

INTRODUCTION TO FRENCH LITERATURE FREN 2382

FRENCH NATURE WRITING AND
THE NATURE OF WRITING

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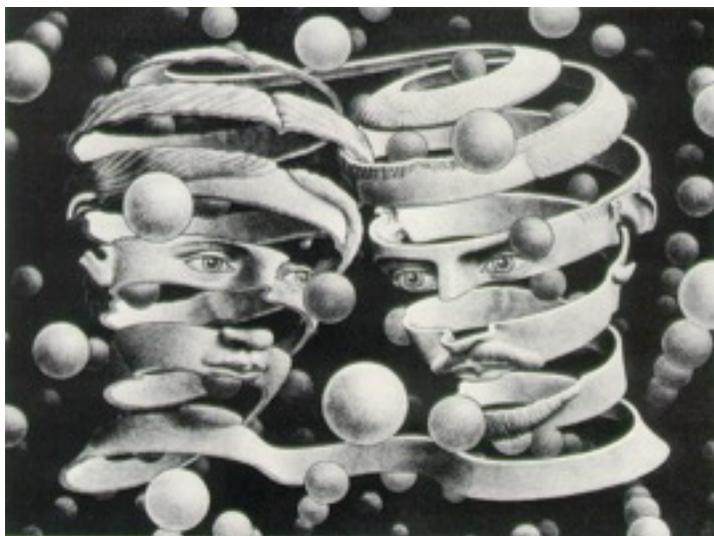
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Introduction

“Before I explain my book to others, I expect others to explain it to me. To expect it to be explained first, is to limit its meaning. While even if we know what we want to say, we do not know if we are saying just that ” (*Paludes*). This confession by the 20th century French author André Gide highlights a fundamental issue surrounding an introduction to this text. Although it might seem clear that all of the pieces of French Literature in this collection provide a complementary, albeit often distinctive, portrait of nature and humankind’s relationship to it, the goal of this work remains nearly as ambiguous as the fundamental nature of nature. It is true that an introduction could serve as an *apologia* in which it is argued that nature—a topic reserved today more often than not for scientists—must also be studied by students in the humanities. In his *Principles of Philosophy*, the 17th century French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes portrays in fact the acquisition of knowledge as a tree whose roots consist of metaphysics, the trunk as physics and the branches as the other sciences, such as medicine, mechanics and morals. In other words, a harvest of wisdom is achieved through a cultivation of ideas in the sciences as well as in the humanities, and most notably philosophy. This book intends therefore to provide roots of understanding about the metaphysics of nature, especially if we consider that literature, according to Pierre Bourdieu reveals that which we do not wish to know and that it is only in art that suffering still finds its own voice and comfort without being

betrayed by them, as the German philosopher Theodor Adorno reminds us. In other words, by studying nature, we are studying ourselves, given that we are part of nature and that analogously, our minds cultivate ideas of life and extinction, following the very course of nature. What might be revealed between the lines of these texts is that it is not so much humanity that speaks about nature, but rather nature that speaks about humanity. Or more concisely, it is nature that helps us to make sense of the contents of this book and in turn our own identity.



M.C. Escher’s “The Bond of Union” (1956)

Suzanne LaLonde

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CHAPTER I
16th Century-Renaissance
The Deep Well of Nature

Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)

Sonnets Pour Hélène Book II: XLIX

That night Love drew you down into the ballroom
To dance a sweet love-ballet with subtle art,
Your eyes though it was evening, brought the day
Like so many lightning flashes through the gloom.

A dance divine, that, time after time, resumed,
Broke, and re-formed again, circling every way,
Merged and then parted, turned, then turned away,
Mirroring the curves Meander's course assumed.

Now rounded, now stretched out, now narrowing,
Now tapering, now triangular, now forming
Ranks like flights of Cranes in frost-escaping line.

I'm wrong, you didn't dance: your feet were fluttering
Over the surface of the ground, your body altering,
Its nature transformed that night to the divine.

Les Amours de Cassandre: XX

I'd like to turn the deepest of yellows,
Falling, drop by drop, in a golden shower,
Into her lap, my lovely Cassandra's,
As sleep is stealing over her brow.

Then I'd like to be a bull, white as snow,
Transforming myself, for carrying her,
In April, when, through meadows so tender,
A flower, through a thousand flowers, she goes.

I'd like then, the better to ease my pain,
To be Narcissus, and she a fountain,
Where I'd swim all night, at my pleasure:

And I'd like it, too, if Aurora would never
Light day again, or wake me ever,
So that this night could last forever.



Essays (1580)
Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

Chapter XXX--Of Cannibals

When King Pyrrhus invaded Italy, having viewed and considered the order of the army the Romans sent out to meet him; "I know not," said he, "what kind of barbarians" (for so the Greeks called all other nations) "these may be; but the disposition of this army that I see has nothing of barbarism in it."—[Plutarch, Life of Pyrrhus, c. 8.]—As much said the Greeks of that which Flaminius brought



into their country; and Philip, beholding from an eminence the order and distribution of the Roman camp formed in his kingdom by Publius Sulpicius Galba, spake to the same effect. By which it appears how cautious men ought to be of taking things upon trust from vulgar opinion, and that we are to judge by the eye of reason, and not from common report.

I long had a man in my house that lived ten or twelve years in the New World, discovered in these latter days, and in that part of it where Villegaignon landed,—[At Brazil, in 1557.]—which he called Antarctic France. This discovery of so vast a country seems to be of very great consideration. I cannot be sure, that hereafter there may not be another, so many wiser men than we having been deceived in this. I am afraid our eyes are bigger than our bellies, and that we have more curiosity than capacity; for we grasp at all, but catch nothing but wind.

Plato brings in Solon,—[In Timaeus.]—telling a story that he had heard from the priests of Sais in Egypt, that of old, and before the Deluge, there was a great island called Atlantis, situate directly at the mouth of the straits of Gibraltar, which contained more countries than both Africa and Asia put together; and that the kings of that country, who not only possessed that Isle, but extended their dominion so far into the continent that they had a country of Africa as far as Egypt, and extending in Europe to Tuscany, attempted to encroach even upon Asia, and to subjugate all the nations that border upon the Mediterranean Sea, as far as the Black Sea; and to that effect overran all Spain, the Gauls, and Italy, so far as to penetrate into Greece, where the

Athenians stopped them: but that some time after, both the Athenians, and they and their island, were swallowed by the Flood.

It is very likely that this extreme irruption and inundation of water made wonderful changes and alterations in the habitations of the earth, as 'tis said that the sea then divided Sicily from Italy—

*"Haec loca, vi quondam et vasta convulsa ruina,
Dissiluisse ferunt, quum protenus utraque tellus
Una foret"*

*["These lands, they say, formerly with violence and vast desolation
convulsed, burst asunder, where erewhile were."—Aeneid, iii. 414.]*

Cyprus from Syria, the isle of Negropont from the continent of Beeotia, and elsewhere united lands that were separate before, by filling up the channel betwixt them with sand and mud:

*"Sterilisque diu palus, aptaque remis,
Vicinas urbes alit, et grave sentit aratrum."*



*["That which was once a
sterile marsh, and bore
vessels on its
bosom, now feeds
neighbouring cities, and
admits the plough."
—Horace, De Arte
Poetica, v. 65.]*

But there is no great appearance that this isle was this New World so lately discovered: for that almost touched upon Spain, and it were an incredible effect of an inundation, to have tumbled back so prodigious a mass, above twelve hundred leagues: besides that our modern navigators have already almost discovered it

Hans Holbein's "The Ambassadors" (1533)

to be no island, but *terra firma*, and continent with the East Indies on the one side, and with the lands under the two poles on the other side; or, if it be separate from them, it is by so narrow a strait and channel, that it none the more deserves the name of an island for that.

It should seem, that in this great body, there are two sorts of motions, the one natural and the other febrific, as there are in ours. When I consider the impression that our river of Dordogne has made in my time on the right bank of its descent, and that in twenty years it has gained so much, and undermined the foundations of so many houses, I perceive it to be an extraordinary agitation: for had it always followed this course, or were hereafter to do it, the aspect of the world would be totally changed. But rivers alter their course, sometimes beating against the one side, and sometimes the other, and some times quietly keeping the channel. I do not speak of sudden inundations, the causes of which everybody understands. In Medoc, by the seashore, the Sieur d'Arsac, my brother, sees an estate he had there, buried under the sands which the sea vomits before it: where the tops of some houses are yet to be seen, and where his rents and domains are converted into pitiful barren pasturage. The inhabitants of this place affirm, that of late years the sea has driven so vehemently upon them, that they have lost above four leagues of land. These sands are her harbingers: and we now see great heaps of moving sand, that march half a league before her, and occupy the land.

The other testimony from antiquity, to which some would apply this discovery of the New World, is in Aristotle; at least, if that little book of Unheard of Miracles be his—[one of the spurious publications brought out under his name—D.W.]. He there tells us, that certain Carthaginians, having crossed the Atlantic Sea without the Straits of Gibraltar, and sailed a very long time, discovered at last a great and fruitful island, all covered over with wood, and watered with several broad and deep rivers, far remote from all *terra firma*; and that they, and others after them, allured by the goodness and fertility of the soil, went thither with their wives and children, and began to plant a colony. But the senate of Carthage perceiving their people by little and little to diminish, issued out an express prohibition, that none, upon pain of death, should transport themselves thither; and also drove out these new inhabitants; fearing, 'tis said, lest' in process of time they should so multiply as to supplant themselves and ruin their state. But this relation of Aristotle no more agrees with our new-found lands than the other.

This man that I had was a plain ignorant fellow, and therefore the more likely to tell truth: for your better-bred sort of men are much more curious in their observation, 'tis true, and discover a great deal more; but then they gloss upon it, and to give the greater weight to what they deliver, and allure your belief, they cannot forbear a little to alter the story; they never represent things to you simply as they are, but rather as they appeared to them, or as they would have them appear to you, and to gain the reputation of men of judgment, and the better to induce your faith, are willing to help out the business with something more than is really true, of their own invention. Now in this case, we should either have a man of irreproachable veracity, or so simple that he has not wherewithal to contrive, and to give a colour of truth to false relations, and who can have no ends in forging an untruth. Such a one was mine; and besides, he has at divers times brought to me several seamen and merchants who at the same time went the same voyage. I shall therefore content myself with his information, without inquiring what the cosmographers say to the business. We should have topographers to trace out to us the particular places where

they have been; but for having had this advantage over us, to have seen the Holy Land, they would have the privilege, forsooth, to tell us stories of all the other parts of the world beside. I would have every one write what he knows, and as much as he knows, but no more; and that not in this only but in all other subjects; for such a person may have some particular knowledge and experience of the nature of such a river, or such a fountain, who, as to other things, knows no more than what everybody does, and yet to give a currency to his little pittance of learning, will undertake to write the whole body of physics: a vice from which great inconveniences derive their original.

Now, to return to my subject, I find that there is nothing barbarous and savage in this nation, by anything that I can gather, excepting, that every one gives the title of barbarism to everything that is not in use in his own country. As, indeed, we have no other level of truth and reason than the example and idea of the opinions and customs of the place wherein we live: there is always the perfect religion, there the perfect government, there the most exact and accomplished usage of all things. They are savages at the same rate that we say fruits are wild, which nature produces of herself and by her own ordinary progress; whereas, in truth, we ought rather to call those wild whose natures we have changed by our artifice and diverted from the common order. In those, the genuine, most useful, and natural virtues and properties are vigorous and sprightly, which we have helped to degenerate in these, by accommodating them to the pleasure of our own corrupted palate. And yet for all this, our taste confesses a flavour and delicacy excellent even to emulation of the best of ours, in several fruits wherein those countries abound without art or culture. Neither is it reasonable that art should gain the pre-eminence of our great and powerful mother nature. We have so surcharged her with the additional ornaments and graces we have added to the beauty and riches of her own works by our inventions, that we have almost smothered her; yet in other places, where she shines in her own purity and proper lustre, she marvellously baffles and disgraces all our vain and frivolous attempts:



From H. Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights"
(1510-15)

*"Et veniunt hederæ sponte sua melius;
Surgit et in solis formosior arbutus antris;
Et volucres nulls dulcius arte canunt."*

*["The ivy grows best spontaneously, the arbutus best in shady caves;
and the wild notes of birds are sweeter than art can teach.
—"Propertius, i. 2, 10.]*

Our utmost endeavours cannot arrive at so much as to imitate the nest of the least of birds, its contexture, beauty, and convenience: not so much as the web of a poor spider.

All things, says Plato,—[Laws, 10.]—are produced either by nature, by fortune, or by art; the greatest and most beautiful by the one or the other of the former, the least and the most imperfect by the last.

These nations then seem to me to be so far barbarous, as having received but very little form and fashion from art and human invention, and consequently to be not much remote from their original simplicity. The laws of nature, however, govern them still, not as yet much vitiated with any mixture of ours: but 'tis in such purity, that I am sometimes troubled we were not sooner acquainted with these people, and that they were not discovered in those better times, when there were men much more able to judge of them than we are. I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato had no knowledge of them; for to my apprehension, what we now see in those nations, does not only surpass all the pictures with which the poets have adorned the golden age, and all their inventions in feigning a happy state of man, but, moreover, the fancy and even the wish and desire of philosophy itself; so native and so pure a simplicity, as we by experience see to be in them, could never enter into their imagination, nor could they ever believe that human society could have been maintained with so little artifice and human patchwork. I should tell Plato that it is a nation wherein there is no manner of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name of magistrate or political superiority; no use of service, riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no dividends, no properties, no employments, but those of leisure, no respect of kindred, but common, no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of corn or wine; the very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, detraction, pardon, never heard of.

—[This is the famous passage which Shakespeare, through Florio's version, 1603, or ed. 1613, p. 102, has employed in the "Tempest," ii. 1.]

How much would he find his imaginary Republic short of his perfection?

"Viri a diis recentes."

["Men fresh from the gods."—Seneca, Ep., 90.]

"Hos natura modos primum dedit."

*["These were the manners first taught by nature."
—Virgil, Georgics, ii. 20.]*

As to the rest, they live in a country very pleasant and temperate, so that, as my witnesses inform me, 'tis rare to hear of a sick person, and they moreover assure me, that they never saw

any of the natives, either paralytic, bleareyed, toothless, or crooked with age. The situation of their country is along the sea-shore, enclosed on the other side towards the land, with great and high mountains, having about a hundred leagues in breadth between. They have great store of fish and flesh, that have no resemblance to those of ours: which they eat without any other cookery, than plain boiling, roasting, and broiling. The first that rode a horse thither, though in several other voyages he had contracted an acquaintance and familiarity with them, put them into so terrible a fright, with his centaur appearance, that they killed him with their arrows before they could come to discover who he was. Their buildings are very long, and of capacity to hold two or three hundred people, made of the barks of tall trees, reared with one end upon the ground, and leaning to and supporting one another at the top, like some of our barns, of which the covering hangs down to the very ground, and serves for the side walls. They have wood so hard, that they cut with it, and make their swords of it, and their grills of it to broil their meat. Their beds are of cotton, hung swinging from the roof, like our seamen's hammocks, every man his own, for the wives lie apart from their husbands. They rise with the sun, and so soon as they are up, eat for all day, for they have no more meals but that; they do not then drink, as Suidas reports of some other people of the East that never drank at their meals; but drink very often all day after, and sometimes to a rousing pitch. Their drink is made of a certain root, and is of the colour of our claret, and they never drink it but lukewarm. It will not keep above two or three days; it has a somewhat sharp, brisk taste, is nothing heady, but very comfortable to the stomach; laxative to strangers, but a very pleasant beverage to such as are accustomed to it. They make use, instead of bread, of a certain white compound, like coriander seeds; I have tasted of it; the taste is sweet and a little flat. The whole day is spent in dancing. Their young men go a-hunting after wild beasts with bows and arrows; one part of their women are employed in preparing their drink the while, which is their chief employment. One of their old men, in the morning before they fall to eating, preaches to the whole family, walking from the one end of the house to the other, and several times repeating the same sentence, till he has finished the round, for their houses are at least a hundred yards long. Valour towards their enemies and love towards their wives, are the two heads of his discourse, never failing in the close, to put them in mind, that 'tis their wives who provide them their drink warm and well seasoned. The fashion of their beds, ropes, swords, and of the wooden bracelets they tie about their wrists, when they go to fight, and of the great canes, bored hollow at one end, by the sound of which they keep the cadence of their dances, are to be seen in several places, and amongst others, at my house. They shave all over, and much more neatly than we, without other razor than one of wood or stone. They believe in the immortality of the soul, and that those who have merited well of the gods are lodged in that part of heaven where the sun rises, and the accursed in the west.

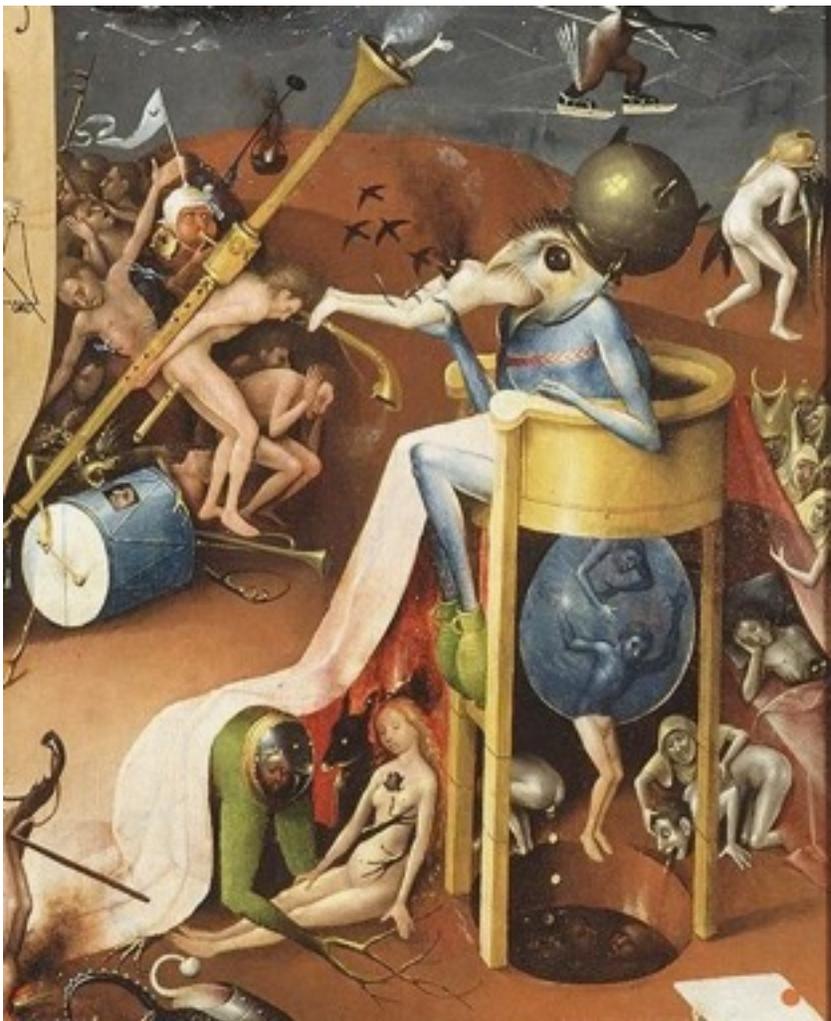
They have I know not what kind of priests and prophets, who very rarely present themselves to the people, having their abode in the mountains. At their arrival, there is a great feast, and solemn assembly of many villages: each house, as I have described, makes a village, and they are about a French league distant from one another. This prophet declaims to them in public, exhorting them to virtue and their duty: but all their ethics are comprised in these two articles, resolution in war, and affection to their wives. He also prophesies to them events to come, and the issues they are to expect from their enterprises, and prompts them to or diverts them from war: but let him look to't; for if he fail in his divination, and anything happen otherwise than he

has foretold, he is cut into a thousand pieces, if he be caught, and condemned for a false prophet: for that reason, if any of them has been mistaken, he is no more heard of.

