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VARIETY: *Second Series*

VARIETY; *Second Series*

Paul Valéry

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
WILLIAM ASPENWALL BRADLEY

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VILLON AND VERLAINE

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NOTHING is easier and nothing formerly seemed more natural than to bring together the names of Francois Villon and Paul Verlaine. It is mere child's play for the lover of historic, that is, of imaginary symmetries, to demonstrate that these two literary figures are alike. Both, admirable poets; both, bad lots; both, mingling in their works the most pious sentiments with descriptions and subjects of the freest sort, passing from one to another with extraordinary ease; both, veritable masters of their art and of the language of their time, using it as men who combine with culture an intimate feeling for the living language, for the very voice of the people surrounding them, creating, altering, combining freely words and forms. Both know enough Latin and considerable argot, and frequent, according to their mood, the church or the tavern; and both, for very different reasons, find themselves constrained to make bitter sojourns in a vacuum

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where they less amend their faults than distill the poetic emotion of remorse, of regrets and of fear. Both fall, repent, fall again and pick themselves up great poets!

But that which is associated and superimposed so easily and so speciously can be divided and dissociated without much trouble. Great importance should not be attached to it. Villon indeed corresponded agreeably enough to Verlaine in an imaginary edifice of French letters in which one might divert oneself by placing symmetrically our great men, pairing them off neatly, sometimes for their pretended contrasts: Corneille and Racine, Bossuet and Fenelon, Hugo and Lamartine; sometimes for their similarities, like the pair of whom we are speaking. This pleases the eye, awaiting the moment of reflection which denounces the slight consistency and logic of these fine arrangements. Moreover, I make this observation only to put you on your guard against the temptation and the peril of confounding a decorative rhetoric with a really critical method, which may lead to a positive result.

I add that the Villon-Verlaine combination—this apparent and seductive relation of two exceptional beings, of whom I shall speak—if it sustains and

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fortifies itself with several biographical traits, on the contrary weakens, or breaks up, once we compare the works instead of the men themselves. I will show you how in a moment.

In sum, the idea of comparing them is born of partial resemblances of their lives and leads me to do here what I am inclined to criticize in general. I esteem—this is one of my paradoxes—that the knowledge of the biography of the poets is useless knowledge; if it be not harmful to the use which should be made of their works, and which consists either in enjoyment, or in the teachings and the problems of art that we read into them. What do Racine's loves matter to me? It is Phedre who matters. What matters to me the raw material, which is more or less everywhere? It is the talent, it is the power of transformation which touches me and makes me envious. All the passion in the world, all the incidents of an existence, even those that are the most moving, are incapable of the slightest fine verse. Even in the most favourable cases, it is not the fact that the authors are men which gives them enduring value, *it is the fact that they are a little more than men*. And if I say that biographical curiosity can be harmful, it is because it too often fur-

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nishes the occasion, the pretext, the means of evading the precise and organic study of a poet's work. One believes one has done one's whole duty by poetry when, on the contrary, one has but fled it, refused the contact and, by way of the research of ancestors, of friends, of troubles, or the profession, of an author, merely misled oneself, shunning the essential to follow the accessory. We know nothing of Homer. The *Odyssey* loses none of its marine beauty. . . . What do we know of the poets of the Bible, of the author of *Ecclesiastes*, or of the *Song of Songs*? These venerable texts lose nothing of their beauty. And what do we know of Shakespeare? Not even whether he wrote *Hamlet*.

But, this time, the biographical problem is inevitable.

The double case Verlaine-Villon is a strange one. It presents a rare and remarkable character. A very important part of their respective works is related to their biography and unquestionably these works are autobiographic in more than one point. They both make detailed confessions. We are not sure that these confessions are always exact. If they

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enounce the truth, they do not tell all the truth. An artist chooses even when he confesses. And perhaps above all when he confesses. Here and there he glosses over, stresses unduly. . . .

I have said that the case was rare. Surely, most poets speak abundantly of themselves. Indeed the lyrical poets speak only of themselves. And of whom and of what else could they speak? Lyricism is the voice of the ego carried to the purest if not to the highest point, but these poets speak of themselves as the musicians do, that is, by merging the emotions of all the precise events of their life with an intimate substance of universal experience. It suffices, in order to understand them, to have enjoyed the light of day, to have been happy (and especially unhappy), to have desired, to have possessed, to have lost and regretted—to have suffered the few very simple sensations of existence common to all men, to each of which corresponds one chord of the lyre. . . .

In general that suffices, but it does not suffice for Villon. It has been perceived for a very long time, for more than four hundred years, since Clement

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Marot already said that "to know and to understand" an important part of his work "*il faudrait avoir ete de son temps a Paris et avoir cougneu les lieuXy les chases et les hommes dont il parle; la memoire desquels taut plus se passera tant moins se congnotstra icelle industrie de ses lays diets. Pour ceste cause, qui vouldra faire une oeuvre de longue duree, ne preigne son subject sur telles choses basses et particulieres*"

One must necessarily, then, consider the life and adventures of Frangois Villon and attempt to reconstruct them, by means of the information that he gives or to decipher the allusions that he continually makes. He gives the real names of the persons who are happily or unhappily connected with his disturbed career; he thanks some, rails at or curses others, indicates the taverns which they haunted and paints in a few marvellously chosen words the places and the aspects of the city. All this is intimately incorporated in his poetry, indivisible from it, and often renders nearly unintelligible, to those who do not know the Paris of the epoch, its picturesque and its sinister quality. I believe that the perusal of a few chapters of *Notre Dame de Paris* is not a bad introduction to the read-

ing of Villon. Hugo seems to me to have seen well—or to have invented—in his powerful manner, so precise in the fantastic, the Paris at the end of the fourteenth century. But I refer you especially to the admirable work of Pierre Champion, where you will find all that we know of Villon and the Paris of his time.

The difficulties with which we are confronted in the text of Villon are not only due to the difference of times and to the disappearance of things but they pertain also to the author's peculiar breed. This witty Parisian is also a dangerous character. He is not a scholar or a bourgeois who indulges in verse-making and a few pranks, and whose disturbances are limited as he limits his impressions to those that would be familiar to a man of his time and rank. Master Villon is an exceptional being—for it is exceptional in our profession (although bold in its outlook) that a poet be a sort of brigand, a master criminal, strongly suspected of criminal vagabondage, affiliated with appalling gangs, living by rapine, a picklock of strong-boxes, a murderer on occasion, ever on the lookout and feeling a rope

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about his neck while writing magnificent verses. It results therefrom that this hunted poet, this hangdog (whose end we still do not know and have little desire to learn), introduces into his verses many expressions and a quantity of terms which belonged to the fugitive and confidential tone of the underworld. He composed at times entire pieces which to us are almost impenetrable. The denizens of the land where this language is spoken are a people preferring night to day, even in its language, which is organized in a fashion "between hound and wolf," I mean between the usual language of which it keeps the syntax and a mysterious vocabulary which is transmitted by initiation and is rapidly renewed. This vocabulary, at times hideous and ignoble-sounding, is sometimes enormously expressive. Even if the significance escapes us, we divine beneath the brutal or caricatural physiognomy of the terms, images strongly suggested by the very form of the words.

This is a veritable poetic creation of the primitive type, for the first and most remarkable of poetic creations is language. Although grafted on the speech of honest folk, the argot or the jargon of the poems of this great poet is an original for-

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mation incessantly elaborated and worked over in the lupanars, in the jails, in the lower depths of the great city, by a whole world hostile to the world, dreadful and fearful, violent and miserable, the interests of which are divided between the preparation of misdeeds, the need of debauch or the thirst for vengeance, and the vision of torture (so often atrocious at that period) which is ever present or near at hand in a mind never at rest, moving like a wild beast in a cage, between crime and punishment.

The life of Francois Villon is, like his work, fairly full of shadows in every sense of this term. There are great obscurities in both and in his very personality.

Nothing we know of him gives us much light on his real nature, for everything, or almost everything, comes to us from his verse or from Justice—two sources which are in close agreement as to the facts, and the combination of them gives us the conception of a bad lot, vindictive, capable of the worst exploits, but suddenly surprising us by an accent pious or tender, as that which appears in

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the celebrated and admirable piece where he sounds the *oraison* of his mother. You remember this ballad, one of the jewels of French poetry:

*femme je suys povrette et ancienne
Ne rien ne sfay; oncques lettre ne leuz,
Au monstier voy dont je suis paroissienne
Paradis painct ou sont harpes et luz. . . .*

In spite of a few terms slightly altered, this language is still our own; and it is almost five hundred years since these verses were written: we can still enjoy them and be moved by them. We can also marvel at the art which produced this masterpiece of finished form, this construction of the strophe, at once clean-cut and musically perfect, where a syntax, remarkably varied, a plenitude entirely natural in the succession of its figures, easily adapts its form of ten verses of ten syllables each to four rhymes. I admire the endurance of this value created under Louis XL In it I see a living witness of the continuity of our literature and of the essentials of our language through the ages. There is in Europe scarcely a people other than the French and the English who can pride themselves on such continuity; since the fifteenth century, these two nations have continuously produced

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works and writers of the first order, from generation to generation.

In short, hanged or not, Villon lives; he lives like the writers whom you can see; he lives, for we hear his poetry and it acts on us—and moreover, it can bear comparison with the most powerful and most perfect of the great poetry given us by four centuries, for the form has the value of gold.

But I return from the career of the work to that of the man himself. I told you that we knew it by fragments. It is a Rembrandt, in large part submerged in shadows, of which certain elements stand out with an extraordinary precision, details of a hallucinating clearness.

These details, as you will see, are revealed to us in records of criminal proceedings, and we owe the knowledge of these documents, which sum up the total of our reliable information on Villon, to the magnificent work of three or four men, savants of the first rank. This is the place to pay homage to Longnon, Marcel Schwob, and Pierre Champion, before whom we knew nothing about our poet that was not extremely doubtful. One after the other, they explored the National Archives, where they found the essential documents

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in the dockets and the dossiers of the old Paris law courts.

I did not know Auguste Longnon, but I knew Marcel Schwob well and I remember with emotion our long twilight conversations, when this strangely intelligent and passionately perspicacious spirit told me of his researches, his presentiments and his discoveries. He brought to his work the inductive imagination of an Edgar Poe and the meticulous sagacity of a philologist trained in the analysis of texts; and at the same time that extraordinary taste for unusual beings and lives out of the normal run, which led him to discover many books and to create many literary values.

Like Longnon—and like the police as well—he employed, to seize and apprehend Villon, the method of the "haul." He cast his net on the probable entourage of the delinquent, whom he hoped to capture by arresting—I mean, by identifying—the whole gang. He aroused my admiration for the way in which criminal affairs were conducted at that time. One evening he told me of the mishaps of a lot of malefactors who were associates of our Villon. Schwob came across them at Dijon, where they committed a thousand misdeeds. On

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the point of being taken, they fled and scattered. But the prosecutor of the Dijon law courts did not lose sight of them. He sent a fellow prosecutor a report which reveals the fugitives' fate in minute detail. Three of them, bearers of the booty, hid in the depths of a forest. There two of the three dispatched their companion with blows of a sword in his back, divided up his share of the loot, and then separated. One got himself hanged, I believe, at Orleans; the other was boiled alive at Montargis for uttering false money. It may be seen that the Justice of that time, without telegraph, telephone, photography, fingerprints or anthropometrical methods, knew fairly well how to work!

Villon is strongly suspected of having belonged to that gang called "Compagnons de la Coquille" or "Coquillards." His wretched, adventurous life seems to have been rather short, and one may wonder whether he reached the age of 40. I shall sum it up in a few words, or rather I shall sum up what has been established by the learned men whom I have cited and who should be read, as much for the better understanding of the poems of this

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great poet as for the admiration of the work of precise historical resurrection.

Villon, who was originally named Francois de Montcorbier, was born in Paris in 1431. His mother, too poor to rear him, confided him to the care of a learned priest, Guillaume de Villon, who belonged to the community of Saint-Benoit-le-Betourne. It is there that Francois Villon grew up and received his elementary education. His foster father seems always to have been kindly disposed, even tender to him. At the age of eighteen, the young man took his degree. At the age of twenty-one, in the summer of 1452, the degree of licenci-ate was conferred upon him. What did he know? As much as anyone knew after having followed the art course more or less carefully: grammar (Latin), formal logic, rhetoric (both according to Aristotle, as he was known and interpreted at that time); later came some metaphysics and a glimpse of the moral, physical and natural sciences of the time.

But the word license has a double meaning. No sooner had he received his degrees than Villon be-

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gan to lead a life that was libertarian to the point of being dangerous. The milieu of the clerks was a strangely mixed one. The quality of clerk was much sought after by all who felt themselves likely to have something to do one day or other with the law. To be a clerk was to be able to insist upon being judged by the ecclesiastical judge and thus escape from the ordinary jurisdiction, which was much more severe. A number of them were men of deplorable morals. Rascals mingled with the clerks, and described themselves as such; and in the prisons were sometimes given strange Latin lessons destined to permit some culprit to pretend to be a clerk so as to change his judge.

In this sorry world Villon made acquaintances of the worst sort. The ladies, most likely, were not lacking in charms. They played, as was natural, a great role in the thoughts and adventures of the poet. But it would never have occurred to any of them that this lad was to give them a certain share of immortality—neither to Blanche la Savetiere, nor the Grosse Margot, nor the Belle Heaulmiere, nor Jehanneton la Chaperonniere, nor Katherine la Bourciere. Observe all these corporative names. ... It would seem as though all the trade guilds

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had to sacrifice their women to the goddess and the trade guilds of the Middle Ages led infallibly to conjugal unhappiness.

But suddenly debauchery and profligacy ended in violence. The fifth of June, 1455, Villon committed murder. The affair is well known to us since it is related in the act of remission accorded by Charles VII to "Maistre Francois des Loges, otherwise known as de Villon, aged twenty-six years, or thereabouts, who, being the day of the feast of our Lord, seated on a stone under the clock of Saint-Benoit-le-Bien-Tourne, in the High Street of Saint-Jacques in our town of Paris, and were with him one called Gilles, priest, and a certain Ysabeau, and it was about the hour of nine o'clock or thereabouts."

There then appeared upon the scene a certain Philippe Sermoise, or Chermoye, priest, and Master Jehan le Mardi. According to the act, which follows the account of Villon, without criticizing it, this priest Sermoise tried to pick a quarrel with the poet, who first responded gently and rose to make room. . . . But Sermoise drew a long dag-

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ger from beneath his gown and struck Villon in the face "causing great effusion of blood. Villon, who, to protect him from the evening dew, was wearing a mantle and under it had a dagger hanging from his belt," drew it and struck Sermoise in the groin, "without meaning to hurt him." (This excuse sounds very lame!) As the other had not, it seems, been killed, and continued to pursue him, he struck him with a stone full in the face. All witnesses fled.

Villon ran to have his wound dressed by a barber. Since this latter had to make a report, he asked his client's name. Villon gave the false name of Michel Mouton. As to Sermoise, he was transported first to a cloister, then to the Hotel-Dieu, where he died two days later, "*faute de bon gouvernement*" The murderer found it prudent to flee.

Some months after, the letter of remission, from which I have quoted several terms, was accorded him. It is remarkable that this explicit measure of clemency is based solely upon the testimony and the arguments of Master Villon. There is no inquiry. The excuse of legitimate defense is admitted uncontested. The information of the interested

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person that, since this unfortunate incident, his conduct has been irreproachable, is taken at its face value. But one cannot but consider the tale rather suspicious: the aggression of the priest Sermoise is unexplained, the false name given by Villon to the barber Fouquet, his flight, the disappearance of the witnesses—there are so many disturbing elements in this affair. Many another has been sent to the gallows on weaker evidence. But, finally, let us not be more severe than the king, who, "wishing to prefer pity to rigour," remits and pardons the deed and case—"considering which," says the text, "let us impose perpetual silence upon our procurator." This silence was soon to be broken.

Concerning the second known crime of Villon there is no doubt, for all the qualifications possible, as defined by the Code, are present. Nothing is lacking: it has to do with a robbery, committed at night, in an occupied house, with housebreaking, burglary, the use of false keys and the whole paraphernalia of thievery.

Villon, acting as lookout, and accompanied by professional picklocks and other accomplices, seized five hundred gold crowns belonging to the

College of Navarre and contained in a coffer in the sacristy of the College's chapel. The theft was only discovered two months afterwards. Nothing could be more curious than the details of the inquiry held by the king's examiners at the Chatelet, I shall cite but one.

The investigators convoked, as experts, *nine* sworn locksmiths, who took a special oath and whose names and addresses are preserved for us in the dossiers of the case. They reconstituted quite accurately the method of the thieves, although the latter had escaped. Unfortunately for them, they were discovered by the incautious chatter of a gossip, their accomplice, whom a *cure* overheard in a tavern, speaking of the affair of the College of Navarre. This priest, who seems to have been fitted less for the priesthood than for a police informer, began a remarkably conducted inquiry which led straight to Francois Villon. Villon hastened to the provinces.

God knows what life was his during this period! . . . He is found sometimes in prison, sometimes in relations with the prince-poet Charles d'Orleans and now and then he doubtlessly took part in the operations of the Coquillards. It seems, in

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any case, that he had a taste of the harsh episcopal prison of Meung-sur-Loire, perhaps because of the theft of a chalice in a sacristy. The Bishop of Orleans, Thibaud d'Auxigny, treated him with a rigour which left a cruel memory with Villon, submitted him to the torture of water and kept him on a chain in a dungeon. Louis XI delivered him and he returned to Paris, but not, alas, to follow the straight path. He found old acquaintances, made new and not of the best, and his association with them led him into the most unfortunate affair of his life. As a consequence of a quarrel, in the course of which a pontifical notary was wounded, Villon was condemned by the Chatelet to be hanged and strangled on the gallows of Paris. Judging by the joy that he manifested when the Court, after the appeal he made against this decree, commuted it to ten years of exile from Paris, he must have lived days of great agony, between torture and frightful visions of his body hanging from the gallows. The relief he experiences in learning that his life is safe, leads him to write two poems: one he addresses to his turnkey to congratulate himself on having made the ap-

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peal, the other to the court, in guise of thanks. He engages all his senses, all his members and his organs,

Foie, poumon, et rate qui respire,

to sing the praises of the court.

Then he left Paris, happy to get off so cheaply.

Afterwards . . . But afterwards we know nothing.

When, how, did Villon's life end?

Dites-moi ou, n'en quel pays?

Of that we know absolutely nothing.

This life, which is not lacking in shadows, fades out in darkness. But, from the sixteenth century on, the work of the criminal was printed; the vagabond, the robber, the gallows-bird, takes his place in a rank that none among French poets can contest with him. Our poetry, from his time on, has recourse to antiquity and establishes itself in a noble and exquisite style. The salons are better fitted to it than the dens and crossroads. Villon, however, has always been read, even by Boileau. His fame is today greater than ever; and if his in-

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famy, demonstrated or corroborated by documentary evidence, stands out more clearly now than it once did, it must be admitted that it increases the interest of the work in undue measure. Observation of the literature and the theatre at every epoch shows that crime has great attraction and that vice is not without interest for virtuous folks, or half-way such. In the case of Villon, it is a criminal who speaks, and he speaks like a poet of first rank. And here we are confronting a problem which I should call psychological, if I knew exactly what this word meant.

How can the conception of crimes, their meditation, the deliberate intention to commit them, coexist with the sensibility that certain poems demonstrate, that art itself demands, with the strong consciousness of oneself which not only manifests but declares and expresses itself with such precision in the celebrated *Debat du Occur et du Corps*? How can this scoundrel, living in constant fear of being hanged, have the heart to give such admirable voices to the unfortunate puppets whom the wind rocks and breaks at the end of a rope? His terror does not prevent him from seeking his rhymes; his frightful vision is utilized for poetic

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aims: *it serves a purpose*, which is not at all what the law anticipates when it justifies itself and its rigours by what it calls the exemplariness of punishment. In vain does it hang some and have others drawn and quartered or boiled; it happens that a sufficiently great criminal (but even greater as a poet than as a criminal) commingles his bad acts, his vices, his fears, his remorse and his repentances, and from this lamentable mixture extracts the works of art with which we have become familiar.

The rank of poet—if it be a rank—can be reconciled, no doubt, with a very regular existence. The majority, the immense majority, I assure you, were or are the most honourable men in the world and occasionally the most honoured.

And yet if one meditates a while on the poet, and tries to assign him his proper place in the world, one is soon embarrassed by this indefinable species. Imagine a well-organized society—a society of which every member receives the equivalent of what he brings to it. This perfect justice eliminates all the beings whose contribution is not calculable. The contribution of the poet or of the artist is not calculable. It is nothing for some, enormous for others. There are no possible equivalences.

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These persons cannot subsist, then, save in a social system so badly made that the most beautiful things man has created and which, in return, have truly made him a man, may be produced. Such a society admits inequalities—expedients, alms and all that by which a Verlaine has been able to live without, like our Villon, having recourse to the dividends apportioned by the associations of malefactors, after being stolen by night from the coffers of rich sacristies.

I shall not have much to say concerning the life of Verlaine; it is too near us, and I shall not here open the files which, from the record office of the court of Mons, have made their way to slumber (not without certain awakenings) in the Royal Library of Brussels, like those of Villon, which have passed from the storerooms of the law courts to the Archives Nationales. Villon is far enough from us; one can speak of him as of a legendary personage. But Verlaine! . . . How many times have I seen him passing my door, furious, laughing, swearing, striking the ground with the thick stick of an invalid or menacing vagabond. How could

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one imagine that this tramp—at times so brutal in looks and speech, sordid, at once so disquieting and pathetic—might be the author of the most delicate poetic music, of the newest and most touching verbal melodies in our language? Every conceivable vice had respected, and perhaps sown, or developed in him, this power of suave invention, this expression of sweetness, of fervour, of tender meditation, that nobody else has been able to produce, for nobody else has been able to dissimulate or to cast the resources of a consummate art, skilled in all the subtleties of the most skilful poets, in works simple of appearance, naive in tone, almost infantile. Remember:

*Calmes dans le demi-jour
Que les branches hautes font. . . .*

Sometimes, his verses make one think of a recital, during catechism, of prayers murmured and rhymed; sometimes they are astonishingly negligent and written in the most familiar language. Sometimes he makes prosodic experiments, as in that strange piece, *Crimen Amoris*, which is in verses of eleven syllables. He moreover used almost all possible metres from that of five syllables to the

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verse of thirteen. He employed combinations fallen into disuse or abandoned since the sixteenth century, pieces in rhymes entirely masculine, or entirely feminine.

Should one want perforce to compare him to Villon, not as a guilty person with a criminal record, but as a poet, one finds—or at least I find, for it is only my impression—I find with surprise that Villon (vocabulary excepted) is, in certain respects, a poet more "modern" than Verlaine. He is more precise and more picturesque. His language is perceptibly firmer: *Le Debat du Cœur et du Corps* is constructed in phrases as clear cut and severe as those of Corneille. And he abounds in formulas which one never forgets, of which each is a windfall of the type of classic windfalls. . . . But, above all else, Villon has the glory of that great work, the famous *Testament*, a strangely complete conception, and *Jugement Dernier*, pronounced on men and things by one who, at the age of thirty, had already seen too much of life. This collection of poems in the form of testamentary dispositions has in itself something of *La Danse Macabre* and of *La Comédie Humaine*. Bishops, princes, hangmen, bandits, *filles de joie*, compan-

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ions in debauchery, each receives his legacy. All those who have been friendly to the poet, all those who have been hard to him, are there, caught up forever in a line or a verse. And in this curious composition, among precise portraits, where the proper names, the sobriquets, the very addresses are given, occur, as more general figures, the most beautiful ballads ever written. Before them the familiar monologue is interrupted. Confession changes into ode and takes its flight. The apostrophe, familiar to Villon, becomes a lyric means and the interrogative form, so frequent with him,

Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?

• • • • •
Le lesserez-la, le povre Villon?

• • • • •
Dites-moy ou, n'en quel pays?

• • • • •
Qu'est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheveilx blonds, sourcilz voulytz? . . .

etc., is made through repetition, and especially through accentuation, an element of pathetic power. He is the only French poet who is able to draw powerful effects from the "*refrain*."

As for Verlaine, in telling you (at my own

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risk) that he seems to me less literary than Villon, I do not wish to say *more naive*; the one is no more nai've than the other, and neither is more naive than La Fontaine; poets are nai've only when they are non-existent. I mean that the poetry peculiar to Verlaine, that of *La Bonne Chanson*, *Sagesse* and the rest, supposes at first glance less accumulated literature than that of Villon, which is moreover but an external aspect. This impression may be explained by the following remark: that the one comes at the beginning of a new era and at the end of the poetic art of the Middle Ages, that of allegories, moralities, romances and pious tales. Villon, to some extent, faces the approaching age, in which the production is to develop in full consciousness. The Renaissance is the birth of art for art's sake. Verlaine is quite the contrary; he comes from it, he goes beyond it, he escapes from Parnassus, he is, or believes himself to be, at the end of an esthetic paganism. He reacts against Hugo, against Leconte de Lisle, against Banville; he is on good terms with Mallarmé, but Mallarmé and he are two extremes, brought together solely by the fact of having nearly the same admirers and nearly the same adversaries.

This reaction obliges Verlaine to create a form quite opposed to that whose perfections have lost their appeal for him. . . . At times, he seems to feel his way along the syllables and the rhymes, and to seek the most musical expression of the moment. But he knows very well what he is doing, and even proclaims it; he decrees a poetic art, "*de la musique avant toute chose*" and for this he prefers liberty. . . . This decree is significant.

This *naïf* is an *organized* primitive, a primitive such as there had never been before, proceeding from a very skilful and very conscious artist. Nobody, among the authentic primitives, resembles Verlaine. Perhaps he was more exactly classified when he was treated, towards 1885, as a "decadent poet." Never has art been more subtle than this one, which implies that the poet is *fleeing* from one art—not leading up to another.

