

Critical Essays, Albert Camus

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I.

The aim of the *Maison de la Culture*, which is celebrating its opening today, is to serve the culture of the Mediterranean. Faithful to the general directions governing institutions of its type, it seeks within a regional framework to encourage the development of a culture whose existence and greatness need no proof. Perhaps there is something surprising in the fact that left-wing intellectuals can put themselves to work for a culture that seems irrelevant to their cause, and that can even, as has happened in the case of Maurras, be monopolized by theoreticians of the Right.

It may indeed seem that serving the cause of Mediterranean regionalism is tantamount to restoring empty traditionalism with no future, celebrating the superiority of one culture over another, or, again, adopting an inverted form of fascism and inciting the Latin against the Nordic peoples. This is a perpetual source of misunderstandings. The aim of this lecture is to try to dispel them.

The whole error lies in the confusion between Mediterranean and Latin, and in attributing to Rome what began in Athens. To us it is obvious that our only claim is to a kind of nationalism of the sun. We could never be slaves to traditions or bind our living future to exploits already dead. A tradition is a past that distorts the present.

But the Mediterranean land about us is a lively one, full of games and joy. Moreover, nationalism has condemned itself. Nationalisms always make their appearance in history as signs of decadence. When the vast edifice of the Roman empire collapsed, when its spiritual unity, from which so many different regions drew their justification, fell apart, then and only then, at a time of decadence, did nationalisms appear. The West has never rediscovered unity since.

At the present time, internationalism is trying to give the West a real meaning and a vocation. However, this internationalism is no longer inspired by a Christian principle, by the Papal Rome of the Holy Roman Empire. The principle inspiring it is man. Its unity no longer lies in faith but in hope.

A civilization can endure only insofar as its unity and greatness, once all nations are abolished, stem from a spiritual principle. India, almost as large as Europe, with no nations, no sovereignty, has kept its own particular character even after two centuries of English rule. This is why, before any other consideration, we reject the principle of a Mediterranean nationalism. In any case, it would never be possible to speak of the superiority of

Mediterranean culture.

Men express themselves in harmony with their land. And superiority, as far as culture is concerned, lies in this harmony and in nothing else. There are no higher or lower cultures. There are cultures that are more or less true. All we want to do is help a country to express itself. Locally. Nothing more. The real question is this: is a new Mediterranean civilization within our grasp?

II.

Obvious facts,

(a) There is a Mediterranean sea, a basin linking about ten different countries. Those men whose voices boom in the singing cafés of Spain, who wander in the port of Genoa, along the docks in Marseilles, the strange, strong race that lives along our coasts, all belong to the same family. When you travel in Europe, and go down toward Italy or Provence, you breathe a sigh of relief as you rediscover these casually dressed men, this violent, colorful life we all know. I spent two months in central Europe, from Austria to Germany, wondering where that strange discomfort weighing me down, the muffled anxiety I felt in my bones, came from. A little while ago, I understood. These people were always buttoned right up to the neck.

They did not know how to relax. They did not know what joy was like, joy which is so different from laughter. Yet it is details like this that give a valid meaning to the word "Country." Our Country is not the abstraction that sends men off to be massacred, but a certain way of appreciating life which is shared by certain people, through which we can feel ourselves closer to someone from Genoa or Majorca than to someone from Normandy or Alsace. That is what the Mediterranean is a certain smell or scent that we do not need to express: we all feel it through our skin.

(b) There are other, historical, facts. Each time a doctrine has reached the Mediterranean basin, in the resulting clash of ideas the Mediterranean has always remained intact, the land has overcome the doctrine. In the beginning Christianity was an inspiring doctrine, but a closed one, essentially Judaic, incapable of concessions, harsh, exclusive, and admirable. From its encounter with the Mediterranean, a new doctrine emerged: Catholicism. A philosophical doctrine was added to the initial store of emotional aspirations. The monument then reached its highest and most beautiful form—adapting itself to man.

Thanks to the Mediterranean, Christianity was able to enter the world and embark on the miraculous career it has since enjoyed. Once again it was someone from the Mediterranean, Francis of Assisi, who transformed Christianity from an inward-looking, tormented religion into a hymn to nature and simple joy. The only effort to separate Christianity from the world was made by a northerner, Luther. Protestantism is, actually, Catholicism wrenched from the Mediterranean, and from the simultaneously pernicious and inspiring influence of this sea.

Let us look even closer. For anyone who has lived both in Germany and in Italy, it is obvious that fascism does not take the same form in both countries. You can feel it everywhere you go in Germany, on people's faces, in the city streets. Dresden, a garrison town, is almost smothered by an invisible enemy. What you feel first of all in Italy is the land itself. What you see first of all in a German is the Hitlerite who greets you with "Heil Hitler"; in an Italian, the cheerful and gay human being. Here again, the doctrine seems to have yielded to the country—and it is a miracle wrought by the Mediterranean that enables men who think humanly to live unoppressed in a country of inhuman laws.

III.

But this living reality, the Mediterranean, is not something new to us. And its culture seems the very image of the Latin antiquity the Renaissance tried to

rediscover across the Middle Ages. This is the Latinity Maurras and his friends try to annex. It was in the name of this Latin order on the occasion of the war against Ethiopia that twenty-four Western intellectuals signed a degrading manifesto celebrating the "civilizing mission of Italy in barbarous Ethiopia." But no. This is not the Mediterranean our Maison de la Culture lays claim to. For this is not the true Mediterranean. It is the abstract and conventional Mediterranean represented by Rome and the Romans.

These imitative and unimaginative people had nevertheless the imagination to substitute for the artistic genius and feeling for life they lacked a genius for war. And this order whose praises we so often hear sung was one imposed by force and not one created by the mind. Even when they copied, the Romans lost the savor of the original. And it was not even the essential genius of Greece they imitated, but rather the fruits of its decadence and its mistakes.

Not the strong, vigorous Greece of the great tragic and comic writers, but the prettiness and affected grace of the last centuries. It was not life that Rome took from Greece, but puerile, over-intellectualized abstractions. The Mediterranean lies elsewhere. It is the very denial of Rome and Latin genius. It is alive, and wants no truck with abstractions. And it is easy to acknowledge Mussolini as the worthy descendant of the Caesars and Augustus of Imperial Rome, if we mean by this that he, like them, sacrifices truth and greatness to a violence that has no soul.

What we claim as Mediterranean is not a liking for reasoning and abstractions, but its physical life—the courtyards, the cypresses, the strings of pimientos. We claim Aeschylus and not Euripides, the Doric Apollos and not the copies in the Vatican; Spain, with its strength and its pessimism, and not the bluster and swagger of Rome, landscapes crushed with sunlight and not the theatrical settings in which a dictator drunk with his own verbosity enslaves the crowds. What we seek is not the lie that triumphed in Ethiopia but the truth that is being murdered in Spain.

IV.

The Mediterranean, an international basin traversed by every current, is perhaps the only land linked to the great ideas from the East. For it is not classical and well ordered, but diffuse and turbulent, like the Arab districts in our towns or the Genoan and Tunisian harbors. The triumphant taste for life, the sense of boredom and the weight of the sun, the empty squares at noon in Spain, the siesta, this is the true Mediterranean, and it is to the East that it is closest. Not to the Latin West.

North Africa is one of the few countries where East and West live close together. And there is, at this junction, little difference between the way a Spaniard or an Italian lives on the quays of Algiers, and the way Arabs live around them. The most basic aspect of Mediterranean genius springs perhaps from this historically and geographically unique encounter between East and West. (On this question I can only refer you to Audisio.)²

This culture, this Mediterranean truth, exists and shows itself all along the line:

(1) In linguistic unity—the ease with which a Latin language can be learned when another is already known;

(2) Unity of origin—the prodigious collectivism of the Middle Ages—chivalric order, religious order, feudal orders, etc., etc. On all these points the Mediterranean gives us the picture of a living, highly colored, concrete civilization, which changes doctrines into its own likeness—and receives ideas without changing its own nature.

But then, you may say, why go any further?

V.

Because the very land that transformed so many doctrines must transform the doctrines of the present day. A Mediterranean collectivism will be different from a Russian collectivism, properly so-called. The issue of collectivism is not being fought in Russia: it is being fought in the Mediterranean basin and in Spain, at this very moment. Of course, man's fate has been at stake for a long time now, but it is perhaps here that the struggle reaches its tragic height, with so many trump cards placed in our hands. There are, before our eyes, realities stronger than we ourselves are. Our ideas will bend and become adapted to them. This is why our opponents are mistaken in all their objections. No one has the right to prejudge the fate of a doctrine, and to judge our future in the name of a past, even if the past is Russia's.

Our task here is to rehabilitate the Mediterranean, to take it back from those who claim it unjustly for themselves, and to make it ready for the economic organization awaiting it. Our task is to discover what is concrete and alive in it, and, on every occasion, to encourage the different forms which this culture takes. We are all the more prepared for the task in that we are in immediate contact with the Orient, which can teach us so much in this respect. We are, here, on the side of the Mediterranean against Rome. And the essential role that towns like Algiers and Barcelona can play is to serve, in their own small way, that aspect of Mediterranean culture which favors man instead of crushing him.

VI.

The intellectual's role is a difficult one in our time. It is not his task to modify history. Whatever people may say, revolutions come first and ideas afterward. Consequently, it takes great courage today to proclaim oneself faithful to the things of the mind. But at least this courage is not useless. The term "intellectual" is pronounced with so much scorn and disapproval because it is associated in people's minds with the idea of someone who talks in abstractions, who is unable to come into contact with life, and who prefers his own personality to the rest of the world.

But for those who do not want to avoid their responsibilities, the essential task is to rehabilitate intelligence by regenerating the subject matter that it treats, to give back all its true meaning to the mind by restoring to culture its true visage of health and sunlight. I was saying that this courage was not useless. For if it is not indeed the task of intelligence to modify history, its real task will nevertheless be to act upon man, for it is man who makes history. We have a contribution to make to this task. We want to link culture with life. The Mediterranean, which surrounds us with smiles, sea, and sunlight, teaches us how it is to be done.

Xenophon tells us in *The Persian Expedition* that when the Greek soldiers who had ventured into Asia were coming back to their own country, dying of hunger and thirst, cast into despair by so many failures and humiliations, they reached the top of a mountain from which they could see the sea. Then they began to dance, forgetting their weariness and their disgust at the spectacle of their lives. In the same way we do not wish to cut ourselves off from the world. There is only one culture. Not the one that feeds off abstractions and capital letters. Not the one that condemns. Not the one that justifies the excesses and the deaths in Ethiopia and defends the thirst for brutal conquests. We know that one very well, and want nothing to do with it. What we seek is the culture that finds life in the trees, the hills, and in mankind.

This is why men of the Left are here with you today, to serve a cause that at first sight had nothing to do with their own opinions. I would be happy if, like us, you were now convinced that this cause is indeed ours. Everything that is alive is ours. Politics are made for men, and not men for politics. We do not want to live on fables. In the world of violence and death around us, there is no place for hope. But perhaps there is room for civilization, for real civilization, which puts truth before fables and life before dreams. And this civilization has nothing to do with hope. In it man lives on his truths.³

It is to this whole effort that men of the West must bind themselves. Within the framework of internationalism, the thing can be achieved. If each one of us within his own sphere, his country, his province agrees to work modestly, success is not far away. As far as we are concerned, we know our aim, our limitations, and our possibilities. We only need open our eyes to make men realize that culture cannot be understood unless it is put to the service of life, that the mind need not be man's enemy. Just as the Mediterranean sun is the same for all men, the effort of men's intelligence should be a common inheritance and not a source of conflict and murder.

Can we achieve a new Mediterranean culture that can be reconciled with our social idea? Yes. But both we and you must help to bring it about. Published in the first number of the review *Jeune Méditerranée*, monthly bulletin of the Algiers Maison de la Culture, April 1937

1 This outline of a lecture given at the Maison de la Culture on February 8, 1937, is a very early text.

With its insistence on the fundamental difference between political doctrines elaborated in the north of Europe and the more tolerant attitude toward life fed by the Mediterranean, it already contains the essence of Camus's argument in *The Rebel*. -P.T.

2 Gabriel Audisio, born in 1900, studied in Marseilles and Algiers, where he was a member of the literary group associated with the publisher Chariot. In 1932 he published a collection of popular folk tales entitled *Les Meilleures Histoires de Cagayous*. These stories, attributed to a popular character named Musette, were originally written by Gabriel Robinet. -P.T.

3 I have spoken of a new civilization and not of a progress in civilization. To handle that evil toy called Progress would be too dangerous.

On Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*¹

A novel is never anything but a philosophy expressed in images. And in a good novel the philosophy has disappeared into the images. But the philosophy need only spill over into the characters and action for it to stick out like a sore thumb, the plot to lose its authenticity, and the novel its life.

Nonetheless, a work that is to endure cannot do without profound ideas. And this secret fusion of experience and thought, of life and reflection on the meaning of life, is what makes the great novelist (as we see him in a work like *Man's Fate*, for example).

The novel in question today is one in which this balance has been broken, where the theories do damage to the life. Something that has happened rather often lately. But what is striking in *La Nausée* is that remarkable fictional gifts and the play of the toughest and most lucid mind axe at the same time both lavished and squandered.

Taken individually, each chapter of this extravagant meditation reaches a kind of perfection in bitterness and truth. The novel that takes shape a small port in the north of France, a bourgeoisie of shipowners who combine religious observance with the pleasures of the table, a restaurant where the exercise of eating reverts to the repugnant in the narrator's eyes—everything that concerns the mechanical side of existence, in short, is depicted with a sureness of touch whose lucidity leaves no room for hope.

Similarly, the reflections on time, represented in an old woman trotting aimlessly along a narrow street, are, taken in isolation, among the most telling illustrations of the philosophy of anguish as summarized in the thought of Kierkegaard, Chestov, Jaspers, or Heidegger. Both faces of the novel are equally

convincing. But taken together, they don't add up to a work of art: the passage from one to the other is too rapid, too unmotivated, to evoke in the reader the deep conviction that makes art of the novel.

Indeed, the book itself seems less a novel than a monologue. A man judges his life, and in so doing judges himself. I mean that he analyzes his presence in the world, the fact that he moves his fingers and eats at regular hours—and what he finds at the bottom of the most elementary act is its fundamental absurdity.

In the best ordered of lives, there always comes a moment when the structures collapse. Why this and that, this woman, that job or appetite for the future? To put it all in a nutshell, why this eagerness to live in limbs that are destined to rot?

The feeling is common to all of us. For most men the approach of dinner, the arrival of a letter, or a smile from a passing girl are enough to help them get around it. But the man who likes to dig into ideas finds that being face to face with this particular one makes his life impossible. And to live with the feeling that life is pointless gives rise to anguish. From sheer living against the stream, the whole of one's being can be overcome with disgust and revulsion, and this revolt of the body is what is called nausea.

A strange subject, certainly, and yet the most banal. M. Sartre carries it to its conclusions with a vigor and certainty that show how ordinary so seemingly subtle a form of disgust can be. It is here that the similarity between M. Sartre and another author, whom, unless I am mistaken, no one has mentioned in connection with *La Nausée*, is to be found. I mean Franz Kafka.

But the difference is that with M. Sartre's novel some indefinable obstacle prevents the reader from participating and holds him back when he is on the very threshold of consent. I attribute this to the noticeable lack of balance between the ideas in the work and the images that express them. But it may be something else. For it is the failing of a certain literature to believe that life is tragic because it is wretched. Life can be magnificent and overwhelming—that is its whole tragedy.

Without beauty, love, or danger it would be almost easy to live. And M. Sartre's hero does not perhaps give us the real meaning of his anguish when he insists on those aspects of man he finds repugnant, instead of basing his reasons for despair on certain of man's signs of greatness. The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning. This is a truth nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point. It is not this discovery that is interesting, but the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it.

At the end of his voyage to the frontiers of anxiety, M. Sartre does seem to authorize one hope: that of the creator who finds deliverance in writing. From the original doubt will come perhaps the cry "I write, therefore I am." And one can't help finding something rather comic in the disproportion between this final hope and the revolt that gave it birth. For, in the last resort, almost all writers know how trivial their work is when compared to certain moments of their life. M. Sartre's object was to describe these moments. Why didn't he go right through to the end? However that may be, this is the first novel by a writer from whom everything may be expected.

So natural a suppleness in staying on the far boundaries of conscious thought, so painful a lucidity, are indications of limitless gifts. These are grounds for welcoming *La Nausée* as the first summons of an original and vigorous mind whose lessons and works to come we are impatient to see.

Review published in *Alger républicain* on October 20, 1938

1 When Camus wrote this review of Sartre's first novel and the following one on the volume of short stories published in English under the title of Intimacy, the two men had never met. —P.T.

On Sartre's *Le Mur* and Other Stories

Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *La Nausée* was reviewed in this column, has just published a collection of short stories in which the strange and bitter themes of his first novel appear once more, in a different form. Men sentenced to death, a madman, a sexual pervert, a man suffering from impotence, and a homosexual make up the characters in these stories. One might wonder at the bias of these choices. But already, in *La Nausée*, the author's aim was to turn an exceptional case into an everyday story. It is at the far boundaries of the heart and instinct that M. Sartre finds his inspiration.

But this needs further definition. One can prove that the most ordinary person is already a monster of perversity and that, for example, we all more or less wish for the death of those we love. At least, such is the aim of a certain kind of literature. It does not seem to me that this is M. Sartre's aim. And, at the risk of being perhaps a shade oversubtle, I would say that his aim is to show that the most perverse of creatures acts, reacts, and describes himself in exactly the same way as the most ordinary. And if there were a criticism to be made, it would concern only the use the author makes of obscenity.

Obscenity in literature can attain a certain grandeur. It certainly contains an element of grandeur, if one thinks for instance of Shakespeare's. But at least obscenity must be called for by the work itself. And while this may be the case for "Erostrate" in *Le Mur*, I cannot say the same for *Intimité*, where the sexual descriptions often seem gratuitous.

M. Sartre has a certain taste for impotence, both in the larger meaning of the word and in its physiological sense, which leads him to choose characters who have arrived at the limits of their selves, stumbling over an absurdity they cannot overcome. The obstacle they come up against is their own lives, and I will go so far as to say that they do so through an excess of liberty.

These beings, with no attachments, no principles, no Ariadne's thread, are so free they disintegrate, deaf to the call of action or creation. A single problem preoccupies them, and they have not defined it. From this stems both the immense interest and the absolute mastery of M. Sartre's stories.

Whether one takes young Lucien, who begins with surrealism and ends in the *Action Française*; Eve, whose husband is insane and who wants at all costs to penetrate into the mad domain from which she is excluded; or the hero of "Erostrate"; everything these characters do, say, or feel is unexpected.

And from the moment they are introduced to us there is no clue as to what they will do in the next. M. Sartre's art lies in the detail with which he depicts his absurd creatures, the way he observes their monotonous behavior. He describes, suggesting very little but patiently following his characters and attributing importance only to their most futile actions.

It would not be surprising to learn that at the very moment he begins his story, the author himself is not sure where it will lead him. Yet the fascination such a story evokes is undeniable. One cannot put it down, and soon the reader too acquires that higher, absurd freedom which leads the characters to their own ends.

For his characters are, in fact, free. But their liberty is of no use to them. At least, this is what M. Sartre demonstrates. And doubtless this explains the often overwhelming emotional impact of these pages as well as their cruel pathos. For in this universe man is free of the shackles of his prejudices, sometimes from his own nature, and, reduced to self-contemplation, becomes

aware of his profound indifference to everything that is not himself. He is alone, enclosed in this liberty.

It is a liberty that exists only in time, for death inflicts on it a swift and dizzying denial. His condition is absurd. He will go no further, and the miracles of those mornings when life begins anew have lost all meaning for him.

How does one remain lucid confronted with such truths? It is normal for such beings, deprived of human recreations—the movies, love, or the Legion of Honor—to regress to an inhuman world where they will this time forge their own chains: madness, sexual mania, or crime. Eve wants to go mad. The protagonist of "Erostrate" wants to commit a crime, and Lulu wants to live with her impotent husband.

Those who escape these turnabouts or who do not complete them can always yearn for the self-annihilation they offer. And, in the best of these short stories, *La Chambre*, Eve watches her husband's delirium and tortures herself to discover the secret of this universe in which she would like to be absorbed, of this isolated room in which she would like to sleep with the door forever closed.

This intense and dramatic universe, this brilliant yet colorless depiction, are a good definition of M. Sartre's work and its appeal. And one can already speak of "the work" of an author who, in two books, has known how to get straight to the essential problem and bring it to life through his obsessive characters. A great writer always brings his own world and its message. M. Sartre's brings us to nothingness, but also to lucidity. And the image he perpetuates through his characters, of a man seated amid the ruins of his life, is a good illustration of the greatness and truth of this work.

Review published in *Alger républicain* on March 12, 1939

On Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine*

Editions Grasset has just given us an excellent translation of Ignazio Silone's novel *Bread and Wine*. Here, once again, is a work that deals with timely problems. But the mixture of anguish and detachment with which these problems are approached enables us to greet *Bread and Wine* as a great revolutionary work. We can do so for several reasons. First of all, the work is without any doubt an anti-Fascist's.

But the message it contains goes beyond anti-Fascism. For although its protagonist, a revolutionary who has spent years in exile after having escaped from a concentration camp, still finds reasons to hate Fascism when he returns to Italy, he also discovers reasons to doubt. Not his revolutionary faith, of course, but the way in which he has expressed it.

One of the book's key passages is certainly the moment when the hero, Pietro Sacca, sharing now the elemental life of Italian peasants, wonders whether the theories in which he has travestied his love for them have not simply put a greater distance between him and them. It is in this sense that the work is revolutionary.

For a revolutionary work is not one that glorifies victories and conquests, but one that brings to light the Revolution's most painful conflicts. The more painful the conflicts, the greater their effect. The militant too quickly convinced is to the true revolutionary what the bigot is to a mystic.

For the grandeur of a faith can be measured by the doubts it inspires. And no sincere militant, born among the people and determined to defend their dignity, could miss the doubt that sweeps over Pietro Sacca. The anguish that grips the Italian revolutionary is precisely what gives Silone's book its bitterness and somber brilliance.

On the other hand, there is no revolutionary work without artistic qualities. This may seem paradoxical. But I believe that if our time teaches us anything on this score, it is that a revolutionary art, if it is not to lapse into the basest forms of expression, cannot do without artistic importance. There is no happy medium between vulgar propaganda and creative inspiration, between what Malraux calls "the will to prove" and a work like *Man's Fate*.

Bread and Wine meets this test. Written by a rebel, it flows forward in the most classical of forms. Short sentences, a vision of the world both naïve and sophisticated, terse, natural dialogues give Silone's style a secret resonance that comes through even in translation. If the word poetry has a meaning, one finds it here, in tableaux of a rustic and eternal Italy, in cypress-planted slopes and an unequalled sky, and in the ancient gestures of Italian peasants.