Divination is a gift of God, and therefore to abuse it, ought to be a punishable imposture. Amongst the Scythians, where their diviners failed in the promised effect, they were laid, bound hand and foot, upon carts loaded with firs and bavins, and drawn by oxen, on which they were burned to death.—[Herodotus, iv. 69.]—Such as only meddle with things subject to the conduct of human capacity, are excusable in doing the best they can: but those other fellows that come to delude us with assurances of an extraordinary faculty, beyond our understanding, ought they not to be punished, when they do not make good the effect of their promise, and for the temerity of their imposture?

They have continual war with the nations that live further within the mainland, beyond their mountains, to which they go naked, and without other arms than their bows and wooden swords, fashioned at one end like the head of our javelins. The obstinacy of their battles is wonderful, and

they never end without great effusion of blood: for as to running away, they know not what it is. Every one for a trophy brings home the head of an enemy he has killed, which he fixes over the door of his house. After having a long time treated their prisoners very well, and given them all the regales they can think of, he to whom the prisoner belongs, invites a great assembly of his friends. They being come, he ties a rope to one of the arms of the prisoner, of which, at a distance, out of his reach, he holds the one end himself, and gives to the friend he loves best the other arm to hold after the same manner; which being done, they two, in the presence of all the assembly, despatch him



Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights (1510-15)

with their swords. After that, they roast him, eat him amongst them, and send some chops to their absent friends. They do not do this, as some think, for nourishment, as the Scythians anciently did, but as a representation of an extreme revenge; as will appear by this: that having observed the Portuguese, who were in league with their enemies, to inflict another sort of death upon any of them they took prisoners, which was to set them up to the girdle in the earth, to shoot at the remaining part till it was stuck full of arrows, and then to hang them, they thought those people of the other world (as being men who had sown the knowledge of a great many vices amongst their neighbours, and who were much greater masters in all sorts of mischief than they) did not exercise this sort of revenge without a meaning, and that it must needs be more painful than theirs, they began to leave their old way, and to follow this. I am not sorry that we should here take notice of the barbarous horror of so cruel an action, but that, seeing so clearly into their faults, we should be so blind to our own. I conceive there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead; in tearing a body limb from limb by racks and torments, that is yet in perfect sense; in roasting it by degrees; in causing it to be bitten and worried by dogs and swine (as we have not only read, but lately seen, not amongst inveterate and mortal enemies, but among neighbours and fellow-citizens, and, which is worse, under colour of piety and religion), than to roast and eat him after he is dead.

Chrysippus and Zeno, the two heads of the Stoic sect, were of opinion that there was no hurt in making use of our dead carcasses, in what way soever for our necessity, and in feeding upon them too;—[Diogenes Laertius, vii. 188.]—as our own ancestors, who being besieged by Caesar in the city Alexia, resolved to sustain the famine of the siege with the bodies of their old men, women, and other persons who were incapable of bearing arms.

*"Vascones, ut fama est, alimentis talibus usi
Produxere animas."*

*["'Tis said the Gascons with such meats appeased their hunger."
—Juvenal, Sat., xv. 93.]*

And the physicians make no bones of employing it to all sorts of use, either to apply it outwardly; or to give it inwardly for the health of the patient. But there never was any opinion so irregular, as to excuse treachery, disloyalty, tyranny, and cruelty, which are our familiar vices. We may then call these people barbarous, in respect to the rules of reason: but not in respect to ourselves, who in all sorts of barbarity exceed them. Their wars are throughout noble and generous, and carry as much excuse and fair pretence, as that human malady is capable of; having with them no other foundation than the sole jealousy of valour. Their disputes are not for the conquest of new lands, for these they already possess are so fruitful by nature, as to supply them without labour or concern, with all things necessary, in such abundance that they have no need to enlarge their borders. And they are, moreover, happy in this, that they only covet so much as their natural necessities require: all beyond that is superfluous to them: men of the same age call one another generally brothers, those who are younger, children; and the old men are fathers to all. These leave to their heirs in common the full possession of goods, without any

manner of division, or other title than what nature bestows upon her creatures, in bringing them into the world. If their neighbours pass over the mountains to assault them, and obtain a victory, all the victors gain by it is glory only, and the advantage of having proved themselves the better in valour and virtue: for they never meddle with the goods of the conquered, but presently return into their own country, where they have no want of anything necessary, nor of this greatest of all goods, to know happily how to enjoy their condition and to be content. And those in turn do the same; they demand of their prisoners no other ransom, than acknowledgment that they are overcome: but there is not one found in an age, who will not rather choose to die than make such a confession, or either by word or look recede from the entire grandeur of an invincible courage. There is not a man amongst them who had not rather be killed and eaten, than so much as to open his mouth to entreat he may not. They use them with all liberality and freedom, to the end their lives may be so much the dearer to them; but frequently entertain them with menaces of their approaching death, of the torments they are to suffer, of the preparations making in order to it, of the mangling their limbs, and of the feast that is to be made, where their carcass is to be the only dish. All which they do, to no other end, but only to extort some gentle or submissive word from them, or to frighten them so as to make them run away, to obtain this advantage that they were terrified, and that their constancy was shaken; and indeed, if rightly taken, it is in this point only that a true victory consists:

*"Victoria nulla est,
Quam quae confessor animo quoque subjugat hostes."*

[*"No victory is complete, which the conquered do not admit to be so.—"Claudius, De Sexto Consulatu Honorii, v. 248.]*

The Hungarians, a very warlike people, never pretend further than to reduce the enemy to their discretion; for having forced this confession from them, they let them go without injury or ransom, excepting, at the most, to make them engage their word never to bear arms against them again. We have sufficient advantages over our enemies that are borrowed and not truly our own; it is the quality of a porter, and no effect of virtue, to have stronger arms and legs; it is a dead and corporeal quality to set in array; 'tis a turn of fortune to make our enemy stumble, or to dazzle him with the light of the sun; 'tis a trick of science and art, and that may happen in a mean base fellow, to be a good fencer. The estimate and value of a man consist in the heart and in the will: there his true honour lies. Valour is stability, not of legs and arms, but of the courage and the soul; it does not lie in the goodness of our horse or our arms but in our own. He that falls obstinate in his courage—

"Si succiderit, de genu pugnat"

[*"If his legs fail him, he fights on his knees."*
—*Seneca, De Providentia, c. 2.]*

—he who, for any danger of imminent death, abates nothing of his assurance; who, dying, yet darts at his enemy a fierce and disdainful look, is overcome not by us, but by fortune; he is

killed, not conquered; the most valiant are sometimes the most unfortunate. There are defeats more triumphant than victories. Never could those four sister victories, the fairest the sun ever be held, of Salamis, Plataea, Mycale, and Sicily, venture to oppose all their united glories, to the single glory of the discomfiture of King Leonidas and his men, at the pass of Thermopylae. Who ever ran with a more glorious desire and greater ambition, to the winning, than Captain Iscolas to the certain loss of a battle?—[Diodorus Siculus, xv. 64.]—Who could have found out a more subtle invention to secure his safety, than he did to assure his destruction? He was set to defend a certain pass of Peloponnesus against the Arcadians, which, considering the nature of the place and the inequality of forces, finding it utterly impossible for him to do, and seeing that all who were presented to the enemy, must certainly be left upon the place; and on the other side, reputed it unworthy of his own virtue and magnanimity and of the Lacedaemonian name to fail in any part of his duty, he chose a mean betwixt these two extremes after this manner; the youngest and most active of his men, he preserved for the service and defence of their country, and sent them back; and with the rest, whose loss would be of less consideration, he resolved to make good the pass, and with the death of them, to make the enemy buy their entry as dear as possibly he could; as it fell out, for being presently environed on all sides by the Arcadians, after having made a great slaughter of the enemy, he and his were all cut in pieces. Is there any trophy dedicated to the conquerors which was not much more due to these who were overcome? The part that true conquering is to play, lies in the encounter, not in the coming off; and the honour of valour consists in fighting, not in subduing.

But to return to my story: these prisoners are so far from discovering the least weakness, for all the terrors that can be represented to them, that, on the contrary, during the two or three months they are kept, they always appear with a cheerful countenance; importune their masters to make haste to bring them to the test, defy, rail at them, and reproach them with cowardice, and the number of battles they have lost against those of their country. I have a song made by one of these prisoners, wherein he bids them "come all, and dine upon him, and welcome, for they shall withal eat their own fathers and grandfathers, whose flesh has served to feed and nourish him. These muscles," says he, "this flesh and these veins, are your own: poor silly souls as you are, you little think that the substance of your ancestors' limbs is here yet; notice what you eat, and you will find in it the taste of your own flesh:" in which song there is to be observed an invention that nothing relishes of the barbarian. Those that paint these people dying after this manner, represent the prisoner spitting in the faces of his executioners and making wry mouths at them. And 'tis most certain, that to the very last gasp, they never cease to brave and defy them both in word and gesture. In plain truth, these men are very savage in comparison of us; of necessity, they must either be absolutely so or else we are savages; for there is a vast difference betwixt their manners and ours.

The men there have several wives, and so much the greater number, by how much they have the greater reputation for valour. And it is one very remarkable feature in their marriages, that the same jealousy our wives have to hinder and divert us from the friendship and familiarity of other women, those employ to promote their husbands' desires, and to procure them many spouses; for being above all things solicitous of their husbands' honour, 'tis their chiefest care to seek out, and to bring in the most companions they can, forasmuch as it is a testimony of the husband's virtue.

Most of our ladies will cry out, that 'tis monstrous; whereas in truth it is not so, but a truly matrimonial virtue, and of the highest form. In the Bible, Sarah, with Leah and Rachel, the two wives of Jacob, gave the most beautiful of their handmaids to their husbands; Livia preferred the passions of Augustus to her own interest; —[Suetonius, Life of Augustus, c. 71.]—and the wife of King Deiotarus, Stratonice, did not only give up a fair young maid that served her to her husband's embraces, but moreover carefully brought up the children he had by her, and assisted them in the succession to their father's crown.

And that it may not be supposed, that all this is done by a simple and servile obligation to their common practice, or by any authoritative impression of their ancient custom, without judgment or reasoning, and from having a soul so stupid that it cannot contrive what else to do, I must here give you some touches of their sufficiency in point of understanding. Besides what I repeated to you before, which was one of their songs of war, I have another, a love-song, that begins thus:

*"Stay, adder, stay, that by thy pattern my sister may draw the
fashion and work of a rich ribbon, that I may present to my beloved,
by which means thy beauty and the excellent order of thy scales
shall for ever be preferred before all other serpents."*

Wherein the first couplet, "Stay, adder," &c., makes the burden of the song. Now I have conversed enough with poetry to judge thus much that not only there is nothing barbarous in this invention, but, moreover, that it is perfectly Anacreontic. To which it may be added, that their language is soft, of a pleasing accent, and something bordering upon the Greek termination.

Three of these people, not foreseeing how dear their knowledge of the corruptions of this part of the world will one day cost their happiness and repose, and that the effect of this commerce will be their ruin, as I presuppose it is in a very fair way (miserable men to suffer themselves to be deluded with desire of novelty and to have left the serenity of their own heaven to come so far to gaze at ours!), were at Rouen at the time that the late King Charles IX. was there. The king himself talked to them a good while, and they were made to see our fashions, our pomp, and the form of a great city. After which, some one asked their opinion, and would know of them, what of all the things they had seen, they found most to be admired? To which they made answer, three things, of which I have forgotten the third, and am troubled at it, but two I yet remember. They said, that in the first place they thought it very strange that so many tall men, wearing beards, strong, and well armed, who were about the king ('tis like they meant the Swiss of the guard), should submit to obey a child, and that they did not rather choose out one amongst themselves to command. Secondly (they have a way of speaking in their language to call men the half of one another), that they had observed that there were amongst us men full and crammed with all manner of commodities, whilst, in the meantime, their halves were begging at their doors, lean and half-starved with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer so great an inequality and injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throats, or set fire to their houses.

I talked to one of them a great while together, but I had so ill an interpreter, and one who was so perplexed by his own ignorance to apprehend my meaning, that I could get nothing out of

him of any moment: Asking him what advantage he reaped from the superiority he had amongst his own people (for he was a captain, and our mariners called him king), he told me, to march at the head of them to war. Demanding of him further how many men he had to follow him, he showed me a space of ground, to signify as many as could march in such a compass, which might be four or five thousand men; and putting the question to him whether or no his authority expired with the war, he told me this remained: that when he went to visit the villages of his dependence, they planed him paths through the thick of their woods, by which he might pass at his ease. All this does not sound very ill, and the last was not at all amiss, for they wear no breeches.

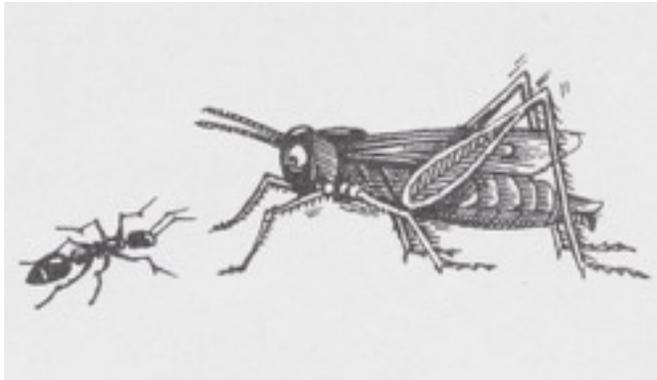
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CHAPTER II
17th Century
The “Beasts” of Nature

Fables (1668-1694)
JEAN DE LA FONTAINE (1621-1695)

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT

A Grasshopper gay
Sang the summer away,
And found herself poor
By the winter's first roar.
Of meat or of bread,
Not a morsel she had!
So a begging she went,
To her neighbour the ant,
For the loan of some wheat,
Which would serve her to eat,
Till the season came round.
'I will pay you,' she saith,
'On an animal's faith,
Double weight in the pound
Ere the harvest be bound.'
The ant is a friend
(And here she might mend)
Little given to lend.
'How spent you the summer?'
Quoth she, looking shame
At the borrowing dame.
'Night and day to each comer
I sang, if you please.'
'You sang! I'm at ease;
For 'tis plain at a glance,
Now, ma'am, you must dance.



THE RAVEN AND THE FOX.

Perch'd on a lofty oak,
Sir Raven held a lunch of cheese;
Sir Fox, who smelt it in the breeze,
Thus to the holder spoke:--
'Ha! how do you do, Sir Raven?
Well, your coat, sir, is a brave one!
So black and glossy, on my word, sir,
With voice to match, you were a bird, sir,
Well fit to be the Phoenix of these days.'
Sir Raven, overset with praise,
Must show how musical his croak.
Down fell the luncheon from the oak;
Which snatching up, Sir Fox thus spoke:--
'The flatterer, my good sir,
Aye liveth on his listener;
Which lesson, if you please,
Is doubtless worth the cheese.'
A bit too late, Sir Raven swore
The rogue should never cheat him more.



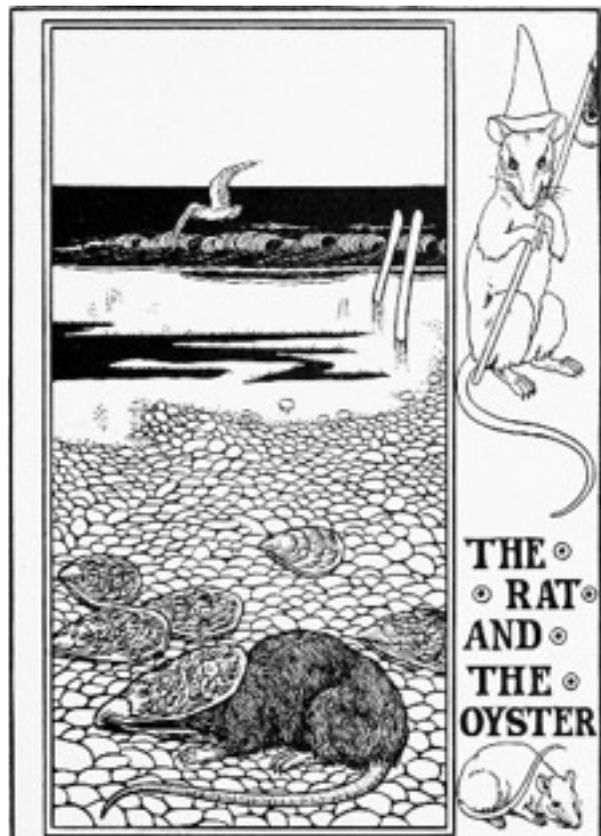
THE FROG THAT WISHED TO BE AS BIG AS THE OX.

The tenant of a bog,
An envious little frog,
Not bigger than an egg,
A stately bullock spies,
And, smitten with his size,
Attempts to be as big.
With earnestness and pains,
She stretches, swells, and strains,
And says, 'Sis Frog, look here! see me!
Is this enough?' 'No, no.'
'Well, then, is this?' 'Poh! poh!
Enough! you don't begin to be.'
And thus the reptile sits,
Enlarging till she splits.
The world is full of folks
Of just such wisdom;--
The lordly dome provokes
The cit to build his dome;
And, really, there is no telling
How much great men set little ones a swelling.



THE RAT AND THE OYSTER

A country rat, of little brains,
Grown weary of inglorious rest,
Left home with all its straws and grains,
Resolved to know beyond his nest.
When peeping through the nearest fence,
"How big the world is, how immense!"
He cried; "there rise the Alps, and that
Is doubtless famous Ararat."
His mountains were the works of moles,
Or dirt thrown up in digging holes!
Some days of travel brought him where
The tide had left the oysters bare.
Since here our traveller saw the sea,
He thought these shells the ships must be.
"My father was, in truth," said he,
"A coward, and an ignoramus;
He dared not travel: as for me,
I've seen the ships and ocean famous;
Have cross'd the deserts without drinking,
And many dangerous streams unshrinking."
Among the shut-up shell-fish, one
Was gaping widely at the sun;
It breathed, and drank the air's perfume,
Expanding, like a flower in bloom.
Both white and fat, its meat
Appear'd a dainty treat.
Our rat, when he this shell espied,
Thought for his stomach to provide.
"If not mistaken in the matter,"
Said he, "no meat was ever fatter,
Or in its flavour half so fine,
As that on which to-day I dine."
Thus full of hope, the foolish chap
Thrust in his head to taste,
And felt the pinching of a trap—
The oyster closed in haste.
Now those to whom the world is new
Are wonder-struck at every view;
And the marauder finds his match,
When he is caught who thinks to catch.