Verlaine, like Villon, finally constrains us to confess that the lapses in conduct, the struggle with a hard, uncertain life, the precarious state, the sojourns in prisons and in hospitals, the habitual drunkenness, the frequentation of low quarters, crime itself, are not in the least incompatible with the most delicate productions of the poetic

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spirit. If I were going to philosophize on this point, it would be necessary to stress here that the poet is not a particularly social being. Inasmuch as he is a poet, he belongs to no utilitarian organization. The respect of civil law expires on the threshold of the cellar where his verses are created. The greatest, Shakespeare as much as Hugo, have by preference conceived unorthodox characters, rebels to all authority, adulterous lovers, of whom they make heroes and "sympathetic characters." They are much less at their ease when they try to exalt virtue; the virtuous, alas, are poor subjects. The contempt of the bourgeois, which was instituted by the romantics and which has not been without producing certain political consequences, reduces itself, at bottom, to contempt of the regular life. The poet has, then, a certain "guilty conscience." But the instinct of morality always goes to roost somewhere. One sees in the worst rascals, in the most frightful environments, the reappearance of the rule that prescribes the law of the jungle. Among the poets, the code contains but a single article:

"Under penalty of poetic death" says our law, "be talented, and if possible . . . a little more"

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ONE SHOULD always apologize for speaking of painting.

But there are serious reasons for not keeping silent about it. All the arts live on words. Every work calls for an answer, and a "literature," written or not, spontaneous or meditated, is inseparable both from the force which drives man to produce and the productions resulting from this odd instinct.

Is not the first cause of a work of art a desire that it be talked of, if merely between a spirit and oneself? Is not a museum primarily a place for monologues? Remove the opportunity for an interior or exterior discourse from pictures, and immediately the most beautiful canvases in the world lose meaning and objective.

"Art criticism" is a literary category which condenses or amplifies, sharpens or shapes, or attempts to harmonize all that comes to mind in the presence of artistic phenomena. Its field extends from metaphysics to invective.

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But the artist often rejects, or thinks he can reject, a literary judgment. Degas, although at bottom a "thorough man of letters," professed a holy horror for our species insofar as it touched upon his craft. He was fond of citing Proudhon's gibes at "literary folk." I used to amuse myself by deliberately teasing him. I asked him to define drawing. "*You understand nothing about it,*" he would say. And he invariably ended with this apologue: the Muses perform their task, each for herself alone; they never talk to one another of their affairs. When the day is over there are no disputes, no comparisons of their respective industries. "They dance!" he would exclaim.

But I was well aware that the silence of painters before their easel is specious and vain. In fact, before their canvas-mirage, they indulge in endless discourses in which lyricism is mingled with coarseness—a whole *literature* refracted, repressed, sometimes reshaped, which, towards nightfall, bursts into a flood of *mots*, the most "*justes*" of which are far from being the least unjust.

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Yet literature sometimes plays a rather striking role behind the scenes of creation.

A painter who aspires to greatness, to liberty, to sureness; who demands of himself the powerful and gratifying sensation of *advancing*, of raising himself to higher spheres, of surprising himself by new developments of his views, by more ambitious combinations of *willy knowledge* and *power*—such a painter is led to sum up his experience, to be strengthened in his own "truths" as well as to define the vaster or more complex works of his dreams.

// is at this point that they write. Leonardo minutely describes battles and floods, Delacroix thinks and composes pen in hand, recording recipes and technical tricks. Corot, in his precious notebooks, repeats even his precepts for his own benefit. Simple as they are, he needs to see them solidified by writing; and thus by stages he increases his faith.

But with him, between life, sight and painting, there is little or no "intellectual" intermediary.

Ingres has *doctrines*, which he formulates in strange terms. He often enounces his imperious oracular statements by means of images.

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Delacroix has a fondness for *theory*.

Corot counsels only contemplation and work.

I may here remark that the artists who have sought to obtain from their art the most energetic action on the senses; who have employed intensity, contrasts, resonances, tones almost to excess; who have combined the acutest sensations; speculated on deep sensibility and its omnipotence, on the irrational connections of the superior centres with the "vague" and the "sympathetic"—which are our absolute masters—these were also the most "intellectual," the most given to discussion, the most stubborn estheticians.

Delacroix, Wagner, Baudelaire—all of them great theorists preoccupied with dominating the soul by means of the senses—dream only of irresistible effects which will intoxicate or overwhelm. They call on analysis to show them, in man, the keyboard on which to play with sureness, and they seek in abstract meditation the formulas which will permit them to influence their subject—the nervous and psychic part of man.

Nothing is more foreign to Corot than the con-

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cern of these violent, tormented minds, so anxious to reach and possess (in the diabolical sense) this weak concealed point of man which holds complete sway over him by way of the organic depths and the entrails. Their aim is to subdue us, Corot's to win us over to his way of feeling. He does not want to enslave. But he hopes to make us his friends, the companions of his enjoyment of a fine day, from dawn till dark.

Corot consults little, nor does he haunt the museums, where Delacroix goes to suffer, to be nobly jealous, to suspect secrets which he tries to sneak up on as one would do with a military or political secret. He hastens there to seek the solution of a problem with which his work had confronted him. Suddenly, from the rue de Furstenberg, dropping all his affairs, he has to run to the Louvre, to call on Rubens, feverishly to question Tintoretto, to discover in a corner of a canvas a trace of *preparation*, a little *underpainting* left uncovered, which explains many things.

Corot venerated the Masters. But he seems to have thought that their way of doing things was

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for them alone. Perhaps he deemed the ways of others might hinder rather than help him. He was not one of those whose infinite jealousy extended to everything that preceded them and whose ambition was to absorb all past grandeur—to combine the greatest of others with themselves. . . .

He believed simply in "nature" and "work."

In May, 1864, he wrote to Berthe Morisot: *Let us work hard and perseveringly; let us not think too much of Papa Corot; nature is an even better counsellor.*

There we have a very simple formula. He possessed a spirit of simplicity. But simplicity is by no means a method. On the contrary, it is an end, an ideal goal, implying the complexity of things and a quantity of possible viewpoints and experiments which have been reduced, exhausted—in short, replaced by a form or a formula essential for someone. Everyone has his moment of simplicity, situated somewhat late in his career.

The desire to attain simplicity in art is fatal when it attempts to be self-sufficient and incites

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us to dispense with toil. But Corot toiled, and toiled joyfully, all his life.

The "simple" is often associated with the "classic," a procedure which can be demonstrated to be entirely unsound but which, however, is permitted by the vagueness of both terms. Here is a little story to illustrate my point.

One of the greatest horsemen of all time, Baucher, received the post of equerry at Saumur from the Second Empire when he had grown old and poor. One day his favourite pupil, a brilliant young cavalry captain, came to visit him. Baucher said to him: "I am going to ride a little for you." He was put on his horse and crossed the grounds *at a walk*, then started back. Dazzled, the captain saw coming towards him a perfect Centaur. "There!" said the master. "I am not showing off. I am at the summit of my art: walking faultlessly."

As for the myth of "Nature" . . .

In the drama of the arts, Nature is a character

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appearing behind a thousand masks. She is everything and anything—all simplicity, all complexity. She escapes from the general view the same as she defies us in detail; she is a resource and an obstacle, mistress, servant, idol, enemy, accomplice—whether one copies her, interprets her, or browbeats her, composes her or reshapes her, whether one takes her as matter or as ideal. In every instance, she is next to, about the artist, with him, against him—and, in her own breast, opposed to herself.

Nature—a *dictionary* for Delacroix; for Corot, a *model*.

This difference, between the two painters, of the functions of *what is seen* should be meditated. Every artist has his own particular relations with the visible. Some devote themselves to reconstituting as faithfully as possible what they see. They believe there exists but one universal vision of the world. They assume it is seen by all as it is by them; and, holding steadfastly to this dogma, they put their whole heart into the elimination of sentiment from their works, of all inequality of per-

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sonal origin. They seek fame among those who are astonished by so much exactitude and end up by being interested in the man who has sunk himself in such a life-like creation.

Others, like Corot, although beginning like the first and, in general, keeping to the end a concern for the strict study of the objects to which they return from time to time to measure their patience and their submission, desire, however, to make us share their feelings for Nature and, in painting her, to paint themselves. Their concern is less to reproduce a model than to produce in us the impression it gives them. This entails a subtle combination of optic truth and of the real presence of sentiment. They proceed by accentuation or by sacrifices; they deepen or lighten their work; at times enriching the data, at times carrying their desire to the point of abstraction, sparing not even the forms.

Others—men like Delacroix—for whom Nature is a dictionary, derive from it the elements of composition. For them, Nature is in everything, an ensemble of the resources of their memory and of the materials of their imagination, documents ever present or nascent but incomplete or uncer-

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tain, which, once the mental spectacle is fixed by the sketch, the construction of their figures following the ardent representation of a given *women*ty they afterwards confirm or correct by direct observation.

Nature is a model for Corot; but a model on several grounds.

First, she represents to him the last word in precision as to light effects. When he comes to painting scenery swathed in mist, trees crowned with vapour, the evanescent forms will always imply the obnubilation of definite outline. The structure lies beneath the veil; not absent but deferred.

Besides, he is one of the painters who best observe the very face of the earth. Rock, sand, the fold of the soil, the modelled course of a road through the countryside, the flight of that continuous accident presented by the natural soil—all these are to him objects of the first importance. His tree grows and can live only in its place; a given tree at a given point. And this tree, so well rooted, is not only a specimen of a given species;

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it is an individual, has its unique history. With Corot, it becomes Someone.

Furthermore, for Corot, Nature is, *in its good places*, a model or example of the strange poetic value of certain arrangements of visible things. "Beauty" is one of the names of the universal, yet accidental value of a point of view.

The majority of the aspects of the world in which we live and move are indifferent to us or else of a definite importance. In the first case, we entirely neglect them; in the second, we respond to them by some clearly determined act which exhausts or annuls the effect of our perception. But it happens that certain other aspects of light affect us beyond all determination or classification and that there exists no act which exactly responds to them nor any vital function which is deeply influenced by them: hence the effects of this strange "emotion" are for us indefinable and give the notion of a certain "world" of which they seem to be the ever imperfect revelation, obtained by a caprice or by a happy coincidence. Thus a fa-

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vourable event mates us think of a whole life completely delightful.

The domain of hearing offers the clearest, simplest example of this. While the *noises* which reach our ears are either a matter of indifference to us or signs of something else present or imminent—which should be classified and may necessitate action—*sound*, hardly heard, stirs in us, not the vision or notion of exterior circumstances to be judged and dispatched in the duration of acts but a *state* or presentiment and awaited creation. We *know at once* that there exists within ourselves a "universe" of possible relations, in which music permits and constrains us to remain a certain time—as if the succession of chosen and commensurable sensations made us live a life of superior quality, nourishing us with pure energy.

Now in the same way there are aspects, forms, moments of the visible world, which *sing*. Rare are those who first distinguish this song. There are sites for which we have all seen admiration begin. Corot pointed out some of these. Soon everyone flocks to them; painters swarm there; they are de-

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graded by hotelkeepers, tourist agents and sight-seers.

Does the secret of a site's enchantment lie in a certain harmony of figures and light whose sway over us is as potent and unintelligible as that of a perfume, a look or the tone of a voice? Or does it lie in some vague echo of the emotions of the ancients—those who here and there deified the most conspicuous natural objects, as springs, rocks, summits, great trees, and who without knowing it made veritable artistic creations of them through the very act of isolating them and giving them names, and through the sort of life they communicated to them? This is the most ancient of the arts and consists simply of feeling an expression spring from an impression and a particular instant become a monument of memory—by the grace of a sunrise or a resplendent sunset, the elemental horror of a wood or exaltation on the heights whence are discovered the kingdoms of the earth.

But, if we cannot reason clearly about emotions of this sort, it is remarkable that we are less in-

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competent when it comes to reproducing them.

We have said that Corot wishes in the first place to serve under Nature, to obey her faithfully. But later, he coaxes her. Just as the instrument coaxed by the virtuoso little by little yields vibrations more exquisite and, as it were, nearer the secret recesses of its soul, thus, from transparent space, from the undulating, softly successive or clearly diversified Earth, from the Tree, from the Grove, from Factories and from all the hours of Light, we see Corot draw "charms" more and more comparable to those of music itself.

Certain among these sketches, such as *those light-hued proofs on papier sale, incomparably soft and translucent, where the bistre or purplish blu* brushwork is sometimes lit by exquisite glints of old gold*—as M. Jean Laran puts it with such apt emotion—refer so directly, so immediately, to Music—and even to what is most delicate and luminous in us—that sometimes a sudden invincible correspondence declares itself in the soul between one of these landscapes and a certain divine drawing of the voice or of the chords. A definite memory

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of themes or timbres emerges at the very moment when the eye lingers, abandoning itself to the prodigies of the etching-needle or the pencil.

What a surprise it is to *recognize* a charming passage from "Parsifal" (as has happened to me) while looking, enchanted, at one of Corot's plates!

At dawn, after an interminable night of torment and despair, King Amfortas, tortured by a strange sort of wound, mysteriously pleasure-inflicted on his soul and flesh, inseparably punished, had his litter carried out into the country. Impurity desired to breathe the morning freshness.

There are only a few measures but they are incomparable. Does not this ultimate marvel—this essence of dawn, all breeze and quivering leaves, seized miraculously by Wagner—imply still more experience and science—and more fully assimilated—a deeper transformation of a man into a master of his art, than the vast work completely based on the eternal recurrence of hieratic themes?

I claim that the artist ends with nature; but the nature of a new man. The spontaneous is the fruit of conquest. It belongs only to those who

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have acquired the certitude of their ability to conduct a work to extreme perfection, to keep the unity of its ensemble while realizing the separate parts and without losing its spirit or nature on the way. To such only may occasionally be given the chance of surprising and defining, in a few notes or strokes, *the soul of an impression*. At one and the same time, they show in this trifle of sonorous or graphic substance, the emotion of a moment and the profundity of a lifetime's science. They have the satisfaction of being the instruments of their supreme discoveries, and can now improvise in full possession of their power. They are enriched by what they have discovered, and find new desires in their hearts. They can proudly consider their whole career as accomplished between two states of happy facility: an initial facility—the awakening of the naive productive instinct which springs from the reveries of an alert, sensitive adolescence; and the second facility, or sentiment of a conquered liberty and simplicity, which permits the greatest play of the mind between senses and ideas. There results therefrom the *marvel of a superior improvisation*. Between the intentions and the

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means, between the conceptions of *substance* and the actions which give birth to *form*, there is no longer any contrast. Between the artist's thought and the matter of his art is born an intimate correspondence, *characterized by a reciprocity inconceivable to those who have never experienced it*. All this is defined in the two lines where Michael Angelo gives the formula of his sovereign ambition:

*Non ha l'ottimo Arthta alcun concetto
Ch'un marmo solo in se non circonscriva.*

Light and shade suffice for many visual expressions. It is said that Leibnitz, showing that all the numbers may be expressed by the sole use of Zero and the figure One, deduced therefrom a complete system of metaphysics; thus with *black* and *white* in the hands of a master.

But how black and white sometimes penetrate the soul more deeply than painting and how a work reduced to the play of light and shade touches us, renders us more profoundly pensive than the whole palette—this I cannot satisfactorily explain.

A remarkable circumstance: among the painters who most loved and best played the game of doing

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without colour, it is the "colourists" who are the winners—Rembrandt, Claude, Goya, Corot.

Moreover, all these painters are essentially *poets*.

The word "Poetry" designates an art of certain effects of language and little by little it has become extended to the state of *invention by means of emotion*, which this art supposes and attempts to communicate.

One says of a site, of a circumstance, and even of a person, that they are *poetic*.

[This state is one of resonance I want to say—but how say it?—that, the whole system of our sensitive and spiritual life being involved, there is produced a sort of harmonic and reciprocal liaison between our impressions, our ideas, our impulsions, our means of expression—as if all our faculties suddenly became mutually commensurable. In works of art this is marked by a mysteriously exact correspondence between the perceptible *causes*, constituting the *form*, and the intelligible *effects* which are the *substance*.

In this state, invention is as natural as excitement, dance and mimicry, and is to some extent

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their equivalent. A savage sings and dances before the spectacle which delights and exalts him, and thus expresses his mounting enchantment, while civilized man, in exchange for a beauty or a strangeness too deeply felt, can hardly utter more than a few *epithets*.

But the painter is immediately seized with a passion to paint.

All painters, however—I mean all the best—are not likewise poets.

One sees many admirable pictures which, while compelling attention by their perfections, nevertheless do not "sing."

It even happens that the *poet* is born late in a *painter* who, until then, was nothing more than a great artist. Such was Rembrandt who, from the highest rank, which he occupied from his very first works, finally rose above all ranks. In Corot, the poet appeared very early. Perhaps, towards the twilight of his life, this poet showed himself somewhat too much. He was too often compared with Virgil and La Fontaine and ended by yielding to the desire to be deliberately the artist to whom

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these literary comparisons applied *beyond a doubt*. Too many nymphs come to life too easily from his hands; too many vaporous groves fill facilely a quantity of canvases.

Painting cannot, without some danger, pretend to simulate the dream. The *Embarquement pour Cythere* does not seem to me to represent Watteau at his best. Turner's fairylands sometimes disenchant me.

Does anything exclude the dream state more than the act of drawing? Before a picture, I cannot more than obscurely imagine this act, which requires the fixity and the constancy of a certain point of view, the coordination of the hand, of the eye, the image and the *will*. The contrast between the sentiment of such energetic conditions of work and the appearance of dream—if such be the aim—is never entirely pleasing.

And then one must always beware of falling into the common modern error of confusing *dream* with *poetry*.

But black and white, the pencil, the lithograph, the etching (but not the line engraving), because

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of the apparent ease of the work and the license of construction and finish permitted them, are always much more favourable to the introduction of vagueness and suggestion than the play of the whole palette in plastic art.

Black and white are in a way nearer to intelligence and the act of writing; painting, nearer the perception of the real and always more or less tempted *to create an illusion*.

From these abstract means—the pen, the lead, the etching-needle—Corot draws marvels of space and light; trees more alive, clouds more mobile, wider horizons, or more solid earth, were never traced on paper.

Turning these wonderful pages makes us feel that this man lived in nature as a philosopher lives in his thought. The artist's observation is capable of attaining an almost mystic depth. Objects bathed in light lose their names; light and shade form odd systems and problems, unconnected with any science, which apply to no practice but derive their existence and value from certain strange harmonies between the soul, the eye and the hand of the person born to detect them in himself and bring them forth.

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I maintain there exists a sort of mysticism of sensation—that is, an "Exterior Life" of an intensity and depth at least equal to those we attribute to the inner gloom and spiritual light of ascetics, *sufis* and persons concentrated in God; all those who practise a policy of aloofness, fashioning a whole second life to which ordinary existence brings but embarrassments, interruptions, occasions for loss or resistance—and, moreover, all the images and means of expression without which the ineffable itself would be indistinguishable from the void. The world of sensations attacks the other and enriches it.

Sensation, for the most part, when it is neither isolated pain nor pleasure, is but a passing event or a sign. It is reduced to a beginning followed by nothing or to a "cause," the consequences of which are as different as are, for our intelligence, illuminated objects from the light which illumines them.

In the vast majority of cases, we seem to be unable either to dwell in the sensation or develop it in its own group. However, certain phenomena, held to be abnormal (because we cannot utilize them and because, on the contrary, they often

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hamper useful perception)—make us conceive of sensation as the first term of harmonious developments. In response to each colour, the eye produces another to balance it. Some quality which is analogous but far more subtle, seems to me to exist in the field of forms. I go so far as to think that *ornament*, in its essence, is a natural reaction of our senses to empty space, which they tend to adorn with what best satisfies their receptive function. Thus the man dying of thirst pictures to himself delicious beverages, and the lonely man in his ardour peoples the shades with fleshly forms.

The isolated sensation and its image are sometimes of an extraordinary power. They abruptly excite the creative instinct. I remember a striking passage in Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana*; a melomaniac has the impression of hearing a *sound* of an extraordinary intensity and purity, which he calls *Euphon* and which opens for him the infinite and peculiar Universe of hearing. By this sign, he knows that inspiration is approaching.

Claude Monet, some weeks after his operation for cataract, spoke to me of the moment when

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the steel was cutting the darkened crystal from his eye; he had, he said, the *revelation of a blue* of a cruel and incomparable beauty.

Certain *words* suddenly force themselves upon the poet and seem in the involved mass of the mind to orientate inspired recollections toward them; these demand, call or illuminate step by step the images and phonetic figures they need in order to justify their appearance and the obsession they create. They become germs of poems.

Thus in the plastic order the *man who sees* becomes and feels himself suddenly to be a *singing soul*; and his singing state rouses a need to produce, which tends to sustain and perpetuate the ability of the moment. A natural transport goes from enthusiasm to the desire for possession and urges the artist to re-create the thing he loves. Possession is *also* a form of knowledge, exhausting, in the action of creating a form, the passion for action the form engenders.

I do not know whether anyone today would refuse to recognize Corot as a *great artist*. In

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Painting, as in Letters, the "craft," brought into discredit by the intellectual inanity of those who last possessed it and overwhelmed by the audacity of those who did not, has fallen both in practice and opinion. The latter, moreover, is no longer what it was.

Thus, as far as I know, there is no one who would deny to Corot the science of his art; but we know from Baudelaire that he was judged quite otherwise in 1845.

Baudelaire writes:

"All the sciolists, after conscientiously admiring a picture by Corot and loyally paying it their tribute of praise, find that it is lacking in execution, and agree in this, that M. Corot definitely does not know how to paint."

(If Baudelaire had never had another style, one would agree in this, that he *definitely* did not know how to write.)

Baudelaire refutes the opinion of these "sciolists" by completely inaccurate arguments, wherein I regret to see nothing but plays on words.

I have touched on this question only to remind the reader what it implies and to suggest to him a rather profound reflection. The reproach made

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to Corot; the rejoinder of the great poet; the ultimate triumph of the work he defended—all these are so many indices or vestiges of the crisis which, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, began to affect art and the judgment of works of art. The foolish idea of opposing profound knowledge of the means of execution, as well as the observance of tried precepts and work carried skillfully and *methodically* to its completion (and a completion removed from individual fantasy) to the impulsive act of unusual sensibility, is one of the surest and most deplorable traits of the frivolity and weakness of character which marked the age of romanticism. The concern for the durability of works of art was already dwindling and yielding, in men's minds, to the desire to surprise; art saw itself condemned to go through a period of successive ruptures. There was born an automatism of boldness, which became as peremptory as tradition had been. Finally Fashion, which is high frequency change in the taste of a clientele, substituted its essential mobility for the slow formation of styles, schools and reputations. But to say that Fashion becomes responsible for the destiny

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of the Fine Arts practically amounts to saying that it becomes a business matter.

In spite of the critics, Corot saw his renown grow and his mastery over his art become recognized as the years passed.

This progress was not in his art alone. Landscape, his favourite subject, came more and more to interest art-lovers and, in the esteem of criticism and in public favour, to assume a rank comparable with the highest. Until then, it had been placed below historical painting, anecdote and portrait, exactly on a level with the still-life.

This hierarchical sentiment has become inconceivable. Who would not give hundreds of canvases overcrowded with saints and goddesses for a single Chardin or Corot? It must be admitted that, save from a sense of duty, we no longer admire that which obliges us to estimate the complexity of the problem and the rigorous conditions self-imposed by the artist. But we are right to like what we like—and we like that which requires the least special culture and acts on us in the direct way of natural objects. Yet—we are right only *in*

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each particular case. This is a proposition which requires some little explanation.

Modern taste, taking into account only the immediate pleasure of the eye, the point of view, the *amusement* of the sensibility—all the qualities of a painting *which can be expressed by comparisons*—has come to be completely satisfied with somewhat restricted experiments: three apples vigorously painted, *nudes* firm as walls or tender as roses, countrysides picked at random.

Although I too admire these scraps of beauty, I cannot help remembering that artists used to be able to fling twenty figures on a canvas or on a wall in the most varied postures and that neither fruit nor flowers nor trees nor architecture were lacking about them; nor remembering the truth of design, the distribution of light and the great concern with disposing this complete variety and solving, in the same work, problems of five or six entirely different kinds, from perspective to psychology. *Those artists were men.* They had acquired, through immense labour and continual reflection, *the right to improvise.* They conceived as if the difficulties of execution, those of the *mise en place*, of chiaroscuro, of colour, did not exist

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for them; thus they could put the whole power of their spirit into the composition, the part of painting in which invention is manifested.

Could anything be farther from us than the disconcerting ambition of a Leonardo, who considered Painting as a supreme goal or a supreme demonstration of knowledge, thinking that it demanded the acquisition of omniscience and not recoiling before a general analysis the depth and precision of which today amaze us?

The passage from the ancient grandeur of Painting to its present state is very noticeable in the work and writings of Eugene Delacroix. This modern man, seething with ideas, who constantly finds his limitations in his efforts to equal the masters of the past, is torn by restiveness and a feeling of impotence. Nothing better shows the diminished force and plenitude of the past than the example of this noble artist divided against himself and energetically fighting the last fight of the grand manner in art.

Did not the Corots, the Th. Rousseaus and the other admirable painters who, by their great tal-

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ent, caused the landscape to be accepted, triumph too completely? May they not have inured and enticed, only too successfully, our public and the artists to forget the "*haute école*"?

Landscape has its pitfalls. The first "pure" landscape artists composed. Corot continued to compose. One day, in the forest, someone, watching him paint, asked him anxiously: "*But where, Monsieur, do you see that fine tree you are placing here?*" Corot drew his pipe from his mouth and, without turning round, pointed with its stem to an oak *behind them*. . . .

But soon the *study* of nature, which was but a means, became the very end of art. "Truth" first became dogma; then "Impression." One no longer composed. Truth was formless. In every matter, to keep to the "truth," to build upon pure observation, has the paradoxical effect of leading to total inconsistency. Besides, it is clear that, if composition—that is, *reasoned choice*—was invented and so long demanded, it was to respond to some need—that of substituting for the unconscious conventions introduced by the simple imitation of what one sees, a conscious convention which (among other benefits) reminds the artist that to

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see or to conceive the beautiful is not the same thing as to make it seen and conceived.

In short, all reasoning henceforth spared the artist, all culture becoming for him worse than useless, every demand reduced to that of the reactions of the retina, forms more or less as they should be, and all the difficulties of detail scamped—an incredible ingenuity in the explanations and even excuses for these defeats—and all these evils extending by a kind of contagion of facility from landscape to the human figure; and finally the technical negligence to which the habit of immediate work in the country is only too favourable, the absence of preparations, the use of crude methods—such are, it seems to me, the rather regrettable effects of fine examples and admirable productions.