To rediscover the road to these gestures and this truth, and to return from an abstract philosophy of the revolution to the bread and wine of simplicity, this is Ignazio Silone's itinerary and the lesson of his novel.

And no small part of its greatness is its ability to inspire us to rediscover, beyond the hatreds of today, the face of a proud and human people who remain our only hope for peace.

Review published in *Alger républicain* on May 23, 1939

Intelligence and the Scaffold¹

It is said that when Louis XVI, on his way to the guillotine, tried to give one of his guards a message for the queen, he drew the following reply: "I am not here to run your errands but to lead you to the scaffold." This excellent example of propriety in wording and obstinate perseverance to the job at hand is, it seems to me, perfectly applicable, if not to all the novels in our language at least to a certain classical tradition in the French novel.

Novelists of this genre do indeed refuse to carry messages, and their only concern seems to be to lead their characters imperturbably to the rendezvous awaiting them, whether it be Madame de Clèves to her convent, Juliette to happiness and Justine to her ruin, Julien Sorel to his beheading, Adolphe to his solitude, Madame de Graslin to her deathbed, or Proust to the celebration of old age he discovers in the salon of Madame de Guermantes.

What characterizes these authors is their singleness of purpose; one would look in vain through these novels for the equivalent of a Wilhelm Meister's interminable adventures; it is not that pedantry is foreign to us but that we have our own particular kind of pedantry, which is not, fortunately, Goethe's sort. All that can be said is that in art an ideal of simplicity always requires fixity of intention. Hence a certain obstinacy that seems central in the French novel.

This is why the problems of the novel are primarily artistic. If our novelists have proved anything, it is that the novel, contrary to general belief, cannot easily dispense with perfection. Only it is an odd sort of perfection, not always a formal one. People imagine—wrongly—that novels can dispense with style. As a matter of fact, they demand the most difficult style—the kind that does not call attention to itself.

But the problems our great novelists set themselves have not concerned form for form's sake. They focused only on the exact relationship they wished to introduce between their tone and their ideas. Somewhere between monotony and chit-chat they had to find a language to express their obstinacy.

If their language often lacks outward distinction it is because it is molded in

a series of sacrifices. The messages have been omitted; everything is reduced to essentials. This is how minds as different as Stendhal's and Madame de La Fayette's may seem akin: both have worked hard to find the right language. Indeed, the first problem Stendhal set himself is the one that has preoccupied great novelists for centuries. What he called an "absence of style" was a perfect conformity between his art and his passions.²

For what gives originality to all [French] novels compared to those written in other countries is that they are not only a school of life but an artistic school: the liveliest flame crackles in their rigorous language. Our great successes are born of a particular concept of strength, which might be called elegance, but which needs to be defined.

One must be two persons when one writes. In French literature, the great problem is to translate what one feels into what one wants others to feel. We call a writer bad when he expresses himself in reference to an inner context the reader cannot know. The mediocre writer is thus led to say anything he pleases. The great rule of an artist, on the other hand, is to half forget himself the better to communicate.

Inevitably this involves sacrifices. And this quest for an intelligible language whose role is to disguise the immensity of his objective leads him to say not what he likes but only what he must. A great part of the genius of the French novel lies in the conscious effort to give the order of pure language to the cries of passion. In short, what triumphs in the works I am discussing is a certain preconceived idea.

I mean intelligence. But the term needs definition. One always tends to think of intelligence as involving only what is visible—structure, for example. Now it is curious to note that the structure of the typical seventeenth-century novel, *La Princesse de Clèves*, is extremely loose.

Several stories are launched and the novel begins in complexity even though it ends in unity. Actually, we have to wait for *Adolphe*, in the nineteenth century, to find the purity of line we are so ready to imagine we find in *La Princesse de Clèves*. In the same way, the structure of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is purely chronological, with no artistic experiments. In Sade's novels the composition is elementary; philosophical dissertations alternate with erotic descriptions right to the end.

Stendhal's novels offer curious evidence of carelessness, and one is never surprised enough at the final chapter of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, in which the author, as if anxious to conclude, with the end in sight, bundles in twice as many events as in the rest of the book. It is surely not these examples which justify the claim that French novels possess an Apollonian perfection of form.

The unity, the profound simplicity, the classicism of these novels thus lie elsewhere. It is surely closer to the truth to say merely that the great characteristic of these novelists is in the fact that each, in his own way, always says the same thing and always in the same tone. To be classic is to repeat one's self. And thus at the heart of our great works of fiction one finds a certain conception of man that intelligence strives to illustrate by means of a small number of situations.

And, of course, this can be said of any good novel, if it is true that novels create their universe by means of intelligence, just as the theater creates its universe by means of action.

But what seems peculiar to the French tradition is that plot and characters are generally limited to this idea and everything is arranged so as to make it echo on indefinitely. Here, intelligence not only contributes the original idea; at the same time it is also a marvelously economical principle that creates a kind of passionate monotony.

It is both creative and mechanical at the same time. To be classical is both to repeat oneself and to know how to repeat oneself. And this is the difference I see between French novels and those of other countries, where intelligence inspires the fiction but also allows itself to be carried away by its own reactions.³

To take a specific example, it seems to me that Madame de La Fayette's aim, since nothing else in the world appears to interest her, is simply to show us a very special conception of love. Her strange postulate is that this passion places man in peril. And while this is something one might say in conversation, no one ever thinks of pushing the logic quite so far as she did.

What one feels at work in *La Princesse de Clèves*, *La Princesse de Montpensier*, or *La Comtesse de Tende* is a constant mistrust of love. It is apparent in her very language, where certain words really seem to burn in her mouth: "What Madame de Clèves had said about his portrait had restored him to life by making him realize that it was he whom she did not hate." But in their own way, the characters also convince us that this healthy suspicion is valid.

They are strange heroes, who die of emotion, who seek mortal illness in thwarted passions. Even the minor characters die through impulses of the soul: "He received his pardon when he was expecting only the death blow, but fear had so possessed him that he went mad and died a few days later." Our most audacious Romantics never dared attribute such powers to passion. Faced with such ravages of feeling, it is easy to understand why Madame de La Fayette makes an extraordinary theory of marriage as a less evil the mainspring of her plot: better to be unhappily married than to suffer from passion.

Here is the deep-seated idea whose obstinate repetition gives her work its meaning. It is one idea of order. Long before Goethe, in fact, Madame de La Fayette balanced the injustice of an unhappy condition against the disorder of the passions; and long before him, in an amazing act of pessimism, she chose injustice, which leaves everything untouched. The order she is concerned with is less simply a wordy one than that of a soul and a system of ideas.

And far from wishing to make passions of the heart the slave of social prejudice, she uses these prejudices as a remedy for the disorderly impulses that terrify her. She is not interested in defending institutions they do not concern her; but she does wish to protect the core of her being, whose only enemy she knows. Love is nothing but madness and confusion. It is not hard to guess what burning memories surge beneath such disinterested phrases, and it is this, far more than deceptive questions of structure, that offers us a great lesson in art.

For there is no art where there is nothing to be overcome, and we realize then that the monotony of this ceremonious harmony is as much the result of clear sighted calculation as of heartrending passion.

There is only one feeling present, because it has consumed all others, and it speaks always in the same rather formal tone because it is not allowed to shout. Such objectivity is a victory. Other writers, who can offer lessons but who achieve no such victories, have tried to be objective, because they were capable of nothing else.

This is why the novelists who are called naturalists or realists, who have written so many novels and many good ones, have not written a single great one. They could not go beyond description. The grandeur of this lofty art in Madame de La Fayette, on the other hand, is that we are made to feel her limits have been put there on purpose.

Immediately they disappear, and the whole work vibrates. This is the result of a studied art that owes everything to intelligence and its attempt to dominate. But it is quite obvious that such art is also born of an infinite possibility of suffering, and a firm decision to master suffering by means of language. Nothing

expresses this disciplined distress, this powerful light with which intelligence transfigures pain, better than an admirable sentence from *La Princesse de Clèves*: "I told him that so long as his suffering had had limits, I had approved of it and shared it; but that I would pity him no longer if he gave way to despair and lost his reason." The tone is magnificent. It assumes that a certain strength of soul can impose limits on misery by censoring its expression.

It introduces art into life by giving man the power of language in his struggle against his destiny. And thus we see that if this literature is a school for life, it is precisely because it is a school of art. To be more accurate, the lesson of these lives and these works of art is no longer simply one of art, but one of style. We learn from them to give our behavior a certain form. And this permanent truth, which Madame de La Fayette never stops repeating, which she expresses in this sentence in unforgettable form, takes on its full significance and illuminates what I mean when we realize that the very man who says it (the Prince of *Clèves*) will nonetheless die of despair.

It would be easy to find in Sade, in Stendhal, in Proust, and in a few contemporary writers similar lessons in style and life, very different in each case, but always made up of a choice, a calculated independence, and a clarity of aim. The perseverance in sin legitimized in Sade,⁴ the litanies of energy in Stendhal,⁵ Proust's heroic effort to portray human suffering within a wholly privileged existence—all say one thing and nothing else. Out of a single feeling that has become a part of them forever, these writers create works that are both various and yet monotonous.

Of course, all I am doing here is making a few suggestions. Perhaps they are enough to demonstrate that the rigor, the purity, and the concentrated force of French classical fiction do not stem purely from its qualities of form (in any case, such a term has no meaning in art), but from the stubborn clinging to a certain tone, a certain constancy of soul, and a human and literary knowledge of sacrifice. Such classicism is a matter of deliberate choices (*partis pris*).⁶

The cult of the efficacy of intelligence creates not only an art but also a civilization and a way of life. It's possible, of course, that such an attitude has limitations. But perhaps they are necessary ones. We tend nowadays to undervalue lucid effort. And we are very proud of the universality of our taste. But perhaps this universality diminishes our inner strength. To someone who asked Newton how he had managed to construct his theory, he could reply: "By thinking about it all the time." There is no greatness without a little stubbornness.

In any case, this is how I explain the very strong feeling I have about our great novels. They prove the effectiveness of human creation. They convince one that the work of art is a human thing, never human enough, and that its creator can do without dictates from above. Works of art are not born in flashes of inspiration but in a daily fidelity. And one of the real secrets of the French novel is its ability to show at the same time a harmonious sense of fatality and an art that springs wholly from individual liberty—to present, in short, the perfect domain in which the forces of destiny collide with human decisions.

Its art is a revenge, a means of overcoming a difficult fate by imposing a form upon it. From the French novel one learns the mathematics of destiny, which are a means of freeing ourselves from destiny. And if the Prince of *Clèves* shows that in spite of everything he is superior to the tremors of a susceptibility that will kill him, it is because he is capable of forming that admirable sentence which refuses to depict madness and despair.

None of our great novelists has turned his back on human suffering, but we can also say that none has surrendered to it and that they have all mastered it with an inspiring patience, through the discipline of art. A contemporary Frenchman owes his idea of virility perhaps (and naturally his virility needs no beating on the drum) to this series of incisive, scorching works in which the superior exercise of an intelligence that cannot keep from dominating moves unflinchingly

forward, to the very scaffold.

From a special issue of the magazine *Confluences* on "Problems of the Novel,"
July 1943

1 The initial notes for "Intelligence and the Scaffold" appear in Camus's *Carnets II*, pp. 60-1 (Alfred A. Knopf edition, pp. 44-5). Since at the time Camus was planning the first version of *The Plague* it is perhaps useful to bear in mind the ideas he expresses in this essay when discussing the construction of that novel. *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*) also contains a long discussion of the Marquis de Sade and Proust. -P.T.

2 "If I am not clear, my whole world is destroyed." (Stendhal).

3 In Russian novels, for example, or in such experiments as James Joyce's.

4 "He invented cruelties he never practiced himself, and which he would have no desire to practice, in order to enter into contact with the great problems" (Otto Flake). The great problem for de Sade is man's irresponsibility without God. Camus noted down this judgment on Sade in *Carnets I*, p. 249, in 1942 (Alfred A. Knopf edition, pp. 208-9). -P.T.

5 The remark by the Prince of Clèves can be juxtaposed with this notation in Stendhal's *Journal*: "As often happens to men who have concentrated their energy on one or two vital points, he had an indolent and careless look."

6 This is why Francis Ponge's *Le Parti pris des choses* is one of the few classical works of our day. Francis Ponge (born 1899) is known for his minute descriptions of individual physical objects. A long letter from Camus to Ponge, in which he described *Le parti pris des choses* as "an absurd work in the purest sense of the term" was published in the *Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française* in September 1956. It was written in 1943 in reply to a letter from Ponge to Camus, and is reprinted in *Pléiade II*, pp. 1662-6. -P.T.

Portrait of a Chosen Man¹

Le Portrait de M. Pouget was published before the war, in installments, in a review of relatively limited influence. At the time, it enjoyed an undoubted but unobtrusive success. It has just appeared in book form,² and it still seems to have been relatively little discussed in the unoccupied zone. This is because, in spite of appearances, the world has not changed since the war. It is still very noisy. And if a measured voice undertakes to speak to us of an austere and pure example, the probability is that no one will listen.

What we mean when we say that a book has "found an audience" is that it has gone beyond the large or small circle of readers it could count upon even before publication. Naturally, I have no doubts that *Le Portrait de M. Pouget* was read enthusiastically in Catholic circles. But it would be a good thing if very different readers had the opportunity to meditate on this fine book, and what I would like to do here is describe its appeal to a mind alien to Catholicism.

It is an extremely difficult enterprise to put intelligence and modesty on stage, or to sketch the portrait and write the novel of a spiritual adventure. *Le Portrait de M. Pouget* belongs to a genre difficult to define, even more tricky to categorize. It is inspired not by friendship, as was Montaigne's essay on *La Boétie*, but rather by veneration, as Alain was inspired when he tried to revive Jules Lagneau.

There is always something moving in the homage one man pays to another. But who can boast that he has defined the intriguing feelings that link certain minds to

others with ties of respect and admiration? Such ties are sometimes more solid than those of blood. The man who has not had this experience is indeed poor, while he who has been granted it and has given himself wholly to it is happy indeed. In any case, this is the kind of experience Monsieur Guitton has described for us.

Who was M. Pouget? An old Lazarist priest, three-quarters blind, who meditated on Tradition, and received a few students in the little cell where his life was drawing to its close. His life can be summed up in a few words: peasant, seminarian, teacher, invalid, with forty years of studious retreat in his order's Mother House.

So it is lacking in the kind of dramatic events that nourish brilliant biographies. The only earthly happenings are those contained in an endless reflection on Tradition and Biblical texts. Writing the biography of M. Pouget thus involved composing a small manual of exegesis and apologetics, tracing a spiritual portrait from his works, his method, and his ideas.

These ideas were not clear-cut. M. Pouget put them forward with considerable precaution. And M. Guitton has shown all the necessary moderation and respect in describing them. Consequently, to summarize would be to distort them. The reader can remedy this difficulty by making allowances for it. If Pouget had read the rest of this article, he and M. Guitton would have been justified in exclaiming: "It's much more complicated than that."

Father Pouget's whole effort seems to have been devoted to finding a middle way between blind faith and a faith that knows its reasons. He did not wish to maintain ideas that are indefensible, to justify ambitions that the Bible never had. Father Pouget made concessions. He considered everything in the Bible inspired, but did not see everything as necessarily sacred. A choice had to be made.

From the point of view of rigid orthodoxy, such an attitude was dangerous. As a matter of fact, this proved to be the case, for it appears that Father Pouget suffered from official disapproval. He made his peace by striving after serenity and putting forward a postulate: "The Church is not infallible because of the proofs that she advances, but because of the divine authority with which she teaches." This said, his problem was to cut his losses, to establish an irreproachable minimum in the Biblical texts, and to show that this minimum was enough to prove the truths of faith.

Father Pouget pointed out, for example, that we require the Gospels to possess a degree of historical accuracy that no one would have thought of requiring from the historians of classical antiquity or the Middle Ages. Allowance must nevertheless be made for the mentality peculiar to each historical period, and for the rapid variations in moral climate from one century to another.

And we have to make a clear distinction in the Bible between what is attributable to divine inspiration and what results from the mentality peculiar to a historical period. Thus, for a long time, the Bible indiscriminately cast both sinners and the righteous into the same hell. Ecclesiastes, for example, clearly states that "the dead know not anything neither have they any more a reward" (Ecc. IX, 5). This is because the idea of moral rewards was foreign to primitive Jewish thought.

Consequently, it is impossible to defend these texts, or torture them by allegory until they show evidence of divine inspiration. To those who might evidence surprise at God's carelessness in thus allowing his ideas to be distorted, Father Pouget would have replied that it was more probably a case of a deliberate plan. God has proportioned his revelations to the ability of men to understand them. The light of God is too bright for human eyes and revelation must be progressive.

"God is a teacher," M. Pouget would say. We had to wait until the twentieth

century to believe that it was possible to philosophize without knowing how to spell. Such an idea would have scandalized Father Pouget. Divine pedagogy, like all reasonable pedagogies, proceeds on the contrary by stages. It does not lay down the law, it teaches. It temporizes with the human mind and gives it time to breathe. Thus God has made himself a realist and a politician.

Father Pouget also liked to talk of another divine attribute, that of condescension (which we must, I suppose, take in its exact meaning of "coming down to the level of ..."). God's motto would thus be, according to our author: "Neither too soon, nor too late, nor too much at a time." The result is that God had made his teaching coincide with history. History is the series of manoeuvres organized by God to make the light of truth penetrate the blind hearts of men. We must consequently look upon revelation as something that develops in a stubborn effort to free itself from successive layers of worldly prejudice.

There must be no tampering with historical truth. And Monsieur Guitton had considerable justification for replying to critics that: "What is remarkable is not that Judeo-Christianity should be clothed in particular mental attitudes, but that it should transcend them." Let us finally note that the Church supports this effort in her own work of defining the faith, which as Father Pouget points out is almost always negative. The Church gives every liberty to her theologians. She rejects only those theories which threaten the existence of the faith in their time. Revelation teaches what is, the Church rejects what is not.

The task of the Church is thus to watch over the march of truth, preventing men from causing it either to hasten or to stray. Heretics, in short, are men who want to go faster than God. There is no salvation for impatience. These principles of the basic minimum, of respect for the mentality peculiar to a particular period, and of progressive revelation form the basis of M. Pouget's method. This method does not, it is true, go to the root of the problem.

That root is the problem of being, and Pouget seems to have been suspicious of metaphysics. In any case, the intellectual esteem inspired by his enterprise makes it the commentator's duty not to go beyond the author's chosen context. Within this context, however, Pouget's method is exposed to one great objection. It runs the risk, in fact, of using this respect for the mentality peculiar to a historical period as an easy way out for problems raised by exegesis.

Everything that contradicts faith is attributed to the mentality of the time, and discussion is thus avoided. On this point M. Guitton offers a reply that is only half satisfying: "The method is as good as the mind using it." True. But that involves the risk of abolishing the very problem of methodology, for there would no longer be good and bad methods but good and bad minds. With a few nuances, I would not find this a completely impossible point of view. But for a person who accepts Tradition, on the other hand, it is rather surprising.

One feels much more comfortable in pointing out what seems invaluable in Pouget's meditations: they leave the problem of faith intact. Let me make myself clear. It is scarcely necessary to say that, for Father Pouget himself, the problem did not arise. But every exegesis assumes its disbelievers. Like Pascal's *Pensées*, Pouget's thought has an implicit aim: it is apologetic. But his method does not try to convince people immediately. That is the task of grace. Pouget's critique was negative and preparatory.

It aimed at showing that the inspired texts of the Bible contained nothing really offensive to common sense. Divine texts cannot be obstacles on the path to faith. They are just the opposite, sure and certain guides. "From all this" said Pouget, "we draw not faith, for this is impossible, but adequate motives for belief." Thus, from the point of view of intelligence, such a method, with all its modesty and generosity, leaves the question intact. Our freedom of choice remains absolute. It is restored to its true climate.

For a hundred years now, science and religion have been mixed together far too

much.³ More supple examination, indeed, restores complete freedom both to Christians and to unbelievers. The former no longer try to "prove" revelation, while the latter no longer base their arguments on the Bible's doubtful genealogies. The problem of faith does not lie in quibbles of this kind. Pouget uses common sense to restore prestige to grace. On this issue he puts things back into their rightful places, the only way to make the mind progress.

These are the real merits of a method like his. And however discreet they may be, these merits are so invaluable as to make us forget the astonishing attitude that kept Copernicus and Galileo on the Index for three hundred years, or that accords divine status to the slightest comma in the Bible. Is all of Father Pouget contained in this method? We might perhaps expect to find that there is also, in addition, some whiff of existence, some more human resonance. The very method, however, ought to disclose, to those who are looking for it, the secret of a great soul.

When M. Guitton writes that the principle Father Pouget followed in his researches was "a courageous indifference to his desires," we seem indeed to stand face to face with the man and, for a second, to possess him completely. Again, we feel completely informed, as to his human side, when Father Pouget confides to us: "There are moments, now that I am drawing near my end, when I have questions which might lead toward disbelief." It would be puerile to exaggerate the meaning of these confessions.

They are the significant shadows of the portrait, the fold of the lip that Piero della Francesca gave the Duke d'Orbino, It would be nothing without the rest—the hard eyes, the imperious nose, and even the landscape in the background. But, without it, the face would lose its secret and its humanity.

Here, in conclusion, I can repeat the question I asked in the beginning: "But who was M. Pouget?" Today, when India is in fashion, one is certain of an audience if one talks about gurus. Indeed, it is one of those spiritual masters whom this priest calls to mind. Yet this cannot be said of his influence. His teaching is really not aimed at illumination or at the inner god; this strange guru has transformed historical criticism into an instrument of asceticism.

He appeals to common sense in order to support the revelation of what goes beyond our senses. I am not competent to judge if he was rewarded in what was dearest to his heart.⁴ One can, on the other hand, easily feel that a book like the one that has just been devoted to him is not only a homage but also a proof of the efficacy of such teaching.

For I have scarcely discussed the book itself, faithful in this, I suppose, to the intentions of its author. In another book by Guitton we read that "the elect are those who realize their own ideal type." In this respect, we can see that we have today a "portrait of a chosen man" that appears as an exceptional triumph in our literature. To write it required not only talent, but also the powerful motives of admiration and affection. M. Guitton indeed brings clarity to the most delicate ideas, which is a feature of the highest style. He also breathes warmth into abstractions and passion into objectivity. This comes from the soul. A virile piety does the rest and gives this fine book its tone.

It would be ungracious to insist upon the reservations that the ethical a priori one feels in certain pages of the book (pp. 130 passim, 157) can inspire in a non-Catholic thinker. It is enough to note that such reservations exist. The essential thing is that this book of good faith should be accorded its rightful place: far above the vain remarks that, today, are heard like the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal mentioned by St. Paul.⁵

Review published in the Cahiers du Sud, April 1943

¹ Though apparently only of minor interest, this essay throws considerable light

upon Camus's attitude toward religion. Like *Diplôme*, which he wrote in 1936 on *Métaphysique chrétienne et Néo-platonisme*, it shows that he had a serious interest in the intellectual history of Christianity, and in the problems which this religion presented. But, unlike *Diplôme*, which retains complete academic objectivity, this essay on Father Pouget shows more of Camus's own opinions. Thus, when he dismisses as "quibbles" (p. 225) the type of problem that drove Ernest Renan from the Church, his own essentially moral objections to Christianity stand out much more clearly by contrast —P.T.