THE MICE AND THE OWL

A pine was by a woodman fell'd,
Which ancient, huge, and hollow tree
An owl had for his palace held—
A bird the Fates had kept in fee,
Interpreter to such as we.
Within the caverns of the pine,
With other tenants of that mine,
Were found full many footless mice,
But well provision'd, fat, and nice.
The bird had bit off all their feet,
And fed them there with heaps of wheat.
That this owl reason'd, who can doubt?
When to the chase he first went out,
And home alive the vermin brought,
Which in his talons he had caught,
The nimble creatures ran away.
Next time, resolved to make them stay,
He cropp'd their legs, and found, with pleasure,
That he could eat them at his leisure;
It were impossible to eat
Them all at once, did health permit.
His foresight, equal to our own,
In furnishing their food was shown.
Now, let Cartesians, if they can,
Pronounce this owl a mere machine.
Could springs originate the plan
Of maiming mice when taken lean,
To fatten for his soup-tureen?
If reason did no service there,
I do not know it anywhere.
Observe the course of argument:
These vermin are no sooner caught than gone:
They must be used as soon, 'tis evident;
But this to all cannot be done.
Hence, while their ribs I lard,
I must from their elopement guard.
But how?—A plan complete!—
I'll clip them of their feet!
Now, find me, in your human schools,
A better use of logic's tools!



The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood (1697)

Charles Perrault (1628-1703)



Here were formerly a King and a Queen, who were so sorry that they had no children, so sorry that it cannot be expressed. They went to all the waters in the world; vows, pilgrimages, all ways were tried and all to no purpose. At last, however, the Queen proved with child, and was brought to bed of a daughter. There was a very fine christening; and the Princess had for her godmothers all the Fairies they could find in the whole kingdom (they found seven), that every one of them might give her a gift, as was the custom of Fairies in those days,

and that by this means the Princess might have all the perfections imaginable.

After the ceremonies of the christening were over, all the company returned to the King's palace, where was prepared a great feast for the Fairies. There was placed before every one of them a magnificent cover with a case of massive gold, wherein were a spoon, knife and fork, all of pure gold set with diamonds and rubies. But as they were all sitting down at table, they saw come into the hall a very old Fairy whom they had not invited, because it was above fifty years since she had been out of a certain tower, and she was believed to be either dead or enchanted. The King ordered her a cover, but could not furnish her with a case of gold as the others, because they had seven only made for the seven Fairies. The old Fairy fancied she was slighted, and muttered some threat between her teeth. One of the young Fairies, who sat by her, overheard how she grumbled; and judging that she might give the little Princess some unlucky gift, went, as soon as they rose from the table, and hid herself behind the hangings, that she might speak last, and repair, as much as possible she could, the evil which the old Fairy might intend.

In the mean while all the Fairies began to give their gifts to the Princess. The youngest gave her for gift, that she should be the most beautiful person in the world; the next, that she should have the wit of an angel; the third, that she should have a wonderful grace in every thing she did; the fourth, that she should dance perfectly well; the fifth, that she should sing like a nightingale; and the sixth, that she should play upon all kinds of music to the utmost perfection.

The old Fairy's turn coming next, with a head shaking more with spite than age, she said, that the Princess should have her hand pierced with a spindle, and die of the wound. This terrible gift made the whole company tremble, and every body fell a-crying. At this very instant the young Fairy came out from behind the hangings, and spake these words aloud:

"Be reassured, O King and Queen; your daughter shall not die of this disaster: it is true, I have no power to undo entirely what my elder has done. The Princess shall indeed pierce her hand with a spindle; but instead of dying, she shall only fall into a profound sleep, which shall last a hundred years; at the expiration of which a king's son shall come and awake her."

The King, to avoid the misfortune foretold by the old Fairy, caused immediately proclamations to be made, whereby every-body was forbidden, on pain of death, to spin with a distaff and spindle or to have so much as any spindle in their houses. About fifteen or sixteen years after, the King and Queen being gone to one of their houses of pleasure, the young Princess happened one day to divert herself running up and down the palace; when going up from one apartment to another, she came into a little room on the top of a tower, where a good old woman, alone, was spinning with her spindle. This good woman had never heard of the King's proclamation against spindles.

"What are you doing there, Goody?" said the Princess.

"I am spinning, my pretty child," said the old woman, who did not know who she was.

"Ha!" said the Princess, "this is very pretty; how do you do it? Give it to me, that I may see if I can do so." She had no sooner taken the spindle into her hand, than, whether being very hasty at it, somewhat unhandy, or that the decree of the Fairy had so ordained it, it ran into her hand, and she fell down in a swoon.

The good old woman not knowing very well what to do in this affair, cried out for help. People came in from every quarter in great numbers; they threw water upon the Princess's face, unlaced her, struck her on the palms of her hands, and rubbed her temples with Hungary-water; but nothing would bring her to herself.

And now the King, who came up at the noise, bethought himself of the prediction of the Fairies, and judging very well that this must necessarily come to pass, since the Fairies had said it, caused the Princess to be carried into the finest apartment in his palace, and to be laid upon a bed all embroidered with gold and silver. One would have taken her for an angel, she was so very beautiful; for her swooning away had not diminished one bit of her complexion; her cheeks were carnation, and her lips like coral; indeed her eyes were shut, but she was heard to breathe softly, which satisfied those about her that she was not dead. The King commanded that they should not disturb her, but let her sleep quietly till her hour of awakening was come.

The good Fairy, who had saved her life by condemning her to sleep a hundred years, was in the kingdom of Matakia, twelve thousand leagues off, when this accident befell the Princess; but she was instantly informed of it by a little dwarf, who had boots of seven leagues, that is, boots with which he could tread over seven leagues of ground at one stride. The Fairy came away immediately, and she arrived, about an hour after, in a fiery chariot, drawn by dragons. The King handed her out of the chariot, and she approved every thing he had done; but, as she had a very great foresight, she thought, when the Princess should awake, she might not know what to do with herself, being all alone in this old palace; and this was what she did: She touched with

her wand every thing in the palace (except the King and the Queen), governesses, maids of honour, ladies of the bedchamber, gentlemen, officers, stewards, cooks, under-cooks, scullions, guards, with their beef-eaters, pages, footmen; she likewise touched all the horses which were in the stables, as well as their grooms, the great dogs in the outward court, and pretty little Mopsey too, the Princess's little spaniel-bitch, which lay by her on the bed.

Immediately upon her touching them, they all fell asleep, that they might not awake before their mistress, and that they might be ready to wait upon her when she wanted them. The very spits at the fire, as full as they could hold of partridges and pheasants, did fall asleep, and the fire likewise. All this was done in a moment. Fairies are not long in doing their business.

And now the King and the Queen, having kissed their dear child without waking her, went out of the palace, and put forth a proclamation, that nobody should dare to come near it. This, however, was not necessary; for, in a quarter of an hour's time, there grew up, all round about the park, such a vast number of trees, great and small, bushes and brambles, twining one within another, that neither man nor beast could pass thro'; so that nothing could be seen but the very top of the towers of the palace; and that too, not unless it was a good way off. Nobody doubted but the Fairy gave herein a sample of her art, that the Princess, while she continued sleeping, might have nothing to fear from any curious people.

"THE PRINCE ENQUIRES OF THE AGED COUNTRYMAN"

When a hundred years were gone and past, the son of the King then reigning, and who was of another family from that of the sleeping Princess, being gone a-hunting on that side of the country, asked, what were those towers which he saw in the middle of a great thick wood? Every one answered according as they had heard; some said that it was a ruinous old castle, haunted by spirits; others, that all the sorcerers and witches of the country kept there their sabbath, or nights meeting. The common opinion was that an Ogre lived there, and that he carried thither all the little children he could catch, that he might eat them up at his leisure, without any-body's being able to follow him, as having himself, only, the power to pass thro' the wood.

Ogre is a giant, with long teeth and claws, with a raw head and bloody-bones, who runs away with naughty little boys and girls, and eats them up. [Note by the translator.]

The Prince was at a stand, not knowing what to believe, when a very aged countryman spake to him thus: "May it please your Royal Highness, it is now above fifty years since I heard my father, who had heard my grandfather, say that there then was in this castle, a Princess, the most beautiful was ever seen; that she must sleep there a hundred years, and should be awaked by a king's son; for whom she was reserved." The young Prince was all on fire at these words, believing, without a moment's doubt, that he could put an end to this rare adventure; and pushed on by love and honour resolved that moment to look into it.

Scarce had he advanced towards the wood, when all the great trees, the bushes and brambles, gave way of themselves to let him pass thro'; he walked up to the castle which he saw at the end of a large avenue which he went into; and what a little surprised him was, that he saw none of his people could follow him, because the trees closed again, as soon as he had pass'd thro' them. However, he did not cease from continuing his way; a young and amorous Prince is always valiant. He came into a spacious outward court, where everything he saw might have frozen up the most fearless person with horror. There reigned over all a most frightful silence; the

image of death everywhere shewed itself, and there was nothing to be seen but stretched out bodies of men and animals, all seeming to be dead. He, however, very well knew, by the ruby faces and pimpled noses of the beef-eaters, that they were only asleep; and their goblets, wherein still remained some drops of wine, shewed plainly, that they fell asleep in their cups.

He then crossed a court paved with marble, went up the stairs, and came into the guard-chamber, where the guards were standing in their ranks, with their muskets upon their shoulders, and snoring as loud as they could. After that he went through several rooms full of gentlemen and ladies, all asleep, some standing, others sitting. At last he came into a chamber all gilded with gold, where he saw, upon a bed, the curtains of which were all open, the finest sight was ever beheld: a Princess, who appeared to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and whose bright, and in a manner resplendent beauty, had somewhat in it divine. He approached with trembling and admiration, and fell down before her upon his knees.

"HE SAW, UPON A BED, THE FINEST SIGHT WAS EVER BEHELD"

And now, as the enchantment was at an end, the Princess awaked, and looking on him with eyes more tender than the first view might seem to admit of: "Is it you, my Prince," said she to him, "you have tarried long."

The Prince, charmed with these words, and much more with the manner in which they were spoken, knew not how to shew his joy and gratitude; he assured her, that he loved her better than he did himself; his discourse was not well connected, but it pleased her all the more; little eloquence, a great deal of love. He was more at a loss than she, and we need not wonder at it; she had time to think on what to say to him; for it is very probable (though history mentions nothing of it) that the good Fairy, during so long a sleep, had entertained her with pleasant dreams. In short, when they talked four hours together, they said not half what they had to say.

In the mean while, all the palace awaked; every one thought upon their particular business; and as all of them were not in love, they were ready to die for hunger; the chief lady of honour, being as sharp set as other folks, grew very impatient, and told the Princess aloud, That supper was served up. The Prince helped the Princess to rise, she was entirely dressed, and very magnificently, but his Royal Highness took care not to tell her that she was dressed like his great grand-mother, and had a point-band peeping over a high collar; she looked not a bit the less beautiful and charming for all that.

They went into the great hall of looking-glasses, where they supped, and were served by the Princess's officers; the violins and hautboys played old tunes, but very excellent, tho' it was now above a hundred years since they had been played; and after supper, without losing any time, the lord almoner married them in the chapel of the castle, and the chief lady of honour drew the curtains. They had but very little sleep; the Princess had no occasion, and the Prince left her next morning to return into the city, where his father must needs have been anxious on his account. The Prince told him that he lost his way in the forest, as he was hunting, and that he had lain at the cottage of a collier, who gave him cheese and brown bread.

The King his father, who was of an easy disposition, believed him; but his mother could not be persuaded this was true; and seeing that he went almost every day a-hunting, and that he always had some excuse ready when he had laid out three or four nights together, she no longer doubted he had some little amour, for he lived with the Princess above two whole years, and had

by her two children, the eldest of which, who was a daughter, was named Aurora, and the youngest, who was a son, they called Day, because he was even handsomer and more beautiful than his sister.

The Queen said more than once to her son, in order to bring him to speak freely to her, that a young man must e'en take his pleasure; but he never dared to trust her with his secret; he feared her, tho' he loved her; for she was of the race of the Ogres, and the King would never have married her, had it not been for her vast riches; it was even whispered about the court, that she had Ogreish inclinations, and that, whenever she saw little children passing by, she had all the difficulty in the world to refrain from falling upon them. And so the Prince would never tell her one word.

But when the King was dead, which happened about two years afterwards; and he saw himself lord and master, he openly declared his marriage; and he went in great ceremony to fetch his Queen from the castle. They made a magnificent entry into the capital city, she riding between her two children.

Some time after, the King went to make war with the Emperor Cantalabutte, his neighbour. He left the government of the kingdom to the Queen his mother, and earnestly recommended to her care his wife and children. He was like to be at war all the summer, and as soon as he departed, the Queen-mother sent her daughter-in-law and her children to a country-house among the woods, that she might with the more ease gratify her horrible longing.

"I WILL HAVE IT SO,' REPLIED THE QUEEN, 'AND WILL EAT HER WITH A SAUCE ROBERT'"

Some few days afterwards she went thither herself, and said to her clerk of the kitchen:

"I have a mind to eat little Aurora for my dinner to morrow."

"Ah! Madam," cried the clerk of the kitchen.

"I will have it so," replied the Queen (and this she spake in the tone of an Ogress, who had a strong desire to eat fresh meat), "and will eat her with a Sauce Robert."

This is a French sauce, made with onions shredded and boiled tender in butter, to which is added vinegar, mustard, salt, pepper, and a little wine. [Note by the translator.]

The poor man knowing very well that he must not play tricks with Ogresses, took his great knife and went up into little Aurora's chamber. She was then four years old, and came up to him jumping and laughing, to take him about the neck, and ask him for some sugar-candy. Upon which he began to weep, the great knife fell out of his hand, and he went into the back-yard, and killed a little lamb, and dressed it with such good sauce, that his mistress assured him she had never eaten anything so good in her life. He had at the same time taken up little Aurora, and carried her to his wife, to conceal her in the lodging he had at the end of the court yard.

About eight days afterwards, the wicked Queen said to the clerk of the kitchen:

"I will sup upon little Day."

He answered not a word, being resolved to cheat her, as he had done before. He went to find out little Day, and saw him with a little foil in his hand, with which he was fencing with a great monkey; the child being then only three years of age. He took him up in his arms, and

carried him to his wife, that she might conceal him in her chamber along with his sister, and in the room of little Day cooked up a young kid very tender, which the Ogress found to be wonderfully good.

This was hitherto all mighty well: but one evening this wicked Queen said to her clerk of the kitchen:

"I will eat the Queen with the same sauce I had with her children."

It was now that the poor clerk of the kitchen despaired of being able to deceive her. The young Queen was turned of twenty, not reckoning the hundred years she had been asleep: her skin was somewhat tough, tho' very fair and white; and how to find in the yard a beast so firm, was what puzzled him. He took then a resolution, that he might save his own life, to cut the Queen's throat; and going up into her chamber, with intent to do it at once, he put himself into as great a fury as he could possibly, and came into the young Queen's room with his dagger in his hand. He would not, however, surprise her, but told her, with a great deal of respect, the orders he had received from the Queen-mother.

"Do it, do it," said she stretching out her neck, "execute your orders, and then I shall go and see my children, my poor children, whom I so much and so tenderly loved," for she thought them dead ever since they had been taken away without her knowledge.

"No, no, Madam," cried the poor clerk of the kitchen, all in tears, "you shall not die, and yet you shall see your children again; but it must be in my lodgings, where I have concealed them, and I shall deceive the Queen once more, by giving her in your stead a young hind."

Upon this he forthwith conducted her to his chamber; where leaving her to embrace her children, and cry along with them, he went and dressed a hind, which the Queen had for her supper, and devoured it with the same appetite, as if it had been the young Queen. Exceedingly was she delighted with her cruelty, and she had invented a story to tell the King, at his return, how ravenous wolves had eaten up the Queen his wife, and her two children.

One evening, as she was, according to her custom, rambling round about the courts and yards of the palace, to see if she could smell any fresh meat, she heard, in a ground-room little Day crying, for his mamma was going to whip him, because he had been naughty; and she heard, at the same time, little Aurora begging pardon for her brother.

The Ogress presently knew the voice of the Queen and her children, and being quite mad that she had been thus deceived, she commanded next morning, by break of day (with a most horrible voice, which made every body tremble) that they should bring into the middle of the great court a large tub, which she caused to be filled with toads, vipers, snakes, and all sorts of serpents, in order to have thrown into it the Queen and her children, the clerk of the kitchen, his wife and maid; all whom she had given orders should be brought thither with their hands tied behind them.

They were brought out accordingly, and the executioners were just going to throw them into the tub, when the King (who was not so soon expected) entered the court on horse-back (for he came post) and asked, with the utmost astonishment, what was the meaning of that horrible spectacle? No one dared to tell him; when the Ogress, all enraged to see what had happened, threw herself head-foremost into the tub, and was instantly devoured by the ugly creatures she had ordered to be thrown into it for others. The King could not but be very sorry, for she was his mother; but he soon comforted himself with his beautiful wife, and his pretty children.

The Moral

To get as prize a husband rich and gay.
Of humour sweet, with many years to stay,
Is natural enough, 'tis true;
To wait for him a hundred years,
And all that while asleep, appears
A thing entirely new.
Now at this time of day,
Not one of all the sex we see
Doth sleep with such profound tranquillity:
But yet this Fable seems to let us know
That very often Hymen's blisses sweet,
Altho' some tedious obstacles they meet,
Are not less happy for approaching slow.
'Tis nature's way that ladies fair
Should yearn conjugal joys to share;
And so I've not the heart to preach
A moral that's beyond their reach.

Text found at Project Gutenberg:

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29021/29021-h/29021-h.htm#The_Sleeping_Beauty_in_the_Wood

CHAPTER III
17th Century
The Mechanization of Nature

Pensées

Blaise Pascal (1663-1662)

70

Nature ...—[Nature has set us so well in the centre, that if we change one side of the balance, we change the other also. *I act. Τά ζῶα τρέχει* This makes me believe that the springs in our brain are so adjusted that he who touches one touches also its contrary.]

94

The nature of man is wholly natural, *omne animal*.

There is nothing he may not make natural; there is nothing natural he may not lose.

95

Memory, joy, are intuitions; and even mathematical propositions become intuitions, for education produces natural intuitions, and natural intuitions are erased by education.



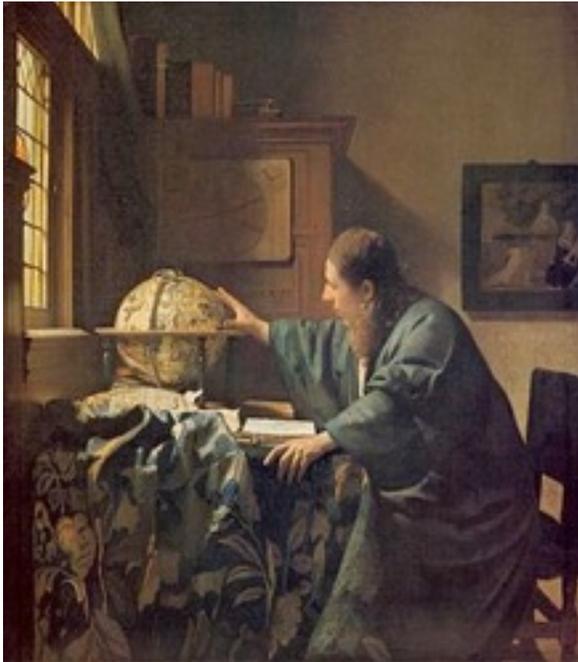
Inconstancy.—We think we are playing on ordinary organs when playing upon man. Men are organs, it is true, but, odd, changeable, variable [with pipes not arranged in proper order. Those who only know how to play on ordinary organs] will not produce harmonies on these. We must know where [*the keys*] are.

