as the spectator is during the performance. This procedure certainly manifests the predominance of dramatic art in polite society around 1900. In its way it also sought to escape the myth of primary subjectivity. But the fact that it was abandoned shows sufficiently that it did not solve the problem. First, it is a sign of weakness to ask for help from a neighboring art, a proof that one lacks resources in the very domain of the art he practices. Then, the author did not thereby keep from entering into the consciousness of his characters and having the reader enter with him. He simply divulged the intimate contents of the consciousness in parentheses and italics, with the style and typographical procedures that are generally used for stage directions. In effect, it was an attempt without a future. The authors who used it had a vague feeling that new life could be put into the novel by writing it in the present. But they had not yet understood that it was not possible if one did not first give up the *explanatory attitude.*

More serious was the attempt to introduce the interior monologue of Schnitz-

allow itself to be integrated, and does not even wish to be read.

The authors are not to be blamed; they did what they could; among them are some of our greatest and purest writers. And besides, as every kind of human behavior discloses to us an aspect of the universe, their attitude has enriched us despite themselves by revealing gratuity as one of the infinite dimensions of the world and as a possible goal of human activity. And as they were artists, their work covered up a desperate appeal to the freedom of the reader they pretended to despise. It pushed contestation to the limit, even to the point of contesting itself; it gives us a glimpse of a black silence beyond the massacre of words, and, beyond the spirit of seriousness, the bare and empty sky of equivalences; it invites us to emerge into nothingness by destruction of all myths and all

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ler (I am not speaking here of that of Joyce which has quite different metaphysical principles. Larbaud, who, I know, harks back to Joyce, seems to me much rather to draw his inspiration from *Les Lauriers sont coupés* and from *Mademoiselle Else*). In short, it was a matter of pushing the hypothesis of a primary subjectivity to the limit and of passing on to realism by leading idealism up to the absolute.

The reality which one shows to the reader without intermediary is no longer the thing itself — the tree, the ashtray — but the consciousness which sees the thing; the "real" is no longer only a representation, but rather the representation becomes an absolute reality since it is given to us as an immediate datum. The inconvenient aspect of this procedure is that it encloses us in an individual subjectivity and that it thereby lacks the intermonadic universe; besides, it dilutes the event and the action in the perception of one and then the other. Now, the common characteristic of the fact and the action is that they escape subjective representation which grasps their results but not their living movement. In short, it is only with a certain amount of faking that one reduces the stream of consciousness to a succession of words, even deformed ones. If the word is given as an intermediary *signifying* a reality which in essence transcends language, nothing could be better; it withdraws itself, is forgotten, and discharges consciousness upon the object.

But if it presents itself as the *psychic reality*, if the author, by writing,

scales of value; it discloses to us in man a close and secret relationship with the nothing, instead of the intimate relationship with the divine transcendence. It is the literature of adolescence, of that age when the young man, useless and without responsibility, still supported and fed by his parents, wastes his family's money, passes judgment on his father, and takes part in the demolition of the serious universe which protected his childhood. If one bears in mind that the festival, as Caillois has well shown, is one of those negative moments when the collectivity consumes the goods it has accumulated, violates the laws of its moral code, spends for the pleasure of spending, and destroys for the pleasure of destroying, it will be seen that literature in the nineteenth century was, on the margin of the industrious society which had the *mystique* of saving, a great sumptuous and funereal festival, an invitation

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claims to give us an ambiguous reality which is a sign, objective in essence — that is, insofar as it relates to something outside itself — and a thing, formal in essence — that is, as an immediate psychic datum — then he can be accused of not having participated and of disregarding the rhetorical law which might be formulated as follows: in literature, where one uses signs, it is not necessary to use *only* signs; and if the *reality* which one wants to signify is *one word*, it must be given to the reader by other words. He can be charged, besides, with having forgotten that the greatest riches of the psychic life are *silent*. We know what has happened to the internal monologue; having become *rhetoric*, that is, a poetic transposition of the inner life — silent as well as verbal — it has today become one method *among others* of the novelist. Too idealistic to be true, too realistic to be complete. it is the crown of the subjectivistic technique. It is within and by means of this technique that the literature of to-day has become conscious of itself, that is, that literature is a double surpassing, toward the objective and toward the rhetorical, of the technique of the internal monologue. But for that it is necessary that the historical circumstance change.

It is evident that the writer continues to-day to write in the past tense. It is not by changing the tense of the verb but by revolutionizing the techniques of the story that he will succeed in making the reader contemporary with the story.

to burn in a splendid immorality, in the fire of the passions, even unto death. When I come to say later on that it found its belated fulfillment and its end in Trotskyising surrealism, one will better understand the function it assumes in a too closed society: it was a safety value. After all, it's not so far from the perpetual holiday to the permanent revolution.

However, the nineteenth century was the time of the writer's transgression and fall. Had he accepted unclassing from below and had he given his art a content, he would have carried on with other means and on another plane the undertaking of his predecessors. He might have helped literature pass from negativity and abstraction to concrete construction; without losing the autonomy which the eighteenth century had won for it and which there was no longer any question of taking away from it, it might have again integrated itself into society; by clarifying and supporting the claims of the proletariat, he would have attained the essence of the art of writing and would have understood that there is a coincidence not only between formal freedom of thought and political democracy, but also between the material obligation of choosing man as a perpetual subject of meditation and social democracy. His style would have regained an inner tension because he would have been addressing a split public. By trying to awaken the consciousness of the working class while giving evidence to the bourgeois of their own iniquity, his works would have reflected the entire world. He would have learned to distinguish generosity, the original source of the work of art, the unconditioned appeal to the reader, from prodigality, its caricature; he would have abandoned

the analytical and psychological interpretation of "human nature" for the synthetic appreciation of *conditions.* Doubtless it was difficult, perhaps impossible; but he went about it the wrong way. It was not necessary for him to get on his high horse in a vain effort to escape all class determination, nor to "brood over" the proletariat, but on the contrary to think of himself as a bourgeois who had broken loose from his class and who was united with the oppressed masses by a solidarity of interest.

The sumptuousness of the means of expression which he discovered should not make us forget that he betrayed literature. But his responsibility goes even further; if the authors had found an audience in the oppressed classes, perhaps the divergence of their points of view and the diversity of their writings would have helped produce in the masses what someone has very happily called a *movement* of ideas, that is, an open, contradictory, and dialectical ideology. Without doubt, Marxism would have triumphed, but it would have been colored with a thousand nuances; it would have had to absorb rival doctrines, digest them, and remain open. We know what happened; two revolutionary ideologies instead of a hundred: before 1870, the Prudhonians in the majority in the International, then crushed by the defeat of the Commune; Marxism triumphing over its adversary not by the power of the Hegelian negativity which preserves while it surpasses, but because external forces pure and simple suppressed one of the forms of the antinomy. It would take a long time to tell all that this triumph without glory has cost Marxism; for want of contradiction, it has lost life. Had it been the better, constantly combatted, transforming it-

self in order to win, stealing its enemies' arms, it might have been identified with mind; alone, it became the Church, while the gentlemen-writers, a thousand miles away, made themselves guardians of an abstract spirituality.

Will anyone doubt that I am aware how incomplete and debatable these analyses are? Exceptions abound, and I know them, but it would take a big book to go into them. I have touched only the high spots. But above all, one should understand the spirit in which I have undertaken this work. If one were to see in it an attempt, even superficial, at sociological explanation, it would lose all significance. Just as for Spinoza, the idea of a line segment rotating about one of its extremities remains abstract and false if one considers it outside of the synthetic, concrete, and bounded idea of circumference which contains, completes, and justifies it, likewise here, the considerations remain arbitrary if they are not replaced in the perspective of a work of art, that is, of a free and unconditioned appeal to a freedom. One cannot write without a public and without a myth — without a *certain* public which historical circumstances have made, without a *certain* myth of literature which depends to a very great extent upon the demand of this public. In a word, the author is in a situation, like all other men. But his writings, like every human project, simultaneously enclose, specify, and surpass this situation, even explain it and set it up, just as the idea of a circle explains and sets up that of the rotation of a segment.

Being situated is an essential and necessary characteristic of freedom. To describe the situation is not to cast

aspersion on the freedom. The Jansenist ideology, the law of the three unities, and the rules of French prosody are not art; in regard to art they are even pure nothingness, since they can by no means produce, by a simple combination, a good tragedy, a good scene, or even a good line. But the art of Racine had to be invented *on the basis* of these; not by conforming to them, as has been rather foolishly said, and by deriving exquisite difficulties and necessary constraints from them, but rather by re-inventing them, by conferring a new and peculiarly Racinian function upon the division into acts, the cesura, rhyme, and the ethics of Port Royale, so that it is impossible to decide whether he poured his subject into a mould which his age imposed upon him or whether he really elected this *technique* because his subject required it. To understand what *Phèdre* could not be, it is necessary to appeal to all anthropology. To understand what it *is*, it is necessary only to read or listen, that is, to make oneself a pure freedom and to give one's confidence generously to a generosity. The examples we have chosen have served only to *situate* the freedom of the writer in different ages, to illuminate by the limits of the demands made upon him the limits of his appeal, to show by the idea of his role which the public fashions for itself the necessary boundaries of the idea which he invents of literature. And if it is true that the essence of the literary work is freedom totally disclosing and willing itself as an appeal to the freedom of other men, it is also true that the different forms of oppression, by hiding from men the fact that they were free, have screened all or part of this essence from authors. Thus, the opinions which they have formed about their profes-

sentation is already the beginning of change, as the work of art, taken in the totality of its exigencies, is not a simple description of the present but a judgment of this present in the name of a future, finally, as every book contains an appeal, this awareness of self is a surpassing of self. The universe is not contested in the name of simple consumption, but in the name of the hopes and sufferings of those who inhabit it. Thus, concrete literature will be a synthesis of Negativity, as a power of uprooting from the given, and a Project, as an outline of a future order; it will be the Festival, the flaming mirror which burns everything reflected in it, and generosity, that is, a free invention, a gift. But if it is to be able to ally these two complementary aspects of freedom, it is not enough to accord the writer freedom to say everything; he must write for a public which has the freedom of changing everything; which means, besides suppression of classes, abolition of all dictatorship, constant renewal of frameworks, and the continuous overthrowing of order once it tends to congeal. In short, literature is, in essence, the subjectivity of a society in permanent revolution. In such a society it would go beyond the antinomy of word and action. Certainly in no case would it be regarded as an act; it is false to say that the author *acts* upon his readers; he merely makes an appeal to their freedom, and in order for his works to have any effect, it is necessary for the public to adopt them on their own account by an unconditioned decision. But in a collectivity which constantly corrects, judges, and metamorphoses itself, the written work can be an essential condition of action, that is, the moment of reflective consciousness.

of the world insofar as the world is His work; it is an inessential creation on the margin of a major Creation; it is praise, psalm, offering, a pure reflection. By the same token literature falls into alienation; that is, since it is, in any case, the reflectiveness of the social body, since it remains in the state of non-reflective reflectiveness, it mediatizes the Catholic universe; but for the clerk it remains the immediate; it retrieves the world, but by losing itself. But as the reflective idea must necessarily reflect *itself* on pain of annihilating itself with the whole reflected universe, the three examples which we have studied showed a movement of the retrieving of literature by itself, that is, its transition from the state of unreflective and immediate reflection to that of reflective mediation. At first concrete and alienated, it liberates itself by negativity and passes to abstraction; more exactly, it passes in the eighteenth century to abstract negativity before becoming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century absolute negation. At the end of this evolution it has cut all its bonds with society; it no longer even has a public. "Every one knows," writes Paulhan, "that there are two literatures in our time, the bad, which is really unreadable (it is widely read) and the good, which is not read."

But even that is an advance; at the end of this lofty isolation, at the end of this scornful rejection of all efficacity there is the destruction of literature by itself; at first, the terrible "it's *only* literature;" then, that literary phenomenon which the same Paulhan calls terrorism, which is born at about the same time as the idea of parasitic gratuity, and as its antithesis, and which runs all through the nineteenth century, contracting as it goes a

thousand irrational marriages and which finally bursts forth shortly before the first war. Terrorism, or rather the terrorist complex, for it is a tangle of vipers. One might distinguish, first, so deep a disgust with the sign as such that it leads in all cases to preferring the thing signified to the word, the act to the statement, the word conceived as object to the word-signification, that is, in the last analysis, poetry to prose, spontaneous disorder to composition; second, an effort to make literature one expression among others of life, instead of sacrificing life to literature; and third, a crisis of the writer's moral conscience, that is the sad collapse of parasitism. Thus, without for a moment conceiving the idea of losing its formal autonomy, literature makes itself a negation of formalism and comes to raise the question of its essential content. To-day we are beyond terrorism and we can make use of its experience and the preceding analyses to set down the essential traits of a concrete and liberated literature.

We have said that, as a rule, the writer addressed all men. But immediately afterward we noted that he was read only by a few. As a result of the divergence between the real public and the ideal public, there arose the idea of abstract universality. That is, the author postulates the constant repetition in an indefinite future of the handful of readers which he has at present. Literary glory peculiarly resembles Nietzsche's eternal recurrence; it is a struggle against history; here, as there, recourse to the infinity of time seeks to compensate for the failure in space (for the author of the seventeenth century, a recurrence *ad infinitum* of the gentleman; for the one of the nineteenth century, an extension *ad infinitum* of the club

of writers and the public of specialists). But as it is self-evident that the effect of the projection into the future of the real and present public is to perpetuate, at least in the representation of the writer, the exclusion of the majority of men, as, in addition, this imagining of an infinity of unborn readers is tantamount to extending the actual public by a public made up of merely possible men, the universality which glory aims at is partial and abstract. And as the choice of the public conditions, to a certain extent, the choice of subject, the literature which has set up glory as its goal and its governing idea must also remain abstract.

The term "concrete universality" must be understood, on the contrary, as the sum total of men living in a given society. If the writer's public could ever be extended to the point of embracing this totality, the result would not be that he would necessarily have to limit the reverberations of his work to the present time, but rather he would oppose to the abstract eternity of glory, which is an impossible and hollow dream of the absolute, a concrete and finite duration which he would determine by the very choice of his subjects, and which, far from uprooting him from history, would define his situation in social time. As a matter of fact, every human project outlines a certain future by its very motto: if I'm going to sow, I'm putting a whole year of waiting before me; if I get married, my venture suddenly causes my whole life to rise up before me; if I launch out into politics, I'm mortgaging a future which will extend beyond my death. The same with writing. Already, under the pretense of belaureled immortality, one discerns more modest and more con-

crete pretensions. The aim of *The Silence of the Sea* was to lead the French to reject the enemy's efforts to get them to collaborate. Its effectiveness and consequently its actual public could not extend beyond the time of the occupation. The books of Richard Wright will remain alive as long as the negro question is raised in the United States. Thus, there is no question as to the writer's renouncing the idea of survival; quite the contrary, he is the one who decides it; he will survive so long as he acts. Afterward, it's honorary membership, retirement. Today, for having wanted to escape from history, he begins his honorary membership the day after his death, sometimes even while he is alive.

Thus, the concrete public would be a tremendous feminine questioning, the waiting of a whole society which the writer would have to seduce and satisfy. But for that the public would have to be free to ask and the writer to answer. That means that in no case must the questions of one group or class cover up those of other milieus; otherwise, we would relapse into the abstract. In short, *actual* literature can only realize its full *essence* in a classless society. Only in this society could the writer be aware that there is no difference of any kind between his *subject* and his *public*. For the subject of literature has always been man in the world. However, as long as the virtual public remained like a dark sea around the sunny little beach of the real public, the writer risked confusing the interests and cares of man with those of a small and favored group. But, if the public were identified with the concrete universal, the writer would really have to write about the human totality. Not about the abstract man of all the

ages and for a timeless reader, but about the whole man of his age and for his contemporaries. As a result, the literary antinomy of lyrical subjectivity and objective testimony would be left behind. Involved in the same adventure as his readers and situated like them in a society without cleavages, the writer, in speaking about them, would be speaking about himself, and in speaking about himself would be speaking about them. As no aristocratic pride would any longer force him to deny that he is in a situation, he would no longer seek to soar above his times and bear witness to it before eternity, but, as his situation would be universal, he would express the hopes and anger of all men, and would thereby express himself completely, that is, not as a metaphysical creature like the medieval clerk, nor as a psychological animal like our classical writers, nor even as a social entity, but as a totality emerging into the world from the void and containing within it all those structures in the indissoluble unity of the human condition; literature would really be anthropological, in the full sense of the term.

It is quite evident that in such a society there would be nothing which would even remotely recall the separation of the temporal and the spiritual. Indeed, we have seen that this division necessarily corresponds to an alienation of man and, therefore, of literature; our analyses have shown us that it always tends to oppose a public of professionals or, at least, of enlightened amateurs, to the undifferentiated masses. Whether he identifies himself with the Good and with divine Perfection, with the Beautiful or the True, a clerk is always on the side of the oppressors. A watchdog or a jester: it is up to him to choose.

M. Benda has chosen the cap and bells and M. Marcel the kennel; they have the right to do so, but if literature is one day to be able to enjoy its essence, the writer, without class, without colleges, without salons, without excess of honors, and without indignity, will be thrown into the world, among men, and the very notion of clerkship will appear inconceivable. The spiritual, moreover, always rests upon an ideology, and ideologies are freedom when they make themselves and oppression when they are made. The writer who has attained full self-consciousness will therefore not make himself the guardian of any spiritual hero; he will no longer know the centrifugal movement whereby certain of his predecessors turned their eyes away from the world to contemplate the heaven of established values; he will know that his job is not adoration of the spiritual, but rather spiritualization.

Spiritualization, that is, *renewal.* And there is nothing else to spiritualize, nothing else to renew but this multicolored and concrete world with its weight, its opaqueness, its zones of generalisation, and its swarm of anecdotes, and that invincible Evil which gnaws at it without ever being able to destroy it. The writer will renew it as is, the raw, sweaty, smelly, everyday world, in order to submit it to freedoms on the foundation of a freedom. Literature in this classless society would thus be the world aware of itself, suspended in a free act, and offering itself to the free judgment of all men, the reflective self-awareness of a classless society. It is by means of the book that the members of this society would be able to get their bearings, to see themselves and see their situation. But as the portrait compromises the model, as the simple pre-

sentation is already the beginning of change, as the work of art, taken in the totality of its exigencies, is not a simple description of the present but a judgment of this present in the name of a future, finally, as every book contains an appeal, this awareness of self is a surpassing of self. The universe is not contested in the name of simple consumption, but in the name of the hopes and sufferings of those who inhabit it. Thus, concrete literature will be a synthesis of Negativity, as a power of uprooting from the given, and a Project, as an outline of a future order; it will be the Festival, the flaming mirror which burns everything reflected in it, and generosity, that is, a free invention, a gift. But if it is to be able to ally these two complementary aspects of freedom, it is not enough to accord the writer freedom to say everything; he must write for a public which has the freedom of changing everything; which means, besides suppression of classes, abolition of all dictatorship, constant renewal of frameworks, and the continuous overthrowing of order once it tends to congeal. In short, literature is, in essence, the subjectivity of a society in permanent revolution. In such a society it would go beyond the antinomy of word and action. Certainly in no case would it be regarded as an act; it is false to say that the author *acts* upon his readers; he merely makes an appeal to their freedom, and in order for his works to have any effect, it is necessary for the public to adopt them on their own account by an unconditioned decision. But in a collectivity which constantly corrects, judges, and metamorphoses itself, the written work can be an essential condition of action, that is, the moment of reflective consciousness.

Thus, in a society without classes, without dictatorship, and without stability, literature would end by becoming conscious of itself; it would understand that form and content, public and subject, are identical, that the formal freedom of saying and the material freedom of doing complete each other, and that one should be used to demand the other, that it best manifests the subjectivity of the person when it translates most deeply collective needs and, reciprocally, that its function is to express the concrete universal to the concrete universal and that its end is to appeal to the freedom of men so that they may realize and maintain the reign of human freedom. To be sure, this is utopian. It is possible to conceive this society, but we have no practical means at our disposal of realizing it. It has allowed us to perceive the conditions under which literature might manifest itself in its fullness and purity. Doubtless, these conditions are not fulfilled today; and it is today that we must write. But if the dialectic of literature has been pushed to the point where we have been able to perceive the essence of prose and of writing, perhaps we may at this time attempt to answer the only question which is urgent for us: what is the situation of the writer in 1947; what is his public; what are his myths; what does he want to write about; what can he and what ought he write about?

IV

SITUATION OF THE WRITER IN 1947

I am speaking about the French writer, the only one who has remained a bourgeois, the only one who has to adjust himself to a language which a hundred and fifty years of bourgeois domination have broken, vulgarized, slackened, and stuffed with "bourgeoisisms," each of which seems a little sigh of ease and abandon. The American writer has often practiced manual occupations before writing his books; he goes back to them. Between two novels, his vocation seems to be on the ranch, in the shop, in the city streets; he does not see in literature a means of proclaiming his solitude, but an opportunity of escaping it. He writes blindly, out of an absurd need to rid himself of his fears and anger, somewhat as the Midwest farmer writes to the New York radio commentators to pour out his heart to them. He muses less about glory than he dreams of fraternity. He does not invent his manner against tradition, but for want of one, and in certain ways his most extreme audacities are naïvetés. The world is new in his eyes, everything is yet to be said, no one before him has spoken of the skies or the crops.

He rarely appears in New York, and if he goes there, it is only on the run, or, like Steinbeck, he locks himself up for three months and he's quits for the year, a year which he will pass on the highways, in the work-yards, or in the bars. It is true that he belongs to "guilds" and Associations, but that is purely to defend his material interests. He has no solidarity with other writers; he is often separated from them by the length or breadth of the continent[1]; nothing is more remote from him than the idea of college or clerkship; for a while he is fêted and then is lost and forgotten; he reappears with a new book to take a new plunge.[2]

Thus, at the mercy of twenty ephemeral glories and twenty disappearances, he drifts continually between the working-class world, where he goes to seek adventures, and his middle-class readers (I don't dare call them bourgeois; I very much doubt whether there is bourgeoisie in the United States), hard, brutal, young, and lost, who tomorrow will take the same plunge as he.

In England, the intellectuals are less integrated into the collectivity than we; they form an eccentric and slightly cantankerous caste which does not have much contact with the rest of the population. The reason is, first of all,

1. American literature is still in the stage of regionalism.

2. When I was passing through New York in 1945, I asked a literary agent to get the rights of translation of *Miss Lonelyhearts*, a work by Nathanael West. He did not know the book and came to a gentleman's agreement with the author of a certain *Lonelyheart*, an old maiden lady who was very surprised that someone was thinking of translating her into French. He learned his mistake and, continuing his search, he finally found West's publisher who admitted that he did not know what had become of the author. I urged them to investigate and finally they learned that West had died several years earlier in an automobile accident. It seems that he still had a bank-account in New York and the publisher was still sending him checks from time to time.

that they have not had our luck; because remote predecessors whom we hardly deserve prepared the Revolution, the class in power, after a century and a half, still does us the honor of fearing us a little (very little); it treats us tactfully. Our confrères in London who do not have these glorious memories do not frighten anyone; they are considered quite harmless; and then, club life is less suitable for spreading their influence than salon life has been in spreading ours. Among themselves, the men speak about business, politics, women, or horses, never about literature, whereas our matrons, who practised literature as an accomplishment, helped, by their receptions, to bring together politicians, financiers, generals, and men of letters. The English writers make a virtue of necessity and by aggrandizing the oddness of their ways attempt to claim as a free choice the isolation which has been imposed upon them by the structure of their society. Even in Italy, where the bourgeoisie, without ever having counted for much, has been ruined by fascism and defeat, the condition of the writer, needy, badly paid, lodged in dilapidated palaces too vast and grandiose to be heated or even furnished, at grips with a princely language too pompous to be supple, is far removed from ours.

Thus, we are the most bourgeois writers in the world. Well housed, decently dressed, not so well fed, perhaps; but even that is significant: the bourgeois spends less on his food, proportionally, than the workman; much more for his clothes and lodging. All of us, moreover, are steeped in bourgeois culture; in France, where the baccalaureat is a hall-mark of the bourgeoisie, it is not permissible to plan to write without being at least a bachelor.