2 Published by Gallimard, 1943.

3 In fact, contemporary disbelief is no longer based on science in the way that it was at the end of the last century. It denies both science and religion. It is no longer the skepticism of reason when confronted with miracles. It is a passionate disbelief.

4 It will nevertheless be noted that Guitton's fine thesis on Time and Eternity in Plotinus and Saint Augustine begins with a methodological distinction between mind and mentality.

5 *Le Portrait de M. Pouget* was written before the war. Since the armistice, M. Guitton has published books and articles of which I would be less inclined to approve.

On a Philosophy of Expression by Brice Parain¹

It is not certain that our time has lacked gods. Many have been proposed, usually stupid or cowardly ones. Our time does, on the other hand, seem to lack a dictionary. At least, this is obvious to those in this world in which all words are prostituted—who hope for justice that is unambiguous and liberty that is unequivocal.

The question Brice Parain has just raised is whether such a dictionary is possible, and, above all, whether it is conceivable in the absence of a god to give the words in such a dictionary their meanings. Parain's recent books are concerned with language.²

But even his early essays took the unreliability of language as their subject matter.³ Parain's long and scrupulous reflection would be enough to earn him attention and esteem. But his books are timely and important for many other reasons, which I shall mention in my conclusion; and despite the apparent speciality of their subject, they are always pertinent.

What is Parain's originality? He makes language a metaphysical question. For professional philosophers, language poses historical and psychological problems. How did it originate, what are its laws—these are the limits of the inquirer's ambition. But there is a primary question that necessarily concerns the very value of the words we use. We must know whether our language is truth or falsehood: this is the question Parain chooses to discuss.

Yet talking is apparently the easiest thing in the world. We lie when we want to and tell the truth when we must. This is not the problem. What we need to know is whether or not our language is false at the very moment when we think we are telling the truth, whether words have flesh or are merely empty shells, whether they mask a deeper truth or are merely part of a wild-goose chase. Actually, we already know that words fail us sometimes at the very moment when our heart is going to speak, that they betray us even more often in our moments of greatest sincerity, and that at other times their only use is to trick us by appearing to leave no problems.

We know quite well that "to pay one's debt to society," "die on the field of battle," "put an end to one's days," "make total war," "be rather weak in the

chest," and "lead a life of toil" are ready-made expressions whose purpose is to camouflage heart-breaking experiences. But the questions Parain asks are even more imperious. For the problem is to know whether our most accurate expressions, our most successful cries are not in fact empty of all meaning, whether language does not, in short, express man's final solitude in a silent universe.

What this adds up to is a search for the essence of language, and a quest for words that can give us the same reasons we require of God. For Parain's basic premise is that if language is meaningless then everything is meaningless, and the world becomes absurd. We know only by means of words. If they are proved useless, then we are finally and irredeemably blinded.

But indulging in metaphysics means accepting paradoxes, and the metaphysics of language follows this rule. Either, in fact, our words translate only our impressions, and, partaking of their contingency, are deprived of any precise meaning; or else our words represent some ideal and essential truth, and consequently have no contact with tangible reality, which they can in no way affect. Thus we can name things only with uncertainty, and our words become certain only when they cease to refer to actual things.

In neither of these cases can we count on words to tell us how to behave. And tragedy begins as a consequence. "We cannot," says Parain, "accuse language of being the instrument of falsehood and of error, without at the same time, and for the same reasons, accusing the world of being bad and God of being wicked."⁴ And, quoting Socrates in the *Phaedo*: "The misuse of language is not only distasteful in itself, but actually harmful to the soul."⁵

The situation Socrates faced is analogous to our own. There was evil in men's souls because there were contradictions in communication, because the most ordinary words had several different meanings, were distorted and diverted from the plain and simple use that people imagined them to have.

Such problems cannot leave us indifferent. We too have our sophists and call for a Socrates, since it was Socrates' task to attempt the cure of souls by the search for a dictionary.

If the words justice, goodness, beauty have no meaning, then men can tear one another to pieces. Socrates' effort, and his failure, lay in seeking this impeccable meaning, for the lack of which he chose to die. The value of Parain's *Recherches* lies in a similar concern for these urgent consequences.

His first effort is one of honesty. He sets out, with the greatest clarity, the paradox of expression: "If man chooses the sensualist hypothesis, he will obtain the external world but lose knowledge; if he chooses the idealist hypothesis, he will obtain knowledge, but will not know how to deal with tangible reality and his knowledge will be useless.

In the first case, his language will become literature; in the second, the logical system, developed from a few simple propositions, will soon appear as the fruit of a dream, or as the appalling amusement with which a prisoner might occupy his solitude."⁶ We understand now why language for Parain is not only a metaphysical problem but indeed the root of all metaphysics.

And it is not without good reason that he offers his researches both as an inquiry into our condition and as an introduction to the history of philosophy. Any philosophical system is, in the last analysis, a theory of language. Every inquiry about being calls into question the power of words.

The history of philosophy for Parain is basically a history of the failures of the mind, confronted with the problem of language. Man has not managed to find his words. And perhaps it is possible to think of the metaphysical adventure as both an obstinate and sterile quest for the masterword that would illuminate

everything, for an adequate "Open Sesame," the equivalent of "Aum," the sacred syllable of the Hindus.

In this respect, Parain's researches show that from classical Greek philosophy to modern dialectic, considerations of language have moved toward an attitude of acceptance and resignation.

Attempts at justification have been replaced by a study of the rules of expression. This evolution is paralleled by the one which, in our century, has replaced metaphysics with the cult of action, the quest for knowledge with the humble wisdom of pragmatism. "Knowledge and becoming are mutually exclusive," wrote Nietzsche. Thus, if we want to live in "the becoming," we must give up all hope of knowledge.

The Greeks, however, those great adventurers of the mind, tackled the problem head on. The pre-Socratics began by defining a motionless and transparent universe, in which every object had its corresponding expression. Nor did they recoil before the consequences of this initial claim.

For if each word is guaranteed by an object in this world, nothing can be denied, and Protagoras is right to proclaim that all is true. Knowledge is inseparable from sensation and discussion becomes impossible. This world cannot be objected to, and we need only speak to tell the truth.⁷

But Gorgias can just as well say that all is false, since in fact there are more real objects than words to designate them. No word can give a complete account of what it designates, nothing can be proved since nothing can be exhausted.

Greek thought oscillated for a long time between these extreme conclusions. And it is not without significance that it should have found its purest literary form in the dialogue, as if Protagoras and Gorgias had to confront each other tirelessly through centuries of Hellenic thought. Socrates' object, and Plato's, was to find the law that transcended our acts and our expressions. We are not very certain about Socrates' conclusions.

We know that he chose to die, perhaps proof he believed more in the virtue of example than in verbal demonstration. But as for Plato, Parain correctly remarks that the Dialogues are nothing but long struggles between language and reality, in which, paradoxically, reality is the loser.

For the theory of Ideas marks the victory of words, which are more general than objects and closer to that ideal land of which this world is but a pale copy. For words to have meaning, their meaning must come from somewhere else than the tangible world, so fleeting and so changeable. This "elsewhere," to which so many Greek minds appealed with all their strength, is Being. Plato's solution is no longer psychological but cosmological.⁸

He makes language an intermediary stage in the hierarchy that proceeds from matter to the One. The logos is a species of being, one of the spheres of universal harmony. Next to it, this world has no importance.

Thus, from the fifth century B.C., the definitive problem is laid out: the world or language, nonsense or eternal light. This is the sharp division that Aristotle, anxious to remain within the familiarity of earthly things, rejects. The Aristotelian theory of proof, whereby words are correct only by convention, but by a convention that rests on an accurate intuition of essences, is an ambiguous compromise.

This is the choice Pascal brings back in all its cruelty. Uncertain of language, trembling before the enormity of falsehood, incapable of making paradox reasonable, Pascal merely convinces himself that it exists.⁹ But he denounces this paradox better than anyone else: "Two errors," he writes. "1. To take everything literally, 2. to take everything spiritually." Thus Pascal suggests not a solution but a submission: submission to traditional language because it

comes to us from God, humility in the face of words in order to find their true inspiration. We have to choose between miracles and absurdity; there is no middle way.

We know the choice Pascal made. With a few important nuances that I shall mention further on, it is obvious that for Parain too this dilemma constitutes the basic problem. But he nonetheless studies the considerable effort modern philosophers have made to arrive at a compromise less insulting to reason. Such a compromise already begins in Descartes and Leibnitz, and I should point out that the chapters devoted to these philosophers in Parain's *Recherches* are absolutely original. The compromise, however, finds its best expression in German philosophy, especially in Hegel. We know that, characteristically, German philosophy hit upon the idea of deifying history.

Precisely, history, taken as a whole, is considered the common expression of unity and of "becoming." Actually, it is no longer a question of unity or the absolute, in the classical sense. There are no longer any truly atemporal essences. On the contrary, ideas realize themselves in time. One of Hegel's texts quoted by Parain is a striking illustration of this position: "It must therefore be said of the Absolute that it is essentially Result and that it is only when it reaches its conclusion that it succeeds in being what it is in truth, its nature consisting precisely of being at one and the same time its own fact, subject or becoming."¹ This will immediately be recognized as a philosophy of immanence. The absolute no longer stands in opposition to the relative world, but mingles with it.

There is no longer any truth, but there is something which is in the process of creating itself, which will become truth. And, similarly, language is nothing but the totality of our inner life. The truth of a word is not something it owns, but something which creates itself little by little in sentences, speeches, literature, and the history of literatures. The word "God," for example, is nothing outside its attributes and the phrase that acknowledges Him.

Separated from the pile of notions men's hearts and the history of mankind have accumulated and continue to accumulate around it, the word itself is insignificant. All words thus form part of an unending adventure that moves toward a universal meaning. At that point too language is being, because being is everything.

I have not enough space here to discuss the idea. Interested readers may turn to Parain's discussion. What he does, briefly, is to confront Hegel with the objections any philosophy of immanence raises: we cannot conceive of a truth that has neither beginning nor end, that participates at one and the same time in the physical and the universal. Metaphysics is the science of beginnings, and the demands language provokes are more categorical than the replies that one can furnish with it.

Is language truth or falsehood? To reply that it is truth "in the process of self-creation" (and with the help of falsehood) is possible only if we carry our abstractions right into the heart of concrete things. In any case, this reply cannot satisfy the trenchant paradox with which the mind is here confronted.

The history of philosophy always brings the thinker back to the Pascalian dilemma. The aim of Parain's *Recherches* is to use new arguments to underline a paradox that is as old and cruel as man himself. It would indeed be a mistake to imagine that what we have here is an argument which simply concludes that the world is meaningless. Because Parain's originality, for the time being at any rate, is to keep the dilemma in suspense.

He does of course say that if language has no meaning then nothing can have any meaning, and that anything is possible. But his books show, at the same time, that words have just enough meaning to refuse us this final certainty that the ultimate answer is nothingness. Our language is neither true nor false. It is simultaneously useful and dangerous, necessary and pointless. "My words do

perhaps distort my ideas, but if I do not reason then my ideas vanish into thin air." Neither yes nor no, language is merely a machine for creating doubt.

And as in every problem that involves being, we find as soon as we advance a little further, to the point where our condition is called into question, that we are in the midst of darkness. A brutal "no" would at least be a definite answer.

But this is not what we find. However uncertain language may be, Parain does feel, in spite of everything, that it yields the elements of a hierarchy. It does not provide us with being, but it allows us to suspect that being exists. Each word goes beyond the object it claims to designate, and belongs to the species.

But if it indicates the species, it is not the species in its entirety. And even if we were to bring together all the words designating all the individuals of this species, this would not make up the species itself. The word contains something further, but this something further is still not enough.

The author refrains from drawing conclusions, and, as he says himself, his book begins and ends with the expression of misgivings. He allows us to guess, though, where his feelings and his experience will lead him. His apparent aim is to maintain choice and paradox: "Any philosophy," he writes, "which does not refute Pascal is vain." This is true, even for minds without a penchant for the miraculous.

In any case, the apparent objectivity of the writer might give the impression that his admirable books contain a metaphysics of falsehood that has already had a very great defender. But while Nietzsche accepted the falsehood of existence and saw it as the principle of all life and all progress, Parain rejects it.

Or, at least, if he agrees to acknowledge it, he does not give it his approval—preferring, at that precise moment, to resign his judgment into the hands of some higher power. This philosophy of expression ends indeed as a theory of silence. Parain's basic idea is one of honesty: the criticism of language cannot get around the fact that our words commit us and that we should remain faithful to them. Naming an object inaccurately means adding to the unhappiness of this world. And, in fact, the vast wretchedness of man, which has long pursued Parain and which has inspired so many moving accents in his work, is falsehood. Without knowing, or without yet saying, how it is possible, he knows that the great task of man is not to serve falsehood. When he finishes his analysis, he merely glimpses the fact that language contains a power that reaches far beyond ourselves: "We ask language to express what is most intimately personal to man. It is not fitted to such a task.

It was made to formulate what is most strictly impersonal, what, in man, is closest to other people.² It is to this higher banality that we should perhaps limit ourselves, for it is there that the artist and the peasant, the thinker and the worker, come together. Because language goes beyond individuals, and its terrible inadequacy is the sign of its transcendence. For Parain, this transcendence needs a hypothesis.

We are well aware that here, confronted with the Pascalian choice, Parain leans toward the miraculous and, through it, to traditional language. He sees as evidence of a god the fact that men resemble one another. The miracle consists of going back to everyday words, bringing to them the honesty needed to lessen the part of falsehood and hatred.³

This is indeed a path that leads to silence, but toward a silence that is relative, since absolute silence is impossible. Although Parain may tell us that his book stops short of ontology, his final effort is to pursue with the most silent of beings that higher conversation in which words are unnecessary: "Language is only a means of drawing us to its opposite: silence and God."⁴

At this point the critic should call a halt. The essential in any case is not yet to know which to choose: miracles or absurdity. The important thing is to show that they form the only possible choice, and that nothing else matters. But I think I would be justified in pointing out, in my conclusion, that this is where Parain's apparently very highly specialized investigations tie in with our century and its destiny.

They have, in fact, never really been removed from them, and it is not irrelevant to learn that in their author's eyes Parain's books constitute one single meditation, extending over a number of years, intimately linked to the history of his life and our times. What characterizes our century is perhaps not so much the need to rebuild the word as to rethink it. This amounts to giving the world its language.

This is why some of the great artistic or political movements of our time have called language into question. Surrealism is a good illustration of how a philosophy of expression can be closely related to social criticism. Today, when the questions the world puts to us are so much more urgent, we search for words with even more anguish. The lexicons that are proposed to us don't fit.

And it is natural for our best minds to form a kind of passionate academy in quest of a French dictionary. This is why the most significant works of the 1940's are perhaps not the ones people think, but those that call language and expression once more into question. The criticism of Jean Paulhan, the new world created by Francis Ponge, and Parain's historical philosophy seem to me to answer this need, though on very different planes and with very marked contrasts between them.

For they do not indulge in Byzantine speculations about grammatical motivation, but ask a number of basic questions that are a part of human suffering. It is in their inquiry that our sacrifices find a form.

Only one thing has changed since the surrealists. Instead of using the uncertainty of language and the world to justify every possible kind of liberty-calculated madness or automatic writing—men are striving for an inner discipline. The tendency is no longer to deny that language is reasonable or to give free rein to the disorders it contains.

The trend is to recognize that language has the limited powers to return, through miracles or through absurdity, to its tradition. In other words, and this intellectual move is of the highest importance for our time, we no longer use the falsehood and apparent meaninglessness of the world to justify instinctual behavior, but to defend a prejudice in favor of intelligence.

It is a question merely of a reasonable intelligence that has returned to concrete things and has a concern for honesty. It is a new classicism—and one that expresses the two values most frequently attacked today: I mean intelligence and France.

For many reasons, the book Parain promises us on the ontology of language takes on great importance. But in the meantime, over and above any differences of opinion, let us begin by recognizing how deeply he resembles us. A taste for the truth, a lesson in modesty following scrupulous analysis informed by the most extensive documentation, this is the education one receives from Parain's books. We cannot turn our back on such works. We still have much to do, and we are still subjected to the most torturous questions.

But it is certain that, whether we turn toward miracles or toward absurdity, we shall do nothing without those virtues in which human honor lies—honesty and poverty. What we can learn from the experience Parain sets forth is to turn our back upon attitudes and oratory in order to bear scrupulously the weight of our own daily life. "Preserve man in his perseverance," we read in *Essai sur la misère humaine*, "it is through this that he becomes immense, and gains the only immensity that he can transmit." Yes, we must rediscover our banality. The

question is merely to know whether we shall have both the genius and the simple heart that are needed.

Article published in *Poésie* 44, 1944

1 Brice Parain (born 1897) was an author whose political preoccupations coincided with those of Camus at a later stage in his career. Thus on p. 184 of *Carnets II* (Alfred A. Knopf edition, p. 144), in November 1946, Camus noted down Parain's remark that "the essence of modern literature is recantation," and later used it as one of the main themes of *The Rebel*. Parain had written, in an article published in *Combat* on November 11, 1946, and entitled *Le caractère commun des productions actuelles*, that modern literature was characterized not by despair but by "palinodes, in other words, a return to commonplaces." "In the last fifty years," he continued, "we have seen all kinds of such returns. Once again it was Rimbaud who showed the way. The others, naturally, have followed. We have had Claudel and devotion, Gide and duty, Aragon and his voice quivering from patriotic emotion, Jean Paulhan and rhetoric, surrealism which has returned from different kinds of magic to different kinds of rationalism, even to positivism, pacifism which has gone to war and even existentialists who have become professors of ethics." Camus took over this idea himself and made it into one of the central themes of *The Rebel*, arguing in his chapter on the Pozt's Rebellion that in Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and surrealism, "complete conformism follows merciless revolt." -P.T.

2 *Essai sur le logos platonicien* (1941), *Recherches sur la nature et les fonctions du langage* (Gallimard, 1943).

3 *Essai sur la misère humaine* (1934), *Retour à la France* (Grasset, 1936).

4 *Recherches*, p. 141.

5 Hackforth's translation.

6 *Recherches*, p. 56.

7 Similarly, if we conclude that we cannot name what does not exist, everything that has a name therefore exists, and there is not one of man's dreams (Jesus or Pan) that does not possess reality. If, on the contrary, we conclude that we can name what does not exist, we are without any rule.

8 *Essai sur le logos platonicien*.

9 How words do have meaning! For us, Pascal is a great philosopher. But in Clermond-Ferrand, on the street where he was born, there exists a Pascal Bar.

1 *Recherches*, p. 149.

2 *Recherches*, p. 173.

3 "Not to lie means not only refusing to hide our acts or our intentions, but also saying them and meaning them truthfully. This is not easy, and not something painlessly achieved."

Recherches, p. 183.

4 *Recherches*, p. 179. But from that point onward, the new problem that arises is how to reconcile the existence of falsehood with the existence of God. This, I assume, is the problem Parain will tackle in his next hook.

On Jules Roy's *La Vallée Heureuse*¹

Today's writers talk about what happens to them. Tolstoi centered *War and Peace* around the retreat from Moscow, which he himself had not experienced. In our own day, he would not receive the approval of his contemporaries unless he replaced the first Napoleon with the third, and cast Prince Andrei in the siege of Sebastopol, where Tolstoi himself fought well (though without having been able to overcome his fear of rats).

There are reasons for this, and they are complex. But, in any case, very few of our writers seem blessed with that innocence which enables them to bring imaginary characters to life, detach themselves from these characters enough to love them truly, and, consequently, make other people love them. This is, after all, because we lack both time and a future, and because we have to hasten to create in the interval between war and revolution. Hence we do what is quickest, which is to report what we have done and what we have seen.

And it is true that any great work is, in a way, the account of a spiritual adventure. But generally such an account is suggested or transfigured. Today, we go no further than the account, the document, the "slice of life," as the Naturalists ignorantly called it. A minimum of preparation, a few strips of bacon, two or three flowers of fluted paper, and the meat is served raw. As a result, cooks are becoming scarce; a certain manner is beginning to be lost, or at least forgotten, and finally the best we can do is accept what we are.

But this shouldn't keep us from being clear-sighted and from realizing that this new taste for raw meat leads to the loss of what has long been the strength, sometimes the explosive strength, of our literature—I mean a sense of propriety. (To make myself clear, and by straining words a little, I will say, for example, that there is a sense of propriety in *Sade*.) Candor is becoming obstreperous, and when everyone embraces it, it becomes a new kind of conformism.

The attitude is very understandable, of course. The adventures of past writers almost always had to do with love. Through respect for their partners, and consideration for the world, they transposed. Today, the raw material of experience is provided by men whom no one respects, and their frenzied embraces, called war or revolution. What is the point of restraint? Let the meat bleed, since that is its function.

But this does not alter the fact that art cannot do without restraint, whose very impulses it shares. It does not alter the fact that art lies in the distance that time gives to suffering or to joy. And if our time compels us to turn away from art in order to involve ourselves in new and fresh suffering, it is still true that the best books are and will be those which limit the damage, and which, though rejecting nothing of the cumbersome present, will nevertheless continue to show a certain restraint.

I have not been able to find a better way than this long digression to express why I find *La Vallée Heureuse*, by Jules Roy, a book that meets all the imperatives of the present and yet is exceptional. It manages to maintain a certain delicacy in spite of the killing. At the same time it deals with a personal experience, which the author scarcely disguises. After ten pages, it is obvious that Chevrier is Roy himself. Only the conclusion seems to have been fictionalized. For the rest, it is very clear.

Roy is in command of the crew of a bomber, in the R.A.F., and has to carry out the customary tour of duty of thirty bombing missions over Germany. Statistically, it is rare for bombers to do more than twenty missions because they are usually shot down before that. This dangerous and monotonous struggle against probability forms the subject matter of the book.

Roy climbs into the his plane, with his crew. He accomplishes his mission. He returns. He waits for the next mission. He climbs back into the "B," his plane, with his crew. He accomplishes his mission. He returns. He waits for the next mission. He climbs back into the "B," and so on and so forth.

All we have is the description of the various circumstances, anti-aircraft barrages, delay in reaching the target when the enemy fighters have already taken off, or collision on landing, when the bomber, in the normal course of events, would have crashed with its load of men and bombs. Finally, we have the death of a friend who has not had the incredible luck of reaching his thirtieth mission.