Rembrandt's "The Anatomy Lesson" (1632)

121

Nature always begins the same things again, the years, the days, the hours; in like manner spaces and numbers follow each other from beginning to end. Thus is made a kind of infinity and eternity. Not that anything in all this is infinite and eternal, but these finite realities are infinitely multiplied. Thus it seems to me to be only the number which multiplies them that is infinite.

230



It is incomprehensible that God should exist, and it is incomprehensible that He should not exist; that the soul should be joined to the body, and that we should have no soul; that the world should be created, and that it should not be created, etc.; that original sin should be, and that it should not be.

231

Do you believe it to be impossible that God is infinite, without parts?—Yes. I wish therefore to show you an infinite and indivisible thing. It is a point moving everywhere with an infinite velocity; for it is one in all places, and is all totality in every place.

Let this effect of nature, which previously seemed to you impossible, make you know that there may be others of which you are still ignorant.

Johannes Vermeer's "The Astronomer"

Do not draw this conclusion from your experiment, that there remains nothing for you to know; but rather that there remains an infinity for you to know.

339

I can well conceive a man without hands, feet, head (for it is only experience which teaches us that the head is more necessary than feet). But I cannot conceive man without thought; he would be a stone or a brute.

340

The arithmetical machine produces effects which approach nearer to thought than all the actions of animals. But it does nothing which would enable us to attribute will to it, as to the animals.

Instinct and reason, marks of two natures.

345

Reason commands us far more imperiously than a master; for in disobeying the one we are unfortunate, and in disobeying the other we are fools.

346

Thought constitutes the greatness of man.

347

Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this.

All our dignity consists, then, in thought. By it we must elevate ourselves, and not by space and time which we cannot fill. Let us endeavour, then, to think well; this is the principle of morality.

348

A thinking reed.—It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the government of my thought. I shall have no more if I possess worlds. By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world.

349

Immateriality of the soul.—Philosophers who have mastered their passions. What matter could do that?

350

The Stoics.—They conclude that what has been done once can be done always, and that since the desire of glory imparts some power to those whom it possesses, others can do likewise. There are feverish movements which health cannot imitate.

Epictetus concludes that since there are consistent Christians, every man can easily be so.

351

Those great spiritual efforts, which the soul sometimes assays, are things on which it does not lay hold. It only leaps to them, not as upon a throne, for ever, but merely for an instant.

352

The strength of a man's virtue must not be measured by his efforts, but by his ordinary life.

353

I do not admire the excess of a virtue as of valour, except I see at the same time the excess of the opposite virtue, as in Epaminondas, who had the greatest valour and the greatest kindness. For otherwise it is not to rise, it is to fall. We do not display greatness by going to one extreme, but in touching both at once, and filling all the intervening space. But perhaps this is only a sudden movement of the soul from one to the other extreme, and in fact it is ever at one point only, as in the case of a firebrand. Be it so, but at least this indicates agility if not expanse of soul.

354

Man's nature is not always to advance; it has its advances and retreats.

Fever has its cold and hot fits; and the cold proves as well as the hot the greatness of the fire of fever.

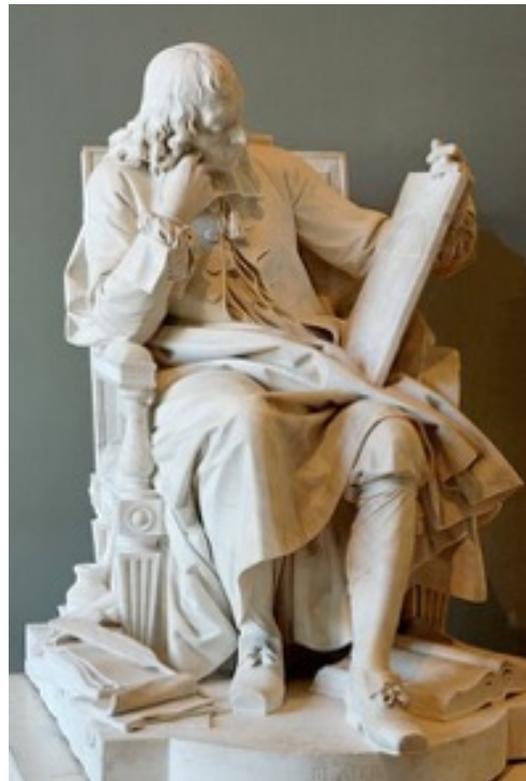
The discoveries of men from age to age turn out the same. The kindness and the malice of the world in general are the same. *Plerumque gratæ principibus vices.*

355

Continuous eloquence wearies.

Princes and kings sometimes play. They are not always on their thrones. They weary there. Grandeur must be abandoned to be appreciated. Continuity in everything is unpleasant. Cold is agreeable, that we may get warm.

Nature acts by progress, *itus et reditus*. It goes and returns, then advances further, then twice as



Pascal Statue in the Louvre Museum

much backwards, then more forward than ever. The tide of the sea behaves in the same manner; and so apparently does the sun in its course.

356

The nourishment of the body is little by little. Fullness of nourishment and smallness of substance.

357



When we would pursue virtues to their extremes on either side, vices present themselves, which insinuate themselves insensibly there, in their insensible journey towards the infinitely little: and vices present themselves in a crowd towards the infinitely great, so that we lose ourselves in them, and no longer see virtues. We find fault with perfection itself.

358

Man is neither angel nor brute, and the unfortunate thing is that he who would act the angel acts the brute.

359

We do not sustain ourselves in virtue by our own strength, but by the balancing of two opposed vices, just as we remain upright amidst two contrary gales. Remove one of the vices, and we fall into the other.

Simon Vouet's "Wealth" (1640)

**Discourse on the Method
of Rightly Conducting the Reason,
and Seeking Truth in the Sciences (1637)**

René Descartes (1596-1650)



My third maxim was to endeavor always to conquer myself rather than fortune, and change my desires rather than the order of the world, and in general, accustom myself to the persuasion that, except our own thoughts, there is nothing absolutely in our power; so that when we have done our best in things external to us, all wherein we fail of success is to be held, as regards us,

absolutely impossible: and this single principle seemed to me sufficient to prevent me from desiring for the future anything which I could not obtain, and thus render me contented; for since our will naturally seeks those objects alone which the understanding represents as in some way possible of attainment, it is plain, that if we consider all external goods as equally beyond our power, we shall no more regret the absence of such goods as seem due to our birth, when deprived of them without any fault of ours, than our not possessing the kingdoms of China or Mexico, and thus making, so to speak, a virtue of necessity, we shall no more desire health in disease, or freedom in imprisonment, than we now do bodies incorruptible as diamonds, or the wings of birds to fly with. But I confess there is need of prolonged discipline and frequently repeated meditation to accustom the mind to view all objects in this light; and I believe that in this chiefly consisted the secret of the power of such philosophers as in former times were enabled to rise superior to the influence of fortune, and, amid suffering and poverty, enjoy a happiness which their gods might have envied. For, occupied incessantly with the consideration of the limits prescribed to their power by nature, they became so entirely convinced that nothing was at their disposal except their own thoughts, that this conviction was of itself sufficient to prevent their entertaining any desire of other objects; and over their thoughts they acquired a sway so absolute, that they had some ground on this account for esteeming themselves more rich and more powerful, more free and more happy, than other men who, whatever be the favors heaped on them by nature and fortune, if destitute of this philosophy, can never command the realization of all their desires.

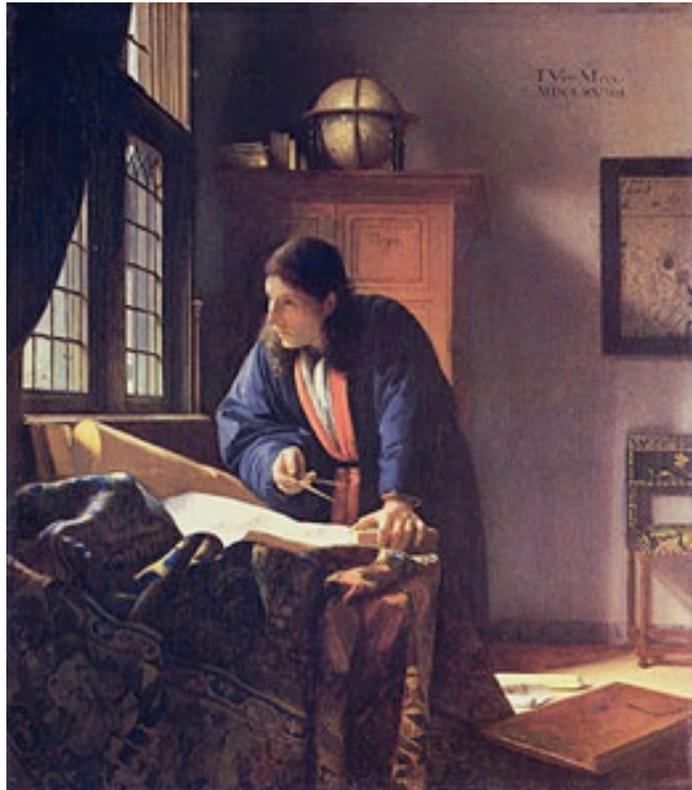


Johannes Vermeer “The Lacemaker” (1670)

In fine, to conclude this code of morals, I thought of reviewing the different occupations of men in this life, with the view of making choice of the best. And, without wishing to offer any remarks on the employments of others, I may state that it was my conviction that I could not do better than continue in that in which I was engaged, viz., in devoting my whole life to the culture of my reason, and in making the greatest progress I was able in the knowledge of truth, on the principles of the method which I had prescribed to myself.

This method, from the time I had begun to apply it, had been to me the source of satisfaction so intense as to lead me to, believe that more perfect or more innocent could not be enjoyed in this life; and as by its means I daily discovered truths that appeared to me of some importance, and of which other men were generally ignorant, the gratification thence arising so occupied my mind that I was wholly indifferent to every other object. Besides, the three preceding maxims were founded singly on the design of continuing the work of self-instruction. For since God has endowed each of us with some light of reason by which to distinguish truth from error, I could not have believed that I ought for a single moment to rest satisfied with the opinions of another, unless I had resolved to exercise my own judgment in examining these whenever I should be duly qualified for the task. Nor could I have proceeded on such opinions without scruple, had I supposed that I should thereby forfeit any advantage for attaining still more accurate, should such exist. And, in fine, I could not have restrained my desires, nor remained satisfied had I not followed a path in which I thought myself certain of attaining all the knowledge to the acquisition of which I was competent, as well as the largest amount of what is truly good which I could ever hope to secure Inasmuch as we neither seek nor shun any object except in so far as our understanding represents it as good or bad, all that is necessary to right action is right judgment, and to the best action the most correct judgment, that is, to the acquisition of all the virtues with all else that is truly valuable and within our reach; and the assurance of such an acquisition cannot fail to render us contented.

Having thus provided myself with these maxims, and having placed them in reserve along with the truths of faith, which have ever occupied the first place in my belief, I came to the conclusion that I might with freedom set about ridding myself of what remained of my opinions. And, inasmuch as I hoped to be better able successfully to accomplish this work by holding intercourse with mankind, than by remaining longer shut up in the retirement where these thoughts had occurred to me, I betook me again to traveling before the winter was well ended. And, during the nine subsequent years, I did nothing but roam from one place to another, desirous of being a spectator rather than an actor in the plays exhibited on the theater of the world; and, as I made it my business in each matter to reflect particularly upon what might fairly be doubted and prove a source of error, I gradually rooted out from my mind all the errors which had hitherto crept into it. Not that in this I imitated the sceptics who doubt only that they may doubt, and seek nothing beyond uncertainty itself; for, on the contrary, my design was singly to find ground of assurance, and cast aside the loose earth and sand, that I might reach the rock or the clay. In this, as appears to me, I was successful enough; for, since I endeavored to discover the falsehood or incertitude of the propositions I examined, not by feeble conjectures, but by clear and certain reasonings, I met with nothing so doubtful as not to yield some conclusion of adequate certainty, although this were merely the inference, that the matter in question contained nothing certain. And, just as in pulling down an old house, we usually reserve the ruins to contribute towards the erection, so, in destroying such of my opinions as I judged to be ill-founded, I made a variety of observations and acquired an amount of experience of which I availed myself in the establishment of more certain. And further, I continued to exercise myself in the method I had prescribed; for, besides taking care in general to conduct all my thoughts according to its rules, I reserved some hours from time to time which I expressly devoted to the employment of the method in the solution of mathematical difficulties, or even in the solution likewise of some questions belonging to other sciences, but which, by my having detached them from such principles of these sciences as were of inadequate certainty, were rendered almost mathematical: the truth of this will be manifest from the numerous examples contained in this volume. And thus, without in appearance living otherwise than those



Johannes Vermeer's "The Geographer" (1669)

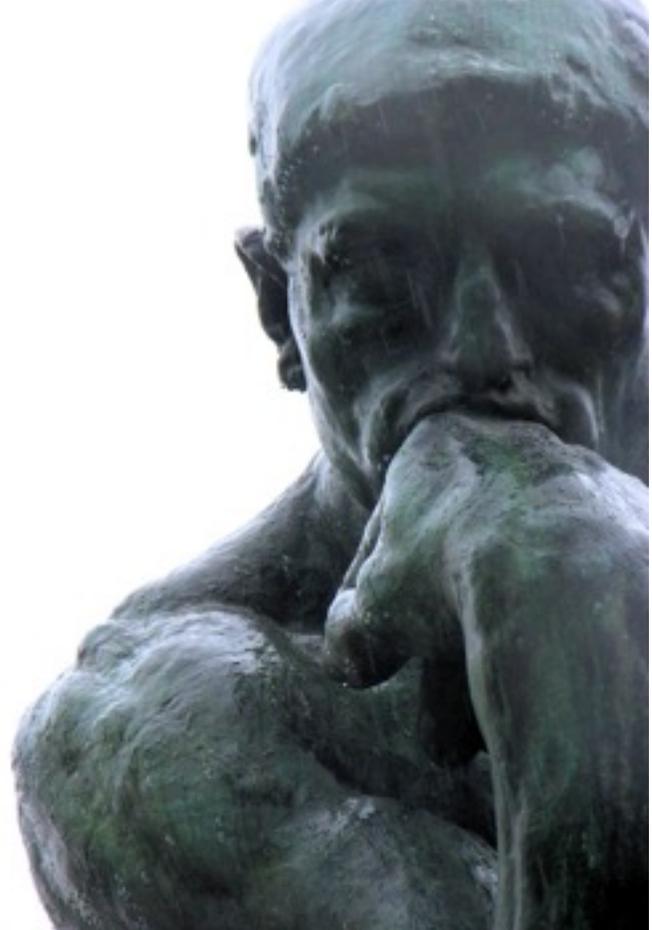
who, with no other occupation than that of spending their lives agreeably and innocently, study to sever pleasure from vice, and who, that they may enjoy their leisure without ennui, have recourse to such pursuits as are honorable, I was nevertheless prosecuting my design, and making greater progress in the knowledge of truth, than I might, perhaps, have made had I been engaged in the perusal of books merely, or in holding converse with men of letters.

These nine years passed away, however, before I had come to any determinate judgment respecting the difficulties which form matter of dispute among the learned, or had commenced to seek the principles of any philosophy more certain than the vulgar. And the examples of many men of the highest genius, who had, in former times, engaged in this inquiry, but, as appeared to me, without success, led me to imagine it to be a work of so much difficulty, that I would not perhaps have ventured on it so soon had I not heard it currently rumored that I had already completed the inquiry. I know not what were the grounds of this opinion; and, if my conversation contributed in any measure to its rise, this must have happened rather from my having confessed my Ignorance with greater freedom than those are accustomed to do who have studied a little, and expounded perhaps, the reasons that led me to doubt of many of those things that by others are esteemed certain, than from my having boasted of any system of philosophy. But, as I am of a disposition that makes me unwilling to be esteemed different from what I really am, I thought it necessary to endeavor by all means to render myself worthy of the reputation accorded to me; and it is now exactly eight years since this desire constrained me to remove from all those places where interruption from any of my acquaintances was possible, and betake myself to this country, in which the long duration of the war has led to the establishment of such discipline, that the armies maintained seem to be of use only in enabling the inhabitants to enjoy more securely the blessings of peace and where, in the midst of a great crowd actively engaged in business, and more careful of their own affairs than curious about those of others, I have been enabled to live without being deprived of any of the conveniences to be had in the most populous cities, and yet as solitary and as retired as in the midst of the most remote deserts.

PART IV

I am in doubt as to the propriety of making my first meditations in the place above mentioned matter of discourse; for these are so metaphysical, and so uncommon, as not, perhaps, to be acceptable to every one. And yet, that it may be determined whether the foundations that I have laid are sufficiently secure, I find myself in a measure constrained to advert to them. I had long before remarked that, in relation to practice, it is sometimes necessary to adopt, as if above doubt, opinions which we discern to be highly uncertain, as has been already said; but as I then desired to give my attention solely to the search after truth, I thought that a procedure exactly the opposite was called for, and that I ought to reject as absolutely false all opinions in regard to which I could suppose the least ground for doubt, in order to ascertain whether after that there

remained aught in my belief that was wholly indubitable. Accordingly, seeing that our senses sometimes deceive us, I was willing to suppose that there existed nothing really such as they presented to us; and because some men err in reasoning, and fall into paralogisms, even on the simplest matters of geometry, I, convinced that I was as open to error as any other, rejected as false all the reasonings I had hitherto taken for demonstrations; and finally, when I considered that the very same thoughts (presentations) which we experience when awake may also be experienced when we are asleep, while there is at that time not one of them true, I supposed that all the objects (presentations) that had ever entered into my mind when awake, had in them no more truth than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately upon this I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, I think, therefore I am (COGITO ERGO SUM), was so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search.



August Rodin's "The Thinker" (1902)

In the next place, I attentively examined what I was and as I observed that I could suppose that I had no body, and that there was no world nor any place in which I might be; but that I could not therefore suppose that I was not; and that, on the contrary, from the very circumstance that I thought to doubt of the truth of other things, it most clearly and certainly followed that I was; while, on the other hand, if I had only ceased to think, although all the other objects which I had ever imagined had been in reality existent, I would have had no reason to believe that I existed; I thence concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that "I," that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body, and is even more easily known than the latter, and is such, that although the latter were not, it would still continue to be all that it is.

After this I inquired in general into what is essential to the truth and certainty of a proposition; for since I had discovered one which I knew to be true, I thought that I must likewise be able to discover the ground of this certitude. And as I observed that in the words I think, therefore I am, there is nothing at all which gives me assurance of their truth beyond this, that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist, I concluded that I might take, as a general rule, the principle, that all the things which we very clearly and distinctly conceive are true, only observing, however, that there is some difficulty in rightly determining the objects which we distinctly conceive.

