Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time, Marcel Proust

Regrets, Reveries the Color of Time

So the poet's habit of living should be set on a key so low that the common influences should delight him. His cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration, and he should be tipsy with water.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Tuileries

At the Garden of the Tuileries this morning, the sun dozed off on all the stone steps, one by one, like a blond youth whose light sleep is promptly interrupted by the passing of a shadow. Young sprouts are greening against the old palace walls.

The breath of the enchanted wind mingles the fresh scent of the lilacs with the fragrance of the past. The statues, which, in our public squares, are as terrifying as lunatics, dream here in the bowers like sages under the lustrous verdure that protects their whiteness.

The basins, with the blue sky basking in their depths, shine like eyes. From the terrace on the edge of the water we see a hussard riding by, as if in another era, from the old quarter of the Quai d'Orsay on the opposite bank. The morning glories spill wildly from the vases, which are crowned with geraniums.

Blazing with sunshine, the heliotrope burns its perfumes. In front of the Louvre the hollyhocks soar up as slender as masts, as noble and graceful as columns, and blushing like young girls. Iridescent with sunlight and sighing with love, the water jets spurt toward the sky. At the end of the terrace a stone horseman, galloping furiously without budging, his lips glued to a joyful trumpet, embodies all the ardor of spring.

But now the sky is darkening; it is about to rain. The basins, where no azure is shining anymore, are like blank eyes or vases full of tears. The

absurd water jet, whipped by the breeze, raises its now ludicrous hymn more and more swiftly toward the sky.

The futile sweetness of the lilacs is infinitely sad. And over there, riding hell for leather, the immobile and furious motion of his marble feet urging on his charger in its fixed and dizzying gallop, the oblivious horseman keeps endlessly blasting his trumpet against the black sky.

Versailles

A canal that inspires dreams in the most inveterate chatterboxes the instant they draw near, and where I am always happy whether I feel cheerful or mournful.
—GUEZ DE BALZAC IN A LETTER TO MONSIEUR DE LAMOTHE-AIGRON

The exhausted autumn, no longer warmed by the meager sunshine, is losing its final colors one by one. The extreme ardor of its foliage, blazing so intensely as to maintain the glorious illusion of a sunset throughout the afternoons and even the mornings, is now extinguished. Only the dahlias, the French marigolds, and the yellow, violet, white, and pink chrysanthemums are still glowing on the somber and desolate face of autumn.

At six in the evening, when you walk across the uniformly gray and naked Tuileries under the equally gloomy sky, where, branch for branch, the black trees sketch their profound and delicate despair, an abruptly spotted bed of those autumn flowers brightens richly in the dusk, inflicting a voluptuous violence on our eyes, which are accustomed to those ashen horizons.

The morning hours are gentler. The sun still shines intermittently, and, leaving the terrace by the edge of the water and going down the vast stone stairway before me, I can still see my shadow descending the steps one by one.

After so many others (especially Mssrs. Maurice Barrès, Henri de Régnier, and Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac), I would hesitate to

utter your name, Versailles, your grand name, sweet and rusty, the royal cemetery of foliage, of vast marbles and waters, a truly aristocratic and demoralizing place, where we are not even troubled by remorse that the lives of so many workers merely served to refine and expand not so much the joys of another age as the melancholy of our own.

After so many others I would hesitate to utter your name, and yet how often have I drunk from the reddened cup of your pink marble basins, drunk to the dregs, savoring the delirium, the intoxicating bittersweetness of these waning autumn days. In the distance the earth, mixed with faded leaves and rotted leaves, always seemed to be a tarnished yellow and violet mosaic.

Passing close to the Hameau and pulling up my overcoat collar against the wind, I heard the cooing of doves. I was intoxicated everywhere by the fragrance of blessed palms as on Palm Sunday. How could I still pick a slender nosegay of spring in these gardens ransacked by autumn?

On the water the wind crumpled the petals of a shivering rose. In this vast defoliation of the Trianon, only the slight arch of a small white geranium bridge raised its flowers above the icy water, their heads scarcely bowed by the wind.

Granted, ever since I inhaled the sea breeze and the salt air in the sunken roads of Normandy, ever since I glimpsed the ocean shining through the branches of blossoming rhododendrons, I have known about everything that the closeness of water can add to the charms of vegetation.

But what more virginal purity in this sweet, white geranium, leaning with graceful restraint over the chilly waters among their banks of dead leaves. Oh, silvery old age of woods still green, oh, weeping branches, ponds and pools that a pious gesture has placed here and there, like urns offered up to the melancholy of the trees!

Stroll

Despite the pure sky and the already hot sunshine, the wind was still as cold, the trees were still as bare as in winter. To light a fire I had to cut down one of the branches that I thought were dead, but the sap spurted out, soaking my arm up to the elbow and exposing a tumultuous heart under the frozen bark of the tree. In between the trunks the bare winter soil was covered with anemones, cowslips, and violets, while the streams, yesterday still gloomy and empty, were now filled with a blue, vivid, tender sky basking in the watery depths.

Not the pale, weary sky of lovely October evenings, a sky stretching out on the watery bottom, virtually dying there of love and melancholy, but an intense and blazing sky on the tender and cheerful azure, from which grays, blues, and pinks kept flashing by: not the shadows of pensive clouds, but the dazzling and slippery fins of a perch, an eel, or a smelt.

Drunk with joy, they scooted between sky and grass, through their meadows and forests, which were all brilliantly enchanted, like ours, by the resplendent genius of spring. And the waters, gliding coolly over their heads, between their gills, and under their bellies, hurried too, singing and gaily chasing the sunbeams.

The farmyard, where you went for eggs, was no less pleasant a sight. Like an inspired and prolific poet, who never refuses to spread beauty to the humblest places, which until now did not seem to share the domain of art, the sun still warmed the bountiful energy of the dung heap, of the unevenly paved yard, and of the pear tree worn down like an old serving maid.

Now who is that regally attired personage moving gingerly among the rustic articles and farm implements, tiptoeing to avoid getting soiled? It is Juno’s bird, dazzling not with lifeless gems but with the very eyes of Argus: it is the peacock, whose fabled glory is astonishing in these surroundings.

Just as on a festive day, strutting before the clusters of gaping admirers at the gate, several minutes before the arrival of the first few guests,

the glittering mistress of the house, in a gown with an iridescent train, an azure gorgerin already attached to her royal throat, her aigrettes on her head, crosses the yard to issue a final order or wait for a prince of the blood, whom she must welcome right at the threshold.

And yet this is where the peacock spends its life, a veritable bird of paradise in a barnyard, among the chickens and turkeys, like a captive Andromache spinning her wool amid female slaves, but, unlike her, never abandoning the magnificence of royal insignia and crown jewels: a radiant Apollo, whom we always recognize even when he is guarding the herds of Admetus.

Family Listening to Music

For music is sweet,
It makes the soul harmonious and, like a heavenly choir,
It rouses a thousand voices that sing in the heart.
—VICTOR HUGO: HERNANI, ACT V, SCENE 3

For a truly dynamic family, in which each member thinks, loves, and acts, a garden is a pleasant thing. On spring, summer, and autumn evenings, they all gather there upon completing the tasks of the day; and however small the garden, however close its hedges, the latter are not so tall as not to reveal a large stretch of sky at which everyone gazes up in wordless reveries. The child dreams about his future plans, about the house he will inhabit with his best friend, never to leave him, about the secrets of earth and life.

The young man dreams about the mysterious charm of the girl he loves; the young mother about her child's future; in the depths of these bright hours the once troubled wife discovers, behind her husband's cold façade, a painful and poignant regret that stirs her pity. The father, watching the smoke curling up from a roof, dwells on the peaceful scenes of his past, which are transfigured by the faraway evening light; he thinks about his coming death, about his children's lives after his death. And thus the soul of the united family rises religiously toward

the sunset, while the huge fir, linden, or chestnut tree envelops the family with the blessing of exquisite fragrance or venerable shade.

But for a truly dynamic family, in which each member thinks, loves, and acts, for a family with a soul, how much sweeter it is if, in the evening, that soul can materialize in a voice, in the clear and inexhaustible voice of a girl or a young man who has received the gift of music and song. A stranger, passing the gate of a garden in which the family holds its tongue, would fear that his approach might rouse them out of a religious dream.