The book is therefore the story of a run of luck, but one enjoyed with suitable humility. For this is the originality of *La Vallée Heureuse*. It is possible that, like all of us, Roy has lost his innocence. But he does not make a fuss about it, which is another way of approaching innocence. He does not generalize about anything nor does he find a pretext for lamentation or glorification. In *La Vallée Heureuse*, Roy has not set out to write a book of morals or heroism.

It contains no theory of destiny. The author talks about himself and his friends, but does not claim to use his own experience as a basis for judging other men. If such judgment is implied, then that is the reader's business. In other words, Roy has accepted the experience without trying to place himself above it. He is trapped in it, or, rather, other people have trapped him like a rat.

And he has found himself caught, as in those formation flights which he describes so admirably, the airplanes coagulated in the heart of the night, wing to wing, each crew pursuing its task, isolated in the fantastic noise and the shadow of the sky, with no feeling except the terrible perpetual expectation of a possible collision, and the nervous fear that, when they return, all the bombs will not have been dropped, and that the instant of landing will bring new death.

Month after month, shoulder to shoulder, Roy thus pursued his task in the night of a war for which he had no liking. And, rather than draw from it some great view on human destiny, he has limited himself to registering the moments when he was afraid and those when he picked up new courage. This is how he has been able to speak for all of us, while seeking to speak for no one, and this is how for the first time, thanks to him, we can imagine the thoughts of those who, year after year, traveled across the black sky of our imprisoned towns.

La Vallée Heureuse does not, therefore, take its place among the great books of humanism that we are used to demanding, but among those works of strength and modesty whose taste we had forgotten. When Chevrier tells us that he is afraid (the terrible *Miserere* that mounts in him at the moment when the bomber takes off on a new mission), it is not so that he can beat his breast. It is normal, in certain circumstances, for a man to be afraid. And, similarly, when he gives the order to aim for the target under conditions made ten times more dangerous by the fact that the bomber is late, he does not glamorize his action. It is normal, under all circumstances, for a man to do his duty.

On each page of the book, we find the same naïveté (in the sense that Schiller spoke of Greek naïveté). The chapter I like the least, the one where Roy talks about love, reveals indeed that this strange warrior has recognized and accepted his sentimentality for what it was, something defenseless. In other words, he writes naturally about being sentimental, just as he wrote naturally about fear and courage. And that is enough to justify everything.

At this degree of simplicity and honesty, a man should be accepted or rejected as a whole. I would have no difficulty in saying what I feel on this point, as readers will have guessed. But this book is one that makes us think seriously. In other words, it is a book worthy of a man. What other praise can I add? Let me merely say that after we have followed Chevrier in his long struggle against chance, death, and himself, the fraternal esteem that comes irresistibly to us is, I suppose, the truest homage a writer of good faith can hope for from a reader of good faith. A word finally about the style.

It too is a style of struggle. It does not flow easily; it makes an effort. The sentences are generally long, and rather complex. The image is surrounded, approached, released for a moment, then taken up again in the thickness of the words before being finally delivered in its strength and flesh. Such a great tension is, inevitably, accompanied by a few obscurities and excessive complexities of style. But it is this very effort that explains Roy's greatest success as well as his surprising ability to make us see what he is describing.

For, after this great pitching of words and sentences, grouped into squadrons, assembled like the airplanes setting out on a raid, traveling wing tip to wing tip, slowly through the night, where at the very end of their journey through clouds and shadows they will make the gigantic flames of war burst forth, so the image bursts forth, in the end, so terrible in its loveliness that it shakes us like an explosion or a cataclysm.

This is the passage where the squadron, coming back from a mission, is suddenly surrounded in the darkness by exploding rockets and machine-gunned by enemy fighters, which shoot the heavy bombers down one by one. "New fires were born with the flapping of the heavy gasoline flames as they were flattened by the wind; the bombers rolled over a little, then caught fire from the fuel tanks in the wings, floated on a little longer and exploded like stars."

Published in L'Arche, February 1947

1 Jules Roy was born in Algeria in 1907. From 1927 to 1953 he was an officer in the French air force, and served with the R.A.F. during World War II. In 1960 he dedicated his book *La Guerre d'Algerie* to Camus's memory, but disagreed with his friend's refusal to take sides in the Algerian conflict. -P.T.

Encounters with André Gide

I was sixteen when I first met André Gide. An uncle, who had taken part of my education in hand, sometimes gave me books. A butcher by trade, with a fairly wealthy clientele, his only real passion was for reading and ideas.

He devoted his mornings to the meat business, and the rest of the day to his library, newspapers, and interminable discussions in the local cafés. One day, he held out to me a small book with a parchmentlike cover, assuring me that I would find it interesting.

I read everything, indiscriminately, in those days; I probably opened *Les Nourritures Terrestres* after having finished *Lettres de Femme* or a volume of the *Pardaillan* series. I found the invocations rather obscure.

I shied away from this hymn to the bounties of nature. In Algiers, at sixteen, I was saturated with these riches; no doubt I longed for others, and then [the evocations of] "Blida, little rose ..."

I knew Blida, unfortunately. I gave the book back to my uncle, telling him that it had indeed been interesting. Then I went back to the beach, to my listless studies and idle reading, and also to the difficult life I led. The encounter had not been a success.

The next year, I met Jean Grenier. He also, among other things, offered me a book. It was a novel by André de Richaud called *La Douleur*. I don't know André de Richaud. But I have never forgotten his admirable book, the first to speak to me of what I knew: a mother, poverty, fine evening skies. It loosened a tangle of obscure bonds within me, freed me from fetters whose hindrance I felt without being able to give them a name.

I read it in one night, in the best tradition, and the next morning, armed with

a strange new liberty, went hesitatingly forward into unknown territory. I had just learned that books dispensed things other than forgetfulness and entertainment.

My obstinate silences, this vague but all-persuasive suffering, the strange world that surrounded me, the nobility of my family, their poverty, my secrets, all this, I realized, could be expressed! There was a deliverance, an order of truth, in which poverty, for example, suddenly took on its true face, the one I had suspected it possessed, that I somehow revered. *La Douleur* gave me a glimpse of the world of creation, into which Gide was to be my guide.

This is how my second encounter with him took place. I began to read properly. A fortunate illness had taken me away from my beaches and my pleasures. My readings were still disorderly, but there was a new appetite in them. I was looking for something, I wanted to rediscover the world I had glimpsed that seemed to me to be my own. From books to daydreams, alone or because of friends, little by little I was discovering new dimensions in life.

After so many years, I still remember the amazement of this apprenticeship. One morning, I stumbled on Gide's *Traité*s. Two days later, I knew by heart whole passages of *La Tentative amoureuse*. As to the *Retour de l'enfant prodigue*, it had become the book of which I never spoke: perfection seals our lips. I only made a dramatic adaptation of it, which I later put on the stage with a few friends. Meanwhile, I read all Gide's work, responding in my turn to *Les Nourritures Terrestres* with the personal upheaval so often described by others.

Mine came the second time round, perhaps because of the first reading I was a young, unenlightened barbarian, but also because for me there was nothing revolutionary in the senses. The shock was decisive in quite a different way. Long before Gide himself had confirmed this interpretation, I learned to read *Les Nourritures Terrestres* as the gospel of a self-deprivation I needed.

From that point on, Gide held sway over my youth, and it is impossible not to be always grateful to those we have at least once admired for having hoisted us to the highest point our soul can reach. In spite of all this, however, I never saw Gide as my master either as a writer or a thinker. I had given myself others. Rather, Gide seemed to me, because of what I have just said, the model of the artist, the guardian, the king's son, who kept watch over the gates of the garden where I wanted to live.

There is almost nothing in what he has written about art, for example, that I don't entirely approve of, although our century has moved away from his conception. The reproach made of Gide's work is that it neglects the anguish of our time. We choose to believe that a writer must be revolutionary to be great. If this is so, history proves that it is true only up to the revolution, and no further. Moreover, it is by no means certain that Gide did move away from his time.

What is more certain is that his time wanted to move away from what he represented. The question is whether it will ever succeed, or will do so only by committing suicide. Gide also suffers from that other prejudice of our day, which insists that we parade our despair to be counted as intelligent. On this point, discussion is easier: the pretext is a poor one.

Yet I had to forget Gide's example, of necessity, and turn away very early from this world of innocent creation, leaving at the same time the land where I was born. History imposed itself on my generation. I had to take my place in the waiting line on the threshold of the black years. We fell into step, and have not yet reached our goal. How could I not have changed since then? At least I have not forgotten the plenitude and light in which my life began, and I have put nothing above them. I have not denied Gide.

In fact, I encountered him again at the end of our darkest years. I was in Paris then, living in part of his flat. It was a studio with a balcony, and its

greatest peculiarity consisted of a trapeze that hung in the middle of the room. I had it taken down, I think; I got tired of seeing the intellectuals who came to see me hanging from it. I had been settled in the studio for some months when Gide, in his turn, came back from North Africa.

I had never met him before; yet it was as if we had always known each other. Not that Gide ever received me very intimately. He had a horror, as I already knew, of that noisy promiscuity which takes the place of friendship in our world. But the smile with which he greeted me was simple and joyful and, when he was with me, I never saw him on his guard.

Otherwise, forty years difference in age stood between us, together with our mutual horror of embarrassing each other. This is why I spent long weeks next door to Gide, almost without seeing him. Occasionally, he would knock at the double door that separated the studio from his library. At arm's length, he would be carrying Sarah, his cat, who had slipped into his room via the roof. Sometimes, the piano attracted him.

On another occasion, he listened by my side to the announcement of the armistice on the radio. I realized that the war, which brings most people an end to their loneliness, was for him, as it was for me, the only true loneliness. Sitting around the radio, for the first time we shared the solidarity of the times. On other days, all I knew of his presence on the other side of the door were footsteps, rustlings, the gentle disturbance of his meditations and musings.

What did it matter! I knew that he was there, next door to me, guarding with his unrivaled dignity that secret realm I had dreamed of entering, and toward which I have always turned, in the midst of our struggles and our shouts.

Today, now that he is no longer among us, who can replace my old friend at the gates of this kingdom? Who will look after the garden until we can get back to it? He, at least, kept watch until his death; so it is right for him to continue to receive the quiet gratitude we owe to our true masters. The unpleasant noises made at his departure will in no way alter this. Of course, those who know how to hate are still furious over this death.

He, whose privileges have been so bitterly envied, as if justice did not consist of sharing these privileges rather than mingling everything in a general servitude, is argued over even at the end: people are indignant about such serenity. Not a day goes by without his once again receiving the homage of hatred, envy, or that poor insolence which thinks it descends from Cardinal de Retz, although actually it originates in the scullery.

Yet what unanimity ought to have been performed around this little iron bed. To die is such appalling torture for some men that it seems to me as if a happy death redeems a small patch of creation. If I were a believer, Gide's death would be a consolation. But if those believers I see do believe, what is the object of their faith? Those deprived of grace simply have to practice generosity among themselves. As far as the believers are concerned, they lack nothing, they are provided for; or at least they act as if that were the case.

We, on the other hand, lack everything but the fraternal hand. Surely this is why Sartre was able to pay Gide, over and above their differences, an exemplary act of homage. Certain men thus find, in their reflections, the secret of a serenity neither miserly nor facile. Gide's secret is that he never, in the midst of his doubts, lost the pride of being a man. Dying was also part of this condition, which he wanted to assume to the very end. What would have been said of him, if after having lived surrounded by privilege, he had gone trembling to his death? This would have shown that his moments of happiness were stolen ones. But no, he smiled at the mystery, and turned toward the abyss the same face he had presented to life. Without even knowing it, we were waiting for that one last moment. And, for one last time, he kept the rendezvous.

"Homage to André Gide," from the Nouvelle nouvelle revue française, November

1951

Roger Martin du Gard¹

Read, in *Devenir!*, the portrait of old Mazarellles and his wife. From his very first book, Roger Martin du Gard achieves the portrait in depth, whose secret seems to be lost nowadays. This third dimension, which extends the range of his work, makes it almost unique in contemporary literature. Our present literary production could, in fact, when it is valid, claim descent from Dostoevski rather than from Tolstoi. Inspired or impassioned shadows outline the commentary in motion of a reflection on man's fate. Doubtless there is also depth and perspective in Dostoevski's characters; but, unlike Tolstoi, he does not make such qualities the rule for his creation. Dostoevski looks above all for movement, Tolstoi for form.

There is the same difference between the young women in *The Possessed* and *Natasha Rostov* as there is between a character in the movies and one on the stage: more animation and less flesh. In Dostoevski these weaknesses on the part of a genius are compensated for by the introduction of a further, spiritual dimension, rooted in sin or sanctity. But, with a few exceptions, such notions are considered old-fashioned by our contemporaries, who have as a result retained from Dostoevski only a legacy of shadows.

Combined with the influence of Kafka (in whom the visionary triumphs over the artist), or with the technique of the American behaviorist novel, assimilated by artists who have more and more difficulty, emotionally and intellectually, in keeping up with the acceleration of history and who, in order to deal with everything, go deeply into nothing, this imperious example has produced in France an exciting and disappointing literature, whose failures are on a par with its ambitions, and of which it is impossible to say whether it exhausts a fashion or foreshadows a new age.

Roger Martin du Gard, who began writing at the beginning of the century, is, on the other hand, the only literary artist of his time who can be counted among Tolstoi's descendants. But at the same time he is perhaps the only one (and, in a sense, more than Gide or Valéry) to anticipate the literature of today, by bequeathing problems that crush it and also by authorizing some of its hopes. Martin du Gard shares with Tolstoi a liking for human beings, the art of depicting them in the mystery of their flesh, and a knowledge of forgiveness—virtues outdated today. The world Tolstoi described nevertheless formed a whole, a single organism animated by the same faith; his characters meet in the supreme adventure of eternity.

One by one, visibly or not, they all, at some point in their stories, end up on their knees. And Tolstoi himself, in his winter flight from family and glory, wanted to recapture their unhappiness, universal wretchedness, and the innocence of which he could not despair. The same faith is lacking in the society Martin du Gard was to depict and also to a certain extent lacking in the author.

This is why his work is also one of doubt, of disappointed and persevering reason, of ignorance acknowledged, and of a wager on man with no future other than himself. It is in this, as in its invisible audacities or its contradictions accepted, that his work belongs to our time. Even today it can explain us to ourselves, and soon, perhaps, be useful to those who are to come.

There is a strong possibility, in fact, that the real ambition of our authors, after they have assimilated *The Possessed*, will be one day to write *War and Peace*. After tearing through wars and negotiations, they keep the hope, even if it's unadmitted, of rediscovering the secrets of a universal art that, through humility and mastery, will once again bring characters back to life in their flesh and their duration. It is doubtful whether such great creation is possible in the present state of society either in the East or in the West.

But there is nothing to prevent us from hoping that these two societies, if they do not destroy each other in a general suicide, will fertilize each other and make creation possible once again. Let us also bear in mind the possibility of genius, that a new artist will succeed, through superiority or freshness, in registering all the pressures he undergoes and digesting the essential features of the contemporary adventure.

His destiny then will be to fix in his work the prefiguration of what will be, and, quite exceptionally, to combine the gift of prophecy with the power of true creation. These unimaginable tasks cannot, in any case, do without the secrets contained in the art of the past. The work of Martin du Gard, in its solitude and its solidity, contains some of these secrets and offers them in a familiar form. In him, our master and our accomplice at the same time, we can both find what we do not possess and rediscover what we are.

. . .

"Masterpieces," said Flaubert, "are like the larger mammals. They have a peaceful look." Yes, but their blood still runs with strange, young ardor. Such fire and such audacity already bring Martin du Gard's work closer to us. The more so, after all, if it does look peaceful. A kind of geniality masks its relentless lucidity, apparent only upon reflection, although then it takes on added dimension.

It is important to note, first of all, that Martin du Gard never thought provocation could be an artistic method. Both the man and his work were forged by the same patient effort, in withdrawal from the world. Martin du Gard is the example, a rare one indeed, of one of our great writers whose telephone number nobody knows. He exists, very strongly, in our literary society. But he has dissolved himself in it as sugar does in water.

Fame and the Nobel Prize have favored him, if I may so express it, with a kind of supplementary darkness. Simple and mysterious, he has something of the divine principle described by the Hindus: the more he is named, the more he disappears. Furthermore, there is no calculation in this quest for obscurity. Those who have the honor of knowing him as a man realize his modesty is real, so real that it appears abnormal.

I for one have always denied that there could be such a thing as a modest artist; since meeting Martin du Gard my certainty has begun to waver. But this monster of modesty also has other reasons, apart from the peculiarity of his character, for seeking to live in withdrawal from the world: the legitimate concern every artist worthy of the name has to protect the time needed for his work.

This reason becomes imperative the moment the author identifies his work with the construction of his own life. Time then ceases to be merely the place where the work is done, but becomes the work itself, immediately threatened by any diversion.

Such a vocation rejects provocation and its calculated stratagems, instead accepting in everything concerned with literary creation the law of true craftsmanship. When Martin du Gard began his career as a writer, men were entering literature (the history of the Nouvelle revue française group is clear proof of this) rather as one enters the religious life.

Today, people enter it or pretend to do so—as if in mockery; it is merely a pathetic derision which can, with a few writers, have its effectiveness. With Martin du Gard, however, there was never any doubt about the seriousness of literature.

The first of his published novels, *Devenir!*, is a clear indication of this,

being the story of a literary vocation that fails through lack of character. He makes the person in whom he depicts himself say: "Everyone has a little genius; what people don't have anymore these days, because it's something you have to acquire, is a conscience."

The same character likes neither too polished an art, which he describes as "castrated," nor "geniuses who are essentially adolescent." I hope readers will forgive the author for the truth and topicality of his second remark. But the "big guy," as Martin du Gard calls him in the novel, continues squarely in the same vein. "In Paris, all writers seem to have talent; actually, they have never had time to acquire any: all they have is a kind of cleverness which they borrow from one another, a communal treasure in which individual values are frittered away."

It is already obvious that if art is a religion, it will not be an attractive one. On this point Martin du Gard quickly cut himself off from the theoreticians of art for art's sake. Symbolism, which caused so much exquisite damage among the writers of his generation, never had any effect on him, except in certain stylistic indulgences² which he later outgrew, like adolescent acne. He was only twenty-seven when he wrote *Devenir!*, and the writer who is quoted with enthusiasm in this first work is already Tolstoi.

From here on, Martin du Gard was to remain faithful all his life to an ascetic vocation, an artistic Jansenism that would make him shun ostentation and effect, in order to sacrifice everything to uninterrupted labor on a work he wanted to make endure. "What is difficult," says this precocious and perspicacious thinker, "is not to have been someone but to stay that way." Genius runs the risk, in fact, of being no more than a fleeting accident. Only character and work can transform it into fame and a livelihood.

Hard work, and the organization and humility that go with it, are thus at the very core of free creation and consequently indispensable in a craft where work, but work humbly pursued, is also the rule of life. It is no exaggeration to say that Martin du Gard's very aesthetic principles made it inevitable that his work, in which individual problems have the starring roles, take on historical dimensions.

The man who finds his reasons for living and his delights in free work can, in the end, bear any humiliation except the humiliation justly inflicted on his work, just as he can accept every privilege except those that separate him from his liberty, the work to which he is chained. Works like Roger Martin du Gard's sometimes unknowingly restore artistic toil to its rightful place in the city, and can no longer be divorced then from its victories or defeats.

But even before any other discovery, the result is this work, solid as stone, whose main body is *Les Thibault* and whose buttresses are *Devenir!*, *Jean Barois*, *Vieille France*, *Confidence africaine*, and the plays.

We can discuss this work, we can try to see its limitations. But we cannot deny that it exists, and does so superbly, with an unbelievable honesty. Commentaries can add to it or detract from it, but the fact remains that we have here one of those works, exceptional in France, around which one can turn, as one walks around a building. The same generation that gave us so many aestheticians, so many subtle, delicate writers, also brought a work rich in people and in passions, constructed according to the plans of a well tried technique.

This nave of men, built solely with the rigor of an art practiced a whole lifetime, testifies that in a time of poets, essayists, and novelists concerned with the soul, a master craftsman, a Pierre de Craon without a religion but not without faith, was born in our land.

Nevertheless, a law exists in art which says that every creator should be buried beneath the weight of his most obvious virtues. The proverbial honesty of his art has sometimes hidden the true Martin du Gard in a time which, for various

reasons, put genius and improvisation above everything else, as if genius could do without a work schedule and improvisation without arduous leisure. The critics thought they had done enough by paying homage to virtue, forgetting that in art virtue is only a means placed at the service of risk.

There is certainly no lack of audacity in the work that concerns us. It stems nearly always from the obstinate pursuit of psychological truth. It thus serves to emphasize the ambiguity of human beings, without which this truth is meaningless. We are already surprised, reading *Devenir!*, by the cruel modernity of the ending; André, who has just buried his wife in great grief, notices the young servant girl standing at the window. We know that he has desired her, and realize that she will help him digest his sorrow.

Martin du Gard deals frankly with sexuality and with the shadowy zone of darkness it casts over every life. Frankly, but not crudely. He has never given way to the temptation of suggestive licentiousness that makes so many contemporary novels as boring as guides to social etiquette. He has not obligingly described monotonous excesses. He has chosen rather to show the importance of sexual life through its inopportunities.

Like a true artist, he has not painted directly what it consists of, but indirectly, what it forces people to become. It is sensuality, throughout her life, for example, that makes Mme de Fontanin vulnerable in the presence of her unfaithful husband. We know this, and yet it is never said, except as Mme de Fontanin watches over her husband on his deathbed.

What is also noticeable in *Les Thibault* is a curious intermingling of the themes of desire and death. (Once more, it is the night before the burial of Mother Frubling that Jacques is initiated by Lisbeth.) Certainly we must see this intermingling as one of the obsessions that are an artist's privilege and at the same time as a means of underlining the unusual nature of the sexual life.

But desire is not only mingled with the things of death, it also contaminates morality and makes it ambiguous. The righteous man, the man who observes the outward show of Christianity, the father in *Les Thibault*, writes in his diary: "Do not confuse with the love of our neighbor the emotion we feel at the approach, at the touch, of certain young people, even children." Then he crosses out only the final words, and this omission reconciles him with both modesty and sincerity.

Just as Jérôme de Fontanin savors the delight of the repentant libertine when he saves Rinette from the prostitution into which he had cast her. "I am good, I am better than they think," he repeats tenderly to himself.

But he cannot resist sleeping with her one last time, adding the pleasures of the flesh to those of virtue. One sentence is all Martin du Gard needs to summarize the mechanical inspiration of the pose: "His fingers were automatically unfastening her skirt, as his lips rested on her forehead in a paternal kiss."

The whole work has this flavor of truth. The admirable *Vieille France* not only offers us Martin du Gard's most sinister character, the postman Joigneau, a sort of Astaroth on bicycle, but it also abounds in pitiless revelations about the provincial heart, and the last page gives an astonishing conclusion. Similarly, in *African Secret*, the very simplicity of an incestuous brother's tone will make his unfortunate adventure seem natural. In 1931, with *Un taciturne*, Martin du Gard dared to put on the stage, without the slightest vulgarity of tone, the drama of a respectable industrialist who discovers he has homosexual leanings.