In the next place, from reflecting on the circumstance that I doubted, and that consequently my being was not wholly perfect (for I clearly saw that it was a greater perfection to know than to doubt), I was led to inquire whence I had learned to think of something more perfect than myself; and I clearly recognized that I must hold this notion from some nature which in reality was more perfect. As for the thoughts of many other objects external to me, as of the sky, the earth, light, heat, and a thousand more, I was less at a loss to know whence these came; for since I remarked in them nothing which seemed to render them superior to myself, I could believe that, if these were true, they were dependencies on my own nature, in so far as it possessed a certain perfection, and, if they were false, that I held them from nothing, that is to say, that they were in me because of a certain imperfection of my nature. But this could not be the case with the idea of a nature more perfect than myself; for to receive it from nothing was a thing manifestly impossible; and, because it is not less repugnant that the more perfect should be an effect of, and dependence on the less perfect, than that something should proceed from nothing, it was equally impossible that I could hold it from myself: accordingly, it but remained that it had been placed in me by a nature which was in reality more perfect than mine, and which even possessed within itself all the perfections of which I could form any idea; that is to say, in a single word, which was God. And to this I added that, since I knew some perfections which I did not possess, I was not the only being in existence (I will here, with your permission, freely use the terms of the schools); but, on the contrary, that there was of necessity some other more perfect Being upon whom I was dependent, and from whom I had received all that I possessed; for if I had existed alone, and independently of every other being, so as to have had from myself all the perfection, however little, which I actually possessed, I should have been able, for the same reason, to have had from myself the whole remainder of perfection, of the want of which I was conscious, and thus could of myself have become infinite, eternal, immutable, omniscient, all-powerful, and, in fine, have possessed all the perfections which I could recognize in God. For in order to know the nature of God (whose existence has been established by the preceding reasonings), as far as my own nature permitted, I had only to consider in reference to all the properties of which I found in my mind some idea, whether their possession was a mark of perfection; and I was assured that no one which indicated any imperfection was in him, and that none of the rest was wanting. Thus I perceived that doubt, inconstancy, sadness, and such like, could not be found in God, since I myself would have been happy to be free from them. Besides, I had ideas of many sensible and corporeal things; for although I might suppose that I was dreaming, and that all which I saw or imagined was false, I could not, nevertheless, deny that the ideas were in reality in my thoughts. But, because I had already very clearly recognized in myself that the intelligent nature is distinct

from the corporeal, and as I observed that all composition is an evidence of dependency, and that a state of dependency is manifestly a state of imperfection, I therefore determined that it could not be a perfection in God to be compounded of these two natures and that consequently he was not so compounded; but that if there were any bodies in the world, or even any intelligences, or other natures that were not wholly perfect, their existence depended on his power in such a way that they could not subsist without him for a single moment.

I was disposed straightway to search for other truths and when I had represented to myself the object of the geometers, which I conceived to be a continuous body or a space indefinitely extended in length, breadth, and height or depth, divisible into divers parts which admit of different figures and sizes, and of being moved or transposed in all manner of ways (for all this the geometers suppose to be in



the object they contemplate), I went over some of their simplest demonstrations. And, in the first place, I observed, that the great certitude which by common consent is accorded to these demonstrations, is founded solely upon this, that they are clearly conceived in accordance with the rules I have already laid down. In the next place, I perceived that there was nothing at all in these demonstrations which could assure me of the existence of their object: thus, for example, supposing a triangle to be given, I distinctly perceived that its three angles were necessarily equal to two right angles, but I did not on that account perceive anything which could assure me that any triangle existed: while, on the contrary, recurring to the examination of the idea of a Perfect Being, I found that the existence of the Being was comprised in the idea in the same way that the equality of its three angles to two right angles is comprised in the idea of a triangle, or as in the idea of a sphere, the equidistance of all points on its surface from the center, or even still more clearly; and that consequently it is at least as certain that God, who is this Perfect Being, is, or exists, as any demonstration of geometry can be.

But the reason which leads many to persuade themselves that there is a difficulty in knowing this truth, and even also in knowing what their mind really is, is that they never raise their thoughts above sensible objects, and are so accustomed to consider nothing except by way of imagination, which is a mode of thinking limited to material objects, that all that is not imaginable seems to them not intelligible. The truth of this is sufficiently manifest from the single circumstance, that the philosophers of the schools accept as a maxim that there is nothing in the understanding which was not previously in the senses, in which however it is certain that the ideas of God and of the soul have never been; and it appears to me that they who make use of their imagination to comprehend these ideas do exactly the same thing as if, in order to hear sounds or smell odors, they strove to avail themselves of their eyes; unless indeed that there is this difference, that the sense of sight does not afford us an inferior assurance to those of smell or

hearing; in place of which, neither our imagination nor our senses can give us assurance of anything unless our understanding intervene.

Finally, if there be still persons who are not sufficiently persuaded of the existence of God and of the soul, by the reasons I have adduced, I am desirous that they should know that all the other propositions, of the truth of which they deem themselves perhaps more assured, as that we have a body, and that there exist stars and an earth, and such like, are less certain; for, although we have a moral assurance of these things, which is so strong that there is an appearance of extravagance in doubting of their existence, yet at the same time no one, unless his intellect is impaired, can deny, when the question relates to a metaphysical certitude, that there is sufficient reason to exclude entire assurance, in the observation that when asleep we can in the same way imagine ourselves possessed of another body and that we see other stars and another earth, when there is nothing of the kind. For how do we know that the thoughts which occur in dreaming are false rather than those other which we experience when awake, since the former are often not less vivid and distinct than the latter? And though men of the highest genius study this question as long as they please, I do not believe that they will be able to give any reason which can be sufficient to remove this doubt, unless they presuppose the existence of God. For, in the first place even the principle which I have already taken as a rule, viz., that all the things which we clearly and distinctly conceive are true, is certain only because God is or exists and because he is a Perfect Being, and because all that we possess is derived from him: whence it follows that our ideas or notions, which to the extent of their clearness and distinctness are real, and proceed from God, must to that extent be true. Accordingly, whereas we not infrequently have ideas or notions in which some falsity is contained, this can only be the case with such as are to some extent confused and obscure, and in this proceed from nothing (participate of negation), that is, exist in us thus confused because we are not wholly perfect. And it is evident that it is not less repugnant that falsity or imperfection, in so far as it is imperfection, should proceed from God, than that truth or perfection should proceed from nothing. But if we did not know that all which we possess of real and true proceeds from a Perfect and Infinite Being, however clear and distinct our ideas might be, we should have no ground on that account for the assurance that they possessed the perfection of being true.

But after the knowledge of God and of the soul has rendered us certain of this rule, we can easily understand that the truth of the thoughts we experience when awake, ought not in the slightest degree to be called in question on account of the illusions of our dreams. For if it happened that an individual, even when asleep, had some very distinct idea, as, for example, if a geometer should discover some new demonstration, the circumstance of his being asleep would not militate against its truth; and as for the most ordinary error of our dreams, which consists in their representing to us various objects in the same way as our external senses, this is not prejudicial, since it leads us very properly to suspect the truth of the ideas of sense; for we are not infrequently deceived in the same manner when awake; as when persons in the jaundice see all objects yellow, or when the stars or bodies at a great distance appear to us much smaller than they are. For, in fine, whether awake or asleep, we ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our reason. And it must be noted that

I say of our reason, and not of our imagination or of our senses: thus, for example, although we very clearly see the sun, we ought not therefore to determine that it is only of the size which our sense of sight presents; and we may very distinctly imagine the head of a lion joined to the body of a goat, without being therefore shut up to the conclusion that a chimaera exists; for it is not a dictate of reason that what we thus see or imagine is in reality existent; but it plainly tells us that all our ideas or notions contain in them some truth; for otherwise it could not be that God, who is wholly perfect and veracious, should have placed them in us. And because our reasonings are never so clear or so complete during sleep as when we are awake, although sometimes the acts of our imagination are then as lively and distinct, if not more so than in our waking moments, reason further dictates that, since all our thoughts cannot be true because of our partial imperfection, those possessing truth must infallibly be found in the experience of our waking moments rather than in that of our dreams.

CHAPTER IV
18th Century
Nature and Society
Voltaire and Rousseau

“The Study of Nature”

François-Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694 – 1778)



François Dumont l'Aîné's portrait (1812) of Antoine Augustin Parmentier (1737-1806) (introduced potatoes to France; member of the Pharmacy College and Agriculture Society)

After making many profound observations upon nature, (having employed in the research, my five senses, my spectacles, and a very large telescope,) I said one day to Mr. Sidrac, unless I am much deceived, philosophy laughs at us. I cannot discover any trace of what the world calls nature; on the contrary, everything seems to me to be the result of art. By art the planets are made to revolve around the sun, while the sun revolves on its own axis. I am convinced that some genius has arranged things in such a manner, that the square of the revolutions of the planets is always in proportion to the cubic root from their distance to their centre, and one had need be a magician to find out how this is accomplished. The tides of the sea are the result of art no less profound and no less difficult to explain.



All animals, vegetables and minerals are arranged with due regard to weight and measure, number and motion. All is performed by springs, levers, pullies, hydraulic machines, and chemical combinations, from the insignificant flea to the being called man, from the grass of the field to the far spreading oak, from a grain of sand to a cloud in the firmament of heaven. Assuredly, everything is governed by art, and the word *nature* is but a chimera.

What you say, answered Mr. Sidrac, has been said many years ago, and so much the better, for the probability is greater that your remark is true. I am always astonished when I reflect, that a grain of wheat cast into the earth will produce in a short time above a handful of the same corn. Stop, said I, foolishly, you forget that wheat must die

before it can spring up again, at least so they say at college. My friend Sidrac, laughing heartily at this interruption, replied. That assertion went down very well a few years ago, when it was first published by an apostle called Paul; but in our more enlightened age, the meanest laborer knows that the thing is altogether too ridiculous even for argument.

My dear friend, said I, excuse the absurdity of my remark, I have hitherto been a theologian, and one cannot divest one's self in a moment of every silly opinion.

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AN ADVENTURE IN INDIA

All the world knows that Pythagoras, while he resided in India, attended the school of the Gymnosophists, and learned the language of beasts and plants.^[1] One day, while he was walking in a meadow near the seashore, he heard these words:

"How unfortunate that I was born an herb! I scarcely attain two inches in height, when a voracious monster, an horrid animal, tramples me under his large feet; his jaws are armed with rows of sharp scythes, by which he cuts, then grinds, and then swallows me. Men call this monster a sheep. I do not suppose there is in the whole creation a more detestable creature."

Pythagoras proceeded a little way and found an oyster yawning on a small rock. He had not yet adopted that admirable law, by which we are enjoined not to eat those animals which have a resemblance to us.^[2] He had scarcely taken up the oyster to swallow it, when it spoke these affecting words:

"O, Nature, how happy is the herb, which is, as I am, thy work! though it be cut down, it is regenerated and immortal; and we, poor oysters, in vain are defended by a double cuirass:

villains eat us by dozens at their breakfast, and all is over with us forever. What an horrible fate is that of an oyster, and how barbarous are men!"

Pythagoras shuddered; he felt the enormity of the crime he had nearly committed; he begged pardon of the oyster with tears in his eyes, and replaced it very carefully on the rock.

As he was returning to the city, profoundly meditating on this adventure, he saw spiders devouring flies; swallows eating spiders, and sparrow-hawks eating swallows. "None of these," said he, "are philosophers."

On his entrance, Pythagoras was stunned, bruised, and thrown down by a lot of tatterdemalions, who were running and crying: "Well done, he fully deserved it." "Who? What?" said Pythagoras, as he was getting up. The people continued running and crying: "O how delightful it will be to see them boiled!"

Pythagoras supposed they meant lentils, or some other vegetables: but he was in an error; they meant two poor Indians. "Oh!" said Pythagoras, "these Indians, without doubt, are two great philosophers weary of their lives, they are desirous of regenerating under other forms; it affords pleasure to a man to change his place of residence, though he may be but indifferently lodged: there is no disputing on taste."

He proceeded with the mob to the public square, where he perceived a lighted pile of wood, and a bench opposite to it, which was called a tribunal. On this bench judges were seated, each of whom had a cow's tail in his hand, and a cap on his head, with ears resembling those of the animal which bore Silenus when he came into that country with Bacchus, after having crossed the Erytrean sea without wetting a foot, and stopping the sun and moon; as it is recorded with great fidelity in the Orphicks.

Among these judges there was an honest man with whom Pythagoras was acquainted. The Indian sage explained to the sage of Samos the nature of that festival to be given to the people of India.

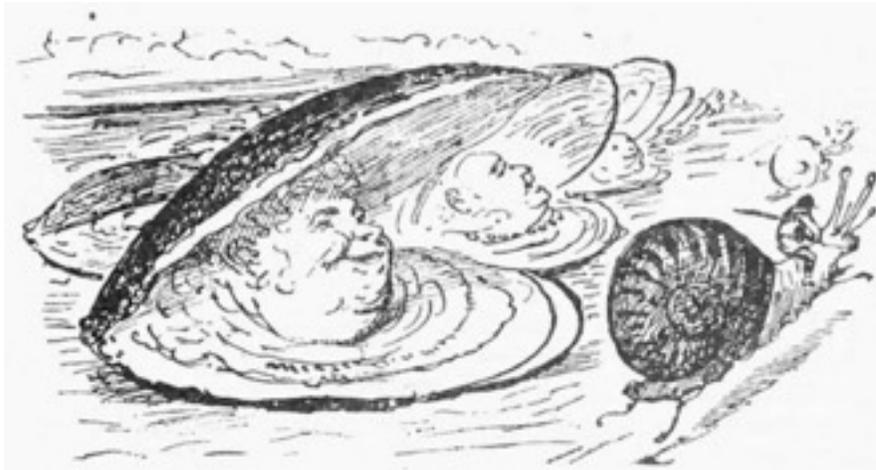
"These two Indians," said he, "have not the least desire to be committed to the flames. My grave brethren have adjudged them to be burnt; one for saying, that the substance of Xaca is not that of Brahma; and the other for supposing, that the approbation of the Supreme Being was to be obtained at the point of death without holding a cow by the tail; 'Because,' said he, 'we may be virtuous at all times, and we cannot always have a cow to lay hold of just when we may have occasion.' The good women of the city were greatly terrified at two such heretical opinions; they would not allow the judges a moment's peace until they had ordered the execution of those unfortunate men."

Pythagoras was convinced that from the herb up to man, there were many causes of chagrin. However, he obliged the judges and even the devotees to listen to reason, which happened only at that time.

He went afterwards and preached toleration at Crotona; but a bigot set fire to his house, and he was burnt—the man who had delivered the two Hindoos from the flames? Let those save themselves who can!

Perhaps it would be impossible at the present day to convince scientists that oysters formerly conversed intelligibly with mankind and protested eloquently against human injustice; but all men are not scientists, and there are many worthy people who still have implicit faith in ancient Semitic records—who firmly believe in miracles and prodigies—and who would consider it rank heresy to doubt that the serpent, though now as mute as an oyster, formerly held a very animated conversation, in the original Edenic language, with the inexperienced and confiding female who then graced with her charming presence the bowers of Paradise; and this sacred narrative of the "maiden and the reptile" is quite as repugnant to modern science as the sentimental fish story of "Pythagoras and the oyster".

As a matter of fact, the doctrine of the metempsychosis, as taught by the Samian sage, was formerly held in great repute by the most civilized nations of antiquity, and it is surely as easy to credit the assertion of our author, that the ancient Gymnosophists "had learned the language of beasts and plants" as to believe the unquestioned and orthodox statement that a certain quadruped, (*Asinus vulgaris*,) —whose romantic history is recorded in the twenty-second chapter of Numbers,—was once upon a time able to converse in very good Hebrew with Monsieur Balaam, an ancient prophet of great merit and renown.



The resemblance of oysters to mankind, here implied, can only be apparent to the "eye of faith," and lovers of these delicious bivalves will fail to recognize the family likeness.

Pythagoras was born at Samos, about 590 years before the Christian era. He received an education well calculated to enlighten his mind and invigorate his body. He studied poetry, music, eloquence and astronomy, and became so proficient in gymnastic exercises, that in his eighteenth year he won the prize for wrestling at the Olympic games. He then visited Egypt and Chaldea, and gaining the confidence of the priests, learned from them the artful policy by which they governed the people. On his return to Samos he was saluted by the name of *Sophist*, or wise

man, but he declined the name, and was satisfied with that of philosopher, or the *friend of wisdom*. He ultimately fixed his residence in Magna Græcia, in the town of Crotona, where he founded the school called *the Italian*.

This school became very prosperous, and hundreds of pupils received the *secret instructions* of Pythagoras, who taught by the use of ciphers or numbers, and hieroglyphic writings. His pupils were thus enabled to correspond together in unknown characters; and, by the signs and words employed, they could discover among strangers those who had been educated in the Pythagorean school. All the pupils of the philosopher greatly revered their teacher, and deemed it a crime to dispute his word. One of their expressions "*thus saith the Master*," has been adopted by modern sects.

The Samian sage taught the doctrine of the metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul into different bodies, which he had probably learned from the Brahmins; who believed that, in these various peregrinations, the soul or thinking principle was purged from all evil, and was ultimately absorbed into the Divine substance from which it was supposed to have emanated.

Godfrey Higgins in the *Anacalypsis* cites authorities to prove that the doctrine of the metempsychosis was held by "many of the early fathers of the Christians, which they defended on several texts of the New Testament. It was held by Origin, Calcidius, Synesius, and by the Simonians, Basilidians, Valentiniens, Marcionites, and the Gnostics in general. It was also held by the Pharisees among the Jews, and by the most learned of the Greeks, and by many Chinese, Hindoos and Indians.

"When all the circumstances relating to Pythagoras and to his doctrines, both in moral and natural philosophy, are considered," continues Higgins, "nothing can be more striking than the exact conformity of the latter to the received opinions of the moderns, and of the former to the moral doctrines of Jesus Christ."

"The pupils of Pythagoras," says Eschenburg, *Manual of Classical Literature*, "soon amounted to 600, dwelt in one public building, and held their property in common. Under philosophy, the Italic school included every object of human knowledge. But Pythagoras considered music and astronomy of special value. He is supposed to have had some very correct views of astronomy, agreeing with the true Copernican system. The beautiful fancy of the music of the spheres is attributed to him. The planets striking on the ether, through which they pass, must produce a sound; this must vary according to their different magnitudes, velocities, and relative distances; these differences were all adjusted with perfect regularity and exact proportions, so that the movements of the bodies produced the richest tones of harmony; not heard, however, by mortal ears."

Pythagoras taught, and his followers maintained, the absolute equality of property, "all their worldly possessions being brought into a common store". The early Christians had also "all things in common," and the doctrines of Jesus and Pythagoras have many points of resemblance. Both were reformers, both sought to benefit the poor and the oppressed, both taught and practised the doctrines now known as Communism, and both, for their love to the human race, suffered a cruel martyrdom from an orthodox and vindictive priesthood.

In obedience to an oracle, the Romans, long after the death of Pythagoras, erected a statue to his memory as the wisest of mankind.

Godfrey Higgins in the *Anacalypsis* draws aside the veil of Isis, and explains in a satisfactory manner the reason why Pythagoras, like Socrates and Jesus, was condemned to death by the established priesthood. Each of these great reformers had been initiated into the *sacred mysteries*, and each taught his followers by secret symbols or parables that contained a hidden meaning; so "that seeing the *uninitiated* might see and not perceive, and hearing might hear and not understand." The reason that Jesus gave for following this method was "because it is given unto you (*i.e.* the initiated) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (*i.e.* the people) it is not given." (Matt. XIII: II.) The mass of mankind, being excluded from this secret knowledge, were kept in a state of debasement as compared with the favored few who were acquainted with the jealously guarded secrets of the Cabala; and the earnest desire of these great reformers—of these noble men who cheerfully gave their lives to benefit their race—was, without divulging the secrets of their initiation, to teach mankind to partake of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, and to learn "that a virtuous life would secure eternal happiness." Such philanthropic doctrines were denounced as wicked and heretical by the orthodox priesthood, who instinctively oppose human progress, and who, like the silversmith of Ephesus, described by St. Paul, felt that "this our craft is in danger" should the people become enlightened. They therefore, excited a popular clamor, and aroused the worst passions and prejudices of their followers; who, inspired with fanatic zeal, cruelly and wickedly burned Pythagoras of Crotona, poisoned Socrates of Athens, and crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

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**(Louis XVI giving Captain La Pérouse his instructions for his round-the-world voyage
The passions of Louis XVI for the navy, clock-making and mechanics.)**

What is the Origin of Inequality Among Men, and is it Authorized by Natural Law?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

It is of man that I have to speak; and the question I am investigating shows me that it is to men that I must address myself: for questions of this sort are not asked by those who are afraid to honour truth. I shall then confidently uphold the cause of humanity before the wise men who invite me to do so, and shall not be dissatisfied if I acquit myself in a manner worthy of my subject and of my judges.