But if the stranger, without hearing the singing, perceived the gathering of friends and relatives listening to it, then how much more would the family appear to be attending an unseen mass—that is, despite the variety of postures, how strongly the resemblance of expressions would manifest the true unity of souls, a unity momentarily realized in their sympathy for the same ideal drama, by their communion in one and the same dream.

At times, as the wind bends the grass and agitates the branches for a long time, a breath bows the heads or suddenly raises them again. Then, as if an invisible messenger were telling a thrilling tale, they all seem to be waiting anxiously, listening in rapture or terror to the same news, which, however, elicits diverse echoes in each person. The anguish of the music reaches its peak; its outbursts are shattered by deep plunges and followed by more desperate outbursts.

For the old man, the lustrous infinity, the mysterious darkness of the music are the vast spectacles of life and death; for the child, they are the urgent promises of sea and land; for the lover they are the mysterious infinity; they are the luminous darkness of love. The thinker sees his mental life unroll fully; the plunges of the faltering melody are its faltering and its plunges, and its entire heart rebounds and snaps back when the melody regains its flight. The powerful murmuring of the harmonies stirs up the rich and obscure depths of his memory. The man of action pants in the melee of chords, in the gallop of vivaces; he triumphs majestically in the adagios.

Even the unfaithful wife feels that her sin is forgiven, is lost in infinity, her sin, which also originated in the dissatisfaction of a heart that, unappeased by the usual joys, had gone astray, but only in a quest for the mystery, and whose highest aspirations are now gratified by this music, which is as full as the voices of bells.

The musician, who, however, claims to take only technical pleasure in music, also experiences those meaningful emotions, which, however, are so thoroughly wrapped up in his concept of musical beauty as to be hidden from his sight.

And I myself, finally, listening in music to the most expansive and most universal beauty of life and death, sea and sky, I also feel what is unique and particular in your enchantment, oh darling beloved.

Today's paradoxes are tomorrow's prejudices, for today's grossest and most disagreeable prejudices had their moment of novelty, when fashion lent them its fragile grace. Many women today wish to rid themselves of all prejudices, and by prejudices they mean principles.

That is their prejudice, and it is heavy even though it adorns them like a delicate and slightly exotic flower. They believe there is no such thing as perspective depth, so they put everything in the same plane. They enjoy a book or life itself like a beautiful day or like an orange. They talk about the "art" of a dressmaker and the "philosophy" of "Parisian life." They would blush to classify anything, to judge anything, to say: This is good, this is bad.

In the past, when a woman behaved properly, it was the revenge of her morals, that is, her mind, over her instinctive nature. Nowadays, when a woman behaves properly, it is the revenge of her instinctive nature over her morals—that is, her theoretical immorality (look at the plays of Mssrs. Halévy and Meilhac). In an extreme loosening of all moral and social bonds, women drift to and fro between that theoretical immorality and their instinctive righteousness.

All they seek is pleasure, and they find it only when they do not seek it, when they are in a state of voluntary inaction. In books this skepticism and dilettantism would shock us like an old-fashioned adornment. But women, far from being the oracles of intellectual fashions, are actually their belated parrots. Even today, dilettantism still pleases them and suits them. While it may cloud their judgment and hamstring their conduct, one cannot deny that it lends them an already withered but still appealing grace. They make us rapturously feel whatever ease and sweetness existence may have in highly refined civilizations.

In their perpetual embarcation for a spiritual Cythera—where they will celebrate not so much their dulled senses as the imagination, the heart, the mind, the eyes, the nostrils, the ears—women add some voluptuous delight to their attitudes. And I assume that the most faithful portraitists of our time will not depict them with any great tension or rigidity. Their lives emit the sweet perfume of unbound hair.

Ambition is more intoxicating than fame; desire makes all things blossom, possession wilts them; it is better to dream your life than to live it, even if living it means dreaming it, though both less mysteriously and less vividly, in a murky and sluggish dream, like the straggling dream in the feeble awareness of ruminant creatures. Shakespeare's plays are more beautiful when viewed in your study than when mounted on a stage. The poets who have created imperishably loving women have often known only mediocre barmaids, while the most envied voluptuaries do not understand the life that they lead or, rather, that leads them.

I knew a little ten-year-old boy who, in poor health and with a precocious imagination, had devoted a purely cerebral love to an older girl. He would sit at his window for hours, waiting for her to pass, weeping if he did not see her, weeping even more if he did see her. He would spend very rare, very brief moments with her. He could no longer sleep or eat. One day he threw himself out the window.

At first, people believed that his despair at never approaching his sweetheart had driven him to suicide. But then they learned that he

had just had a very long chat with her: she had been extremely kind to him. So everyone assumed he had renounced the insipid days that remained of his life after that euphoria, which he might never have a chance to relive.

However, from secrets he had often confided in a friend people finally inferred that he had been disappointed whenever he saw the sovereign of his dreams; but once she was gone, his fertile imagination granted the absent girl all her former power, and he again desired to see her.

Each time, he tried to blame the accidental reason for his disappointment on the imperfection of circumstances. After that final conversation, when his already skillful imagination had carried his sweetheart to the supreme perfection of which her nature was capable, the boy, desperately comparing that imperfect perfection with the absolute perfection by which he lived, by which he died, threw himself out the window. Subsequently, having become an idiot, he lived a very long life, but his fall had cost him all memory of his soul, his mind, the voice of his sweetheart, whom he would run into without seeing her. She, despite pleas and threats, married him and died several years later without ever getting him to recognize her.

Life is like that little sweetheart. We dream it and we love it in dreaming it. We should not try to live it: otherwise, like that little boy, we will plunge into stupidity, though not at one swoop, for in life everything degenerates by imperceptible nuances. At the end of ten years we no longer recognize our dreams; we deny them, we live, like a cow, for the grass we are grazing on at the moment. And who knows if our wedding with death might not lead to our conscious immortality?

“Captain,” said his orderly several days after the preparation of the cottage, where the retired officer was to live until his death (which his heart condition would not keep waiting for long). “Captain, now that you can no longer make love or fight, perhaps some books might distract you a little. What should I buy for you?”

“Buy me nothing; no books; they can’t tell me anything as interesting as the things I’ve done. And since I don’t have much time left, I don’t want anything to distract me from my memories. Hand me the key to my large chest; its contents are what I’ll be reading every day.”

And he took out letters, a whitish, sometimes tinted sea of letters: some very long, some consisting of a single line, on a card, with faded flowers, objects, brief notes he had jotted down to recall the momentary surroundings where he had received them, and photographs that had spoiled despite precautions, like relics worn out by the very piety of the faithful: they kiss them too often. And all those things were very old, and there were some from women who had died and others whom he had not seen in over ten years.

Among all those things there were the slight but clear-cut traces of sensuality or affection tied to the least minutiae of the circumstances of his life, and it was like an immense fresco that, without narrating his life, depicted it, but only in its most passionate hues and in a very hazy and yet very particular manner, with a great and touching power. There were memories of kisses on the mouth—a fresh mouth in which he had unhesitatingly left his soul and which had since turned away from him—reminiscences that made him weep and weep.

And although quite feeble and disillusioned, he felt a good, warm thrill upon gulping down a few of those still living memories, like a glass of fiery wine that had ripened in the sun, which had devoured his life; it was the kind of thrill that spring gives our convalescences and winter’s hearth our weaknesses. The feeling that his old, worn body had nevertheless blazed with similar flames—blazed with similar devouring flames—brought a renewal to his life. Then, musing that the things lying down full-length upon him were simply the enormous, moving shadows, which, elusive, alas, would all soon intermingle in the eternal night, he began weeping again.

And, while knowing that those were nothing but shadows, shadows of flames, which had hurried off to burn somewhere else, which he would never see again, he nevertheless started worshiping them, lending

them a cherished existence that contrasted with imminent and absolute oblivion. And all those kisses and all that kissed hair and all those things made up of tears and lips, of caresses poured out like heady wine, of despairs gathering like music or like evening for the bliss of being infinitely permeated with mystery and destinies: the adored woman, who had possessed him so thoroughly that nothing had existed for him but whatever had served his adoration; she had possessed him so thoroughly and was now slipping away, so vague that he no longer held on to her, no longer held on to even the perfume wafting from the fleeing folds of her cloak.