In other countries, the dreamy-eyed possessed twist and squirm under the sway of an idea which has seized them from behind and which they never manage to look in the face. After having tried everything, they end by trying to pour their obsession on paper and to let it dry there with the ink. But as for us, we were used to literature long before beginning our first novel. To us it seemed natural for books to grow in a civilized society, like trees in a garden. It is because we loved Racine and Verlaine too much that when we were fourteen years old, we discovered, during the evening study period or in the great court of the lycée, our vocation as a writer. Even before having found ourselves at grips with a work of our own — that monster, so drab, so smeared with our own sticky juices, such a gamble — we had been brought up on literature already made, and we naively thought that our future writings would issue from our mind in the finished state in which we found those of others, with the seal of collective recognition and the pomp which comes from secular consecration, in short, like national resources. For us, the ultimate transformation of a poem, its last toilette for eternity, was, after having appeared in magnificent illustrated editions, to end by appearing in small type in a hard-covered book bound in green canvas, whose clean smell of ink and pulp seemed to us the very perfume of the Muses, and to move the dreamy sons with ink-stained fingers of the future bourgeoisie. Breton himself, who wanted to set fire to culture, got his first literary shock in class one day when his teacher was reading Mallarmé to him. In short, for a long time we thought that the final destination of our work was to furnish literary texts for the

French *explication* classes of 1980. Later on, five years would be just about long enough after our first book for us to be shaking hands with all our confrères. Centralization has grouped us all in Paris. With a bit of luck, a busy American might join us all in twenty-four hours, to know, in twenty-four hours, our opinions about UNRRA, the UNO, UNESCO, the Henry Miller affair, and the atomic bomb; in twenty-four hours, a trained cyclist might circulate — from Aragon to Mauriac, from Vercors to Cocteau, stopping off to see Breton in Montmartre, Queneau in Neuilly, and Billy at Fontainebleau — a report of the scruples and points of conscience which are part of our professional obligations, one of those manifestoes, one of those petitions or protests to Tito for or against the return of Trieste, the annexation of the Saar, or the use of V3's in future warfare, by which we like to show that we belong to our century; in twenty-four hours, without a cyclist, a piece of gossip goes all about our college and returns embroidered upon to the one who launched it. We all — or almost all — can be seen together in certain cafés, at the Pléiade concerts, and, in certain strictly literary circumstances, at the English Embassy. From time to time, one of us who has been overworking has it announced that he's leaving for the country; we all go to see him; we advise him that it's all for the best, that one can't write in Paris, and we see him off with our envy and our best wishes; as for us, an aged mother, a young mistress, or an urgent job keeps us in town. He leaves with the reporters of *Samedi-Soir* who are going along to photograph his retreat. He gets bored; he comes back. "After all," he says, "there's only Paris." It is Paris to which writers from

the provinces, if they are well-off, come to practise regionalism; it is Paris where the qualified representatives of North African literature have chosen to express their nostalgia for Algiers. Our path is cut out for us; for the haunted Chicago Irishman who suddenly decides to write as a last recourse, the new life which he is tackling is a fearful thing with no point of comparison. It is a block of dark marble which will take him a long time to hew into shape; but we knew, from the time we were adolescent, the memorable and edifying features of great lives; even if our father did not disapprove of our vocation, we knew from the time we were fourteen, in the fourth grade of the lycée, how one replies to recalcitrant parents, how much time the author of genius has to remain unknown, at what age it is normal for glory to crown him, how many women he should have and how many unhappy loves, whether it is desirable that he mix in politics, and when; everything is written down in books; it is enough to bear it well in mind. Romain Rolland had proved at the beginning of the century in *Jean Christophe* that one can achieve a rather good likeness by combining the features of a few famous musicians. But one can devise other schemes; it's not bad to start one's life like Rimbaud, to begin a Goethean return to order in one's thirties, to throw oneself at fifty, like Zola, into a public debate. After that, you can choose the death of Nerval, Byron, or Shelley. Naturally, it will not be a matter of realizing each episode in all its violence, but rather of *indicating* it, the way a serious tailor indicates the fashion without servility. I know several among us, and not the least, who have thus taken the precaution of giving their

lives a turn and an allure both typical and exemplary, so that if their genius remains doubtful in their books, it might at least shine forth in their behavior. Thanks to these models and recipes, from our childhood on the career of a writer seemed to us magnificent, though without surprises; one is promoted partly by merit, partly by seniority. That's what we are. In other respects, saints, heroes, mystics, adventurers, angels, enchanters, executioners, victims, as you like. But, first of all, bourgeois. There's no shame in admitting it. And different from one another only in the way we each assume this common situation.

In fact, if one wanted to make a sketch of contemporary literature, it wouldn't be a bad idea to distinguish three generations. The first is that of the authors who began to produce before the war of 1914. By now they have finished their career, and their future books, even though they may be masterpieces, will hardly be able to add to their fame; but they are still alive, they think and judge, and their presence determines minor literary currents which must be taken into account. The main thing, it seems to me, is that in their persons and by their works, they opened the way to a reconciliation between literature and the bourgeois public. It should first be noted that they drew the greater part of their resources from something quite other than their writings. Gide and Mauriac have property, Proust had independent means, Maurois comes from a family of manufacturers; others came to literature from the liberal professions: Duhamel was a doctor, Romains, a teacher, Claudel and Giraudoux were in the diplomatic service. The reason was that, except for

successful tripe, one could not support himself by literature in the period when they began writing. Like politics under the Third Republic it could only be a "marginal" occupation, even if it ended by becoming the principal concern of the one who practised it. Thus, literary personnel were drawn by and large from the same milieu as political personnel; Jaurès and Péguy came from the same school; Blum and Proust wrote in the same reviews. Barrès carried on his literary campaigns and his electoral campaigns on the same front. As a result, the writer could no longer consider himself as a pure consumer; he directed the production or supervised the distribution of goods or he was a civil-servant; he had duties toward the State; in short, a whole part of him was integrated into the bourgeoisie; his behavior, his professional relationships, his obligations, and his concerns were bourgeois; he bought, sold, ordered, and obeyed; he entered the charmed circle of courtesy and ceremony. Certain writers of this period have a well-founded reputation for greed which is belied by the appeals which they have launched in their writings. I don't know whether this reputation is justified. It proves, all the same, that they know the value of money; the divorce we pointed out between the author and his public is now in the author's very soul. Twenty years after symbolism he had not forgotten about the absolute gratuity of art, but at the same time he was involved in the utilitarian cycle of means-ends and ends-means. A producer and destroyer at the same time. Divided between the spirit of seriousness that he has to observe at Cuverville, Frontenac, Elbeuf, and, when he has to represent France, at the White House, and the holiday spirit of con-

testation that he finds as soon as he sits down before a blank sheet of paper; incapable of embracing bourgeois ideology without reserve as well as of condemning without recourse the class to which he belongs. What saves him in this embarrassment is that the bourgeoisie itself has changed; it is no longer that fierce rising class whose sole concern was thrift and the possession of goods. The sons and grandsons of successful peasants and shopkeepers are born into money; they have learned the art of spending. The utilitarian ideology, without at all disappearing, is relegated to the background. A hundred years of uninterrupted reign have created traditions; bourgeois childhoods in the great country house or in the château bought from a ruined noble have acquired a poetic depth; the "men of property" have less recourse in their prosperity to the spirit of analysis; they, in turn, ask the spirit of synthesis to establish their right to govern; a synthetic — thus poetic — bond is established between the proprietor and the thing possessed.

Barrès was the first to invent it; the bourgeois is one with his property. If he remains in his province and on his estate, something passes into him from the gentle foot-hills of his region, from the silvery quivering of the poplars, from the mysterious and slow fecundity of the soil, from the rapid and capricious nervousness of the skies; in assimilating the world, he assimilates its depth; henceforth, his soul has substrata, mines, gold-lodes, veins, underground sheets of petroleum. Henceforth the rallié[1]

1. Translator's note — *Les ralliés*: "Royalists and imperialists who have accepted the Republic." This term will appear hereafter in the text.

writer has his path cut out for him; to save himself he will save the bourgeoisie depthwise.

Of course, he will not serve utilitarian ideology. He will even be, if necessary, its severe critic, but he will disclose all the gratuity in the exquisite hothouse of the bourgeois soul, all the spirituality which he needs to practise his art with a good conscience. Instead of reserving this symbolic aristocracy, which he won in the nineteenth century, for himself and his confrères alone, he will extend it to the whole bourgeoisie. About 1850, an American writer showed, in a novel, an old colonel sitting in a Mississippi steamboat; for a moment he was tempted to ponder the innermost recesses of the souls of the passengers about him. He soon dismissed this preoccupation, saying to himself, or approximately, "It is not good for man to penetrate too far into himself." That was the reaction of the first bourgeois generation.

About 1900 the machine was reversed in France: it was understood that one would find the seal of God in the human heart, provided he sounded it deeply enough. Estaunié speaks about secret lives. The postal-clerk, the blacksmith, the engineer, the departmental treasurer, all have their nocturnal and solitary fêtes. Consuming passions and wild conflagrations dwell deeply within them. In the wake of this author, and a hundred others, we were to learn to recognize in stamp and coin collecting all the nostalgia for the beyond, all the Baudelairean dissatisfaction. For I ask you, why would one spend his time and money acquiring medallions, were it not that he was past caring for the friendship of men and the love of women and power? And what is more gratuitious than a stamp

collection? Not everybody can be a Leonardo or a Michel Angelo, but those useless stamps pasted on the pink pages of an album are a touching homage to all the nine muses; it is the very essence of destructive consumption.

Others saw in bourgeois love a desperate appeal mounting toward God. What is more disinterested, what is more poignant than an adultery? And that taste of ashes in one's mouth after coitus, is it not negativity itself and the contestation of all pleasures? Others went even further. They discovered a divine grain of madness not in the weaknesses of the bourgeoisie but in its very virtues. We were shown that the oppressed and hopeless life of the mother of a family was so absurd and so lofty in its obstinacy that all the extravagances of the surrealists appeared as common sense in comparison. A young author who underwent the influence of these teachers without belonging to their generation and who has since changed his mind, if I may judge by his behavior, once said to me, "Is there any madder wager than conjugal fidelity? Isn't it braving the Devil and even God? Show me a madder and more magnificent blasphemy." You can see the trick; it's a matter of beating the great destroyers on their own ground. You name Don Juan and I answer by Orgon; there's more generosity, more cynicism, and more despair in raising a family than in seducing a thousand and one women. You offer Rimbaud, I come back with Chrysale; there's more pride and Satanism in assuming that the chair that one sees is a chair than in practising the systematic deranging of the senses. And so that there will be no doubt about it, the chair which is given to our perception is only probable; to assert that it is a chair, one

must take a leap to the infinite and suppose an infinity of concordant representations. Doubtless, the vow of conjugal love also involves a virgin future; the sophism begins when one presents these necessary, and so to speak, natural inductions that man makes against time and to insure his tranquillity as the most audacious defiances, the most desperate contestations.

Be that as it may, that is how the writers I am talking about established their reputation. They addressed a new generation and explained to it that there was a strict equivalence between production and consumption and between construction and destruction; they demonstrated that order was a perpetual festival and disorder the most boring monotony. They discovered the poetry of daily life, made virtue enticing, even disturbing, and painted the bourgeois epic in long novels full of mysterious and perturbing smiles. That was all their readers asked for; when one is honest out of self-interest, virtuous out of pusillanimity, and faithful out of habit, it is agreeable to hear it said that he surpasses a professional seducer or a highwayman in boldness. Around 1924, I knew a young man of good family who was infatuated with literature, particularly contemporary authors. He acted quite mad when it was the thing to do, gorged himself on the poetry of the bars when it was *à la mode,* flashily paraded a mistress, and then, when his father died, prudently took over the family factory and followed the straight and narrow. He has since married an heiress; he doesn't deceive her, or, if he does, it's only on the sly, when he takes a trip. In short, the most faithful of husbands. Just about the time he got married, he drew from his reading the for-

mula that was to justify his life: "One should do what everyone else does," he wrote to me one day, "and be like no one else." You can guess that I regard that as the most abject garbage and the justification of all sorts of dishonesty. But it sums up rather well, I think, the ethics which our authors sold their public. They justified themselves with it first of all: you've got to do what everyone else does, that is, sell Elbeuf cloth or Bordeaux wine according to the conventional rules, take a wife with a dowry, visit your parents regularly, and your in-laws and the friends of your in-laws: you've got to be like no one else, that is, save your soul and your family's by fine writings which are both destructive and respectful. I shall call the ensemble of these works an alibi literature. It rapidly supplanted that of the hireling writers. Since before the first war the governing classes needed alibis more than incense. The marvelous of Fournier was an alibi; a whole line of bourgeois fairies sprang from him; in each case it was a matter of leading each reader approximately to that obscure spot of the most bourgeois soul where all dreams meet and melt in a desperate desire for the impossible, where all the events of the most human everyday existence are lived as symbols, where the real is devoured by the imaginary, where the whole man is no longer anything but a divine absence. People are sometimes astonished that Arland was the author of both *Foreign Lands* and *Order*; but they shouldn't be. The so noble dissatisfaction of his first heroes has meaning only if one experiences it at the heart of a strict order; it is not at all a matter of revolting against marriage, the profes-

sions, and the social disciplines, but of delicately going beyond them by means of a nostalgia which nothing can satisfy because at bottom it is not a desire for anything. Thus, order is there only to be transcended, but it must be there. There you have it, justified and solidly re-established. It's certainly better to contest it by a dreamy melancholy than to overthrow it by arms. I shall say as much about the Gidian restlessness, which later became confusion, and the Mauriacian sin, the place from which God is absent. It is always a matter of putting daily life in parentheses and living it scrupulously but without soiling one's hands; it is always a matter of proving that man is worth more than his life, that love is much more than love and the bourgeois much more than the bourgeois. In the greater writers there is, of course, something else. In Gide, in Claudel, in Proust, one finds the real experience of a man, a thousand directions. But I have not wanted to draw a picture of a period but rather to show a climate and isolate a myth.[1]

The second generation comes of age after 1918. Of course, this is a very rough classification since we are including Cocteau, who started before the war, whereas Marcel Arland, whose first book, to my knowledge, does not antedate the armistice, has definite affinities with the writers whom we have just spoken about. The obvious absurdity of a war whose true causes it took us thirty years to know leads back the spirit of Negativity. I am not go-

1. In Jouhandeau the bourgeois souls have the same quality of the marvelous; but often this marvelous changes sign; it becomes negative and satanic. As you might well imagine, the black masses of the bourgeoisie are still more fascinating than its permissible displays.

ing to enlarge upon this period "of decompression," as Thibaudet has so well named it. It was all fireworks; now that it has fallen, so much has been written about it that we seem to know it thoroughly. All we need note is that its most magnificent rocket, surrealism, ties in with the destructive tradition of the writer-consumer. These turbulent young bourgeois wanted to ruin culture because they were cultivated; their chief enemy was Heine's philistine, Monnier's Prudhomme, and Flaubert's bourgeois, in short, their papa. But the violence of the preceding years had brought them to radicalism. Whereas their predecessors had confined themselves to combatting the utilitarian ideology of the bourgeoisie by *consumption*, they more deeply identified the quest of the useful with the human project, that is, with the conscious and voluntary life. Consciousness is bourgeois, the self is bourgeois. Negativity should devote itself, in the first place, to that nature which, as Pascal says, is only a first layer of custom. The first thing to be done is to eliminate the conventional distinctions between conscious and unconscious life, between dream and waking. This means that subjectivity is dissolved. There is, in effect, the subjective when we recognize, the moment they appear, that our thoughts, our emotions, and our will come from us, and when we believe both that it is certain that they belong to us and only probable that the external world is guided by them.

The surrealist took a hearty dislike to that humble certainty on which the stoic based his ethics. It displeased him both by the limits it assigns us and the responsibilities it places upon us. Any means were good for escaping consciousness of self and consequently of one's situation in

the world. He adopted psychoanalysis because it presented consciousness as being invaded by parasitical outgrowths whose origin is elsewhere; he rejected "the bourgeois idea" of work because work implies conjectures, hypotheses, and projects, thus, a perpetual recourse to the subjective. Automatic writing was, above all, destruction of subjectivity. When we try our hand at it, we are spasmodically cut through by clots which tear us apart; we are ignorant of their origin; we do not know them before they have taken their place in the world of objects and we must then perceive them with foreign eyes. Thus, it was not a matter, as has too often been said, of substituting their unconscious subjectivity for consciousness, but rather of showing the object as a fitful glimmering at the heart of an objective universe. But the surrealist's second step was to destroy objectivity in turn. It was a matter of exploding the world, and as dynamite was not enough, as, on the other hand, a *real* destruction of the totality of existants was impossible, because it would simply cause this totality to pass from one *real* state to another *real* state, one had to do his best rather to disintegrate particular objects, that is, to do away with the very structure of objectivity in these objects-evidences. Evidently this operation cannot be tried out on *real* existants which are already given with their indeformable essence. Hence, one will produce imaginary objects, so constructed that their objectivity does away with itself. We are given a first draft of this procedure in the false pieces of sugar which Duchamp actually cut in marble and which suddenly revealed themselves as having an unexpected weight. The visitor who weighed them in his hand was supposed to

feel, in a blazing and instantaneous illumination, the self-destruction of the objective essence of sugar. It was necessary to let him know the deception of all being, the malaise, the off-balance feeling we get, for example, from trick gadgets, when the spoon abruptly melts in the tea-cup, when the sugar (an inverse hoax to the one Duchamp constructed) rises to the surface and floats. It was hoped that by means of this intuition the whole world would be exposed as a radical contradiction. Surrealist painting and sculpture had no other aim than to multiply these local and imaginary explosions which were like holes through which the entire universe would be drained out. The paranoiacally critical method of Dali was only a perfecting and complication of the procedure. It also professed to be an effort "to contribute to the total discredit of the world of reality." Literature also did its best to make language go through the same kind of thing and to destroy it by telescoping words. Thus, the sugar refers to the marble and the marble to the sugar; the limp watch contests itself by its limpness; the objective destroys itself and suddenly refers to the subjective, since one disqualifies reality and is pleased to "consider the very images of the external world as unstable and transitory" and to "put them into the service of the reality of our mind." But the subjective then breaks down in its turn and allows a mysterious objectivity to appear behind it.

All this without even starting a single real destruction. Quite the contrary; by means of the symbolic annulment of the self by sleep and automatic writing, by the symbolic annulment of objects by producing evanescent

objectivities, by the symbolic annulment of language by producing aberrant meanings, by the destruction of painting by painting and of literature by literature, surrealism pursues this curious enterprise of realising nothingness by too much fullness of being. It is always by *creating*, that is, by adding paintings to already existing paintings and books to already published books, that it destroys. Whence, the ambivalence of its works: each of them can pass for the barbaric and magnificent invention of a form, of an unknown being, of an extraordinary phrase, and, as such, can become a voluntary contribution to culture; and as each of them is a project for annihilating all the rest by annihilating itself along with it, Nothingness glitters on its surface, a Nothingness which is only the endless fluttering of contradictions. And the *esprit* which the surrealists wish to attain on the ruins of subjectivity, this *esprit* of which it is not possible to have an inkling otherwise than by the accumulation of self-destructive objects, also sparkles and flickers in the reciprocal and congealed annihilation of things. It is neither Hegelian Negativity, nor hypostasized Negation, nor even Nothingness, though it bears a likeness to it; it would be more correct to call it the *Impossible* or, if you like, the imaginary point where dream and waking, the real and the fictitious, the objective and the subjective, merge. Confusion and not synthesis, for synthesis would appear as an articulated existence, dominating and governing its internal contradictions. But surrealism does not desire the appearance of this novelty which it would again have to contest. It wants to maintain itself in the enervating tension which is produced by an unrealizable

intuition. At least Rimbaud wanted to see a drawing-room in a lake; the surrealist wants to be perpetually on the point of seeing lake and drawing-room; if, by chance, he encounters them, he gets disgusted or he gets scared and gets into bed with the blinds drawn. He ends up by doing a lot of painting and writing but he never actually destroys anything. Moreover, Breton recognized this in 1925 when he wrote: "The immediate reality of the surrealist revolution is not so much to change anything whatever in the physical and apparent order of things as to criticize a movement in the mind." The destruction of the universe is the object of a subjective enterprise very like what has always been called philosophical conversion. This world, perpetually annihilated without one's touching a grain of wheat or sand or a feather of a bird, is quite simply *put in parentheses.* It has not been sufficiently noted that the constructions, paintings and poems-objects of surrealism were the manual realization of the sterilities by which the sceptics of the third century B.C. justified their perpetual "epoché." After which, Carneades and Philo sure of not compromising themselves by an imprudent adherence, lived like everybody else. In the same way, the surrealists, once the world is destroyed and miraculously preserved by its destruction, can shamelessly give full play to their immense love of the world. This world, the world of every day, with its trees and roofs, its women, its sea-shells, and its flowers, but haunted by the impossible and by nothingness, is what is called the surrealist marvelous. I can not keep myself from thinking of that other parenthesis by which the rallié writers

of the preceding generation destroyed bourgeois life and preserved it with all its nuances. Isn't the surrealist marvelous that of *The Wanderer* (*Le Grand Meaulnes*), but *radicalized*? Certainly its passion is sincere, as are its hatred of and disgust with the bourgeois class. But the situation has not changed: one must save oneself without breaking anything, — or by a symbolic breaking — wash oneself of the original contamination without giving up the advantages of one's position.

The root of the matter is that once again one has to find an eagle's nest. The surrealists, more ambitious than their fathers, count on the radical and metaphysical destruction which they are initiating to confer upon them a dignity a thousand times superior to that of the parasitic aristocracy. It is no longer a matter of escaping from the bourgeois class; one must leap out of the human condition. It is the family patrimony that these sons want to squander, it is the world. They have come back to parasitism as to a lesser evil, abandoning everything, studies and professions, by common consent; but they have never been satisfied with being parasites on the bourgeoisie; their ambition has been to be parasites on the human race. Metaphysical as it may be, it is clear that they have been unclassed from above and that their preoccupations have strictly forbidden them from finding a public in the working class. Breton once wrote: "Marx said, 'Transform the world.' Rimbaud said, 'Change life.' For us, these two orders are one and the same." That would be enough to reveal the bourgeois intellectual. For it is a question of knowing which change precedes which. For the militant Marxist there is no

doubt that social transformation alone can permit radical transformations of thought and feeling. If Breton thinks that he can pursue his inner experiences on the margin of revolutionary activity and parallel to it, he is condemned in advance, for that would amount to saying that a freedom of spirit is conceivable in chains, at least for certain people, and, consequently, to making revolution less urgent. This is the very betrayal of which revolutionaries have always accused Epictetus and of which Politzer not long ago accused Bergson. And if it is maintained that Breton intended in this text to announce a progressive and interlinked metamorphosis of the social state and the intimate life, I answer by citing this other passage: "Everything leads us to believe that there is a certain point in the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, cease to be regarded as contradictory... One would be wasting his time looking for any other motive in surrealist activity than the hope of determining this point." Is this not a proclamation of divorce from a working-class public more than from a bourgeois public? For the proletariat, engaged in struggle, must at every moment, in order to bring its undertaking to a successful conclusion, distinguish the past from the future, the real from the imaginary, and life from death. It is not by accident that Breton has cited these contraries; they are all categories of action; revolutionary activity, more than any other, needs them. And just as surrealism has radicalized the negation of the useful in order to transform it into a rejection of the project and the conscious

life, it radicalizes the old literary claim of gratuity in order to make of it a rejection of action by destroying its categories. There is a surrealist quietism. Quietism and permanent violence; two complementary aspects of the same position. As the surrealist has deprived himself of the means of planning an enterprise, his activity is reduced to impulsions in the immediate. We find here a heavier and duller version of the Gidean moment. That's not surprising; there is quietism in all parasitism and the favorite *tempo* of consumption is the moment.

Yet, surrealism declares itself revolutionary and offers its hand to the Communist Party. It is the first time since the Restoration that a literary school explicitly claims kinship with an organized revolutionary movement. The reasons are clear: these writers, who are also young people, want, above all, to destroy their family, their uncle the general, their cousin the curé, as Baudelaire in 1848 saw in the February revolution an opportunity to set fire to the house of General Aupick; if they were born poor, they have also certain complexes to liquidate, envy and fear; and then they are also rebelling against external constraints: the recently ended war, with its censorship, military service, taxes, army-ridden legislature, and all the general eye-wash; they are all anti-clerical, neither more nor less than Combes and the pre-war radicals, and they are nobly disgusted with colonialism and the war in Morocco. These indignations and hatreds are capable of being expressed abstractly by a conception of radical Negation which, *a fortiori,* will bring about, without there being any need of making it the object of a particular act of will, the negation of the bourgeois class.

And youth being the metaphysical age par excellence, as Auguste Comte well noted, this metaphysical and abstract expression of their revolt is evidently the one they are choosing in preference. However, it is also the one which leaves the world strictly intact. It is true that they also add a few sporadic acts of violence, but at most, these scattered acts of violence succeed in provoking scandal. The best they can hope for is to set themselves up as a primitive and secret society on the model of the Ku Klux Klan. Thus, they get so far as to want others to take upon themselves, on the margin of their spiritual experiences, the forceful execution of acts of concrete destruction. In short, they would like to be the clerks of an ideal society whose temporal function would be the permanent practice of violence.[1] In this way, after having praised the suicides of Vaché and Rigaut as exemplary acts, after having presented gratuitous massacre ("firing into the crowd") as the simplest surrealistic act, they summon to their aid the yellow peril. They do not see the profound contradiction which opposes these brutal and partial destructions to the poetic process of annihilation which they have undertaken. Indeed, every time a destruction is partial, it is a *means* for attaining a positive and more general end. Surrealism stops at this means; it makes it an absolute end; it refuses to go further. On the contrary, the total abolition it dreams of does not harm anybody precisely

1. To make oneself the clerk of violence implies that one deliberately adopts violence as a method of thought, that is, one has common recourse to intimidation, to the principle of authority; one haughtily refuses to demonstrate and discuss. This is what gives the dogmatic texts of the surrealists a purely formal but disturbing resemblance to the political writings of Charles Maurras.

because it is total. It is an absolute located outside of history, a poetic fiction. And it brings into the picture, among the realities to abolish, the end which, in the eyes of Asiatics or revolutionaries, justifies the violent means to which they are forced to have recourse.