At last, in *Les Thibault*, the brilliant touches multiply. One could quote the scene in which Gise secretly allows the child that the man she loves has had with another woman to suck her virgin breast; or the meal Antoine and Jacques have, after the father's death, that almost in spite of themselves takes on a slight air of celebration. But there are two such touches I rank higher than the

others, for they show the great novelist at work.

The first is Jacques' stubborn silence when, for the first time, Antoine comes to see him at the reform school in Crouy. How could there be a better way to convey humiliation than this silence. The rapidly muttered words, the onsets of reticence in which this silence is clothed, and which serve to underline it even further, are so accurately calculated and proportioned that mystery and pity suddenly erupt into what was until then a straightforward story, opening much wider vistas than those of the middle class Parisian milieu in which it had begun.

Humiliation has never been depicted more objectively or more successfully, except by Dostoevski, whose technique is either frenzied or grating (I am not counting Lawrence, who describes a personal humiliation) and by Malraux, in the epic mode (especially in *La Voie royale*, which I persist in liking whatever its author may say). No one, however, has ever tried to paint it in subdued and even colors, and Martin du Gard has perhaps achieved what is most difficult in art.

If there are artistic miracles, they must resemble those that come from grace. I have always thought it would be easier to redeem a man steeped in vice and crime than a greedy, narrow-minded, pitiless merchant. Thus, in art, the more prosaic the reality chosen as one's subject matter, the more difficult it is to transfigure. Even here, however, there is a point beyond which we cannot go, that makes any claim to absolute realism quite untenable.

But it is here nonetheless, half way between reality and its stylization, that art from time to time achieves the perfect triumph. The portrait of Jacques in his humiliation remains, in my view, one of these triumphs. To give one last example of Martin du Gard's technique, I shall quote the father's simulated death in *Les Thibault*. A brilliant idea, indeed, on the novelist's part, to make the playacting that had, in a sense, formed this character's whole life, extend even into death.

The man who could not prevent himself from constantly playing the part of a Christian is also incapable, in the idleness and depression of an illness that he does not know is fatal, of resisting the temptation to dramatize the last moments of his life. So he organizes, from his bed, a dress rehearsal, which is half sincere, involving assemblies of servants, exemplary acts of repentance, the praising of virtues, and flights of holiness. The father expects his reward in the form of protests that will dissipate the vague anxiety he sometimes harbors, as does every invalid.

But his family's genuine grief, their tacit acceptance of his speeches on his approaching end, suddenly bring him face to face with his true condition. His playacting, instead of producing the good results he had hoped for, brings the cruel reflection of a merciless reality. Having thought himself an actor, he finds himself a victim. From this moment, he begins to die, and fear sterilizes his faith. His great cry "Ah, how can God do this to me!" crowns this dramatic discovery with the emptiness and duplicity of his religious beliefs and also his need of them. He dies reconciled, nonetheless, but in gasps of pain and childish songs that reveal a man broken to the very core, stripped of his pretense and ostentation, delivered naked to death and simple faith.

Such a canvas bears the signature of a master. The novelist able to depict the successive impulses of a soul that transforms being itself into a device for pretense has nothing to learn from anyone. He has only lessons, and durable ones, to offer us.

But even more than his art it is Martin du Gard's themes that coincide with our own preoccupations. The path he has followed with so fortunate and deliberate a pace is one the rest of us have had to race along, with history at our heels. I mean, generally, the personal evolution that leads one to a recognition of the history of all men and to an acceptance of their struggles. Even in this, of course, Martin du Gard has his own particular stamp.

He stands midway between his predecessors and his peers (who talked of nothing but the individual and never let history play more than a circumstantial role) and his successors (who make only embarrassed allusions to the individual). In *Les Thibault*, and in Jean Barois, individuals are intact and the pain of history still quite fresh.

They have not yet worn each other out. Martin du Gard has not experienced our situation, in which we inherit at the same time shop-worn people and a history tensed and paralyzed by several wars and the fear of final destruction. We can say without paradox that what is alive in our present-day experience lies behind us, in a work like Roger Martin du Gard's.

As early as 1913, in any case, Jean Barois outlines the movement that concerns us. The subject of this curious novel is familiar, although its construction is quite unusual. Technically, in fact, there is nothing of the novel about it. It breaks with all the genre's traditions, and there is nothing comparable to it in literature since. Its author seems to have looked, systematically, for the least fictional of mediums. The book is made up of dialogues (accompanied by brief stage directions) and documents, some of them incorporated in their original form.

Consequently, the interest of the book never weakens, and it can be read in one sitting. This may be because the subject was perfectly suited to such a technique. Actually, Martin du Gard intended to adopt this form for all his future work. As it turned out, only Jean Barois was to profit from it. One might say that in a way this book (more than Zola's novels, which were intended as scientific although their author could not keep them from becoming epic) is the only great novel of the age of scientism, whose hopes and disappointments it expresses so well. This documentary novel is also a monograph, all the more surprising in that it concerns the case history of a religious crisis.

It happens that to make a card index of the aspirations and doubts of a soul was, in the long run, an enterprise particularly fitting in a period inspired, with a few exceptions, by the religion of science. In the course of the book, Barois abandons the old faith for the new. If, face to face with death, he betrays this new belief at the very last moment, he still remains the man of that brief new age which was to collapse in 1914.

His story is therefore all the more striking, related to us in the style of the new gospels. The case history reads like an adventure tale because its unusual form is deeply wedded to the story it unfolds. The evolution of a man who comes to doubt traditional faith, who thinks he finds a more certain faith in science,³ could not be reported better than by this technique of quasi-scientific description, which Martin du Gard intended to perfect.

In the end, science satisfied neither Barois nor his creator, but its method, or at least its ideal, was fleetingly raised, in this novel, to the dignity of perfectly effective art. The exploit has not been repeated in our literature or even in Martin du Gard's later work. But didn't the faith that inspired it, already threatened in the book itself, also die, prematurely, as a result of the excesses of mechanized savagery? Jean Barois remains at least a testamentary work in which we can find moving evidence of a vanished belief and prophecies that affected our lives.

The conflict between faith and science, which so excited the early years of this century, arouses less interest today. We are living out its consequences, nonetheless, which were foreshadowed in Jean Barois. To take only one example: irreligion is portrayed as closely linked to the rise of the socialist movement, and the book consequently lays bare one of the most powerful driving forces in our history. Fleeing from the encounter with God, Jean Barois discovers men. His liberation coincides with the great movement that grew up around Dreyfus.

The "Sower's" group links Barois to the rest of mankind; it is there that he

reaches full maturity, and that what can be called the cycle of history (struggle and victory) exhausts his manhood. Historical disappointments bring him gradually back to solitude, to anguish, and, faced with death, to the denial of his new faith. Can the community of men, which sometimes helps us to live, also help us die? This is the question underlying all Martin du Gard's work, which creates its tragic quality.

For if the reply is negative, the situation of the modern unbeliever is temporarily madness, even if a tranquil madness. This is doubtless why so many men today proclaim with a kind of fury that the human community keeps us from dying. Martin du Gard has never said this, because in truth he does not believe it. But he gives us in his novel, along with Barois, the portrait of a rationalist who does not deny his own beliefs, and who dies without abjuring reason. The Stoic Luce probably represents Martin du Gard's ideal in 1913. A particularly severe and sombre ideal, if Luce himself is to be believed. "I do not acknowledge two moral standards.

One must attain happiness, without being the dupe of any mirage, through truth and truth alone" One could hardly give a better definition of the enlightened renunciation of happiness. But let us simply remember that the first portrait of men who reject all forms of hope, determined to confront death in its entirety, who later swarm into our literature, was traced in 1913 by Roger Martin du Gard.

The great theme of the individual caught between history and God will be orchestrated symphonically in *Les Thibault*, where all the characters move toward the catastrophe of the summer of 1914. The religious problem, however, is upstaged. It runs through the first volumes, disappears as history gradually swamps individual destinies, reappearing in negative form in the final volume, with the description of Antoine Thibault's solitary death. The reappearance is nonetheless significant. Like any true artist, Martin du Gard cannot get rid of his obsessions.

It is significant, therefore, that his great work ends with the constant theme of all his books, the death agony, in which man is, if I may put it this way, finally faced with the ultimate question. But in the Epilogue that ends *Les Thibault*, Martin du Gard's two main characters—the priest and the doctor—have disappeared, or come very near to doing so. *Les Thibault* ends with the death of a doctor, alone among other doctors.

It seems that for Martin du Gard, as for Antoine, the problem has now ceased to present itself solely on the individual human level. And it is indeed the experience of history, and his enforced involvement in it, which explains this evolution on Antoine's part. Historical passion (in the two senses of the word) is atheistic today, or seems to be.

In simple terms, this means that the historical misfortunes of the twentieth century have marked the collapse of bourgeois Christianity. A symbolic illustration of this idea can be seen in the fact that the father, who represents religion to Antoine,⁴ dies just after Antoine has proclaimed his atheism. War breaks out at the same time, and a world that thought it could live by trade and still be religious collapses in bloodshed.

If it is legitimate to see *Les Thibault* as one of the first committed novels, the point should simply be made that it has better claims to this description than those published today. For Martin du Gard's characters, unlike ours, have something to commit and something to lose in historical conflicts. The pressure of immediate events struggles in their very being against traditional structures, whether religious or cultural. When these structures are destroyed, in a certain way man himself is destroyed.

He is simply ready to exist, some day. Thus Antoine Thibault first becomes aware that other people exist, but this first step leads him only to confront death in an attempt to discover, beyond any consolation or illusion, the final secret of

his reasons for living. With *Les Thibault*, the man of our half-century is born, the human being we are concerned with, and whom we can choose to commit or to liberate. He is ready for everything, so long as we have not decided what he is.

It is Antoine who most strikingly embodies the theme. Of the two brothers, Jacques is the one most often praised and admired. He has been seen as exemplary. I, on the other hand, see Antoine as the true hero of *Les Thibault*. And, since I cannot undertake to comment on the whole of so vast a work, I feel that its essential features can be underlined in a comparison between the two brothers.

Let me begin by giving my reasons for choosing Antoine as the central character. *Les Thibault* opens and closes with Antoine, who constantly grows in importance throughout the work. Besides, Antoine seems closer to his creator than Jacques. A novelist certainly expresses and betrays himself through all his characters at the same time: each of them represents one of his tendencies or his temptations. Martin du Gard is or has been Jacques, just as he is or has been Antoine; the words he gives them are sometimes his own, sometimes not. An author will, by the same token and for the same reasons, be nearest the character who combines the largest number of contradictions.

From this point of view, Antoine, because of his complexity, the different roles he plays in the novel, is a richer character than Jacques. Finally, and this is my principal reason, the basic theme of *Les Thibault* is more convincing in Antoine than in Jacques. Both of them, it is true, leave their private universe to rejoin the world of men. Jacques even does so before Antoine.

But his evolution is less significant since it is more logical and could have been foreseen. What is easier than to pass from individual revolt to the idea of revolution? But what is more profound, and more persuasive, on the other hand, than the inner metamorphosis of a happy, well-balanced man, full of strength and sincere self-esteem (a mark of nobility, according to Ortega y Gasset), that brings him to the recognition of a common misery in which he will find both his limits and his fulfillment?

The interest *Les Thibault's* first readers took in Jacques is understandable, of course. Adolescents were in fashion at the time. Martin du Gard's generation popularized the cult of youth in France, a cult at first merry and then fearful, which has contaminated our literature. (Nowadays, every writer seems riddled with anxiety to find out what young people think of him, when the only interesting thing would be to know what he really thinks about them.) However, I am not sure that the reader of 1955 will be tempted for very long to prefer Jacques to Antoine.

Let us admit at least that Martin du Gard succeeded, with Jacques, in giving us one of the finest portraits of adolescence our literature offers. Thin-skinned, courageous, self-willed, determined to say everything he thinks (as if everything one thinks were worth saying), passionate in friendship but clumsy in love, stiff and stilted like certain virginities, uncomfortable with himself and with other people, doomed by his purity and intransigence to lead a difficult life, he is superbly depicted by his creator.

But here again we have an exceptional destiny, a character who tears through life like a blind meteor. In a sense, Jacques is not made for life. His two great experiences, love and the revolution, are proof of this. It is worth noting, first of all, that Jacques experiences the revolution before he experiences love. When he sleeps with Jenny, he tries to live them both at the same time, a hopeless idea. When the revolution betrays both him and itself, he leaves Jenny suddenly and goes off to face a solitary death that he hopes will be exemplary.

His disappearance is the only guarantee that their love will endure. The wild, intractable Jenny, who begins by hating Jacques, without, moreover, being very fond of anyone, cannot bear to be touched, which has curious implications. Yet,

separated from Jacques, she discovers she has a kind of hard passion for him, in which there is little tenderness. She can find lasting fulfillment, if this word has any meaning for her, only as a widow. It would seem that Jenny is the stuff of which suffragettes are made; faithfulness to the ideas of her dead husband, and the care given to the child of this curious love will be enough to keep her going.

And in truth, what other ending is conceivable for the adventure of these two trapped souls? Their love— in the Paris of August 1914, with Jenny in mourning following Jacques into all the public places where the socialist betrayal, and the beginnings of disaster, will unfold, with both of them running through the scorching afternoon as bells boom out the order to mobilize—is filled more with pain than delight. It is not without surprise that we learn these two lovers have occupied one bed; we would prefer, in fact, not to think about this formality. Artistically, the two characters are more than convincing; they are true.

In a human way, Jacques alone touches our hearts, because he is a figure of torment and failure. Setting out from his solitary revolt, he discovers history and its struggles, joins the socialist movement on the eve of one of its greatest defeats, lives through this defeat in anguish, discovers Jenny for the briefest of moments, abandons her in the same dreamlike state in which he had made her his mistress, and, despairing of everything, retreats into solitude, but this time to the loneliness of sacrifice. "To give oneself, to achieve deliverance by giving one's all." One definitive act removes him from this life, which he has never really known, but which at least he thinks he is serving this way. "To be right against everyone else and escape into death!" The formula is significant.

In reality, Jacques does not participate, even after having discovered participation. A solitary figure, he can rejoin other people only through a solitary form of sacrifice. His deepest desire (ours, too, after all) is to be right, along with everybody else. But if this is only a dream, which it is, in order to be consistent he would prefer to be right against everybody else. In his case, dying, deliberately, is the only way of being right once and for all.

In reality, Jacques has not only never been able to feel at one with other people, except through a great idea; but he has always felt hemmed in by them. "I always think of myself as the prey of other people; that if I escaped them, if I managed somewhere else, far from them, to begin an entirely new life, I would finally achieve serenity." Here Jacques expresses something all of us think, at one time or another. But there is no "somewhere else," no new life either, or at least not one without other people.

Someone who insists on always being right will always feel alone against everyone else; it is impossible to live with others and be right at the same time. Jacques does not know that the only real progress lies in learning to be wrong all alone. But this presupposes a capacity for patience, the patience to make and to build, the only capacity that has ever produced great works, in history or in art.

Such patience is beyond the capacity of a certain type of man, however, who can be satisfied only by action alone. At the summit of this sort of men is the terrorist, of whom Jacques is one of the first representatives in our literature. He dies alone; even his example is useless, and the last man who sees him, a policeman, insults him as he finishes him off, because he hates having to kill him. Those like Jacques, who want to change life in order to change themselves, leave life untouched and, in the end, remain what they are: sterile and disturbing witnesses for everything in man that refuses and always will refuse to live.

The portrait of Antoine offers different problems and teaches different lessons. Unlike Jacques, Antoine loves life, carnally, with passion; he has a physical and wholly practical knowledge of it. As a doctor, he reigns in the kingdom of

the body. But his nature explains his vocation. In him, knowledge always passes through the medium of the senses. His friendships, his loves, are physical. The shoulder of his friend or brother, a woman's radiance, are the paths by which feelings set fire to his heart or kindle his intelligence.

Sometimes he even prefers what he feels to what he believes. He defends Protestantism, in front of Mme de Fontanin,⁵ solely out of physical attraction, for he never has any traffic with it otherwise. A liking for the physical sometimes leads to flabbiness or the cynicism of the sensualist. But it is balanced in Antoine by two complementary things, work and character. His life is ordered, occupied, and has, above all, a single purpose: his profession. Immediately, his sensuality is an advantage.

It helps him in his job and gives him a sense, an orientation no doctor can do without that guides his probings of the human body. It also softens his excessive determination. The result, his unshakable balance, his informed tolerance, and also his excessive self-assurance. For Antoine is far from perfect: he has the defects of his virtues. In the man who enjoys being what he is, a certain form of solitary happiness does not exist without selfishness and blindness.

Jacques and Antoine help us understand that there are two kinds of men; some will still be adolescents when they die, the others are born adult. But the adults run the risk of imagining that their balance is the general rule, and consequently that unhappiness is a sin. Antoine seems to believe that the world he lives in is the best possible and that anyone, indeed, can choose to live in a large town house on the rue de l'Université, to pursue the honorable calling of doctor of medicine, and welcome life in all its goodness.

This is his limitation, in the first volumes at least, and it leads him to adopt a number of unattractive attitudes. Born a bourgeois, he lives with the idea that everything around him is eternal, since everything surrounding him suits his convenience. This conviction even influences his true nature, which he drapes in the doublet of being a "Thibault son and heir." He behaves as a man of wealth, even in his sexual adventures: he pays cash for his pleasures, striking an air of importance and authority.

Antoine will therefore not have to accept life. He will merely have to discover that he is not the only person living. In keeping with his nature, he will simply follow an opposite path to his brother's. Here the profound truth of the novel is revealed. Martin du Gard knows that men learn not from circumstances themselves, but from the contact of their own natures with circumstances. They become what they are. And, quite naturally, it is a woman who breaks the shell with which Antoine protects himself. Truth can reach a carnal man only through the flesh. This is why its path cannot be foreseen.

Here the path is called Rachel, and the episode of her affair with Antoine remains one of the most beautiful in *Les Thibault*. The love affair between Rachel and Antoine, unlike so many affairs in literature, does not hover in the blissful heavens of verbal effusions. But it fills the reader with a secret joy, and gratitude for a world in which such truths are possible.

Rachel's physical beauty radiates the whole of *Les Thibault*, and until the very eve of his death Antoine continues to draw warmth from it. He finds in Rachel not the tired or humiliated prey to which he had been accustomed, but his generous equal. She admires Antoine, of course, but she is not his subordinate. She has lived, seen the world, she remains slightly mysterious for him, and cannot free herself from what she has been.

Without ceasing to love Antoine, she says, "I am like this," and he has to admit that people can exist independently of him, that this is nevertheless something good, which gives an added taste to life. From their first meeting, they are equals. On the stormy summer night when Antoine operates on a little girl with the emergency resources at his disposal, Rachel holds the lamp steadily and

Antoine discovers that the doctor in him is helped simply by the fact that she is there. Later on, exhausted, sitting side by side, they fall asleep.

Antoine wakes, feeling a gentle warmth along one side of his body: Rachel has dozed off against him. They will become lovers a little later on, but they are already intimate, linked to each other so that each pours into the other a richer life. From this moment on, Antoine abdicates, joyfully and gratefully. When Jacques meets his brother again in Lausanne, after long years of separation, he finds him "changed." What a hundred sermons could not have accomplished a woman has achieved. But this woman does not belong to the world Antoine had thought unique and unchangeable.

She is one of those who never stay, who are always nomads; what one inhales in her presence is liberty. A sensual freedom, of course, in which Antoine discovers for the first time that equality within difference which is the highest dream of minds and bodies. But this liberty is also a freedom from prejudices Rachel does not fight against; she does not even know that they are there, and her very existence quietly denies them.

This is why Antoine becomes less complicated with her and discovers the only valid aspects of his own nature: his personal generosity, his vitality, and his power to admire.⁶ He does not become better, but he fulfills himself a little more, outside himself and yet nearer to what he really is, in joyfully responding to a person who in turn acknowledges and welcomes him. Perhaps a certain royal truth is defined in this—a man who feels entitled to be just what he is, at the same time freeing another being by loving her very nature.

Long after their separation, this realization continues to inspire Antoine. "He was laughing the deep, youthful laugh he had so long repressed, that Rachel had permanently freed." They do in fact separate, without seeing each other, on a foggy, rainy night; their story is apparently a short one. Rachel follows the darker slope of her character, returning to Africa to rejoin the mysterious man who dominates her (here, the motivation seems a bit romantic). Actually, she is moving toward death, with which this living creature has a natural complicity.

But she has helped Antoine to grow up, and she will even have helped him to die better since it is toward her that he turns once more when he is close to death. "Do not despise your uncle Antoine," he writes in the notebook that he is keeping for Jacques' son ... "this poor adventure is, after all, the best thing that happened in my poor life." The word "poor" is excessive here, but it is written in self-pity by a dying man.

Antoine's love life has doubtless not been a very rich one, but, in this life, Rachel has been a royal gift that enriched him without obligation. When Jacques, to whom Antoine risks confiding something of this love, proclaims from the height of his ignorant purity: "Ah, no, Antoine, love is something different from that," he does not know what he is talking about. There is a lesson he has missed, a knowledge worth having, which would make him humbler about love according to the flesh and freer for the joyous gifts that life and people can bestow.

Liberty and humility, these are the virtues Rachel awakens in Antoine. Life is bad, Antoine sometimes tries to tell himself, "as if he were talking to some stubbornly optimistic interlocutor; and this stubborn, stupidly satisfied person was himself, the everyday Antoine." It is this Antoine, better informed, who survives the liaison with Rachel.

He knows that life is good, he moves easily through it, can he when he has to, and patiently waits for life to justify this confidence. Most of the time it does. But, somewhere within him, a concern awakened by Rachel has at the same time humanized his assurance. Antoine now knows that other people exist, and that, in love, for example, we do not take our pleasure alone. This is one way, but a sure and certain one, of learning that during the historical events to come he will not be the only one to suffer. France goes to war.

Jacques refuses the war and dies from this refusal. Antoine agrees to fight, with no love for war,⁷ and eventually dies from this acceptance. He leaves behind his life as a wealthy and famous doctor, the newly-decorated town house whose paint is chipped off by his army equipment. He knows that he will never return to the world he is leaving behind.

But he keeps the essential thing, his profession, which he can pursue even during the war and even, as he sincerely remarks, into the revolution. Carried along in the crazy course of history, Antoine is now free; he has given up what he owns, not what he is. He will know how to judge the war: a doctor reads communiqués as lists of wounds and death agonies.

Gassed, crippled, certain that he is going to die, he regrets nothing of the old world. In the Epilogue his only two concerns are the future of mankind (he hopes for a "peace with neither victory or humiliation," so that wars will not arise again) and Jean-Paul, Jacques' son. As for himself, he no longer has anything but memories, among them the memory of Rachel, which make up his knowledge of life and which help him to die.