He convulsively tried to revive all those things, resurrect them, and pin them like butterflies. And it grew more difficult each time. And he still had caught none of the butterflies; but each time, his fingers had rubbed off a smidgen of the glamour of their wings; or rather, he saw them in the mirror, he vainly banged on the mirror to touch them, but only dimmed it slightly more each time, and he saw the butterflies only as indistinct and less enchanting. And nothing could cleanse that tarnished mirror of his heart now that the purifying breath of youth or genius would no longer pass over it—by what unknown law of our seasons, what mysterious equinox of our autumn . . . ?

And each time, he felt less sorrow about losing them—those kisses on those lips, and those endless hours, and those fragrances that had once made him delirious.

And he sorrowed for sorrowing less, and then even that sorrow faded. Then all sorrows drifted away, all; he did not have to banish pleasures: clutching their flowering branches and without looking back, they had long since fled on their winged heels, fled this dwelling which was no longer young enough for them. Then, like all human beings, he died.

Relics

I have bought everything of hers that was for sale: I had wanted to be her lover, but she refused to even chat with me for an instant. I have the small deck of cards with which she amused herself every evening, her two marmosets, three novels bearing her coat-of-arms on their

boards, and her dog. Oh, you delights, dear leisures of her life: without even relishing them as I would have done, without even desiring them, you had all her freest, most secret, and most inviolable hours; you did not feel your happiness and you cannot describe it.

Cards, which she handled every evening with her closest friends, which saw her bored or laughing, which witnessed the start of her romance and which she put down so as to kiss the man who came to play with her every evening after that; novels, which she opened or closed in bed at the whim of her fancy or fatigue, which she selected according to her momentary caprice or her dreams, novels, to which she confided her dreams, which mingled with the dreams they expressed, and which helped her to dream her own dreams better—have you retained nothing about her, and will you tell me nothing?

Novels, because she too imagined the lives of your characters and of your poet; cards, because in her own way she, together with you, felt the calm and sometimes the fever of vivid intimacy—novels, have you kept nothing of her mind, which you diverted or imbued, nothing of her heart, which you unburdened or consoled?

Cards, novels, which she held so often, which lay so long on her table; you queens, kings, or jacks, who were the motionless guests at her most reckless parties; you heroes and heroines of novels, who, near her bed and under the crossed lights of her lamp and her eyes, dreamed your dream, silent yet full of voices—you could not have allowed all the perfume to evaporate, all the fragrance with which you were permeated by the air in her room, the fabrics of her frocks, the touch of her hands or her knees.

You have preserved the creases inflicted on you by her joyful or nervous hand; and perhaps you still imprison the tears of grief induced by a book or by life; and the daylight that brightened or wounded her eyes gave you that warm color. I touch you all atremble, fearful of your revelations, worried by your silence. Alas! Perhaps, like you, bewitching and fragile beings, she was the indifferent and unconscious witness to

her own grace. Her most genuine beauty may have been in my desire. She lived her life, but I may have been the only one to dream it.

Moonlight Sonata

ONE

More than by the fatiguing trip, I was exhausted by my memory and by frightened thoughts of my father's demands, of Pia's indifference, and of my enemies' relentlessness. During the day, my mind had been diverted by Assunta's company, her singing, her gentleness toward me, whom she barely knew, her white, brown, and rosy beauty, her fragrance persisting in the blusters of the ocean wind, the feather in her hat, the pearls around her neck.

But toward nine at night, feeling overwhelmed, I asked her to take the carriage back on her own and leave me to rest a bit in the fresh air. We had almost reached Honfleur; the place was well chosen: it was located against a wall, by the gateway to a double avenue lined with huge trees that shielded against the wind, and the air was mild. Assunta agreed and left. I stretched out on the grass, facing the gloomy sky; lulled by the murmuring sea, which I could hear behind me but not discern in the darkness, I shortly dozed off.

Soon I dreamed that in front of me the sunset was illuminating the distant sand and sea. Twilight was thickening, and it seemed to me that these were a sunset and a twilight like any twilight and any sunset. Then I was handed a letter; I tried to read it, but I was unable to make out anything. Only now did I realize it was very dark out despite the impression of intense and diffuse light. This sunset was extraordinarily pale, lustrous without brightness, and so much darkness gathered on the magically illuminated sand that I had to make an arduous effort merely to recognize a seashell. In this twilight, the kind special to dreams, the sun, ill and faded, appeared to be setting on a polar beach.

My distress had suddenly dissipated; my father's decisions, Pia's feelings, my enemies' cunning still weighed on me but no longer crushed me: they were like a natural and irrelevant necessity. The contradiction of that dark resplendence, the miracle of that enchanted

respite for my ills, inspired no defiance in me, no dread; instead I was swept up, deluged, inundated by a growing bliss and finally awakened by its delicious intensity. I opened my eyes. Splendid and pallid, my dream spread out all around me. The wall I was resting against was brightly lit, and the shadow of its ivy was as sharp as at four in the afternoon.

The leaves of a silver poplar glistened as they were turned over by a faint breeze. Whitecaps and white sails were visible on the water, the sky was clear, the moon had risen. For brief moments, wispy clouds drifted across the moon, where they were tinted with blue nuances, their pallor as deep as the jelly of a medusa or the heart of an opal. Brightness shone everywhere, but my eyes could not catch it. The darkness persisted even on the grass, which was glowing almost like a mirage. The woods and a trench were absolutely black. All at once, a slight rustle awakened slowly like a misgiving, then swelled quickly and seemed to roll over the forest. It was the shuddering of leaves crumpled by the breeze. One by one I heard them surging like waves against the vast silence of the entire night. Then the rustle itself waned and died out.

In the grassy strip running ahead of me between the two dense lines of oaks, a river of brightness appeared to flow, contained between those two embankments of gloom. The moonlight, conjuring up the gatekeeper's lodge, the foliage, a sail from the night where they had been demolished, failed to arouse them. In this dreamlike hush, the moon illuminated only the hazy phantoms of their shapes without distinguishing their contours, which made them so real for me in the daytime, which oppressed me with the certainty of their presence and the perpetuity of their trivial surroundings.

The lodge without a door, the foliage without a trunk, almost without leaves, the sail without a boat, appeared to be not so much a cruelly undeniable and monotonously habitual reality as the strange, inconsistent, and luminous dreams of slumbering trees plunging into darkness. Never, indeed, had the woods slept so profoundly; I sensed that the moon had taken advantage of their slumber so that it might

silently begin that grand, pale, and gentle celebration in the sky and the sea.

My sadness had vanished; I could hear my father scolding me, Pia mocking me, my enemies hatching plots, and none of that seemed real. The sole reality was in that unreal light, and I invoked it with a smile. I did not understand what inscrutable resemblance united my sorrows with the solemn mysteries celebrated in the woods, in the sky, and on the sea, but I sensed that their explanation, their consolation, their forgiveness were proffered, and that it made no difference that my mind did not share the secret since my heart understood it so well. I called my holy mother by her name, Night; my sadness had recognized her immortal sister in the moon, the moon shone on the transfigured sorrows of night, and melancholy had arisen in my heart, where the clouds had dissipated.

TWO

Then I heard footsteps. Assunta was coming toward me, her white face looming over a huge, dark coat. She murmured to me: “I was afraid you’d be cold; my brother was in bed, I’ve come back.” I approached her; I was shivering; she pulled me inside her coat and, to keep its folds around me, she slipped her arm around my neck. We walked a few paces under the trees, in the profound darkness.

Something flared up before us; I had no time to back up; I wanted to move aside, thinking we were bumping into a trunk, but the obstacle slid under our feet—we had strolled into the moon. I drew Assunta’s head close to mine. She smiled; I started crying; I saw that she was crying too. Then we realized that the moon was crying and that its sadness was consistent with our own. The sweet and poignant flashes of its light went to our very hearts. Like us it was crying, and, as we do nearly always, it cried without knowing why, but with such intense feelings that its sweet and irresistible despair swept along the woods, the fields, the sky (which was again reflected in the sea), and my heart, which at last saw clearly into its heart.