As for the Communist Party, hounded by the bourgeois police, very inferior in number to the Socialist Party, with no hope of taking power except in the distant future, new, uncertain in its tactics, it is still in the negative phase. Its job is to win over the masses, bore from within among the socialists, and incorporate the elements that it will be able to detach from the collectivity which repulses it; its intellectual arm is criticism. Thus, it is not disinclined to see in surrealism a temporary ally which it is getting ready to reject when it will no longer need it; for negation, the essence of surrealism, is only a stage for the C.P. The latter is not willing even for a moment to consider automatic writing, induced sleep, and objective chance, except in so far as they may contribute to the disintegration of the bourgeois class. Thus, it seems that we have re-encountered that community of interests between the intellectuals and the oppressed classes which was the good fortune of the authors of the eighteenth century. But this is only an appearance. The deep source of the misunderstanding lies in the fact that the surrealist is very little concerned with the dictatorship of the proletariat and sees in the Revolution, as pure violence, the absolute end, whereas the end that communism proposes to itself is the taking of power, and by means of that end it justifies the blood it will shed. And then the bond between surrealism and the proletariat is indirect

and abstract. The strength of a writer lies in his direct action upon the public, in the anger, the enthusiasm, and the reflections which he stirs up by his writings. Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire were in constant contact with the bourgeoisie because it read them. But the surrealists have no readers in the proletariat; there is just a bare chance of their communicating with the party from the outside, or rather with its intellectuals. Their public is elsewhere, among the cultivated bourgeoisie; the C.P. knows this and uses them simply to stir up trouble in ruling-class circles. Thus, their revolutionary doctrines remain purely theoretical (since they change nothing by their attitude), do not help them gain a single reader, and find no echo among the workers; they remain the parasites of the class they insult; their revolt remains on the margin of the revolution. Breton finally recognizes this himself and returns to his independence as a clerk. He writes to Naville: "There is not one of us who does not wish for the passing of power from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat. In the meantime, it is none the less necessary that the experiences of the inner life continue and, of course, with no external control, even Marxist... The two problems are essentially distinct."

The opposition will be accentuated when Soviet Russia and consequently the French Communist Party pass to the phase of constructive organization; surrealism, having remained *negative* in essence, will turn away from them. Breton will then draw near the Trotskyists precisely because the latter, a hounded minority, are still at the stage of critical negation. The Trotskyists, in their

turn, will use the surrealists as an instrument of disintegration; a letter from Trotsky to Breton leaves no doubt about the matter. If the Fourth International too had been able to pass to the constructive phase, it is clear that it would have been the occasion of a break.

Thus, the bourgeois writer's first attempt to reconcile himself with the proletariat remains utopian and abstract because he is not seeking a public but an ally, because he preserves and reinforces the division of the temporal and spiritual and because he maintains himself within the limits of a clerkship. The agreement on principle between surrealism and the C.P. against the bourgeoisie does not go beyond formalism; it is the formal idea of negativity which unites them. In fact, the negativity of the Communist Party is temporary; it is a necessary, historical moment in its great enterprise of social reorganization; surrealist negativity, whatever one may say about it, remains outside of history, in the moment and in the eternal simultaneously; it is the absolute end of life and art. Breton somewhere asserts the identity, or at least parallelism with reciprocal symbolization, of mind in its struggle against its bug-bears and the proletariat in its struggle against capitalism, which amounts to asserting the "sacred mission" of the proletariat. But the fact is that this class conceived as a legion of destroying angels, and which the C.P. defends against the approaches of the surrealists like a wall, is really only a quasi-religious myth for the authors, one which plays, for the tranquillization of their conscience, a role analogous to that of the myth of the people in 1848 for the writers of good will.

The originality of the surrealist movement resides in its attempt to appropriate *everything* at the same time: unclassing from above, parasitism, aristocracy, the metaphysic of consumption, and alliance with revolutionary forces. The history of this attempt has shown that it was doomed to failure. But fifty years earlier it would not even have been conceivable; the only relation a bourgeois writer could have had at that time with the working class was to write for it and about it. The thing that permits dreaming, be it only for a moment, of concluding a temporary pact between an intellectual aristocracy and the oppressed classes is the appearance of a new factor: the party as a mediation between the middle classes and the proletariat.

I understand well enough that surrealism with its ambiguous aspect of literary chapel, spiritual college, church, and secret society[1] is only one of the post-war products. One would have to speak of Morand, Drieu la Rochelle, and a host of others. But if the works of Breton, Peret, and Desnos have seemed to us the most representative, the fact is that all the others implicitly contain the same traits. Morand is the consuming type, the traveler, the wayfarer. He nullifies national traditions by putting them into contact with each other according to the old procedure of the sceptics and Montaigne; he throws them into a basket like crabs, and, without commentary, leaves it to them to tear each other apart. It is a matter of achieving a certain *gamma* point,

1. A resemblance to Action Française of which Maurras was able to say that it was not a party but a conspiracy. And don't the punitive expeditions of the surrealists resemble the pranks of the young royalist henchmen?

highly akin to the *gamma* point of the surrealists, whence differences of custom, language, and interests abolish each other in the total indistinctness. Here *speed* plays the role of the paranoiac-critical method. *Gallant Europe* is the nullification of countries by the railroad; *Nothing but the Earth*, the nullification of continents by the airplane. Morand has Asiatics go about in London, Americans in Syria, and Turks in Norway; he shows our customs as seen through these eyes, as Montesquieu did by those of Persians, which is the surest way of removing their *raison d'être*. But at the same time he arranges it so that these visitors have lost much of their pristine purity and are already thorough traitors to their customs without having completely adopted ours; at this particular moment of their transformation each of them is a battlefield where the exotic and picturesque and our rationalistic mechanism are being destroyed by each other. His books, full of tinsel and trinkets and strange, lovely names, nevertheless, ring the knell of exoticism; they are at the origin of a whole literature which aims at doing away with local color, either by showing that the distant cities we dreamed of in our childhood are as hopelessly familiar and commonplace to the eyes of their inhabitants as the Saint Lazare Station and the Eiffel Tower are to ours, or by letting us perceive the comedy, hokum, and absence of faith behind ceremonies which travelers of past centuries described for us with the utmost respect, or by revealing to us through the worn-out screen of oriental or African picturesqueness the universality of capitalist mechanism and rationalism. In the end nothing else is left but the world, similar and monotonous

everywhere. I have never felt the deeper meaning of this procedure so keenly as I did one day in the summer of 1938, between Mogador and Sufi, when I was in a bus which passed a veiled Mohammedan woman who was riding a bicycle. A Mohammedan woman on a bike! There you have a self-destructive object which the surrealists or Morand can equally well lay claim to. The precise mechanism of the bicycle contests the idle harem dreams which one ascribes to this veiled creature as she passes by but at the same moment what remains of the voluptuous and magical darkness between the painted eyebrows and behind the low forehead contests, in turn, mechanism; it gives us a feeling that behind capitalist standardization, there is something beyond, which, though chained and conquered, is yet virulent and bewitching. Phantom exoticism, the surrealist impossible, and bourgeois dissatisfaction: in all three cases the real breaks down; behind it one tries to maintain the irritating tension of the contradictory. In the case of the traveling writers the ruse is obvious: they suppress exoticism because one is always exotic in relation to someone, and they don't want to be; they destroy history and traditions in order to escape from their historical *situation*; they want to forget that the most lucid consciousness is always grafted on to something; they want to effect a fictitious liberation by means of an abstract internationalism and to achieve, by means of universalism, an aristocratic detachment.

Drieu, like Morand, sometimes makes use of self-destruction by exoticism: in one of his novels, the Alhambra becomes an arid provincial park under a mo-

notonous sky. But through the literary destruction of the object, of love, over twenty years of follies and bitterness, he was pursuing the destruction of himself; he was the empty valise, the opium smoker, and in the end, the vertigo of death drew him into National Socialism. *Gilles*, the squalid and glib novel about his life, shows clearly that he was the enemy brother of the surrealists. His Nazism, which also was only an appetite for universal conflagration, proved, in practice, to be as ineffectual as the communism of Breton. Both of them are clerks. Both of them, innocently and without ulterior motives ally themselves with the temporal. But the surrealists are healthier; their myth of destruction covers up an enormous and magnificent appetite; they want to destroy everything but themselves, as is shown by their horror of disease, vice, and drugs. Drieu, gloomy and more genuine, meditated upon his death; it was because of self-hatred that he hated his country and mankind. They all were after the absolute, and as they were hemmed in everywhere by the relative, they identified the absolute with the *impossible*. They all hesitated between two roles: that of proclaimers of a new world and that of gravediggers of the old. But as it was easier to discern signs of decadence in post-war Europe than those of renewal, they chose to be gravediggers. And to soothe their conscience they restored to a place of honor the old Heraclitean myth according to which life is born from death. They were all haunted by that imaginary *gamma* point, the only steadfast thing in a world in movement, when destruction, because it is utterly and hopelessly destruction, is identified with ab-

solute construction. They were all fascinated by violence, wherever it might come from; it was by violence that they wanted to free man from his human condition. That is why they joined hands with extreme parties by gratuitously ascribing to them apocalyptic aims. They were all duped: the Revolution has not come off and Nazism has been beaten. They lived in a comfortable and lavish period when despair was still a luxury. They condemned their country because they were still insolent with victory; they denounced war because they thought the peace would be a long one. They were all victims of the disaster of 1940: the reason is that the moment for action had come and that none of them were armed for it. Some killed themselves, others are in exile; those who have returned are exiled among us. They were the proclaimers of catastrophe in the time of the fat cows; in the time of the lean cows they have nothing more to say.[1]

1. These passionless remarks have stirred up impassioned whirlwinds. However, far from convincing me, the defenses and the attacks have made me more convinced than ever that surrealism has lost — perhaps temporarily — its timeliness. As a matter of fact, I find that most of its defenders are eclectics. It is made out to be a cultural phenomenon "of high importance," an "exemplary" attitude, and an attempt is being made to integrate it on the q.t. into bourgeois humanism. If it still had any life in it, would it be willing to spice the slightly stale rationalism of M. Alquié with the Freudian pepper? In the last analysis, it is a victim of the idealism which it has so fought against; the *Gazette des lettres*, *Fontaine*, and *Carrefour* are stomach pockets which just can't wait to digest it.

If a Desnos could have read in 1930 the following lines of M. Claude Mauriac, a young spark-plug of the Fourth Republic: "Man fights against man without realizing that the joint effort of all minds should first be brought to bear against a certain skimpy and false conception of man. But surrealism has known this and has been crying it aloud for twenty years. As an enterprise of knowledge, it proclaims that everything about the traditional modes of thinking and feeling has to be re-invented," he would certainly have protested; surrealism was not an "enterprise of *knowledge*;" he specifically

quoted Marx's famous phrase: "We do not want to understand the world; we want to change it;" he never wanted this "joint effort of minds" which pleasantly recalls the Rally of the French People [General de Gaulle's Rassemblement Populaire Français]. Against this rather silly optimism he always affirmed the strict connection between inner censorship and oppression; if there had to be a joint effort of all minds (that expression *minds*, in the plural, is hardly surrealistic!) it would come after the Revolution. In his heyday he would not have tolerated anyone's brooding over him that way in order to understand him. He considered — like the Communist Party in this respect — that everything that was not totally and exclusively for him was against him. Is he aware today of the way he is being maneuvered? In order to enlighten him, I shall therefore reveal to him that M. Bataille, before publicly informing Merleau-Ponty that he was withdrawing his article from us, had notified him of his intentions in a private conversation. [M. Merleau-Ponty is a member of the editorial board of *Les Temps Modernes* of which M. Sartre is editor-in-chief and in which the present work was originally serialized.] This champion of surrealism had then declared, "I have serious charges to make against Breton, but we must unite against communism." That should be sufficient! I think that I show more esteem for surrealism by harking back to the time of its ardent life and by discussing its aim than by slyly trying to assimilate it. It is true that it is not going to thank me for it, for, like all totalitarian parties, it affirms the continuity of its views in order to mask their perpetual change and therefore does not at all like anyone to hark back to its previous declarations. Many of the texts I meet with today in the catalogue of the surrealist exhibition (*Surrealism in* 1947) and which are approved by the chiefs of the movement are closer to the gentle eclecticism of M. Claude Mauriac than to the bitter revolts of the first surrealism. Here, for example, are a few lines of M. Pastoureau: "The political experiment of surrealism which has caused it to revolve around the Communist Party for some ten years is very plainly conclusive. To attempt to continue it would be to lock itself up in the dilemma of compromise and ineffectualness. To follow the Communist Party in the way of the collaboration of classes to which it is committed is contradictory to the motives which in the past pushed surrealism into undertaking political action and which are as much *immediate demands in the domain of the mind and especially in that of morals* as the pursuit of the distant end which is the total liberation of man. And yet, it is obvious that the politics on which one might base the hope of seeing the aspirations of the proletariat realized is not that of the so-called left opposition to the Communist Party nor that of the little anarchist groups... Surrealism whose appointed role is to demand innumerable reforms in the domain of the mind, and, in particular, ethical reforms, can no more participate in a political action which is necessarily immoral in order to be effective than it can participate, unless by renouncing the liberation of man as a goal to be attained, in a political action which is necessarily ineffectual because respectful of principles which it thinks it does not have to violate. Thus, it retires into itself. Its efforts will again tend to fulfill the same demands and to hasten the liberation of man, but *by other means*."

(Analogous texts and even identical phrases will be found in "Inaugural Break," a declaration adopted June 21, 1947 by the group in France. Cf. pp. 8-11.)

The reader will note, in passing, the word "reform" and the extraordinary recourse to morals. Will we some day read a periodical entitled "Surrealism in the Service of Reform"? But above all, this text established surrealism's break with Marxism: everybody now agrees that one can act on superstructures without the economic substructure's being modified. An *ethical* and *reformist* surrealism wanting to confine its action to changing ideologies: that smacks dangerously of idealism. What these "other means" are remains to be determined. Is surrealism going to offer us new scales of values? Is it going to produce a new ideology? Not a bit; surrealism is going to busy itself, "pursuing its old-time objectives, in weakening Christian civilization and in preparing the conditions for the coming of the eventual *Weltanschauung*." It is still, obviously, a matter of negation. Western civilization — even Pastoureau admits it — is moribund; a tremendous war threatens it and will attend to burying it; our time calls for a new ideology which permits man to live; but surrealism will continue to attack the "Christian-Thomist stage" of civilization. And how can it be attacked? By the pretty lollipop of the 1947 Exhibition? Let's rather go back to the *real* surrealism, that of the Point du Jour, of Nadja, of the communicating vessels.

Alquié and Max-Pol Fouchet stress above everything else the fact that it was an attempt at liberation. According to them, it is a matter of asserting the rights of the human totality without omitting anything, be it the unconscious, the dream, sexuality, or the imaginary. I am in complete agreement with them. That is what surrealism *wanted*; that is certainly the greatness of its enterprise. It should again be noted that the "totalitarian" idea is typical of the age; it animates the Nazi, the Marxist, and, today, the "existentialist" attempt. It must certainly go back to Hegel as the common source of all these efforts. But I discern a serious contradiction at the origin of surrealism: to use Hegelian language, this movement had the *concept* of totality (that is what is striking in the famous phrase of Breton, "freedom, color of man") and *realized* something quite different in its concrete manifestations. The totality of man is, indeed, necessarily a synthesis, that is, the organic and schematic unity of all his secondary structures. A liberation which proposes to be *total* must start with a total knowledge of man by himself (I am not trying to show here that it is possible; it is known that I am profoundly convinced that it is). That does not mean that we must know — or that we can know — *a priori*, the whole anthropological content of human reality, but that we can *first* reach ourselves in both the deep and manifest unity of our behavior, our emotions, and our dreams. Surrealism, the fruit of a particular epoch, was embarrassed at the start by anti-synthetic survivals: first, the analytic negativity which is practised on *everyday reality*. Hegel writes of scepticism: "Thought becomes perfect thought annihilating the being of the world in the *multiple variety of its determinations*, and the negativity of free self-consciousness at the heart of this multiform configuration of life becomes real negativity... scepticism corresponds to the realization of this

consciousness, to the negative attitude in regard to the being who is the other; thus, it corresponds to desire and to work." As a matter of fact, what appears to me essential in surrealist activity is the descent of the negative spirit *into work*: sceptical negativity *becomes concrete*; Duchamp's pieces of sugar as well as the fox-table are *works*, that is, concrete and painstaking destruction of what scepticism destroys only in words. I shall have as much to say for *desire*, which is one of the essential structures of surrealist love, and which is, as we know, desire of consuming, of destroying. We see the distance that has been covered; it exactly resembles the Hegelian avatars of conscious ness: bourgeois analytics and idealistic destruction of the world by digestion. The attitude of the *rallié* writers deserves the name Hegel gave to stoicism: "It is only a concept of negativity; it raises itself above this life like the spirit of the master." Surrealism, on the contrary, "penetrates this life like the spirit of the slave." This is certainly its value and, without any doubt, that is the way it can hope to join hands with the worker who experiences his freedom in work. However, the worker destroys in order to construct. By destroying the tree he constructs beams and boards. Thus, he learns the two aspects of freedom, which is a constructive negativity. Surrealism, borrowing its methods from bourgeois analysis, inverts the process; instead of destroying in order to construct, it constructs in order to destroy. Its construction is always alienated; it is compounded in a process whose end is annihilation. However, as the construction is real and the destruction is symbolic, the surrealist object may also be directly conceived as an end in itself. It is "marble sugar" or a contestation of sugar, according to the way one looks at it. The surrealist object is necessarily iridescent because it represents the human order as topsy-turvy and because, as such, it contains within itself its own contradiction. That is what permits its constructor to claim that he is both destroying the real and is poetically creating a super-reality beyond reality. In fact, the super-real thus constructed becomes one object among others in the world or it is only the crystallized indication of the possible destruction of the world. The fox-table of the last Exhibition is as much a syncretic effort to imbue our flesh with a vague sense of woodiness as it is a reciprocal contestation of the inert by the living and the living by the inert. The effort of the surrealists aims to present these two aspects of their production in the unity of the same movement. But the synthesis is lacking; the reason is that our authors do not want it. They are content with presenting the two moments as blended in an essential unity and, at the same time, as being each essential, which does not remove the contradiction. And doubtless the expected result is achieved: the created object arouses a tension in the mind of the spectator, and it is this tension which is, strictly speaking, the surrealist *instant*; the *given* thing is destroyed by internal contestation, but the contestation itself and the destruction are in turn contested by the positive character and the concrete *being-there* of the creation. But this irritating iridiscence of the impossible is, at bottom, *nothing*, unless it be the irreconcilable divergence between the two terms of a contradiction. We have a case of technically provoking Baudelairean *dissatisfaction*. We have no revelation, no intuition of a

new object, no seizure of matter or content, but only the *purely formal* consciousness of the mind as a surpassing, an appeal, and an emptiness. I shall again apply to surrealism Hegel's formula on scepticism: "In (surrealism) consciousness actually experiences itself as a consciousness contradicting itself within itself." Will it at least turn in on itself? Will it bring about a philosophical conversion? Will the surrealist object have the concrete efficiency of the hypothesis of the evil genius? But a second preconception of surrealism intervenes at this point: I have shown that it utterly rejects subjectivity as the free arbiter. Its deep love of materiality (the object and the unfathomable support of its destructions) leads it to profess materialism. Thus, it immediately covers up the consciousness which it for a moment discovered; it substantiates contradiction. It is no longer a matter of tension of subjectivity but of an objective structure of the universe. Read *The Communicating Vessels*: the title as well as the text shows the regrettable absence of any mediation; dream and waking are communicating vessels; that means that there is a merging, an ebb and flow but not a synthetic unity. I know perfectly well what will be said: "But this synthetic unity has to be made and that is precisely the aim which surrealism sets up for itself." "Surrealism," says Mezer, "starts from realities distinct from the conscious and the unconscious and goes toward the synthesis of those components." All well and good; but *with what* does it propose to do it? What is the instrument of mediation?

To see a whole merry-go-round of fairies whirling around a pumpkin (even if it is possible, which I doubt) is to *mix* dream and reality; it is not to unify them in a new form which would retain within it, transformed and surpassed, elements of the dream and the real. In fact, we are always on the level of contestation; the *real* pumpkin supported by the entire real world contests these fading fairies which run about its rind; and vice-versa, the fairies contest the gourd. There remains consciousness, the only witness, the only recourse, of this reciprocal destruction; but it is not wanted. Whether we paint or sculpt our dreams, it is sleep which is eaten by waking: the scandalous object, retrieved by the electric lights, presented in a closed room, in the midst of other objects, two yards and ten inches from one wall and three yards and fifteen inches from another, becomes a thing of the world (I place myself here in the surrealist hypothesis which recognizes *the same nature* in the use as in the perception. It is evident that there would not even be any use in discussing the matter if one thought, as I do, that these natures are radically distinct) insofar as it is a positive creation and only escapes insofar as it is a pure negativity. Thus, surrealist man is an addition, a mixture, but never a synthesis.

It is no accident that our authors owe so much to psychoanalysis; it offered them under the name of "complexes" precisely the model of those contradictory and multiple interpretations which they everywhere make use of and which are without real cohesion. It is true that "complexes" exist. But what has not been sufficiently observed is that they can exist only on the foundation of a previously given synthetic reality. Thus, for surrealism the total man is only the sum total of all his manifestations. Lacking the synthetic

idea, they have organized whirligigs of contraries; this flutter of being and non-being might have been able to reveal subjectivity, just as the contradiction of the sensible sent Plato back to intelligible forms; but their rejection of the subjective has transformed man into a plain haunted house: in that vague atrium of consciousness there appear and disappear self-destructive objects which are exactly similar to things. They enter by the eyes or by the back door. Powerful disembodied voices ring out like those which announced the death of Pan. This odd *collection* brings to mind American neo-realism even more than it does materialism. After this, as a substitute for the synthetic unifications which are effected by consciousness, one will conceive, by participation, a sort of magical unity which manifests itself capriciously and which will be called objective chance. But it is not the inverted image of human activity. One does not liberate a collection; one makes an inventory of it. And surrealism is just that — an inventory. It is only a matter of fighting against the discredit into which certain portions of the human condition have fallen. Surrealism is haunted by the ready-made, the solid; it abhors geneses and births; it never regards creation as an emanation, a passing from the potential to the act, a gestation; it is the surging up *ex nihilo*, the abrupt appearance of a completely formed object which enriches the collection. At bottom, a *discovery*. So how could it "deliver man from his monsters"? It has perhaps killed the monsters, but it has also killed man. It will be said that there remains desire. The surrealists have wanted to liberate human desire, they have proclaimed that man was desire. But that is not quite true; they have proscripted a whole category of desires (homosexuality, vices, etc.), without ever justifying this proscription. Then, they have judged it conformable to their hatred of the subjective never to come to know desire except by its products, as psychoanalysis does too. Thus, desire is still a *thing*, a collection. But instead of referring back from things (abortive acts, objects of oneiric symbolism, etc.) to their subjective source (which, strictly speaking, is desire) the surrealists remain fixed upon the thing. At bottom, desire is paltry and does not in itself interest them, and then it represents the rational explanation of the contradictions offered by complexes and their products. One will find very few and rather vague things in Breton about the unconscious and the libido. What interests him a great deal is not raw desire but crystallized desire, what might be called, to borrow an expression of Jaspers, the emblem of desire in the world. What has also struck me among the surrealists or ex-surrealists whom I have known has never been the magnificence of their desires or of their freedom. They have led lives which were modest and full of restraints; their sporadic violence made me think rather of the spasms of a maniac than of a concerted action; as for the rest, they were solidly harpooned by powerful complexes. As far as freeing desire goes, it has always seemed to me that the great roaring boys of the Renaissance or even the Romantics did a great deal more. You may say that, at least, they are great poets. Fine; there we have a meeting-ground. Some naive people have said that I was "anti-poetic" or "against poetry." What an absurd phrase! As well say that I am *against* air or *against* water. On the contrary, I recognize in no uncertain terms that surrealism is the *only* poetic movement of the

first half of the twentieth century; I even recognize that in a certain way it contributes to the liberation of man. But what it liberates is neither desire nor the human totality, but pure imagination. Now, the fact is that the purely imaginary and *praxis* are not easily reconciled. I find a touching admission of this in a surrealist of 1947, whose name seems predisposed to the utmost honesty:

"I must recognize (and probably I am not alone among those who are not easily satisfied) that there is a divergence between my feeling of rebellion, the reality of my life, and the fields of the battle of poetry which I may be waging, which the works of those who are my friends help me to wage. Despite them, despite myself, I hardly know how to live.

Does recourse to the imaginary, which is a criticism of the social order, which is a protestation and a hastening of history, risk burning the bridges which connect us with other men and, at the same time, with reality? I know that there can be no question of freedom for man himself." Yves Bonnefoy,* *Surrealism in* 1947, P. 68).

But between the two wars surrealism spoke in a quite different tone. And it's something quite different that I attacked above concerning the surrealists' singing political manifestoes, their bringing judgment to bear against those among them who did not stick to the line, their defining a method of social action, their entering the C.P. and leaving it with a flourish, their rapprochement with Trotsky, and their concern about clarifying their position with regard to Soviet Russia. It's hard for me to believe that they thought they were acting as poets. It may be objected that man is a whole and that he is not to be divided up into a politician and a poet. I agree, and I will even add that I am more at ease for knowing that there are authors who make poetry a product of automatism and politics a conscious and reflective effort. But after all it is a truism; it is both true and false. For if man is one and the same, if, in a way, his mark is found everywhere, that does not at all mean that the *activities* are identical; and if, in each case, they bring the whole mind into question, one need not conclude that they do so in the same way, nor that the success of one justifies the failures of the other. Besides, does one think that he would be flattering the surrealists by telling them that they have been carrying on political activity as poets?

Still, it is reasonable for a writer who wants to mark the unity of his life and his work to show by a *theory* the community of aims of his poetry and his practice. But the fact is that this theory can itself only *belong to prose*. There is a surrealist prose, and that is the only thing I was considering in the pages that are under attack. But surrealism is hard to pin down; it is *Proteus*. Sometimes it presents itself as completely involved in reality, struggle, and life; and if you call it to account, it starts screaming that it's pure poetry and that you're murdering it, and that you don't know what poetry is all about. This is shown rather clearly in the following anecdote which everyone knows but which is pregnant with meaning: Aragon had

* TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. — Bonnefoy (*la bonne foi*) — good faith, honesty. This will explain M. Sartre's play on words in the sentence immediately preceding the quotation.