But the period would have it so. Painting is not alone to be considered in this baleful light. Just as landscape has succeeded in corrupting painting, so, in much the same fashion, description has modified the art of writing. A purely descriptive work (of which there are so many) *is, as a matter of*

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fact, only part of a work. However great the describer's talent, it is only able to bring into play a part of the mind: *an incomplete mind may be enough to do good work, even excellent work.*

Moreover, all description reduces itself to the enumeration of the parts or the aspects of a thing seen, and this inventory can be drawn up in any sort of order, which introduces a sort of chance into the execution. In general, one can reverse the successive propositions, and there is nothing to impel the author to give necessarily forms to those elements which are, to some extent, parallel. The narrative ceases to be anything more than a series of substitutions. Besides, such an enumeration may be as brief or as developed as one wishes. A hat may be described in twenty pages, a battle in ten lines. As seen in painting, the result of the evolution which has consisted in indefinitely diminishing the role of intellectual toil and in making the execution depend upon "sensibility" alone, has not been invariably happy. In all the arts, the sovereignty of mind over its moments has had to yield to those qualities of the artist which require the least power of coordination, of preliminary studies,

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of technical preparation, and, on the whole, of *character*.

All this, as I already said, was only made possible by the example of a few men of the first rank. Such men alone open up new roads: no less worth is needed to inaugurate a decadence than to bring things to an apogee.

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BAUDELAIRE is at the height of his glory.

The little volume, *Les Fleurs du Mai*, which contains less than three hundred pages, outweighs, in the esteem of the literary, the most illustrious and bulkiest works. It has been translated into most European languages: this is a fact on which I shall dwell a moment, for it is, I believe, without precedent in the history of French Letters.

French poets are generally little known and appreciated abroad. We are more readily accorded leadership in prose; but poetic mastery is but reluctantly conceded to us. The order and rigour which have reigned over our language since the seventeenth century, our particular accentuation, our strict prosody, our taste for simplification and direct clarity, our fear of overstatement and absurdity, a sort of modesty in our expression and the abstract tendency of our thought have resulted in a poetry which differs considerably from that

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of other nations and which generally makes it inaccessible to them. La Fontaine seems insipid to foreigners. Racine is a closed book. His harmonies are too subtle, his design is too pure, his language too elegant, too full of delicate light and shade, not to seem lifeless to those who have not an intimate knowledge of our tongue. Victor Hugo himself is scarcely known outside of France except by his novels.

But with Baudelaire, French poetry at length passes beyond our frontiers. It is read throughout the world; it takes its place as the characteristic poetry of modernity; it encourages imitation, it enriches countless minds. Men like Swinburne, Gabriele d'Annunzio and Stefan George bear magnificent witness to the Baudelairian influence in foreign countries.

Thus I can say that, though there may be French poets greater and more powerfully endowed than Baudelaire, there is none more *important*.

Whence comes this extraordinary importance? How has a man so peculiar, so far removed from the average as Baudelaire, been able to engender so widespread a movement?

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This great posthumous favour, this spiritual richness, this supreme glory, must depend not only upon his own value as a poet but also upon exceptional circumstances. Critical intelligence associated with poetic proficiency is such a circumstance. Baudelaire owes to this rare alliance a capital discovery. He was born sensual and exacting; he had a sensibility whose exigencies led him to make the most delicate formal experiments; but these gifts would doubtless have made him merely a rival to Gautier or an excellent Parnassian artist, had his mental curiosity not led him to the discovery of a new intellectual world in the works of Edgar Allan Poe. A demon of lucidity, a genius of analysis and an inventor of the newest, most seductive combinations of logic and imagination, of mysticism and calculation, a psychologist of the exceptional, a literary engineer who studied and utilized all the resources of art—thus Poe appeared to him, and filled him with admiration. So many original views and extraordinary promises enthralled him; his talent was transformed by them, his destiny magnificently changed.

I shall return shortly to the effects of this magic

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contact of two minds. But now I must consider a second remarkable circumstance of the moulding of Baudelaire.

He arrived at man's estate when romanticism was at its height; a dazzling generation was in possession of the empire of Letters. Lamartine, Hugo, Musset, Vigny were the masters of the day.

Place yourselves in the situation of a young man who came to the writing age in 1840. He has been brought up on the authors whom his instinct imperiously orders him to wipe out. His literary existence provoked and nourished by them, thrilled by their fame, determined by their works, is, however, necessarily dependent upon negation, upon the overthrow and replacement of those men who seemed to him to fill all fame's niches and to deny him: one, the world of forms; another, that of sentiments; a third, the picturesque; a fourth, profundity.

The point was to distinguish himself at any cost from a group of great poets whom some stroke of chance had exceptionally assembled in full vigour in the same period.

Baudelaire's problem then might, and probably should, be thus stated: "To be a great poet but to

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be neither Lamartine nor Hugo nor Musset." I do not say that these words were consciously uttered, but the thought must have existed in Baudelaire. It was even essentially Baudelaire. It was his *raison d'Etat*. In the domains of creation, which are also the domains of pride, the need to distinguish oneself cannot be separated from existence itself. Baudelaire wrote in the outline of his preface for the *Fleurs du Mai*: "*Illustrious poets have for long divided the richest provinces of the poetical domain among themselves. . . . Consequently, I shall do something else. . . .*"

In short, he is led, constrained, by the state of his soul and its environment, more and more clearly to oppose the system, or the absence of system, called romanticism.

I shall not define this term. To attempt to do so it would be necessary to have lost all sense of strictness. My present task is merely to reconstitute the most probable reactions and intuitions of our poet "at the state of birth," when confronted with the literature of his age. From it, Baudelaire received a certain impression which we may reconstitute without much trouble. Indeed, thanks to the se-

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quence of time and to later literary developments—thanks even to Baudelaire, to his work and its success—we possess a sure and simple means of introducing a little precision into our necessarily vague idea, sometimes accepted, sometimes wholly arbitrary, of romanticism. *This method consists in the observation of what followed romanticism, of what altered, corrected and contradicted it, and finally took its place.* It suffices to consider the movements and the works which were produced after and against it and which were inevitably, automatically, *exact responses* to what it was. Romanticism thus regarded was, then, what Naturalism countered and what Parnassus assembled its forces against; it was what determined Baudelaire's particular attitude. It was what roused almost simultaneously against itself the will to perfection—the mysticism of "art for art's sake"—the demand for observation and an impersonal recording of things; the *desire, in a word, of a more solid substance and of a subtler, purer form.* Nothing throws more light on the Romantics than the ensemble of the programmes and tendencies of their successors.

Can it be that the vices of romanticism are only

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the excesses inseparable from self-confidence? . . . The adolescence of new things is always somewhat pretentious. Wisdom, calculation and, in a word, perfection appear only when strength comes to be economized.

However this may be, the period of scruples began with Baudelaire's youth. Gautier had already protested and reacted against the slackness in formal conditions and the indigence or imprecision of the language. Soon, each in his own way, Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert and Leconte de Lisle were to take arms against impassioned facility, stylistic inconsistency and the excesses of silliness and eccentricity. . . . Parnassians and realists consented to lose in apparent intensity, in abundance, in oratorical dynamism, what they gained in depth, in truth, in technical and intellectual quality.

To sum up, I will say that the replacing of romanticism by these diverse "schools" may be regarded as the substitution of reflective for spontaneous action.

The romantic output, *in general*, ill supports a slow and unsympathetic reading by a difficult and refined reader.

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Baudelaire was such a reader. Baudelaire had the greatest interest—a vital interest—in picking out, in calling attention to, in exaggerating all the weaknesses and lapses of romanticism observed at close quarters in the work and personalities of its greatest men. *Romanticism is at its apogee*, he might say; *consequently it is mortal*; and he was able to consider the gods and demigods of the day, much as the suspicious eyes of Talleyrand and Metternich, about 1807, regarded the world's master. . . .

Thus Baudelaire regarded Victor Hugo, and it is not impossible to conjecture what he thought of him. Hugo reigned; he had acquired over Lamartine the advantage of infinitely more powerful and more precise *working materials*. The vast range of his diction, the diversity of his rhythms, the superabundance of his images, crushed all rival poetry. But his work sometimes made concessions to the vulgar, lost itself in prophetic eloquence and infinite apostrophes. He flirted with the crowd, he indulged in dialogues with God. The simplicity of his philosophy, the disproportion and incoherence of the developments, the frequent contrasts between the marvels of detail and the fragility of

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the subject, the inconsistency of the whole—everything, in a word, which could shock and thus instruct and orientate a pitiless young observer towards his future personal art—all these things Baudelaire was to note in himself and separate from the admiration forced upon him by the magic gifts of Hugo, the impurities, the imprudences, the vulnerable points in his work—that is to say, the possibilities of life and the opportunities for fame which so great an artist left to be gleaned.

With some malice and a little more ingenuity than is called for, it would be only too tempting to compare Victor Hugo's poetry with Baudelaire's, with the object of showing how exactly *complementary* the latter is to the former. I shall say no more. It is evident that Baudelaire sought to do what Victor Hugo had not done; that he refrained from all the effects in which Victor Hugo was invincible; that he returned to a prosody less free and scrupulously removed from prose; that he pursued and almost always captured the production of *unbroken charm*, the inappreciable and quasi-transcendent quality of certain poems—but a quality seldom encountered, and rarely in its

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pure state, in the immense work of Victor Hugo.

Moreover, Baudelaire did not know, or barely knew, the last Victor Hugo, the creator of extreme errors and supreme beauties. *La Légende des Siècles* appeared two years after *Les Fleurs du Mai*. As for Hugo's later works, these were published only long after Baudelaire's death. I attribute to them a technical importance infinitely superior to that of all Hugo's other poems. This is not the place, and I have not the time, to develop this opinion. I shall only sketch a possible digression. What strikes me in Victor Hugo is his incomparable vital energy. Vital energy is longevity and capacity for work *combined*—longevity *multiplied by* the capacity for work. During more than sixty years, this extraordinary man was at his desk every day from five o'clock till noon! He unremittingly sought to bring about new combinations of language, to will them, to solicit them and to have the satisfaction of hearing them respond. He wrote one hundred or two hundred thousand lines of poetry and acquired by that uninterrupted exercise a curious manner of thinking which superficial critics have judged as best they could. But, in the course of this long career, Hugo never wearied of realizing

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and fortifying himself in his art; and he unquestionably sinned more and more against selection, he lost more and more the feeling for proportions, he clogged his verses with indeterminate words, vague and vertiginous, and he studded them so abundantly and facilely with "the abyss," "the infinite," "the absolute," that these monstrous terms lost even the appearance of profundity which usage had given them. Yet, what stupendous poems he wrote in the last period of his life—poems incomparable in extent, in external organization, in resonance, in plenitude! In the *Corde d'Airain*, in *T)ieu*, in the *Fin de Satan*, in the piece on the death of Gautier, the seventy-year-old artist—who had seen all his rivals die, had seen a whole generation of poets born of himself and would even have profited by the inappreciable lessons that the pupil would have given the master had the master lived—attained the highest point of poetic power and of the noble science of versification.

Hugo never ceased to learn by practice; Baudelaire, the span of whose life scarcely exceeded the *half* of Hugo's, developed in quite another manner. One would say he had to compensate for the

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probable brevity and foreshadowed insufficiency of the short space of time he had to live, by the employment of that critical intelligence of which I spoke above. A score of years were vouchsafed him to attain the peak of his own perfection, to discover his personal field and to define a specific form and attitude which would carry and preserve his name.¹ Time lacked to realize his literary ambitions by numerous experiments and an extensive output of works. He had to choose the shortest road, to limit himself in his gropings, to be sparing of repetitions and divergencies. [He had therefore to seek by means of analysis what he was, what he could do and what he wished to do; and to unite, in himself, with the spontaneous virtues of a poet, the sagacity, the skepticism, the attention and reasoning faculty of a critic/]

This is why Baudelaire, although originally a romantic, and even a romantic by taste, sometimes appears as a *classic*. There are infinite ways of defining the classic, or of thinking to define him. For today we shall adopt this one: *a classic is a*

¹ *Je te donne ces vers afin que si mon nom
Aborde heureusement aux époques lointaines. . . .*

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writer who carries a critic within him and who associates him intimately with his work. There was a Boileau, or an image of Boileau, in Racine.

After all, what was there to *choose* in romanticism and how was there to be discerned in it a good and an evil, a false and a true, weaknesses and virtues, unless one were to treat the authors of the first half of the nineteenth century as the men under Louis XIV treated the authors of the sixteenth? *Every classicism assumes a preceding romanticism.* All the advantages that are attributed to "classic" art, all the objections that are made to it, are related to this axiom. *The essence of classicism is to come after.* Order assumes a certain disorder to be overcome. *Composition*, which is artifice, follows some primitive chaos of natural intuitions and developments. *Purity* is the result of infinite operations on the language, and the pursuit of *form* is nothing but the meditated reorganization of the means of expression. Classic consequently implies voluntary, concerted acts which modify "natural" production in conformance with a *clear* and *rational* conception of man and art. But, as the sciences have taught us, we can make a rational work and construct in orderly

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fashion only by means of a group of *conventions*. Classic art is recognized by the existence, the clearness, the absolutism of these conventions. Whether it is a matter of the three unities, of the prosodic precepts or of verbal restrictions, these apparently arbitrary rules constitute its force and its weakness. Little understood today and now difficult to defend and almost impossible to observe, they none the less arise from an ancient, subtle and deep understanding of the conditions of *unmixed* intellectual enjoyment.

Baudelaire, in the midst of romanticism, reminds us of some classic, but he merely reminds and nothing more. He died young, and he moreover lived under the execrable impression given to men of his time by the miserable survival of the old classicism of the Empire. It was in no sense a question of breathing life into what was distinctly dead but, perhaps, of reaching by other means the soul which no longer inhabited the corpse.

The romantics had neglected practically everything demanding concentrated thought. They sought the effects of shock, enthusiasm and contrast. Neither measure nor rigour nor depth tormented them excessively. They were averse from

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abstract thinking and from reasoning—and not only in their works, but also in the preparation of their works, which is infinitely more serious. The French seemed to have forgotten their analytical talents. It is fitting to note here that the romantics revolted against the eighteenth century much more than against the seventeenth and readily brought charges of superficiality against men infinitely more learned than they ever were themselves—more curious of facts and ideas, more anxious for precision and for thought on a grand scale.

At a time when science was about to undergo extraordinary developments, romanticism manifested an anti-scientific state of mind. Passion and inspiration are persuaded that they are self-sufficient.

But, under quite another sky, in the midst of a population wholly occupied with its material development, still indifferent to the past, organizing its future and giving the most complete liberty to experiments of every kind, there appeared about this time, a man who was to consider the things

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of the mind with a clearness, a sagacity, a lucidity which had never been encountered to such a degree in a head endowed with poetic invention. And among these things was literary production. Until Poe, never had the problem of literature been examined in its premises, reduced to a psychological problem and approached by means of an analysis where the logic and the mechanics of effects were deliberately employed. For the first time, the relations between the work and the reader were elucidated and given as the positive foundations of art. This analysis—and this⁴ circumstance assures us of its value—applies and is verified as clearly in every domain of literary production. The same observations, the same distinctions, the same quantitative remarks, the same directive ideas adapt themselves equally to works destined to act powerfully and brutally on the emotions—to conquer a public in love with strong emotions or strange adventures—and the most refined types of literature and the delicate organization of the poet's creations.

To say that this analysis holds good for the short story as well as for the poem, that it is as applicable to the construction of the imaginary and fantastic

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as it is in the reconstitution and literary representation of the probable, is to say that its generality is truly remarkable. A characteristic of what is really general is its fecundity. To arrive at a point from which one dominates a whole field of activity is necessarily to perceive a quantity of possibilities—unexplored domains, roads to be traced, lands to be exploited, cities to be built, relations to be established, methods to be extended. Thus it is not astonishing that Poe, possessing so effective and sure a method, should be the inventor of several different varieties, should have offered the first and most striking example of the scientific tale, of the modern cosmogonic poem, of the novel of criminal investigation, of the introduction into literature of morbid psychological states, and that all his work should manifest on every page an intelligence which is to be observed to the same degree in no other literary career. This great man would today be completely forgotten had not Baudelaire introduced him into European literature. Let us not fail to observe here that Poe's universal glory is weak or contested only in his native country and England. (This Anglo-Saxon poet is strangely neglected by his own race.

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Another remark: *Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe exchanged values*. Each gave to the other what he had, received from the other what he had not. The latter communicated to the former a whole system of new and profound thought. He enlightened him, he enriched him, he determined his opinions on a quantity of subjects: philosophy of composition, theory of the artificial, comprehension and condemnation of the modern, importance of the exceptional and of a certain strangeness, an aristocratic attitude, mysticism, a taste for elegance and precision, even politics. . . . Baudelaire was impregnated, inspired, deepened by them.

But, in exchange for what he had taken, Baudelaire gave Poe's thought an infinite extension. He proffered it to the future. It was Baudelaire's act, translation, prefaces, that opened this expansion which, in Mallarme's great line,² changes the poet in himself, and assured it to the shade of the unhappy Poe.

I shall not examine all that Letters owe to the influence of this marvellous inventor. Whether we take Jules Verne and his disciples, Gaboriau and his

² *Tel qu'en Lui-mSme enfin l'eternite le change.* . . .

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like, or whether, in far more elevated styles, we consider the productions of Villiers de Plsle-Adam or of Dostoievsky, it is easy to see that the *Adventures of J. Gordon Pym*, the *Mystery of the Rue Morgue*, *Ligeia*, the *Tell-Tale Heart*, have been for them models abundantly imitated, thoroughly studied and never surpassed.

I only wonder what Baudelaire's poetry, and more generally French poetry, may owe to the discovery of the works of Poe. Some poems in *Fleurs du Mai* derive their sentiment and their material from Poe's poems. Some contain lines which are exact transpositions; but I shall neglect these particular borrowings whose importance is, in a sense, merely local. I shall retain but the essential, which is the very idea that Poe had formed of poetry. His conception, which he set forth in various articles, was the principal factor in the modification of Baudelaire's ideas and art. The fermentation of this theory of composition in Baudelaire's mind, the lessons which he deduced from it, the developments it received from his intellectual posterity—and particularly its great intrinsic value—necessitate our stopping a moment to examine it.

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I shall not conceal the fact that the basis of Poe's thoughts is associated with a certain personal metaphysical system. But this system, if it directs and dominates and suggests the theories in question, by no means penetrates them. It engenders them and explains their generation; it does not constitute them.

Poe's ideas on poetry are expressed in several essays, the most important of which (but that which least concerns the technique of English verse) is entitled *The Poetic Principle*. Baudelaire was so deeply struck by this essay, he received so intense an impression from it, that he considered its contents—and not only the contents but the form itself—as *his own property*.

Man cannot help appropriating what seems so exactly made *for him* that, in spite of himself, he regards it as made *by him*. . . . He tends irresistibly to take over what suits his own person so closely; and language itself confuses, under the name of *possession*, the notion of what is adapted to someone and satisfies him entirely, with that of this person's property. . . .

Baudelaire, although enlightened and obsessed by the theory of *The Poetic Principle*—or, rather,

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because he was enlightened and possessed by it—did not include his translation of this essay in Poe's own works, but introduced the most interesting part, scarcely changed, in the preface to his translation of the *Histoires Extraordinaire*. This plagiarism would be open to discussion if the author had not himself, as will be seen, drawn attention to it: in an article on Theophile Gautier,⁸ he reproduced the whole passage in question, preceding it with these very plain and surprising lines: *It is occasionally permissible, I believe, to quote oneself in order to avoid paraphrasing oneself. I shall consequently repeat.* . . . Then follows the borrowed passage.

What then were Poe's views on Poetry?

I shall briefly resume his ideas. He analyses the psychological requirements of a poem. Among these, he puts in the first rank, the ones which depend upon the *dimensions* of poetical works. He gives exceptional importance to the consideration of their length. He moreover examines the very conception of these works. He easily establishes that there exists a great number of poems concerned with notions for which prose would have

³ In *L'Art Romantique*.

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been an adequate vehicle. Neither history, science nor morality gains by being set forth in the language of the soul. Didactic poetry, historical poetry or ethics, although honored and consecrated by the greatest poets, strangely combine the materials of discursive or empirical knowledge with the creations of the inner being and the emotive forces.

Poe understood that modern poetry should conform to the tendency of an age which drew a sharper and sharper distinction between forms and provinces of activity. He understood that it could claim to realize its own object and produce itself, to some degree, in a *pure state*.

Thus, by analysing the requirements of poetic delight and defining *absolute poetry* by *exhaustion*, Poe showed a way and taught a very strict and fascinating doctrine in which he united a sort of mathematics with a sort of mysticism. . . .

If we now regard *Les Fleurs du Mai* as a whole and take the trouble to compare this volume with other poetic works of the same period, we shall not be surprised to find that Baudelaire's work is re-

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markedly consistent with Poe's precepts and consequently remarkably different from the productions of romanticism. *Les Fleurs du Mai* contains neither historical nor legendary poems; nothing based upon a narrative. There are no flights into philosophy. Politics here make no appearance. Descriptions are rare and always *pertinent*. But all is charm, music, powerful, abstract sensuality. . . . *Luxe, forme et volupté*.

In Baudelaire's best poems there is a combination of flesh and spirit, a mixture of solemnity, warmth and bitterness, of eternity and intimacy, a most rare alliance of will with harmony, which distinguishes them clearly from romantic verse as it distinguishes them clearly from Parnassian verse. Parnassus was not excessively kind to Baudelaire. Leconte de Lisle reproached him with sterility. He forgot that a poet's true fecundity does not consist in the number of his poems but rather in the extent of his effects. They can be judged only in time sequence. We see today that the resonance, after more than sixty years, of Baudelaire's unique and far from copious work, still fills the whole poetic sphere, that it is still influential, impossible to neglect, reinforced by a remarkable number of

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works which derive from it and which are not imitations but the consequences of it. Consequently, to be just, it would be necessary to join to the slender collection of *Les Fleurs du Mai* several first-rate works and a number of the most profound and finest experiments that poetry has ever undertaken. The influence of *Poemes Antiques* and *Poemes Barbares* has been less diverse and less surprising.

It must be recognized, however, that this same influence, had it been exerted on Baudelaire, would perhaps have dissuaded him from writing or from retaining some very slack verses which are to be found in his book. Out of the fourteen lines of the sonnet *Kecueillement*, one of his most charming pieces, there are five or six which, to my never-failing surprise, are undeniably weak. But the first and last verses of this poem are so magical that we do not feel the ineptitude of the central part and are quite ready to hold it for null and void. Only a very great poet can effect a miracle of this kind.

A minute ago I spoke of the production of *charm*, and now I have pronounced the word *miracle*. Doubtless these are terms which must be used sparingly because of the emphasis of their

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meaning and the facility with which they may be employed; but I should not know how to replace them except by an analogy so long and perhaps so debatable that I shall perhaps be forgiven for sparing him who would have to make it, as well as those who would have to listen to it. I shall remain vague, confining myself to suggesting what it might be. It should be shown that language contains emotive resources mingled with its practical, directly significant properties. The duty, the work, the function, of the poet are to bring out and render active these forces of movement and enchantment, these stimulants of the emotional life and intellectual sensibility, which are mixed together in the customary language with the signs and means of communication of ordinary superficial life. Thus the poet consecrates himself to and consumes himself in the task of defining and constructing a language within the language; and this operation, which is long, difficult and delicate, which demands a diversity of mental qualities and is never finished, tends to constitute the speech of a being purer, more powerful and profound in his thoughts, more intense in his life, more elegant and felicitous in his speech, than any real person.

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This extraordinary speech manifests itself and is recognized by the rhythm and harmonies which sustain it, and which should be so intimately and even mysteriously bound to its origin that the sound and the sense can no longer be separated, responding to each other indefinitely in the memory.

Baudelaire's poetry owes its duration and the ascendancy it still has to the plenitude and the unusual clearness of its timbre. At times, this voice yields to eloquence, as happened a little too frequently in the case of the poets of the period; but it almost always retains and develops an admirably pure melodic line and a perfectly sustained sonority which distinguish it from all prose.

Baudelaire, in this, reacted very happily against the tendency to prosaic style which has been observable in French poetry since the middle of the seventeenth century. It is remarkable that the man to whom we owe this return of poetry to its essence is also one of the first French writers to be passionately interested in music. I mention this taste, which was shown by the celebrated articles on *Tannhdmer* and *Lohengrin*, because of the later development of the influence of music upon

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literature. . . . "What was baptized Symbolism is summed up quite simply in the intention common to several families of poets to take back from music what belonged to them. . . . "

To render less imprecise and less incomplete this attempt to explain Baudelaire's importance today, I must now recall what he was as an art critic. He knew Delacroix and Manet. He sought to weigh the respective merits of Ingres and his rival, as he had compared the quite different "realisms" of Courbet and Manet. For the great Daumier he had an admiration which posterity shares. Perhaps he exaggerated the value of Constantin Guys. But, on the whole, his judgments, invariably motivated and accompanied by the finest and most substantial considerations on painting, remain models of their kind, which is so terribly facile, hence so terribly difficult.

But Baudelaire's greatest glory, as I have shown at the outset, is without question to have inspired several great poets. Neither Verlaine, nor Mallarmé, nor Rimbaud would have been what they were had they not read *Les Fleurs du Mai* at the decisive age. It would be easy to point in this collection to poems of which the form and the in-

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spiration foreshadow certain pieces by Verlaine, Mallarme or Rimbaud. But these are so clear that I shall not enter into details. I shall confine myself to indicating that the sense of the intimate and the powerful, uneasy mixture of mystical emotion and sensual ardour which are developed in Verlaine; the frenzy for evasion, the impatience excited by the universe, the deep consciousness of sensations and their harmonic resonances which render Rimbaud's brief, violent work so energetic and active, are clearly present and recognizable in Baudelaire.

As for Stephane Mallarme, whose earliest poems might be taken for the most beautiful and compact of *Les Fleurs du Mai*, he pursued in their subtlest consequences the formal, technical experiments of which Poe's analyses and Baudelaire's essays and commentaries had communicated to him the passion and taught him the importance. While Verlaine and Rimbaud continued Baudelaire in the order of sentiment and sensation, Mallarme carried his work forward in the province of perfection and poetic purity.

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To Monsieur Jules Cambon, Ambassador of France

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I HAVE just finished re-reading a *Lucien Leuwen* which is not altogether the one I was so fond of thirty years ago. I have changed and it is changed. I hasten to say that the second *Leuvuen*, which reforms, augments and improves the first, develops, after reviving it, the delicious memory of the early reading. But I do not repudiate my pleasure of yore.