I conceive that there are two kinds of inequality among the human species; one, which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorised by the consent of men. This latter consists of the different

privileges, which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others; such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful or even in a position to exact obedience.

It is useless to ask what is the source of natural inequality, because that question is answered by the simple definition of the word. Again, it is still more useless to inquire whether there is any essential connection between the two inequalities; for this would be only asking, in other words, whether those who command are necessarily better than those who obey, and if strength of body or of mind, wisdom or virtue are always found in particular individuals, in proportion to their power or wealth: a



Thomas Gainsborough's *Conversation in a Park* (1746-47)

question fit perhaps to be discussed by slaves in the hearing of their masters, but highly unbecoming to reasonable and free men in search of the truth.

The subject of the present discourse, therefore, is more precisely this. To mark, in the progress of things, the moment at which right took the place of violence and nature became subject to law, and to explain by what sequence of miracles the strong came to submit to serve the weak, and the people to purchase imaginary repose at the expense of real felicity.

The philosophers, who have inquired into the foundations of society, have all felt the necessity of going back to a state of nature; but not one of them has got there. Some of them have not hesitated to ascribe to man, in such a state, the idea of just and unjust, without troubling themselves to show that he must be possessed of such an idea, or that it could be of any use to him. Others have spoken of the natural right of every man to keep what belongs to him, without explaining what they meant by belongs. Others again, beginning by giving the strong authority over the weak, proceeded directly to the birth of government, without regard to the time that must have elapsed before the meaning of the words authority and government could have existed among men. Every one of them, in short, constantly dwelling on wants, avidity, oppression, desires and pride, has transferred to the state of nature ideas which were acquired in society; so that, in speaking of the savage, they described the social man. It has not even entered into the heads of most of our writers to doubt whether the state of nature ever existed; but it is clear from the Holy Scriptures that the first man, having received his understanding and commandments immediately from God, was not himself in such a state; and that, if we give such credit to the writings of Moses as every Christian philosopher ought to give, we must deny that, even before the deluge, men were ever in the pure state of nature; unless, indeed, they fell back into it from some very extraordinary circumstance; a paradox which it would be very embarrassing to defend, and quite impossible to prove.

Let us begin then by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating this subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin; just like the hypotheses which our physicists daily form



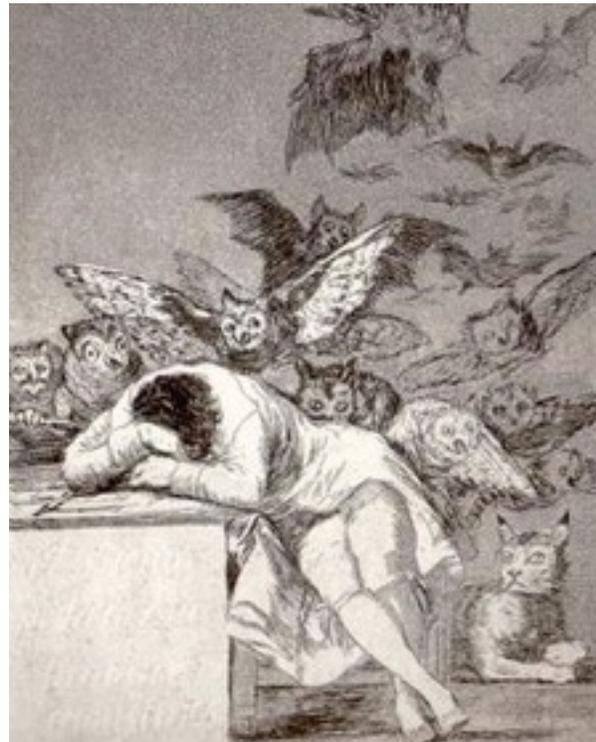
Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam" (1515)

respecting the formation of the world. Religion commands us to believe that, God Himself having taken men out of a state of nature immediately after the creation, they are unequal only because it is His will they should be so: but it does not forbid us to form conjectures based solely on the nature of man, and the beings around him,

concerning what might have become of the human race, if it had been left to itself. This then is the question asked me, and that which I propose to discuss in the following discourse. As my subject interests mankind in general, I shall endeavour to make use of a style adapted to all nations, or rather, forgetting time and place, to attend only to men to whom I am speaking. I shall suppose myself in the Lyceum of Athens, repeating the lessons of my masters, with Plato and Xenocrates for judges, and the whole human race for audience.

O man, of whatever country you are, and whatever your opinions may be, behold your history, such as I have thought to read it, not in books written by your fellow-creatures, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies. All that comes from her will be true; nor will you meet with anything false, unless I have involuntarily put in something of my own. The times of which I am going to speak are very remote: how much are you changed from what you once were! It is, so to speak, the life of your species which I am going to write, after the qualities which you have received, which your education and habits may have depraved, but cannot have entirely destroyed. There is, I feel, an age at which the individual man would wish to stop: you are about to inquire about the age at which you would have liked your whole species to stand still. Discontented with your present state, for reasons which threaten your unfortunate descendants with still greater discontent, you will perhaps wish it were in your power to go back; and this feeling should be a panegyric on your first ancestors, a criticism of your contemporaries, and a terror to the unfortunates who will come after you.

The first part important as it may be, in order to judge rightly of the natural state of man, to consider him from his origin, and to examine him, as it were, in the embryo of his species; I shall not follow his organisation through its successive developments, nor shall I stay to inquire what his animal system must have been at the beginning, in order to become at length what it actually is. I shall not ask whether his long nails were at first, as Aristotle supposes, only crooked talons; whether his whole body, like that of a bear, was not covered with hair; or whether the fact that he walked upon all fours, with his looks directed toward the earth, confined to a horizon of a few paces, did not at once point out the nature and limits of his ideas. On this subject I could form none but vague and almost imaginary conjectures. Comparative anatomy has as yet made too little progress, and the observations of naturalists are too uncertain to afford an adequate basis for any



Francisco de Goya's "Les Caprices" (1797)

solid reasoning. So that, without having recourse to the supernatural information given us on this head, or paying any regard to the changes which must have taken place in the internal, as well as the external, conformation of man, as he applied his limbs to new uses, and fed himself on new kinds of food, I shall suppose his conformation to have been at all times what it appears to us at this day; that he always walked on two legs, made use of his hands as we do, directed his looks over all nature, and measured with his eyes the vast expanse of Heaven.

If we strip this being, thus constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and all the artificial faculties he can have acquired only by a long process; if we consider him, in a word, just as he must have come from the hands of nature, we behold in him an animal weaker than



some, and less agile than others; but, taking him all round, the most advantageously organised of any. I see him satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook; finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast; and, with that, all his wants supplied.

While the earth was left to its natural fertility and covered with immense forests, whose trees were never mutilated by the axe, it would present on every side both sustenance and shelter for every species of animal. Men, dispersed up and down among the rest, would observe and imitate their industry, and thus attain even to the instinct of the beasts, with the advantage that, whereas every species of brutes was confined to one particular instinct, man, who perhaps has not any one peculiar to himself, would appropriate them all, and live upon most of those different foods which other animals shared among themselves; and thus would find his subsistence much more easily than any of the rest.

Francisco de Goya's "Les Caprices" (1797)

Accustomed from their infancy to the inclemencies of the weather and the rigour of the seasons, inured to fatigue, and forced, naked and unarmed, to defend themselves and their prey from other ferocious animals, or to escape them by flight, men would acquire a robust and almost unalterable constitution. The children, bringing with them into the world the excellent constitution of their parents, and fortifying it by the very exercises which first produced it, would thus acquire all the vigour of which the human frame is capable. Nature in this case treats them exactly as Sparta treated the children of her citizens: those who come well formed into the world she renders strong and robust, and all the rest she destroys; differing in this respect from our modern communities, in which the State, by making children a burden to their parents, kills them indiscriminately before they are born.

The body of a savage man being the only instrument he understands, he uses it for various purposes, of which ours, for want of practice, are incapable: for our industry deprives us

of that force and agility, which necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had had an axe, would he have been able with his naked arm to break so large a branch from a tree? If he had had a sling, would he have been able to throw a stone with so great velocity? If he had had a ladder, would he have been so nimble in climbing a tree? If he had had a horse, would he have been himself so swift of foot? Give civilised man time to gather all his machines about him, and he will no doubt easily beat the savage; but if you would see a still more unequal contest, set them together naked and unarmed, and you will soon see the advantage of having all our forces constantly at our disposal, of being always prepared for every event, and of carrying one's self, as it were, perpetually whole and entire about one.

Hobbes contends that man is naturally intrepid, and is intent only upon attacking and fighting. Another illustrious philosopher holds the opposite, and Cumberland and Puffendorf also affirm that nothing is more timid and fearful than man in the state of nature; that he is always in a tremble, and ready to fly at the least noise or the slightest movement. This may be true of things he does not know; and I do not doubt his being terrified by every novelty that presents itself, when he neither knows the physical good or evil he may expect from it, nor can make a comparison between his own strength and the dangers he is about to encounter. Such circumstances, however, rarely occur in a state of nature, in which all things proceed in a uniform manner, and the face of the earth is not subject to those sudden and continual changes which arise from the passions and caprices of bodies of men living together. But savage man, living dispersed among other animals, and finding himself betimes in a situation to measure his strength with theirs, soon comes to compare himself with them; and, perceiving that he surpasses them more in adroitness than they surpass him in strength, learns to be no longer afraid of them. Set a bear, or a wolf, against a robust, agile, and resolute savage, as they all are, armed with stones and a good cudgel, and you will see that the danger will be at least on both sides, and that, after a few trials of this kind, wild beasts, which are not fond of attacking each other, will not be at all ready to attack man, whom they will have found to be as wild and ferocious as themselves. With regard to such animals as have really more strength than man has adroitness, he is in the same situation as all weaker animals, which notwithstanding are still able to subsist; except indeed that he has the advantage that, being equally swift of foot, and finding an almost certain place of refuge in every tree, he is at liberty to take or leave it at every encounter, and thus to fight or fly, as he chooses. Add to this that it does not appear that any animal naturally makes war on man, except in case of self-defense or excessive hunger, or betrays any of those violent antipathies, which seem to indicate that one species is intended by nature for the food of another.

But man has other enemies more formidable, against which he is not provided with such means of defence: these are the natural infirmities of infancy, old age, and illness of every kind, melancholy proofs of our weakness, of which the two first are common to all animals, and the last belongs chiefly to man in a state of society. With regard to infancy, it is observable that the mother, carrying her child always with her, can nurse it with much greater ease than the females of many other animals, which are forced to be perpetually going and coming, with great fatigue, one way to find subsistence, and another to suckle or feed their young. It is true that if the woman happens to perish, the infant is in great danger of perishing with her; but this risk is common to many other species of animals, whose young take a long time before they are able to provide for themselves. And if our infancy is longer than theirs, our lives are longer in

proportion; so that all things are in this respect fairly equal; though there are other rules to be considered regarding the duration of the first period of life, and the number of young, which do not affect the present subject. In old age, when men are less active and perspire little, the need for food diminishes with the ability to provide it.

As the savage state also protects them from gout and rheumatism, and old age is, of all ills, that which human aid can least alleviate, they cease to be, without others perceiving that they are no more, and almost without perceiving it themselves. With respect to sickness, I shall not repeat the vain and false declamations which most healthy people pronounce against medicine; but I shall ask if any solid observations have been made from which it may be justly concluded that, in the countries where the art of medicine is most neglected, the mean duration of man's life is less than in those where it is most cultivated. How indeed can this be the case, if we bring on ourselves more diseases than medicine can furnish remedies? The great inequality in manner of living, the extreme idleness of some, and the excessive labour of others, the easiness of exciting and gratifying our sensual appetites, the too exquisite foods of the wealthy which overheat and fill them with indigestion, and, on the other hand, the unwholesome food of the poor, often, bad as it is, insufficient for their needs, which induces them, when opportunity



offers, to eat voraciously and overcharge their stomachs; all these, together with sitting up late, and excesses of every kind, immoderate transports of every passion, fatigue, mental exhaustion, the innumerable pains and anxieties inseparable from every condition of life, by which the mind of man is incessantly tormented; these are too fatal proofs that the greater part of our ills are of our own making, and that we might have avoided them nearly all by adhering to that simple, uniform and solitary manner of life which nature prescribed. If she destined man to be healthy, I venture to declare that a state of reflection is a state contrary to nature, and that a thinking man is a depraved animal. When we think of the good constitution of the savages, at least of those whom we have not ruined with our spirituous liquors, and

Jean-Marie Fragonard's *The Swing* (1767)

reflect that they are troubled with hardly any disorders, save wounds and old age, we are tempted to believe that, in following the history of civil society, we shall be telling also that of human sickness. Such, at least, was the opinion of Plato, who inferred from certain remedies prescribed, or approved, by Podalirius and Machaon at the siege of Troy, that several sicknesses which these remedies gave rise to in his time, were not then known to mankind: and Celsus tells us that diet, which is now so necessary, was first invented by Hippocrates. Being subject therefore to so few causes of sickness, man, in the state of nature, can have no need of remedies, and still less of physicians: nor is the human race in this respect worse off than other animals, and it is easy to learn from hunters whether they meet with many infirm animals in the course of the chase. It is certain they frequently meet with such as carry the marks of having been considerably wounded, with many that have had bones or even limbs broken, yet have been healed without any other surgical assistance than that of time, or any other regimen than that of their ordinary life. At the same time their cures seem not to have been less perfect, for their not having been tortured by incisions, poisoned with drugs, or wasted by fasting. In short, however useful medicine, properly administered, may be among us, it is certain that, if the savage, when he is sick and left to himself, has nothing to hope but from nature, he has, on the other hand, nothing to fear but from his disease; which renders his situation often preferable to our own.

We should beware, therefore, of confounding the savage man with the men we have daily before our eyes. Nature treats all the animals left to her care with a predilection that seems to show how jealous she is of that right. The horse, the cat, the bull, and even the ass are generally of greater stature, and always more robust, and have more vigour, strength and courage, when they run wild in the forests than when bred in the stall. By becoming domesticated, they lose half these advantages; and it seems as if all our care to feed and treat them well serves only to deprave them. It is thus with man also: as he becomes sociable and a slave, he grows weak, timid and servile; his effeminate way of life totally enervates his strength and courage. To this it may be added that there is still a greater difference between savage and civilised man, than between wild and tame beasts: for men and brutes having been treated alike by nature, the several conveniences in which men indulge themselves still more than they do their beasts, are so many additional causes of their deeper degeneracy.

It appears, at first view, that men in a state of nature, having no moral relations or determinate obligations one with another, could not be either good or bad, virtuous or vicious; unless we take these terms in a physical sense, and call, in an individual, those qualities vices which may be injurious to his preservation, and those virtues which contribute to it; in which case, he would have to be accounted most virtuous, who put least check on the pure impulses of nature. But without deviating from the ordinary sense of the words, it will be proper to suspend the judgment we might be led to form



J.A. Watteau's "Pierrot" (1719)

on such a state, and be on our guard against our prejudices, till we have weighed the matter in the scales of impartiality, and seen whether virtues or vices preponderate among civilised men; and whether their virtues do them more good than their vices do harm; till we have discovered, whether the progress of the sciences sufficiently indemnifies them for the mischiefs they do one another, in proportion as they are better informed of the good they ought to do; or whether they would not be, on the whole, in a much happier condition if they had nothing to fear or to hope from any one, than as they are, subjected to universal dependence, and obliged to take everything from those who engage to give them nothing in return.

Above all, let us not conclude, with Hobbes, that because man has no idea of goodness, he must be naturally wicked; that he is vicious because he does not know virtue; that he always refuses to do his fellow-creatures services which he does not think they have a right to demand; or that by virtue of the right he truly claims to everything he needs, he foolishly imagines himself the sole proprietor of the whole universe. Hobbes had seen clearly the defects of all the modern definitions of natural right: but the consequences which he deduces from his own show that he understands it in an equally false sense. In reasoning on the principles he lays down, he ought to have said that the state of nature, being that in which the care for our own preservation is the least prejudicial to that of others, was consequently the best calculated to promote peace, and the most suitable for mankind. He does say the exact opposite, in consequence of having improperly admitted, as a part of savage man's care for self-preservation, the gratification of a multitude of passions which are the work of society, and have made laws necessary. A bad man, he says, is a robust child. But it remains to be proved whether man in a state of nature is this robust child: and, should we grant that he is, what would he infer? Why truly, that if this man, when robust and strong, were dependent on others as he is when feeble, there is no extravagance he would not be guilty of; that he would beat his mother when she was too slow in giving him her breast; that he would strangle one of his younger brothers, if he should be troublesome to him, or bite the arm of another, if he put him to any inconvenience. But that man in the state of nature is both strong and dependent involves two contrary suppositions. Man is weak when he is dependent, and is his own master before he comes to be strong. Hobbes did not reflect that the same cause, which prevents a savage from making use of his reason, as our jurists hold, prevents him also from abusing his faculties, as Hobbes himself allows: so that it may be justly said that savages are not bad merely because they do not know what it is to be good: for it is neither the development of the understanding nor the restraint of law that hinders them from doing ill; but the peacefulness of their passions, and their ignorance of vice: *tanto plus in illis proficit vitiorum ignoratio, quam in his cognitio virtutis.*

There is another principle which has escaped Hobbes; which, having been bestowed on mankind, to moderate, on certain occasions, the impetuosity of egoism, or, before its birth, the desire of self-preservation, tempers the ardour with which he pursues his own welfare, by an innate repugnance at seeing a fellow-creature suffer. I think I need not fear contradiction in holding man to be possessed of the only natural virtue, which could not be denied him by the most violent detractor of human virtue. I am speaking of compassion, which is a disposition suitable to creatures so weak and subject to so many evils as we certainly are: by so much the more universal and useful to mankind, as it comes before any kind of reflection; and at the same time so natural, that the very brutes themselves sometimes give evident proofs of it. Not to

mention the tenderness of mothers for their offspring and the perils they encounter to save them from danger, it is well known that horses show a reluctance to trample on living bodies. One animal never passes by the dead body of another of its species: there are even some which give their fellows a sort of burial; while the mournful lowings of the cattle when they enter the slaughter-house show the impressions made on them by the horrible spectacle which meets them. We find, with pleasure, the author of the Fable of the Bees obliged to own that man is a compassionate and sensible being, and laying aside his cold subtlety of style, in the example he gives, to present us with the pathetic description of a man who, from a place of confinement, is compelled to behold a wild beast tear a child from the arms of its mother, grinding its tender limbs with its murderous teeth, and tearing its palpitating entrails with its claws. What horrid agitation must not the eyewitness of such a scene experience, although he would not be personally concerned! What anxiety would he not suffer at not being able to give any assistance to the fainting mother and the dying infant!