On the margin of the prodigal children of the ralliés who found more unexpectedness and madness in their father's house than on the mountain footpaths and the trails of the desert, on the margin of the great tenors of despair, of the prodigal youths for whom the hour for returning to the fold had not yet struck, there flourished a discrete humanism. Prévost, Pierre Bost, Chamson, Aveline, and Beucler were about the same age as Breton and Drieu. Their débuts were brilliant; Bost was still a lycée boy when Copeau performed his *The Imbecile;* Prévost, at the École Normale, was already notorious. But they remained modest in their budding glory; they had no taste for playing the Ariels of capitalism. They did not pre-

written a poem which rightly appeared as a provocation to murder; there was talk of legal prosecution; whereupon, the whole surrealist group solemnly asserted the irresponsibility of the poet; the products of automatism were not to be likened to concerted undertakings. However, to anyone who had some experience with automatic writing, it was apparent that Aragon's poem was of a quite different kind. Here was a man quivering with indignation, who, in clear and violent terms, called for the death of the oppressor; the oppressor was stirred to action, and all at once he found before him nothing more than a poet who woke up and rubbed his eyes and was amazed that he was being blamed for his dreams. This is what has just happened again: I attempted a critical examination of the totality of the fact "surrealism" as an engagement in the world, insofar as surrealists were attempting, *by means of prose,* to make its meanings clear. I was answered that I am harming poets and that I misunderstand their "contribution" to the inner life. But really, they didn't give a rap about the inner life; they wanted to shatter it, to break down the walls between subjective and objective, and to wage the Revolution on the side of the proletariat.

To conclude: surrealism is entering a period of withdrawal; it is breaking with Marxism and the C.P. It wants to demolish the Christian-Thomist edifice stone by stone. Very well, but I should like to know what public it expects to reach. In other words, *in what souls* it expects to ruin western civilization. It has said over and over again that it could not affect the workers directly and that they were not yet accessible to its action. The facts show that they are right: how many workers visited the 1947 Exhibition? On the other hand, how many bourgeois? Thus, its purpose can only be negative: to destroy the last remnants of the Christian myths in the minds of the bourgeois who form their public. That was what I wanted to show.

tend to be either damned or prophetic. When Prévost was asked why he wrote, he answered, "To earn my living." The phrase shocked me at the time because the last remnant of the great literary myths of the nineteenth century were still trailing in my head. Nevertheless he was wrong. One does not write to earn his living. But what I took for facile cynicism was actually a will to think toughly, lucidly, and, if need be, disagreeably. These authors, in complete reaction against satanism and angelism, wanted to be neither saints nor beasts, only men. Perhaps they were the first writers since romanticism who did not think of themselves as aristocrats of consumption but rather as workmen in a room, like bookbinders or lacemakers. They did not consider literature as a trade in order to give themselves license to sell their wares to the highest bidder, but, on the contrary, to reestablish themselves, without humility or pride, in an industrious society. One learns a trade, and then he who practises it has no right to scorn his clientele. So they too launched a reconciliation with the public. Much too honest to believe they had genius and to demand its rights, they trusted much more to hard work than to inspiration. They lacked perhaps that absurd confidence in their destiny, that iniquitous and blind pride which characterises great men.[1] They all had that strong self-seeking culture which the Third Republic gave to its future civil-servants. Thus, almost all of them became civil-servants, administrative officers in the Senate and

1. Which has particularly characterised them for the last hundred years because of the misunderstanding which has separated them from the public and has obliged them to decide upon the marks of their talent themselves.

Chamber, teachers, and curators of museums. But, as they came for the most part from modest backgrounds they were not concerned with using their ability to defend bourgeois traditions. They never enjoyed that culture as a *historic* property; they saw in it only a precious instrument for becoming men. Besides, they had in Alain a master and thinker who detested history. Convinced, like him, that the moral problem is the same in all ages, they saw society in an instantaneous cross-section.

Hostile to psychology as well as to the historical sciences, sensitive to social injustice but too Cartesian to believe in the class struggle, their only concern was to practise their trade, against passions and impassioned errors and against myths, by using — without weakness — will and reason. They liked the common people, the Parisian workmen, the craftsmen, the petty bourgeois, the clerks, the wayfarers, and the care they took in telling the stories of these individual destinies sometimes led them into flirting with populism. But this sequel to naturalism was different in that they never admitted that social and psychological determinism formed the web and woof of these humble existences. And, differing from the point of view of socialist realism, they did want to see their heroes as hopeless victims of social oppression. In each case, these moralists applied themselves to showing the role of will, patience, and effort, presenting deficiencies as faults and success as merit. They rarely took an interest in exceptional careers, but they wanted to make people see that it is possible to be a man even in adversity.

To-day several of them are dead; others are silent or produce only at long intervals. By and large it can be said

that the writers whose débuts were so brilliant and who around 1927 were able to form a "club of those under thirty" have almost all fallen by the wayside. To be sure, individual accidents must be taken into account, but the fact is so striking that it requires a more general explanation. Indeed, they lacked neither talent nor inspiration, and from the point of view which concerns us, they must be regarded as precursors: they renounced the proud solitude of the writer; they liked their public; they did not attempt to justify the privileges which they acquired; they did not meditate upon death or upon the impossible; rather they wanted to give us rules for living. They were widely read, certainly much more than the surrealists. Yet, if one wishes to mark the chief literary tendencies between the two wars with a name, it is of surrealism that one will think. What is the reason for their failure?

I believe it is explained, paradoxical as it may seem, by the public which they chose for themselves. About 1900, on the occasion of its triumph in the Dreyfuss affair, an industrious and liberal petty bourgeoisie became conscious of itself. It was anti-clerical and republican, anti-racist, individualistic, rationalistic and progressive. Proud of its institutions, it was ready to modify them but not overthrow them. It did not scorn the proletariat, but it felt itself too close to it to be conscious of oppressing it. It lived moderately, sometimes uneasily, but it aspired not so much to wealth, or to inaccessible greatness, as it did to improve its way of life within very narrow limits. Above all, it wanted to live. To live: by that it meant to choose a trade, to practise it conscientiously and even passionately, to maintain a certain initiative in one's work, to

control effectively its political representatives, to express itself freely in state matters, and to raise its children with dignity. It was Cartesian in that it distrusted improvements which were too abrupt and in that, contrary to the romantics who have always hoped that happiness would burst upon them like a catastrophe, it dreamed rather of mastering itself than of changing the course of the world. This class, which has been happily baptized "average," teaches its sons that there is no need for too much and that the best is the enemy of the good. It is well disposed toward the demands of the working-class provided that these remain on a strictly professional level. It has no history and no historical sense, since, unlike the upper bourgeoisie, it has neither a past nor traditions, nor, unlike the working class, does it have immense hope for the future. As it does not believe in God, but needs very strict imperatives to give meaning to the privations which it endures, one of its intellectual concerns has been to establish a lay morality. The university, which belongs completely to this average class, strove for twenty years without success to achieve this through the writings of Durkheim, Brunschvicg, and Alain. Now, these professors were, directly or indirectly, the masters of the writers we are now considering. These young people, born of the petty bourgeoisie, taught by petty-bourgeois professors, prepared at the Sorbonne or in the great schools for petty-bourgeois professions, returned to their class when they began to write. Better still, they never left it. They carried over this morality—but improved and subtilized—into their novels and short stories, a morality which everybody was familiar with but whose principles no one has ever dis-

covered. They dwelt upon the beauties and the risks, upon the austere grandeur of the profession; they sang not of mad love but rather of conjugal friendship and that enterprise in common which is marriage. They founded their humanism upon profession, friendship, social solidarity, and sport. Thus, the petty bourgeoisie which already had its political party, Radical Socialism, its mutual aid society, the League for Human Rights, its secret society, Freemasonry, and its daily paper, *L'Oeuvre,* had writers, and even a literary weekly, which was called, symbolically, *Marianne.* Chamson, Bost, Prévost, and their friends wrote for a public of civil-servants, university people, higher clerks, doctors, and so on. They made literature Radical Socialist.

Now Radicalism has been the great victim of this war. By 1910 it had realized its program. For thirty years it has lived on its momentum. By the time it found its writers it was already living on its past. To-day it has definitely disappeared. When the reform of the administrative personnel and the separation of church and state had been accomplished, Radical Socialist politics could become only a matter of opportunism; in order to maintain itself for a single moment it presupposed social and international peace. Two wars in twenty-five years and the aggravation of the class struggle have been too much for it; the party has not resisted, but even more than the party it is the Radical Socialist spirit which has been the victim of circumstances.

These writers, who did not fight in the first war and who did not see the second one coming, who did not want to believe in the exploitation of man by man, and who

rather bet on the possibility of living honestly and modestly in capitalist society, whom their class of origin—which had become their public—deprived of the feeling for history without giving them, in compensation, a metaphysical absolute, did not have a sense of the tragic in one of the most tragic of all eras, nor that of death when death threatened all Europe, nor that of Evil when so brief a moment separated them from the most cynical attempt to debase them. They limited themselves, in all honesty, to stories of lives which were ordinary and without greatness, while circumstances were forging careers which were exceptional in Evil as well as in Good. On the eve of a poetic springtime—more apparent, to be sure, than real—their lucidity dispelled within them that double-dealing which is one of the sources of poetry; their morality, which could support the soul in daily life, which perhaps had supported it during the first world war, was revealed as inadequate for great catastrophes. In such times man turns toward Epicureanism or Stoicism—and these authors were neither Stoics nor Epicureans[1] —or he asks for help from irrational forces, and they had chosen to see no farther than the boundary of their reason. Thus, history stole their public from them as it stole voters from the Radical Socialist party. They remained silent, I imagine, out of disgust, lacking power to adopt their wisdom to the follies of Europe. After twenty years of plying their craft and finding nothing to tell us in the time of misfortune, they have wasted their labor.

So there remains the third generation, our own, which

1. Prévost declared, more than once, his sympathy for Epicurianism as revised and corrected by Alain.

began to write after the defeat or shortly before the war. I do not want to talk about it before saying something about the climate in which it appeared. First, the literary climate: ralliés, extremists, and radicals peopled our sky. Each of these stars exerted, in its way, its own influence upon our world, and all these influences, combining, managed to form about us the strangest, most irrational, and most contradictory idea of what literature is. We breathed in this idea, which I shall call objective, with the air of our time. Whatever the effort these writers did actually make to distinguish themselves from one another, their works were reciprocally contaminated in the minds of the readers where they co-existed. Moreover, if the differences are sharp and deep, their works have common traits. It is striking, at first, that neither the radicals nor the extremists were concerned with history, although one side aligned itself with the progressive left and the other with the revolutionary left. The first were on the level of Kierkegaardian repetition; the second were on that of the moment; that is, the aberrant synthesis of eternity and the infinitesimal present. In an age when we were being crushed by the pressure of history the literature of the ralliés alone offered some taste for history and some historical sense. But as it was a question of justifying privileges they envisaged only the action of the past on the present in the development of societies. Today, we know the reasons for these refusals, and that they are social: the surrealists are clerks, the petty bourgeoisie has neither traditions nor future, the upper bourgeoisie has done with conquest and aims at maintaining itself. But these diverse attitudes were compounded to

produce an objective myth according to which literature had to choose eternal subjects or at the very least those which were not of the moment. And then our elders had only one fictional technique at their disposal, the one inherited from the French nineteenth century. Now, there is none more hostile to a historical view of society.

Thus, ralliés and radicals have used the traditional technique; the latter because they were moralists and intellectuals and wanted to understand matters by their causes, the former because it served their purposes. By its systematic denial of change it was better able to bring out the perenniality of bourgeois virtues. Behind the vain, forgotten turmoils it let us catch a glimpse of that fixed and mysterious order, that motionless poetry that they wished to reveal in their works. Thanks to this technique, these new Eleatics wrote against the age, against change; they discouraged agitators and revolutionaries by making them see their enterprises in the past even before they had begun.

We learned it by reading their books, and at first it was our only means of expression. About the time we were beginning to write, good minds were calculating the "optimum time" at the end of which a historical event might be the object of a novel. Fifty years—that, it appeared, was too much; one no longer enters into the thing. Ten—that wasn't enough; one does not have enough perspective. Thus, we were gently led to see in literature the kingdom of untimely considerations.

Moreover, these hostile groups made alliances among themselves; sometimes the radicals became reconciled with the ralliés. After all, they had in common the ambi-

tion of reconciling themselves with the reader and of honestly serving his needs. Doubtless their clienteles differed appreciably, but one passed continually from one to the other, and the left wing of the public of the ralliés formed the right wing of the radical public. On the other hand, if the radical writers sometimes went along for a way with traditional politics, if, when the Radical Socialist party joined the Popular Front, they all decided together to collaborate in *Vendredi*, they never concluded an alliance with the extreme literary left, that is, with the surrealists.

The extremists, on the contrary, have this in common, though reluctantly, with the ralliés, that they both hold that the object of literature is a certain ineffable beyondness which can only be suggested and that it is essentially the imaginary realization of the unrealizable. This is particularly palpable when we are dealing with poetry. Whereas the radicals banished it, so to speak, from literature, the novels of the ralliés were steeped in it. This fact, one of the most important in contemporary literary history, has often been noted; the reason for it has not been given. What the bourgeois writers really wanted to prove was that there is no life so bourgeois or so humdrum that it has not its poetic *beyondness*. They considered themselves catalysts of bourgeois poetry.

At the same time the extremists identified all forms of artistic activity with poetry, that is, with the inconceivable beyondness of destruction. Objectively, this tendency was expressed at the moment we were beginning to write by the confusion of genres and the mistaken notion of what

the novel is essentially. And it is not rare, even to-day, for critics to accuse a work of prose of lacking poetry.

This whole literature is literature with a thesis, since these writers, though they vigorously protest to the contrary, all defend ideologies. Extremists and ralliés profess to despise metaphysics. But how shall we name those endlessly repeated declarations that man is too large for himself and, by a whole dimension of his being, escapes psychological and social determinations?

As to the radicals, while proclaiming that literature is not made with fine feelings, their chief concern was moralizing. In the objective mind, all this is translated by tremendous oscillations of the concept of literature: it is pure gratuity—it is teaching; it exists only by denying itself and being reborn from its ashes; it is the exquisite, the impossible, the ineffable beyond language—it is an austere profession which addresses a specific clientele, tries to clarify its needs, and strives to satisfy them. It is terror, it is rhetoric. The critics then come along and try, for their convenience, to unify these opposite concepts; they invent the notion of the *message,* which we spoke of earlier.

Everything, to be sure, is a message. There is a message of Gide, of Chamson, of Breton, and of course, it is what they were unwilling to say, what criticism made them say in spite of themselves. Whence a new theory is added to the preceding ones; in these delicate and self-destroying works where the word is only a hesitant guide which stops half-way and lets the reader continue on his way alone and whose truth is quite beyond language, in an undif-

ferentiated silence, it is always the unintentional contribution of the writer which has chief importance.

A work is never beautiful unless it in some way escapes its author. If he paints himself without planning to, if his characters escape his control and impose their whims upon him, if the words maintain a certain independence under his pen, then he does his best work. Boileau would be completely dumbfounded if he read this kind of statement, which one frequently finds in the articles of our critics: "the author knows too well what he wants to say; he is too lucid; the words come too easily; he does whatever he wants with his pen; he is not dominated by his subject."

Unfortunately, everybody is in agreement on this point. For the ralliés, the essence of the work is the poetry, thus, the beyond and, by an imperceptible gliding, which escapes the author himself, the part of the Devil. For the surrealist the only valid mode of writing is automatism. Even the radicals, following Alain, insist that a work of art is never finished until it has become a collective representation and that it then contains, by virtue of all that generations of readers have put into it, infinitely more than at the moment of its conception.

This idea, which, moreover, is correct, amounts to making evident the reader's role in the constitution of the work; but at the time it helped increase the confusion. In short, the objective myth inspired by these contradictions is that every lasting work has its secret.

Well and good, if it were a secret of fabrication; but no, it starts at the point where technique and will leave off. Something from above is reflected in the work of art

and breaks like sunlight on the waves. To put it briefly, from pure poetry to automatic writing the literary climate is Platonism. In this mystical epoch which is without faith, or rather dishonestly mystical, a major literary current leads the writer to surrender before his work as a political current leads him to surrender before the party. It is said that Fra Angelico painted on his knees; if that is true, many writers resemble him, but go much further than he; they think that it is enough to write on one's knees to write well.

When we were still schoolboys on the lycée benches or in the Sorbonne amphitheatres, the leafy shadow of the beyond spread itself over literature. We knew the bitter and deceptive taste of the impossible, of purity, of impossible purity. We felt ourselves to be in turn the unsatisfied and the Ariels of accomplishment. We believed that one could save his life by art, and then, the following term, that one never saved anything and that art was the lucid and desperate balance sheet of our perdition. We swung between terror and rhetoric, between literature-as-martyrdom and literature-as-profession. If someone were to amuse himself by carefully reading our writings he would doubtless find there, like scars, the traces of these varying temptations—but he would have to have time to waste.

That is all very far away from us now. However, since it is by writing that the author forges his ideas on the art of writing, the collectivity lives on the literary conceptions of the preceding generation, and the critics who have understood them twenty years late are quite happy to use them as touchstones to judge contemporary works.

The literature of the period between the wars has a hard time of it these days. Georges Bataille's reflections on the impossible do not have the value of the slightest surrealistic tract. His theory of expense is a feeble echo of great days which are past. Lettrism is a substitute product, a flat and conscientious imitation of Dadaist exuberance. One's heart is no longer in it; one feels the application and the haste to succeed. Neither André Dhotel nor Marius Groult are worth Alain Fournier. Many former surrealists have joined the Communist Party like the Saint Simonians who, around 1880, turned up on boards of directors of big business. Neither Cocteau nor Mauriac nor Green has any challengers; Giraudoux has a hundred, but all mediocre. Most of the radicals are silent. The reason is that the gap has been revealed not between the author and his public which, after all, would be in the great literary tradition—but between the literary myth and the historical reality.

We started feeling this gap about 1930, quite a while before publishing our first books.[1] It was about this time that most Frenchmen were stupefied on discovering

1. If I did not speak of Marlaux or Saint-Exupéry earlier, it is because they belong to our generation. They were writing before we were and are doubtless a little older than we. But whereas we needed the urgency and the physical reality of a conflict in order to discover ourselves, Malraux had the immense merit of recognizing as early as his first work that we were at war and of producing a war literature when the surrealists and even Drieu were devoting themselves to a literature of peace. As to Saint-Exupéry, against the subjectivism and the quietism of our predecessors he was able to sketch the chief features of a literature of work and tool. I shall show later that he is the precursor of a literature of construction which tends to replace the literature of consumption. War and construction, heroism and work, doing, having and being — it will be seen, at the end of this chapter, that these are the chief literary and philosophical themes of today. Consequently, when I say "we", I believe that I can speak of them too.

their historicity. They had, of course, learned at school that man plays and wins or loses in the womb of universal history, but they did not apply it to their own case. They thought in a vague sort of way that it was all right for the dead to be historical. The striking thing about lives of the past is that they always unfold *on the eve* of the great events which exceed forecasts, disappoint expectations, upset plans, and bring new lights to bear on the years that have gone by. We have here a case of trickery, a perpetual juggling, as if men were all like Charles Bovary who, discovering after his wife's death the letters she had received from her lovers, all at once saw twenty years of conjugal happiness which *had already been lived* slipping away.

In the century of the airplane and electricity we did not think that we were exposed to these surprises. It didn't seem to us that we were *on the eve* of anything. On the contrary, we had the vague pride of feeling that it was *the day after* the last disruption of history. Even if we were at times disturbed by German re-armament, we thought that we were moving on a long, straight road and we felt certain that our lifetime would be uniquely woven of individual circumstances and marked by scientific discoveries and happy reforms.

From 1930 on, the world depression, the coming of Nazism, and the events in China opened our eyes. It seemed as if the ground were going to fall from under us, and suddenly, *for us too*, the great historical juggling began. The first years of the great world Peace suddenly had to be regarded as the years between wars. Each sign of promise which we had greeted had to be seen as a

threat. Each day we had lived revealed its true face; we had abandoned ourselves to it trustingly and it was leading us to a new war with secret rapidity, with a rigor hidden beneath its nonchalant airs. And our life as an individual which had seemed to depend upon our efforts, our virtues, and our faults, on our good and bad luck, on the good and bad will of a very small number of people, seemed governed down to its minutest details by obscure and collective forces, and its most private circumstances seemed to reflect the state of the whole world. All at once we felt ourselves abruptly *situated.*

The detachment which our predecessors were so fond of practising had become impossible. There was a collective adventure which was taking form in the future and which would be *our* adventure. That was what would later permit our generation, with its Ariels and its Calibans, to be dated. Something was awaiting us in the future shadow, something which would reveal us to ourselves, perhaps in the illumination of a last moment, before annihilating us. The secret of our gestures and our most intimate designs lay ahead of us in the catastrophe to which our names would be attached.

Historicity flowed in upon us; in everything we touched, in the air we breathed, in the page we read, in the one we wrote; in love itself we discovered, like a taste of history, so to speak, a bitter and ambiguous mixture of the absolute and the transitory. What need had we patiently to construct self-destructive objects since each of the moments of our life was subtly whisked away from us at the very time that we were enjoying it, since each *present* that we lived with gusto, like an ab-

solute, was struck with a secret death, seemed to us to have its meaning outside of itself, for other eyes which had not yet seen the light, and, in a way, to be *already past* in its very presence? Besides, what did surrealist destruction, which leaves everything in place, matter to us, when a destruction by sword and fire threatened everything, surrealism included?

It was, I believe, Miro who painted a *Destruction of Painting*. But incendiary bombs could destroy the painting and its destruction together. We would no longer have dreamed of crying up the exquisite virtues of the bourgeoisie. To do that we would have had to believe that they were eternal, but did we know whether the French bourgeoisie would exist tomorrow? Nor of teaching, as the radicals had done, the means of leading in peace-time the life of an honest man, when our greatest care was to know whether one could remain a man in war-time.

The pressure of history suddenly revealed to us the interdependence of nations. An incident in Shanghai was a scissor-stroke in our destiny, but at the same time it replaced us, in spite of ourselves, in the national collectivity. We very soon had to realize that the traveling of our elders, their sumptuous voyages abroad, and the whole ceremonial of tourism on the grand scale, was an illusion. Everywhere they went they carried France with them. They travelled because France had won the war and the exchange was favorable. They followed the franc. Like the franc, they had more access to Seville and Palermo than to Zurich and Amsterdam.

As for us, when we were old enough to make our

world tour, autarchy had killed off the novels about the grand tour, and then, we no longer had the heart to travel. With a perverse taste for standardizing the world, they amused themselves with finding the imprint of capitalism everywhere. We would have found, without any difficulty, a much more obvious uniformity — cannons everywhere. And then, whether travellers or not, in the face of the conflict which threatened our country, we had understood that we were not citizens of the world since we could not make ourselves be Swiss, Swedish, or Portuguese. The destiny of our works themselves were bound to that of a France in danger. Our elders wrote for idle souls, but for the public which we, in our turn, were going to address the vacation was over. It was composed of men of our sort who, like us, were expecting war and death. For these readers without leisure, occupied without respite with a single concern, there was only one fitting subject. It was about their war and their death that we had to write. Brutally reintegrated into history, we had no choice but to produce a literature of historicity.

But what makes our position original, I believe, is that the war and the occupation, by precipitating us into a world in a state of fusion, perforce made us rediscover the absolute at the heart of relativity itself. For our predecessors the rule of the game was to save everybody, because suffering is atoned for, because nobody is bad voluntarily, because man's heart is unfathomable, because divine grace is shared equally. That meant that literature — apart from the Surrealist extreme left which simply spread mischief — tended to establish a sort of

moral relativism. Christians no longer believed in hell. Sin was the place devoid of God; carnal love was love of God gone astray.

As democracy tolerated all opinions, even those which aimed expressly at destroying it, republican humanism, which was taught in the schools, made tolerance the primary virtue. Everything would be tolerated, even intolerance. Hidden truths had to be recognized in the silliest ideas, in the vilest feelings. For Léon Brunschvicg, the philosopher of the régime, who all his life assimilated, unified, and integrated, and who shaped three generations, evil and error were only false shows, fruits of separation, limitation, and finiteness. They were annihilated as soon as one overthrew the barriers which compartmentalized systems and collectivities.

The radicals followed Auguste Comte in this, that they held progress to be the development of order; thus, order was already there, *in posse,* like the hunter's cap in the illustrated puzzles. It was only a matter of discovering it. That was how they passed their time; it was their spiritual exercise. They thereby justified everything — starting with themselves.

The Marxists at least recognized the reality of oppression and capitalist imperialism, of the class struggle and misery. But the effect of dialectical materialism, as I have shown elsewhere, is to make Good and Evil vanish conjointly. There remains only the historical process, and then Stalinist communism does not attribute so much importance to the individual that his sufferings and even his death cannot be redeemed if they help to hasten the day when power is seized.

The notion of Evil, which had been abandoned, had fallen into the hands of some Manichaeans — Anti-Semites, fascists, anarchists of the right — who used it to justify their bitterness, their envy, and their lack of understanding of history. That was enough to discredit it. For political realism as for philosophical idealism Evil was not a very serious matter.

We have been taught to take it seriously. It is neither our fault nor our merit if we lived in a time when torture was a daily fact. Châteaubriand, Oradour, the Rue des Saussaies, Tulle, Dachau, and Auschwitz have all demonstrated to us that Evil is not an appearance, that knowing its cause does not dispel it, that it is not opposed to Good as a confused idea is to a clear one, that is not the effects of passions which might be cured, of a fear which might be overcome, of a passing aberration which might be excused, of an ignorance which might be enlightened, that it can in no way be diverted, brought back, reduced, and incorporated into idealistic humanism, like that shade of which Leibnitz has written that it is necessary for the glare of daylight.