Some opinions have been harsh for Jean de Mitty, who was the first editor of *Leuwen*, about 1894. I admit the text he offered us at that time will henceforth appear a regrettable text, shortened, probably rather seriously altered; and I am not unaware that Mitty himself gave cause for severe judgments, which were not limited to this publication but were directed against him personally. But, for my part, I still find myself in his debt, and I will risk saying a bit of good of him

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here. We met at Stephane Mallarme's, where he quite frequently came on Tuesday evenings. It happened more than once that, when leaving these cherished gatherings, we walked down the long, ill lit rue de Rome to the radiant centre of Paris, discussing Napoleon and Stendhal.

At that period, I was ardently reading the *Vie d'Henri Brulard* and the *Souvenirs d'Egotisme*, which I preferred to the celebrated novels, *Le Rouge et le Noir* and even *La Chartreuse de Parme*. Plots and incidents mattered little to me. I was interested only in the living system to which each incident refers, the makeup and reactions of some man—if in any *plot*, the inner plot. Mitty was then preparing—adapting, if you will—the little volume of *Lucien Lewwen* which he sent me as soon as it was published by Dentu. This book gave me extreme pleasure. I was one of the first to read it and I went about praising it everywhere.

Until then, I had read nothing on love which did not bore me exceedingly and appear absurd or worthless. I placed love so high and so low in my youth that I found nothing strong enough or true

enough or harsh enough or tender enough in the most illustrious works. But in *Leuiven*, the extraordinarily delicate drawing of *Madame de Chasteller's* portrait, the noble and profound character of the hero's sentiment, the progress of an attachment which becomes all-powerful in a sort of silence; and the consummate art of holding it in, of keeping it uncertain of itself—all this captivated me and led me to re-read the book. Perhaps I had my reasons for being somewhat intimately touched by these indefinable qualities. Moreover, I was astonished to be touched; for I did not suffer, and I scarcely suffer now, from being beguiled by a written work to a point where I no longer clearly distinguish my own affections from those communicated to me by an author's craftsmanship. I see the pen and him who holds it. I care little for his emotions, I have no need of them. I ask him only to instruct me as to his means. But *Lucien Leuwen* performed in me the miracle of a confusion which I loathe.

As to the picture of provincial, Parisian, military, political, parliamentary and electoral life, and

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the charming caricature of the first years of the reign of Louis-Philippe, vivid and brilliant comedy, sometimes light comedy—as the *Chartreuse de Parme* sometimes suggests operetta—it provided me entertainment sparkling with traits of character and ideas.

Tender and vivid was my impression of the first *Leuiven*. Why not show a trifle of gratitude to the shade of that poor Mitty to whom I owe a few delightful hours? I was carried away by this primitive and imperfect *Leuwen* which I obtained from him. I shall not again re-read his vulnerable version. It affords me, however, a pretext for a few friendly words of farewell to this first text and the man who published it.

Hardly do I write the words, "light comedy" and "operetta," than I feel that the reader may be shocked. Doubtless he will dislike the mixture of literary castes, surprised to see Stendhal, praised by Taine and by Nietzsche, Stendhal almost a philosopher, placed side by side with mere wits. But truth and life are disorder; affiliations and relationships which are not surprising lack reality. I

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believe, then, that there is a certain road which perhaps leads from Stendhal, by M[^]rimee and the Musset of *Fantasio*, to the minor plays of the Second Empire and Meilhac's and Halevy's princes and conspirators. In that case, this capricious thread would come from afar. (But in the sphere of the mind everything comes from everything and goes everywhere.)

Stendhal, lover of *opera-bnffa*, must have delighted in Voltaire's little novels, immortal marvels of alertness, of activity and of terrible fantasy. In those nimble, cruel works, where satire, opera, ballet, the art of the pamphleteer and ideology? combine, in an infernal movement, the fables which were the scandalous delight of the end of the reign of Louis XV, may not an alert mind see the elegant forerunners of the operettas which formed the pitiless amusement of the last days of Napoleon III? I never re-read the *Princesse de Babylone*, *Zadig*, *Babouky*, *Candide*, without hearing a music a thousand times wittier, more critical and more diabolical than that of Offenbach and his like. . . .

In a word, I dare think that *Ranuce-Ernest*

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might have reigned at the Varietes and *Doctor Du Poirier* practised at the Palais-Royal.

Happily, Beyle received from the century in which he was born the priceless gift of vivacity. Ponderous prepotency and boredom never had prompter adversary. Classics and romantics, between whom he moved and glittered, irritated his zest for precision. He would have been amused (but at bottom flattered) had he been given a glimpse in a crystal globe of all his doctoral future. He would have seen in the enchanted water his formulas become theses, his manias turn into precepts, his witticisms develop into theories. He would have seen whole doctrines springing from himself, interminable commentaries deduced from his brief maxims. His favourite motives, *Napoleon*, *love*, *energy*, *happiness*, have given birth to volumes of exegesis. The philosophers have taken a hand, erudition has focussed its magnifying eye on the most insignificant items of his life, on his scribblings, on his tradesmen's bills. A sort of naively mysterious idolatry venerates the name and the relics of this iconoclast. His eccentricities have inevitably inspired imitation. The exact opposite of himself, of his independence, of his caprice, of his

love of contradiction, is born of him. There is much that is unexpected in the ways of fame. Fame is always mystical, even the fame of atheists.

The victim of his father and of the respectable, serious folk who bound or bored him—the unenslaved slave of those ponderous workers of the Conseil d'Etat, the pillars of the Empire, consultants, chairmen of parliamentary committees, whose duty it was ceaselessly to feed the master's fever resulting from the needs of an immense France and of a continually critical situation, with their nutriment of responses, of detailed rules, of figures, decisions and explanations. He had intimately known, noted, punctured and railed at the stupidities and virtues of the men in high places; observed their venality, their thirst for advancement, their obscure and puerile calculations, their meticulous futility, their taste for eloquence and importance, the obstacles they set up for themselves and for others; their incredible courage before those mountains of documents, those columns of figures which crushed the soul without enriching the intellect, those infinite clerical ac-

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counts which gave those in power the illusion of existing, knowing, foreseeing and acting. Beyle always opposes some unspoiled youth and some man of wit to those monsters of drudgery, of nonsense, of cupidity, dryness, hypocrisy and envy of whom he has so often painted the faces, the characters and the actions. He conceived out of his disgusts, he assured himself, by himself, that true value can be separated from vanities, from official papers, lies, solemnity and the automatic. He had remarked that these important men, so necessary to the smooth working of affairs, were ineffectual and speechless before the unexpected. A State which has not some improvisers in reserve, is a State without sinews. Everything which advances quickly menaces it, and it is annihilated by the first thing that has not been foreseen.

It is easy to see in reading Beyle that he would have liked to amuse himself by handling important affairs. He loves creating men with clear, brief judgments, with instantaneous retorts of *the same duration* as the events, as abrupt, as surprising as the surprises—ministers or bankers who lead, settle or pass through circumstances, who combine the agreeable with the profound, and who mingle

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cunning and pertinence. One feels clearly that he himself is in them, that he lightly intrigues or governs beneath their masks, and that, moreover, in creating them, he avenges himself for not being what they are. Every writer compensates himself as best he can for some wrong done him by fate.

The value of many men of worth depends upon the variety of individuals whom they feel themselves capable of being. Henri Beyle, capable of being a good prefect of the 1810 type, was none the less an intractable man, forever attacking what was most respectable. This sceptic believes in love. This unruly fellow is a patriot. This abstract scholiast is interested in painting (or strives or pretends to be interested in it). He poses as a Positivist, and he becomes a mystic of passion.

Do, perhaps, the increase of self-consciousness and of constant self-observation lead one to find oneself, to render oneself many-sided? The spirit multiplies among its possibilities, detaches itself at each instant from what it has just been, receives what it has just said, flies to the opposite, answers itself and awaits the result. In Stendhal, I find the movement, the fire, the rapid reflexes, the elastic

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tone, the honest cynicism of those admirable comedians, Diderot and Beaumarchais. To know oneself is to foresee oneself; to foresee oneself amounts to playing a part. Beyle's consciousness is a stage, and there is a great deal of the actor in this writer. His work is full of remarks addressed to the spectators. His prefaces speak to the public as before the curtain, wink, make the reader signs of complicity, try to convince him that he is the least stupid man in the audience, that he is in the secret of the farce, that he alone grasps the real meaning. "Only you and I are in the know!" they say.

This has done marvels for Stendhal's posthumous fame. It flatters his reader's pride.

Beyle cannot keep from directly animating his works. He itches to be on the stage himself, to return to it on every occasion. In person he manages his marionettes, of whom he composes a very complete social company, the parts being definitely assigned, as in the theatre of the past. He produces lovers, grey-beards, prelates, diplomatists, students, republicans and guardsmen. These types are more conventional than Balzac's, thus more recogniz-

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able. He sees their ideas more than their thought, their sentiments more than their motives and their mundane function. For him, Napoleon (for example) is a hero; he is a model of energy, of imagination, of will power, a great soul endowed with a marvellously clear intellect, a lover of ideal grandeur, adoring power and glory with passion *a la Stendhal*. But Balzac sees the organizer and the Empire, the *Code Civil*, the Revolution accomplished, consolidated, mastered, society re-established, the legend issuing from history and, by the mass-compelling efficacy of the myth, invading the political domain.

Beyle perceived the classical traits of Napoleon, his Italian aspect, his characteristics, so boldly marked, in which he finds Rome and Florence, Caesar and the Condottiere. Balzac considers principally the Emperor of the French.

If one were interested, it is plain that this parallel of Balzac and Stendhal might be conceived and pursued with a certain show of reason. Both take the same age and the same social substance as their material. They are two imaginative observers of the same subject. . . .

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All Stendhal's characters have this common vice or virtue: on every occasion, they can only manifest—each according to his aspect or his estate—some antipathy or sympathy felt by their creator. Occasionally, the artist seems to cherish his aversions. Without knowing it, we love what we take pleasure in tormenting. He charges and brands them, stabs or rends them with delight. He comes back to them, he takes infinite zest in mocking at their stupidity, their basenesses, their calculations. There is no one in this gallery who is not more or less railed at; no one who does not deceive or who is not deceived—or both at the same time, which is the usual case. Even those he prefers are victims of their tender heart and dupes of the Beautiful.

It is not quite clear why Stendhal did not devote himself to the theatre, to which everything destined him. Doubtless the epoch was not yet one which Beyle's plays and comedies would have pleased.

But, being an author and at the same time an intimate actor, he erects a stage in his mind—or in his soul or brain—(the word matters little, the main point being to designate the sort of place-time where occurs that which no one else sees—

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where what is seen is little distinct from what is wished for or accomplished).

On these private boards he unceasingly presents the spectacle of Self; he perpetually dramatizes his life, his career, his loves, his varying ambitions; makes his gestures, articulates his replies, his responses to his impulsions, to his naivetes, to his "fiascos" of various kinds.

Among the characters of this endless morality play, continuing indefinitely, constantly re-animated by the circumstances, appear several allegorical beings or familiar entities: the *Beau Ideal*, *Happiness*, *Logic*, *Money*, the *Noble Style*. . . . The shade of Bonaparte, the silhouette of the Jesuit, the marionette of the most knavish of Kings, etc., come on the stage turn by turn, for plaudits or abuse.

There is even a certain *music* that accompanies this mimodrama. Sometimes we hear shrilling across his prose, like personal themes, certain idioms—almost interjections—which have no value save as *nervous signals*, sounding the trumpet-call of energy, the resurrection of the *most cherished memory*, the waking of the desire to be again what one

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was in the past, to wish for what one formerly wished for. . , .

These are brief, abrupt formulas, breaking the chains of the moment, shattering a dismal day and surging up from the inner being like a call to arms; as if in the midst of ordinary or tiresome circumstances, against the excess of spleen or melancholy, against the sensation of mean estate and of misfortune, sounded the all-powerful trumpet of personal value, the alarm of the *one and only self* and almost the clear blast of the bugle which once startled the young dragoon slumbering in his saddle, when his regiment's recruits crossed the Alps to join the reserve army of the year VIII.

The theme of egotistical egoism sounds thus beneath his pen: ALORS COMME ALORS! . . .

Another theme is that of the *Nets cast too high*.

Pride casts them so high that nothing real is ever taken in them. Vanity, on the contrary, holds the net low and always catches, here and there, some perceptible advantage.

These questions of pride and vanity are essential when we are dealing with a man who stands before the public; they forever mingle curiously with talent, stimulate and even produce it, de-

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prave or give it a direction. We must stop for a moment, in speaking of Stendhal, to reflect upon them. The comparative quantities of vanity and of pride implied in a work are the *characteristic grandeurs* that the analytic critic should constantly seek. They are never meaningless.

The least stupid of illustrious authors, Stendhal, though tormented with the desire to be read and to exert an influence eternally, and in spite of so much intelligence—in spite, too, of his pleasure in surprising himself, in breaking himself of ridiculous foibles, in self-mockery (as one pinches oneself to wake and recover consciousness)—was torn between his great desire to please and find fame and the mania or delight of being oneself and, in one's own fashion, one's opponent. He felt in his secret flesh the spur of literary vanity; but he felt, a little more profoundly, the keen, peculiar pang of absolute pride which wishes to depend upon oneself alone.

Our talents demand to be employed; the active, incessant formation of ideas gives birth to a strange impatience to produce them. The future work ferments in its future author. But this very frenzy

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impels us to sell our soul to others; this power, when at last it breaks loose and gives itself free play, almost always leads us far from ourselves. It drags our ego where it had not meant to go. It engages it in a world of exhibitions, of comparisons, of reciprocal evaluations, where to some extent it becomes for oneself *an effect of the effect which it produces upon a great number of unknown persons*. The man who is *known* tends to be nothing but an emanation of this indefinite number of unknowns, that is, a creation of opinion, an absurd, public monster to whom the real man little by little yields and conforms.

Thus is it with those saints whose humility has placed them upon altars where the poor are decked with gold and the humble shrouded with incense.

We listen to the temptations of our talents at the expense of what perhaps lies nearest our hearts: of what is jealous, shy and incommunicable and desires to be so. This nai'Ve insular man and this lover of glory (which is no less nai'Ve) finally accept, as best they can, an identical destiny.

How extricate ourselves from this clash of two capital instincts of the intelligence? One urges us to solicit, to force, to win minds. The other jealously recalls us to our irreducible strangeness and solitude. One spurs us on to appear, the other actuates us to be and to confirm ourselves in being. It is a conflict between that which is too human in man and that which has nothing human in it, and feels itself unique. Every strong, unspoiled person deems himself something other than a man, naively refusing and dreading to recognize in himself one of the indefinitely numerous copies of a standard species or type! In every profound personality some hidden virtue is incessantly engendering a hermit. In contact with, or at the memory of, other beings, they feel at times a particular distress, the sharp, abrupt sensation of which cuts into them and makes them shrink at once into an indefinable, intimate island. It is a reflex of inhumanity, of invincible antipathy, which may go as far as madness, as in the case of the emperor who wished that the whole human race had but one head that it might be severed at a single stroke. But in persons of a less brutal and more inward nature this energetic sentiment, this obsession of man by man, is capable of

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giving birth to ideas and to works. The victim of the ill of not being unique consumes himself in inventing that which separates him from the others. To become different is his mania. And perhaps it is not so much a question of placing himself above everything which works on him and torments him as it is of putting himself, so to speak, entirely aside, beyond all comparison. "Great men" make certain "incommensurable" men smile.

Perhaps the great "sin"—the metaphysical sin *par excellence*—to which the theologians have given the fine name of *pride* has as root this irritability or need to be unique. But if this reflection were to be carried still further—doubtless a little too far—along the road of the simplest sentiments, one would find at the bottom of pride merely the horror of death. For we know death only by those who die; if we are really like them, we too shall die. And then, this horror of death produces from its depths a certain frantic will to be *unlike*, to be independence itself and different *par excellence*—that is, to be God. To refuse to be like, to refuse to have our like, to refuse to resemble those who are apparently and reasonably like us—all this is to refuse to be mortal and to wish blindly not to be of the same

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essence as those who pass and fade about us, one after the other. The syllogism which led Socrates to death more surely than the hemlock, the induction which forms its major premise and the deduction which concludes it awaken a defense and an obscure revolt of which the worship of self is a readily deduced result.

Such is the direction egotism takes when we trace it to its source. I have gone rather farther in this exploration than doubtless was necessary in talking of Stendhal; what I have just written would be better adapted to Nietzsche and would find a more suitable place on the margin of *Ecce Homo* than on that of *Henri Brulard*. But the greater includes the lesser and sheds light upon it; and the corrupted *ego* only exaggerates and renders terribly sensitive the secret dispositions and the profound temptations which are to be found in the almost normal *ego*.

As for egotism (*a la Stendhal*) it implies a belief, the belief in a *natural ego* whose culture, civilization and customs are mutually hostile. This natural *ego* is known to us, and can only be known, by

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those of our reactions which we imagine to be primitive and really spontaneous. The more these reactions appear to us independent of the social environment—of its habits or of the education it has given us—the more valuable and authentic they are for the Egotist.

What strikes me, amuses me and even charms me in this desire of the Egotist for the natural is that it requires and necessarily implies a *convention*. In order to distinguish what is natural from what is conventional, a convention is indispensable. How otherwise separate *nature* from *culture*? The natural is variable; the spontaneous has very diverse origins in each of us. Can we believe that even love is not permeated by things learned, that there is no tradition even in the passions and emotions and the complications of the sentiments and thoughts it can produce? If I say even that *the natural is what, in the dispositions and the movements, emanates directly from the organism*, I thereby say that there are as many ways of being natural as there are different dispositions—that is, individuals—each of whom finds the words and the acts of another quite remote from nature—which he finds in himself.

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It may be remarked that to be an *egotist* and to utilize the works of others with the cool unconcern we so often find in authors is a truly amazing combination.

It is clearly seen, moreover, how diverting it is to acknowledge and acclaim "nature" and the "natural" as a thesis, and in the forms of a theory.

This naïve, seductive system, which links up with Rousseau and which reappears as often as the civilized state makes us feel its obstacles and laws rather than its advantages, is a cause of pride for those who reinvent and follow it. It is at one and the same time a sort of intimate morality, a rule of mundane conduct, a religion of personality, a literary bias and a consequence of that temperament of the born actor which I find in Stendhal and in all those who indulge in confessions. Nothing is more interesting, more comic, more candid, more thrilling and more ingenuous than to take the decision to be *oneself*, to be *true*. This great and simple decision is not rare in literature. Examples abound, for its attractions are considerable. There is a short cut to being *original*—(adjacent

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superstition)—and to being original while confining oneself to *being*. The certainty of finding fine facilities, once an initial bold stroke has been accomplished; the freedom to utilize the slightest incidents of life, the insignificant details which yield the *truth*; the liberty to employ informal language and to create values with the trifles that books generally pass over in silence; the sure charms of throwing light on our manners and customs to bring out clearly what is ordinarily relegated to obscurity—all these are great advantages indeed.

Cynicism in literary works usually signifies a certain element of disappointed ambition. When one no longer knows what to do in order to astonish and survive, one prostitutes oneself, one surrenders one's pudenda, offering them to the public gaze.

After all, there should be a certain pleasure in giving oneself up to oneself and to others; by the sole gesture of unbosoming oneself, to experience the sensation of discovering an America. Everyone knows perfectly what he will see; but it is enough to go through the gesture; everyone is excited. That is the magic of literature.

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Finally, literary egotism consists in playing the role of *self*; in making oneself a little more *natural* than nature; a little more oneself than one was a few moments before. Giving to one's impulses or impressions a fellow creature who, by force of differing, of anticipating oneself and, above all, of *faking notes*, stands forth and perfects himself from work to work *as the writer's art progresses*, one substitutes for oneself an invented character whom one imperceptibly comes to accept as a model. It should never be forgotten that, in our observation of ourselves, there enters an enormous element of the arbitrary.

I should not be surprised were Stendhal fortified in his egotism by his relations with certain of those deliberately unconventional Englishmen who were to be found in Italy at that period and who were very much preoccupied with appearing eccentric, having all the means to that end—the physique, the boredom, the phlegmatic caprice, the guineas, the essential indolence, the prestige of a nation which they professed to scandalize, well

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knowing it did not at all mind being shocked. Those noble lords were capable of having a sufficiently stimulating effect on him. Think of what he most hated in this world—the meanness, thrift, the absence of all caprice, stupid and sordid habits, all anti-passional virtues—(the terror of opinion, of expense, of loving what one naturally loved)—which he had closely observed, undergone and blasphemed in his infancy, which had rendered Grenoble and all French provincial life odious to him. He abhorred traditions, the small town, the local vanity, the infliction of mediocrity. When he thinks of these things, he bridles, and becomes a denizen of the island Self.

There had not yet been invented that belated love for the provincial, for steeples and dead things which has curiously combined in our time with an excess of new things. The worship of localities and ancestors was not yet installed, for railroads and the disordered effects of modern economy had not yet made a few feel the more or less profound need for more or less real roots, the nostalgia of a quasi-vegetative state which those who have known it have not always particularly enjoyed.

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Stendhal was one of those men who were clearly formed, armed and definitely marked by their childhood impressions. All his life, he was to judge in accordance with the memories of the young Beyle, and his judgments were to be immediately based upon them. His father, his aunt Seraphie, his grandparents, his mother's sweet wraith; his first friends, his masters, always served him as types, as standards of sensibility, of cruelty, of stupidity or of boredom. He drew comparisons between them and all the people whom he met thereafter. He came to maturity provided with a full set of characters.

One birthday, Henri Brulard wrote on his trouser belt: *I have just turned fifty.*

Every reader of *Brulard* has spent some minutes dreaming over this confidence. What can it really mean? What was the point of this fantastic act? Did Beyle really make this inscription on so personal a writing-pad? If he simply and solely made up this little act, what was the purpose of this quaint mendacity? What future reader did he think should be affected by it? Did he wish to

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render his diary "vivid and unusual" or to prove its sincerity by the almost indecent intimacy of this detail? *Hypotheses nan fingo*. . . .

But also what was the meaning of those linguistic caprices, those numerous passages, in which he inserts quite unmysterious English and Italian words?

Why write: "*Lettre* of the author of the *Cenci*.*l*. Or: "*C'est a* forthy [sic] seven *que Dominique, etc.*"

At other times, he indulges in childish syllabic permutations: *trespres, ligionre*. . . .

I hope with all my heart he did not flatter himself that, in this way, he would fool the curious.

I see in these habits only a cryptographical theatricalism. He pretends to write in cipher, almost as an actor pretends to eat or to drink; and perhaps he does it to give himself the sensation of being in collusion with himself—*being a little more intimate with himself than the self is with the majority of egos*.

Did he perhaps think vaguely that the mother-tongue—that of the inner speech—might insidi-

ously suggest to him, by the turn of the expression, some manner of feeling not absolutely his and independent of his nationality? The free ego inhabits Cosmopolis and thinks in all languages.

It is true that every man jealously and powerfully personal forges for himself a secret tongue. There transpires in his head what occurs in a family or a very small, exclusive society, such as a couple of friends or lovers. Every complicity is immediately sealed by a special vocabulary. Every private understanding is organized at the expense of public conventions. Stendhal conspires with Stendhal under varied names—(129 pseudonyms counted by Leautaud)—sometimes against Stendhal, always against the fools, the self-important and the insensible.

Stendhal, the inventor of *the happy few*, makes me think, by his marked taste for the secrecy of opinions and for the small circles of kindred sympathies and antipathies, of that spontaneous generation of very narrow, very fervent and justly excessive groups, whence issued all the new ideas, which, two or three times during the last fifty or sixty years, have transformed our literature and arts. In a certain sense, he is the ancestor of that

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"esotericism" which is found at the origin of Naturalism, Parnassus and Symbolism. Experience has shown that coteries are good things in their way. The public at large has a right to regular, tested, industrial products. But industrial progress requires numerous experiments and bold researches possible only in laboratories, and laboratories alone permit the realization of extreme temperatures, rare reactions, degrees of enthusiasm, ultimate analyses, without which the future of science and the arts would be only too obvious.

Beyle's few traits which I have just alluded to have a certain interest, since it is so difficult to explain them. They doubtless depend on theories and manias. In them I seem to distinguish a certain calculation, a speculation on the future reader, a noticeable intention to divert by the apparently negligent and impromptu—which imply and insinuate *le seul a seul* in the relations of the author and the unknown to be diverted.

An *ideologue* after his fashion, Stendhal loved precepts and principles. He formulated axioms of conduct and esthetics; he had pretensions to rea-

soning. It is not impossible that he reasoned a good deal about what seems to us rather unreasonable.

As to his manias, they are visible. But, after all, what is a mania?

What is most striking in a page of Stendhal, what at once proclaims him and attaches or irritates the mind, is the tone. He possesses, and moreover affects, the most individual tone in literature. This tone is so marked, it brings the man so close to us that it excuses in the eyes of Stendhalians: (i) the negligences, the wilful negligence, the contempt for all the formal qualities of style; (2) diverse pilferings and a quantity of plagiarisms. In all criminal matters, the essential for the accused is to render himself infinitely more interesting than his victims. What do we care about Beyle's victims? From the dismal belongings of others, he refashions works which are readable, because there is diffused in them a certain *tone*.

And in what does this tone consist? I have perhaps already said it: Being lively at all costs; writ-

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ing as one talks if one be a man of wit, with allusions even if they are obscure, abrupt halts, leaps and parentheses; writing almost as one speaks to oneself; maintaining the movement of a free and gay conversation; sometimes going even as far as unadorned monologue; always and everywhere fleeing the poetic style and making the reader realize that one is fleeing it, that one is avoiding the phrase *per se*, which, by the rhyme and the extent, would sound too pure and too beautiful, would achieve that rhetorical genre which Stendhal mocks and detests and where he sees but affectation, attitude and ulterior motives.

But it is a law of nature that we defend ourselves from one affectation only by means of another.

This purpose and these prohibitions which he prescribes for himself become reduced to the evocation of a real voice. His affectation leads him to wish to accumulate all the most expressive symptoms of *sincerity* in a single work. His invention in the matter of style was doubtless to have the courage to write according to his *character*, which he knew, and even *imitated* marvellously.