Les Thibault ends with the diary of a sick doctor and the death of the hero. A world is dying along with him, but the problem is to discover what one generous individual can pass on from the old world to the new. History overflows and floods whole continents and peoples, then the waters recede and the survivors count up what is missing and what remains. Antoine, a survivor of the war of 1914, transmits what he has been able to save from the disaster to Jean Paul that is to say, to us.

And here is his greatness, which is to have come back, lucidly, to everyone's level. From the moment Antoine sees his death warrant in the eyes of his teacher, Philip, until his final solitude, he never ceases to grow in stature, but he does so precisely as he comes to recognize one by one his weaknesses and doubts. The petty, self-satisfied doctor now discovers his ignorance. "I am condemned to die without having understood very much about myself or about the world." He knows that pure individualism is not possible, that life does not consist solely of the selfish glow of youthful strength.

With three thousand new babies every hour, and as many deaths, an infinite force sweeps the individual along in the uninterrupted flow of generation, drowning him in the vast, unfillable ocean of collective death. What else can he do but accept himself with his limitations, and try to reconcile the duties he has toward himself with those he has toward others? As to the rest, he has to wager once again.

Gassed and fallen from his throne, Ulysses seeks a definition of his wisdom, and realizes it must have an element of folly and of risk. To avoid being a burden on anyone, first of all he will kill himself, all alone, in a way both so humble and deliberate that one hesitates to say whether he is like a successful Barois or a bourgeois Kirilov.

And in spite of this sensible suicide, or because it is so reasonable, his wager will be irrational and optimistic: he bets on the continuity of the human adventure, writing his last words for Jacques' son.

This double obliteration, by death and by fidelity to what will live on, makes Antoine vanish into the very stuff of history, of which men's hopes are made, and whose roots are human misfortune. In this respect, the remark of Antoine's that touches me most deeply is the one he jots down shortly before his death: "I've only been an average man." This is true, in a way, whereas Jacques, by the same standards, is someone exceptional.

But it is the average man who gives the whole work its strength, illuminates its underlying movement, and crowns it with this admirable Epilogue. After all, the truth Ulysses represents includes Antigone's as well, although it does not hold

the other way round. What are we to think of the creator who can build, silently and without commentaries, two characters who are so different and so commanding?

Since I have concentrated on the relevance of Martin du Gard's work to the present day, I still must show that his very doubts are our own. The birth of an awareness of history in the Thibault brothers is paired with the posing of a problem we can well understand. Summer 1914, which reveals along with the impending war the failure of socialism in circumstances decisive to the future of the world, offers a summary of all Martin du Gard's doubts. He was not lacking in lucidity.

We know that Summer 1914, appearing in 1936, was published long after *The Death of the Father* (1929). During this long interval, Martin du Gard carried out a veritable revolution in the structure of his work. He abandoned his original plan, and decided to give Les Thibault an ending different from the one he had originally intended. The first plan involved thirty or so volumes; the second reduces Les Thibault to eleven.

Martin du Gard had no hesitation next about destroying the manuscript of *L'Appareillage* (*Setting Sail*), a volume which was to follow *The Death of the Father* and which had cost him two years' work. Between 1931, the date of this sacrifice, and 1933, the year when armed with a new plan he began to write Summer 1914, there were two years of quite natural confusion. This is perceptible in the book's very structure. After a long pause the machine at first had some difficulty getting started again, and really gets going only in the second volume.

But it seems to me that we also feel this change in a number of new perspectives. Begun at the moment of Hitler's ascendance to power, when the Second World War could already be sensed on the horizon, this great historical fresco of a conflict men tried to hope would be the last is almost compelled to call itself into question. In *Vieille France*, written during the years when Martin du Gard had given up Les Thibault, the schoolmistress was already asking herself a formidable question: "Why is the world like this? Is it really society's fault?... Is it not rather man's own fault?"

The same question worries Jacques at the height of his revolutionary fervor, just as it explains most of Antoine's attitudes toward historical events. One can therefore suppose it must have haunted the novelist himself.

None of the contradictions of social action are, in any case, eluded in the long, perhaps overlong, ideological conversations that fill Summer 1914. The main problem, the use of violence in the cause of justice, is discussed at great length in the conversations between Jacques and Mithoerg. The famous distinction between the yogi and the commissar has already been made by Martin du Gard: within the revolution, in fact, it brings about the confrontation between the apostle and the technician. Better still, the nihilistic aspect of the revolution is isolated, in order to be treated in depth, in the character of Meynestrel.

The latter believes that after having put man in the place of God, atheism ought to go even further and abolish man himself. Meynestrel's reply, when asked what will replace man, is "Nothing." Elsewhere, the Englishman Patterson defines Meynestrel as "the despair of believing in nothing." Finally, like all those who join the revolution from nihilism, Meynestrel believes that the best results are achieved by the worst means.

He has no hesitation about burning the secret papers Jacques has brought back from Berlin, which prove the collusion between the Prussian and Austrian general staffs. The publication of these documents would risk altering the attitude of the German social democrats, thus making the war, which Meynestrel considers as the "trump card" for social upheaval, far less likely.

These examples are enough to show that there was nothing naïve in Martin du

Gard's socialism. He cannot manage to believe that perfection will one day be embodied in history. If he does not believe this, it is because his doubt is the same as the schoolteacher's in *Vieille France*.

This doubt concerns human nature. "His pity for men was infinite; he gave them all the love his heart contained; but whatever he did, however hard he tried, he remained skeptical about man's moral potentialities." To be certain only of men, and to know that men have little worth, is the cry of pain that runs through the whole of this work, for all its strength and richness, and that brings it so close to us. For, after all, this fundamental doubt is the same doubt that is hidden in every love and that gives it its tenderest vibration.

This ignorance, acknowledged in such simple terms, moves us because it is the other side of a certainty we also share. The service of man cannot be separated from an ambiguity that must be maintained in order to preserve the movement of history. From this come the two pieces of advice that Antoine bequeaths to Jean-Paul. The first is one of prudent liberty, assumed as a duty. "Don't let yourself be tied down to a party. Feeling your way in the dark is no joke. But it is a lesser evil" The other is to trust oneself in taking risks: to keep going forward, in the midst of others, along the same path that crowds of men have followed for centuries, in the nighttime of the species, marching and stumbling toward a future that they cannot conceive.

Clearly, there are no certainties offered here. And yet this work communicates courage and a strange faith. To wager, as Antoine does, over and above doubts and disasters, on the human adventure, amounts in the end to praising life, which is terrible and irreplaceable. The Thibault family's fierce attachment to life is the very force that inspires the whole work. Father Thibault dying takes on an exemplary quality; he refuses to disappear, comes unexpectedly to life again, lunges at the enemy, struggles physically against death, bringing nurses and relatives into the fray.

Inevitably, we are reminded of the Karamazovs' love of life and pleasure, of Dimitri's despairing remark, "I love life too much. It's even disgusting." But life is not polite, as Dimitri is well aware. In this great struggle to escape by any and every means from annihilation lies the truth of history and its progress, of the mind and all its works.

Here indeed is one of those works conceived in the refusal to despair. This refusal, this inconsolable attachment to men and the world, explains the roughness and the tenderness of Martin du Gard's books. Squat, heavy with the weight of flesh in ecstasy and humiliation, they are still sticky with the life that has given them birth. But, at the same time, a vast indulgence runs through all their cruelties, transfiguring and alleviating them.

"A human life," writes Antoine, "is always broader than we realize." However low and evil it may be, a life always holds in some hidden corner enough qualities for us to understand and forgive. There is not one of the characters in this great fresco, not even the hypocritical Christian bourgeois who is painted for us in the darkest colors, who goes without his moment of grace. Perhaps, in Martin du Gard's eyes, the only guilty person is the one who refuses life or condemns people.

The key words, the final secrets, are not in man's possession. But man nevertheless keeps the power to judge and to absolve. Here lies the profound secret of art, which always makes it useless as propaganda or hatred, and which, for example, prevents Martin du Gard from depicting a young follower of Maurras except with sympathy and generosity. Like any authentic creator, Martin du Gard forgives all his characters. The true artist, although his life may consist mostly of struggles, has no enemy.

The final word that can be said about this work thus remains the one that it has been difficult to use about a writer since the death of Tolstoi: goodness. Even then I must make it clear that I am not talking about the screen of goodness

that hides false artists from the eyes of the world while at the same time hiding the world from them.

Martin du Gard himself has defined a certain type of bourgeois virtue as the absence of the energy necessary to do evil. What we are concerned with here is a particularly lucid virtue, which absolves the good man because of his weaknesses, the evil man because of his generous impulses, and both of them together because of their passionate membership in a human race that hopes and suffers.

Thus Jacques, returning home after long years of absence, and having to help lift up his dying father, finds himself overwhelmed by the contact with this enormous body, which in his eyes had formerly symbolized oppression: "And suddenly the contact with this moistness so overwhelmed him that he felt something totally unexpected—a physical emotion, a raw sentiment which went far beyond pity or affection: the selfish tenderness of man for man." Such a passage marks the true measure of an art that seeks no separation from anything, that overcomes the contradictions of a man or a historical period through the obscure acceptance of anonymity. The community of suffering, struggle, and death exists; it alone lays the foundation of the hope for a community of joy and reconciliation.

He who accepts membership in the first community finds in it a nobility, a faithfulness, a reason for accepting his doubts; and if he is an artist he finds the deep wellsprings of his art. Here man learns, in one confused and unhappy moment, that it is not true he must die alone. All men die when he dies, and with the same violence. How, then, can he cut himself off from a single one of them, how can he ever refuse him that higher life, which the artist can restore through forgiveness and man can restore through justice. This is the secret of the relevance to our times I spoke of earlier.

It is the only worthwhile relevance, a timeless one, and it makes Martin du Gard, a just and forgiving man, our perpetual contemporary. Preface to the Pléiade edition of the complete works of Martin du Gard, published in 1955.

¹ Roger Martin du Gard was born in Paris in 1881 and died in 1958. He was trained as a historian and archivist, and his first really important novel, *Jean Barois*, uses some of the techniques of the professional historian for literary purposes. Published in 1913, it tells the story of a man who is led by the discoveries of nineteenth-century science to abandon the Catholic faith in which he has been educated. He founds a rationalist review called *Le Semeur*, which has similarities to Péguy's *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, and plays an active part in the campaign to establish the innocence of Captain Dreyfus. He is highly successful in his professional career, but nevertheless conscious of how easily he can relapse into the acceptance of Christian belief. One day, for example, when he has just delivered a lecture on *The Future of Disbelief*, his cab is almost involved in an accident, and he finds himself reciting the Hail Mary. This incident makes him realize the danger that he may, in old age, return to the religion of his childhood, and he therefore composes a "Last Will and Testament" in which he declares his complete lack of belief and states that any future relapse into religion is to be explained solely by old age and the fear of death. As he grows older, he does in fact accept Catholicism again, and dies a believer. On discovering his will, his pious wife, encouraged by a priest, burns this evidence of her husband's intended fidelity to free thought.

Martin du Gard's major work, however, and the one for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1937, is the long novel *Les Thibault*. This began appearing in 1922, and was completed by the publication of the *Epilogue* in 1940. It describes the life of two brothers, Jacques and Antoine Thibault, during the years immediately before the First World War. Jacques, the rebel, is some ten years younger than his more stable brother Antoine, and appears to be the more interesting character. In particular, his love affair with Jenny de Fontanin, sister of his close friend Daniel, occupies a good deal of the first two

volumes. However, Antoine takes on more importance in the *La Belle Saison* and *La Mort du Père*, and represents a theme to which Camus himself devotes much attention: the impossibility of explaining, within a religious context, the purely physical suffering that afflicts men, children, and animals alike. Like Dr. Rieux in *The Plague*, Antoine is extremely conscious of the interminable defeat that death inflicts upon a doctor, and he administers to his father, who is dying in agony, the injection that he knows will kill him.

Originally Martin du Gard had intended to continue the adventures of Jacques and Antoine in a whole series of novels describing their life in the Paris of the 1920's. However, on January 1, 1931, he was involved in a serious car accident, and had to spend a long time in bed. There, meditating on his work, he came to realize that the 1914-18 war had so completely destroyed the world in which Jacques and Antoine had lived that he could not carry on with their story as if nothing had happened. He consequently destroyed the part of the novel that he had already written but not yet published, and composed *L'Été 1914*, a two-volume account of the outbreak of the First World War. Jacques, a socialist and fervent pacifist, is killed in an attempt to throw leaflets from an airplane onto the French and German armies as they advance to battle. Antoine is gassed, and eventually kills himself when he realizes that he will never recover.

The Epilogue is made up of his diary, and ends with two notations: "Easier than you think" and "Jean-Paul." Dying, he thinks of the son born to Jacques and Jenny, and of the physical survival of humanity and the family that this son represents. There are a number of analogies between Martin du Gard and Camus that help to explain the long preface Camus wrote to his collected works in 1954. Both were socialists, but were opposed to extremist forms of political thought. Both were agnostics, preoccupied with the problems of death and physical suffering. As artists, both strove to be impersonal, and to write books in which their own personality would not be immediately visible.

Yet while Martin du Gard succeeded, so much so that he is more completely identified with his work than any other French writer, Camus failed, and it is perhaps his awareness of this failure which gives such a note of regret. Similarly, Martin du Gard succeeded in organizing his life in such a way that he could devote his life to his work, whereas Camus, as can be seen from his letter to "P. B." (pages 343-4), was constantly distracted from writing by his other preoccupations and duties. —P.T.

2 "The milky river of the sky sweeps along its silver spangles" (from *Devenir!*).

3 "This innate need," says Barois, "to understand and explain, which today finds its wide and complete satisfaction in the scientific development of our age."

4 "I have never, alas, seen God except through my father."

5 One can almost speak of love between Mme de Fontanin and Antoine, although they never exchange a guilty word or gesture.

6 Admiration is also Martin du Gard's subject matter in the beautiful scenes between Antoine and his teacher, Philip. This is not surprising. Where admiration is lacking, both heart and work are weakened.

7 "It would really be too easy to be a citizen only until the outbreak of war and then no longer."

Herman Melville

Back in the days when Nantucket whalers stayed at sea for several years at a stretch, Melville, at twenty-two, signed on one, and later on a man-of-war, to sail the seven seas. Home again in America, his travel tales enjoyed a certain success while the great books he published later were received with indifference

and incomprehension.¹

Discouraged after the publication and failure of *The Confidence Man* (1857), Melville "accepted annihilation." Having become a custom's officer and the father of a family, he began an almost complete silence (except for a few infrequent poems) which was to last some thirty years. Then one day he hurriedly wrote a masterpiece, *Billy Budd* (completed in April 1891), and died, a few months later, forgotten (with a three-line obituary in *The New York Times*). He had to wait until our own time for America and Europe to finally give him his place among the greatest geniuses of the West.

It is scarcely easier to describe in a few pages a work that has the tumultuous dimensions of the oceans where it was born than to summarize the Bible or condense Shakespeare. But in judging Melville's genius, if nothing else, it must be recognized that his works trace a spiritual experience of unequalled intensity, and that they are to some extent symbolic.

Certain critics² have discussed this obvious fact, which now hardly seems open anymore to question. His admirable books are among those exceptional works that can be read in different ways, which are at the same time both obvious and obscure, as dark as the noonday sun and as clear as deep water. The wise man and the child can both draw sustenance from them.

The story of captain Ahab, for example, flying from the southern to the northern seas in pursuit of Moby Dick, the white whale who has taken off his leg, can doubtless be read as the fatal passion of a character gone mad with grief and loneliness. But it can also be seen as one of the most overwhelming myths ever invented on the subject of the struggle of man against evil, depicting the irresistible logic that finally leads the just man to take up arms first against creation and the creator, then against his fellows and against himself.³

Let us have no doubt about it: if it is true that talent recreates life, while genius has the additional gift of crowning it with myths, Melville is first and foremost a creator of myths.

I will add that these myths, contrary to what people say of them, are clear. They are obscure only insofar as the root of all suffering and all greatness lies buried in the darkness of the earth. They are no more obscure than Phèdre's cries, Hamlet's silences, or the triumphant songs of Don Giovanni. But it seems to me (and this would deserve detailed development) that Melville never wrote anything but the same book, which he began again and again. This single book is the story of a voyage, inspired first of all solely by the joyful curiosity of youth (Typee, Omoo, etc.), then later inhabited by an increasingly wild and burning anguish.

Mardi is the first magnificent story in which Melville begins the quest that nothing can appease, and in which, finally, "pursuers and pursued fly across a boundless ocean." It is in this work that Melville becomes aware of the fascinating call that forever echoes in him: "I have undertaken a journey without maps." And again: "I am the restless hunter, the one who has no home." *Moby Dick* simply carries the great themes of *Mardi* to perfection.

But since artistic perfection is also inadequate to quench the kind of thirst with which we are confronted here, Melville will start once again, in *Pierre*: or the *Ambiguities*, that unsuccessful masterpiece, to depict the quest of genius and misfortune whose sneering failure he will consecrate in the course of a long journey on the Mississippi that forms the theme of *The Confidence Man*. This constantly rewritten book, this unwearying peregrination in the archipelago of dreams and bodies, on an ocean "whose every wave is a soul," this *Odyssey* beneath an empty sky, makes Melville the Homer of the Pacific. But we must add immediately that his Ulysses never returns to Ithaca.

The country in which Melville approaches death, that he immortalizes in *Billy Budd*, is a desert island. In allowing the young sailor, a figure of beauty and

Innocence whom he dearly loves, to be condemned to death, Captain Vere submits his heart to the law. And at the same time, with this flawless story that can be ranked with certain Greek tragedies, the aging Melville tells us of his acceptance for the first time of the sacrifice of beauty and innocence so that order may be maintained and the ship of men may continue to move forward toward an unknown horizon. Has he truly found the peace and final resting place that earlier he had said could not be found in the Mardi archipelago?

Or are we, on the contrary, faced with a final shipwreck that Melville in his despair asked of the gods? "One cannot blaspheme and live," he had cried out. At the height of consent, isn't Billy Budd the worst blasphemy? This we can never know, any more than we can know whether Melville did finally accept a terrible order, or whether, in quest of the spirit, he allowed himself to be led, as he had asked, "beyond the reefs, in sunless seas, into night and death" But no one, in any case, measuring the long anguish that runs through his life and work, will fail to acknowledge the greatness, all the more anguished in being the fruit of self-conquest, of his reply.

But this, although it had to be said, should not mislead anyone as to Melville's real genius and the sovereignty of his art. It bursts with health, strength, explosions of humor, and human laughter. It is not he who opened the storehouse of sombre allegories that today hold sad Europe spellbound. As a creator, Melville is, for example, at the furthest possible remove from Kafka, and he makes us aware of this writer's artistic limitations. However irreplaceable it may be, the spiritual experience in Kafka's work exceeds the modes of expression and invention, which remain monotonous.

In Melville, spiritual experience is balanced by expression and invention, and constantly finds flesh and blood in them. Like the greatest artists, Melville constructed his symbols out of concrete things, not from the material of dreams. The creator of myths partakes of genius only insofar as he inscribes these myths in the denseness of reality and not in the fleeting clouds of the imagination. In Kafka, the reality that he describes is created by the symbol, the fact stems from the image, whereas in Melville the symbol emerges from reality, the image is born of what is seen.⁴

This is why Melville never cut himself off from flesh or nature, which are barely perceptible in Kafka's work. On the contrary, Melville's lyricism, which reminds us of Shakespeare's, makes use of the four elements. He mingles the Bible with the sea, the music of the waves with that of the spheres, the poetry of the days with the grandeur of the Atlantic. He is inexhaustible, like the winds that blow for thousands of miles across empty oceans and that, when they reach the coast, still have strength enough to flatten whole villages.

He rages, like Lear's madness, over the wild seas where Moby Dick and the spirit of evil crouch among the waves. When the storm and total destruction have passed, a strange calm rises from the primitive waters, the silent pity that transfigures tragedies. Above the speechless crew, the perfect body of Billy Budd turns gently at the end of its rope in the pink and grey light of the approaching day.

T. E. Lawrence ranked Moby Dick alongside *The Possessed* or *War and Peace*. Without hesitation, one can add to these Billy Budd, *Mardi*, *Benito Cereno*, and a few others. These anguished books in which man is overwhelmed, but in which life is exalted on each page, are inexhaustible sources of strength and pity. We find in them revolt and acceptance, unconquerable and endless love, the passion for beauty, language of the highest order in short, genius.

"To perpetuate one's name," Melville said, "one must carve it on a heavy stone and sink it to the bottom of the sea; depths last longer than heights." Depths do indeed have their painful virtue, as did the unjust silence in which Melville lived and died, and the ancient ocean he unceasingly ploughed. From their endless darkness he brought forth his works, those visages of foam and night, carved by the waters, whose mysterious royalty has scarcely begun to shine upon

us, though already they help us to emerge effortlessly from our continent of shadows to go down at last toward the sea, the fight, and its secret.

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1 For a long time, *Moby Dick* was thought of as an adventure story suitable for school prizes.

2 In passing, let me advise critics to read page 449 of *Mardi* in the French translation.

3 As an indication, here are some of the obviously symbolic pages of *Moby Dick*. (French translation, Gallimard): pp. 120, 121, 123, 129, 173-7, 191-3, 203, 209, 241, 310, 313, 339, 373, 415, 421, 452, 457, 460, 472, 485, 499, 503, 517, 520, 522. Camus probably read *Moby Dick* in the French translation by Lucien Jacques, Joan Smith, and Jean Giono, which was published by Gallimard in 1941. If this is the case, then the page numbers correspond to these page numbers in the *Everyman* edition and refer more or less to the following episodes:

120-p. 114: of chapter XXX. Ahab's leg.

121-p. 115: beginning of chapter XXXI.

123-p. 117. Whether a whale be a fish.

129-pp. 122-3. Black Fish-Narwhal.

173-7-pp. 163-7: chapter XLI. The Whiteness of the Whale.

203-p. 192. "Now the advent of these outlandish strangers ..."

209-p. 197. Queequeg as the standard bearer "hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair."

241-p. 227: chapter LIII. The Town-Ho's story of how the mate Radney was eaten by *Moby Dick*.

310-p. 290. The Right Whale's Head.

313-end of chapter LXXIV. Resolution in facing death.

339-pp. 317-18: end of chapter LXXXII, beginning of chapter LXXXIII.

373-p. 350: chapter XC. The smell of the Rosebud.

415-pp. 393-4: chapter CIII.

452-p. 420: chapter CXXII. The tempering of the harpoon.

457-p. 425. The meeting with the Bachelor.

460-p. 248: beginning of chapter CXVI.

472-pp. 438-9: chapter CXX.

485-p. 451: end of chapter CXXV.

499-p. 463: beginning of chapter CXXX, "The Symphony." Ahab weeps into the sea.

503-p. 480. *Moby Dick* breaks Ahab's ivory leg.

520-end of chapter CXXXIII.