The Source of Tears in Past Loves

When novelists or their heroes contemplate their lost loves, their ruminations, so poignant for the reader, are, alas, quite artificial. There is a gap between the immensity of our past love and the absoluteness of our present indifference, of which we are reminded by a thousand material details: a name recalled in conversation, a letter rediscovered in a drawer, an actual encounter with the person, or, even better, the act of possessing her after the fact, so to speak.

In a work of art, the contrast may be so distressing, so full of restrained tears, but in life our response is cold, precisely because our present state is indifference and oblivion, our beloved and our love please us at most aesthetically, and because agitation and the ability to suffer have disappeared along with love. Thus the agonizing melancholy of this contrast is only a moral truth. This melancholy would also become a psychological reality were a writer to place it at the start of the passion he describes and not after its end.

Often, indeed, when, warned by our experience and sagacity (and despite the protests of the heart, which has the sentiment or rather the illusion that our love will last forever) that someday we will be utterly unconcerned about this woman, the very thought of whom currently sustains our life: we will be as indifferent to her as we are now to all other women. . . . We will hear her name without painful pleasure, we will see her handwriting without trembling, we will not change our route in order to catch sight of her in the street, we will run into her without anxiety, we will possess her without delirium.

Then, despite the absurd and powerful presentiment that we will always love her, that certain prescience will make us weep; and love, the love that has risen over us once again like a divine, an infinitely woeful and mysterious morning, will spread a bit of its huge, strange, and profound horizons before our anguish, a bit of its bewitching desolation. . . .

Friendship

When you feel sorrowful, it is good to lie down in the warmth of your bed, and, quelling all effort and resistance and burying even your head under the covers, you surrender completely, moaning, like branches in the autumn wind. But there is an even finer bed, redolent with divine fragrances. It is our sweet, our deep, our inscrutable friendship. That is where I cozily rest my heart when the world turns sad and icy. Enveloping even my mind in our warm affection, perceiving nothing beyond that, and no longer wanting to defend myself, disarmed, but promptly fortified and made invincible by the miracle of our affection, I weep for my sorrow, and for my joy at having a safe place to hide my sorrow.

Ephemeral Efficacy of Grief

Let us be thankful to the people who bring us happiness; they are the enchanting gardeners who make our souls blossom. But let us be even more grateful to cruel or merely indifferent women, to unkind friends who have caused us grief. They have devastated our hearts, which are now littered with unrecognizable wreckage; they have uprooted tree trunks and mutilated the most delicate boughs like a ravaging wind that has nevertheless sown a few good seeds for an uncertain harvest.

By smashing all the bits of happiness that concealed our greatest misery from ourselves, by turning our hearts into bare, melancholy courtyards, they have enabled us to finally contemplate our hearts and judge them. Mournful plays are similarly good for us; we must therefore regard them as far superior to cheerful plays, which stave off our hunger instead of satisfying it: the bread that should nourish us is bitter.

In a happy life, the destinies of our fellow men never appear to us in their true light: they are either masked by self-interest or transfigured by desire. But in the detachment we gain from suffering in life and from the sentiment of painful beauty on stage, other men's destinies and even our own empower our attentive souls to hear the eternal but unheard voice of duty and truth. The sad work of a true artist speaks to us in that tone of people who have suffered, who force anyone who has suffered to drop everything and listen.

Alas! What sentiment has brought it removes capriciously, and sadness, more sublime than gaiety, is not as enduring as virtue. By this morning we have forgotten last night's tragedy, which elevated us so high that we could view our lives in their entirety and their reality with sincere and clear-sighted compassion. Within a year perhaps we will get over a woman's betrayal, a friend's death. Amid this wreckage of dreams, this scattering of withered happiness, the wind has sown the good seed under a deluge of tears, but they will dry too soon for the seed to germinate.

In Praise of Bad Music

(After a performance of François de Curel's L'Invitée)

Detest bad music but do not make light of it. Since it is played, or rather sung, far more frequently, far more passionately than good music, it has gradually and far more thoroughly absorbed human dreams and tears. That should make it venerable for you. Its place, nonexistent in the history of art, is immense in the history of the emotions of societies. Not only is the respect—I am not saying love—for bad music a form of what might be called the charity of good taste, or its skepticism, it is also the awareness of the important social role played by music.

How many ditties, though worthless in an artist's eyes, are among the confidants chosen by the throng of romantic and amorous adolescents. How many songs like "Gold Ring" or "Ah, slumber, slumber long and deep," whose pages are turned every evening by trembling and justly famous hands, are soaked with tears from the most beautiful eyes in the world: and the purest maestro would envy this melancholy and voluptuous homage of tears, the ingenious and inspired confidants that ennoble sorrow, exalt dreams, and, in exchange for the ardent secret that is confided in them, supply the intoxicating illusion of beauty.

Since the common folk, the middle class, the army, the aristocracy have the same mailmen—bearers of grief that strikes them or happiness that overwhelms them—they have the same invisible messengers of love, the same beloved confessors. These are the bad composers. The same

annoying jingle, to which every well-born, well-bred ear instantly refuses to listen, has received the treasure of thousands of souls and guards the secret of thousands of lives: it has been their living inspiration, their consolation, which is always ready, always half-open on the music stand of the piano—and it has been their dreamy grace and their ideal.

Certain arpeggios, certain reentries of motifs have made the souls of more than one lover or dreamer vibrate with the harmonies of paradise or the very voice of the beloved herself. A collection of bad love songs, tattered from overuse, has to touch us like a cemetery or a village. So what if the houses have no style, if the graves are vanishing under tasteless ornaments and inscriptions? Before an imagination sympathetic and respectful enough to conceal momentarily its aesthetic disdain, that dust may release a flock of souls, their beaks holding the still verdant dream that gave them an inkling of the next world and let them rejoice or weep in this world.

Lakeside Encounter

Yesterday, before going to dine in the Bois de Boulogne, I received a letter from Her: after a week she was responding rather coldly to my desperate letter, notifying me that she feared she could not say goodbye to me before leaving. And I, yes, rather coldly replied that it was better this way, and I wished her a pleasant summer. Then I dressed and I rode across the Bois in an open carriage. I felt extremely sad, but calm. I was determined to forget, I had made up my mind: it was a matter of time.

As my carriage turned into the lakeside drive, I spotted a lone woman slowly walking at the far end of the small path that circles the lake fifty meters from the drive. At first I could barely make her out. She waved casually at me, and then I recognized her despite the distance between us. It was she! I waved back for a long time. And she continued to gaze at me as if wanting me to halt and take her along. I did nothing of the kind, but I soon felt an almost exterior agitation pounce upon me and grip me firmly. “I guessed right!” I exclaimed. “For some unknown

reason she's always feigned indifference toward me. She loves me, the dear thing."

An infinite happiness, an invincible certainty came over me; I felt dizzy and I burst into sobs. The carriage was approaching Armenonville; I dried my eyes, and the gentle greeting of her hand passed over them as if also to dry their tears, and her softly questioning eyes fixed on mine, asking if I could take her along.

When I arrived at the dinner, I was radiant. My happiness spread to each person in hearty, blissful, thankful amiability: nobody had the slightest inkling what hand unknown to them—the little hand that had waved to me—had kindled this great fire of my joy, its radiance visible to everyone; and my sense of their unawareness of that hand added the charm of secret sensual delights to my happiness.

We were waiting only for Madame de T., and she soon arrived. She is the most insignificant person I know and, though somewhat attractive, the most unpleasant. But I was too happy not to forgive each individual for his faults, his ugliness, and I went over to her with an affectionate smile.
"You were less friendly just now," she said.

"Just now?" I said, astonished. "Just now? But I haven't seen you."
"What do you mean? You didn't recognize me? It's true you were far away. I was strolling along the lake, you drove by proudly in your carriage, I waved at you and I wanted to ride with you so as not to be late."

"You mean that was you?" I exclaimed and in my despair I repeated several times: "Oh, do please forgive me, please forgive me!"
"How unhappy he looks! My compliments, Charlotte," said the mistress of the house. "But you can cheer up, she's with you now."
I was crushed; my entire happiness was destroyed.

All well and good! But the most horrible part of it was that it was not as if it had not been. Even after I realized my mistake, that loving image of

the woman who did not love me altered my conception of her for a long time.