I do not dislike this tone which he fashioned for

himself. Sometimes it enchants me, it amuses me always; but—contrary to the author's intention—by the comic effect that so much sincerity and a little too much *life* inevitably produce upon me. I confess to finding his intonations three or four times too sincere; I perceive the design of being oneself, of being so true that one ends by being false. The truth that one favours, by that very fact changes insensibly under the pen into the truth which is made to appear true. Truth and the will to truth together form an unstable mixture wherein a contradiction ferments and whence a falsified production issues unfailingly.

How is one to avoid choosing the best in this *truth* on which one works? How is one not to underline, round out, colour, attempt to clarify, strengthen, make more exciting, more intimate, more brutal than the model? *In literature, truth is not conceivable.* Sometimes by simplicity, sometimes by eccentricity, sometimes by excessive precision, sometimes by negligence, sometimes by the confession of things more or less shameful but always *chosen*—chosen as carefully as possible—always, and by any means—whether we take Pascal, Diderot, Rousseau or Beyle, and whether

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the nudity exhibited be that of a sinner, a cynic, a moralist or a libertine—truth is inevitably lit up, coloured and made up according to all the rules of the mental stage. We know that one does not unveil oneself save for a certain effect. A great saint knew that when he undressed on the market place. Everything which is against custom is against nature. It implies effort, the consciousness of effort, intention, and therefore artifice. For a woman to disrobe is the same thing as though she were going before the footlights.

There are thus two ways of falsifying: one by the work of *embellishment*, the other, by the effort to *make true*.

The latter case is perhaps that which reveals the more acute affectation. It also marks a certain despair of arousing general interest by purely literary means. Eroticism is never far from the veracious.

Besides, the authors of Confessions, or Memoirs, or intimate Diaries, are invariably the dupes of their hope of shocking; and we are the dupes of these dupes. It is never oneself that one wishes to exhibit such as one is. One knows quite well that a real person has not very much to teach us as to his nature. One consequently writes the confes-

sions of some other person more remarkable, purer, livelier, more sensitive, and even more *himself* than is permitted, for the self has degrees. He who confesses lies and flees the real truth, which is worthless, shapeless and, in general, indistinct. But a confidence always aims at glory, scandal, excuses and propaganda.

Beyle played, in himself, a dozen parts—the dandy, the impassive reasoner, the dabbler in fine arts, the 1812 soldier, the lover of love, the politician and the historian. He gave himself a hundred pseudonyms, less to hide behind than to feel himself live in several versions. Like an actor on the road, he carries a bag full of his wigs, his beards and his costumes, his *Bombet*, his *Brulard*, his *Dominique*, his hardware dealer. ... In the *Memoires d'un Touriste*, made up as a well-to-do salesman travelling on business, he talks the language of the public coach, plays the economist, airs his administrative views, criticizes and reshapes the projected routes of future railways. He amuses himself by pretending to be afraid of the police, suspects the post, employs ciphers and signs so transparent that they would be comic were not his fears imaginary and self-evoked. He peopled

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his life to the best of his ability; and certain feigned anxieties helped him to feel himself alive. Sometimes his excessive taste for the mimicry of mystery and the appearances of secrecy remind the reader vaguely of Mr. Punch.

This temperament, producing a perpetual scenario, made him, on the other hand, consider all human affairs under the aspect of a comedy. Supremely sensitive to hypocrisy, he sensed simulation and dissimulation hundreds of leagues away in social space. His faith in universal falsehood was firm, almost constitutional. He went as far as to seek and define that which it is impossible for man to feign (personal courage and absolute pleasure).

This man who was so "conscious" placed infinite value on the "natural" This artist of duality did nothing but ceaselessly paint charming types of simplicity. Such characters as Fabrice and Lucien are persons still unspoiled, brave, young and fresh. He seizes them at the moment they make their first appearance among their fellows

and move about, at first ingenuously, in the midst of a ready-made charade.

He himself feigned, lent himself his sincerity. What, then, is sincerity? There is almost no difficulty when it is a matter of the relations of individuals to individuals; but when it is a question of the relations of self to oneself?! As I have more than once said, as soon as the "will" has any hand in the matter, this *will to be sincere with oneself* becomes an inevitable principle of falsification.

External sincerity is the harmonization of man's two aspects, the one visible, the other deduced or probable. But to give a meaning to the notion of inner sincerity, a sort of operation, a division of the subject, is needed to introduce almost at birth a certain absolute observer of our recent states. The function of this observer is to tell *us* that a newly born thought does or does not conform to a certain constant idea which we have, or ought to have, of ourselves. This rough analysis suffices to render explicit some of the conventions which intervene in the illusion of sincerity. Nor is this all. These conventions themselves are necessarily borrowed from the external world—for example,

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from acquired morality—(to judge oneself, to blame oneself, is play-acting).

Play-acting and convention consist in a certain substitution of *what one knows* for *what one is*—and one does not know what one is.

To sum up, Stendhal's real sincerity—like all self-willed sincerities without exception—was confused with a comedy of sincerity which he played for his own benefit. To be sincere amounts to ignoring or to placing the observer, the umpire of the match, *outside bounds*. Stendhal measured the pretences of others by this standard and by his emotions, and found himself infinitely *sensitized* with regard to the "truth" of the middle distance which can be attributed to everyone and which everyone should offer to a witness sufficiently remote in his reflective consciousness.

Almost all that he heard seemed a lie to him. He read people like an open book, or at least fancied he did.

The age was eminently favourable to this kind of intellectual activity. Never were circumstances more propitious for all social masquerades. Ten

kinds of rule in fifty years. The contemporaries had lived as they could under makeshift, short-lived governments, all bent on plumbing men's hearts and none of them averse to fraud. They had seen abrupt changes and transformations in the most solemn persons, the quick substitution of cockades, the phantasmagoria of power, the exits and entries of legitimacy, of liberty, of the eagles, of God himself; the astonishing spectacle of men, lost by their oaths of allegiance, torn by their memories, their passions, their interests, their rancours, their predictions. Some felt, confusedly, that they were wearing a whole assortment of headgear—a wig, a skull cap, a red liberty cap, a hat with red, white and blue feathers, a cocked hat, a bourgeois topper. Sometimes caught unawares and sometimes justified by events; and sometimes, by the homecoming of the *fleurs-de-lis*, sometimes by the back flash of 1815, sometimes by the dupery of 1830, always living from moment to moment, always trained to change in the space of a night from proscribers into prescribers, from suspects into magistrates, from ministers into fugitives, they lived a more or less dangerous farce and

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most of them, in all parties and under all colours, ended by no longer believing in anything but money. This *practical* character manifested itself under Louis-Philippe, when at last enrichment was proposed shamelessly and without disguise, as the supreme lesson, the ultimate truth, the final morality of a half-century of political and social experimentation. On the ruins of successive rules, Stendhal saw a new world being set up. He observed the beginnings of a reign of words and business. The parliamentary system was trying its wings—a system essentially dramatic, strictly subjected to the rules of the theatre, composed of apostrophes, of verbal exchanges, or abrupt mental veerings; a system founded on oratory, on the emotional event, on the effects of the parliamentary session and the idols of the stage. The political parties were taking shape. It was the extraordinary advent of statistical values, of opinions, of averages, of composite, fluctuating majorities, for the handling of which there was immediately created the art of vitiating, of corrupting those sources of power, already impure, of interpreting their unconscious oracles; a reign of abstract myths and

their strifes, apparitions, tumults of black or red spectres, projected, evoked and tamed by skilful showmen.

The same period was a witness to the resounding entry into the political field of combined finance and publicity. The era of big business had come. It was time for the undertaking of the vast industrial transformation of the world. But all the sciences put together would not have succeeded without the power of oratory. Commercial eloquence gave birth on every hand to innumerable "gulls." The launching of stock issues, the prospectuses, the irresistible advertisements piling up their crude appeal, all properties becoming mobilized at the call of promoters and Companies. Public credulity developed beyond the wildest hopes.

Even in Letters, a sort of intervening revolution taught the Muses the manners, the violence, the charlatanry of electoral strife. In poetry, factions were formed which aped the crude, harsh manners of political parties. Everyone wrote Manifestoes. The first night of *Hernani* was a regular "public meeting," with opposing friends and foes, their places and roles allotted in advance.

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All this did not favour general frankness. Everybody who was somebody lied, exaggerated, acted a part. Could it have been otherwise?

It was a time when all high posts were occupied by "chameleons" and surmounted by "weather-cocks."

The mouths of the most august were heard to lie on the most sacred occasions. Some on the sword, some on the Gospel, some on the Charter, all found themselves constrained in turn to make their solemn sacrifice to falsehood. Promises of peace, of liberty, of pardon, the assurances of the Allies—all were falsehoods. The bulletins of the Grande Armée, the proclamations of successive authorities, newspapers of all political colours, had lied, kept on lying, had to lie. One lied in court, in the classroom, on the Stock Exchange, in the Institute; even philosophy lied, even fine arts, even style! Chateaubriand and the poetic style lied. Monsieur Victor Hugo and his friends disfigured and enlarged the truth in every word they uttered.

This little list of the functions of falsehood between 1800 and 1840 could be drawn up by a patient reader from phrases cut exclusively out of the works, letters, diaries and notes of *Dominique*.

His suspicions and contempt do not limit themselves to noting charlatanry in all politics and in nearly all contemporary literature. Sometimes the savants are not spared. He tells, I don't remember where, the not incredible story of two learned cronies who agreed to spread the report that they know one of those unfathomable languages that are more easily taught than understood—Etruscan or prehistoric Mexican. The state, only too happy to appear to honour science and patronize talents which gave it no trouble, lavished decorations, pensions and professorships on both of them.

However, Beyle always had a reverence for mathematics. He had to some extent prepared himself for the Ecole Polytechnique, and he fully appreciated the beauties of the quadratic equation. He had hoped that his algebra would take him out of Grenoble. He escaped by other means; but, from his brief preparatory studies, he retained the valuable habit of mind which consists in holding as worthless all that is *vague*, as well as all undemonstrable values.

I may note, in passing, that the illustrious Lagrange is perhaps the sole contemporary of whom

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he never speaks except in the most respectful terms.

As for the clergy . . .

The clergy was Stendhal's favorite stimulant. Sometimes Stendhal mockingly paints a bishop who preens himself, a mitred Narcissus who attempts to give the benediction nobly and unctuously before a sacristy mirror. Sometimes, in a brutal mood, he exposes the trickster or mocks the fool in the ecclesiastic. Not even Voltaire himself dealt so harshly with the priesthood. Voltaire did not enter into the priest's heart to seek there what he was only too willing to find—falsehood or absurd credulity which, one or the other, Beyle was always discovering. Outside the good Blanes—abbot, astrologer, liberal, sorcerer and a bit of a heretic—no priest is to be found in Beyle's pages, who is not an hypocrite or a silly ass. There is no exception, no middle ground. We cannot conceive a third case—a combination not unfavourable or immoral or absurd, of the man and the Order.

The problem exists. To the eyes of those indifferent to religious matters, there is a mystery of the priest. The problem exists, and is bound up with the existence of those observers outside of religion. The intelligent non-believer necessarily holds the priest to be an enigma, a monster—half man, half angel—at whom he wonders, at whom he smiles, by whom, not infrequently, he is disquieted. He asks himself: *How can one be a priest?*

This real and delicate problem of the priest's possibility merits a few reflections.

One cannot approach Stendhal without the question of sincerity recurring to the mind under some guise. The problem of the priest—of the professional believer—is but a particular case of the problem of belief. The sincerity or the intelligence of the believer is always a matter of uncertainty to the unbeliever; and the reverse is occasionally true. It is almost inconceivable to the unbeliever that an educated, calmly attentive man, capable of detaching himself from his desires or his vague fears (or who attributes to them only a significance that is individual, organic and almost morbid)—who knows his own mind and is capable of separating property and values—I say it is almost in-

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conceivable that such a man should not reject as legends and fables those narratives of strange immemorial and improbable events which are essential to the authority of every religion—that he should not take into account the fragility of the proofs and of the reasonings on which dogmas are based and that he should not be surprised to remark that revelations, opinions of literally infinite importance for man, are offered to him as dangerous enigmas in the manner of the Sphinx, with feeble guarantees and in forms remote from those he is accustomed to demand for things that are true. Nothing is more difficult to attribute unreservedly to someone similar to ourselves. There can be no doubt that faith exists; but one wonders what it coexists with in those in whom it does exist. An unbeliever sees in this an almost contagious peculiarity and esteems that a believer of distinguished or superior intelligence, a man like Faraday, head of the Sandemanian sect, or Pasteur, really includes two men within himself.

The difficulty is even more serious when the continuity of faith and its permanent action is involved. The unbeliever does not easily admit that sincere faith can coexist with a not irreproachable

conduct, any more than he conceives that it can harmonize with mental rigour and lucidity. If, therefore, he observes faults or vices in a believer, he will always be tempted to conclude that the sinner's faith is pure pretence. The believer's sin to some extent *tempts* the unbeliever. This is a kind of trap which the "psychology" of the one lays for that of the other.

Stendhal *vise, scrisse e amo* in the midst of a religious ebb tide. He saw the publication of the *Genie du Christianisme*, and I can easily imagine the effect that book, so dull yet so vastly important, had on him. With this work Chateaubriand introduced the picturesque, romantic mysticism whose literary and even religious consequences have gone on unfolding down to the present day. But Stendhal kept in himself all that was needed in order not to be beguiled by this refurbishing of the emotional beauties and virtues of faith and religion. He had unfortunate memories of the pious folk who rendered his youth dreary. He retained a remarkable confidence in the spirit of the Encyclopedists, and possibly had not lost the high hopes held in the second half of the eighteenth century of reducing man's knowledge to a finite sys-

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tern of precise laws, clearly formulated and logically erected on the model of those fine, pure analytical constructions by which men like Clairaut, d'Alembert and Lagrange had represented the physical universe as conceived in their day. An abstract sensualist, he offered a fairly acceptable embodiment of the year 1760 protesting against 1820 and its dull sermonizing.

Moreover, as poet of personal energy, a declared admirer of the proud, violent acts of the Convention, and a worshipper of the early Bonaparte, the past as a whole had but little hold on him. He desired to retain of it only its individual traits, the characteristics of excessive figures, strong in their own might. For everything traditional, he necessarily had the sentiments of all those who cannot tolerate having their thoughts and judgments chosen for them.

To men of this species, traditions and religions are essentially antipathetic, even odious. They see therein forces founded on *imitation*, and this imitation, fortified at need, as Pascal notes and very wisely advises, by comedy: "Follow in the manner by which they have begun—by *doing all as if they believed*, by taking the holy water," etc.

(Imagine Beyle's face on reading this sentence, if he ever read it!)

Doubtless, in their hardened hearts, these men do not find that which encourages all the sacrifices of the intellect and self-respect and submits the body to sham in order, little by little, to fashion the soul to truth. They have no inner perception of that *substance of the things we must hope for*, which, united to imparted knowledge, to prescriptions from without, to regular practices, accomplishes and edifies religion in man. They see, at the end of life, only a nasty few minutes to be passed. *There is no tomorrow*, they think, and death represents for them but one of the essential properties of life—that of losing all the others.

It is easy to conceive that there should exist for these minds what I have called the problem of the priest. Stendhal, as we have said, solves it summarily. His mental structure and the expansion it necessarily gave to its initial impressions—the vivacity which carried his antipathies to the extreme limit and expressed them by a formula too simple to be true, too clear to apply to men—only too easily conduct him to a great confusion of methods. He bases his reasoning on priests of his own

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making. He puts himself in their place and necessarily feels himself a knave or an idiot. Since he cannot visualize their faith, he accords them mere credulity. As he knows they are not all stupidly credulous, he charges those who are not with falsehood, he inculcates innocent men with fraud and dissimulation.

But it is an evident, though widespread, error to hold that problems can be solved by pure reasoning when their elements can be neither enumerated nor defined. Only questions of pure algebra can be treated within oneself and intellectually alone. When we come to real things, it is for observation to decide. That there may be real priests endowed with fine minds, my experience assures me. I myself know a number, and that suffices me. I do not say I can explain it to myself. I simply say that Stendhal's opinion is to be traced only to this *accident*, that he knew no priests who were like mine.

That is how one fools oneself through wishing to see clearly. This example of Stendhal's judgment of priests leads immediately to a general remark.

The majority of those who flatter themselves on their knowledge of the human heart do not separate their vaunted perspicacity from an unfavourable disposition with regard to men. They are bitter and ironical. Nothing, it is true, gives the *psychological* air like the habitual attitude of *depreciation*. According to this sometimes convenient convention, seeing clearly is seeing the dark side of things.

Thereby (and it is a pleasant fact for lovers of paradox), Beyle takes his place with the Fathers and Doctors who are the least lenient toward mankind and with the most rigorous masters of moral theology. The form and the intention are very different, but the suspicious way of viewing things and the almost guilty wish to believe the worst are the same. The worst is the nutriment of critical temperaments. Evil is their prey. Consequently they must consider it the rule. A "psychologist" *a la Stendhal*, sensualist though he be, has need of innate evil. What would men of wit and intelligence do without original sin?

Still more sombre, Balzac, in his picture of society—deeper, more corrosive—gathers around him

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all whose callings make them observers and seekers of infamies and shameful things—the confessor, the doctor, the lawyer, the judge and the policeman, all whose job it is to reveal, to define and to some extent govern the dregs of society. Sometimes, when I read Balzac, I have the vision of a vast, brilliant opera, all shoulders, lights, scintillations, velvet, men and women of the highest society, exposed or opposed to some extra-lucid eye. A black gentleman—very black, very much alone—contemplates and reads the hearts of this luxurious crowd. All these groups gilded with richly shadowed light, these visages, this flesh, these jewels, these charming murmurings, these rapt smiles, are nothing before his gaze, which pitilessly transforms the splendid assembly into a hideous collection of taints, miseries and secret crimes. Everywhere he sees but depravity, ignominies or crimes. He sees adultery, debt, abortions, syphilis and cancer, stupidity and lust.

But, however profound such a gaze may be, it is, to my taste, too simple and systematic. Every time we accuse and judge—the bottom is not reached.

One ought to make a "Stendhal Monologue." It would be composed exclusively of phrases taken from his whole work and joined together. One would there read all his problems at a glance.

To live. To please. To be loved. To love. To write. Not to be duped. To be oneself—and yet, to be *successful*. How to be read? And how to live, despising or hating all the parties.

Where to live? Italy is ruled by princes and priests. Paris has a frightful climate and everybody is a schemer. Little passion, too much vanity. All one can use is one's wit.

There remains the future. (He retains the illusion of posterity.) One should shape a policy of future glory. In fifty years, what pleases me will please others. That which makes me *myself* will animate those who will award the definitive glory. Then men will despise what is lauded today. *Mais-tre* and Bonald will be scoffed at. Chateaubriand and the poetic style will have become impossible. Besides, boredom will be rife. There will be the two Chambers, and the republican mode of America will have triumphed everywhere. Hypocrisy will have changed its mask.

Meanwhile, there was half a century to be got-

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ten through. How, without perishing, was he to traverse forty years of romanticism to arrive at literary eternity? A chain of admirers, a sect of *the happy few*, was needed to lead him to the days of Taine and Paul Bourget, to the moment when that vigorous poet, Nietzsche, a German-speaking Slav to whom the idea of energy appealed like a poison, was to transmute the cosmopolitan *a la Stendhal* into the "good European."

He was a very diverting creature, this Beyle, possessed by a great desire to scandalize, joined with higher ambitions. He rarely failed to point out that exception should be taken to what he said. In this he was fairly successful. He offended artists by his style, the powers that be by his lack of respect, women by his cynicism and his systems. The fluency, the opinions, the "cheek" of this man who has so much intelligence, sometimes reminds one of those prehistorical commercial travellers who dazzled and harassed their corner of the *table d'hôte* at the time of the last stage-coaches and the first locomotives. But this Gaudisart, stopping at the *Grand Hotel de l'Europe et de*

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*I*Amour*, is an eccentric of the first rank. What he retailed still lives, will live and will make live. His sparkling, curious merchandise will excite many philosophic minds. Grave men will sweat to make themselves as lively and clear-headed as he.

For me, Henri Beyle is a type of intelligence much more than he is a man of letters. He is too peculiarly himself to be reduced to a writer. It is in this that he pleases and displeases others, and pleases me.

I have seen Pierre Louys curse his deplorable prose, throw down *Le Rouge et Le Noir* and trample it with a strange and possibly justified fury.

But Stendhal, as he is and may be, has, in spite of the Muses, in spite of his pen, and almost in spite of himself, become one of the demigods of our Letters, a master of that abstract yet ardent literature, more frugal and lighter than any other, which is characteristic of France. It is a *genre* which takes account only of acts and ideas, which disdains settings, which make light of harmony and the balance of form. It is all in the stroke, the tone, the formula and the dart, it is prodigal of foreshortenings and vivid mental reactions. This *genre* is always swift and readily insolent. It seems

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to have no age and, to some extent, no matter. It is personal in the extreme, directly *centred* on the author, as disconcerting as a game abounding in give and take, and it fends off the dogmatic and the poetic which it detests equally.

One could never finish talking about Stendhal. I see no higher praise.

REMARKS ON PROGRESS

REMARKS ON PROGRESS

FORMERLY, artists did not like what was called Progress. They did not see much more of it in works of art than philosophers saw in manners and customs. They condemned the barbarous acts of science, the outrages engineers inflict on landscapes, the tyranny of mechanics, and the simplification of human types which compensated for the complication of collective organisms. About 1840, indignation was already felt at the first results of a transformation which had as yet been hardly indicated. The Romantics, contemporaries though they were of Ampere, Faraday and their fellows, knew little of the sciences or disdained them, taking from them only what was fantastic. Their minds sought an asylum in a Middle Age which they forged for themselves; they overlooked the chemist in the alchemist. Their sole delight was in Legend or History—that is, the antipodes of Physics. They escaped organized existence through the passions and emotions, from which they established a culture—and even a comedy.

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In short, to the cult of progress responded the curse of progress, which made *two commonplaces*.

As I thought of this artistic antipathy to progress, there came to me several accessory ideas which I offer for what they may be worth.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the artist discovered and defined his opposite—the *bourgeois*. The bourgeois is the figure which balances the romantic. Besides, he is endowed with contradictory qualities which make him simultaneously the slave of routine and the absurd sectary of progress. The bourgeois loves the established and believes in improvement. He embodies common sense and attachment to the most palpable reality but he has a vague faith in an increasing, almost fatal amelioration of vital conditions. The artist reserves for himself the domain of the Dream.

Now, the course of time or, if you like, the spirit of unexpected combinations (which derives and deduces from what *is* the most surprising consequences and composes of them what *will be*) has amused itself by forming an admirable confusion of two notions once diametrically opposed. The

marvellous and the positive have contracted an astonishing alliance, the two old enemies swearing to engage us in a race of unlimited transformations and surprises. Men may be said to become accustomed to considering all knowledge as transitory and all states of their industry and material relations as provisional. This is new. The statute of general life should take increasing account of the unexpected. The real is no longer clearly defined. Place, time and matter permit unanticipated liberties. Precision breeds dreams. Dreams take body. Common sense, a hundred times confounded and flouted by successful experiments, is no longer evoked except by ignorance. The value of average evidence has fallen to nothing. The fact that something is commonly accepted, which formerly gave an invincible force to judgments and opinions, to-day depreciates them. What was formerly believed by all—always and everywhere—now seems to carry no great weight. To the sort of certitude emanating from the concordance of the opinions or testimony of a great number of persons, is now opposed the objectivity of records checked and interpreted by a small number of specialists. Perhaps the price of general consent (on which our man-

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ners and civil laws repose) was but the result of the pleasure experienced by the majority of people in finding themselves in agreement among themselves and similar to their fellows.

Finally, almost all the dreams dreamt by humanity and figuring in our various fables, have now left the realm of the impossible and the spirit. The fabulous is today to be found in business. The manufacture of marvel-making machines provides the livelihood of the thousands. But the artist has taken no part in this production of wonders. It proceeds from science and capital. The bourgeois has invested his funds in phantasms and speculated on the ruin of common sense.

Louis XIV, at the height of his power, did not possess the hundredth part of the modern middle-class man's dominion over nature, his means of amusing himself, of cultivating his mind or of indulging in sensations. It is true, I do not count the joy of commanding, of subjecting, of intimidating, of dazzling, of smiting or of absolving which is a divine, theatrical joy. But, rather, time, distance, speed, liberty, the images of the whole world . . .

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A young, healthy man of today, with a little money, flies where he will, traverses the whole world at top speed and sleeps every night in a palace. He can adopt a hundred forms of life; taste almost everywhere a little love, a little certitude. If he be not without, intelligence (but that intelligence no deeper than it should be), he gathers the best of what exists and transforms himself into a continually happy individual. The greatest monarch is less to be envied. The body of the great Louis was much less comfortable than his is capable of being, whether it be a question of heat or cold, of the skin or of the muscles. If the king suffered, he was badly cared for. Beneath the blazonry of kingship, he had to toss and groan on a feather-bed, without hope of sudden peace or of that absence of feeling which chemistry accords to the least of modern sufferers.

Thus, against ill, against boredom, for pleasure, and for the satisfaction of every sort of curiosity, numberless men are better provided than was, two hundred and fifty years ago, the most powerful man in Europe.

Suppose that the immense transformation which we see about us, in which we live and which mo-

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tivates us, develops still further, utterly altering what subsists of customs until it quite otherwise articulates the needs and means of life; soon this wholly new age will bring forth men no longer having a single mental habit which links them to the past. History will offer them strange, almost incomprehensible narratives, for nothing in their age will have any parallel in the past nor will anything of the past survive in their present. All save the purely psychological in man will have changed, for our ambitions, our politics, our wars, our arts, our manners and customs will then be subjected to a rule of quick change. They will depend more and more closely upon the positive sciences and thus less and less on what existed in the past. The *new fact* will tend to assume all the importance hitherto possessed by tradition and historic fact.

Already some native of the new countries visiting Versailles necessarily regards those bigwigged personages clad with embroidery and nobly immobilized in ceremonious attitudes, with the same eye as, at the Museum of Ethnography, we consider the figures draped in feather cloaks or with skins, which represent priests and chiefs of extinct hordes.

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One of the surest and most cruel effects of progress is thus the addition of a supplementary sting to death, a process which goes on increasing proportionately as the revolution of customs and ideas hastens and accentuates itself. It did not suffice to perish; one had also to become unintelligible, almost ridiculous, until even Racine or Bossuet took his place beside the bizarre painted, tattooed smile-provoking figures lined up in the galleries which, by imperceptible degrees, link up with the naturalized representatives of the animal kingdom.