Satan, Maritain once said, is pure. Pure, that is, without mixture and without remission. We have learned to know this horrible, this irreducible purity. It blazes forth in the close and almost sexual rapport between the executioner and his victim. For torture is first of all a matter of debasement. Whatever the sufferings which have been endured, it is the victim who decides, as a last resort, what the moment is when they are unbearable and when he must talk. The supreme irony of torture is that the sufferer, if he breaks down and talks, applies his will as

a man to denying that he is a man, makes himself the accomplice of his executioners and, by his own movement, precipitates himself into abjection. The executioner is aware of this; he watches for this weakness, not only because he will obtain the information he desires, but because it will prove to him once again that he is right in using torture and that man is an animal who must be led with a whip. Thus, he attempts to destroy the humanity in his fellow-creature. Also, as a consequence, in himself; he knows that the groaning, sweating, filthy creature who begs for mercy and abandons himself in a swooning consent with the moanings of an amorous woman, and who yields everything and is even so carried away that he improves upon his betrayals because the consciousness that he has done evil is like a stone around his neck dragging him still farther down, exists also in his own image and that he — the executioner — is bearing down upon himself as much as upon his victim. If he wishes, on his own account, to escape this total degradation, he has no other recourse than to affirm his blind faith in an iron order which like a corset confines our repulsive weaknesses — in short, to commit man's destiny to the hands of inhuman powers.

A moment comes when torturer and tortured are in accord, the former because he has, in a single victim, symbolically gratified his hatred of all mankind, the latter because he can bear his failing only by pushing it to the limit, and because the only way he can endure his self-hatred is by hating all other men along with himself. Later, perhaps, the executioner will be hanged. Perhaps the victim, if he recovers, will be redeemed. But what will

blot out this Mass in which two freedoms have communed in the destruction of the human? We knew that, to a certain extent, it was being celebrated everywhere in Paris while we were eating, sleeping, and making love. We heard whole blocks screaming and we understood that Evil, fruit of a free and sovereign will, is, like Good, absolute.

Perhaps a day will come when a happy age, looking back at the past, will see in this suffering and shame one of the paths which led to peace. But we were not on the side of history already made. We were, as I have said, *situated* in such a way that every lived minute seemed to us like something irreducible. Therefore, in spite of ourselves, we came to this conclusion, which will seem shocking to lofty souls: Evil cannot be redeemed.

But, on the other hand, most of the resisters, though beaten, burned, blinded, and broken, did not speak. They broke the circle of Evil and reaffirmed the human — for themselves, for us, and for their very torturers. They did it without witness, without help, without hope, often even without faith. For them it was not a matter of believing in man but of wanting to. Everything conspired to discourage them: so many indications everywhere about them, those faces bent over them, that misery within them. Everything concurred in making them believe that they were only insects, that man is the impossible dream of spies and squealers, and that they would awaken as vermin like everybody else.

This man had to be invented with their martyrized flesh, with their hunted thoughts which were already betraying them — invented on the basis of nothing, for

nothing, in absolute gratuity. For it is within the human that one can distinguish means and ends, values and preferences, but they were still at the creation of the world and they had only to decide in sovereign fashion whether there would be anything more than the reign of the animal within it. They remained silent and man was born of their silence. We knew that every moment of the day, in the four corners of Paris, man was a hundred times destroyed and reaffirmed.

Obsessed as we were by these tortures, a week did not go by that we did not ask ourselves: "Suppose I were tortured, what would I do?" And this question alone carried us to the very frontiers of ourselves and of the human. We oscillated between the no-man's-land where mankind denies itself and the barren desert from which it surges and creates itself. Those who had immediately preceded us in the world, who had bequeathed us their culture, their wisdom, their customs, and their proverbs, who had built the houses that we lived in and who had marked the routes with the statues of their great men, practiced modest virtues and remained in the moderate regions. Their faults never caused them to fall so low that they did not find others beneath them who were more guilty, nor did their merits cause them to rise so high that they did not see other souls above them whose merit was greater. Their gaze encountered men farther than the eye can reach. The very sayings they made use of and which we had learned from them — "a fool always finds a bigger fool to admire him," "we always need someone smaller than ourselves" — their very manner of consoling themselves in affliction by telling themselves that, whatever

their unhappines, there were others worse off, all goes to show that they considered mankind as a natural and infinite milieu that one could never leave and whose limits could not be touched. They died with a good conscience and without ever having explored their condition.

Because of this, their writers gave them a literature of *average situations*. But we could no longer find it *natural* to be men when our best friends, if they were taken, could choose only between abjection and heroism, that is, between the two extremes of the human condition, beyond which there is no longer anything. If they were cowards and traitors, all men were above them; if heroic, all men were below them. In the latter case, which was the more frequent, they no longer felt humanity as a limitless milieu. It was a thin flame within them which they alone kept alive. It kept itself going in the silence which they opposed to their executioners. About them was nothing but the great polar night of the inhuman and of unknowingness, which they did not even *see*, which they divined in the glacial cold which transpierced them.

Our fathers always had witnesses and examples available. For these tortured men, there were no longer any. It was Saint-Exupéry who said in the course of a dangerous mission, "I am my own witness." The same for all of them; anguish and forlornness and the sweating of blood begin for a man when he can no longer have any other witness than himself. It is then that he drains the cup, that he experiences his human condition to the bitter end. Of course, we are quite far from having all felt this anguish, but it haunted us like a threat and a promise.

Five years. We lived entranced and as we did not take

our profession of writer lightly, this state of trance still reflects itself in our writings. We have undertaken to create a literature of extreme situations. I am not at all claiming that in this we are superior to our elders. Quite the contrary. Bloch-Michel, who has earned the right to talk, has said that fewer virtues are needed in great circumstances than in small. It is not for me to decide whether he is right or whether it is better to be a Jansenist than a Jesuit. I rather think that there must be something of everything and that the same man cannot be one and the other at the same time.

Therefore, we are Jansenists because the age has made us such, and insofar as it has made us touch our limits I shall say that we are all metaphysical writers. I think that many among us would deny this designation or would not accept it without reservations, but this is the result of a misunderstanding. For metaphysics is not a sterile discussion about abstract notions which have nothing to do with experience. It is a living effort to embrace from within the human condition in its totality.

Forced by circumstances to discover the pressure of history, as Torricelli discovered atmospheric pressure, and tossed by the cruelty of the time into that forlornness from where one can see our condition as man to the very limit, to the absurd, to the night of unknowingness, we have a task for which we may not be strong enough (this is not the first time that an age, for want of talents, has lacked its art and its philosophy). It is to create a literature which unites and reconciles the metaphysical absolute and the relativity of the historical fact, and which I shall call, for want of a better name, the literature of great circum-

stances.[1] It is not a question for us of escaping into the eternal or of abdicating in the face of what the unspeakable Mr. Zaslavsky calls in *Pravda* the "historical process."

The questions which our age puts to us and which remain *our* questions are of another order. How can one make himself a man in, by, and for history? Is there a possible synthesis between our unique and irreducible consciousness and our relativity; that is, between a dogmatic humanism and a perspectivism? What is the relationship between morality and politics? How, considering our deeper intentions, are we to take up the objective consequences of our acts? We can rigorously attack these problems in the abstract by philosophical reflection. But if we want to live them, to support our thoughts by those fictive and concrete experiences which are what novels are, we have at our disposal the technique which I have already analyzed here and whose ends are rigorously opposed to our designs. Specially perfected to relate the events of an individual life within a stable society, it enabled the novelist to record, describe, and explain the weakening, the vections, the involutions, and the slow disorganization of a particular system in the middle of a universe at rest. But from 1940 on, we found ourselves in the midst of a cyclone. If we wished to orient ourselves in it we suddenly found ourselves at grips with

1. What are Camus, Marlaux, Koestler, etc. now producing if not a literature of extreme situations? Their characters are at the height of power or in prison cells, on the eve of death or of being tortured or of killing. Wars, coups d'état, revolutionary action, bombardments, massacres. There you have their everyday life. On every page, in every line, it is always the whole man who is in question.

a problem of a higher order of complexity, exactly as a quadratic equation is more complex than a linear. It was a matter of describing the relationship of different partial systems to the total system which contains them when both are in movement and the movements condition each other reciprocally.

In the stable world of the pre-war French novel, the author, placed at a gamma point which represented absolute rest, had fixed guide-marks at his disposal to determine the movements of his characters. But we, involved in a system in full evolution, could only know relative movements. Whereas our predecessors thought that they could keep themselves outside of history and that they had soared to heights from which they could judge events as they really were, circumstances have plunged us into our time. But since we were in it, how could we see it as a whole? Since we were *situated*, the only novels we could dream of were novels of *situation*, without internal narrators or all-knowing witnesses. In short, if we wished to give an account of our age, we had to make the technique of the novel shift from Newtonian mechanics to generalized relativity; we had to people our books with minds that were half lucid and half overcast, some of which we might consider with more sympathy than others, but none of which would have a privileged point of view either upon the event or upon himself. We had to present creatures whose reality would be the tangled and contradictory tissue of each one's evaluations of all the other characters — himself included — and the evaluation by all the others of himself, and who could never decide from within whether the changes of their destinies came from

their own efforts, from their own faults, or from the course of the universe.

Finally, we had to leave doubts, expectations, and the unachieved throughout our works, leaving it up to the reader to conjecture for himself by giving him the feeling, without giving him or letting him guess our feeling, that his view of the plot and the characters was merely one among many others.

But, on the other hand, as I have just pointed out, our very historicity reinstated us because from day to day we were living that absolute which it had seemed at first to take away from us. If our plans, our passions, and our acts were explicable and relative from the viewpoint of past history, they again took on in this forlornness the uncertainty and the risks of the present, their irreducible density.

We were not unaware of the fact that a time would come when historians would be able to survey from all angles this stretch of time which we lived feverishly minute by minute, when they would illuminate our past by our future and would decide upon the value of our undertakings by their outcome and upon the sincerity of our intentions by their success. But the irreversibility of our age belonged only to us. We had to save or lose ourselves gropingly in this irreversible time. These events bounced upon us like thieves and we had to do our job in the face of the incomprehensible and the untenable, to bet, to conjecture without evidence, to undertake in uncertainty and persevere without hope. Our age would be explained, but no one could keep it from having been inexplicable to us. No one could remove the bitter taste,

the taste it will have had for us alone and which will disappear with us.

The novels of our elders related the event as having taken place in the past. Chronological order permitted the reader to see the logical and universal relationship, the eternal verities. The slightest change was already understood. A past was delivered to us which had already been thought through. Perhaps two centuries from now an author who may decide to write a historical novel about the war of 1940 may find this a suitable technique. But if it occurred to us to meditate on our future writings, we were convinced that no art could really be ours if it did not restore to the event its brutal freshness, its ambiguity, its unforeseeability, if it did restore to time its actual course, to the world its rich and threatening opacity, and to man his long patience.

We did not want to delight our public with its superiority to a dead world — we wanted to take it by the throat. Let every character be a trap, let the reader be caught in it, and let him be tossed from one consciousness to another as from one absolute and irremediable universe to another similarly absolute; let him be uncertain of the very uncertainty of the heroes, disturbed by their disturbance, flooded with their present, docile beneath the weight of their future, invested with their perceptions and feelings as by high insurmountable cliffs. In short, let him feel that every one of their moods and every movement of their minds encloses all mankind and is, in its time and place, in the womb of history and, despite the perpetual juggling of the present by the future, a descent without recourse toward Evil or an ascent toward

Good which no future will be able to contest. This is what explains the success we have accorded Kafka's works and those of the American novelists. As for Kafka, everything has been said: that he wanted to paint a picture of bureaucracy, the progress of disease, the condition of the Jews in eastern Europe, the quest for inaccessible transcendence, and the world of grace when grace is lacking. This is all true. Let me say that he wanted to describe the human condition. But what we were particularly sensitive to was that this trial perpetually in session, which ends abruptly and evilly, whose judges are unknown and out of reach, in the vain efforts of the accused to know the leaders of the prosecution, in this defense patiently assembled which turns against the defender and figures in the evidence for the prosecution, in this absurd present which the characters live with great earnestness and whose keys are elsewhere, we recognize history and ourselves in history.

We were far from Flaubert and Mauriac. There was in Kafka, at the very least, a new way of presenting destinies which were tricked and undermined at their foundation, which were lived minutely, ingeniously, and modestly, of rendering the irreducible truth of appearances and of making felt beyond them another truth which will always be denied us. One does not imitate Kafka. One does not rewrite him. One had to extract a precious encouragement from his books and look elsewhere.

As for the Americans, it was not their cruelty or pessimism which moved us. We recognized in them men who had been swamped, lost in too large a continent as we were in history and who tried, without traditions, with

the means available, to render their stupor and forlornness in the midst of incomprehensible events. The success of Faulkner, Hemingway, and Dos Passos was not the effect of snobbism, or at least, not at first. It was the defense reflex of a literature which, feeling itself threatened because its techniques and its myths were no longer going to allow it to cope with the historical situation, grafted foreign methods upon itself in order to be able to fulfill its function in new situations.

Thus, at the very moment that we were facing the public, circumstances forced us to break with our predecessors. They had chosen literary idealism and had presented us with events through a privileged subjectivity. For us, historical relativism, by positing the a priori equivalent of all subjectivities,[2] restored to the living event all its value and

2. Of course, some minds are richer than others, more intuitive, or better qualified for analysis or synthesis. Some of them are even prophetic and some are in a better position to foresee because they hold certain cards in their hand or because they discern a broader horizon. But these differences are a posteriori and the evaluation of the present and the near future remains conjectural. For *us* too the event appears only through subjectivities. But its transcendence comes from the fact that it exceeds them all because it extends through them and reveals to each person a different aspect of itself and of himself.

Thus, our technical problem is to find an orchestration of consciousnesses which may permit us to render the multidimensionality of the event. Moreover, in giving up the fiction of the omniscient narrator, we have assumed the obligation of suppressing the intermediaries between the reader and the subjectivities — the viewpoints of our characters. It is a matter of having him enter into their minds as into a windmill. He must even coincide successively with each one of them. We have learned from Joyce to look for a second kind of realism, the raw realism of subjectivity without mediation or distance. Which leads us to profess a third realism, that of temporality. Indeed, if without mediation we plunge the reader into a consciousness, if we refuse him all means of surveying the whole, then the time of this consciousness must be imposed upon him without abridgment. If I pack six months into a single page, the reader jumps out of the book.

This last aspect raises difficulties that none of us has resolved and which

led us back, in literature, to dogmatic realism by way of absolute subjectivism. They thought that they were justifying, at least apparently, the foolish business of story-telling by ceaselessly bringing to the reader's attention, explicitly or by allusion, the existence of an author. We hope that our books remain in the air all by themselves and that their words, instead of pointing backwards toward the one who has designed them, will be toboggans, forgotten, unnoticed, and solitary, which will hurl the reader into the midst of a universe where there are no witnesses; in short, that our books may exist in the manner of things, of plants, of events, and not at first like products of man. We want to drive providence from our works as we have driven it from our world. We should, I believe, no longer define beauty by the form nor even by the matter, but by the density of being.[3]

I have shown how "retrospective" literature denotes the taking of a position from which one surveys the whole of society and how those who choose to narrate from the viewpoint of past history seek to deny their body, their

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are perhaps partially insoluble, for it is neither possible nor desirable to limit all novels to the story of a single day. Even if one should resign himself to that, the fact would remain that devoting a book to twenty-four hours rather than to one, or to an hour rather than to a minute, implies the intervention of the author and a transcendent choice. It will then be necessary to mask this choice by purely aesthetic procedures, to practice sleight of hand, and, as always in art, to lie in order to be true.

3. From this viewpoint, absolute objectivity, that is, the story in the third person which presents characters solely by their conduct and words without explanation or incursion into their inner life, while preserving strict chronological order, is rigorously equivalent to absolute subjectivity. Logically, to be sure, it might be claimed that there is at least a witnessing consciousness, that of the reader. But the fact is that the reader forgets to see himself while he looks and the story retains for him the innocence of a virgin forest whose trees grow far from sight.

historicity, and the irreversibility of time. This leap into the eternal is the direct effect of the divorce which I have pointed out between the writer and his public. Vice-versa, it will be understood without difficulty that our decision to re-integrate the absolute into history is accompanied by an effort to confirm this reconciliation of author and reader which the radicals and the ralliés had already undertaken.

When the writer thinks that he has pathways to the eternal, he is beyond comparison. He has the benefit of an illumination which he can not communicate to the vulgar throng which crawls beneath him. But if it has occurred to him to think that one does not escape his class by fine sentiments, that there is no privileged consciousness anywhere, that *belles-lettres* are not *lettres de noblesse*, that the best way to be bowled over by one's age is to turn one's back on it or to pretend to be above it, and that one does not transcend it by running away from it but by taking hold of it in order to change it, that is, by going beyond it toward the immediate future, then he is writing for everybody and with everybody because the problem which he is trying to solve by means of his own talents is everybody's problem. Besides, those among us who collaborated in the underground newspapers addressed themselves in their articles to the whole community. We were not prepared for this kind of thing and we turned out to be not very clever; the literature of resistance did not produce anything to get excited about. But this experience made us feel what a literature of the concrete universal might be.

In these anonymous articles we practised, in general,

only pure negativity. In the face of a manifest opposition and the myth it was shaping from day to day to sustain itself, spirituality was dissent. Most of the time our job was to criticize a political action, to denounce an arbitrary measure, to warn against a man or against propaganda, and when we happened to glorify someone who had been deported or shot, it was for having had the courage to say no. Against the vague and synthetic notions which were crammed into us day and night, Europe, Race, the Jew, the anti-bolshevik crusade, we had to reawaken the old spirit of analysis which alone was capable of tearing them to pieces. Thus, our function seemed a humble echo of the one which the eighteenth-century writers had so brilliantly fulfilled. But as we could not address the oppressor, as Diderot and Voltaire could, except by literary fiction, be it only to have made them ashamed of their oppression, as we never had relations with them, we did not have the illusion of these authors that we were escaping our oppressed condition by practising our profession.

On the contrary, from within oppression itself we depicted to the oppressed collectivity of which we were part its anger and its hopes. With more luck, more skill, more talent, more cohesion, and more drive, we might have been able to write the interior monologue of occupied France. Moreover, even if we might have managed it, there would have been no reason for glorifying us inordinately. The National Front grouped its members by profession. Those among us who worked for the Resistance in their specialty could not ignore the fact that the doctors, the engineers, and the railway workers were,

in their speciality, doing a job of far greater importance.

Whatever the case may be there was the risk that after the liberation this attitude, which was easy for us because of the great tradition of literary negativity, might turn into systematic negation and might once again bring about the divorce of writer and public; because we were at war, we glorified all forms of destruction; desertions, refusals to obey, derailing of trains, setting harvests on fire, and criminal attacks.

The war was over. By persisting in this attitude, we might have joined the surrealist group and all those who make of art a permanent and radical form of destruction. But 1945 does not resemble 1918. It was fine to invoke the flood upon a victorious and smug France which thought that it would dominate Europe. The flood has come. What remains to be destroyed? The great metaphysical destruction of the other post-war period was carried on joyously, in a spirit of unleashed explosion. To-day, there is the threat of war, famine, and dictatorship. We are again super-charged. 1918 was holiday-time. A bonfire might be built of twenty centuries of culture and accumulations. To-day the fire would go out by itself or would refuse to catch. It will be a long time before the holiday season comes round again.

In this age of lean cows, literature refuses to link its destiny to that of consumption, which is too precarious. In a rich oppressive society art can still be taken for the supreme luxury because luxury seems the mark of civilization. But to-day luxury has lost its sacred character. The black market has turned it into a phenomenon of social disintegration. It has lost the aspect of

"conspicuous consumption" which made up half its charm. One hides himself in order to consume; one isolates himself; one is no longer at the top of the social hierarchy, but on the margin. An art of pure consumption would be neither here nor there. It would no longer be supported by solid luxury, whether culinary or sartorial. It might just barely provide a handful of privileged souls with solitary escapes, onanistic pleasures, and the opportunity to miss the old sweetness of living.

When the whole of Europe is preoccupied before everything else with reconstruction, when nations deprive themselves of necessities in order to export, literature, (which, like the Church, adapts itself to all situations and saves itself, come what may) reveals its other face. Writing is not living. Neither is it running away from life in order to contemplate Platonic essences and the archetype of beauty in a world at rest. Nor is it letting oneself be slashed, as by swords, by words which, unfamiliar and not understood, come up to us from behind. It is the practising of a profession, a profession which requires an apprenticeship, sustained work, professional consciousness, and the sense of responsibility.

It is not we who have discovered these responsibilities. Quite the contrary. For a hundred years the writer has been dreaming of giving himself to his art in a sort of innocence, beyond Good and Evil, and, so to speak, before the fall. It is society which has just laid our burdens and our duties on our shoulders. It must think that we are quite formidable since it condemned to death a hundred of us who collaborated with the enemy while it left manufacturers who were guilty of the same crime at

liberty. It is said nowadays that it was better to build the Atlantic wall than to talk about it. I don't find that particulary scandalizing.

To be sure, it is because we are pure consumers that the collectivity proves to be pitiless toward us. An author shot is one mouth less to feed. The least important producer would be a greater loss to the nation.[1] And I am not saying that this is just. On the contrary, it opens the way to all abuses, to censorship, to persecution. But we ought to rejoice that our profession involves some dangers. When we wrote clandestinely, the risks for us were minimal, but for the printers they were considerable. It often made me feel ashamed. At least it taught us to practise a sort of verbal deflation. When each word might cost a life, you ought not take time off to play the cello. You go as fast as possible. You make it snappy. The war of 1914 precipitated the crisis of language. I would readily say that the war of 1940 has revalorised it. But it is to be hoped that in taking up our names again, we were taking risks on our own account. After all, a roof-mender will always be running a great many more.

In a society which insists upon production and restricts consumption to what is strictly necessary, the work of literature is evidently gratuitous. Even if the writer

1. I sometimes wonder whether the Germans, who had at their disposal a hundred means of knowing the names of the members of the National Writers Committee, did not spare us. We were pure consumers for them too. Here the process is inverted. The diffusion of our newspapers was highly limited. It would have been more inexpedient in regard to the supposed politic of collaboration to arrest Eluard or Mauriac than dangerous to let them whisper in freedom. The Gestapo doubtless preferred to concentrate its efforts on the underground forces and the members of the Maquis whose acts of real destruction troubled more than our abstract negativity. Doubtless, they arrested and shot Jacques Decour. But at the time Decour was not yet very well known.

strongly stresses the work that he puts into it, even if he points out, and rightfully, that this work, considered in itself, involves the same faculties as that of an engineer or doctor, the fact remains that the created object is not to be compared with *goods*. This gratuity, far from grieving us, is our pride, and we know that it is the image of freedom.

The work of art is gratuitous because it is an absolute end and because it presents itself to the spectator as a categorical imperative. In addition, although it neither can nor wants to be production by itself, it wants to represent the free consciousness of a productive society, that is, to reflect production upon the producer in terms of freedom, as Hesiod did in the past. It is not, to be sure, a matter of picking up the thread of that boring literature of work of which Pierre Hamp was the most solemn and soporific representative. But as this type of reflection is both a summons and a surpassing, it is necessary to manifest to the men of this age the principles, aims, and inner constitution of their productive activity, at the same time that we show them their works and days.

If negativity is one aspect of freedom, constructiveness is the other. Now, the paradox of our age is that constructive freedom has never been so close to becoming conscious of itself and never has it been so profoundly alienated. Never has work more powerfully manifested its productivity, and never have workers been more swindled out of its products and its significance. Never has *homo faber* better understood that he has *made* history and never has he felt so powerless before history.

Our job is cut out for us. Insofar as literature is negativity it will challenge the alienation of work; insofar as it is a creation and an act of surpassing, it will present man as *creative action.* It will go along with him in his effort to pass beyond his present alienation toward a better situation. If it is true that to have, to make, and to be are the prime categories of human reality, it might be said that the literature of consumption has limited itself to the study of the relations which unite *being* to *having.* The sensation is presented as enjoyment, which is philosophically false, and the one who knows best how to enjoy himself is the one who exists most. From *The Culture of the Self* to *The Possession of the World,* including *Earthly Nourishments* and *Barnabooth's Journal,* to be is to appropriate.

The work of art, an outcome of similar pleasures, itself pretends to be enjoyment or promise of enjoyment. So the circle is completed. We, on the contrary, have been led by circumstances to bring to light the relationship between *being* and *doing* in the perspective of our historical situation. *Is* one what one *does*? What he makes of *himself*? In present-day society, where work is alienated? *What* should one do, what end should he choose *today*? And *how* is it to be done, by what means? What are the relationships between ends and means in a society based on violence?

The works deriving from such preoccupations can not aim first to please. They irritate and disturb. They offer themselves as tasks to be discharged. They urge the reader on to quests without conclusions. They present us with experiences whose outcomes are uncertain. The

fruits of torments and questions, they can not be enjoyment for the reader, but rather questions and torments. If our results turn out successful, they will not be diversions, but rather obsessions. They will give not a world "to see" but to change.

On the other hand, this old, used, sore, sniveling world will lose nothing thereby. Since Schopenhauer it has been assumed that objects are revealed in their full dignity when man silences in his heart the wish for power. It is to the idle consumer that they yield their secrets. It is permitted to *write* about them only in moments when one has nothing to *do* about them. The fastidious descriptions of the last century were a rejection of utility. One did not touch the universe; one took it in raw, with the eyes. The writer, in opposition to bourgeois ideology, chose to speak to us of things at the privileged moment when all the concrete relations which united him with the objects were broken, save the slender thread of his gaze, and when they gently undid themselves to his eyes, untied sheaves of exquisite sensations.