I attempted a reconciliation, I forgot about her less quickly, and, struggling to find solace for my distress by imagining that those were her hands as I had originally felt, I often closed my eyes to evoke those little hands, which had waved to me, which would have so nicely dried my eyes, so nicely cooled my brow—those little gloved hands, which she gently held out by the lake, as frail symbols of peace, love, and reconciliation, while her sad and questioning eyes seemed to ask me to take her along.

Like a blood-red sky that warns the passerby, “There is a fire over there,” certain blazing looks often reveal passions that they serve merely to reflect. They are flames in the mirror. But sometimes even carefree and cheerful people have eyes that are vast and somber like grief, as if a filter had been stretched between the soul and the eyes so that all the live content of the soul had virtually seeped into the eyes.

Warmed solely by the fervor of their egoism (that attractive fervor of egoism, to which people are drawn as strongly as they are alienated by inflammatory passion), the parched soul is henceforth nothing but an artificial palace of intrigues.

However, their eyes, which endlessly burn with love, and which a dew of languor will water, set aglow, cause to float, and drown without extinguishing them—those eyes will astonish the universe with their tragic blaze. Twin spheres that are now independent of the soul, spheres of love, ardent satellites of an eternally frozen world, those spheres will continue to cast an unwonted and deceptive shimmer until the death of these false prophets, these perjurers, whose promise of love the heart will not keep.

The Stranger

Dominique had settled next to the extinguished fire, waiting for his guests. Every evening he would invite some aristocrat to come for supper together with men of wit; and since he was rich, well-born, and

charming, he was never alone. The candles had not yet been lit, and the daylight was dying sadly in the room.

All at once he heard a voice, a distant and intimate voice, saying to him: "Dominique"; and at the mere sound of it, so far and so near, "Dominique," he froze with fear. He had never heard that voice before, and yet he recognized it so clearly, his remorse recognized so clearly the voice of a victim, a noble victim that he had immolated. He tried to remember some ancient crime he had committed, but none came to mind.

Yet the tone of that voice reproached him for a crime, a crime he had probably committed without realizing it, but for which he was responsible—as attested by his fear and sadness. Upon raising his eyes he saw, standing before him, grave and familiar, a stranger with a vague and gripping demeanor. Uttering a few respectful words, Dominique bowed to the stranger's obvious and melancholy authority.

"Dominique, am I the only person you won't invite to supper? You have some wrongs to right with me, ancient wrongs. Then I will teach you how to get along without other people, who will no longer come when you're old."

"I invite you to supper," Dominique replied with a warm gravity that surprised him.
"Thank you," said the stranger.

No crest was inscribed in the stone on his ring, nor had wit frosted his words with its glittering needles. However, the gratitude in his firm, brotherly gaze intoxicated Dominique with unknown happiness.

"But if you wish to keep me here, you have to dismiss your other guests."
Dominique heard them knocking at the door. The candles were unlit; the room was pitch-black.
"I can't dismiss them," Dominique replied, "I can't be alone."

“With me you’ll be alone, that’s true,” said the stranger sadly. “But you have to keep me here. You have to right ancient wrongs that you did me. I love you more than all of them do and I’ll teach you how to get along without those others, who will no longer come when you’re old.”

“I can’t,” said Dominique.
And he sensed he had just sacrificed a noble happiness at the command of an imperious and vulgar habit, that no longer had even pleasures to dispense as prizes for obedience.

“Choose quickly,” said the stranger, pleading and haughty.
Dominique went to open the door, and at the same time he asked the stranger, without daring to turn his head: “Just who are you?”

And the stranger, the stranger who was already disappearing, said: “Habit, to which you are again sacrificing me tonight, will be stronger tomorrow thanks to the blood of the wound that you’re inflicting on me in order to nourish that habit. And more imperious for being obeyed yet again, habit will turn you away from me slightly more each day and force you to increase my suffering. Soon you will have killed me. You will never see me again. Yet you’ll have owed me more than you owe the others, who will shortly abandon you. I am inside you and yet I am forever remote from you; I almost no longer exist. I am your soul, I am yourself.”

The guests had entered. The company stepped into the dining room, and Dominique wanted to describe his conversation with the visitor, who had disappeared; but given the overall boredom and the obvious strain it put on the host to remember an almost faded dream, Girolamo interrupted him—to the great satisfaction of everyone, including even Dominique—and drew the following conclusion:
“One should never be alone; solitude breeds melancholy.”
Then they resumed drinking; Dominique chatted gaily but without joy, though flattered by the dazzling company.

Dream
Your tears flowed for me, my lip drank your weeping.

—ANATOLE FRANCE

It takes no effort for me to recall what my opinion of Madame Dorothy B. was last Saturday (three days ago). As luck would have it, people talked about her that day, and I was forthright in saying that I found her to be devoid of charm and wit. I believe she is twenty-two or twenty-three. Anyway, I barely know her, and whenever I thought about her, no vivid memory ruffled my mind, so that all I had before my eyes was the letters of her name.

On Saturday I went to bed quite early. But around two A.M., the wind blasted so hard that I had to get up and close a loose shutter that had awakened me. I mused about the brief sleep I had enjoyed, and I was delighted that it had been so refreshing, with no distress, no dreams. As soon as I lay back down, I drifted off again. But after an indeterminable stretch of time, I started waking up little by little—or rather, I was roused little by little into the world of dreams, which at first was blurry, like the real world when we normally awaken, but then the world of dreams cleared up.

I was in Trouville, lying on the beach, which doubled as a hammock in an unfamiliar garden, and a woman was gently studying me. It was Madame Dorothy B. I was no more surprised than I am when waking up in the morning and recognizing my bedroom. Nor was I astonished at my companion's supernatural charm and at the ecstasy of both sensual and spiritual adoration caused by her presence. We looked at each other in a profound rapport, experiencing a great miracle of glory and happiness, a miracle of which we were fully aware, to which she was a party, and for which I was infinitely grateful to her.

But she said to me: "You're crazy to thank me, wouldn't you have done the same for me?"

And the feeling (it was, incidentally, a perfect certainty) that I would have done the same for her intensified my joy into delirium as the manifest symbol of the most intimate union. She signaled mysteriously with her finger and smiled. And, as if I had been both in her and in me, I

knew that the signal meant: “Do all your enemies, all your adversities, all your regrets, all your weaknesses matter anymore?”

And without my uttering a word, she heard me reply that she had easily vanquished everything, destroyed everything, voluptuously cast a spell on my suffering. And she approached me, caressed my neck, and slowly turned up the ends of my moustache. Then she said to me: “Now let’s go to the others, let’s enter life.” I was filled with superhuman joy and I felt strong enough to make all this virtual happiness come true. She wanted to give me a flower and from between her breasts she drew a yellow and pale-pink rosebud and slipped it into my buttonhole. Suddenly I felt my intoxication swell with a new delight. The rose in my buttonhole had begun exhaling its scent of love, which wafted up to my nostrils.

I saw that my joy was causing Dorothy an agitation that I could not understand. Her eyes (I was certain of it because of my mysterious awareness of her specific individuality)—her eyes shivered with the faint spasm that occurs a second before the moment of weeping, and at that precise moment it was my eyes that filled with tears, her tears I might say. She drew nearer, turning her face up to my cheek, and I could contemplate the mysterious grace of her head, its captivating vivacity, and, with her tongue darting out between her fresh, smiling lips, she gathered all my tears on the edges of her eyes. Then she swallowed my tears with a light whisking of her lips, a noise that I experienced as an unknown kiss, more intimately troubling than if it had touched my lips directly.

I awoke with a start, recognized my room, and, the way lightning in a nearby storm is promptly followed by thunder, a dizzying reminiscence of happiness fused with, rather than preceded, the shattering certainty that this happiness was mendacious and impossible. However, despite all my reasoning, Dorothy B. was no longer the woman she had been for me only yesterday.

The slight ripple left in my memory by our casual contact was nearly effaced, as if by a powerful tide that leaves unknown vestiges behind

when it ebbs. I felt an immense desire, doomed in advance, to see her again; I instinctively needed to write to her and was prudently wary of doing so. When her name was mentioned in conversation, I trembled, yet it evoked the insignificant image that would have accompanied her before that night, and while I was as indifferent to her as to any commonplace socialite, she drew me more irresistibly than the most cherished mistresses or the most intoxicating destiny. I would not have lifted a finger to see her and yet I would have given my life for the other "her."