I once tried to form a practical idea of what is called progress. Eliminating then every consideration of a moral, political or esthetic nature, progress appeared to me to reduce itself to the very rapid and noticeable increase of the (mechanical) power utilizable by men and to that of the *precision* which they can attain in their forecasts. A number of horsepower, a number of verifiable decimals—such are the indices which, beyond all doubt, have greatly increased during the last century. Think of what is consumed every day in the multitude of motors of all kinds, of the de-

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struction of reserves which is going on in the world. A Paris street toils and trembles like a factory. Each night a lavish display of light conveys to the half-dazzled gaze an extraordinary power of dissipation, an almost guilty generosity.

Will not waste have become a public and permanent necessity? Some distant observer, considering our state of civilization, would perhaps think that the Great War was merely a fatal, but direct and inevitable consequence of the development of our means. The extent, the duration, the intensity, and even the atrocity of that war responded to the magnitude of our power. It was on the scale of our resources and our industries in peacetime; as different in its proportions from earlier wars as our instruments of action, our material resources, our superabundance *demand*ed. But the difference was not only in the proportions. In the physical world, one cannot enlarge something without its soon becoming transformed even in its quality. It is only in pure geometry that there exist similar figures. Similarity is possibly never found elsewhere than in the mind. The last war cannot be considered as a simple enlargement of past conflicts. Those wars of the past came to an end well before

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the real exhaustion of the nations engaged. Thus, for a single piece lost, good chess players abandon the game. Consequently, the drama ended by a kind of *convention*, and the event which demonstrated the inequality of the forces was more symbolical than effective. But, on the contrary, we saw, only a few years ago, wholly modern warfare fatally pursued to the extreme exhaustion of the adversaries, all of whose resources, even to the remotest, were one after another consumed on the line of fire. Joseph de Maistre's famous *mot*, that a battle is lost because one believes it to be lost, has itself lost its truth. The battle henceforth is *really* lost because men, bread, gold, coal, gasoline, are lacking not only in the armies but in the interior of a country. . . .

FROM "*MEDITERRANEAN
INSPIRATIONS*"

FROM "MEDITERRANEAN INSPIRATIONS"

I WAS born in a port of moderate importance, situated at the inner extremity of a gulf and at the foot of a hill, whose mass of rock stands out from the general line of the shore. This rock would be an island, if two banks of sand—brought in and piled up higher by the sea currents, which, from the mouth of the Rhone, sweep westwards the silt of Alpine rock brought down by the river—did not connect it with the coast of Languedoc. The hill rises, then, between the sea and a large lake, in which the Canal du Midi begins—or ends. The port which it dominates is formed of docks and the canals by which this lake communicates with the sea.

Such is my native site, concerning which I shall make this naive reflection that I was born in one of the places where I should like to have been born. I am glad I was born in a spot where my first impressions were those one experiences looking at the

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sea from the midst of man's activity. For me, there is no sight worth that to be seen from a terrace or a balcony situated above a port. I could pass days looking at what Joseph Vernet, painter of charming seascapes, called *the diverse labours of a sea port*. In this privileged post, the eye possesses the intoxicating view of open sea and its general simplicity, while the human life and industry, trading, constructing and manoeuvring close at hand, are visible in the foreground. The eye can turn, at any moment, to the presence of an eternally primitive nature, intact and unchangeable by man but constantly and visibly subject to universal forces, and its view of this nature is identical to that of the first men. But, the eye, as it comes nearer to the land, immediately discovers, first the irregular work of time, which indefinitely shapes the shore, and then the reciprocal work of men, whose accumulated constructions and geometrical forms—straight lines, planes and arcs—contrast with the disorder and irregularity of nature's forms, as the spires and towers and light-houses that men erect confront the shapeless landslides and collapses of geological nature with the

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opposing will to build, the purposeful and, so to speak, rebellious labours of our race.

The eye thus embraces at one and the same time the human and the inhuman. It is this that the great Claude Lorrain felt and magnificently expressed in the noblest style, exalting the ordonnance and the ideal splendour of the great Mediterranean ports. He shows Genoa, Marseilles and Naples transfigured by the architecture of their setting, the profiles of the land and the perspective of the water, arranged like stage scenery set for a single person to act, to sing and sometimes to die—LIGHT!

Halfway up the hill of which I spoke was my school. There I learned *rosa*, *the rose*, without too much difficulty, and I left regretfully at the end of my fourth year. The very small number of students greatly satisfied our pride. We were four in my class, and, by the law of probabilities, I was first once out of four times without the slightest effort. The philosophers, more fortunate still, were only two in number. One necessarily won the first prize, the other the second. How could it have been

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otherwise? But balance ordained that the winner of the second general prize should win the first prize in oratory, and the other (obviously) the second. And so on. They both came down from the platform laden with laurels and gilt-edged books, to the strains of a military band.

Corneille claims that there is no glory without risk:

A vaincre sans peril, on triomphe sans gloire.

But Corneille is mistaken, and his error is a naive one. Glory does not depend upon effort, which is generally invisible. It depends wholly on the setting.

This school had unequalled charms. The grounds, looking out over city and sea, were composed of three tiers of increasing elevation; the juniors, the middle school, the seniors enjoyed vaster and vaster horizons, something which is not always true in life! Thus our recreations did not lack spectacles for there was always something happening on the confines of land and sea.

One day, from the top of these admirably situ-

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ated grounds, we saw rising in the sky a dense smoke, much thicker and larger in extent than that of the liners and freighters to which we were accustomed. Hardly had the bell rung for the noon recess, than the day-students, in a howling mob, ran to the waterfront, where the crowd, for several hours, had been watching the burning of a big ship which had already been towed from the harbour and abandoned to its fate at the side of a distant jetty. Suddenly the flames leaped to the yardarms, and the masts, sapped at the base by the fire burning fiercely in the hold, at once collapsed with all their rigging, while an immense bouquet of sparks leapt up and a dull sinister roar was borne by the wind to our ears. You can well imagine that more than one student missed his class that afternoon. By evening, this fine three-master was reduced to a sombre shell seemingly intact but full, like a crucible, of an incandescent mass, whose vivid glow grew more intense as the night came on. This great wreck was finally towed out to the open sea where it was sunk.

At other times, from the school we watched the arrival of the squadrons which came every year to anchor a mile off shore. The warships of that epoch

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—the *Richelieu*, the *Colbert*, the *Trident*—were curious vessels, with their plough-like prows, their crinoline of sheet iron aft and, under the flag, the admiral's gallery, which filled us with envy. They were ugly and imposing, they still carried a considerable amount of rigging, and their bulwarks were, in the ancient fashion, bordered with the crew's sacks. The squadron sent ashore smart yawls ornamented and armed. The flagboats flew over the water; six or eight pairs of oars, strictly in unison, gave them brilliant wings which, every few seconds, sent up in the sunlight a gleam and a swarm of luminous drops. They dragged behind, in the foam, the colours of their flag and the corners of a blue carpet, with scarlet border, on which the black and gilt officers were seated.

These splendours inspired many calls to follow the sea; but, between the cup and the lip, between being a schoolboy and holding the glorious position of naval ensign, very serious obstacles were interposed: the incorruptible geometric figures, the traps and systematic enigmas of algebra, the dreary logarithms, the sines and their fraternal cosines—all these combined to discourage more than one who saw with despair the inexorable surface of a

blackboard (like an unpassable iron curtain) lowered between the sea life of his dreams and the real sea life. Consequently, one had to be content with gazing on the open sea, enjoying with the eyes and the imagination only and seeking an outlet for this unfortunate passion in literature or painting; for it seems at first that the desire is sufficient to open those careers which are so tempting by their apparent facility. It is only the predestined who suspect it in time and demand of themselves all their indeterminate difficulties. There is neither programme nor aid.

These dreamers, budding poets or painters, contented themselves with the impressions lavished by the sea, so fertile in events, in extraordinary forms and projects, mother of Aphrodite and inspirer of so many adventures. In my youth, it could be said that History was still living in the waters. Our fishing boats, the majority of which continued to bear on their prows the emblems borne by Phoenician barks, are little different from those utilized by the ancient and medieval navigators. Sometimes, at dusk, as I watched these stout fishing-boats returning with their tunny fish, a strange feeling came over me. The sky, absolutely pure but

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penetrated with a rosy fire at its base, its azure turning to green at the zenith; the sea, already very dark, with breakers and gleams of an extraordinary whiteness; and towards the east, a little above the horizon, a mirage of towers and walls, the phantom of Aigues-Mortes. Of the fleet nothing could be seen at first but the sharply acute angles of their lateen sails. As they drew nearer, one began to make out the heaps of enormous tunny. These powerful fish, many of them the size of a man, gleaming and covered with blood, reminded one of the corpses of men-at-arms being brought to shore. It was a picture of an epic grandeur which I baptized: "Return from the Crusade,"

But this noble spectacle gave birth to another, of a fearful beauty, which you will pardon me for describing.

One morning, the day after a large haul, in which hundreds of great tunny fish had been taken, I went to the sea to bathe. To enjoy the admirable light, I first walked out on a little pier. Suddenly, looking down, I saw, a few feet from me, beneath the marvellously level, translucent water, a horrible and splendid chaos which made

me shudder. *Things* of a sickening red, masses of a delicate rose or of a deep, sinister purple were lying there. I recognized with horror the frightful mass of the viscera and entrails of the whole herd of Neptune's creatures which the fishermen had thrown back into the sea. I could neither flee nor bear what I saw, for the disgust which this charnelhouse caused me vied with my feeling for the real and strange beauty of this disorder of organic colours, of these repulsive glandular trophies whence wisps of blood were oozing still, and the pale, trembling pockets held by vague threads beneath the shining surface of the water—so crystal-clear that the infinitely slight movement of the waves stirred in the limpid depths, above the shambles, a shudder of imperceptible gold.

The eye loved what the soul abhorred. Divided between repugnance and interest, between flight and analysis, I endeavoured to think what an artist of the Far East, a man with the talents and the curiosity of a Hokusai, for example, would have derived from this sight.

What a print, what coralline motives, he would have conceived! Then my thought turned to the brutal and bloody part of ancient poetry. The

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Greeks did not hesitate to evoke the most atrocious scenes. The heroes worked like butchers. Mythology, epic poetry, tragedy, are full of bloodshed. But art is comparable to that limpid, crystalline mass through which I saw those atrocious things. It gives us eyes that are capable of contemplating everything.

I should never reach the end of my youthful maritime impressions. I cannot take the time to tell you everything which amused, held and fascinated me on the quays of the port—to describe, for instance, some of those boats, of which few are left, those time-old types that steam and gasoline have done away with, the strange xebecs, oriental in their elegance, with bizarre, slender prows decorated with long antennae like the bold flourishes of an agile pen. These boats must have been the same as the Saracen and Barbary ships at the epoch when these redoubtable visitors came to pillage and seize women and girls upon our coasts. My xebecs limited their activities to transporting excellent produce. Their hulls were painted yellow and vivid green (a triumph of pure tonality), and on their

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decks were heaped up lemons from Portugal or oranges from Valencia in strongly coloured pyramids. About them, on the calm green water, floated quantities of red or yellow fruit fallen or tossed overboard. . . .

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Our Sovereign Possession

I AM going to evoke for you the disorder of presentday life. I shall attempt to show you the reaction of the mind which notes this disorder and its reflections, when, having measured its power and powerlessness, it questions itself and attempts to picture this chaos so uncongenial to its nature.

But the image of chaos is chaos. Disorder is thus my first point; and it is this I shall ask you to consider. It requires a certain effort, for we end by growing intimately accustomed to it, we live on it, we breathe it, we foster it until it comes to be a veritable need. We find it about us as well as within us, in the daily papers, in our daily life, in our deportment, in our pleasures and even in our knowledge. It stimulates us, and that which we have ourselves created lures us in the end to an unknown, and unwished-for, destination. This present state, which is of our making, necessarily prepares a certain future but a future absolutely im-

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possible for us to forecast. Therein lies its great novelty, a consequence of the very novelty of our contemporary present. We can no longer deduce from the past any intimations of the immediate future, since, in several decades, we have remoulded, reconstructed, organized, at the expense of the past (that is, by destroying, refuting it and changing it from top to bottom) a state of affairs the most remarkable features of which are without precedent.

Never was transformation more profound and more quickly effected. The earth has been entirely reconnoitred, explored and equipped—I might even say appropriated—the most distant events are now known at the very moment of their occurrence; our ideas and our power over matter, time and space are conceived and utilized quite otherwise than in the past. Where is the thinker, the philosopher—even the most sagacious and erudite historian—who would now risk the slightest prophecy? Where is the politician or the economist we would believe after the many errors committed? We can no longer even clearly distinguish war from peace, abundance from penury, victory from defeat. And our economy constantly hesitates be-

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tween an unlimited development of the symbolism of exchanges and a wholly unexpected return to the primitive system—the barter of savages.

Occasionally, when I think of this state of things and of men, simultaneously so brilliant and so obscure, so active and so poor, I remember an impression I had, some years ago, while accompanying a naval cruise. The squadron, coming from Toulon and bound for Brest, was suddenly in the middle of a fine day befogged in the dangerous rock-strewn waters of the He de Sein: six battleships, thirty light cruisers and submarines suddenly blinded and stopped, in the midst of a reef-field, at the mercy of wind and currents. The slightest shock might have sunk those citadels loaded with armour and artillery. The impression was striking; these marvellous great ships, commanded by men of science, courage, discipline, having at their disposal all modern technical power and precision, were suddenly immobilized in the murk and condemned to anxious waiting because of a little mist rising from the sea.

Our age presents a similar contrast. Though completely armed with knowledge and endowed with

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power, we are blind and impotent in a world we have equipped and organized—a world of which we now fear the inextricable complexity. The mind attempts to clarify this confusion, to foresee what it will bring forth and discern in the chaos the perceptible currents and the lines whose eventual intersections will constitute the events of tomorrow.

Sometimes it attempts to preserve the seemingly essential in what was, in what it knows and in what it believes essential to civilized life. Sometimes it resolves to sweep everything away and construct a new system of the human universe.

Again, the mind must think of itself, of the conditions of its existence (which are also conditions of growth), of the dangers menacing its virtues, its forces and its possessions, its liberty, its development, its depth. These are the two preoccupations the examination of which suggests that rather vague and mysterious title, spiritual polity.

I merely wish to indicate that these questions exist. I have no intention of dealing with them exhaustively; I do not even pretend to circumscribe so vast a subject which, far from becoming simpli-

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fied and clarified by meditation, becomes more complex and more confused the more the mind dwells upon it. If we explore even superficially all the fields of activity, all the orders of human power and learning, we observe in each of these the characteristics of the critical state—economic crisis, scientific crisis, literary and artistic crisis, crisis of political liberty, crisis of manners and customs. I shall not enter into details. I shall simply indicate one of the remarkable features of this state: *The modern world with all its power, possessed of a marvellous technical capital, and thoroughly conversant with all methods, has never yet been able to adopt a political or moral system, an ideal, or civil or penal laws, in harmony with the modes of thought which the universal propagation and development of a certain scientific spirit little by little impose on mankind.*

Today, everyone more or less aware of the critical activities which have renewed the foundations of the sciences and elucidated the properties of language, the origins of institutions and forms of social life, agrees that there are no notions or prin-

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ciples—no *truth* as one used to say—which are not subject to revision, to correction, to remodelling; that there is no action which is not conventional, no law, written or unwritten, which is not merely approximate.

Everyone tacitly agrees that the *man*, envisaged in constitutional or civil laws, who is the object of political speculations and manoeuvres—the *citizen*, the *elector*, the *taxpayer*—is not perhaps precisely the same man whom current biological or psychological notions—even those of psychiatry—would permit us to define. Hence results a strange contrast, a curious division in our judgments. We regard the same individuals as responsible and irresponsible; sometimes we hold them irresponsible and treat them as responsible, according to the fiction adopted at the moment, whether we find ourselves in the juridic or in the objective state of our thinking faculty. Similarly, in numerous minds is to be found the co-existence of faith and atheism, of anarchy in the sentiments and of some doctrine of order in the opinions. On the same subject, the majority of us will have several theses which, at the same moment, are without difficulty mutually

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interchangeable in our judgments, according to the passing mood.

These are certain signs of a *critical phase*, that is, of a kind of intimate disorder defined by the co-existence of contradiction in our ideas and inconsequence in our acts. Thus our minds are filled with tendencies and thoughts mutually ignorant of each other; and if the age of civilization were to be measured by the number of accumulated contradictions—by the number of incompatible customs and beliefs which meet and interact through the plurality of philosophic and esthetic systems co-existing and co-habiting in the same heads—it must be agreed that our civilization is among the oldest. Do we not constantly find the practice of several religions, the mingling of several races, the profession of several political opinions in the same family, and, in the same individual, a whole wealth of latent discords?

A *modern man*—and it is in this that he is modern—lives on familiar terms with a quantity of contraries lingering in his mental penumbra and taking their turn on the stage. Nor is this all; these internal contradictions or these antagonistic co-existences within us are generally unperceived, and

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it seldom occurs to us that they have not always existed. It would however be enough for us to remember that tolerance, religious liberty and free thought are always late in making their appearance and that they can only be conceived and influence the laws and the customs in an advanced period, when minds have been progressively enriched and enfeebled by their exchanged differences. Intolerance, on the contrary, may be said to be a terrible virtue of primitive ages.

I have dwelt at some length on this characteristic, for in it I discern the very essence of modernity. Here too I see one of the causes of the great difficulty, or rather of the impossibility, of representing the modern world on a single plane and on a single scale. It is scarcely possible to reason without confusion on this subject. It is vain to fall back on our knowledge of history and try to deduce from it what is to follow this state of general drifting. As I have said, the number and importance of the changes introduced into the human universe in so short a time have made it almost impossible to compare what happened fifty or a hundred years ago with what is taking place today. We have introduced forces, invented new facilities, contracted

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quite different and unexpected habits. We have cancelled values, dissociated ideas, ruined sentiments which seemed unshakeable, since they had resisted twenty centuries of vicissitudes, while, to express so new a state of affairs, we have only immemorial notions.

In a word, we find ourselves confronted with a confusion of the social system, of the verbal material and of the myths of all sorts which we have inherited from our fathers, and of the recent, vital conditions—conditions of intellectual origin, conditions entirely artificial and furthermore essentially instable, for they are directly dependent upon ulterior creations of the intellect, increasingly numerous. Here we are, then, a prey to a confusion of *unlimited hopes, justified by unparalleled results and immense disappointments or tragic premonitions*, the inevitable effects of defeats and extraordinary catastrophes.

My preoccupation with this question dates from neither today nor yesterday. Here is what I wrote in 1919, some months after the end of the war: *

¹ See "The Intellectual Crisis," in *Variety*.

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"We civilizations know now that we are mortal. We had all heard of whole worlds vanished, of empires foundered with all their men and all their works to the unexplorable depths of the centuries with their gods and their laws, their academies and their dictionaries, their classics, their romantics, their symbolists, their critics, and the critics of their critics. . . .

"We knew that all the visible earth is made of ashes, that the ashes signify something. We perceived, through the mass of History, the phantoms of huge vessels once laden with wealth and learning. We could not count them. But these wrecks, after all, did not concern us. Nineveh and Babylon were vague and splendid names; the total ruin of these worlds meant for us as little as their very existence.

"Now we see that the abyss of History is great enough to engulf everything. We feel that a civilization is as fragile as a life. The circumstances which will send the works of Keats and of Baudelaire to join those of Menander are no longer inconceivable; they are found in the daily papers.

"Nor is that all. The painful lesson is still more complete: it was not enough that our generation

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should learn by its own experience how the loveliest and the most ancient things, the most fearful and the best designed, are perishable *by accident*. We have seen, in the domain of thought, common sense and sentiment, the appearance of extraordinary phenomena, the sudden realization of paradoxes, the brutal denial of evidence.

"Thus, the spiritual Persepolis is not less ravaged than the material Susa. All is not lost, but everything has felt itself perishing. An extraordinary shudder has stirred the marrow of Europe. It has felt, in all its thinking cells, that it no longer recognized itself, that it had ceased to resemble itself, was soon to lose consciousness—a consciousness acquired by centuries of bearable misfortunes, by thousands of first-rate men, by innumerable geographical, ethnical and historical hazards.

"Then, as if for a definite defence of its physical self and richness, all its memory returned confusedly. Its great men and its great books came back to it pell-mell. Never did men read so much or so passionately as during the war; ask the booksellers. Never did men pray so much and so profoundly; ask the priests.

"All the saviours were invoked; all the founders,

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protectors, martyrs, and heroes; the fathers of every fatherland, the sainted heroines, the national poets.

"And, in the same mental disorder, at the appeal of the same anguish, cultivated Europe underwent the rapid revival of its innumerable creeds: dogmas, philosophies, heterogeneous ideals; the three hundred ways of explaining the world; the thousand and one shades of Christianity, the two dozen positivisms, the whole spectrum of intellectual light displayed its incompatible colours—a strange contradictory light on the death throes of the European soul. While inventors feverishly sought in their imagination and in the annals of former wars, the hope of conquering barbed-wire, of baffling submarines or of paralyzing the flight of aeroplanes, the soul was invoking all the known incantations, gravely considering the bizarrest prophecies. It sought refuges, signs and consolations in the entire register of memories, antecedent acts and ancestral attitudes. All these are the known products of anxiety—the disordered enterprises of the brain, which flees from reality to nightmare and from nightmare to reality, mad with fright like a rat in a trap.

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"The military crisis is perhaps over. The economic crisis is visible in all its force; but the intellectual crisis, more subtle and, by its very nature, assuming the most deceptive appearances (since it takes place in the very realm of dissimulation)—this crisis with difficulty permits us to seize its real point, its *phase*.

"No one can say what, tomorrow, will be alive or dead in literature, in philosophy, in esthetics; no one yet knows what ideas and modes of expression will be inscribed on the list of losses, and the discoveries which will be proclaimed.

"Hope remains indeed, but hope is only man's mistrust of the mind's precise forebodings. It suggests that every conclusion unfavourable to itself *must be* an error of the mind. The facts, however, are plain and pitiless: thousands of young artists and young writers have been killed. There is the lost illusion of a European culture and the proof of the inability of knowledge to save anything whatsoever; there is science, mortally stricken, in its ethical ambitions and somehow dishonoured by the cruelty of its applications; there is idealism barely the victor, profoundly bruised, responsible for its dreams; realism disappointed, beaten, con-

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quered by crimes and misdeeds; greed and renunciation equally flouted, creeds confused, cross against cross, crescent against crescent. The sceptics themselves are unhorsed by events so sudden, violent and troubling, that they play with our thoughts like a cat with a mouse—the sceptics lose their doubts, find them again, lose them, and cease to be the masters of their thought.

"The ship has swayed and pitched so heavily that the best slung lamps are finally overturned."

Things have not changed inordinately since 1919, and I believe that the pages I then wrote still represent with sufficient accuracy the prevailing uncertainty and anxiety. But I have at present to complete this picture of chaos by showing you something which observes and nourishes it, which can neither suffer nor deny it, which by its very essence incessantly divides itself against itself—the spirit.

By this word spirit, I in no wise mean a metaphysical entity but merely a *power of transformation* which we can isolate and distinguish from all others by simply considering certain ambient ef-

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fects and certain modifications of our environment which we may attribute only to an activity very different from that of known natural energies; for, on the contrary, it consists in opposing these to each other or combining them.

This opposition, or restraint, is such that there results from it a gain of time or an economy of our own forces or else an increase of the power, precision, liberty, or duration of our life. There is a way of defining the spirit which puts no metaphysical system at stake but simply gives to this word the irreproachable meaning of a fact, making it to some extent the symbol of an ensemble of objective observations.

Some of the transformations accomplished by this power define a loftier domain. The spirit does not devote itself solely to satisfying instincts and indispensable needs but practises speculation on our sensibility. Is there miracle of transformation more remarkable than that accomplished in the poet or the musician when they transpose their affections and even their sadness and distress into works of art, into poems, into musical composi-

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tions, into means of preserving and indirectly diffusing their whole emotional life by means of technical artifices? And, in the same way, the spirit can change man's leisure into play. It transforms nai've astonishment into curiosity and a passion for learning. Idle ingenuity leads it to construct profoundly abstract sciences. The first geometers were doubtless men whose calculations and figures were a solitary diversion and to whom it never occurred that the results of their recreations would one day serve some useful purpose—the elucidation of the cosmic system and the discovery of natural laws.

Similarly, it is by an extraordinary use of the resources of this transformative spirit that fear itself has given birth to astonishing productions. Fear has reared temples and changed itself into those marvellous prayers in stone, those magnificently significant edifices which are perhaps the highest expression of beauty and will. Thus, from the dispositions of the soul, from leisure and dreams, the spirit creates superior values. It is a veritable philosopher's stone, a transmuting agent for all things material or mental.

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The characteristic I have taken to define, with the examples I have just given, permits me, then, to say that man's spirit has embarked him on a sort of adventure seemingly striving to depart farther and farther from its initial vital conditions, as if endowed with a paradoxical instinct utterly opposed to the action of all the other instincts which, on the contrary, tend to draw the living being constantly back to the same point and to the same state.

It is this strange instinct which tends to reconstruct the conditions of our existence and give us occupations sometimes far removed from those the pure and simple concern for animal existence imposes on us. It creates and multiplies new, artificial needs and introduces a quantity of other impulses side by side with the natural instincts, as well as with some incentives of vital necessity. It has, in particular, created that remarkable need of capitalizing experiments, of uniting and arranging them, of rearing edifices of thought from them and even of projecting them outside the present, as if seeking to grasp life where it does not yet exist and draw it whence it is no longer.

In passing, I may indicate one of the most ex-

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traordinary human inventions (and it is by no means a recent one). I mean simply the invention of the "past" and the "future/* These are not mere natural notions. Natural man, like the animal, lives in the present. The nearer he is to nature, the less the past and the future exist in him. Doubtless the animal only feels itself to be between a minimum of past and a minimum of future, the modicum needed to maintain the sensation of desire until it is satisfied or the sensation of need until it is fulfilled. Its duration is reduced to the intervals of tension or activity which have their origin in an excitation and their end in a proximate organic response. Doubtless diverse incidents can insert themselves between these limits of duration; but it is always by the shortest route that the irritated sensibility will seek to bring about the appeasing act.