It was the age of impressions, impressions of Italy, of Spain, of the Orient. The man of letters described these landscapes, which he absorbed consciously, at the indefinable moment between the end of the taking-in and the beginning of the digestion, when subjectivity had come to impregnate the object but before its acids had begun to eat into it, when fields and woods are still fields and woods and already a state of soul. A glazed and polished world inhabited bourgeois books, a world for sojourns in the country, which tinges us with a decent gaiety or a well-bred melancholy. We see it from our

windows; we are not in it. When the novelist peoples it with peasants, they are in contrast with the vacant shadow of the mountains and the silvery sheen of the rivers. While they are hard at work digging their spades into the earth, we are made to see them dressed up in their Sunday clothes. These workers, lost in this seventh-day universe, resemble the academician of Jean Eiffel whom Prévost introduced into one of his caricatures and who excused himself by saying, "I'm in the wrong cartoon." Or, perhaps they too have been transformed into objects — into objects and states of soul.

For us, *doing* reveals *being*. Each gesture traces out new forms on the earth. Each technique, each tool, is a way that opens upon the world; things have as many aspects as there are ways of using them. We are no longer with those who want to possess the world, but with those who want to change it, and it is to the very plan of changing it that it reveals the secrets of its being. One knows the hammer best, says Heidegger, when one uses it to hammer. And the nail, when one drives it into the wall, and the wall when one drives the nail into it.

Saint-Exupéry has opened the way for us. He has shown that, for the pilot, the airplane is an organ of perception.[1] A chain of mountains at three hundred seventy-five miles an hour and in the new perspective of flight is a tangle of snakes. They settle down, grow dark, thrust their hard and calcinated heads against the sky, trying to do damage, to strike. Speed with its astringent power gathers the folds of the earthly gown and hems them in. At fourteen thousand feet above, the obscure

1. See particularly *Earth of Men.*

pulls which draw San Antonio toward New York shine like rails.

After him, after Hemingway, how could we dream of describing? We must plunge things into action. Their density of being will be measured for the reader by the multiplicity of practical relations which they maintain with the characters. Have the mountain climbed by the smuggler, the customs-officer, and the guerilla, have it flown over by the aviator[2] and the mountain will suddenly surge from these connected actions and jump out of your book like a jack-in-the-box. Thus, the world and man reveal themselves by *undertakings.* And all the undertakings we might speak of reduce themselves to a single one, that of *making history.* So here we are, led by the hand to the moment when the literature of *exis* must be abandoned to inaugurate that of *praxis.*

Praxis as action in history and on history; that is, as a synthesis of historical relativity and moral and metaphysical absolute, with this hostile and friendly, terrible and derisive world which it reveals to us. There is our subject. I do not say that we have chosen these austere paths. There are surely some among us who are carrying within them some charming and heart-breaking love story which will never see the light of day. What can we do about it? It is not a matter of choosing one's age but of choosing oneself within it.

The literature of production which is being proclaimed will not make us forget the literature of consumption, its antithesis; it should not pretend to surpass it, and maybe it will never equal it. No one is dreaming of claiming that

2. Like Hemingway, for example in *For Whom the Bell Tolls.*

because of it we shall get to the very bottom and realize the essence of the art of writing. Maybe it will even disappear soon. The generation which is following us seems hesitant; many of its novels are about sad and stolen holidays, like those parties during the occupation when young people danced between two alerts while drinking cheap wine to the sound of pre-war phonograph records. In that case, it will be a revolution that didn't come off. And even if this literature does manage to establish itself, it will pass like the other, and the other will return, and perhaps the history of the next few decades will record the alternating from one to the other. That will mean that men will have definitely botched up another Revolution of infinitely greater importance. The fact is that only in a socialist collectivity would literature, having finally understood its essence and having made the synthesis of *praxis* and *exis*, of negativity and construction, of doing, having, and being, deserve the name of *total literature*. While waiting, let us cultivate our garden. We have our work cut out for us.

Indeed, to recognize literature as a freedom, to replace spending by giving, to renounce the old aristocratic lie of our elders, and to want to launch, through all our works, a democratic appeal to the whole of the collectivity is not the whole story. We still have to know who reads us and whether the present state of affairs does not relegate our desire of writing for the "concrete universal" to the rank of utopias. If our desires could be realized, the twentieth-century writer would occupy between the oppressed and those who oppress them an analogous position to that of eighteenth-century authors

between the bourgeois and the aristocracy, to that of Richard Wright between the blacks and the whites, read by both the oppressed and the oppressor, furnishing the oppressor with his image, both inner and outer, being conscious with and for the oppressed of the oppression, contributing to the formation of a constructive and revolutionary ideology. Unfortunately, these are anachronistic hopes; what was possible in the time of Proudhon and Marx is so no longer. So let us take up the question from the beginning, and without any preconceived conclusions let us take an inventory of our public.

From this point of view, the situation of the writer has never been so paradoxical. It seems to be made up of the most contradictory characteristics. On the asset side, brilliant appearances, vast possibilities; on the whole, an enviable way of life. On the debit side, only this: that literature is dying. Not that talent or good will is lacking, but it has no longer anything to do in contemporary society. At the very moment that we are discovering the importance of *praxis*, at the moment that we are beginning to have some notion of what a *total* literature might be, our public collapses and disappears. We no longer know — literally — for whom to write.

At first glance, to be sure, it would seem as if writers of the past ought to envy our lot.[1] Malraux once said,

1. But don't let us exaggerate. *In gross*, the situation of the writer has improved. But, as will be seen, chiefly by extra-literary means (radio, movies, journalism) which were not available formerly. The one who can't or won't have recourse to these means must practise a second profession or have a tough time of it. "It is extremely rare for me to have coffee to drink and enough cigarettes," writes Julien Blanc ("Grievances of a Writer," *Combat*, April 27, 1947). "Tomorrow I won't put any butter on my bread, and the druggist's price for the phosphorous which I lack is preposterous... since

"We are profiting from the suffering of Baudelaire." I don't think that that's quite true, but it is true that Baudelaire died without a public and that we, without having proven our merit, without even knowing whether we ever will prove it, have readers all over the world. One might be tempted to blush at this, but, after all, it is not our fault; it's all the result of circumstances. The pre-war autarchies and the war deprived national publics of their annual contingent of foreign works. Today people are catching up. They're gobbling up double mouthfuls. On this point alone there is decompression. The states are in on it. I have shown elsewhere that in the conquered or ruined countries literature has recently begun to be considered as an article for export. This literary market was expanded and regularized when the collectivities got busy with it. We find there the usual procedures: dumping (for example, the American *Overseas* editions), protectionism (in Canada, in certain countries of Central Europe), international agreements. The countries flood each other reciprocally with "Digests," that is, as the name indicates, of literature already digested, of literary pap. In short, belles-lettres, like the movies, are in the process of becoming an industrialized art. To be sure, we benefit: the plays of Cocteau, of Salacrou, and of Anouilh are being performed everywhere. I could

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1943 I have undergone five serious operations. Very shortly I am going to have a sixth, a very serious one. Being a writer, I have no social security. I have a wife and child. The state remembers me only to ask for excessive taxes on my trifling royalties. . . It is going to be necessary for me to take steps to reduce my hospital expenses... And the Society of Men of Letters and the Authors' Fund? The first will back me up; the second, having given me a gift last month of four thousand francs... Let's forget it."

cite any number of works which have been translated into six or seven languages less than three months after their publication. Yet, all this is brilliant only on the surface. Perhaps we are read in New York or Tel Aviv, but the shortage of paper has limited our editions in Paris. Thus the public has been dispersed more than it has increased. Perhaps ten thousand people read us in four or five foreign countries and another ten thousand in our own. Twenty thousand readers — a minor prewar success. These worldwide reputations are far less well established than the national reputations of our elders. I know, paper is coming back. But at the same moment, European publishing is entering a crisis; the volume of sales remains constant.

Even though we might have a certain amount of celebrity outside of France, there would be no reason for rejoicing; it would be an ineffectual glory. Nations today are separated by differences of economic and military potential more surely than by seas or mountains. An idea can *descend* from a country with a high potential toward a country with a low potential — for example, from America to France — it can not *rise*. To be sure, there are so many newspapers, so many international contacts, that Americans finally get to hear about the literary or social theories that are circulating in Europe, but these doctrines are exhausted in their ascent; virulent in a country with a weak potential, they are in a languid state when they reach the summit. We know that intellectuals in the United States gather European ideas into a bouquet, inhale them for a moment, and then toss them away because the bouquets wither more quickly there

than in other climates. As for Russia, she gleans and takes what she can easily convert into her own substance. Europe is conquered and ruined; she is no longer master of her destiny; and that is the reason why her ideas can no longer make their way. The only concrete circuit for the exchange of ideas passes through England, France, the Northern countries, and Italy.

It is true that our reputations are far more widespread than our books. We make contact with people, without even wanting to do so, by new means, with new angles of incidence. Of course, the book is still the heavy infantry which clears and occupies the terrain. But literature has its airplanes, its V1's and V2's which go a great distance, upsetting and harassing, without bringing about the actual decision. First, the newspaper. An author used to write for ten thousand readers. He is given the critic's column in a weekly and he has three hundred thousand even if his articles are worthless. Then the radio. *No Exit*, one of my plays, banned in England by the theatre censors, was broadcast four times by the B.B.C. On a London stage it would not have found, even making the improbable assumption that it would be a success, more than twenty to thirty thousand spectators. The drama broadcast of B.B.C. automatically provided me with a half-million. Finally, the movies. Four million people frequent the French movie houses. If we recall that at the beginning of the century Paul Souday reproached Gide for publishing his works in limited editions, the success of *The Pastoral Symphony* will enable us to measure the distance that we have covered.

However, of the columnist's three hundred thousand

readers, he'll be lucky if a few thousand have the curiosity to buy his works, into which he has put the best of his talent. The others will learn his name for having read it a hundred times on the second page of the magazine like that of the physic which they've seen a hundred times on the twelfth. The Englishmen who would have gone to see *No Exit* in the theatre would have done so with a knowledge of why they were going, on the basis of the reviews and mouth to mouth criticism, and with the intention of judging the work. When my B.B.C. listeners were turning on their radios they were unaware of the existence of the play or of me. They wanted to hear, as usual, the Thursday drama broadcast. As soon as it was over, they forgot it, as they did the preceding ones.

In the movie houses, the public is attracted by the names of the stars, then by the name of the director, and last of all by that of the writer. The name of Gide recently entered certain heads by invasion, but I am sure that it is curiously married there with the beautiful face of Michele Morgan. It is true that the film has caused a few thousand copies of the work to be sold, but in the eyes of its new readers the latter appears as a more or less faithful commentary on the former. The wider the public that the author reaches, the less deeply does he affect it, the less he recognizes himself in the influence he has; his thoughts escape him; they become distorted and vulgarized. They are received with more indifference and scepticism by bored and weary souls who, because the author can not speak to them in their "native language" still consider literature as a diversion. What

remains is formulas attached to names. And since our reputations extend much farther than our books, that is, than our merits, whether great or small, we need not see in these passing favors which are granted us the sign of a first awakening of the concrete universal but quite simply that of a literary inflation.

That would be nothing; it would be enough, in short, to be on guard; after all, it depends on us for literature not to be industrialized. But there is worse; we have readers but no public.[1] In 1780 the oppressing class alone had an ideology and political organizations. The bourgeoisie had neither party nor political self-consciousness. The writer worked for it directly by criticizing the old myths of monarchy and religion, and by giving it a few elementary notions whose content was chiefly negative, such as those of liberty, political equality, and *habeas corpus*. In 1850 the proletariat, in the presence of a conscious bourgeoisie which was provided with a systematic ideology, remained formless and obscure to itself, pervaded by vain and hopeless anger. The First International had only scratched its surface. Everything remained to be done. The writer could have addressed the workers directly. We have seen that he missed his chance. But at least he served the interests of the oppressed class unintentionally and even unknowingly by practising his negativity on bourgeois values. Thus, in either case, circumstances permitted him to testify for the oppressed before the oppressor and to help the oppressed become conscious of themselves. The essence of literature found itself in ac-

1. Aside, of course, from Catholic "writers." As for the so-called Communist "writers" I speak about them later on.

cord with the exigencies of the historical situation. But today everything is reversed. The oppressing class has lost its ideology; its self-consciousness vacillates; its limits are no longer clearly definable; it opens up and it calls the writer to the rescue. The oppressed class, cramped in a party and tied down by a rigorous ideology, becomes a closed society. One can no longer communicate with it without an intermediary. The fate of the bourgeoisie was tied up with European supremacy and colonialism. It is losing its colonies at a time when Europe is ceasing to govern its destiny. It is no longer a matter of little kings carrying on wars for Rumanian petroleum or the Bagdad railroad; the next conflict will necessitate an industrial equipment that the entire Old World is incapable of furnishing. Two world powers, neither of which is bourgeois and neither of which is European, are disputing the possession of the universe. The triumph of one means the advent of statism and international bureaucracy; of the other, the coming of abstract capitalism. Everybody a civil servant? Everybody an employee? The bourgeoisie will be lucky if it can keep the illusion of the sauce with which it will be eaten. It knows today that it represented a moment in the history of Europe, a stage in the development of techniques and tools and that it has never been the measuring rod of the world. Besides, the feeling it had of its essence and its mission has been dimmed. It has been shaken, undermined, and eroded by economic crises with consequent internal fissures, displacements, and landslides. In certain countries it stands like the facade of a building which has been gutted; in others, great sections of it have collapsed into

the proletariat. It can no longer be defined by the possession of goods, of which it has less and less each day, nor by political power, which it shares almost everywhere with new men who have sprung directly from the proletariat. At present it is the bourgeoisie which has taken on the amorphous and gelatinous aspect which characterizes oppressed classes before they have become conscious of their state. In France we discover that it is fifty years behind in equipment and in the organization of heavy industry. Whence, the crisis in our birth-rate, an undeniable sign of regression. Besides, the black market and the occupation have caused forty percent of its wealth to pass into the hands of a new bourgeoisie which has neither the morals, the principles, nor the goals of the old one. Ruined, but still oppressive, the European bourgeoisie barely manages to keep governing, and with modest means. In Italy, it keeps the workers in check because it is supported by the coalition of the Church and misery. Elsewhere, it makes itself indispensable because it supplies the technical staffs and administrative personnel. Elsewhere again, it rules by dividing. And then, above all, the era of national revolutions is closed. The revolutionary parties do not want to overturn this worm-eaten carcass. They even do what they can to prevent its collapsing. At the first sound of cracking there would be foreign intervention and perhaps the world-wide conflict for which Russia is not yet ready. An object of everybody's solicitude, doped by the U.S.A., by the Church, and even by the U.S.S.R., at the mercy of the changing fortune of the diplomatic game, the bourgeoisie can neither preserve nor lose its power with-

out the concurrence of foreign powers. It is the "sick man" of contemporary Europe. Its agony may last a long time.

As a result, its ideology is collapsing. It justified property by work and also by that slow osmosis which diffuses into the soul of the possessors the virtues of the things possessed. The possession of property was, in its eyes, a merit and the finest self-culture. But, property is becoming symbolic and collective. One no longer possesses things but their signs or the signs of their signs. The argument of "work-merit" and that of "enjoyment-culture" have turned flat. Out of hatred of the trusts and the bad conscience which abstract property induces, many turned toward fascism. Summoned by their wishes, it came, replaced the trusts by a system of directorship, then disappeared, and the system remained. The bourgeois gained nothing. If they still possess, they do so harshly and joylessly. They considered wealth as an unjustifiable state of fact; they have lost faith. Neither do they retain much confidence in that democratic régime which was their pride and which collapsed at the first push. But as national socialism in turn collapsed just when they were about to rally to it, they no longer believe either in Republic or Dictatorship. Nor in Progress; it was fine when their class was on the way up; now that it is declining, they are no longer concerned with the notion; it would be heart-breaking for them to think that other men and other classes will ensure it. Their work brings them into no more direct contact with actual matter than before, but two wars have made them discover fatigue, blood and tears, violence, and evil.

The bombs have not only destroyed their factories but have caused fissures to appear in their idealism as well. Utilitarianism was the philosophy of savings; it loses all meaning when the savings are compromised by inflation and threats of bankruptcy. To quote Heidegger roughly, "The world is revealed at the horizon of instruments which are out of order." When you use a tool, you do so to produce a certain modification which is itself the means of bringing about another, and so on. Thus, you are engaged in a chain of means and ends whose scope escapes you, and you are too absorbed in the details of your action to question its final ends. But if the tool should break, the action is suspended and you see the whole chain. So with the bourgeois; his instruments are out of order; he sees the chain and knows the gratuitousness of his ends. As long as he believed in them without seeing them, and as long as he was working over the nearest links with his head down, they justified him; now that they hit him right between the eyes, he discovers that he is unjustifiable. The whole world is disclosed and likewise his forlornness in the world. Anguish is born.[1] And shame too. Even for those who judge it in the name of its own principles, it is manifest that the bourgeoisie has been guilty of three betrayals: at Munich, in May '40, and under the Vichy government. Of course, it corrected itself; many Vichyites of the first hour were in the re-

1. I admit without difficulty the Marxist description of "existentialist" anguish as a historical and class phenomenon. Existentialism, in its contemporary form, appears with the decomposition of the bourgeoisie, and its origin is bourgeois. But that this decomposition can *disclose* certain aspects of the human condition and make possible certain metaphysical intuitions does not mean that these intuitions and this disclosure are illusions of the bourgeois consciousness or mythical representations of the situation.

sistance in '42. They realized that they had to fight against the occupier in the name of bourgeois nationalism. And it is true that the Communist Party hesitated more than a year; it is true that the Church hesitated until the Liberation. But both of them have enough strength, unity, and discipline to demand of their initiates that they forget their past faults. The bourgeoisie has forgotten nothing. It still carries about the wounds inflicted upon it by one of its sons, the one it was most proud of. By condemning Pétain to life imprisonment, it feels that it has put itself behind bars. It might apply to itself the words of Paul Chack, an officer, a Catholic, and a bourgeois, who, because he blindly followed the orders of a Catholic and bourgeois marshal of France, was accused before a bourgeois tribunal under the government of a Catholic and bourgeois general, and who, stupefied by this sleight-of-hand, kept mumbling throughout the trial, "I don't understand." Harassed, without a future, without guarantees, without justification, the bourgeoisie, which objectively had become the *sick man*, has subjectively entered the phase of the guilty conscience. Many of its members are bewildered; they shuttle between anger and fear, which are two kinds of flight. The best of them still try to defend, if not their goods, which in a good many cases have gone up in smoke, at least the real bourgeois conquests: the universality of laws, freedom of expression, *habeas corpus.* It is they who form our public. Our *only* public. They understood, in reading the old books, that literature, by its nature, is ranged on the side of democratic freedoms. They turn to it; they beg it to give them reasons for living

and hoping, a new ideology. Perhaps never since the eighteenth century has so much been expected of the writer.

We have nothing to tell them. In spite of themselves, they belong to an oppressing class. Victims, doubtless, and innocent, but, still and all, tyrants and guilty. All we can do is reflect their unhappy conscience in our mirrors, that is, advance a bit further the decomposition of their principles. We have the thankless job of reproaching them for their faults when they have become maledictions. Ourselves bourgeois, we have known bourgeois anguish. We have had that harassed soul. But since the characteristic of an unhappy conscience is to want to tear itself away from the state of unhappiness, we cannot remain tranquilly in the bosom of our class, and since it is no longer possible for us to leave it with a flap of our wings by giving ourselves the appearance of a parasitic aristocracy, we must be its gravediggers, even if we run the risk of burying ourselves along with it.

We turn toward the working class which to-day, like the bourgeoisie in 1780, might constitute for the writer a revolutionary public. It is still a virtual public, but it is singularly present. The worker of 1947 has a social and professional culture. He reads technical, union, and political journals. He has become conscious of himself and his position in the world and he has much to teach us. He has lived all the adventures of our time, in Moscow in 1917, in Budapest, in Munich, in Madrid, in Stalingrad, and in the Maquis. At the time that we are discovering in the art of writing freedom in its two aspects of negativity and creative surpassing, he is trying to free

himself and, by the same token, to free all men from oppression forever. As a member of the oppressed, he may see the object of his anger reflected by literature in its aspect of negativity; as a producer and revolutionary, he is, par excellence, the subject of a literature of *praxis*. We share with him the duty of contesting and destroying; he demands the right to make history at the moment that we are discovering our historicity. We are not yet familiar with his language; neither is he with ours; but we already know the means of reaching him. We also know that in Russia he engages in discussion with the writer himself and that a new relationship between the public and the writer has appeared there which is neither a passive and female waiting nor the specialized criticism of the intellectual. I do not believe in the "Mission" of the proletariat, nor that it is endowed with a state of grace; it is made up of men, just and unjust, who can make mistakes and who are often mystified. But it must be said without hesitation that the fate of literature is bound up with that of the working class.

Unhappily, these men, to whom we *must* speak, are separated from us by an iron curtain in our own country; they will not hear a word that we shall say to them. The majority of the proletariat, straight-jacketed by a single party, encircled by a propaganda which isolates it, forms a closed society without doors or windows. There is only one way of access, a very narrow one, the Communist Party. Is it desirable for the writer to engage himself in it? If he does it out of conviction as a citizen and out of disgust with literature, very well, he has chosen. But can he become a communist and remain a writer?

The C.P. aligns its politics with that of Soviet Russia because this is the only country in which one finds the rough draught of a socialist organization. But if it is true that Russia began the social revolution, it is also true that she has not ended it. The retardation of her industry, her shortage of supervisory personnel, and the masses' lack of culture have prevented her from realizing socialism by herself and even from imposing it upon other countries by the contagion of her example. If the revolutionary movement which started from Moscow could have spread to other nations, it would have continued to evolve in Russia itself in proportion to the ground it gained outside. Contained within the Soviet frontiers, it congealed into a defensive and conservative nationalism because it had to save, at any cost, the results it had achieved. At the very moment when it was becoming the Mecca of the working classes, Russia saw that it was impossible, on one hand, for her to assume her historical mission and, on the other, to deny it. She was forced to withdraw into herself, to apply herself to creating supervisors, to catch up on her equipment, and to perpetuate herself by an authoritarian régime in the form of a revolution at a standstill. As the European parties which derived from her, and which were preparing for the coming of the proletariat, were nowhere strong enough to take the offensive, she had to use them as the advance bastions of her defense. But as they could serve her, in regard to the masses, only by fostering revolutionary politics, and as she has never lost hope of becoming the leader of the European proletariat if circumstances should some day show themselves more favorable, she has left them their red flag and

their faith. Thus the forces of the World Revolution have been diverted to the maintenance of a revolution in a state of hibernation. Still it must be acknowledged that, insofar as it has honestly believed in the possibility, even though remote, of seizing power by insurrection, and insofar as it has made it its business to weaken the bourgeoisie and to bore from within the Socialist Party, the C.P. has practiced a negative criticism of capitalistic institutions and régimes which has maintained the outer appearances of freedom. Before 1939 it made use of everything: pamphlets, satires, bitter novels, Surrealistic violence, overwhelming evidence regarding our colonial methods. Since 1944 things have become aggravated; a collapsing Europe has simplified the situation. Two powers remain standing, the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A.; each one frightens the other. From fear, as we know, comes anger, and from anger, blows.

Now, the U.S.S.R. is the less strong. Hardly out of a war which she had feared for twenty years, she still has to temporize, to catch up in the armament race, to retighten the dictatorship internally, and, externally, to assure herself of allies, vassals, and positions.

The revolutionary tactic is changed into diplomacy. It must have Europe on its side. Thus, it must appease the bourgeoisie, lull it to sleep with fables, and at any cost keep it from throwing itself into the Anglo-Saxon camp out of fright. The time has quite passed when *L'Humanité* could write: "Every bourgeois who meets a workman ought to be scared." Never have the Communists been so powerful in Europe, and yet never have the chances of a revolution been slighter. If the party should somewhere

consider the possibility of seizing power, this attempt would be nipped in the bud. The Anglo-Saxons have at their disposal a hundred ways of annihilating it, even without having recourse to arms, and for that matter the Soviets would not look upon it very favorably. If, by chance, the insurrection succeeded, it would simply vegetate without spreading. If by some miracle it finally became contagious, it would risk being the occasion of a third world war. Thus, it is no longer for the coming of the proletariat that the Communists are preparing in their respective nations, but for war, plain and simple war. If victorious, the U.S.S.R. will spread its régime to Europe; the nations will fall like ripe fruit; if beaten, it's all up with her and the Communists parties. To reassure the bourgeoisie without losing the confidence of the masses, to permit it to govern while appearing to keep up the offensive, and to occupy positions of command without letting itself be compromised—that's the politics of the C.P. Between 1939 and 1940 we were the witnesses and victims of the decay of a war; today we are present at the decaying of a revolutionary situation.