Each hour blurs a bit more of my memory of that dream, which is already quite distorted by this telling. I can make out less and less of my dream; it is like a book that you want to continue reading at your table when the declining day no longer provides enough light, when the night falls. In order to see it a bit clearly, I am obliged to stop thinking about it for a moment, the way you are obliged to squint in order to discern a few letters in the shadowy book. Faded as my dream may be, it still leaves me in deep agitation, the foam of its wake or the voluptuousness of its perfume. But my agitation will likewise dissipate, and I will be perfectly calm when I run into Madame B. And besides, why speak to her about things to which she is a stranger?

Alas! Love passed over me like that dream, with an equally mysterious power of transfiguration. And so, you who know the woman I love, you who were not in my dream, you cannot understand me; therefore do not try to give me advice.

Memory's Genre Paintings

We have certain reminiscences that are like the Dutch paintings in our minds, genre pictures in which the people, often of a modest station, are caught at a very simple moment of their lives, with no special events, at times with no events whatsoever, in a framework that is anything but grand and extraordinary. The charm lies in the naturalness of the figures and the simplicity of the scene, whereby the gap between picture and spectator is suffused with a soft light that bathes the scene in beauty.

My regimental life was full of these scenes, which I lived through naturally, with no keen joy or great distress, and which I recall affectionately. I remember the rustic settings, the naïveté of some of my peasant comrades, whose bodies remained more beautiful, more agile, their minds more down-to-earth, their hearts more spontaneous, their characters more natural than those of the young men with whom I associated before and after.

I also remember the calmness of a life in which activity is regulated more and imagination controlled less than anywhere else, in which pleasure accompanies us all the more constantly because we never have time to flee it by dashing to find it. Today all those things unite, turning that phase of my life into a series of small paintings—interrupted, it is true, by lapses, but filled with happy truth and magic over which time has spread its sweet sadness and its poetry.

Ocean Wind in the Country

I will bring you a young poppy with purple petals.
—THEOCRITES: THE CYCLOPS

In the garden, in the grove, across the countryside, the wind devotes a wild and useless ardor to dispersing the blasts of sunshine, furiously shaking the branches in the copse, where those blasts first came crashing down, while the wind pursues them from the copse all the way to the sparkling thicket, where they are now quivering, palpitating. The trees, the drying linens, the peacock spreading its tail stand out in the transparent air as blue shadows, extraordinarily sharp, and flying with all winds, but not leaving the ground, like a poorly launched kite.

Because of the jumble of wind and light, this corner of Champagne resembles a coastal landscape. When we reach the top of this path, which, burned by light and breathless with wind, rises in full sunshine toward a naked sky, will we not see the ocean, white with sun and foam? You had come as on every morning, with your hands full of flowers and with soft feathers dropped on the path in mid-flight by a ring dove, a swallow, or a jay. The feathers on my hat are trembling, the poppy in my buttonhole is losing its petals, let us hurry home.

The house groans in the wind like a ship; we hear the bellying of invisible sails, the flapping of invisible flags outside. Keep that bunch of fresh roses on your lap and let my heart weep in your clasping hands.

The Pearls

I came home in the morning and I went to bed, freezing and also trembling with an icy and melancholy delirium. A while ago, in your room, your friends of yesterday, your plans for tomorrow (just so many enemies, so many plots hatched against me), your thoughts at that time (so many vague and impassable distances), they all separated me from you. Now that I am far away from you, this imperfect presence, the fleeting mask of eternal absence—a mask quickly removed by kisses—would apparently suffice to show me your true face and satisfy the strivings of my love.

I had to leave; I had to remain far away from you, sad and icy! But what sudden magic is causing the familiar dreams of my happiness to start rising again (a thick smoke over a bright and burning flame), rising joyously and continuously in my mind? In my hand, warmed under the bed covers, the fragrance of the rose-scented cigarettes that you got me to smoke has reawakened. With my lips pressed against my hand, I keep inhaling their perfume, which, in the warmth of memory, exhales dense billows of tenderness, happiness, and “you.”

Ah, my darling beloved! The instant that I can get along without you, that I swim, joyful, in my memory of you (which now fills the room), without struggling against your insurmountable body, I tell you absurdly, I tell you irresistibly: I cannot live without you. It is your presence that gives my life that fine, warm, melancholy hue, like the pearls that spend the night on your body. Like them, I live from and sadly draw my tinges from your warmth, and, like them, if you did not keep me close to you, I would die.

The Shores of Oblivion

“They say that Death embellishes its victims and exaggerates their virtues, but in general it is actually life that wronged them. Death, that

pious and irreproachable witness, teaches us, in both truth and charity, that in each man there is usually more good than evil."

What Michelet says here about death may be even more applicable to the death that follows a great and unhappy love. If, after making us suffer so deeply, a person now means nothing to us, does it suffice to say that, according to the popular expression, he is "dead for us"? We weep for the dead, we still love them, we submit at length to the irresistible appeal of the magic that survives them and that so frequently draws us back to their graves.

But the person who, on the contrary, made us experience everything, and with whose essence we were saturated, can no longer cause us even a hint of pain or joy. He is more than dead for us. After regarding him as the only precious thing in this world, after cursing him, after scorning him, we cannot possibly judge him, for his features barely take shape before our memory's eyes, which are exhausted from focusing far too long on his face. However, this judgment on the beloved person—a judgment that has varied so greatly, sometimes torturing our blind hearts with its acumen, sometimes also blinding itself so as to end this cruel discord—this judgment has to carry out a final variation.

Like those landscapes that we discover only from peaks, it is solely from the heights of forgiveness that she appears before you in her true worth—the woman who was more than dead to you after being your very life. All we knew was that she did not requite our love, but now we understand that she felt genuine friendship for us. It is not memory that embellishes her; it is love that wronged her. For the man who wants everything, and for whom everything, if he obtained it, would never suffice, receiving a little merely seems like an absurd cruelty.

Now we understand that it was a generous gift from the woman, who was not discouraged by our despair, our irony, our perpetual tyranny. She was always kind. Several remarks of hers, quoted for us today, sound indulgently precise and enchanting, several remarks made by the woman whom we thought incapable of understanding us because she did not love us. We, on the contrary, spoke about her with so much

unjust egotism, so much severity. Do we not, incidentally, owe her a great deal?

If that great tide of love has ebbed forever, we nevertheless can, when strolling inside ourselves, gather strange and beguiling shells, and, when holding them to one ear, we can, with a mournful pleasure and without suffering, hear the immense roaring of the past. Then, deeply moved, we think about the woman, who, to our misfortune, was loved more than she loved. No longer is she “more than dead” for us. She is a dead person whom we remember affectionately. Justice would have us revise our opinion of her. And by the all-powerful virtue of justice, she can be mentally resurrected in our hearts so as to appear for that last judgment that we render far away from her, render calmly and tearfully.

Physical Presence

We loved each other in the Engadine, in some remote village with a doubly sweet name: the reverie of German sonorities languished in the voluptuousness of Italian syllables. All around, three unbelievably verdant lakes reflected the fir forests. Peaks and glaciers closed off the horizon. In the evening the delicacy of the light was intensified by the variety of those perspectives. Will we ever forget the lakeside strolls in Sils-Maria, at six o’clock in the fading afternoon? The larches, so darkly serene when bordering on the dazzling snow, stretched their branches, of a sleek and radiant green, into the pale-blue, nearly mauve water.

One evening, the hour was especially favorable to us: within moments the setting sun brought out all possible nuances in the water and brought our souls all possible delights. Suddenly we gave a start: we had just seen a small, rosy butterfly, then two, then five, leaving the flowers on our shore and fluttering over the lake. Soon they looked like an impalpable rosy dust sweeping along the surface; then they reached the flowers on the opposite shore, fluttered back, and gently resumed their adventurous passage, stopping at times, as if yielding to temptation upon this preciously tinged water like a huge, fading blossom.

This was too much, and our eyes filled with tears. In fluttering over the lake, these small butterflies flickered to and fro across our souls (our souls, which were tense with agitation at the sight of so many beauties and about to vibrate) and passed again and again like the voluptuous bow of a violin. Their slight flittering did not graze the water, but it did caress our eyes, our hearts, and we nearly fainted with each quiver of the tiny, rosy wings.