It is otherwise with man. By an increase, by an imaginary generalization of the moment, by a sort of excess, man, *creating time*, not only constructs perspectives within and beyond his intervals of reaction but, even more, he lives but very little in the present. His principal abode is in the past or the future. He never holds himself in the present

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unless obliged by sensation—pleasure or pain. It may be said of him that he has an undefinable want of what does not exist. This is a condition which is not animal but entirely artificial, since, all told, it is not absolutely necessary to the living being. Certainly the development of "time" may often be useful to him. But in a sense this utility is itself, contrary to nature. Nature does not bother with individuals. If man prolongs or improves his existence, he acts against nature, and his action is one of those which bring the spirit into opposition with life.

Now the mental toil of foreseeing is one of the essential bases of civilization. Foresight is at once the origin and the means of realizing all enterprises, big and little. It is also the presumptive foundation of all politics. It is, in a word, a psychical element in human life which has become inseparable from its organization. An observer exterior to humanity would thus see man acting most often without visible object, as if another world were present to him and as if he were obedient to the influences of invisible things or of hidden beings. *Tomorrow* is a hidden power. Foresight is, as it were, the soul of all those movements, unde-

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cipherable for such an observer, who would be reduced to seeing only what lay before his eyes.

More: not only has man acquired this property of standing aside from the present and thus dividing himself against himself, but he has at the same time acquired a property remarkable though unequally developed in different individuals. This, in varying degrees, is the consciousness which enables him, abstracting himself from all that exists, to draw aside from his own personality. The ego can sometimes consider its own person as something almost foreign. Man can observe himself (or so he believes) ; he can criticize himself, he can constrain himself. This is an original creation, an attempt to create what I shall name the spirit's spirit.

To this summary description of the spirit thus conceived, to these immediate notations, to the creation of time, to this creation of the pure ego, of the "I" which is opposed even to identity, to memory itself, to the personality of the subject—let us add the notion of what man has been able to discern of his richest possession—the universality on which depends his whole speculative,

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philosophic, scientific and esthetic life. Even in the practical domain, the extension of his activity and of his desires, the opportunities that lie open to him, the part he has to play, the road he should follow, the precautions to be taken—all this demands an acquisition, an exercise, a gymnastic of the possible. The possible is a sort of property.

Man speculates. He forms plans and theories. What is a theory if not, precisely, the employment of the possible? Is not foresight a remarkable application of this faculty? But there is a form of particular foresight I should mention. Not only does the spirit strive to foresee in the field of phenomena and external events, but it tries to foresee itself, to anticipate its own operations. It seeks to exhaust all the consequences of the data collected by its attention and to grasp their law. Indeed, there is in the spirit a certain horror, almost a phobia, of repetition. What repeats itself in us never belongs to the spirit itself. The spirit tends never to repeat itself. Repetition is repugnant to it, though it sometimes repeats itself by accident. On the contrary, it always tends to find the law of a series, to pass to the ultimate (as the mathematicians say), that is, to dominate, to surmount,

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to exhaust the foreseen repetition. It tends to reduce to a formula the infinite of which it identifies the elements. Mathematical science is, at bottom and for a large part, but a science of pure repetition. It summarizes the repetition of the mechanism of which it has taken possession.

Thus the spirit seems to eschew the very method of profound organic life, which, on the contrary, demands the repetition of the elementary acts on which depend vital exchanges. We depend on the recurrence of a few reflexes. But, on the other hand, knowledge implies a will contrary to particularity, to the singularity of moments. It tends to merge the particular case in the general law, repetition in the formula, differences in the average and in great numbers. In this, the spirit is opposed to the behaviour of the living machine.

Bear in mind that, in spite of accepted opinion and the impression given by the papers, the theatre and novels, the process of living is essentially monotonous. It is an error to say of a play or of a book that it is "alive" when it is more or less disorderly, offering the unexpected, the spontaneous, the tumultuous, moving effects. These are but superficial characteristics and fluctuations of sensi-

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bility; but the support of these appearances, the substance of these accidents, is a system of periods or cycles of transformations which occur outside our consciousness and generally under cover of our sensibility.

In the mind, memory, habits and all sorts of automatisms represent this profound, static life; but the infinite variety of external circumstances finds itself resources of a superior kind. In particular, the spirit creates order and disorder, for its business is to bring about change. In this way, and in an ever vaster domain, it develops the fundamental law of sensibility, which is to introduce an element of imminency, of ever proximate instability into the living system.

The effect of our sensibility is constantly to interrupt in us that sort of slumber which would harmonize with the profound monotony of the vital functions. We must be constantly shaken, warned, awakened by certain inequalities, by certain events of the environment, certain modifications in our psychological behaviour; and we have organs, a whole specialized system, calling us forth suddenly, and very frequently, to the new, urging

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us to find the adaptation suited to the circumstance, the attitude, the action, the displacement or the deformation which will cancel or accentuate the effects of novelty. This system is that of our senses.

The mind thus borrows from the sensibility, which furnishes the initial spark, that character of instability necessary to start its power of transformation.

The animal quietly lying on the ground hears an unfamiliar sound; it is the *event*. It pricks its ears, then raises its head. It becomes uneasy. The power of transformation extends the length of its body, raising it to its paws. Its ear gives it its bearings and it takes to flight. A subtle sound was enough. In the same way, a mind attentive to phenomena, in which custom has not dulled the sensibility, is awakened, caught, by a commonplace event (like the fall of an object); it is seized with an intellectual apprehension which communicates itself to the whole complex of questions and conditions inherent in it. Newton remained for twenty years in the forest of his calculations.

Another remark: through the labours created

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by the mind, through the modifications it gives the things surrounding it (whether it is a question of material nature or of living beings), it tends to communicate to these beings, to this nature, precisely the same characteristics it recognizes in itself. Have you noticed that all our inventions tend either to the economy of our forces or to the economy of repetitions; or to leading our body far from its natural states—for example, to giving it speeds which approximate more and more closely the speed proper to perception and spiritual conception?

We used to say "as quick as thought," Rapidity seemed the essence of perception. But today we are familiar with a number of speeds greater than this. In the time between the sight of an object and the memory it invokes, or the recognition of the object, light has covered thousands of miles and our car has travelled three yards along the road. Thought thus seems to have spent its ingenuity in finding the means to make things move as promptly as itself. That is certainly an influence of the properties or the functional characteristics of the spirit on the orientation of inventions.

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But my object is not only to characterize the spirit. It is first and foremost to show what it has made of the world and how, in particular, it has made the modern social world, the order and disorder of which, equally and for the same reason, are the work of the spirit. Plunged into the human universe, the spirit is surrounded by spirits. Each is, as it were, the centre of a population of its fellows. It is unique, and yet it is but one unit in this indeterminate number. It is at once incomparable and commonplace. Its relations with others are among its major preoccupations. These relations participate in the contradiction to which I have just alluded. On the one hand, the spirit is opposed to the multitude. It wishes to be itself and even limitlessly to extend the realm where the ego is master. On the other hand, it is obliged to recognize a social world, a universe of wills, of human hopes, which are limited but of which it attempts now to perfect, now to destroy the existing order.

The spirit detests groups. It does not like factions. It feels diminished by agreement with other spirits; while, on the contrary, it seems to gain something by disagreement. A man who has need of thinking like his fellows has perhaps less wit

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than the rebel against conformity. Moreover, it is well known that every agreement is instable. We know that dissension lies in wait for all groups. Schism, objection and distinction are vital acts for the spirit and are never slow in arriving once agreement is reached. The spirit then recovers its liberty by mental reservation; it even rises up against the facts and the evidence; it is par excellence the rebel, even when it commands. This is because it has first of all conceived *that which* is as a disorder to be overcome. But, in the presentday world, it has no great difficulty in finding employment for its constructive instinct. The political drama offers endless subjects.

Every policy implies same conception of man. It is in vain that one limits political objectives, assumes them as simple or crude as one likes; every policy implies a concept of man and of the human mind, and an image of the world. Now, as I have hinted, in the modern world the distance between the idea of man posited by science and philosophy and that to which the laws and political notions

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apply, is constantly increasing. There is already a gulf between them.

If we were to translate into precise scientific language the things of the social and moral class, the discord between these ideas would become flagrant—the one, which would be the product of recent objective researches based on *verifiable* elements (that is the exact meaning of the word scientific) ; and the other, a vague, confused notion—in which ancient beliefs, the habits of all ages, abstract ideas deriving from the remote past, the economic and political experiments of more than one people, the more or less venerable sentiments, are oddly fitted and combined. Let us take an example: if one wished to apply, in the political domain, the ideas concerning mankind proposed to use by modern scientific doctrine, life would probably become intolerable for most of us. General sentiment would revolt at this rigorous application of the most rational data. One would come, in fact, to the classification of each individual, to the penetration of his most intimate recesses—sometimes, to the suppression or mutilation of certain blemished or thwarted beings. . . .²

² Quite recent legislation of a foreign country, realizing this prevision, prescribes measures of this rational rigour.

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I do not know whether man will ever consent to accept the yoke of so purely rational an organization, but I have purposely chosen this exaggerated example to show the remarkable contrast already existing between the rival and simultaneous conceptions in our minds, each endowed with its own forces and referable to tradition or to progress. Here, moreover, is a great novelty—this antimony between scientific *truth* and political *reality*. The gap has not always existed. There have been periods when the conception of man entertained by the magistrate and statesman and found in the laws, manners and customs was not in contradiction with that formulated by the philosophy of the time.

I said that the spirit is characterized by a power of transformation the tendency of which is to alter the initial, animal conditions of the species, and that it has succeeded in thus constructing for itself a whole world very different from the primitive world, its starting-point. It is therefore not astonishing that it should find itself a prey to a quantity of enigmas due to the antagonisms and

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contrasts which declare themselves between the above developments and man's fundamental nature—his nature at the start. Beside the real enigmas proposed to us by things, we find others proposed to us by our own works and our accumulated creations.

A large part of our present difficulties is due to the powerful survival of a sort of mysticism or mythology which is less and less in harmony with the facts but of which we cannot rid ourselves. We constantly feel the dead weight of it and its necessity. There is in us a strife between the past, represented by this mythology, and a certain tomorrow which torments us. Never has this strife between yesterday and tomorrow been fiercer than today. You will doubtless find feeble images, prefigurations of it, in history; for example, at the end of the old world, at the beginning of the Christian era, at the time of the Renaissance, at that of the French Revolution.

But the scale of the phenomena has become strangely altered. The farther we go, the more is felt the growing interval between the two aspects of spiritual activity—its aspect of transformation and its conservative aspect.

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I would begin by saying that the whole social structure is based on belief or confidence. All power is established on these psychological properties. It may be said that the social world, the juridical world, the political world, are essentially mythical worlds, that is, worlds whose laws and bases, and the relations constituting them, are not furnished by the observation of things, by a fact, by a direct perception; on the contrary, it is from us that they receive their existence, their force, their impulsion and constraint; and this existence, this influence, are all the more powerful in that we ignore that they derive from us, from our spirit.

To believe in human speech, spoken or written, is as indispensable to human beings as to trust to the solidity of the soil. Certainly, now and then, we have misgivings, but we can entertain doubts only in particular instances.

Oaths, credit, contracts, signatures, with the relations they presuppose, the existence of the past, the presentiment of the future, the lessons we receive, the projects we form—all these are, by nature, entirely mythical in this sense, that all are based entirely on the cardinal property of our

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minds not to treat as things of the spirit things which are *only* of the spirit.

Now, the essential characteristic of this indispensable acceptance of the "mythical" is the following: it permits inequality in exchanges—the exchange of words or of bills for merchandise; the exchange of *I have* for *you will have*; the exchange of the present and certainty for the future and uncertainty; more remarkable still, the exchange of confidence for obedience, of enthusiasm for renunciation and sacrifice, of sentiment for action. In short, the exchange of the present, the tangible, the real, the ponderable, for imagined advantages. But the progress of the practical sense—a progress imposed upon us by the increasingly complicated organization of a world where measurable sizes increasingly dominate, where vague things increasingly make us aware of their vagueness—this progress attacks the old foundations of the social structure.

It must be admitted that the greatest minds have precipitated this ruin (Voltaire, for example). Even in the sciences, the task of criticism has been particularly urgent and fecund. The greatest minds are always sceptical. However, they

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believe in something. They believe in everything capable of rendering them greater. Such, for instance, was Napoleon, who believed in his star, that is, in himself. Now, not to believe in current beliefs is obviously to believe in oneself, and often in oneself alone.

But to complete this sketch of the world's *fiduciary life* and its structure based on belief in man and the morrow, and to make you feel the real importance of the imaginary, I should like to show you how *power* itself, assumed to be a result of force, is essentially a spiritual value.

Power has but the force which one is willing to attribute to it; even the most brutal is founded on belief. *Under the assumption that it can act at all times and in all places, we ascribe, to it the power which it is able, in reality, to exert only in one place and at a certain moment.* In fact, all power is precisely in the position of a bank the existence of which rests on the sole probability (very great, it is true) that all the depositors will not come the same day to demand their money.
// any power were called upon to exert its real

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forces continually or at any given moment at all the points of its empire, the power would be, at all of these points, nearly equal to zero.

Note also (and this is an even more interesting consideration), that if all men were equally enlightened, equally critical and above all equally courageous, all society would be impossible!

Confidence or credulity, intellectual inequality and fear in a thousand forms are equally indispensable to it. To these essential elements must be added cupidity and vanity—and other virtues—which are the spices and the psychical complement of the psychical bases of society and politics.

But I will give you a rather striking (though quite fantastic) image of this fiduciary structure required by the whole edifice of civilization and which is the work of the spirit.

Suppose (and this supposition is not mine but was made, I believe, by an English or American writer whose name I have forgotten), suppose that a sort of mysterious malady were to attack and rapidly destroy all the paper in the world. Suppose there is no prevention, no remedy; it is

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impossible to find a way of exterminating the microbe or of fighting the physico-chemical phenomenon attacking the cellulose. The unknown parasite penetrates drawers and coffers, reducing the contents of our pocket-books and our libraries to powder, and all written things vanish.

Paper, as you know, plays the role of accumulator and conductor. It transmits a very variable charge of authenticity and of credibility not only from one man to another, but from one time to another.

Imagine, then, paper as having disappeared: bank-notes, stocks, drafts, laws, codes, poems, newspapers, etc. At once, all social life is destroyed and, from this ruin of the past, there is seen emerging out of the future, out of the potential and the probable, the *pure real*.

Everyone feels himself at once reduced to his immediate sphere of perception and action. His future and his past shrink amazingly; we are reduced to the radius of our senses and our direct actions.

This is an easily grasped example of the immense role played by verbal and fiduciary values. Nothing could make us better seize the fragility

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of the organized world and the spirituality of the social world than this fanciful hypothesis.

But I shall now make another hypothesis, far less fanciful, which should be still more striking. Instead of this disintegration, this disease, this tuberculosis of paper—the fragile support of so many things—imagine now the breakdown of the *support of this support*, the confidence, the credit which we accord this written paper and which gives it its entire value. The fact has already occurred, but never with the universal character it unfortunately has today. It is no longer an hypothesis. We have seen solemn treaties trodden underfoot or lose their force from day to day. We see States, all States, repudiating their promises, dishonouring their signatures, opposing or offering their creditors the horror of a void.

We have seen the lawgiver forced to free citizens themselves from the obligations imposed upon them by private contracts.

I will even say—*mirabile dictu!*—that *gold* itself no longer fully possesses its immemorial, mythical sovereignty—gold, which once seemed to contain, in its precious, weighty atom, confidence in its pure state! . . .

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Thus there is a general crisis of values. Nothing escapes it, either in the economic sphere, or in the moral or political spheres. Liberty itself ceases to be the fashion. The most *advanced* parties which, fifty years ago, demanded it furiously, today deny and sacrifice it! This crisis extends to everything—science, the statute book, Newtonian mechanics, diplomatic traditions, all is affected. I am not even sure that love itself, after half a dozen centuries, is not on the way to quite another evaluation.

In a word, there is a crisis of confidence, a crisis of fundamental conceptions, a crisis of all human relationships—that is, a crisis of spiritual values.

This is not all. We must now envisage a crisis of the spirit itself, and it is with this that I shall end. I leave aside the unprecedented crisis of the sciences, which seem today to despair of holding to their ancient ideal of unifying and explaining the universe. The universe is breaking up, losing all prospect of being viewed as a unity. The world of extreme smallness seems strangely different from the big world of which it forms a part. Even the identity of bodies is being lost in the process; nor

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shall I mention the crisis of determinism—that is, of causality.

But I am thinking of the dangers which seriously menace the very existence of all the superior spiritual values.

It is clear that we can conceive of an almost happy state of humanity—at least a stable state, pacific, organized and comfortable (I do not say we are very near to it); but we can conceive of this state and at the same time conceive of it getting along with a very moderate intellectual temperature. In general, *happy peoples have no intelligence*. They have little need of it.

If, then, the world follows a certain downgrade on which it has already started, we should henceforth consider as doomed to rapid disappearance the conditions in which, and thanks to which, what we most admire, what has until now been most admirable, has been created and been able to produce its effects.

Everything cooperates to diminish the chances of survival of what might be, or rather what might have been, most noble and beautiful. How can this be so?

First of all, it is easy to observe in ourselves a

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diminution, a sort of general obnubilation, of sensibility. We moderns are not very sensitive. Modern man has obtuse senses. He tolerates noise, he tolerates sickening odours, violent, intense or glaring lights. He is subjected to perpetual trepidation. He needs brutal stimulants, strident sounds, infernal drinks, brief and bestial emotions.

Living in mental disorder, he tolerates incoherence. On the other hand, spiritual labour to which we owe everything has sometimes become too easy. Coordinated mental labour is today provided with powerful means to render it easier, often to the point of suppressing it. We have created symbols, there exist machines which dispense with attention, with the patient, difficult work of the mind. The farther we go, the more the rapid, symbolical graphical methods will multiply. *They tend to suppress the effort of reasoning.*

Finally, the conditions of modern life tend inevitably, implacably, to standardize individuals and characters; unfortunately but necessarily, the average tends to be reduced *to the lowest type*. Bad money drives out the good.

Another danger: credulity and naivete are increasing to a disquieting extent. During the last

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twenty years a number of superstitions have little by little been introduced even into the salons. We see distinguished persons "touching wood" and practising magic rites. Besides, one of the most striking features of the world today is *futility*. I might even say that we are divided between futility and disquietude. We have the finest playthings man ever possessed. We have the automobile, we have the yo-yo, we have the radio and the moving picture, we have all that genius has been able to provide to transmit with lightning speed things which are not always of the highest quality. How many amusements there are! There were never so many toys! But how many anxieties there are too! Never were there so many fears!

Finally, how many duties! Duties dissimulated in comfort itself! Duties daily multiplied by concern for the morrow and for the constant amelioration of living conditions, a concern which also ensnares us in a tightening network of rules and restrictions, many of which we are unaware of. We are not conscious of everything we obey. The telephone rings and we run to answer; the clock strikes, we hurry to our appointment. Think of what working schedules, timetables, the increasing

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demands of hygiene, even the new laws of orthography, down to safety passages at the street crossings, represent in the formation of the spirit. Everything commands us, everything urges us, everything tells us what to do and prescribes our doing it automatically. Examination of reflexes becomes the principal examination today.

Even fashion has introduced a discipline of the imagination, a surveillance of imitation which subjects the esthetic foibles of the day to obscure commercial interests.

In every way, we are circumscribed, dominated by an occult or open control which extends to everything and we are bewildered by this obsessing incoherence of stimulants which becomes necessary to us.

Are not these detestable conditions for the production of art works comparable to those created by mankind in preceding centuries? We have lost the *leisure for maturing* and, if we look within ourselves, we artists no longer find that other virtue of the ancient creators of beauty—the determination to endure. Among so many dying beliefs of which I have spoken, there is one which has

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already disappeared—the belief in posterity and its judgment.

We have come at length to the end of this summary review of disorder which, of necessity, I have not made methodical. Perhaps you expect me to draw a conclusion? We like to have a play end well or at least to have it come to some sort of an end. You will have prompt satisfaction on this latter point. On the former, I repeat, my subject is precisely the impossibility of concluding. Our need of a conclusion is so strong that we introduce it irresistibly and absurdly into history and even politics. As things flow past we cut them up into definite tragedies, we want a war that is over to be something definitely finished. I need not tell you that such a sentiment is illusory. We believe that a revolution is a clear-cut solution and we know that that too is incorrect. These are crude simplifications.

The only conclusion of a study such as this—a glance at chaos—the only one it renders desirable, would be an anticipation or a presentiment of some future. But I loathe prophecies. Some time

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ago a man asked me what I augured of life fifty years hence. As I shrugged my shoulders, my questioner narrowed his question: "What shall we be in twenty years?" I replied: "We enter the future backwards . . . ," adding: "In 1892, what could one have foreseen of what has since happened? Fifty years ago, in 1882, it was impossible to foresee the events and the discoveries which have profoundly modified the face of the world." And I further added, "Monsieur, in 1892, would you have foreseen that, in 1932, to cross a street in Paris, you would have to seek the protection of a six-months old baby?" He answered: "No, I should never have foreseen that."

To sum up, it becomes increasingly vain to forecast on the basis of yesterday's data; it remains wise—and this will be my last word—to be ready for anything, or almost anything. We should keep our minds and hearts open to the wish for lucidity, clearness of intellect, the sentiment of the greatness and risk of the extraordinary adventure on which the human race—departing perhaps too far from the initial and natural conditions of the species—has embarked, going I know not whither!

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IN the previous essay I spoke to you of what I called *Spiritual Polity*. Under this title (which was somewhat lacking in precision), I expressed my concern over the present state of world affairs and examined the facts of which we are the witnesses and the agents, occupying myself, not so much with their political or economic character as with the situation they create for the things of the spirit. I laid stress (perhaps at too great length) on this critical state and said in substance that a disorder of which it is impossible to imagine the outcome is noticeable in every domain. Interruption, incoherence, surprise, are the ordinary conditions of our life. They have even become real needs for many, whose minds no longer find nutriment except in abrupt variations and constantly renewed stimulants. The words "sensational" and "amazing," currently employed today, are among those which depict an epoch. We no longer tol-

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erate continuity. We can no longer utilize leisure.

Our nature has a horror of the void—the void on which, in the past, minds could paint the images of their ideals, in the Platonic sense. This state, which I called "chaotic," is the composite result of the works of men and their accumulated labour. Doubtless it prepares a certain future, but a future quite impossible for us to forecast; and, of all things that are new, this is the greatest. We can no longer deduce from what we know any reliable conceptions of the future.

In a few decades, we have overturned and created so many things at the expense of the past—refuting, disorganizing, reorganizing the ideas, the methods, the institutions which it has bequeathed us—that the present appears to us an entirely unprecedented state. We no longer regard the past as a son regards his father, as a source from whom he can learn something, but as a grown man regards a child.

It often amuses me to imagine the resurrection of one of our great predecessors. I volunteer to act as his guide and walk with him about Paris. I listen to his questions and his exclamations; and, by this naive means, which forces me to be sur-

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prised by what I see every day without surprise, I become conscious of the immense difference which the flight of time has created between the life of yesterday and that of today. But I am soon embarrassed in my role of cicerone. Think of all one would have to know in order to explain our contemporary system of existence to Descartes or Napoleon, to make them understand how we manage to live under such strange conditions and in an environment which they would find rather alarming, even hostile. This embarrassment is the measure of the intervening changes.

I can only touch here upon the immense question of these changes, surpassing all prevision, which have profoundly modified the world and, in a few years, rendered it unrecognizable to those who have lived long enough to have known it as it was. I lay stress on the short time it has taken to produce such enormous results and likewise call your attention to the most potent causes of this abrupt mutation. I am thinking of all the facts, wholly and marvellously new, which have been revealed since the beginning of the last century.

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Until then, science had pursued its researches only on the phenomena recognized *from the beginning of time as immediately perceptible*. No doubt the idea of the universe had been profoundly modified, together with science itself; but the observable phenomena, on the one hand, and man's power of action, on the other, had not been appreciably increased. Now, in 1800 (I believe), the discovery of the electric current, through the remarkable invention of the battery, opened the era of new facts which were to alter the face of the world. It is not without interest to fix our attention on this date and to consider that it was only one hundred and thirty-five years ago that this revelation took place. You are familiar with the marvellous outcome—the whole domain of electrodynamics and electromagnetism opened to the impassioned curiosity of scientists, all the multiple applications, the perception of relations between electricity and light, the theoretic consequences which ensued; finally radiation, whose study has come to challenge all our physical knowledge and even our habits of thought.

Now consider the number of these facts, radically new, impossible to foresee, which, in less

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than a century and a half, have astounded us, from electric current to X-rays and the different rays which have been discovered since Curie. To these, add the quantity of applications, from the telegraph to television, and you will have some idea of *the effort of adaptation which becomes necessary for a people so long confined to the contemplation and utilization of the same immediately perceptible phenomena.*

A little fable will render clearer my thought which, in the last analysis, is the entrance of the human race into a phase of its history where all foresight becomes—and in this alone it is foresight—an occasion for error, a dubious production of our spirit.

Suppose, then, that the greatest scientists born before the end of the eighteenth century—Archimedes, Newton, Galileo and Descartes are assembled somewhere in Inferno and that a messenger from the Earth brings them a dynamo to examine. They are told that this apparatus serves living men for the production of motion, light and heat. They look, they turn it about. They take it to pieces,

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examine it and measure all its parts. In short, they do all they can. But electric current is unknown to them, as well as the method of inducing it. They have little more than the idea of mechanical transformations. "What is the use of these wires on the spool?" they ask. They are obliged to admit their impotence. Thus, all learning and all human genius assembled before this mysterious object, fail to discover its secret, to divine the new facts contributed by Volta, Ampere, Oersted, Faraday and the others.

(Do not fail to note that all these great men, who have just declared themselves incapable of understanding the dynamo, fallen from the Earth into the Shades, have done exactly what we ourselves do when we examine a brain, weigh it, dissect it, cut it into thin slices for histological examination. This natural transformer remains incomprehensible to us. . . .)

Observe also that I have chosen, in my example of the dynamo, minds of the first rank who are reduced to impotence by the radical impossibility of explaining an apparatus whose functioning and use are familiar to the majority of men today and

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which has moreover become indispensable to social life.