If it should be asked whether the writer, in order to reach the masses, should offer his services to the Communist Party, I answer no. The politics of Stalinist Communism is incompatible in France with the honest practice of the literary craft. A party which is planning revolution should have nothing to lose. For the C.P. there is something to lose and something to handle circumspectly. As its immediate goal can no longer be the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat by force, but rather that of safeguarding a Russia which is in danger, it

now presents an ambiguous appearance. Progressive and revolutionary in its doctrine and in its avowed ends, it has become conservative in its means. Even before it has seized power, it has adopted the turn of mind, the reasoning, and the artifices of those who have long since attained it, those who feel that it is escaping them and who want to maintain themselves. There is something in common, and it is not talent, between Joseph de Maistre and M. Garaudy. And generally it is enough to skim through a piece of Communist writing to pick out at random a hundred conservative procedures: persuasion by repetition, by intimidation, by veiled threats, by forceful and scornful assertion, by cryptic allusions to demonstrations that are not forthcoming, by exhibiting so complete and superb a conviction that, from the very start, it places itself above all debate, casts its spell, and ends by becoming contagious; the opponent is never answered; he is discredited; he belongs to the police, to the Intelligence Service; he's a fascist. As for proofs, they are never given, because they are terrible and implicate too many people. If you insist upon knowing them, you are told to stop right there and to take someone's word for the accusation. "Don't force us to bring them out; you'll be sorry if you do". In short, the Communist intellectual adopts the attitude of the staff which condemned Dreyfuss on secret evidence. He also reverts, to be sure, to the Manichaeism of the reactionaries, though he divides the world according to other principles. For the Stalinist a Trotskyist is an incarnation of evil, like the Jew for Maurras. Everything that comes from him is necessarily bad. On the other hand, the possession of certain titles serves

as a seal of approval. Compare this sentence of Joseph de Maistre, "The married woman is necessarily chaste," with this one of a correspondent of *Action*, "The communist is the *permanent* hero of our time." That there are heroes in the Communist Party — let me be the first to admit it. So what? Has no married woman ever been weak? No, since she is married before God. And is it enough to enter the Party to become a hero? Yes, since the C.P. is the party of heroes. But what if someone cited the name of a Communist who sometimes was not all he should be? It's because he wasn't a *real* Communist.

In the nineteenth century one had to give all sorts of guaranties and lead an exemplary life in order to cleanse oneself in the eyes of the bourgeois of the sin of writing, for literature is, in essence, heresy. The situation has not changed except that it is now the Communists, that is, the qualified representatives of the proletariat, who as a matter of principle regard the writer as suspect. Even though he may be irreproachable in his morals, a Communist intellectual bears within him this original defect: that he entered the party *freely*; he was led to this decision by a thoughtful reading of *Capital*, a critical examination of the historical situation, an acute sense of justice and generosity, and a taste for solidarity; all this is proof of an independence which doesn't smell so very good. He entered the party by free choice; therefore, he can leave it.[4] He entered because he had criticized the politics of his class of origin; therefore, he will be able to criticize that of the representatives of his class of adoption. But in

4. The worker has joined the C.P. under the pressure of circumstances. He is less suspect because his possible choices are more limited.

the very action by which he inaugurates a new life, there is a malediction which will weigh upon him all through this life. From the moment of ordination there begins for him a long trial, similar to the one Kafka has described for us, in which the judges are unknown and the dossiers secret, where the only definitive sentences are condemnations. It is not up to his invisible accusers to give proof of his crime, as is customary in justice; it is for him to prove his innocence. As everything he writes can be held against him and as he knows it, each of his works presents the ambiguous character of being both a public appeal in the name of the C.P. and a secret plea for his own cause. Everything that, from the outside, for the readers, seems a chain of peremptory assertions, appears within the Party, in the eyes of the judges, as a humble and clumsy attempt at self-justification. When to *us* he appears most brilliant and most effective, he is perhaps then most guilty. Sometimes it seems to us — and perhaps he too believes it — that he has been raised into the hierarchy of the Party and that he has become its spokesman, but he is being tested or tricked; the levels are faked; when he thinks he's high up, he's far down. You can read his writings a hundred times but you'll never be able to decide as to their real importance. When Nizan, who was in charge of foreign politics for *Ce soir*, was in all honesty trying his utmost to prove that our only chance for salvation lay in a Franco-Russian pact, his secret judges, who let him talk on, already knew about Ribbentrop's conversations with Molotov. If he thinks that he can get out of it by a corpselike obedience, he is mistaken. He is expected to have wit, pungency, lucidity, and inventiveness.

But at the same time that these are required of him, he is penalized for these virtues, for they are, in themselves, tendencies toward crime. How is he to practice the critical spirit? The flaw is in him like the worm in a piece of fruit. He can please neither his readers, his judges, nor himself. In the eyes of everyone and even of himself he is only a guilty subjectivity which deforms Knowledge by reflecting it in his troubled waters. This deformation can be useful; as his readers make no distinction between what comes from the author and what from the "historical process," it is always possible to disclaim him. It is taken for granted that he dirties his hands in his job, and as his mission is to express C.P. politics from day to day, his articles still remain when the line has long since changed, and these are what the opponents of Stalinism refer to when they want to show its contradictions or versatility. Thus, the writer is not only *presumed guilty in advance;* he is charged with all past faults, since his name remains attached to the errors of the Party, and he is the scapegoat of all the political purges.

Nevertheless, it is not impossible that he may hold out for a long time if he learns to keep his qualities in leash when they run the risk of pulling him too far. Yet he must not use cynicism. Cynicism is as serious a vice as good will. Let him know how to keep his eyes shut; let him see what need not be seen, and let him forget sufficiently what he has seen in order never to write about it, yet let him remember it sufficiently so that in the future he may avoid looking at it; let him carry his criticism far enough to determine the point where it should be brought to a halt, that is, let him go beyond this point in order to be

able in the future to avoid the temptation of going beyond it, but let him know how to detach himself from this prospective criticism, to put it in parentheses, and to regard it as null and void; in short, let him at all times be aware that the mind is finite, bounded everywhere by magic frontiers, by mists, like the primitives who can count up to twenty and are mysteriously denied the power of going any further. This artificial fog which he must be always ready to spread between himself and risky evidence, we shall call, very simply, dishonesty. But we're not through yet: let him avoid speaking too often about dogmas; it's not good to show them in broad daylight; the works of Marx, like the Bible of the Catholics, are dangerous to the one who approaches them without a director of conscience; there is one in each cell; if doubts or scruples arise it is to him that one must go and talk. Nor should you put too many Communists in your novels or on the stage; if they have faults, they run the risk of displeasing; if too perfect, they bore. Stalinist politics has no desire to find its image in literature because it knows that a portrait is already a contestation. One can get out of it by painting the "permanent hero" *en profil perdu*—by making him appear at the end of the story to draw conclusions, or by everywhere suggesting his presence but without showing it, as Daudet with the Arlésienne. As far as possible, avoid bringing up the revolution; that's rather dated. The European proletariat no more governs its destiny than does the bourgeoisie; history is written elsewhere. It must be slowly weaned of its old dreams, and the perspective of insurrection must be gently replaced by that of war. If the writer conforms to all these prescrip-

tions, he will not be in greater favor on that account. He's a useless mouth; he doesn't work with his hands. He knows it; he suffers from an inferiority complex; he is almost ashamed of his craft and puts as much zeal into bowing before the workers as Jules Lamaître put into bowing before the generals around 1900.

During this period, the Marxist doctrine — which is quite intact — has been withering away; for want of internal controversy, it has been degraded to a stupid determinism. Marx, Lenin, and Engels said any number of times that explanation by causes had to yield to the dialectical process. But the dialectic does not admit of being put into the formulas of a catechism. An elementary scientism is being spread. History is accounted for by juxtapositions of causal and linear series. Shortly before the war, Politzer, the last of the great minds of French Communism, was forced to teach that "the brain secretes thought" as an endocrine gland secretes hormones; when the Communist intellectual today wants to interpret history or human behavior, he borrows from bourgeois ideology a deterministic psychology based on mechanism and the law of interest.

But there is worse. The conservation of the C.P. is today accompanied by an opportunism which contradicts it. It is not only a matter of safeguarding the U.S.S.R., but it is also necessary to deal tactfully with the bourgeoisie. Thus, they talk its language: family, country, religion, morality. And as they have not thereby given up the idea of weakening it, they try to fight it on its own ground by improving upon its principles. The result of this tactic is to superimpose two contradictory conserv-

atisms, materialist scholasticism and Christian moralism. The truth is that once you abandon all logic, it is not so difficult to pass from one to the other because both suppose the same sentimental attitude; it is a matter of holding fast to positions which are threatened, of refusing to discuss, and of masking fear behind anger. But the point is that the intellectual, by definition, must *also* use logic. Therefore, he is asked to cover up the contradictions by sleight-of-hand. He must do his best to reconcile the irreconcilable, to unite by force ideas which repel each other, and to cover up the soldering by glittering layers of fine style—to say nothing of the task which has fallen to him only recently, that is, to steal the history of France from the bourgeoisie, to annex the great Ferré, little Bara, Saint Vincent de Paul, and Descartes. Poor Communist intellectuals. They have fled the ideology of their class of origin only to find it again in the class they have chosen. Work, family, country—no more laughing at it, they've got to sing it. I imagine that they must often rather want to let loose, but they are chained. They are allowed to roar at phantoms or against some writers who have remained free and who represent nothing.

They'll start naming illustrious writers. To be sure, I recognize the fact that they had talent. Is it an accident if they no longer have any? I have shown above that the work of art, which is an absolute end, is opposed in essence to bourgeois utilitarianism. Do they think that it can accommodate itself to Communist utilitarianism? In a genuinely revolutionary party it would find the propitious climate for its blossoming because the freedom of man and the coming of the classless society are likewise

absolute goals, unconditioned exigencies which literature can reflect in its own exigency. But the C.P. today has entered the infernal circle of means. It must take and keep key positions, that is, means of acquiring means. When ends withdraw, when means are swarming like gnats as far as the eye can see, the work of art in turn becomes a means. It enters the chain. Its ends and its principles become external to it. It is governed from the outside. It takes man by the belly or the short hairs. The writer maintains the appearance of talent, that is, the art of finding words which gleam, but something is dead within. Literature has changed into propaganda.[5] Yet it is someone like M. Garaudy, a Communist and a propagandist, who accuses me of being a gravedigger. I could return the insult, but I prefer to plead guilty; if I could do so, I would bury literature with my own hands rather than make it serve ends which utilize it. But why the excitement? Gravediggers are honest people, certainly unionized, perhaps Communists. I'd rather be a gravedigger than a lackey.

Since we are still free, we won't join the C.P. watchdogs. The fact that we have talent does not depend upon us, but as we have chosen the profession of writing, each of us is responsible for literature, and whether or not it becomes alienated does depend upon us. It is sometimes claimed that our books reflect the hesitations of the petty bourgeoisie which decides for neither the proletariat nor for capitalism. That's false; we've made up our minds. We are then told that our choice is ineffectual and ab-

5. In Communist literature in France, I find only one genuine writer. Nor is it accidental that he writes about mimosa and beach pebbles.

stract, that it is an intellectual game if it is not accompanied by our adhesion to a revolutionary party. It is true that today in France one can hardly reach the working classes if not through the Party. But only loose thinking can identify their cause with the C.P.'s. Even if, as citizens, we can in strictly specific circumstances support its politics with our votes, that does not mean that we should serve it with our pens. If the two alternatives are really the bourgeoisie and the C.P., then the choice is impossible. For we do not have the right to write for the oppressing class *alone,* nor to join forces with a party which asks us to work dishonestly and with a bad conscience. Insofar as the Communist Party channelizes, almost in spite of itself, the aspirations of an entire oppressed class which irresistibly leads it to demand, for fear of being "outflanked on the left," such measures as peace with the Viet Nam or the increase of salaries—which its whole political line is inclined to avoid—we are with this party against the bourgeoisie; insofar as certain well-intentioned bourgeois circles recognize that spirituality must be simultaneously a free negativity and a free construction, we are with these bourgeois against the C.P. Insofar as a scurvy, opportunistic, conservative, and deterministic ideology is in contradiction with the very essence of literature we are against both the C.P. and the bourgeoisie. That means clearly that we are writing against everybody, that we have readers but no public. Bourgeois who have broken with our class but who have remained bourgeois in our morals, separated from the proletariat by the Communist screen, we remain up in the air; our good will serves no one, not even us; we are in the age of the un-

discoverable public. Worse still, we are writing against the current.

The authors of the eighteenth century helped make history because the historical perspective of the moment was revolution and because a writer can and ought to align himself on the side of revolution if it is proven that there is no other means of bringing an end to oppression. But the writer today can in no case approve of a war, because the social structure of war is dictatorship, because its results are always a matter of chance, and because, whatever happens, its costs are infinitely greater than the gains, and finally because war alienates literature by making it serve the propagandistic hullabaloo.

Since our historical perspective is war, since we are asked to choose between the Anglo-Saxon and the Soviet blocs, and since we refuse to prepare for war with either one or the other, we have fallen outside of history and are speaking in the desert. We are not even left with the illusion of winning our case by means of an appeal; there will be no appeal, and we know that the posthumous fate of our works will depend neither upon our talents nor our efforts, but upon the results of future conflicts. In the event of a Soviet victory, we will be passed over in silence until we die a second time; in the event of an American victory, the best of us will be put into the jars of literary history and won't be taken out again.

A clear-sighted view of the darkest possible situation is in itself already an optimistic act. It implies, in effect, that the situation can be *thought about,* that is, that we are not lost in a dark forest and that, on the contrary, we can break away from it, at least in spirit, that we can

examine it and thus already go beyond it and take up our resolutions in the face of it, even if these resolutions are hopeless. Our engagement must begin the moment we are repulsed and excommunicated by the Churches, when the art of writing, wedged in between different propagandas, seems to have lost its characteristic effectiveness. It is not a question of adding to the exigencies of literature, but simply of serving them all together, even without hope.

1. First, let us list our *virtual* readers, that is, the social categories which do not read us, but which might. I do not think that we have made much headway among teachers, which is a pity. They have already served as intermediaries between literature and the masses.[1] By now, most of them have already chosen. They dispense the Christian or the Stalinist ideology to their pupils, according to the side they have taken. However, there are still some who are hesitating. These are the ones who must be reached. A great deal has been written about the petty bourgeoisie, distrustful and always mystified, so ready, in its bewilderment, to follow fascist agitators. I do not think that much has been written *for it*[2] except propaganda tracts. Yet it is accessible through certain of its elements. Finally, more remote, difficult to distinguish, and still more difficult to touch are those popular factions which have not joined up with communism or which detach themselves from it and risk falling into resigned indifference or formless discontent. Outside of that, nothing. The peasants hardly read — though slightly more than

1. They have caused Hugo to be read. More recently they have spread the work of Giono in certain areas.

2. I except the abortive attempt of Prévost and his contemporaries. I have spoken of them above.

they did in 1914. The working class is locked up. Such are the data of the problem; they are not encouraging, but we must adapt ourselves to them.

2. How shall we incorporate some of our potential readers into our actual public? Books are inert. They act upon those who open them, but they can not open by themselves. There can be no question of popularizing; we would be literary morons, and in order to keep literature from falling into the pitfalls of propaganda we would be throwing it right in ourselves. So we must have recourse to new means. They already exist; the Americans have already adorned them with the name of "mass media;" these are the real resources at our disposal for conquering the virtual public — the newspaper, the radio, and the movies. Naturally, we have to squelch our scruples. To be sure, the book is the noblest, the most ancient of forms; to be sure, we will always have to return to it. But there is a *literary* art of radio, film, editorial, and reporting. There is no need to popularize. The film, by its very nature, speaks to crowds; it speaks to them about crowds and about their destiny. The radio surprises people at the table or in bed, at the moment when they are most defenseless, in the almost organic abandon of solitude. At the present time, it makes use of its opportunity in order to fool them, but it is also the moment when one might better appeal to their good faith; they have not yet put on or have laid aside the personality with which they face the world. We've got one foot inside the door. We must learn to speak in images, to transpose the ideas of our books into these new languages.

It is by no means a matter of letting our works be adapted for the screen or the broadcasts of the French Radio. We must write directly for the movies and the airwaves. The difficulties which I have mentioned above arise from the fact that radio and movies are machines. Since considerable capital is at stake, it is inevitable that they are today in the hands of the state or of conservative corporations. They apply to the writer under a sort of misapprehension; he believes that they are asking him for his work, which they are not concerned with, whereas all they want of him is his signature, which pays. And since in this respect he is so lacking in practical sense that, in general, they can't persuade him to sell one without the other, at least they try to get him to please and to assure the stockholders of their profits or to be persuasive and serve the politics of the state. In both cases, they demonstrate to him statistically that bad productions have more success than good ones, and when they put him wise to the bad taste of the public, he is requested to be so good as to submit to it. When the work is finished, in order to be sure that it's bad enough they hand it over to mediocrities who cut out what's beyond them.

But this is exactly the point that we have to fight about. It is improper for us to stoop in order to please; on the contrary, our job is to reveal to the public its own needs and, little by little, to form it so that it *needs to read.* We must appear to be giving in and yet must make ourselves indispensable and consolidate our positions, if possible, by facile successes; then, we must take advantage of the disorder in the governmental services and the

incompetence of certain producers to turn these arms against them. Then the writer will launch out into the unknown; he will speak in the dark to people he does not know, to whom no one has ever spoken except to lie. He will lend his voice to their anger and their worries. Through him, men whom no mirror has ever reflected, who have learned to smile and weep like blind men, without seeing themselves, will suddenly find themselves before their image. Who could dare claim that literature will lose thereby? I think that on the contrary it will gain. The whole numbers and fractions which formerly were the whole of arithmetic today represent only a small sector of the science of numbers. The same with literature: "total literature," if ever it sees the day, will have its algebra, its irrational and imaginary numbers. Let it not be said that these industries have nothing to do with art. After all, printing is also an industry, and the authors of former times conquered it for us. I do not think that we shall ever have the full use of the "mass media" but it would be a fine thing to begin conquering it for our successors. In any case, what is certain is that if we do not make use of it, we must resign ourselves to be forever writing for nobody but the bourgeois.

3. Bourgeois, intellectuals, teachers, non-communist workers; granting that we touch all these disparate elements, how are we going to make a public out of them, that is, an organic unity of readers, listeners, and spectators?

Let us bear in mind that the man who reads strips himself in some way of his empirical personality and escapes from his resentments, his fears, and his lusts in

order to put himself at the peak of his freedom. This freedom takes the literary work and, through it, mankind, for absolute ends. It sets itself up as an unconditioned exigence in relationship to itself, to the author, and to possible readers. It can therefore be identified with Kantian *good will* which, in every circumstance, treats man as an end and not as a means. Thus, by his very exigence, the reader attains that chorus of good wills which Kant has called the City of Ends, which thousands of readers all over the world who do not know each other are, at every moment, helping to maintain. But in order for this ideal chorus to become a concrete society, it must satisfy two conditions: first, that readers replace this theoretical acquaintance with each other, insofar as they are all particular examples of mankind, by an intuition or, at the very least, by a presentiment of their physical presence in the midst of this world; second, that, instead of remaining solitary and uttering appeals in the void, which, in regard to the human condition in general, affect no one, these abstract good wills establish real relations among themselves when actual events take place, or, in other terms, that these non-temporal good wills *historicize* themselves while preserving their purity, and that they transform their exigences into material and timely demands. Lacking the wherewithal, the city of ends lasts for each of us only while we are reading; on passing from the imaginary life to real life we forget this abstract, implicit community which rests on nothing. Whence, there arise what I might call the two essential mystifications of reading.

When a young communist while reading *Aurélien,*

when a Christian student, while reading *The Hostage*, have a moment of aesthetic joy, their feeling envelops a universal exigence; the city of ends surrounds them with its phantom walls. But during this time the works are supported by a concrete collectivity — in one case, the Communist Party, in the other, the community of the faithful — which sanctions them and which manifests its presence between the lines: the priest has spoken of it from the pulpit, *L'Humanité* has recommended it. The student never feels alone when he reads. The book dons a sacred character. It is an accessory of the cult. Reading becomes a rite, more precisely, a communion. On the other hand if a Nathanaël should open *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, as soon as he gets into the swing of the book he launches the same impotent appeal to the good will of men. The city of ends, magically evoked, does not refuse to appear. Yet, his enthusiasm remains essentially solitary. The reading in this case is *disjunctive*; he is turned against his family, against the society about him; he is cut off from the past and the future to be reduced to his naked presence in the moment; he is taught to descend within himself in order to recognize and take stock of his most particular desires. Our Nathanaël pays no heed to the possibility that somewhere else in the world, wherever it may be, there may be another Nathanaël plunged in the same reading and the same transports. The message is addressed only to him. When all has been said and done, he is invited to reject the book, to break the pact of mutual exigences which unite him to the author; he has found nothing but himself, himself as a separate entity. As Durkheim might have put it, the solidarity of

Claudel's readers is organic and that of Gide's mechanical.

In both cases, literature runs very serious risks. When the book is sacred, it does not draw its religious virtue from its intentions or its beauty, but rather receives it from without, like a seal, and as the essential moment of the reading in this case is the communion, that is, the symbolic integration into the community, the written work passes to the *inessential*, it really becomes an *accessory* of the ceremony. The example of Nizan shows this rather clearly: as a communist, he was read with fervor by the communists; now that he is an apostate, and dead, it would not occur to any Stalinist to pick up his books again; to these biased eyes they now offer nothing but the image of treason. But as in 1939 the reader of *The Trojan Horse* and *The Conspiracy* addressed an unconditioned universal appeal for the union of all free men, as, on the other hand, the sacred character of these works was, on the contrary, conditional and temporary and implied the possibility, in the event of the excommunication of their author, of rejecting them like sacrificial offerings that had been defiled, or simply of forgetting them if the C.P. changed its line, these two contradictory implications destroyed the very meaning of the reading.[1] There's nothing surprising in that, since we have seen the communist writer himself ruin the very meaning of writing; the circle is completed.

1. This contradiction is met with everywhere, particularly in communist *friendship*. Nizan had many friends. Where are they? Those he was most fond of belonged to the C.P. These are the ones who revile him today. The only ones who remain faithful are not in the Party. The reason is that the Stalinist community with its excommunicative power is present in love and friendship which are person to person relationships.

Must we therefore be satisfied with being read in secret, almost by stealth? Must the work of art mature like a fine, ripe vice in the depths of solitary souls? Here again I think that I discern a contradiction: we have discovered in the work of art the presence of all mankind; reading is a commerce of the reader with the author and with other readers; how can it be, at the same time, an invitation to segregation?

We do not want our public, however numerous it may be, to be reduced to the juxtaposition of individual readers nor to have its unity conferred upon it by the transcendent action of a Party or a Church. Reading should not be mystical communion any more than it should be masturbation, but rather a companionship. On the other hand we recognize that the purely formal recourse to abstract good wills leaves each one in his original isolation. However, that is the point from which we must start; if one loses this conducting wire, he is suddenly lost in the wilds of propaganda or in the egotistical pleasures of a style which is a matter of "purely personal taste." It is therefore up to us to convert the city of ends into a concrete and open society — and this by the very content of our works.

If the city of ends remains a feeble abstraction, it is because it is not realizable without an objective modification of the historical situation. Kant, I believe, saw this very well, but sometimes he counted on a purely subjective transformation of the moral subject and at other times he despaired of ever meeting a good will on this earth. In fact, the contemplation of beauty might well arouse in us the purely formal intention of treating men

as ends, but this intention would reveal itself to be utterly futile in practice since the fundamental structures of our society are still oppressive. Such is the present paradox of ethics; if I am absorbed in treating a few chosen persons as absolute ends, for example, my wife, my son, my friends, the needy person I happen to come across, if I am bent upon fulfilling all my duties toward them, I shall spend my life doing so; I shall be led *to pass over in silence* the injustices of the age, the class struggle, colonialism, Anti-Semitism, etc., and, finally, to *take advantage of oppression in order to do good.* Moreover, the former will be found in person to person relationships and, more subtly, in my very intentions. The good that I try to do will be vitiated at the roots. It will be turned into radical evil. But, vice versa, if I throw myself into the revolutionary enterprise I risk having no more leisure for personal relations — worse still, of being led by the logic of the action into treating most men, and even my friends, as means. But if we start with the moral exigence which the aesthetic feeling envelops without meaning to do so, we are starting on the right foot. We must *historicize* the reader's good will, that is, by the formal agency of our work, we must, if possible, provoke his intention of treating men, in every case, as an absolute end and, by the *subject* of our writing, direct his intention upon his neighbors, that is, upon the oppressed of the world. But we shall have accomplished nothing if, in addition, we do not show him—and in the very warp and weft of the work—that it is quite impossible to treat concrete men as ends in contemporary society. Thus, he will be led by the hand until he is made to see that, in effect, what he

wants is to eliminate the exploitation of man by man and that the city of ends which, with one stroke, he has set up in the aesthetic intuition is only an ideal which we shall approach only at the end of a long historical evolution. In other words, we must transform his formal good will into a concrete and material will to change *this world* by specific means in order to help the coming of the concrete society of ends. For good will is not possible in this age, or rather it is and can be only the intention of making good will possible. Whence, a particular *tension* which must manifest itself in our works and which remotely recalls the one I mentioned in regard to Richard Wright. For, a whole section of the public which we wish to win over still consumes its good will in person to person relationships, and another whole section, because it belongs to the oppressed classes, has given itself the job of obtaining, by all possible means, the material improvement of its lot. Thus, we must at the same time teach one group that the reign of ends cannot be realized without revolution and the other group that revolution is conceivable only if it prepares the reign of ends. It is this perpetual tension — if we can keep it up — which will realize the unity of our public. In short, we must militate, in our writings, in favor of the freedom of the person *and* the socialist revolution. It has often been claimed that they are not reconcilable. It is our job to show tirelessly that they imply each other.

We were born into the bourgeoisie, and this class has taught us the value of its conquests: political freedom, *habeas corpus*, etc. We remain bourgeois by our culture, our way of life, and our present public. But at the same

time the historical situation drives us to join the proletariat in order to construct a classless society. No doubt that for the time being the latter is not very much concerned with freedom of thought; they've got other fish to fry. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, pretends not even to understand what the words "material freedom" mean. Thus, each class can, at least in this regard, preserve a good conscience, since it is unaware of one of the terms of the antinomy.