When we spotted them returning from the opposite shore, thereby revealing that they were playing and freely strolling on the surface, a delightful harmony resounded for us; they, however, returned slowly by way of a thousand whimsical detours, which varied the original harmony as a bewitching and fanciful melody. Our souls, now sonorous, listening to the silent flight, heard a music of enchantment and freedom and all the sweet and intense harmonies of the lake, the woods, the sky, and our own lives accompanied it with a magical delicacy that made us burst into tears.

I had never spoken to you, and I had even lost sight of you that year. But how deeply we loved each other in the Engadine! I never had enough of you; I never left you at home. You came along on my strolls, ate at my table, slept in my bed, dreamed in my soul.

One day (could not a sure instinct, as a mysterious messenger, have notified you about that childishness in which you were so intricately involved, which you, too, experienced, yes, truly experienced, so profound was your “physical presence” in me?), one day (neither of us had ever before seen Italy), we were amazed at what we were told about Alp Grün: “From there you can see all the way to Italy.”

We left for Alp Grün, imagining that in the spectacle stretching out beyond the peak, there where Italy began, the hard, physical scenery would halt brusquely, and an utterly blue valley would open up in the depths of a dream. En route it struck us that a border does not alter the soil and that even if it did, the change would be too subtle for us to perceive it all at once. Though a bit disappointed, we laughed at ourselves for being so childish.

However, upon reaching the summit, we were dazzled. Our juvenile imaginings had come true before our very eyes. At our side, glaciers sparkled.

At our feet, torrents cut through a savage, dark-green Engadine landscape. Then a slightly mysterious hill; and beyond it, mauve slopes kept half-revealing and concealing in turns a truly blue region, a radiant avenue to Italy. The names were no longer the same; they instantly harmonized with this new softness.

We were shown the Lago di Poschiavo, the Pizzo di Verona, the Val Viola. Next we went to an extraordinarily savage and solitary place, where the desolation of nature and the certainty that we were utterly inaccessible, as well as invisible and invincible, would have increased the voluptuousness of our loving each other there, intensified it into a delirium. I now truly and deeply felt my sadness at not having you with me in your material form, not merely in the apparel of my regret, but in the reality of my desire.

I then descended a bit lower to the still towering spot where tourists came for the view. An isolated inn has an album in which they sign their names. I wrote mine and, next to it, a combination of letters alluding to your name, because it was impossible for me not to supply material proof of the reality of your spiritual presence. By putting a trace of you in that album I felt relieved of the compulsive weight with which you were suffocating my soul.

And besides, I nurtured the immense hope of someday bringing you here to read that line; then you would climb even higher with me to compensate me for all that sadness. Without my saying a word, you would grasp everything or, rather, recall everything; and, while climbing, you would depend fully on me, lean heavily against me to make me feel all the more concretely that this time you were truly here; and I, between your lips, which keep a faint scent of your Oriental cigarettes, I would find perfect oblivion.

We would very loudly holler the wildest things just to glory in the pleasure of yelling without being heard far and wide; only the short grass would quiver in the light breeze of the peaks. The ascent would then cause you to slow down, puff a bit, and I would lean toward you to hear your puffing: we would be insane. We would also venture to where a white lake lies next to a black lake, as gently as a white pearl next to a black pearl. How we would have loved each other in some remote village in the Engadine! We would have allowed only mountain guides to come close, those very tall men, whose eyes reflect different things than the eyes of other men and who are virtually of a different "water." But I am no longer concerned with you.

Satiety occurred before possession. Even platonic love has its saturation point. I would no longer care to bring you to this countryside, which, though not grasping it, much less knowing it, you conjured up with such touching precision.

The sight of you retains only one charm for me: the magic of suddenly remembering those sweetly exotic German and Italian names: Sils-Maria, Silva Plana, Crestalta, Samaden, Celerina, Juliers, Val Viola.

Spiritual Sunset

Like nature, intelligence has its spectacles. Never have the sunsets, never has the moonlight, so often moving me to tears of ecstasy, produced more passionate tenderness in me than that vast and melancholy conflagration, which, during our strolls at the close of day, tinges as many waves in our souls as the brilliant rays of the vanishing sun on the sea. We then quicken our steps in the night.

More electrified and exhilarated than a horseman by the increasing speed of his beloved mount, we abandon ourselves, trembling with trust and joy, to our tumultuous thoughts; and the more we possess them and direct them, the more irresistibly we feel we belong to them. With tender emotion we pass through the dark countryside, greeting the night-filled oaks as the solemn field, like the epic witnesses of the force that intoxicates us and sweeps us away.

Raising our eyes to the sky, we cannot help experiencing an exaltation upon recognizing the mysterious reflection of our thoughts in the intervals between the clouds, which are still agitated by the sun's farewell: we plunge faster and faster into the countryside, and the dog that follows us, the horse that carries us, or the now silent friend, sometimes less so when no living soul is near us, the flower in our buttonhole, or the cane we twirl joyfully in our feverish hands receives an homage of looks and tears—the melancholy tribute of our delirium.

As in Moonlight

Night had fallen; I went to my room, nervous about remaining in the darkness and no longer seeing the sky, the fields, and the ocean radiating under the sun. But when I opened the door, I found my room illuminated as though by the setting sun. Through the window I could see the house, the fields, the sky, and the ocean, or rather I appeared to be "seeing" them again, in a dream; the gentle moon recalled them for me rather than showed them to me, engulfing their silhouettes in a wan splendor that failed to scatter the darkness, which thickened on their shapes like oblivion. And I spent hours gazing at the courtyard, watching the mute, vague, faded, and enchanted memories of the things whose cries, voices, or murmurs had brought me pleasure or brought me sorrow during the day.

Love has perished; I am fearful on the threshold of oblivion; but, appeased, slightly pale, very close to me and yet faraway and already hazy, they reveal themselves to me as if in moonlight: all my past happiness and all my healed anguish, staring at me in silence. Their hush moves me while their distance and their indecisive pallor intoxicate me with sadness and poetry. And I cannot stop looking at this inner moonlight.

Critique of Hope in the Light of Love

No sooner does an approaching hour become the present for us than it sheds all its charms, only to regain them, it is true, on the roads of memory, when we have left that hour far behind us, and so long as our soul is vast enough to disclose deep perspectives. Thus, after we passed the hill, the poetic village, to which we hastened the trot of our

impatient hopes and our worn-out mares, once again exhales those veiled harmonies, whose vague promise has been kept so poorly by the vulgarity of the streets, the incongruity of the cottages huddling together and melting into the horizon, and the disappearance of the blue mist, which seemed to permeate the village.

But we are like the alchemist who attributes each of his failures to some accidental and always different cause; far from suspecting an incurable imperfection in the very essence of the present, we blame any number of things for poisoning our happiness: the malignity of the particular circumstances, the burden of the envied situation, the bad character of the desired mistress, the bad state of our health on a day that should have been a day of joy, the bad weather or the bad accommodations during our travels. And, certain that we will manage to eliminate those things that destroy all pleasure, we endlessly appeal to a future we dream of; we rely on it with the sometimes reluctant but never disillusioned confidence of a realized, that is, disillusioned dream.

However, certain pensive and embittered men, who radiate in the light of hope more intensely than other people, discover all too soon, alas, that hope emanates not from the awaited hours but from our hearts, which overflow with rays unknown by nature, and which pour torrents of those rays upon hope without lighting a hearth fire. Those men no longer have the strength to desire what they know to be undesirable, the strength to chase after dreams that will wither in their hearts when they wish to pick them outside themselves.

This melancholy disposition is singularly intensified and justified in love. Constantly passing back and forth over its hopes, the imagination admirably sharpens its disappointments. Unhappy love, making the experience of happiness impossible, prevents us from discovering the nothingness of happiness. But what lesson in philosophy, what advice given by old age, what blight of ambition could surpass in melancholy the joys of happy love! You love me, my little darling: how could you have been cruel enough to tell me? So this was the ardent happiness of mutual love, the mere thought of which made my head whirl and my teeth chatter!

I unpin your flowers, I lift your hair, I tear off your jewels, I reach your flesh; my kisses sweep over your body and beat it like the tide rising across the sand; but you yourself elude me, and with you happiness. I have to leave you, I go home alone and sadder. Blaming that last calamity, I return to you forever; it was my last illusion that I tore away; I am miserable forever.