522-p. 482. "I meet thee, this third time, *Moby Dick*." It should be noted that there is a difference in the chapter numberings between the French translation and the *Everyman* edition referred to here. Thus, the French edition is consistently one chapter number ahead, so that chapter CXXXIV in the *Everyman* edition is chapter CXXXV in the French edition. The chapter headings here refer to the *Everyman* edition. -P.T.

4 In Melville, the metaphor suggests the dream, but from a concrete, physical starting point. In *Mardi*, for example, the hero comes across "huts of flame." They are built, simply, of red tropical creepers, whose leaves are momentarily lifted by the wind.

On the Future of Tragedy¹

An oriental wise man always used to ask in his prayers that God spare him from living in an interesting age. Our age is extremely interesting, that is to say, it is tragic. To purge us of our miseries, do we at least have a theater suited to our time or can we hope to have one? In other words, is modern tragedy possible? This is the question I would like to consider today.

But is it a reasonable question? Isn't it the same type of question as: "Will we have good government?" or "Will our authors grow modest?" or again, "Will the rich soon share their fortunes with the poor?"—interesting questions, no doubt, but ones that lead to reverie rather than to thought.

I don't think so. I believe, and for two reasons, that one can legitimately raise the question of modern tragedy. First, great periods of tragic art occur, in history, during centuries of crucial change, at moments when the lives of whole peoples are heavy both with glory and with menace, when the future is uncertain and the present dramatic. Aeschylus, after all, fought in two wars, and Shakespeare was alive during quite a remarkable succession of horrors.

Both, moreover, stand at a kind of dangerous turning point in the history of their civilizations. It is worth noting that in thirty centuries of Western history, from the Dorians to the atomic bomb, there have been only two periods of tragic art, both of them narrowly confined in both time and space. The first was Greek and presents remarkable unity, lasting a century, from Aeschylus to Euripides. The second lasted scarcely longer, flourishing in the countries bordering the edge of western Europe.

Too little has been made of the fact that the magnificent explosions of the Elizabethan theater, the Spanish theater of the Golden Age, and French seventeenth-century tragedy are practically contemporary with one another. When Shakespeare died, Lope de Vega was fifty four and had already had a large number of his plays performed; Calderón and Corneille were alive.

Finally, there is no more distance in time between Shakespeare and Racine than between Aeschylus and Euripides. Historically, at least, we can consider them a single magnificent flowering, though with differing aesthetics, of the Renaissance, born in the inspired disorder of the Elizabethan stage and ending with formal perfection in French tragedy. Almost twenty centuries separate these two tragic moments.

During these twenty centuries, there was nothing, nothing, except Christian mystery plays, which may be called dramatic but which, for reasons I shall explain, cannot be considered tragic. We can therefore say that these were very exceptional times, which should by their very peculiarity tell us something about the conditions for tragic expression.

I think this is a fascinating subject for study, one that should be thoroughly and patiently pursued by real historians. But this is not within my competence and I would simply like to enlarge on what I think about it as a man of the theater.

Looking at the movement of ideas in these two periods, as well as at the tragic works that were written at the time, I find one constantly recurring factor. Both periods mark a transition from forms of cosmic thought impregnated with the notion of divinity and holiness to forms inspired by individualistic and rationalist concepts. The movement from Aeschylus to Euripides is, roughly speaking, the development from the great pre-Socratic thinkers to Socrates himself (Socrates, who was scornful of tragedy, made an exception for Euripides).

Similarly, from Shakespeare to Corneille we go from a world of dark and mysterious forces, which is still the Middle Ages, to the universe of individual values affirmed and maintained by the human will and by reason (almost all the sacrifices in Racine are motivated by reason).

It is the same transition, in short, that links the passionate theologians of the Middle Ages to Descartes. Although the evolution is more clearly visible in Greece, because it is simpler and limited to one place, it is the same in both cases.

Each time, historically, the individual frees himself little by little from a body of sacred concepts and stands face to face with the ancient world of terror and devotion. Each time, literarily, the works move from ritual tragedy and from almost religious celebration to psychological tragedy. And each time the final triumph of individual reason, in the fourth century in Greece and in the eighteenth century in Europe, causes the literature of tragedy to dry up for centuries.

What can we draw from these observations on the subject that concerns us? First of all, the very general remark that the tragic age always seems to coincide with an evolution in which man, consciously or not, frees himself from an older form of civilization and finds that he has broken away from it without yet having found a new form that satisfies him. It seems to me that we, in 1955, have reached this stage, and can therefore ask whether this inner anguish will find tragic expression in our world.

However, the twenty centuries separating Euripides from Shakespeare should encourage us to be prudent. After all, tragedy is one of the rarest of flowers, and there is only the slimmest chance that we shall see it bloom in our own day.

But there is another reason that encourages us to wonder about this chance, a very particular phenomenon that we have been able to observe in France for some thirty years now, which began with the reform carried out by Jacques Copeau.² This phenomenon is the advent of writers to the theater, which up to then had been the exclusive domain of theatrical brokers and business interests.

The interference of writers has led to the resurrection of the tragic forms that tend to put dramatic art back in its rightful place, at the summit of the literary arts. Before Copeau (except for Claudel, whom nobody performed) the privileged place for theatrical sacrifices in France was the double bed. When the play was particularly successful, the sacrifices multiplied, and the beds as well. In short, it was a business, like so many others, in which the price of everything was marked-with, if I may say so, the mark of the beast. This, moreover, is what Copeau used to say about it:

... If we are asked what feeling inspires us, what passion urges, compels, forces, and finally overwhelms us, it is this: indignation. The frantic industrialization that, more cynically every day, degrades the French stage and makes the educated public turn away from it; the monopolization of most of our theaters by a handful of entertainers hired by shameless merchants; everywhere, and even in places where great traditions ought to preserve some modesty, the same spirit of ham acting and commercial speculation, the same vulgarity; everywhere bluff and every conceivable kind of exaggeration and exhibitionism feed like parasites on a dying art, itself now no longer even mentioned; everywhere the same flabbiness, disorder, indiscipline, ignorance and stupidity, the same contempt for the creator, the same hatred of beauty; an ever more vain and stupid output of plays, ever more indulgent critics, and ever more misguided public taste: these are what inspire our indignation and revolt.

Since this magnificent protest, followed by the creation of the Vieux-Colombier, the theater in France, for which we are indebted to Copeau, has gradually recovered its claim to nobility, that is to say, it has found a style. Gide, Martin du Gard, Giraudoux, Montherlant, Claudel, and so many others have restored a glory and ambitions that had disappeared a century ago.

At the same time a movement of ideas and reflections on the theater, whose most significant product is Antonin Artaud's fine book *Le Théâtre et son double*,³ and the influence of such foreign theoreticians as Gordon Craig⁴ and Appia, have once more brought the tragic dimension to center stage in our thoughts.

By bringing all these observations together, perhaps I can clearly define the problem I would like to discuss for you. Our time coincides with a drama in civilization which might today, as it did in the past, favor tragic modes of expression. At the same time many writers, in France and elsewhere, are

engrossed in creating a tragedy for our epoch. Is this a reasonable dream, is this enterprise possible, and under what conditions?

This is the timely question, I believe, for all those who find in the theater the excitement of a second life. Of course, no one today is in a position to give so definite a reply to this question as: "Conditions favorable. Tragedy to follow." I shall therefore limit myself to a few suggestions about this great hope that inspires men of culture in the West.

First of all, what is a tragedy? The problem of defining "the tragic" has greatly occupied both literary historians and writers themselves, although no formula has ever received universal agreement. Without claiming to solve a problem that so many thinkers hesitate over, at least we can proceed by comparison and try to see, for example, how tragedy differs from drama or melodrama. This is what seems to me the difference: the forces confronting each other in tragedy are equally legitimate, equally justified.

In melodramas or dramas, on the other hand, only one force is legitimate. In other words, tragedy is ambiguous and drama simple-minded. In the former, each force is at the same time both good and bad. In the latter, one is good and the other evil (which is why, in our day and age, propaganda plays are nothing but the resurrection of melodrama). Antigone is right, but Creon is not wrong. Similarly, Prometheus is both just and unjust, and Zeus who pitilessly oppresses him also has right on his side. Melodrama could thus be summed up by saying: "Only one is just and justifiable," while the perfect tragic formula would be: "All can be justified, no one is just." This is why the chorus in classical tragedies generally advises prudence.

For the chorus knows that up to a certain limit everyone is right and that the person who, from blindness or passion, oversteps this limit is heading for catastrophe if he persists in his desire to assert a right he thinks he alone possesses. The constant theme of classical tragedy, therefore, is the limit that must not be transgressed. On either side of this limit equally legitimate forces meet in quivering and endless confrontation. To make a mistake about this limit, to try to destroy the balance, is to perish.

The idea of a limit no one should overstep, beyond which lies death or disaster, also recurs in Macbeth and Phèdre, though in a less pure form than in Greek tragedy. This explains, finally, why the ideal drama, like Romantic drama, is first and foremost movement and action, since what it represents is the struggle between good and evil and the different incidents in this struggle.

The ideal tragedy, on the other hand, and especially Greek tragedy, is first and foremost tension, since it is the conflict, in a frenzied immobility, between two powers, each of which wears the double mask of good and evil. It is of course true that between these two extreme types of tragedy and melodrama, dramatic literature offers all the intermediary stages.

But if we restrict ourselves to the pure forms, what are the two forces, in Greek classical tragedy for example, that enter into conflict? If we take Prometheus Bound as typical of this kind of tragedy, we can say that there is, on the one hand, man and his desire for power, and on the other, the divine principle reflected by the world.

Tragedy occurs when man, through pride (or even through stupidity as in the case of Ajax) enters into conflict with the divine order, personified by a god or incarnated in society. And the more justified his revolt and the more necessary this order, the greater the tragedy that stems from the conflict.

Consequently, everything within a tragedy that tries to destroy this balance destroys the tragedy itself. If the divine order cannot be called into question and admits only sin and repentance, there is no tragedy. There can only be mysteries or parables, or again what the Spaniards call acts of faith or sacramental acts, that is to say, spectacles in which the one truth that exists

is solemnly proclaimed.

It is thus possible to have religious drama but not religious tragedy. This explains the silence of tragedy up to the Renaissance. Christianity plunges the whole of the universe, man and the world, into the divine order. Hence there is no tension between the world and the religious principle, but, at the most, ignorance, together with the difficulty of freeing man from the flesh, of renouncing his passions in order to embrace spiritual truth.

Perhaps there has been only one Christian tragedy in history. It was celebrated on Golgotha during one imperceptible instant, at the moment of: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This fleeting doubt, and this doubt alone, consecrated the ambiguity of a tragic situation. The divinity of Christ has never been doubted since.

The mass, which daily consecrates this divinity, is the real form religious theater takes in the West. It is not invention, but repetition. On the other hand, everything that frees the individual and makes the universe submit to his wholly human law, especially by the denial of the mystery of existence, once again destroys tragedy. Atheistic or rationalist tragedy is thus equally impossible. If all is mystery, there is no tragedy.

If all is reason, the same thing happens. Tragedy is born between light and darkness and rises from the struggle between them. And this is understandable. In both religious and atheistic drama, the problem has in fact already been solved. In the ideal tragedy, just the opposite, it has not been solved. The hero rebels and rejects the order that oppresses him, while the divine power, by its oppression, affirms itself exactly to the same extent as it is denied. In other words, revolt alone is not enough to make a tragedy.

Neither is the affirmation of the divine order. Both a revolt and an order are necessary, the one supporting the other, and each reinforcing the other with its own strength. There is no Oedipus without the destiny summed up by the oracle. But the destiny would not have all its fatality if Oedipus did not refuse it. And if tragedy ends in death or punishment, it is important to note that what is punished is not the crime itself but the blindness of the hero who has denied balance and tension.

I am talking, of course, of the ideal tragic situation. Aeschylus, for example, who remains close to the religious and Dionysiac origins of tragedy, granted Prometheus forgiveness in the last section of the trilogy; the Furies are replaced by the Kindly Ones. But in Sophocles the balance is most of the time scrupulously maintained, and it is in this respect that he is the greatest tragedian of all time.

Euripides, on the other hand, will upset the tragic balance by concentrating on the individual and on psychology. He is thus a forerunner of individualistic drama, that is to say, of the decadence of tragedy. Similarly, the great Shakespearean tragedies are still rooted in a kind of vast cosmic mystery that puts up an obscure resistance to the undertakings of its passionate individuals, while Corneille ensures the triumph of the individual ethic and by his very perfection announces the end of the genre.

People have thus been able to write that tragedy swings between the two poles of extreme nihilism and unlimited hope. For me, nothing is more true. The hero denies the order that strikes him down, and the divine order strikes because it is denied. Both thus assert their existence at the very moment when this existence is called into question. The chorus draws the lesson, which is that there is an order, that this order can be painful, but that it is still worse not to recognize that it exists.

The only purification comes from denying and excluding nothing, and thus accepting the mystery of existence, the limitations of man—in short, the order where men know without knowing. Oedipus says "All is well," when his eyes have

been torn out. Henceforth he knows, although he never sees again. His darkness is filled with light, and this face with its dead eyes shines with the highest lesson of the tragic universe. What can be drawn from these observations?

A suggestion and a working hypothesis, nothing more. It seems in fact that tragedy is born in the West each time the pendulum of civilization is half way between a sacred society and a society built around man. On two occasions, twenty centuries apart, we find a struggle between a world that is still interpreted in a sacred context and men who are already committed to their individuality, that is to say, armed with the power to question.

In both cases, the individual increasingly asserts himself, the balance is gradually destroyed, and the tragic spirit finally falls silent. When Nietzsche accuses Socrates of having dug the grave of ancient tragedy, he is right up to a certain point—to exactly the same extent that it is true to say of Descartes that he marks the end of the tragic movement born in the Renaissance. At the time of the Renaissance, the traditional Christian universe is called into question by the Reformation, the discovery of the world, and the flowering of the scientific spirit.

Gradually, the individual rises against the sacred order of things and against destiny. Then Shakespeare throws his passionate creatures against the simultaneously evil and just order of the world. Death and pity sweep across the stage and once again the final words of tragedy ring out: "A higher life is born of my despair." Then the pendulum moves increasingly in the opposite direction. Racine and French tragedy carry the tragic movement to its conclusion with the perfection of chamber music.

Armed with Cartesianism and the scientific spirit, triumphant reason then proclaims the rights of the individual and empties the stage: tragedy descends into the street with the bloody scaffolds of the Revolution. No tragedies, therefore, will spring from romanticism, but only dramas, and among them, only Kleist's or Schiller's reach true greatness.

Man is alone, and thus confronted with nothing but himself. He ceases to be a tragic figure and becomes an adventurer; dramas and the novel will depict him better than any other art. The spirit of tragedy consequently disappears until our own day, when the most monstrous wars have inspired not a single tragic poet.

What then leads one to hope for a renaissance of tragedy among us? If my hypothesis is valid, our only reason for hope is that individualism is visibly changing today and that beneath the pressures of history, little by little the individual is recognizing his limits.

The world that the eighteenth-century individual thought he could conquer and transform by reason and science has in fact taken shape, but it's a monstrous one. Rational and excessive at one and the same time, it is the world of history. But at this degree of hubris, history has put on the mask of destiny. Man doubts whether he can conquer history; all he can do is struggle within it.

In a curious paradox, humanity has refashioned a hostile destiny with the very weapons it used to reject fatality. After having defied human reign, man turns once more against this new god. He is struggling, as warrior and refugee at the same time, torn between absolute hope and final doubt. He lives in a tragic climate. Perhaps this explains why tragedy may seek a renaissance. Today, man proclaims his revolt, knowing this revolt has limits, demands liberty though he is subject to necessity; this contradictory man, torn, conscious henceforth of human and historical ambiguity, is the tragic man.

Perhaps he is striding toward the formulation of his own tragedy, which will be reached on the day when All is well. And what can in fact be observed in the French dramatic renaissance are the first tentative movements in this direction. Our dramatists are looking for a tragic language because no tragedy can exist

without a language, and because this language is all the more difficult to formulate when it must reflect the contradictions of the tragic situation. It must be both hieratic and familiar, barbarous and learned, mysterious and clear, haughty and pitiful.

In quest of this language, our writers have thus gone back instinctively to its sources, that is to say, to the tragic epochs I have mentioned. So we have seen Greek tragedy reborn in our country, but in the only forms possible to highly individualistic minds—either derision or highly mannered literary transposition. That is to say, humor and fantasy, since comedy alone is in the individual realm. Two good examples of this attitude are provided in Gide's *Oedipe* or Giraudoux's *La Guerre de Troie*.
[reads]5

What is also visible in France is an effort to reintroduce the language of religion to the stage. A logical thing to do. But this had to be done by classical religious images, while the problem of modern tragedy lies precisely in the need to create new sacred images. So we have seen either a kind of pastiche, in both style and sentiment, as in Montherlant's *Port Royal*, which is at the moment triumphing in Paris.
[reads]

or the resurrection of authentic Christian sentiments, as in the admirable *Portage de midi*.
[reads]

But here we can see just how the religious theater is not tragic: it is not a theater in which the creature and creation are pitted one against the other, but a theater in which men abandon their love for what is human. In a way, Claudel's works before his conversion, such as *Tête d'Or* or *La Ville* are more significant for our purposes. But however that may be, religious theater always precedes tragedy. In a way, it anticipates it. So it is not surprising that the dramatic work in which the style, if not the situation, is already perceptibly tragic should be Henry de Montherlant's *Le Maître de Santiago*, from which I should now like to read the two principal scenes:
[reads]

I find authentic tension in a work like this, although it is slightly rhetorical and, above all, highly individualistic. But I feel that a tragic language is taking shape in it and that this language gives us more than does the play itself. In any case, if the attempts and researches that I have tried to present to you through some of their most outstanding examples do not give you the certainty that a dramatic renaissance is possible, they do at least leave us with this hope.

The path still to be traveled must first of all be made by our Society itself, in search of a synthesis between liberty and necessity, and by each of us. We must keep alive our power of revolt without yielding to our power of negation. If we can pay this price, the tragic sensibility that is taking shape in our time will flourish and find its expression. This amounts to saying that the real modern tragedy is the one that I cannot read to you, because it does not yet exist. To be born, it needs our patience and a genius.

My only aim has been to make you sense that there does exist in modern French dramatic art a kind of tragic nebula within which various nuclei are beginning to coagulate. A cosmic storm may, of course, sweep the nebula away, along with its future planets. But if this movement continues despite the storms of time, these promises will bear their fruit and the West will perhaps experience a renaissance of the tragic theater.

It is certainly in preparation everywhere. Nevertheless, and I say this without nationalism (I love my country too much to be a nationalist), it is in France that the first signs of such a renaissance are visible. In France, of course, but I have surely said enough to make you share my conviction that the model,

and the inexhaustible inspiration, remains for us the genius of Greece. To express to you both this hope and a double gratitude, first of all the one French writers feel for Greece, their common fatherland, and secondly my own gratitude for the welcome you have given us, I can find no better way of ending this lecture than reading you an extract from the magnificent and learnedly barbarous transposition that Paul Claudel has made of Aeschylus's Agamemnon, in which our two languages are mutually transfigured into one wondrous and inimitable tongue.

[reads]

Lecture delivered in Athens, 1955

1 Like his early association with the Théâtre de l'Equipe when he lived in Algiers, and his later adaptations of Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* and Dostoevski's *The Possessed*, this lecture demonstrates the continuity of Camus's interest in the theater and his concern for its wider implications. As he points out in a program note to the adaptation of *Requiem for a Nun* (this page—this page), his own ambition in the theater was to write a modern tragedy.

2 Jacques Copeau (1878–1949) was one of the outstanding theatrical directors of the twentieth century. After an initial association with Antoine and the realism of the Théâtre libre, he founded his own theater, the Vieux-Colombier, in 1913. There he was able to put into practice his idea that the staging of a play should be subordinated to the meaning of the text and not to the ambition of the famous actor performing the main part. His concept of drama as involving the active participation of the audience as well as the combined efforts of the actors, the director, and the designer is already visible in Camus's work in 1936, in the play *Révolte dans les Asturies*. —P.T.

3 Antonin Artaud's *Le Théâtre et son double* was published in 1938. Artaud puts forward the view that the Western theater is wrong to attempt an imitation of life. The true aim of the theater, he argues, should be to shock the spectator into an awareness of the violence that lies beneath civilization and the importance of man's more primitive instincts. Artaud began his career as a member of the surrealist movement, and his views have recently found a possibly accidental echo in the plays of Jean Genet—see Robert Brustein: *The Theatre of Revolt* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co.; 1962). In her study of Camus's work, Professor Germaine Brée also discusses a possible influence of Artaud's ideas on *La Peste* (see Camus [Rutgers University Press; 1959], p. 116). —P.T.

4 Arthur Gordon Craig (1872–1966). Son of Ellen Terry, and a famous theatrical designer and director. In 1908 he founded *The Mask*, in Florence, and ran a school of acting. Like Copeau, he tended to increase the importance of the director at the expense of the "star" actor, and, like Artaud, he was extremely interested in Oriental forms of drama. —P.T.

5 Unfortunately, the French text does not show what passages Camus read during the lecture. —P.T.

William Faulkner

Foreword to *Requiem for a Nun*, 1957

The goal of this foreword is not to present Faulkner to the French public. Malraux undertook that task brilliantly twenty years ago, and thanks to him, Faulkner gained a reputation with us that his own country had not yet accorded him. Nor is it a question of praising Maurice Coindreau's translation. French readers know that contemporary American literature has no better nor more effective ambassador among us.

One need only imagine Faulkner betrayed as Dostoevski was by his first adapters to measure the role Monsieur Coindreau has played. A writer knows what he owes to his translators, when they are of this quality. I wish only, since I brought *Requiem for a Nun* to the stage, to make a few remarks for the benefit of those who are interested in the problems that making a stage adaptation poses. The publication of the two texts [the novel and Camus's adaptation now makes possible a comparison I would like to encourage.

It will be seen first of all that the original novel, although it is divided into acts, includes, along with the scenes in dialogue form, chapters that are lyrical and historical describing the origin of the buildings in which the action proper takes place. These structures are the court house, the capitol, seat of the governor of the state, and the prison. Each of them serves to introduce an act and the place where the scenes occur. The dialogues of the first act take place in the living room of the young Stevens family, but they occur just after the trial and concern the death sentence that has just been pronounced.

The great scene of Temple's confession, the main point of the second act, takes place in the governor's office, in the capitol at Jackson. Finally, the meeting between Temple and the condemned woman, in the third act, takes place in the prison. Faulkner's intention is plain. He wanted the Stevens drama to be knotted and unknotted in the temples built by man to a painful justice that Faulkner does not believe is of human origin.

From this point of view, the courthouse can be seen as a temple, the governor's office as a confessional, and the prison as a convent in which the condemned Negro woman atones for her crime, and Temple's. To breathe life into these sacred buildings, Faulkner has had recourse to poetic evocations that lay the human and historical foundation for the events that take place in them.