Such is the pure emotion of nature, prior to all kinds of reflection! Such is the force of natural compassion, which the greatest depravity of morals has as yet hardly been able to destroy! for we daily find at our theatres men affected, nay shedding tears at the sufferings of a wretch who, were he in the tyrant's place, would probably even add to the torments of his enemies; like the bloodthirsty Sulla, who was so sensitive to ills he had not caused, or that Alexander of Pheros who did not dare to go and see any tragedy acted, for fear of being seen weeping with Andromache and Priam, though he could listen without emotion to the cries of all the citizens who were daily strangled at his command.

Electronic text found at: http://www.constitution.org/jjr/ineq_04.htm



Théodore Géricault's "The Raft of the Medusa" (1816-19)

CHAPTER VI

19th Century

The Allure of Nature

Atala (1801)

François de Chateaubriand (1768-1848)



Anne-Louis Girondet de Roussy-Troisnon "The Burial of Atala" (1808)

PROLOGUE

France once possessed, in North America, a vast empire that stretched from Labrador to Florida and from the shores of the Atlantic to the farthest lakes of Upper Canada.

Four great rivers, having their sources in the same mountain chain, appeared on the charts as dividing these immense regions: the St. Lawrence River lost towards the east in the Gulf of that name; the Western River (a cartographic error) shown bearing its waters to unknown seas; the Bourbon River (Saskatchewan) its waters flowing east to north (into Lake Winnipeg, whose waters eventually drain via the Nelson River) into Hudson Bay, and the Mississippi which runs from north to south into the Gulf of Mexico.

This latter river, in its course of over two thousand miles, waters a delightful territory that the inhabitants of the United States call the New Eden, and to which the French have given the noble name of Louisiana. A thousand other rivers, tributaries of the rivers Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Arkansas, Ohio, Wabash, and Tennessee, enrich it with their sediments and fertilise its waters. When all these rivers are swollen with winter floods, when storms blow down whole segments of forest, uprooted trees choke their sources. Soon mud cements them, creepers bind them, and plants, taking root everywhere, serve to consolidate the debris. Carried by the foaming currents, they descend to the Mississippi. The river takes them, drives them towards the Gulf of Mexico, grounds them on sand banks, and swells the number of its mouths. At intervals, it raises its voice, while passing below the hills, and pours its overflowing waters among forest colonnades and the pyramids of Indian graveyards; it is the Nile of the wilderness. But grace is always joined to magnificence in natural scenery: as the main current carries these corpses of pine and oak to the sea, one finds, on the two lateral flows re-ascending along the shore, floating islands of pistia (water-lettuce) and water lilies, whose yellow flowers rise like small pavilions. Green snakes, blue heron, flamingos, and young alligators embark, as passengers, on these flowery vessels, and the fleet, spreading golden sails to the wind, floats off dreamily towards some secluded angle of the river.

Both banks of the Mississippi present the most extraordinary picture. On the western side, savannah stretches as far as the eye can see, its distant waves of verdure seeming to rise into the azure sky where they vanish. In these boundless prairies one sees herds of three or four thousand wild buffalo straying at random. Sometimes a bison, full of years, cuts through the waves as he swims, to sleep amongst the deep grasses, on an island in the Mississippi. With his forehead adorned with twin horns, and his ancient and mud-streaked beard, you would take him for a god of the river, casting a satisfied gaze on the grandeur of its flow, and the wild abundance of its shores.

Such is the view to the west, but the scene is quite different on the opposite bank, revealing an admirable contrast to the former. Suspended above the currents, clustered on the rocks and mountains, and scattered in the valleys, are trees of all shapes, colours, and scents, mingled, growing together, ascending into the air towards heights that exhaust the gaze. Wild vines, catalpas, and gourds intertwine at the foot of these trees, climb their boughs, cling to the extremities of their branches, shooting from maple to tulip-tree, tulip-tree to hibiscus, forming a thousand grottoes, a thousand arches, a thousand lattices. Often wandering from tree to tree, these vines traverse arms of rivers over which they build bridges of flowers. From within these masses, the magnolia lifts its motionless cone; topped by huge white flowers, it dominates the whole forest, and owns no rival but the palm that lightly sways its leafy fans nearby.

Here a multitude of creatures, set down in these retreats by the Creator's hand, spread life and enchantment. At the extremity of avenues, one sees bears drunk on grapes, stumbling over branches of elm; caribou swim in a lake; black squirrels play amongst the dense foliage; mockingbirds, Virginian doves the size of a sparrow, settle on grass red with strawberries; green parrots with yellow heads; crimson woodpeckers; fiery cardinals climb in spirals in the crowns of cypress trees; hummingbirds glitter among Florida jasmine; and bird-eating snakes hiss as they hang from the wooded domes, swaying there like lianas.

If all is silence and rest in the savannah on the other bank of the river, here, on the

contrary, all is movement and a murmur of sound: beaks pecking the trunks of oak-trees; the rustling of creatures on the move, grazing, or crushing the cores of fruits between their teeth; the whisper of waves; faint moans, a muted lowing, or a gentle cooing, filling the wilderness with a wild and tender harmony. But when a breeze rises and animates these solitudes, swaying these floating islands, mingling these masses of white, azure, green, and pink, mixing all colours, merging together all murmurs; then such noises sound from the depths of the forests, such things present themselves to the eye, that I would try in vain to describe them to those who have not traversed these tracts of primitive nature.

After the discovery of the Mississippi by Father Jacques Marquette and the unfortunate Robert Cavelier de La Salle, the first French who settled in Biloxi and New Orleans, formed an alliance with the Natchez Indian nation, whose power was considerable in those parts. Quarrels and jealousies subsequently stained the hospitable land with blood. Among these savages was an old man named Chactas who by his age, his wisdom and experience of life, was a patriarch favoured by those wild places. Like all men he had acquired virtue through adversity. Not only did the forests of the New World bring him their misfortunes, but he carried them with him to the shores of France. Confined in the galleys at Marseilles through a cruel injustice; set free; and subsequently presented to Louis XIV; he had conversed with the great men of the age, and attended the ceremonies at Versailles, the tragedies of Racine, and the funeral orations of Bossuet: in a word, the Savage had observed society in its most splendid forms.

For several years, after returning to the bosom of his country, Chactas enjoyed repose. However the heavens exacted a heavy price for their favour, for the old man became blind. A young girl accompanied his steps beside the Mississippi, as Antigone guided the footsteps of Oedipus on Mount Cythaeron, or as Malvina led Ossian on the cliffs of Morven.

Despite the numerous injustices that Chactas had experienced at the hands of the French, he still held affection for them. He always remembered Fénelon, whose guest he had been, and wished to render some service to that virtuous man's compatriots. A favourable opportunity presented itself. In 1725, a Frenchman named René, driven by passion and misfortune, arrived in Louisiana. He ascended the Mississippi as far as the Natchez, and asked to be received as a warrior of that nation. Chactas having questioned him, and finding him unwavering in his resolution, adopted him as his son and presented him with an Indian wife, named Celuta. Shortly after the marriage, the Savages prepared themselves for a beaver hunt.

Chactas, though blind, was designated by the Council of Sachems (elderly counsellors) to command the expedition, because of the respect in which the Indian tribes held him. Prayers and fasting commence: Medicine men interpret dreams; the Manitous (deities, present in sacred objects) are consulted; sacrifices of tobacco are made; fillets of elk-tongue are burned; they are observed carefully to see if they crackle in the flames, in order to discover the will of the Spirits; at last the members of the party set off, after having eaten of a sacred dog. René is a member of the expedition. With the help of reverse currents, the canoes ascend the Mississippi, and enter the course of the Ohio. It is autumn. The beautiful wilds of Kentucky reveal themselves to the astonished eyes of the young Frenchman.

One night, in the moonlight, while the Natchez slept in their canoes, and the Indian fleet, raising its sails of hide, fled before a light breeze, René, remaining alone with Chactas, asked

him for an account of his adventures. The old man agreed to satisfy him, and sitting beside him at the stern of the canoe, he commenced with these words:

THE TALE

THE HUNTERS

“It is a singular destiny my dear son, that unites us. I see in you the civilized man who chooses to become a savage; you see in me the savage, whom the Great Spirit (I do not know for what purpose) wished to civilize. In the course of our lives, through opposing aims, you have come to occupy my place, and I am seated in yours: so we must inevitably possess a totally different view of things. Who, between us, has won or lost most through this change of position? That, the Spirits alone know, the least knowledgeable of whom has more wisdom than all of mankind put together.

At the next ‘moon of flowers’ (May), it will be seven times ten snows, and three since my mother gave birth to me, on the banks of the Mississippi. The Spaniards had recently settled Pensacola Bay, but no white man yet inhabited Louisiana. I had scarcely counted seventeen falls of leaf, before I advanced with my father, the warrior Outalissi, against the Muscogee, a powerful nation of the Floridas. We joined our Spanish allies, and the battle was fought on a branch of the Mobile River. Areskouï (the war-god) and the Manitous were not favourable to us. Our enemies triumphed; my father lost his life; I was twice wounded in defending him. Oh! If only I had descended then to the land of souls I would have avoided the misfortunes that awaited me on earth! The Spirits commanded otherwise: I was carried by the fugitives to St. Augustine.

In this city, newly built by the Spaniards, I risked being sent to the mines of Mexico, when an old Castilian, named Lopez, moved by my youth and my innocence, offered me sanctuary, and introduced me to his sister with whom he lived, as he lacked a wife.

Both of them showed me the most tender of feelings. I was raised with great care; I was taught by all kinds of masters. But after spending thirty moons in St. Augustine, I was seized by disgust for city life. I was visibly wasting away: sometimes I remained motionless for hours, gazing at the summits of the distant forest; sometimes I might be found sitting by some river-bank, sadly contemplating its flow. I imagined the woods through which its course had passed, and my soul was lost in the solitude.

Unable to resist the urge to return to the wilds, I presented myself before Lopez one morning, dressed in the clothes of a savage, holding my bow and arrows in one hand, and my European clothes in the other. I gave them to my generous patron, at whose feet I fell, shedding torrents of tears. I called myself odious names, I accused myself of ingratitude: ‘But,’ I said, ‘O my father, finally you must see for yourself: I will die if I do not adopt the life of an Indian.’

Lopez, struck with astonishment, tried to dissuade me from my purpose. He represented to me the danger that I would run, by risking my falling into the hands of the Muscogee once more. But seeing that I was determined to adventure all, bursting into tears and hugging me, ‘Go,’ he cried, ‘Child of Nature! Resume that manly independence, of which Lopez has no wish to deprive you. If I were younger myself, I would enter the wilderness with you (of which I too

have sweet memories!) and return you to the arms of your mother. When you are deep in your forests, think now and then of this old Spaniard who gave you shelter, and remember, so as to attract the love of your fellow men, that the first experience you acquired of the human heart, was all in its favour.' Lopez ended with a prayer to the God of Christianity, a religion I had refused to embrace, and we parted tearfully.

The punishment for my ingratitude was not long delayed. My inexperience led me astray in the woods, and I was taken by a party of Muscogees and Seminoles, as Lopez had predicted. I was recognised as Natchez, by my clothing and the feathers that adorned my head. They bound me, though lightly, because of my youth. Simaghan, the head of the band, wanted to know my name, I replied: 'My name is Chactas, son of Outalissi, son of Miscou, who has taken more than a hundred scalps from Muscogee braves.' Simaghan replied: 'Chactas, son of Outalissi, son of Miscou, rejoice; you will be burned to death in the Grand Village.' I replied, 'That is well,' and I sang my song of death.

Wholly captive as I was, I could not, during the first days, restrain my admiration for my enemies. The Muscogees, and above all their allies the Seminoles, breathe out cheerfulness, affection, and contentment. Their step is light, their aspect open and serene. They speak often and volubly; their language is harmonious and smooth. Even age can not deprive the Sachems of their joyful simplicity: like the ageing birds of our woods, they still blend their old songs with the new airs of their young offspring.

The women who accompanied the band, showed a tender pity for and kindly curiosity towards my youth. They questioned me about my mother, about the early days of my life; they wanted to know whether my mossy cradle had been hung among flowering maple branches, whether the breezes rocked me beside the nests of young fledglings. A thousand other questions followed concerning the state of my heart: they asked me if I had seen a white doe in my dreams, and whether the trees in the hidden valley had counselled me to love. I answered those mothers, daughters and wives, in all innocence. I told them: 'You are the graces of day, and the night loves you like the dew. Man comes from your womb to hang at your breasts, and on your lips; you know the magic words that lull all pain. That is what she who brought me into this world told me, she who will never look upon me again! She said further that virgins were mysterious flowers found in solitary places.'

Such praise gave the women much pleasure; and they smothered me with a host of gifts; they brought me coconut milk, maple sugar, sagamite stew, bear hams, beaver pelts, shells to adorn myself, and moss for my bed. They sang, they laughed with me, and then they took to shedding tears, when they thought of my being burned to death.

One night the Muscogee had set up camp on the edge of the forest, I was sitting by the war-fire, with the hunter committed to guarding me. Suddenly I heard the whisper of a garment over the grass, and a woman partly-veiled came to sit beside me. Tears flowed from beneath her eyelids; in the firelight a small gold crucifix shone at her breast. She was uniformly beautiful; in her visage could be seen unknown degrees of virtue and passion, whose appeal was irresistible. To this she joined more tender graces; extreme sensitivity, combined with a profound melancholy, breathed in her eyes; her smile was heavenly.

I thought she was the Virgin of Last Love, that virgin sent to prisoners of war to bring enchantment to their grave. Persuaded that this was so, I spoke to her, haltingly, yet with a

confusion that did not arise from fear of the pyre: ‘Lady, you are worthy of a first love, and are not created to be the last. The movements of a heart that will soon cease to beat would only respond sadly to the movements of yours. How can life and death mingle? You will make me regret the daylight far too deeply. Let some other be happier than I, and a long embrace unite the liana and the oak!’

The young girl then said: ‘I am no Virgin of Last Love. Are you a Christian?’ I replied that I had never betrayed the Spirits of my hut. At these words, the Indian girl made an involuntary movement. She said: ‘I pity you for being no more than a wicked idolater. My mother made me (sic) a Christian; I am named Atala, the daughter of Simaghan, who wears the gold bracelets, and is leader of this band of warriors. We go to Apalachucla where you will be burned.’ As she uttered these words, Atala rose and walked away.”

Here Chactas was forced to interrupt his story. A crowd of memories weighed on his spirit; his dimmed eyes inundated his faded cheeks with tears: so two hidden springs, in earth’s deep night, might be revealed by the water they let fall among the rocks.

“O my son!” he said, at last, “You see that Chactas is in no way wise, despite his reputation for wisdom. Alas, my dear boy, men can see no more than this: that they are still able to weep! Several days rolled by; the daughter of the Sachem returned each evening to speak with me. Sleep had fled from my eyes, and Atala was in my heart, like the memory of my ancestral cradle.

On the seventeenth day of our march, about the time when mayflies emerge from the water, we entered the Great Alachua Savannah. It is surrounded by hills, which, rising one behind another, in ascending towards the clouds, bear tiered forests of sweet gum, citron-trees, magnolia and live oak. The chief, on arriving there, uttered his cry, and the warrior band made camp at the foot of the hills. I was removed to a distance, near the edge of one of those natural wells, so renowned in Florida. I was tied to the foot of a tree; a warrior watched me closely. I had scarcely spent an instant in this place, when Atala appeared beneath the sweet gum trees beside the spring. ‘Hunter,’ she said to the Muscogee brave, ‘if you wish to pursue the deer, I will guard the prisoner.’ The warrior bounded for joy at these words spoken by the chief’s daughter; he leapt from the summit of the hill and strode off over the plain.

Strange contradiction of the human heart! I, who had longed to say things of mystery to one whom I already loved like the sun, was now tongue-tied and confused. I think I would have preferred to have been thrown to the alligators in the river than to find myself alone thus with Atala. The daughter of the wilderness was as troubled as her prisoner; we maintained a profound silence, the Spirits of Love had stolen our words. At last, Atala, making an effort, said this: ‘Warrior, you are very lightly bound; you could easily escape.’ At these words, boldness returned to my tongue, and I answered: ‘Lightly bound, O woman ...!’ I did not know how to end my words. Atala hesitated a few moments then said: ‘Save your self.’ And she released me from the tree. I seized the rope; I placed it again in the hands of the girl, previously a stranger to me, forcing her beautiful fingers to close on my bonds. ‘Take it! Take it up once more!’ I cried. ‘You are mad,’ Atala said in a trembling voice. ‘Wretch! Do you not know that you will be burned to death? What are you thinking of? Do you not realise that I am the daughter of a formidable Sachem?’ ‘There was a time,’ I replied with tears, ‘when I too was carried in a beaver skin, on my mother’s shoulders. My father had a fine hut, and his deer drank the waters of a thousand

torrents; but now I wander without a home. When I am no more, there will be no friend to place a little grass on my body, to screen it from the flies. No one cares for the body of an unfortunate stranger.'

These words moved Atala. Her tears fell into the spring. 'Ah! I replied earnestly, 'if only your heart spoke as mine does! Is not the wilderness free? Have not the forests corners where we may hide? Do those born in huts need many things to be happy! O daughter fairer than a husband's first dreams! O my beloved! Dare to follow my footsteps.' Such were my words. Atala replied in a tender voice: 'My young friend, you have learned the language of the white man, it is easy to deceive an Indian girl.' 'What!' I cried, 'you call me your young friend! Ah! If a poor slave...' 'Well!' she said, leaning towards me, 'a poor slave ...' I resumed eagerly: 'Let a kiss assure you of his loyalty!' Atala heard my prayer. As a fawn appears to hang on the pink flowers of the lianas it seizes with its sensitive tongue, on the steep slopes of a mountain, so I remained suspended on the lips of my beloved.

Alas, my dear son, pain touches closely on pleasure. Who would have thought that the very instant when Atala granted me the first token of her love, would be the very one in which she would destroy my hopes? White-haired old Chactas, what was your astonishment, when the daughter of Sachem pronounced these words! 'Sweet prisoner, I foolishly yielded to your desire; but where can this passion lead us? My religion separates me from you forever ... O my mother! What is it you have done?' Atala ceased suddenly, and stifled some fatal secret that almost escaped her lips. Her words plunged me into despair. 'Well!' I cried, 'I will be as cruel as you; I will not flee. You will see me framed in fire; you will hear my groans, and you will be filled with joy.' Atala seized my hands in both of hers. 'Poor young idolater,' she cried, 'you truly stir my pity! Do you wish me to weep with all my heart? What torment that I cannot fly with you! Unfortunate was your mother's womb, O Atala! Why not throw yourself to the alligators in this river!'

At that moment, the alligators, at the approach of sunset, began to grunt and bellow.' Atala said: 'Let us leave this place.' I dragged Simaghan's daughter to the foot of the hills that formed leafy depths in thrusting their promontories into the savannah. Everything was calm and beautiful in the wilderness. The wood-stork was clattering on her nest, the forest echoed to the monotonous call of quails, the whistling of parakeets, the bellowing of bison and the neighing of the mares belonging to the Seminoles.