In a word, we have the privilege—or interesting misfortune—of seeing a profound, rapid, irresistible transformation of all the conditions of human action.

Do not for a moment believe that men born before our time ever witnessed variations so great and so extraordinary.

I will not enumerate all that has been profoundly modified, altered, replaced in the last thirty years, for I have shown you in the previous essay what is essential in the table of transformations. To complete my thought and to approach my present subject I will merely say that thirty years ago one could still examine the things of this world under an *historical aspect*, that is, everybody then sought in the present the fairly intelligible sequence and development of past events. Continuity guided men's minds. Models, examples, precedents, causes, were without much difficulty found in documents, souvenirs, historical works. This was general; and, apart from a few new de-

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velopments in the industrial domain, all the rest of the elements of civilization linked up fairly well with the past. But, during these last thirty or forty years, too many new things have entered every field, too many surprises, too many creations, too many destructions, too many considerable and abrupt developments have brutally interrupted this intellectual tradition, this continuity. And problems increasingly numerous, problems perfectly new and unexpected, have presented themselves on every side, whether in politics, in the arts, or in the sciences. All the cards have been reshuffled in every human affair. *Man finds foimself beset by a host of questions which until the present time, had been thought of by no one*, philosopher or not, scientist or not; everybody is, as it were, surprised. *Every man belongs to two eras.*

In the past, the new was apparent in scarcely anything but solutions or responses to ancient if not immemorial problems or questions. But for us, the new consists in the unknown character of the questions themselves, not in their solutions; in statements, not answers.

Hence this general impression of impotence and

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incoherence which dominates our minds, stimulating them and putting them in that anxious state to which we can neither accustom ourselves nor foresee an issue. On one hand is a past which is neither abolished nor forgotten but from which we can derive next to nothing to guide us in the present and help us to imagine the future. On the other is a future without the slightest prefiguration. We are daily at the mercy of an invention or accident, material or intellectual.

We have only to take a file of papers but a few months old to see how, in a few days, events constantly confound the forecasts of the most competent. Dare I add that a competent man becomes the man who makes errors but does so while observing all the rules? I cannot help thinking of that American brain trust which faded away after a few weeks of discussion.

Throughout the universe, on every hand, we see, in every domain, nothing but precipitate attempts, plans, experiments, essays and trials.

Russia, Germany, Italy, the United States, are like vast laboratories where research work is done

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on a scale hitherto unknown, where attempts are made to fashion a new man, a new political economy, new manners and customs, a new life and even new religions. And it is the same in the sciences, in the arts and in all human affairs.

But, before this state, so puzzling on the one hand, so exciting on the other, the very question of the human intelligence, of its limits, of its preservation, of its probable future, is presented to itself as the capital question of the moment.

In fact, the disorder of which I have spoken, the difficulties I am describing, are only the obvious consequences of the intense intellectual development which has transformed the world. They are the basis of this crisis. We easily find them at the root of the political and economic phenomena of our age—of the thought, of the studies, of the reasoning, of its intellectual labours. To cite but one example: the introduction of hygiene into Japan has doubled the population in thirty-five years! A few notions have, in that period of time, created an enormous political pressure.

Thus the action of the spirit, frantically creat-

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ing material means of high power in a blind outburst has brought about stupendous events, on a world scale; and these modifications of the human world have imposed themselves without order on its original limits, without preconceived plan and, above all, without regard to living nature or to its slowness of adaptation and evolution. It may be said that *all we know*—that is, *all of which we are capable*—has come to oppose itself to *what we are*.

And this places us before a question, to wit, whether this world, wondrously transformed, but turned terribly topsy-turvy by so much power applied with so little wisdom, can in the end acquire a rational statute, can return rapidly to—or rather, arrive rapidly at—a tolerable state of equilibrium? In other words, can the mind extricate us from the state in which it has placed us? (Note that the word *rational* is, at bottom, the equivalent of the word *rapidly*; for equilibrium is bound to return, just as it was reestablished after the fall of the Roman Empire, but only at the end of several centuries. It was reestablished *by events*, while the question I propound is, whether the spirit, acting directly and immediately, will be capable of

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reestablishing *rationality*, that is, *rapidly*, a certain equilibrium in a few years.)

Thus, my whole question comes back to this: whether the human mind will be able to surmount what the human mind has done? Whether the human intellect can save first the world, then itself? Hence it is a sort of examination of the value of the mind today and of its value tomorrow, or of its probable value, which constitutes the object of the problem which I set myself—and which I shall not solve.

Nor do I flatter myself that I shall be able to state it completely, or clearly or simply. The more this question has taken shape in my mind, the more I have become aware of its complexity. But, without seeking to simplify what is the contrary of simple or to throw light upon that whose function it is to clarify and which in its essence is so obscure, I shall attempt to give you an impression of the question itself; and it will suffice, for this purpose, I hope, for me to present the way in which modern life—the life of the majority of men—treats, influences, excites or fatigues their

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mind, dealing with it in such a fashion that we may rightly entertain great fears for the conservation of value in the intellectual order.

The conditions of mental work have, in fact, suffered the same fate as all other human concerns, that is, they participate in the intensity, the haste, the general acceleration of exchanges, as do all the effects of the incoherence, of the fantastic scintillation of events. I admit I am so frightened by certain symptoms of degeneration and debility which I see (or believe I see) in the general movement of intellectual production and consumption, that I sometimes despair of the future! I excuse myself—(and I accuse myself)—for sometimes dreaming that man's intelligence—and all that differentiates man from the animals—might one day weaken and, humanity, insensibly returning to an instinctive state, redescend to simian inconstance and futility. Little by little it would be won over to an indifference, to an inattention, to the instability which many things in the contemporary world—in its tastes, in its manners and customs, in its ambitions—manifest or already permit us to fear. . . . And I say (without taking my own words too seriously):

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"All human history, in so far as it manifests thought, has perhaps been only the effect of a sort of crisis, of an aberrant thrust comparable to one of those* abrupt variations observable in nature which disappear as strangely as they came. There have been instable species, monstrous in size, in power, in complication, which have not lasted. Who knows whether all our culture be not an hypertrophy, a sport, an unwarrantable development, which one or two hundred centuries will have sufficed to produce and to exhaust?"

This is, doubtless, an exaggerated notion, and my only intention is to make you see, in rather a summary form, all the concern that may be felt with regard to the destiny of the intellect. But it is too easy to justify these fears. It will suffice, in order to reveal their real germ, to indicate certain of the black points on the mind's horizon.

Let us begin by examining that fundamental faculty which is wrongly opposed to the intelligence, whose real motor power it is—I refer to sensibility. If modern man's sensibility is gravely compromised by the present conditions of life, and

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if the future seems to promise this sensibility an increasingly harsh treatment, we shall be entitled to assume that intelligence will suffer profoundly from the alteration of sensibility. But how is this alteration brought about?

Our modern world is entirely occupied with the increasingly thorough and efficacious development of natural energies. Not only does it seek them and expend them, in order to satisfy the eternal necessities of life, but, as soon as it possesses the means of satisfying wholly unknown and non-existent needs, it wastes them, and finds a thrill in wasting them to the point where it actually creates needs of a wholly new kind. In our state of industrial civilization, everything occurs as if, after inventing a substance, one were to invent an illness for it to cure, a thirst for it to quench, a pain for it to abolish. For the sake of enrichment, we are inoculated with tastes and desires which have no roots in our deep-seated physiological life, but result from psychical or sensorial excitements deliberately produced. Modern man is drunk with squandering. There is an excess of speed, excess of light, excess of tonics, of narcotics, of stimulants. Excess of frequency in impressions; excess

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of diversity; excess of sound; excess of facilities; excess of marvels, excess of those amazing contrivances by which immense effects are placed under a child's control. All life today is inseparable from these excesses. Our organic system, submitted more and more to ever new mechanical, physical and chemical experiments, reacts to these rhythms inflicted upon it, almost as it does to an *insidious poison*. It grows accustomed to its poison and soon comes to demand it. Every day the dose is found insufficient.

In Ronsard's time, the eye was satisfied with a candle—if not an oil-soaked wick; the scholars of that epoch, who liked to work at night, read and wrote without difficulty by a feeble, flickering flame. Today the eye demands twenty, fifty, a hundred candle power. The ear demands the full force of the orchestra, tolerates the harshest dissonances, accustoms itself to the thunder of trucks, to the whirl, the grinding and the roar of machines, even, at times, wishing to hear them in concert music.

As to the most central of our senses—that intimate sense of the distance between the desire for and the possession of an object, which is nothing

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but the sense of duration (that sentiment of time which was formerly satisfied with the speed of race horses)—it today finds express trains slow and is impatient at the time required to transmit electric messages. Events themselves are never highly enough seasoned for our taste. If a great catastrophe is not announced in the morning, we feel a certain void: "There is nothing in the papers today," we sigh. There we are caught in the act. We are all poisoned. I am thus justified in saying that there exists for us a sort of intoxication by energy, as there is an intoxication by haste and another by size.

Children think that a ship is never big enough, an automobile or aeroplane swift enough, and the idea of the absolute superiority of quantitative size—an idea whose naivete and crudeness are (I hope) obvious—is one of the most characteristic notions of the modern human species. If one tries to discover in what way speed-madness (for example) affects the spiritual virtues, one easily discerns all around oneself—and in oneself—all the risks of this intoxication.

I have pointed out, as a critical phenomenon in the history of the world, the disappearance, some

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forty years ago, of free land, that is, the complete territorial occupation by organized nations, the suppression of what belongs to no one. But parallel to this political phenomenon there is to be noted the disappearance of free time. Free space and free time are now mere memories. This free time is not leisure in the sense in which the word is ordinarily understood. Apparent leisure still exists and even justifies and generalizes itself by legal measures and mechanical improvements against the conquest of time by activity. Working days are measured and their number of hours limited by law. But internal leisure, which is quite a different thing from chronometric leisure, is becoming lost. We are losing that peace essential to our inner being, that priceless evasion during which the most delicate elements of life find comfort and refreshment, during which the being, to some extent, washes itself clean of the past and of the future, of present consciousness, of suspended obligations and of shirking delays—in which there is no worry, no foreboding, no internal pressure, but a sort of repose in absence, a beneficent vacation which restores the mind to its own liberty. At such moments it is occupied only with itself. It is released

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from its duties towards practical knowledge and relieved of concern with coming events. It can produce structures as pure as crystal. But the rigour, the tension and the precipitancy of our modern existence trouble or waste this precious repose. Look in yourselves and about you! The progress of insomnia is remarkable and follows close behind all other progress. How many are there who sleep only a synthetic sleep and who provide themselves with nothingness through the skilled industry of organic chemistry! Perhaps new combinations of more or less *barbituric* molecules will give us the meditation which existence increasingly forbids us to obtain by natural means. The pharmacopeia, some day, will offer us sagacity. But meanwhile fatigue and mental confusion are often such that one finds oneself naively regretting the South Sea islands, the simple, idle paradises, the lives, slow and inexact of form, we have never known. Savages know nothing of the necessity of a time divided into fractions.

There were neither minutes nor seconds for the ancients. Artists like Stevenson and Gauguin, fled Europe and went to clockless islands. Neither mail

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nor the telephone disturbed Plato. The train time did not hurry Virgil. Descartes lost himself in dreams on the quays of Amsterdam. But our movements today are regulated by precise divisions of time. The twentieth of a second is no longer negligible in certain practical spheres.

No doubt, the organism is admirable in its suppleness. Till now it has increasingly resisted inhuman treatment; but will it always be able to stand this constraint, this excess? . . .

In the face of all these facts, I am about ready to conclude that our sensibility is becoming weakened. If we need a stronger stimulant, a greater expenditure of energy in order to feel, the reason is that the delicacy of our senses, after a period of extreme refinement, is diminishing. I am convinced that precise measurements of the energies demanded today by the senses of civilized beings would show that the thresholds of their sensibility are more difficultly crossed, that it is becoming more obtuse.

This attention of sensibility is sufficiently shown by the general and increasing indifference to ugly and brutal sights.

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In view of artistic culture, we have developed our museums; we have introduced a kind of esthetic education into our schools. But these are only specious measures, of no use save to spread an abstract erudition without practical effects. Since we permit our public thoroughfares, streets and squares, to be dishonoured by monuments which offend our sight and intelligence, our cities to develop in disorder and our public structures to arise without the slightest concern for the simplest demands of formal sentiment, everything is limited to the distribution of knowledge without vital depth.

But here I am encroaching upon the ethical domain. Our decadence in the disposition of buildings and perspectives is due, in great measure, to the exaggeration of the mania for control, which is itself a symptom of degeneration of the taste for responsibility.

Town-planning can only be a definite, deliberate action. It is a work of art. Thus it cannot result from the deliberations of a council, a committee, a commission, or any other official body, however well composed. To build is to realize a certain desire of the eye, a desire which, little by

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little, the mind shapes, deepens and gradually creates by acts and in matter. But one of the marks of our modern deterioration of character is the subordination of action to the control of action and the hit or miss dissemination of distrust and deliberation.

I shall return to this presently.

Let us first take up one of the principal objects of our examination—perhaps the most important;

The whole future of intelligence depends upon education, or rather upon the instruction of all sorts imparted to the mind. The terms "education" and "instruction" should not here be taken in a restricted sense. In pronouncing them, one generally thinks of the systematic formation of the child or adolescent by his parents or masters. But let us not forget that our whole life may be considered an education no longer organized or even organizable, but, on the contrary, essentially unorganized, consisting of the aggregate of the impressions and acquisitions, good or bad, we owe to life itself. School is not the only place of instruction for the young. The environment and the age have as much influence on them as the educators, if not more. The street, conversation, the

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theatre, acquaintances, the things that are in the air at the time, the successive fashions (and by fashion I mean not only that of clothes and of manners but of language as well) act powerfully and constantly on their mind.

But let us first devote our attention to organized education, as dispensed dogmatically in the schools. I shall make a preliminary remark on what, in my opinion, is the most apparent characteristic of our time. I consider that we can no longer treat any question whatsoever concerning human life without taking account of the diverse forms which it assumes in the civilized world as a whole. In every matter, our epoch exacts from us or imposes upon us an outlook more extended than before. One can no longer restrict the study of a human problem to what occurs in a particular nation. Its investigation must be extended to neighbouring and sometimes very distant peoples. Human relationships have become so close, so numerous, and the repercussions so rapid and often so surprising, that the examination of local phenomena of every observable sort in a restricted district cannot suffice for our instruction as to the local

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conditions and possibilities. Today, all knowledge is, of necessity, comparative knowledge.

European men of tomorrow—that is, the children and adolescents of today—are divided into very different groups. Tomorrow these groups will confront each other, they will be in competition, in liaison, or in opposition. We should thus observe and compare what we make of our children with what other nations make of theirs, and think of the possible consequences of these dissimilar educations. I shall not greatly stress this; but I cannot refrain from reminding you that, for the past few years, the entire youth of three or four great countries has been submitted to an educational treatment of a character essentially political. *Politics first*—such is the principle of their school programmes and disciplines. These are laid out for the uniform development of young minds, and remarkably precise political and social intentions here dominate all cultural considerations. The slightest details of school life, the manners inculcated, the games and the books, all cooperate to turn them into men adapted to a perfectly determinate social structure and national or social designs. Mental liberty is resolutely subordinated to

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state doctrine—a doctrine which, doubtlessly, varies in its principles according to the nation, but which may be said to be identical everywhere in its desired objective. *The State forms its men.*

Our own youth will therefore soon find itself face to face with homogenous youths, fashioned, trained, and, as it were, *nationalised*. The modern State of this type suffers no discordance, and this instruction, which begins at the earliest age, never abandons its prey but continues and completes its education by post-graduate systems of military character.

I shall not pursue this observation farther, but shall limit myself to propounding the question which concerns me here, a question to which the future alone can respond:

What will result from this system for the value of culture? What will become of mental liberty, of freedom of research and, above all, of emotional freedom? What will become of the liberty of intelligence?

Let us give a little attention to the French system of education and instruction.

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I am obliged to recognize that this system, or rather what stands in its stead (for, after all, I do not know whether we have a system)—I am obliged to recognize that our instruction partakes of the general uncertainty and disorder. It even produces so exactly this chaotic state, this state of confusion, so remarkably incoherent, that to observe our programmes and the objectives of our studies would suffice to reconstitute the mental state of our age and discover all the aspects of our doubt and our fluctuations concerning every value. Our instruction is not, as in the countries of which I have just spoken, clearly dominated by politics. It is mixed with politics, which is very different; and it is mixed with politics in an irregular, inconstant manner. It may be said to be free, with a liberty constantly tempered by the fear of its excesses—revived, the next moment, by the fear of the contrary excess. Scarcely are we reassured by the energy which shows signs of manifesting itself, than we are up in arms against this suggested demonstration.

Instruction thus shows its indecision, and shows it in its own fashion. Its aims are divided, between tradition and progress. At times it advances reso-

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lately, drafting programmes which make *tabula rasa* of many literary or scientific traditions. At other times the respectable concern for what are called *humanities* brings it back to them, and there once again arises the infinite, familiar dispute between the dead and the living, in which the living do not always win. I am obliged to remark that, in these discussions and in this alternative, the fundamental questions are never raised. I know that the problem is terribly difficult. The increasing quantity of knowledge on the one hand, and, on the other, the concern for keeping certain qualities which, rightly or wrongly, we consider not only as superior in themselves, but as characteristic of the nation, can with difficulty be reconciled. But if the very subject of education is considered—the *child*, who is to be made a man—and if one asks oneself just what one wants this child to become, it seems to me that the problem would be singularly and happily transformed, and that every programme, every method of instruction, compared point by point, with the idea of this transformation to be obtained, and its direction, would be judged thereby. Suppose, for example, one said:

"The point is to give this child (chosen by

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chance) the notions necessary for him to give the nation a man able to earn his living and to dwell in the modern world which will be his, and to contribute a useful, not a dangerous element to it—one capable of contributing to general prosperity; capable, on the other hand, of enjoying the varied acquisitions of civilization and of augmenting them—in short, of costing society the smallest possible amount and giving it the maximum return."

I do not say that this formula is definitive or complete or even altogether satisfying. I say that it is on this kind of question especially that we must fix our mind when we wish to discuss instruction. Clearly the essential thing is to inculcate in the young the fundamental conventions permitting them relations with their kind, and the notions which, eventually, will give them the means of developing their forces or of protecting them from their weaknesses in the social environment. But when we examine what exists about us, we are struck to notice how much the methods in use—if methods there be—neglect this primary reflection which I deem essential. The dominant preoccupation appears to be endowing children with

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a culture torn between the so-called *classic* tradition and the natural desire to initiate them into the enormous development of modern knowledge and activity. Sometimes one tendency wins, sometimes the other; but never, amid so many arguments, does the essential question arise:

"What is desired and what ought to be desired?"

The reason is, that this question implies a decision, the taking of sides. We must imagine the *man of our time*, and this *idea of man* in the probable environment where he will live should first of all be established. It ought to result from precise observation, not from the feeling and the preferences of all and sundry—notably from their political hopes. There is nothing more culpable, more pernicious and more deceptive than partisanship in education. There is however one point on which unfortunately everyone agrees. The real objective of education is *the diploma*.

I never hesitate to declare the diploma to be the mortal enemy of culture. The more importance diplomas have acquired in life (and economic circumstances have only increased this importance) the less has been the yield of instruction. The more control has been exercised and multiplied, the more

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the results have been bad. The control has been bad by its effects on the public spirit and on the spirit in general; bad because it creates hopes and illusions of acquired rights; bad by all its suggested stratagems and subterfuges—recommendations, strategic preparations and, in a word, the employment of every expedient to cross the dreaded threshold. This is, it must be admitted, a strange and undesirable initiation into intellectual and civic life.

Moreover, if I base myself on experience alone and regard the effects of control in general, I observe that control, in every field, leads to the vitiation of action, to its perversion. I have already said that, when an action is submitted to control, the basic goal of him who acts is no longer the action itself, but foreseeing control and blocking it. The control of studies is only a particular case, a striking demonstration, of this general observation.

Nor is this all. The diploma gives society a phantom guarantee and the holders of the diploma phantom rights. The holder of a diploma passes officially as possessing knowledge; all his life, he re-

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tains this testimonial of a temporary, purely expedient science. On the other hand, this holder of a "legal" diploma comes to believe that society owes him something. Never has a convention been instituted which is more unfortunate for everybody—for the State and for individuals (and, in particular, for culture). It is for example in consideration of the diploma that we have seen the use of summaries, manuals, absurd condensations of science, collections, ready-made questions and answers, of extracts and other dreadful things—all of them substitutes for reading. From this it results that nothing in such an adulterated culture can any longer aid or befit the life of a mind in the process of development.

Education is not limited to childhood and adolescence. Instruction is not confined to the school. Throughout life, our environment is our educator—an educator which is simultaneously severe and dangerous. Severe, for mistakes are more costly here than in college; dangerous, for we are scarcely conscious of the educational influence, good or bad, of our environment and fellows. We are constantly

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learning something. We are made up, in large part, of all the events which have had an influence on us; but we do not distinguish their effects which accumulate and combine in us. Let us examine a little more closely the way in which we are modified by this haphazard education.

I shall distinguish two sorts of these accidental lessons which we are continually learning. First there are those which are good or, at least, might be good. These are the object lessons, the experiences we are obliged to undergo, the facts which we directly observe or experience. The more direct this observation, the more directly we perceive things, or events, or beings, without immediately translating our impressions into commonplaces or ready-made formulas, the more valuable they are. I may add—and it is not a paradox—that a direct perception is valuable in proportion to our inability to express it. The more it defies the resources of our language, the more it obliges us to develop these.

We possess a whole store of formulas, of names, of ready-made phrases which are purely imitative, which deliver us from the trouble of thinking and

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which we have a tendency to take for valuable and appropriate solutions.

To the things that impress us we usually respond by words of which we are not the real authors. Our thought—or what we take for our thought—is thus a simple automatic response.

But where does it come from? This is where we see the second kind of lessons I have spoken of. They are the ones which do not come from our direct personal experience but which we derive from our reading or from the words of others.

You know, although you have not perhaps sufficiently meditated upon it, to what degree the modern era is *verbal*. Our cities are covered with gigantic writings. The very night is peopled with words of fire. The first thing in the morning innumerable printed sheets are in the hands of pedestrians, of travellers in the trains and of the lazy in their beds. You have only to press a button in your room to hear the world's voices and sometimes the "voice of our masters," As for books, never have so many been published. We have never read so much, or rather cast our eye over so much.

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What can come from this great debauch? The same results I have just described; but in this instance it is our verbal sensibility which is brutalized, blunted, degraded. Our language is using itself up.

The epithet is depreciated, and the inflation of advertising has annihilated the power of the most powerful adjectives. Praise and even blame have reached a stalemate; one must rack one's mind to find the means to glorify or to insult!

Moreover, the quantity and frequency of publications, the flux of things printed and distributed, sweep away judgments and impressions between morning and night, mix and mingle them and make of our minds a veritable gray matter where nothing lasts or dominates; and we have a strange impression of monotony in the new, of boredom with marvels, with extremes.

What should be concluded from these statements?

However incomplete, I think that they will suffice to justify serious fears for the destiny of the intelligence such as we have known it up to now. We possess a model of the mind and of diverse standards of intellectual value which, although

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very ancient—not to say immemorial—are perhaps not eternal.

For instance, we can yet scarcely imagine that mental labour can be collective. The individual seems essential to the growth of the highest science and the production of the arts. As for myself, I hold energetically to this opinion; but I recognize therein my own feeling and I know I should distrust it. The stronger it is, the more I find my own personality in it, and I say to myself we should never attempt to interpret the lines of the future through a personality. I endeavour not to commit myself on the great enigmas propounded to us by the modern era. I realize it subjects our minds to unimagined tests.

All the notions on which we have lived are shaken. The sciences lead the dance. Time, space and matter are, as it were, on the fire, and the categories in fusion.

As to political principles and economic laws, you are well aware that Mephistopheles in person seems today to have enrolled them in the troop of his Sabbat.

Finally there arises the question, so difficult and controversial, of the relations between the individ*-

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ual and the State—the State, that is, the increasingly precise, narrow and exact organization which takes from the individual whatever it wants of his freedom, his toil, his time, his strength—in short, of his life—in order to give him . . . But what will it give him? The means of enjoying what is left, of developing it? There are very difficult questions to determine. The State at present seems to have the upper hand, and its power tends-almost entirely to absorb the individual.

But the individual likewise represents liberty of mind. Now, we have seen that this liberty (in its highest sense) becomes illusory solely through the effect of modern life. We are hypnotized, harassed, dulled, a prey to all the contradictions, all the discords which tear the tissue of contemporary civilization. Even before the State has entirely assimilated the individual, he is already compromised.

As I told you I shall not draw a conclusion, but I will end with a word of advice.

Among all the features of the age, there is one of which I shall say no ill. I am no enemy of sport. I mean the sport which does not spring merely from imitation and from fashion and which is not too much talked about in the papers. But I like the

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idea of sport, and I gladly carry it over into the domain of the spirit. This idea leads to developing to the highest point some one of our native qualities, while keeping the balance among them all; for sport which deforms its subject is bad sport. Finally, all sport seriously practised requires contests, severe privations, hygiene, tension and endurance measured by the results—all told, a veritable moral system of action tending to develop the human type through a training based upon the analysis of its faculties and their disciplined stimulation. One might characterize it by this formula (which may seem paradoxical), that it consists in the reflective education of the reflexes.

But the mind, mind though it be, can be treated analogously. The working of our mind may be considered a series, irregularly constituted, of unconscious productions and of conscious interventions. We are mentally a succession of transformations, of which the conscious are more complex than the unconscious. Sometimes we dream, sometimes we wake. There is the fact, roughly expressed. Now, all unquestionable human progress is due to the utilization of these two modes of psychical existence, with increase of consciousness,

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that is, with an increase of internal voluntary action. If civilized man thinks so differently from the primitive, it is due to the predominance of conscious reactions over unconscious productions. No doubt, these latter are the indispensable, and sometimes priceless, substance of our thoughts; but their durable value depends, ultimately, upon consciousness.

Intellectual sport thus consists in the development and control of our interior acts. Just as the virtuoso on the piano or the violin succeeds artificially in increasing, through study of himself, the consciousness of his impulses and in acquiring an insight into them which enables him to achieve a superior sort of liberty, so in the intellectual field should one acquire an art of thinking and develop a sort of controlled psychology. . . . May this happy lot be yours!

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