I do not know how I had the courage to tell you this; I have just ruthlessly thrown away the happiness of a lifetime, or at least its consolation; for your eyes, whose happy trust still intoxicated me at times, will henceforth reflect only the sad disenchantment, which your acumen and your disappointments already warned you about. Since this secret, which one of us concealed from the other, has been loudly proclaimed by us both, no happiness is possible for us.

We are not left with even the unselfish joys of hope. Hope is an act of faith. We have undeceived its credulity: hope is dead. After renouncing enjoyment, we can no longer spellbind ourselves to nurture hope. Hoping without hope, which would be wise, is impossible.

But come nearer, my dear, sweet darling. Dry your eyes so you can see; I do not know if it is the tears that blur my vision, but I think I can make out over there, behind us, large fires being kindled. Oh, my dear, sweet darling, I love you so much! Give me your hand, let us go toward those beautiful fires without getting too close. . . . I think that indulgent and powerful Memory must be wishing us well and now doing a great deal for us, my dear.

Under the Trees

We have nothing to fear and a great deal to learn from that vigorous and peace-loving tribe of trees that keep producing tonic essences and soothing balms for us and that also provide gracious company in which we spend so many cool, snug, and silent hours. In those burning afternoons, when the light, by its very excess, eludes our eyes, let us descend into one of those Norman “grounds,” whose tall and thick beeches rise supplely here, and their foliage, like a narrow but resistant

shore, pushes back that ocean of light, keeping only a few drops, which tingle melodiously in the dark hush under the trees.

At the beach, on the plains, in the mountains, our minds may not know the joy of stretching out across the world; but here the mind experiences the happiness of being secluded from the world. And, fenced in all around by those trunks that cannot be uprooted, the mind soars like a tree. Lying on your back, with your head on dry leaves, your thoughts in a profound repose, you follow the joyful agility of your mind, which, without making the foliage tremble, ascends to the highest branches, where it settles on the edge of the gentle sky, near a singing bird.

Here and there a bit of sunshine stagnates at the foot of trees, which sometimes dip into it dreamily, gilding the outermost leaves of their branches. Everything else, relaxed and inert, remains silent in a gloomy happiness. Erect and towering in the vast offering of their branches, and yet calm and refreshed, the trees, in their strange and natural posture, murmur gracefully, inviting us to participate in this so ancient and so youthful life, so different from our own, and virtually its obscure and inexhaustible reserve.

For an instant a faint breeze ruffles their glistening and somber immobility, and the trees quiver softly, balancing the light on their crowns and stirring the shade at their feet.
Petit-Abbeville, Dieppe, August 1895

The Chestnut Trees

More than anything, I loved pausing under the immense chestnut trees when they were yellowed by autumn. How many hours did I spend in those mysterious and greenish caverns, gazing overhead at the murmuring cascades of pale gold that poured down in coolness and darkness! I envied the robins and the squirrels for dwelling in those frail, deep pavilions of verdure in the branches, those ancient hanging gardens that each spring for two centuries now has decked out in white and fragrant blossoms.

The scantly curving branches descended nobly from tree to earth, as if they were other trees planted head-down in the trunk. The pallor of the remaining leaves more sharply accentuated the boughs, which already seemed darker and more solid for being stripped bare, and which, thereby reunited with the trunk, looked like a magnificent comb holding back the sweet, blond, flowing hair.
Réveillon, October 1895

The Sea

The sea will always fascinate those people in whom the disgust with life and the enticement of mystery have preceded their first distress, like a foreboding of reality's inability to satisfy them. People who need rest before so much as experiencing any fatigue will be consoled and vaguely excited by the sea. Unlike the earth, the sea does not bear the traces of human works and human life. Nothing remains on the sea, nothing passes there except in flight, and how quickly the wake of a ship disappears! Hence the sea's great purity, which earthly things do not have. And this virginal water is far more delicate than the hardened earth, which can be breached only by a pick.

With a clear sound a child's footstep in water leaves a deep wake, and the united tinges of the water are broken for a moment; then, every vestige is wiped away, and the sea is once more calm as it was on the earliest days of the earth. The man who is weary of earthly paths or who, before even trying them, can guess how harsh and vulgar they are will be seduced by the pale lanes of the sea, which are more dangerous and more inviting, more uncertain and more forlorn. Everything here is more mysterious, even those huge shadows that sometimes float peacefully across the sea's naked fields, devoid of houses and shade, and that are stretched by the clouds, those celestial hamlets, those tenuous boughs.

The sea has the magic of things that never fall silent at night, that permit our anxious lives to sleep, promising us that everything will not be obliterated, comforting us like the glow of a night-light that makes little children feel less alone. Unlike the earth, the sea is not separated

from the sky; it always harmonizes with the colors of the sky and it is deeply stirred by its most delicate nuances.

The sea radiates under the sun and seems to die with it every evening. And when the sun has vanished, the sea keeps longing for it, keeps preserving a bit of its luminous reminiscence in the face of the uniformly somber earth. It is the moment of the sun's melancholy reflections, which are so gentle that you feel your heart melting at the very sight of them. Once the night has almost fully thickened, and the sky is gloomy over the blackened earth, the sea still glimmers feebly—who knows by what mystery, by what brilliant relic of the day, a relic buried beneath the waves.

The sea refreshes our imagination because it does not make us think of human life; yet it rejoices the soul, because, like the soul, it is an infinite and impotent striving, a strength that is ceaselessly broken by falls, an eternal and exquisite lament. The sea thus enchants us like music, which, unlike language, never bears the traces of things, never tells us anything about human beings, but imitates the stirrings of the soul. Sweeping up with the waves of those movements, plunging back with them, the heart thus forgets its own failures and finds solace in an intimate harmony between its own sadness and the sea's sadness, which merges the sea's destiny with the destinies of all things.
September 1892

Seascape

In regard to words whose meanings I have lost: perhaps I should have them repeated by all those things that have long since had a path leading into me, a path that has been abandoned for years but that could be taken anew, and that I am certain is not blocked forever. I would have to return to Normandy, not make much of an effort, but simply head for the sea.

Or rather, I would stroll along one of the woodland paths from which, now and then, one can catch glimpses of the sea, and where the breeze mingles the smells of salt, wet leaves, and milk. I would ask nothing of all those things of infancy. They are generous to the child they have

known since birth; they would, on their own, reteach him the forgotten things.

Everything, and above all its fragrance, would announce the sea, but I would not have seen it as yet. . . . I would hear it faintly. I would walk along a once familiar hawthorn-lined path, feeling deeply moved and also fearing that a sudden slash in the hedge might reveal my invisible yet present friend, the madwoman who laments forever, the old, melancholy queen, the sea.

All at once I would see it; it would be on one of those somnolent days under a glaring sun, when the sea reflects the sky, which is as blue as the water, but paler. White sails like butterflies would be resting on the motionless surface, unwilling to budge as if fainting in the heat. Or else, quite the opposite, the sea would be choppy and yellow under the sun, like a vast field of mud, with huge swells that, from so far away, would appear inert and crowned with dazzling snow.

Sails in the Harbor

In the harbor, long and narrow like a watery roadway between the just slightly elevated wharves, where the evening lights shone, the passersby paused near the assembled ships and stared as if at noble strangers who have arrived on the previous day and are now ready to leave. Indifferent to the curiosity they excited in the crowd, apparently disdaining its lowness or simply ignorant of its language, the ships maintained their silent and motionless impetus at the watery inn where they had halted for a night.

The solidity of each stem spoke no less about the long voyages still to come than its damage spoke about the distress already suffered on these gliding lanes, which are as old as the world and as new as the passage that plows them and that they do not survive. Fragile and resistant, they were turned with sad haughtiness toward the Ocean, over which they loom and in which they are virtually lost. The marvelous and skillful intricacies of the riggings were mirrored in the water the way a precise and prescient intelligence lunges into the uncertain destiny that sooner or later will shatter it.

They had only recently withdrawn from the terrible and beautiful life into which they would plunge back tomorrow, and their sails were still limp after the bellying wind; their bowsprits veered across the water as the ships had veered yesterday in their gliding, and from prow to poop, the curving of their hulls seemed to preserve the mysterious and sinuous grace of their furrowing wakes.

The end