It goes without saying that these chapters could not be used on the stage, except for a few details. I cut them, therefore, aware of what I was losing, but resigned to confide to the scene designer and the director the task of discreetly making evident the religious nature of the places where the play would unfold. Only the scenes in dialogue, then, could furnish the raw material of a dramatic action.

The reader of this book will quickly see that they could not be lifted as is; in many respects, they remain scenes in a novel. Here one senses how different dramatic and fictional time can be. Tension, condensation, the alternation of tension and explosion are the laws of the former, free development and a certain musing quality are inseparable from the latter. It was necessary, therefore, to redistribute the dialogue in an appropriately dramatic continuity that would permit the action to move forward without ever ceasing to leave it in suspense, that would underline the evolution of each character and lead it to its conclusion, that would clarify motives without throwing too crude a light on them and, finally, that would bring together in the last elevation all the themes touched upon or orchestrated during the action.

From a practical point of view, this meant eliminating the prologue to the trial, rearranging the scenes in the first act, developing the character of Gowan Stevens—to whom I gave one whole scene with the governor and whom I had reappear in the final scene to bring to a conclusion the matter of the blackmail letters. In addition, for reasons of dramatic effectiveness, it was necessary to rework the scene with the jailkeepers.

With this new framework established, the most difficult problem, the problem of language, remained. Despite appearances, Faulkner's style is far from resistant to dramatic transcription. After reading the *Requiem*, I was even sure that Faulkner had resolved in his manner, and without even being aware of it, a very difficult problem—the problem of a language for modern tragedy.

How can characters in business suits be made to speak a language ordinary enough

to be spoken in an apartment and unusual enough to sustain the high level of tragic destinies? Faulkner's style, with its staccato breathing, its interrupted sentences, its repeats and prolongations in repetitions, its incidences, its parentheses and its cascades of subordinate clauses, gives us a modern, and in no way artificial, equivalent of the tragic soliloquy. It is a style that gasps with the very breathlessness of suffering.

An interminably unwinding spiral of words and sentences that conducts the speaker to the abyss of sufferings buried in the past. Temple Stevens to the delicious hell of the Memphis bordello she wanted to forget, and Nancy Mannigoe to the bund, stunning, ignorant pain that will make her a murderer and a saint at the same time.

It was necessary to retain these effects of style at any cost. But if this breathless, agglutinated, insistent language can bring something new to the theater, it can do so only when used sparingly. Without this language the play would certainly be less tragic. But by itself it could destroy any play by a monotonous effect that would tire the most well-disposed spectator, and it would also run the risk of reducing the tragedy to the melodrama it always threatens to become. What I had to do was make use of this language and at the same time deliberately neutralize it.

I am not sure that I succeeded. In any case, this is what I decided: during all the scenes in which the characters refuse to surrender, when the action hangs on a kind of apparent mystery, during all the transitions, also, that serve to bring forward a development, to expose new facts, or to change the rhythm of the scene—briefly, in anything that is not suffered directly by the character, and therefore by the actor, but simply experienced and enacted on the exterior—I chose to simplify Faulkner's language, and to make it as direct as I could, adding only, for unity of composition, a few echoes, a few touches, of his "breathless" style.

To compensate, in everything that concerned naked irrepressible suffering, and particularly in Temple's confession and her husband's reactions, I have imitated Faulkner's style in French.

One further word that will doubtless interest those who, after having listened to the last scene in which Nancy proclaims her faith, asked me if I had been converted (please note that if I translated and staged a Greek tragedy, no one would ask me if I believe in Zeus). I did considerably rework the last scene. One will be able to see in this book that it consists above all of long speeches by Nancy Mannigoe and Gavin Stevens on faith and Christ.

Faulkner reveals herein his strange religion, developed still further in *A Fable*, a religion less strange in its substance than in the symbols he proposes for it. Nancy decides to love her suffering and her own death, like many great souls before her; but, according to Faulkner, she thus becomes a saint, the strange nun who suddenly invests the bordellos and prisons in which she has lived with the dignity of a cloister. This basic paradox had to be preserved.

The rest—that is, the long enlightening speeches—are liberties a novelist may take, if he really wishes to, but prohibited to the dramatist. I therefore cut and tightened these speeches and made use of Temple instead in order to challenge the paradox that Nancy illustrates and throw it into stronger relief. I can therefore accuse myself of abbreviating Faulkner's message. But in so doing I only responded to dramatic necessities, and I believe that I respected the essentials.

On Faulkner

In his preface to *Sanctuary*, André Malraux wrote that Faulkner had introduced the detective story into classical tragedy. This is true. There is, moreover, something of the detective story in every tragedy. Faulkner, who knows this,

didn't hesitate to choose his criminals and heroes from daily newspaper stories. In my opinion this is what makes his Requiem one of the very few modern tragedies we have.

In its original form, Requiem for a Nun is not a play. It is a novel in dialogue form. But it has a dramatic intensity. First of all because it gradually discloses a secret and sustains throughout an expectation of tragedy. Secondly, because the conflict that brings the characters face to face with their destiny, centering around the murder of a child, is a conflict that cannot be solved except through the acceptance of this destiny.

Faulkner has contributed then to hastening the time when the tragedy at work in our history can also take its place in our theater. His characters are our contemporaries and yet they are confronted with the same destiny that crushed Electra or Orestes. Only a great artist could attempt to introduce the noble language of pain and humiliation into our public rooms this way. Nor is it accidental that Faulkner's strange religion is experienced in this play by a Negro woman who has been a prostitute and is a murderer.

On the contrary, this extreme contrast summarizes the human grandeur of the Requiem and all Faulkner's work. Let me add in conclusion that the great problem of modern tragedy is language. Characters in business suits cannot talk like Oedipus or Titus. Their language must at the same time be simple enough to be our own and lofty enough to reach the tragic. In my view, Faulkner has found such a language. I have tried to recreate it in French, and to betray neither a work nor an author I admire.

1956

Program note to the Camus adaptation of Requiem for a Nun.

Excerpts from Three Interviews

I

"I had to put the form back in, to prune the text; it is not a play, it's a world into which I introduced logic. For the French public, the theater is inconceivable without unity... I like and I admire Faulkner; I believe I understand him rather well. Even though he did not write for the stage, he is in my opinion the only truly tragic dramatist of our time... He gives us an ancient but always contemporary theme that is perhaps the only tragedy in the world: the blind man stumbling along between his destiny and his responsibilities. A simple dialogue must be found, acceptable for people who are simple too, [but] who have access to grandeur despite their coats and ties. Only Faulkner has known how to find an intensity of tone, of situation, intolerable to the point of making the heroes deliver themselves by means of a violent, superhuman act."

Combat, 1956

II

The Requiem was not a play, but a novel in great dialogued scenes filled with a historical-poetic accent and a psychological climate that I have taken pains to preserve... I wanted to clear the way for a more theatrical than fictional progression... I developed only the role of the husband which I find admirable... The play poses no racial problem. Faulkner is too great a creator not to be universal. In the Requiem, the religion of suffering, notably in the seventh scene, becomes one with the catharsis, that ancient purification."

Nouvelles littéraires, 1956

III

Is the meeting of Albert Camus and William Faulkner equivalent to a first modern tragedy? The stage setting will already have told you that the detective element in this tragedy plays a strong role. It does in all tragedies for that matter. Take *Electra* or *Hamlet*. Faulkner, who has never been reluctant to look for his characters in news items reported in the newspapers, knows this well. A secret, then. And a conflict. Something which sets the protagonists against their destiny and is resolved with their acceptance of this destiny.

These are the keys to ancient tragedies. Faulkner used them to open the way to modern tragedy. Even though it was not written for the stage, his work, whose intensity is wholly dramatic, seems to me one that most nearly approaches a certain tragic ideal. This problem of modern tragedy, I believe, has always interested you. Is this the reason you agreed to produce the *Requiem*?

It is precisely the reason. Together with the admiration that I plainly hold for someone I consider the greatest American novelist. You see, we are living through a highly dramatic time that does not yet have a drama. Faulkner permits us to catch a glimpse of the time when what is tragic in our own history can at last reach the footlights. Doesn't the whole difficulty consist of making contemporary people speak a tragic language?

Without a doubt, but I hope to have surmounted it. Faulkner's "breathless" style, that I did my utmost to imitate, is the style of suffering itself. The basis of his whole religion ...

Just so. A strange religion, more clearly expressed in his latest work, *A Fable*, whose symbols give a glimpse of the hope for redemption through pain and humiliation. Here, Nancy Mannigoe, murderer and prostitute, is his message bearer. This is not accidental. And the meaning of his title: *Requiem for a Nun*, did he explain it to you?

He? Not at all. I saw him for only ten minutes and he didn't say three words to me. No, the title takes on its meaning when one knows the role that bordellos and prisons play in Faulkner's universe. Nancy and Temple are two nuns who have entered the monastery of abjection and expiation. As diffuse as it is, doesn't Faulkner's faith run counter to your own agnosticism?

I don't believe in God. that's true. But I am not an atheist nonetheless. I would even agree with Benjamin Constant that there is something vulgar ... yes ... worn out about being against religion.

Should one see in this the sign of a certain evolution in your thinking, and doesn't this interest in Faulkner foresee an eventual rallying to the spirit if not the dogma of the Church? Certain readers of *The Fall* seemed to hope for this. Nothing really justifies them in this. Doesn't my judge-penitent clearly say that he is Sicilian and Japanese? Not Christian for a minute. Like him, I have a good deal of affection for the first Christian. I admire the way he lived, the way he died. My lack of imagination keeps me from following him any further.

There, in parentheses, is my only similarity to the Jean-Baptiste Clamence with whom people stubbornly insist on identifying me. I would like to have called that book "*A Hero of Our Time*." Originally it was only a short novel, meant to appear next January in a collection that will be called *Exile and the Kingdom*. But I let myself get carried away with the idea: to paint a portrait of a small prophet like so many today. They proclaim nothing at all and find nothing better to do than accuse others in accusing themselves.

Le Monde, August 31, 1956

René Char¹

One cannot do justice in a few pages to a poet like René Char, but one can at least place him in the right context. Certain works justify our seizing any pretext to testify, even without shades of meaning, to what we owe them. And I am happy that this German edition of my favorite poems gives me the opportunity to say that I consider René Char our greatest living poet, and *Fureur et Mystère* to be the most astonishing book French poetry has given us since Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations* and Apollinaire's *Alcools* ...

The originality of René Char's poetry, actually, is startling. He came to it by way of surrealism, no doubt, but by lending rather than giving himself to that movement, staying just long enough to realize that his step was firmer when he walked alone. Since the publication of *Seuls demeurent*, a handful of poems have been enough to set a free and virgin wind blowing through our poetry. After so many years devoted to the manufacture of "inane trifles," our poets relinquished the lute only to put the bugle to their lips, transforming poetry into a salubrious funeral pyre.

It blazed, like those great bonfires of grass which in the poet's own country give scent to the wind and richness to the earth. At last we could breathe. Natural mysteries, with living waters and sunlight, burst into a room where poetry still lay spellbound in echoes and shadows. I am describing a poetic revolution.

But I would have less admiration for the originality of this poetry if its inspiration were not, at the same time, so ancient. Char rightly lays claim to the tragic optimism of pre Socratic Greece. From Empedocles to Nietzsche a secret has been passed from summit to summit, and after a long eclipse, Char once more takes up this hard and rare tradition. The fires of Etna smoulder beneath some of his unendurable phrases, the royal wind of Sils Maria irrigates his poems and makes them echo with the sound of clear and tumultuous waters.

What Char calls "wisdom with tear-filled eyes" is revived here, at the very height of our disasters. His poetry, at once both old and new, combines refinement with simplicity. It carries day and night in the same impulse. In the intense light beneath which Char was born we know the sun sometimes grows dark. At two in the afternoon, when the countryside is replete with warmth, a dark wind blows over it. In the same way, whenever Char's poetry seems obscure, it is because of his furious concentration of images, a thickening of the light that sets it apart from the abstract transparence we usually look for only because it makes no demands on us.

But at the same time, just as on the sun-filled plains, this black point solidifies vast beaches of fight around itself, light in which faces are stripped bare. At the center of the *Poème pulvérisé*, for example, there is a mysterious hearth around which torrents of warm images inexhaustibly whirl.

This is also why Char's poetry is so completely satisfying. At the heart of the obscurity through which we advance, the fixed, round light of Paul Valéry's skies would be of no use. It would bring nostalgia, not relief. In the strange and rigorous poetry René Char offers us, on the other hand, our very night shines forth in clarity and we learn to walk once more. This poet for all times speaks accurately for our own. He is at the heart of the battle, he formulates our misfortunes as well as our renaissance: "If we live in a lightning flash, it is the heart of the eternal."

Char's poetry does indeed exist in a flash of lightning—and not only in a figurative sense. The man and the artist, who go hand in hand, were tempered yesterday in the struggle against Hitlerian totalitarianism, and today in the denunciation of the rival but allied nihilisms that are tearing our world apart. Char has accepted sacrifice but not delight in the common struggle. "To leap not in the festival, but in its epilogue." A poet of revolt and liberty, he has never succumbed to complacency, and never, to use his own words, confused revolt with ill temper.

It can never be said enough, and all men confirm it every day, that there are two kinds of revolt—one that conceals a wish for servitude, and another that seeks desperately for a free order, in which, as Char magnificently puts it, bread will be cured. Char knows well that to cure bread means to restore it to its rightful place, to place it above all doctrines, and give it the taste of friendship. This rebel thus escapes from the fate of so many noble insurgents who end up as cops or accomplices. Char will always protest against those who sharpen guillotines. He will have no truck with prison bread, and bread will always taste better to him in a hobo's mouth than in the prosecuting attorney's.

It is easy to understand, then, why this poet of revolutionaries has no trouble being also a poet of love, into which his poems sink fresh and tender roots. A whole aspect of Char's ethic and his art is summed up in the proud phrase of the *Poème pulvérisé*: "Bow down only in order to love." For him, love is a question of bowing down, and the love that runs through his work, however virile, has the stamp of tenderness. This is again why Char, caught up as we all are in the most confusing history, has not been afraid to maintain and celebrate within this history the beauty for which it has given us so desperate a thirst. Beauty surges from his admirable *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, burning like the rebel's blade, red, streaming from a strange baptism, crowned with flames.

We recognize her then for what she is, not some anaemic, academic goddess, but the sweetheart, the mistress, the companion of our days. In the middle of the struggle, here is a poet who dared to shout at us: "In our darkness, there is no one place for beauty. There is space for beauty everywhere." From that moment on, confronting the nihilism of his time and opposing all forms of betrayal, each of René Char's poems has been a milestone on the path to hope.

What more can one ask of a poet in our time? In the midst of our dismantled citadels, by virtue of a generous and secret art, are woman, peace, and liberty hard to maintain. And far from diverting us from the fray, we learn that these rediscovered riches are the only ones worth fighting for. Without having meant to, and simply because he has rejected nothing of his time, Char does more than express what we are: he is also the poet of our tomorrows.

Although he remains alone, he brings us together, and the admiration he arouses mingles with that great fraternal warmth within which men bear their best fruit. We can be sure of it; it is in works like his from now on that we will seek recourse and vision. Char's poems are messengers of truth, of that lost truth each day now brings us closer to, although for a long time we were able only to say that it was our country and that far away from it we suffered, as if in exile.

But words finally take shape, light dawns, one day the country will receive its name. Today a poet describes it for us, magnificently, reminding us, already, to justify the present, that this country is "earth and murmurs, amid the impersonal stars."

Preface to the German edition of René Char's *Poésies*, written in 1958 and published in 1959

¹ René Char, a close personal friend of Camus, was born in Provence in 1907. He was initially associated with the surrealist movement, but broke with it in 1937. During World War II he fought as a member of the Resistance. References to his experiences, which also inspired his book *Feuillets d'Hypnos* in 1946, can be found in *Carnets II*, pp. 216-17; Alfred A. Knopf edition, p. 170. —P.T.

On Jean Grenier's *Les Iles*

I was twenty in Algiers when I read this book for the first time. I can do no

better than compare its overwhelming effect, its influence on me and many of my friends, to the shock a whole generation in France received from *Les Nourritures Terrestres*.

But the revelation offered by *Les Iles* was of a different order. It suited us, whereas Gide's glorification of the senses left us at once full of admiration and puzzled. We really had no need to be freed from the winding sheet of morality, or to sing of the fruits of the earth. They hung on our doorstep in the sunlight. All we had to do was sink our teeth into them.

Some of us knew, of course, that poverty and suffering existed. We simply rejected them with all the strength of our youthful blood. The truth of the world lay only in its beauty, and the delights it offered. Thus we lived on sensations, on the surface of the world, among colors, waves, and the good smell of the soil. This is why *Les Nourritures*, with its invitation to happiness, came too late. Happiness was a faith that we proclaimed, insolently. We needed, quite the opposite, to be diverted a bit from our greed, to be torn, in fact, from our happy barbarity.

Of course, if gloomy preachers had stalked across our beaches hurling anathema at the world and at the creatures who enchanted us, our reaction would have been violent, or sarcastic. We needed more subtle teachers, and a man born on other shores, though like us enamoured of light and bodily splendors, came to tell us in peerless language that these outward appearances were beautiful, but that they were doomed to perish and should therefore be loved in despair.

Immediately, this great, eternal theme began to echo in us like an overwhelmingly new discovery. The sea, the light, people's faces, from which a kind of invisible barrier suddenly separated us, receded, but still exercised their fascination. *Les Iles*, in short, had just initiated our disenchantment; we had discovered culture.

Without denying the physical reality that composed our realm, this book coupled it with another reality that explained our youthful uneasiness. What Grenier did was to remind us that the moments of bliss, the instants when we said "Yes," which we had experienced only obscurely and which inspire some of the finest pages in *Les Iles*, were essentially fleeting and would perish. Immediately, we understood our sudden melancholies.

The man who labors painfully between a harsh earth and a somber sky can dream of another world where bread and the sky will both be light. He hopes. But men whose longings are fully satisfied every hour of the day by the sunshine and the hills have ceased to hope. They can only dream of an imaginary elsewhere. Thus men from the North flee to the shores of the Mediterranean, or into deserts of light.

But where can men of sun-drenched countries flee, except into the invisible? The journey Grenier describes is a voyage into imaginary and invisible lands, a quest from isle to isle, such as the one Melville, using other means, illustrates in *Mardi*. Animals take their pleasure and die, man marvels and he dies—where is his harbor? This is the question that echoes through the book. It is answered only indirectly. Grenier, like Melville, ends his voyage with a meditation on the absolute and on God. Speaking of the Hindus, he writes of a port that can be neither named nor situated in any particular place, of another island, but one forever distant, and in its own way deserted.

Once again, for a young man brought up outside traditional religions, this prudent, allusive approach was perhaps the only way to direct him toward a deeper meditation on life. Personally, I had no lack of gods: the sun, the night, the sea ... But these are gods of enjoyment; they fill one, then they leave one empty. With them alone for company I should have forgotten the gods in favor of enjoyment itself.

I had to be reminded of mystery and holy things, of the finite nature of man, of

a love that is impossible in order to return to my natural gods one day, less arrogantly. So I do not owe to Grenier certainties he neither could nor wished to give me. But I owe him, instead, a doubt which will never end and which, for example, has prevented me from being a humanist in the sense that it is understood today—I mean a man blinded by narrow certainties. From the very day I read *Les Iles*, I admired its pervasive tremor, and wanted to imitate it.

"I have long dreamed of arriving alone in a foreign town, alone and stripped of everything. I would have lived humbly, in poverty even. Above all else, I would have kept the secret." This is the kind of music that almost intoxicated me as I repeated it softly to myself, walking in the Algerian evenings. I felt that I was entering a new land, that one of those high-walled gardens which stood on the heights of my city, past which I often walked, catching only a whiff of invisible honeysuckle, and of which, in my poverty, I had dreamed, was finally left open to me. I was not mistaken.

A garden of incomparable wealth was opening up to me; I had just discovered art. Something, someone was stirring dimly within me, longing to speak. Reading one book, hearing one conversation, can provoke this rebirth in a young person. One sentence stands out from the open book, one word still vibrates in the room, and suddenly, around the right word, the exact note, contradictions resolve themselves and disorder ceases. Already, at the same moment, in response to this perfect language, a timid, clumsier song rises from the darkness of our being.

I believe I already wanted to write at the time I discovered *Les Iles*. But I really decided to do so only after reading this book. Other books contributed to this decision. Their role accomplished, I forgot them. But this book has not stopped living within me, and I have been reading it for twenty years. Even today, I find myself repeating, as if they were my own, phrases from *Les Iles* or other books by the same author. I don't regret it at all. I simply admire my good fortune, in that I, who more than anyone else needed to bow down before someone, should have found a teacher, at just the right moment, and that I should have been able to continue to love and admire him from year to year and from work to work.

For it is indeed lucky to be able to experience, at least once in one's lifetime, this enthusiastic submission to another person. Among the half-truths that delight our intellectual society this stimulating thought can be found—that each conscience seeks the death of the other. At once we all become masters and slaves, dedicated to mutual annihilation. But the word master has another meaning, linked to the word disciple in respect and gratitude.

It is no longer a question of one mind seeking to kill the other, but of a dialogue, which never ceases once it has begun, and which brings absolute satisfaction to certain lives. This long confrontation involves neither servitude nor obedience, only imitation, in the spiritual sense of the word. In the end, the master rejoices when the disciple leaves him and achieves his difference, while the latter will always remain nostalgic for the time when he received everything and knew he could never repay it. Mind thus engenders mind, from one generation to another, and human history, fortunately, is built as much on admiration as on hatred.

But this is not a tone in which Grenier would speak. He prefers to tell us about a cat's death, a butcher's illness, the scent of flowers, the passage of time. Nothing is really said in this book. Everything is suggested, with incomparable strength and sensitivity. The delicate language, at once so accurate and dreamlike, has the fluidity of music. It flows, swiftly, but its echoes linger. If a comparison has to be made, one should speak of Chateaubriand or Barrès, who drew new accents from French.

But why bother? Grenier's originality goes beyond these comparisons. He merely speaks to us of simple and familiar experiences in an apparently unadorned language. Then he lets us translate, each in his own way. It is only on these conditions that art is a gift which carries no obligations. I, who have received

so much from this book, recognize the extent of this gift and acknowledge my debt. The great revelations a man receives in his life are few, rarely more than one or two.

But, like good fortune, they transfigure us. To anyone eager to give and to know, this book offers in each one of its pages a similar revelation. It took *Les Nourritures Terrestres* twenty years to find a public to overwhelm. It is time for new readers to come to this book. I would still like to be one of them, just as I would like to go back to that evening when, after opening this little volume in the street, I closed it again as soon as I had read the first lines, hugged it tight against me, and ran up to my room to devour it without witnesses. And I envy, without bitterness, but rather, if I may say so, with warmth, the unknown young man today who picks up *Les Iles* for the first time ...

Essay published in *Preuves*, 1959, and reprinted as a preface in the same year

The end