But we others, though we have nothing to mediate at present, are none the less in the position of mediators. Pulled from both sides, we are condemned to suffer this double exigence as a Passion. It is our personal problem as well as the drama of our age. It will, of course, be said that this antinomy which tortures us is merely due to our still dragging around the remains of bourgeois ideology which we have not been able to shake off; on the other hand, it will be said that we have a case of revolutionary snobbism and that we want to make literature serve ends for which it is not designed. That would not be too bad, but these voices find responsive echoes in some of us who have unhappy consciences. Therefore, it would be well for us to impress this truth upon our minds: it is, perhaps, tempting to abandon formal liberties in order to deny more completely our bourgeois origins, but that would be enough to discredit fundamentally the project of writing. It might be more simple for us to disinterest ourselves in material demands in order to produce "pure literature" with a serene conscience, but we would thereby be giving up the idea of choosing our readers outside of the oppressing class.

Thus, opposition must also be overcome for ourselves and within ourselves. Let us first persuade ourselves that it can be overcome: literature in itself proves this, since it is the work of a total freedom addressing plenary freedoms and thus in its own way, manifests the totality of the human condition as a free product of a creative activity. And if, on the other hand, a full solution is beyond the powers of most of us, it is our duty to overcome the opposition in a thousand detailed syntheses. Every day we must take sides: in our life as a writer, in our articles, in our books. Let it always be by preserving as our guiding principle the rights of total freedom as an effective synthesis of formal and material freedoms. Let this freedom manifest itself in our novels, our essays, and our plays. And if our characters do not yet enjoy it, if they live in our time, let us at least be able to show what it costs them not to have it. It is not enough to denounce abuses and injustices in a fine style, nor to make a brilliant and negative psychological study of the bourgeoisie, nor even to let our pens serve social parties in order to save literature. We must take up a position *in our literature*, because literature is in essence a taking of position. We must, in all domains, both reject solutions which are not rigorously inspired by socialist principles and, at the same time, stand off from all doctrines and movements which consider socialism as the absolute end. In our eyes it should not represent the final end, but rather the end of the beginning, or, if one prefers, the last means before the end which is to put the human person in possession of his freedom. Thus, our works should

be presented to the public in a double aspect of negativity and construction.

First, negativity. We are familiar with the great tradition of critical literature which goes back to the end of the eighteenth century; it is concerned with separating by analysis that which specifically belongs to each notion from what tradition or the mystifications of the oppressor have added to it. Writers like Voltaire or the Encyclopedists considered the practice of this criticism as one of their essential tasks. Since the matter and the tool of the writer are language, it is normal for writers to think of cleaning their instrument. This negative function of literature was, to tell the truth, ignored in the following century, probably because the class in power made use of these concepts which had been established on their behalf by the great writers of the past, and because there was, at the beginning, a kind of equilibrium among its institutions, its aims, the kind of oppression it practised, and the meaning it gave to the words it used. For example, it is clear that in the nineteenth century the word "freedom" never designated anything but political freedom and that the words "disorder" or "license" were reserved for all other forms of freedom. Similarly, the word revolution necessarily referred to a great historical revolution, the one of '89. And as the bourgeoisie, by a very general convention, neglected the *economic* aspect of this revolution, as, in its history, it barely mentioned the name of Gracchus Baboeuf and the views of Robespierre and Marat so that it might give its official respect to Desmoulins and the Girondists, the result was that any political insurrection which succeeded could be desig-

nated a revolution, and that this denomination could be applied to the events of 1830 and 1848 which, at bottom, merely brought about a simple change of the directing personnel.

This narrowness of vocabulary caused the picture to lack certain aspects of the historical, psychological, and philosophical reality, but as these aspects were not manifest by themselves, as they corresponded to a dull malaise in the consciousness of the masses or the individual rather than to effective factors of social or personal life, one was struck by the dry property of the words and by the immutable clearness of the significations rather than by their insufficiency. In the eighteenth century to write a Philosophical Dictionary was secretly to undermine the class in power. In the nineteenth, Littré and Larousse were positivistic and conservative bourgeois; their dictionaries aimed solely at verifying and settling matters. The crisis of language which marked the literature between the two wars was the result of the fact that after a silent maturation, neglected aspects of the historical and psychological reality passed abruptly to the first level. Yet, we have the same verbal apparatus at our disposal for naming them. Perhaps it may not be too serious because in most cases it is only a matter of deepening concepts and changing definitions. For example, when we have rejuvenated the meaning of the word "Revolution" by pointing out that what should be designated by this vocable is a historical phenomenon involving the change of the régime of property, the change of political personnel, and the recourse to insurrection, we shall have proceeded, without great effort, to the rejuvenation of a

sector of the French language, and the word, impregnated with a new life, will be off to a new start. It must be noted, however, that the fundamental job to be done on language is of a synthetic nature, whereas in Voltaire's century it was analytic; it is necessary to enlarge, to deepen, and to open the doors and to let the troop of new ideas enter while controlling them as they pass by. In other words, to be anti-academic.

Unfortunately, what complicates our job in the extreme is that we are living in a century of propaganda. In 1914 the two opposing camps were arguing only the question of God; it still wasn't too serious. Today, there are five or six enemy camps which want to wrest the key-notions from each other because these are what exert the most influence on the masses. It will be recalled how the Germans preserved the external aspect, the title, the arrangement of articles, and even the typographical character of the pre-war French newspapers and used them to diffuse ideas which were entirely opposed to those which we were accustomed to find in them. They thought that we would not notice the difference in the pills since the coating did not change. The same with words: each party shoves them forward like Trojan horses, and we let them enter because they make the nineteenth-century meaning of the words shine before us. Once they are in place, they open up, and strange, astounding meanings spread out within us like armies; the fortress is taken before we are on guard. Thereafter, neither conversation nor argument is any longer possible. Brice Parain saw this quite clearly; to quote him roughly, "If you use the word freedom in front of me, I start fuming, I approve,

or I contradict, but I don't understand what you mean by it. So we're talking in the dark." That's true, but it's a modern evil. In the nineteenth century Littré's dictionary might have gotten us together; before this war we could have had recourse to the vocabulary of Lalande. Today, there is no longer an arbiter.

Nevertheless, we are all accomplices because these slippery notions serve our dishonesty. That's not all; linguists have often noted that in troubled periods words preserve the traces of the great human migrations. A barbaric army crosses Gaul, the soldiers amuse themselves with the native language, and so it stays twisted for a long time. Our own still bears the marks of the Nazi invasion. The word "Jew" formerly designated a certain type of man; perhaps French anti-Semitism had given it a slight pejorative meaning, but it was easy to brush it off. Today one fears to use it; it sounds like a threat, an insult, or a provocation. The word "Europe" formerly referred to the geographical, economic, and political unity of the Old Continent. Today, it preserves a musty smell of Germanism and servitude. Even the innocent and abstract term "collaboration" is in disrepute. On the other hand, as Soviet Russia is now at a standstill the words which the communists used before the war have also stopped short. They stop in the middle of their meaning, just as the Stalinist intellectuals do in the middle of their thought, or else they get off on side-paths. The transformations of the word "Revolution" are quite significant in this respect. In an earlier chapter I quoted the saying of a journalist who was a collaborator: "Stand firm! That's the motto of the Nationalist Revolution." To which I

now add this one which comes from a communist intellectual: "Produce! That's the real Revolution!" Things have gone so far that recently in France one could have read on the election posters: "To vote for the Communist Party is to vote for the defense of property."[1] Vice-versa, who is not a socialist today? I remember a writers' congress — all of them leftists — which refused to use the word socialism in a manifesto "because it was too discredited." And the linguistic reality is today so complicated that I still do not know whether these authors rejected the word for the reason they gave or because it was so down at the heel that it scared them. Moreover, we know that in the United States the term

1. And the idea of freedom? The fantastic criticisms that have been made of existentialism prove that people no longer mean anything by it. Is it their fault? Here is the P.R.L., antidemocratic and antisocialist, recruiting former fascists, former collaborators and former P.S.F.'s. Yet it calls itself the Republican Party of Freedom (Parti républicain de la liberté). If you are against it, it means that you are therefore against freedom. But the communists also refer to freedom; only it is Hegelian freedom, which is an assumption of necessity. And the surrealists too, who are determinists. A young simpleton said to me one day, "After *The Flies*, in which you spoke splendidly about the freedom of Orestes, you betrayed yourself and you betrayed us by writing *Being and Nothingness* and by failing to set up a deterministic and materialistic humanism." I understand what he meant: that materialism delivers man from his myths. It is a liberation, I agree, but in order the better to enslave him. However, from 1760 on, some American colonists defended slavery in the name of freedom: if the colonist, citizen, and pioneer wants to buy a negro, isn't he free? And having bought him, isn't he free to use him? The argument has remained. In 1947 the proprietor of a public swimming pool refused to admit a Jewish captain, a war hero. The captain wrote letters of complaint to the newspapers. The papers published his protest and concluded: "What a wonderful country America is! The proprietor of the pool was *free* to refuse admittance to a Jew. But the Jew, a citizen of the United States, was *free* to protest in the press. And the press, which, as everybody knows, is free, mentions the incident without taking sides. Finally, everybody is free." The only trouble is that the word *freedom* which covers these very different meanings—and a hundred others—is used without anyone's thinking that he ought to indicate the meaning he gives it in each case.

communist designates any American citizen who does not vote for the Republicans, and in Europe the word *fascist* means any European citizen who does not vote for the communists. To confuse things still more, we must add that French conservatives state that the Soviet régime — which, however, subscribes neither to a theory of race, nor a theory of anti-Semitism, nor a theory of war — is one of national socialism, whereas on the left it is said that the United States — which is a capitalist democracy with a loose dictatorship of public opinion — borders on fascism.

The function of a writer is to call a spade a spade. If words are sick, it is up to us to cure them. Instead of that, many writers live off this sickness. In many cases modern literature is a cancer of words. It is perfectly all right to write "horse of butter" but in a sense it amounts to doing the same thing as those who speak of a fascist United States or a Stalinist national socialism. There is nothing more deplorable than the literary practice which, I believe, is called poetic prose and which consists of using words for the obscure harmonics which resound about them and which are made up of vague meanings which are in contradiction with the clear signification.

I know: the purpose of a number of writers was to destroy words as that of the surrealists was to destroy conjointly the subject and the object; but it was the extreme point of the literature of consumption. But today, as I have shown, it is necessary to construct. If one starts deploring the inadequacy of language to reality, like Brice Parain, one makes himself an accomplice of the enemy, that is, of propaganda. Our first duty as a writer

is thus to re-establish language in its dignity. After all, we think with words. We would have to be quite vain to believe that we are concealing ineffable beauties which the word is unworthy of expressing. And then, I distrust the incommunicable; it is the source of all violence. When it seems impossible to get others to share the certainties which we enjoy, the only thing left is to fight, to burn, or to hang. No. We are no better than our life, and it is by our life that we must be judged; our thought is no better than our language, and it ought to be judged by the way it uses it. If we want to restore their virtue to words, we must carry on a double operation; on the one hand, an analytical cleaning which rids them of their adventitious meanings, and, on the other hand, a synthetic enlargement which adapts them to the historical situation. If an author wished to devote himself completely to this job, there would be more than enough for a whole lifetime. With all of us working on it together, we shall do a good job of it without too much trouble.

That is not all, we are living in the age of mystifications. Some are fundamental ones which are due to the structure of society; some are secondary. At any rate, the social order today rests upon the mystification of consciousness, as does disorder as well. Nazism was a mystification; Gaullism is another; Catholicism is a third. At the present there can be no doubt that French communism is a fourth. Obviously we could pay no attention to it and do our work honestly without aggressiveness. But as the writer addresses the freedom of his reader, and as each mystified consciousness, insofar as it is an accomplice of the mystification which enchains it, tends

to persist in its state, we will be able to safeguard literature only if we undertake the job of de-mystifying our public. For the same reason the writer's duty is to take sides against all injustices, wherever they may come from. And as our writings would have no meaning if we did not set up as our goal the eventual coming of freedom by means of socialism, it is important in each case to stress the fact that there have been violations of formal and personal liberties or material oppression or both. From this point of view we must denounce British politics in Palestine and American politics in Greece as well as the Soviet deportations. And if we are told that we are acting as if we were quite important and that it is quite childish of us to hope that we can change the course of the world, we shall reply that we have no illusions about it, but that nevertheless it is fitting that certain things be said, even though it be only to save our faces in the eyes of our children, and besides we do not have the crazy ambition of influencing the State Department, but rather the slightly less crazy one of acting upon the opinion of our fellow citizens.

Yet, we must not let off great inkwell explosions carelessly and without discernment. In each case we must consider the aim in view. Former communists would like to make us see Soviet Russia as enemy number one because she has corrupted the very idea of socialism and has transformed the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Consequently, they would like us to devote all our time to stigmatizing its extortion and its violence; at the same time they point out to us that capitalist injustices are highly obvious and are not likely to

deceive anyone; thus, we would be wasting our time exposing them. I am afraid that I surmise only too well the interests which this advice serves. Whatever the putative violence may be, still, before passing judgment upon it, it is advisable to consider the situation of the country which commits it and the perspectives in which it has committed it. It would first be necessary to prove, for example, that the present machinations of the Soviet government are not, in the last analysis, dictated by its desire to protect the revolution which has stalled and to "hold on" until the moment when it will be possible to resume its march forward. Whereas American anti-Semitism and negrophobia, our own colonialism and the attitude of the powers in regard to Franco, often lead to injustices which are less spectacular but which aim none the less at perpetuating the present régime of the exploitation of man by man. It will be said that everybody knows this. That may be true, but if nobody *says* it, what good does it do us to know it? Our job as a writer is to represent the world and to bear witness to it. Besides, even if it were proven that the Soviet Union and the Communist Party are pursuing genuinely revolutionary ends, that would not exempt us from judging the *means*. If one regards freedom as the principle and the goal of all human activity, it is equally false that one must judge the means by the end and the end by the means. Rather, the end is the synthetic unity of the means employed. Thus, there are means which risk destroying the end which they intend to realize because by their mere presence they smash the synthetic unity which they wish to enter.

The attempt has been made to determine by quasi-mathematical formulas the conditions under which a means may be called legitimate; in these formulas are included the probability of the end, its proximity, and what its returns are in regard to the cost of the means employed. One might think that we were back at Bentham and the arithmetic of pleasures. I am not saying that a formula of this kind might not be applied in certain cases, for example, in the hypothesis, itself quantitative, in which a certain number of lives must be sacrificed to save others. But in the majority of cases the problem is quite different; the means employed introduce a *qualitative* alteration into the end and consequently are not measurable. Let us imagine that a revolutionary party systematically lies to its militants in order to protect them against uncertainties, crises of conscience, and adverse propaganda. The end pursued is the abolition of a régime of oppression; but the lie is itself oppression. May one perpetuate oppression with the pretext of putting an end to it? Is it necessary to enslave man in order the better to free him? It will be said that the means is transitory. Not if it helps create a *lied-to* and *lying* mankind; for then the men who take power are no longer those who deserve to get hold of it; and the reasons one had for abolishing oppression are undermined by the way he goes about abolishing it. Thus, the politics of the Communist Party which consists of lying to its own troops, of calumniating, of hiding its defeats and its faults, compromises the goal which it pursues. On the other hand, it is easy to reply that in war — and every revolutionary party is at war — one can not tell soldiers the whole

truth. Thus, we have here a question of measure. No ready-made formula will excuse us from an examination in each particular case. It is up to us to make this examination. Left to itself, politics always takes the path of least resistance, that is, it goes downhill. The masses, duped by propaganda, follow it. So who can *represent* to the government, the parties, and the citizens the means that are being employed, if not the writer? That does not mean that we must be systematically opposed to the use of violence. I recognize that violence, under whatever form it may manifest itself, is a setback. But it is an inevitable setback because we are in a universe of violence; and if it is true that recourse to violence against violence risks perpetuating it, it is also true that it is the only means of bringing an end to it. A certain newspaper in which someone wrote a rather brilliant article saying that it was necessary to refuse any complicity with violence wherever it came from had to announce the following day the first skirmishes of the Indo-Chinese war. I should like to ask the writer to-day how we can refuse to participate indirectly in all violence. If you say nothing, you are necessarily for the continuation of the war; one is always responsible for what one does not try to prevent. But if you got it to stop at once and at any price, you would be at the origin of some massacres and you would be doing violence to all Frenchmen who have interests down there. I am not, of course, speaking of compromises, since war is born of compromise. Violence for violence; one must make a choice, according to other principles. The politician will wonder whether transportation of troops is possible, whether by continuing

the war he will alienate public opinion, what the international repercussions will be. It is incumbent upon the writer to judge the means not from the point of view of an abstract morality, but in the perspectives of a precise goal which is the realization of a socialist democracy. Thus, we must mediate upon the modern problem of ends and means not only in theory but in each concrete case.

Evidently, there is a big job to be done. But even if we consume our life in *criticism* who can reproach us? The task of criticism has become *total*; it engages the whole man. In the eighteenth century the tool was forged; the simple utilization of analytical reason was enough to clean the concepts; to-day when it is necessary both to clean and to complete, to push to their conclusions notions which have become false because they have stopped along the way, criticism is *also* synthetic. It brings into action all our faculties of invention; instead of limiting itself to making use of a reason already established by two centuries of mathematics, on the contrary, it is this criticism which will form modern reason so that, in the end, it has creative freedom as its foundation. Doubtless, it will not by itself bring about a positive solution. But what does today? I see all about us only absolute formulas, patchwork, dishonest compromises, outdated and hastily refurbished myths. Even if we did nothing but puncture all these inflated wind-bladders one by one, we would be well deserving of our readers.

However, around 1750 criticism was a direct preparation for changing the régime since it contributed to the weakening of the oppressing class by dismantling its

ideology. The case today is not the same since the concepts to be criticized belong to all ideologies and all camps. Thus, it is no longer negativity alone which can serve history even if it finally does become a positivity. The *individual* writer may limit himself to his critical task, but our literature as a whole must be, above all, construction. That does not mean that we must make it our business, individually or as a group, to find a new ideology. In every age, as I have pointed out, it is literature in its entirety which is the ideology because it constitutes the synthetic and often contradictory[1] totality of everything which the age has been able to produce to enlighten itself, taking into account the historical situation and the talent. But since we have recognized that we have to produce a literature of *praxis*, we ought to stick to our purpose to the very end. We no longer have time to *describe* or *narrate*; neither can we limit ourselves to *explaining*. Description, even though it be psychological, is pure contemplative enjoyment; explanation is acceptance, it excuses everything. Both of them assume that the die is cast. But if perception itself is action, if, for us, to show the world is to disclose it in the perspectives of a possible change, then, in this age of fatalism, we must reveal to the reader his power, in each concrete case, of doing and undoing, in short of acting. The present situation, revolutionary by virtue of the fact that it is unbearable, remains in a state of stagnation because men have dispossessed themselves of their own destiny; Europe is abdicating before the future conflict

1. Because, like Mind, it is of the type of what I have elsewhere called "detotalized totality."

and seeks less to prevent it than to range itself in advance in the camp of the conquerors. Soviet Russia considers itself to be alone and cornered, like a wild boar surrounded by a fierce pack ready to tear it apart. The United States, which does not fear the other nations, is infatuated with its own weight; the richer it is, the heavier it is. Weighed down with fat and pride, it lets itself be rolled toward war with its eyes closed. As for us, we are writing for only a few men in our own country and a handful of others in Europe. But we must go seek them where they are, lost in their age like needles in a haystack, and we must remind them of their power. Let us take them in their job, in their family, in their class, and in their country, and let us examine their servitude with them, but let it not be to push them deeper into it; let us show them that in the most mechanical gesture of the worker there is already the complete negation of oppression; let us never envisage their situation as factual data but as a problem; let us point out that it keeps its form and its boundaries of infinite possibilities, in a word, that it has no other shape than what they confer upon it by the way they have chosen to go beyond it; let us teach them both that they are victims and that they are responsible for everything, that they are at once the oppressed, the oppressors, and the accomplices of their own oppressors and that one can never draw a line between what a man submits to, what he accepts, and what he wants; let us show that the world they live in is never defined except in reference to the future which they project before them, and since reading reveals their freedom to them, let us take advantage of it to remind them that this

future in which they place themselves in order to judge the present is none other than that in which man rejoins himself and finally reaches himself as a totality by the coming of the City of Ends, for it is only the presentiment of Justice which permits us to be shocked by particular injustices, that is, to put it precisely, to regard them as injustices; finally, in inviting them to see things from the viewpoint of the City of Ends so they may understand their age, let us not allow them to remain in ignorance of the aspects of this age which favor the realizing of their aim.

The theatre was formerly a theatre of "characters." More or less complex, but complete, figures appeared on the stage, and the situation had no other function than to put these characters into conflict and to show how each of them was modified by the action of the others. I have elsewhere shown how important changes have taken place in this domain; many authors are returning to the theatre of situation. No more characters; the heroes are freedoms caught in a trap, like all of us. What are the issues? Each character will be nothing but the choice of an issue and will equal no more than the chosen issue. It is to be hoped that all literature will become moral and problematic like this new theatre. Moral—not moralizing; let it show simply that man is *also* a value and that the questions he raises are always moral. Above all, let it show the inventor in him. In a sense, each situation is a trap — there are walls everywhere. I've expressed myself poorly: there are no issues to *choose*. An issue is invented. And each one, by inventing his own issue, invents himself. Man must be invented each day.

The point is that all is lost if we want to *choose* between the powers which are preparing for war. To choose the U.S.S.R. is to give up civil liberties without even being able to hope to gain material freedom; the retardation of its industry prohibits it, in case of victory, from organizing Europe; hence, indefinite prolongation of dictatorship and misery. But after the victory of the United States, when the C.P. would be annihilated and the working class discouraged, disoriented, and—if I may risk a neologism—atomized, when capitalism would be more pitiless since it would be master of the world, can any one believe that a revolutionary movement which would start from zero would have much chance? But aren't there unknown factors to be reckoned with? That's just it! I reckon with what I know. But who is forcing us to choose? Does one really make history by choosing between given wholes simply because they are given, and by siding with the stronger? In that case in 1940 all Frenchmen should have sided with Germany as the collaborators proposed.

Now, it is obvious that, on the contrary, historical action can never be reduced to a choice between raw data, but that it has always been characterized by the invention of new solutions on the basis of a definite situation. Respect for "wholes"[2] is pure and simple empirism. Man has long since gone beyond empiricism in science, ethics, and individual life; the fountain-makers of Florence "chose between wholes"; Toricelli *invented* the weight of air—I say that he invented it rather than discovered it because when an object is concealed from all eyes, one must invent it out of whole cloth in order to be able to discover it. When it is a question of historical fact, why,

out of what inferiority complex, do our realists deny this faculty of creation which they proclaim everywhere else? The historical agent is almost always the man who in the face of a dilemma suddenly causes a third term to appear, one which up to that time had been invisible. It is true that a *choice* must be made between the U.S.S.R. and the Anglo-Saxon bloc. As for socialist Europe, there's no "choosing" it since it doesn't exist. It is *to be made.* Not by starting with the England of Mr. Churchill, nor even with that of Mr. Bevin, but by starting on the continent, by the union of all countries which have the same problems. It will be said that it is too late, but what does anyone know about it? Has anyone even tried? Our relations with our immediate neighbors always take place through Moscow, London, or New York; doesn't anyone know that there are direct ways? Whatever the case may be and as long as circumstances do not change, the fortunes of literature are tied up with the coming of a socialist Europe, that is, of a group of states with a democratic and collectivist structure, each of which, while waiting for something better, would be deprived of part of its sovereignty for the sake of the whole. The hope of avoiding war dwells in this hypothesis only; in this hypothesis only will the circulation of ideas remain free and will literature again find an object and a public.

Quite a number of jobs at the same time — and quite disparate. It's true. But Bergson has well shown that the eye — an extremely complicated organ if you regard it as a juxtaposition of functions — appears somewhat simple if it is replaced in the creative movement of evolu-

tion. The same with the writer; if you enumerate by analysis the themes which Kafka develops and the questions he raises in his books, and if you then go back to the beginning of his career and consider that for him these were themes *to be treated* and questions *to be raised*, you will be alarmed. But that's not the way he's to be taken. The work of Kafka is a free and unitary reaction to the Judaeo-Christian world of Central Europe. His novels are a synthetic act of going beyond his situation as a man, as a Jew, as a Czech, as a recalcitrant fiancé, as a tubercular etc., as were also his handshake, his smile, and that gaze which Max Brod so admired. Under the analysis of the critic they break down into problems; but the critic is wrong; they must be read *in movement.*

I have not wanted to hand out extra assignments to the writers of my generation. What right would I have to do so, and has anybody asked me to? Nor do I have any taste for the manifestoes of a school. I have merely tried to describe a situation with its perspectives, its threats, and its demands. A literature of *praxis* is coming into being in the age of the unfindable public. That's the situation. Let each one handle it in his own way. His own way, that is, his own style, his own technique, his own subjects. If the writer is imbued, as I am, with the urgency of these problems, one can be sure that he will offer solutions to them in the *creative unity of his work*, that is, in the indistinctness of a movement of free creation.[1]

There is no guarantee that literature is immortal. Its

1. Camus' *The Plague*, which has just been published, seems to me a good example of a unifying movement which bases a plurality of critical and constructive themes on the organic unity of a single myth.

chance today, its only chance, is the chance of Europe, of socialism, of democracy, and of peace. We must play it. If we writers lose it, too bad for us. But also, too bad for society. As I have shown, the collectivity passes to reflection and meditation by means of literature; it acquires an unhappy conscience, a lopsided image of itself which it constantly tries to modify and improve. But, after all, the art of writing is not protected by immutable decrees of Providence; it is what men make it; they choose it in choosing themselves. If it were to turn into pure propaganda or pure entertainment, society would wallow in the immediate, that is, in the life without memory of hymenoptera and gasteropods. Of course, all of this is not very important. The world can very well do without literature. But it can do without man still better.

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