Our passage was all but silent. I walked at Atala's side; she held the end of the rope, I had forced her to take up once more. Sometimes we shed tears; sometimes we attempted to smile. A glance, sometimes towards the sky, sometimes fixed on the ground, an ear attentive to the song of the bird, a gesture toward the setting sun, a hand tenderly clasped, a breast in turn throbbing or tranquil, the names of Chactas and Atala softly repeated at intervals ... Oh, love's first walk together, the remembrance of you must be truly powerful, since, after so many years of misfortune, you still stir the heart of old Chactas!

How incomprehensible are mortal beings agitated by passion! I had just abandoned the generous Lopez, I had exposed myself to every danger in order to be free; yet, in an instant, a woman's glance had altered my preferences; my resolutions; my thoughts! Forgetting my country, my mother, my home, and the terrible death that awaited me, I had become indifferent to everything that was not Atala! Without the strength to cling to human reason, I had suddenly

retreated into a species of childhood; and far from being able to do anything to save myself from the evils that awaited me I almost needed help in sleeping and eating!

It was in vain therefore that after our walks in the savannah, Atala, throwing herself at my feet, asked me once more to leave her. I protested that I would return to the camp alone, if she refused to bind me to the tree again. She was obliged to satisfy me, hoping to convince me at another time.

On the following day, which was to decide my fate, we halted in a valley near Cuscowilla, the capital of the Seminoles. These Indians unite with the Muscogees to form the Creek Confederacy. The daughter of that land of palm-trees came to find me in the middle of the night. She led me into a large pine forest, and renewed her entreaties to persuade me to escape. Without answering her, I took her hand in mine, and forced this enchanted doe to wander with me in the forest. The night was delightful. The Spirit of the breeze shook her azure hair, fragrant with the scent of pines, and one breathed the faint smell of amber exhaled by the alligators lying beneath the tamarinds of the river-bank. The moon shone in the midst of a spotless blue sky, and its pearl-grey light fell on the indeterminate summits of the forest. Not a sound was heard, except some distant unknown harmony that reigned in the depth of the trees: it seemed that the soul of solitude sighed throughout the whole extent of wilderness.

Among the trees, we saw a young man who, holding a torch in his hand, resembled the Spirit of Spring, traversing the forest in order to re-animate nature. It was a lover who was off to learn his fate at the hut of his mistress. If the virgin extinguishes the torch, she accepts the vows offered, if she veils herself without extinguishing it, she rejects him as a husband.

The Warrior, slipping through the shadows, chanted these words in a low voice:

‘I outrun the sun’s footsteps on the mountain-summits, to seek my lonely dove among the forest oaks.

I have hung at her neck a string of cowrie-shells; see, three red for my love; three purple for my fears; three blue ones for my hopes;

Mila’s eyes are like an ermine’s, her hair light as a field of rice; her mouth a pink shell garnished with pearls, her two breasts are two little spotless kids, born to one mother on the same day.

Let Mila quench this torch! Let her mouth cast upon it a voluptuous shade! I will render her womb fertile. The hope of the nation will hang at her fecund breast, and I will smoke my peace-pipe beside my son’s cradle!

Oh! Let me outrun the sun’s footsteps on the summits, to seek my lonely dove among the forest oaks!’

So sang the young man, whose accents troubled the depths of my soul, and made Atala’s visage pale. Our hands trembled in each other’s grasp. But we were distracted from this scene, by a scene no less dangerous to us.

We passed a child's grave, which served as a boundary to two nations. It had been placed at the edge of the road, according to custom, so that young women, going to the stream, might draw the soul of the innocent creature into their breast, and return it to its homeland. We saw, at this moment, newly-wed brides who, desiring the fulfilments of motherhood, sought, with parted lips, to gather to them the soul of the little child that they conceived as wandering among the flowers. The true mother arrived next to lay a wreath of maize and white lilies on the grave. She watered the earth with her milk and, seated on the moist grass, spoke to her child in a tender voice:

‘Why do I mourn for you in your cradle of earth, O my newborn? When the fledgling has grown, it must seek its food, and finds many a bitter seed in the desert. At least you did not know weeping; at least your heart has not been exposed to the devouring breath of mankind. The bud that withers in its sheath passes with all its scent, as you, O my son, with all your innocence! Happy are those who die in the cradle, who have known only a mother's smiles and kisses!’

Already captivated by our own hearts, we were overwhelmed by these images of love and motherhood, which seemed to pursue us in these enchanted solitudes. I carried Atala in my arms deep into the forest, and I spoke words that today I would seek for in vain on my lips. The south wind, my dear son, loses its heat in traversing the icy mountains. Memories of love in the heart of an old man are like the light of day reflected by the tranquil orb of the moon, when the sun has set and silence hangs over the huts of Savages.

Who could save Atala? Who could prevent her succumbing to nature? Nothing but a miracle, no doubt, and that miracle was achieved! Simaghan's daughter had recourse to the Christian God; she threw herself on the ground, and uttered a fervent prayer to her mother and the Holy Virgin. It was at this moment, O René, that I gained a marvellous understanding of that religion, which, in the forest, amidst all the hardships of life, can fill the wretched with a thousand blessings; of that religion which, opposing its power to the torrent of passion, alone suffices to defeat them, when all favours them; the secrecy of the woods; the absence of men; and the fidelity of shadows. Oh, how divine she seemed to me, the innocent Savage, the ignorant Atala, who kneeling before an old fallen pine, as at the foot of an altar, offered to her God prayers for an idolatrous lover! Her eyes, raised to the orb of night, her cheeks, shining with tears of religion and love, were of an immortal beauty. Several times it seemed to me as if she were about to take flight towards the heavens; and several times I thought I saw Spirits, descending with the moon's rays, and heard them among the branches of the trees, those Spirits that the God of the Christians sends to hermits among the rocks, when he is disposed to gather them to him. I was distressed, fearing that Atala had only a little time to spend on earth.

Yet she shed so many tears, she showed herself so wretched, that I might perhaps have consented to leave, if a war-cry had not echoed through the forest. Four armed men hurled themselves on me: we had been discovered; the warrior chieftain had given orders to pursue us.

Atala, who resembled a queen in the nobility of her carriage, disdained to speak to these warriors. She gave them a proud glance, and went to Simaghan's side.

She could obtain no mercy. They redoubled my guard; they multiplied my bonds; they sent my lover away. Five nights passed, and we reached Apalachucla situated on the bank of the River Chata Uche. I was promptly crowned with flowers; they painted my face with azure and

vermilion; beads were attached to my nose and ears, and they placed a chichikoué (gourd rattle) in my hand.

Thus prepared for the sacrifice, I entered Apalachucla, to the repeated cries of the crowd. All was over with me, when suddenly the sound of a conch was heard, and the Mico, or head Sachem of the nation, ordered them to gather round.

You know, my son, the torments to which the Indians subject prisoners of war. Christian missionaries, at the peril of their lives, and through tireless acts of charity, had succeeded, among several nations, in achieving the substitution of a milder punishment, that of slavery, for the horrors of the stake. The Muscogee had not yet adopted this custom; though a significant number had declared in its favour. It was to decide on this important matter that the Mico had summoned the Sachems. I was led to the place of their deliberations.

Not far from Apalachucla, the council house stood on an isolated mound. Three circles of columns formed the elegant architecture of this rotunda. The columns were of carved and polished cypress; they increased in height and thickness, and decreased in number, as they approached the centre, marked by a single pillar. From the top of this pillar ran strips of bark, which, passing over the top of the other columns, covered the pavilion, in the shape of a fan.

The Council assembled. Fifty aged warriors, in beaver cloaks, sat on tiers facing the door of the pavilion. The great leader was seated in their midst, holding the peace pipe, freshly painted to indicate war, in his hand. To the right of the old men, were seated fifty women wearing robes covered with swans' feathers. Warrior chieftains, tomahawk in hand, feathers in their hair, arms and chests stained with blood, sat on the left.

At the foot of the central column, the council-fire burned. The leading medicine man, surrounded by his eight sacred attendants, and dressed in long robes, adorned with an owl trophy on his head, poured sweet-gum resin into the flames, and offered a sacrifice to the sun. These triple ranks of aged men, mature women, and warriors; the priests; the clouds of incense; the sacrifice; all served to give the council an imposing appearance.

I stood there, tightly-bound, in the midst of the gathering. The sacrifice completed, the Mico began speaking, and delivered a simple explanation of the matter that had brought them together. He threw a belt of blue wampum beads to the floor, as a witness to the authority of what he had just said.

Then a Sachem of the tribe of the Eagle rose, and spoke thus:

'My father the Mico, Sachems, Women, Warriors of the four tribes, of Eagle, Beaver, Snake and Turtle, do not waver from the customs of our ancestors; let us burn the prisoner, not soften our hearts. The white-man's custom that they propose to you, would only prove pernicious. Accept the redwampum that represents my words. I have spoken.' And he threw a belt of red beads onto the ground.

A woman now rose and said:

'My father the Eagle, you have the mind of a fox, and the cautious slowness of a turtle. I would polish the bond of friendship with you, and together we will plant the tree of peace. But let us alter our ancestral customs, in as much as they have proved fatal. Let us have slaves to cultivate our fields, and hear no more the howls of the captive, that trouble a mother's heart. I have spoken.'

As we see the waves of the sea breaking during a storm, as the dry leaves in autumn are lifted by the whirlwind, as the reeds of the Mississippi bow and rise again at a sudden flood, as a group of elk stags bell in the depths of the forest, so the Council murmured and sounded. The Sachems, warriors, and women spoke alternately or all together. Interests conflicted, opinions were divided, the council was nearly dissolved; but finally ancient custom prevailed, and I was condemned to the stake.

Circumstance caused my punishment to be delayed; the Festival of the Dead or the Feast of Souls was due. It is the custom not to put to death any prisoner during the days devoted to this ceremony. I was closely guarded; and doubtless the Sachems removed Simaghan's daughter, as I saw no sign of her.

Meanwhile, the tribes from more than three hundred miles around were arriving in droves to celebrate the Feast of Souls. They had built a long-hut in a remote place. On the appointed day, each clan exhumed the remains of their fathers from their individual graves, and the skeletons were suspended, by rank and family, from the walls of the Chamber of Communal Ancestry. The winds, (a storm had risen) forests, and cataracts roared outside, while the elders of the various nations concluded treaties between themselves of peace and alliance beneath the bones of their fathers.

They celebrated funeral-games; foot-races; the ball-game; five-stones. Two girls tried to capture a willow-wand. Their breasts touched, their hands fluttered over the wand which they raised above their heads. Their lovely bare feet intertwined, their lips met, their sweet breath mingled, their hair flowed down and interwove; they looked towards their mothers, blushing: the crowd applauded. The medicine man invoked Michabo, the Great Hare; god of the waters. He told of the Great Hare's battles against Matchi-Manitou, the spirit of evil. He spoke of the first man, and the first woman Atahensic, cast down from heaven for loss of innocence; of the earth red with fraternal blood, her son the impious Jouskeka slaying his brother the righteous Tawiskaron; the flood descending at the command of the Great Spirit; Masso alone saved in his bark canoe, and the raven sent out to discover land; he spoke too of the beautiful Enda, rescued from the land of the spirits by her husband's sweet songs.

After these games and songs, they prepared to grant their forefathers an eternal burial place.

On the banks of the River Chata Uche, stood a wild fig tree consecrated to the popular religion. The young girls were accustomed to wash their bark cloaks in this place and expose them to the breezes of the wilderness, under the branches of this ancient tree. It was there that a huge grave had been dug. They left the funeral chamber, singing a hymn to the dead; each family carrying some sacred relic. They reached the grave, and lowered the relics into it, which were spread out in layers, separated by bear and beaver pelts. The grave-mound rose steadily, and on it was planted the Tree of Tears and Sleep.

Let us have pity for mankind, my dear son! These same Indians whose customs were so touching; these same women who testified to so tender an interest in me, now, with loud cries, demanded punishment be exacted on me; and entire tribes delayed their departure for the pleasure of seeing a young man suffer dreadful torment.

In a valley to the north, some distance from the Grand Village, a grove of cypress and pine trees rose, called the Grove of Blood. It was reached via the remains of one of these monuments

of whose origin we know nothing, being the work of a people now forgotten. At the centre of this wood, lay an open space, where they sacrificed prisoners of war. They lead me there in triumph. All was ready for my death: they had planted there the stake dedicated to Areskoui (the war-god); pines, elms, and cypresses fell beneath the axe; the pyre rose higher; the spectators constructed an amphitheatre from branches, and trunks of trees. Each devised a torment: one proposed taking my scalp, another to scorch my eye sockets with heated hatchets. I commenced my death chant.

‘I do not fear torture: I am brave, O Muscogees, I defy you! I despise you as less than women. Outalissi, my father, the son of Miscou, drank from the skulls of your most famous warriors; you will draw not one sigh from my heart.’

Provoked by my song, a warrior pierced my arm with an arrow; I said: ‘Brother, I thank you.’

Despite the efforts of the executioners, the preparations for my sacrifice could not be completed before sunset. They consulted the medicine man who forbade their disturbing the Spirits of the shades, and my death was therefore delayed until the next day. But in their impatience to enjoy the spectacle, and to be ready all the sooner at daybreak, the Indians did not quit the Grove of Blood; they lit great fires and began feasting and dancing.

I, however, was stretched out on my back. Ropes extending from my neck, legs, and arms were attached to stakes driven into the ground. Warriors lay down on the ropes, and I could not make a move, without their being warned. The night advanced: the songs and dances ceased by degrees; the fires gave off no more than a reddish glow, before which could be seen the shadows of various Savages as they passed; all slept; as the noise of men died away, that of the wilderness increased, and to the tumult of voices succeeded the moans of the wind in the forest.

It was the hour when a young Indian woman, who has just become a mother, wakes with a start in the middle of the night, because she thinks she has heard the cries of her first-born demanding sweet nourishment. Eyes fixed on the heavens, where a crescent moon wandered among the clouds, I reflected on my fate. Atala seemed to me a monster of ingratitude. To abandon me at the moment of my execution, I who had devoted myself to the flames rather than leave her! And yet I felt that I still loved her, and would die joyfully for her.

There is in extreme pleasure, a pang that awakens us, as if to warn us to enjoy the fleeting moment; in the greatest pain, on the contrary, some heaviness sends us to sleep; eyes wearied with weeping naturally seek to close, and the goodness of Providence makes itself evident in the midst of our misfortunes. I yielded, despite myself, to that heavy sleep which the wretched sometimes taste. I dreamed that the ropes were removed; I seemed to feel that relief one experiences when, after being strongly bound, a helping hand loosens our chains.

This sensation became so intense, that it encouraged me to raise my eyelids. By the moonlight, a ray of which escaped between two clouds, I saw a tall white figure bending over me, and occupied in silently un-ravelling my bonds. I was about to cry out, when a hand, which I instantly recognized, closed my mouth. A single rope remained, but it seemed impossible to cut, without waking a warrior who covered it entirely with his body. Atala reached out her hand to it, the warrior half-awakened, raised himself from the ground. Atala was motionless, watching him. The Indian thought he was dreaming of a ghost among the ruins; he lay down again, closing his eyes and invoking his Manitou. The knot was untied. I rose; I followed my deliverer, who placed

the tip of a bow in my hand while grasping its other extremity. But what dangers surrounded us! Sometimes we were near to striking against sleeping Indians; sometimes a guard challenged us, and Atala replied in an assumed voice. Children were crying, dogs barking. Scarcely had we emerged from the fatal enclosure when howls shook the forest. The camp woke, a thousand lights were lit; Savages with torches were seen running from all sides; and we flung ourselves headlong on our way.

When dawn broke over the Appalachians, we were already far away. What was my happiness when I found myself once again in the solitude with Atala, Atala my deliverer, Atala who gave herself to me forever! Words failed my tongue; I fell to my knees; and I said to Simaghan's daughter: 'Men are such little things, but when the Spirits visit them, then they are less than nothing. You are a spirit, you have visited me, and I can not speak before you.' Atala gave me her hand with a smile: 'I had to accompany you', she said, 'since you could not escape without me. Tonight, I won over the medicine man with gifts, I made your tormentors drunk with fire-water, and I must venture my life for you, since you were ready to relinquish yours for me. Yes, young idolater,' she added in a tone which frightened me, 'the sacrifice will be reciprocal.'

Atala gave me the weapons she had taken care to bring; then she bandaged my wound. In cleaning it with a morsel of papaya, she moistened it with her tears. 'This is a balm,' I said 'that you apply to my wound.' 'I fear lest it may not prove a poison,' she replied. She tore one of the veils from her breast, from which she first made a compress, fastening it with a lock of her hair.

That intoxication which incapacitates the Indians for some length of time, and is for them a kind of illness, doubtless prevented them from following us at first. If they sought us later, it is likely they did so towards the west, convinced that we had tried to reach the Mississippi; but we had followed the direction of the Pole star, directing our path by the moss growing on the tree-trunks.

We were not long in realising that we had gained little by my deliverance. The wilderness now revealed its immeasurable solitudes to us. Inexperienced in forest life, diverted from our true path, and moving at random, what would become of us? Often, in gazing at Atala, I remembered that ancient story of Hagar, that Lopez had read to me, she who had wandered in the desert of Beersheba, long ago, when men lived three times as long as the oak-tree.

Atala made me a cloak from the inner bark of an ash-tree, since I was virtually naked. She embroidered moccasins of muskrat skin, using a porcupine bristle. I took care in turn of her adornment. Sometimes I would put on her head a wreath of the blue mallows we found on our route in abandoned Indian cemeteries; sometimes I made her necklaces from the red seedpods of azaleas; and then I would take to smiling, in contemplating her marvellous beauty.

When we encountered a river, we would cross on a raft or by swimming. Atala would support herself with a hand on my shoulder; and like two wandering swans, we traversed the solitary waves.

Often in the intense heat of day, we sought shelter under the mossy cedars. Almost all the trees in Florida, especially cedar and live-oak, are covered with a white moss (*tillandsia usneoides*: Spanish moss) that reaches from their branches to the ground. When at night, by moonlight, you see on the bare savannah an isolated oak clothed in this drapery you might imagine it to be a ghost, trailing its long veils behind it. The scene is no less picturesque in broad daylight; for a host of butterflies, brilliant flies, hummingbirds, green parakeets, and blue jays,

cling to these mosses, which produce the effect of a white wool tapestry on which some European weaver has embroidered insects and glittering birds.

It was in the shade of these smiling inns, prepared by the Great Spirit, that we rested. When the winds descended from heaven to sway our great cedar, so that the aerial castle built among its branches was set afloat along with the birds and travellers sleeping in their shelter; so that a thousand sighs rose from the corridors and vaults of our moving edifice; not even the wonders of the ancient world could approach that monument of the wilderness.

Every night we lit a large fire, and we built a shelter, of bark raised on four stakes. If I had killed a wild turkey, a pigeon, or a wood-cock, we suspended it before the oak-wood fire, at the end of a thin pole planted in the ground, and we gave to the wind the task of turning the hunter's prey. We ate the lichens called tripe-de-roche, the bark of sweet birch, and may-apples, which have a peach and raspberry taste. Black walnuts, maples, and sumach, provided wine for our table. Sometimes I would seek, among the reeds, a plant (*sarracenia flava*; the yellow pitcher plant) whose flower, an elongated cone, contained a glass of the purest dew. We blessed Providence which, in the soft stem of a flower, had placed this clear spring among the noisome marshes, as it had set hope in the depths of hearts sickened with grief, as it had made virtue spring from the breast amidst the miseries of life.

Alas, I soon discovered that I was deceived by Atala's apparent calm. As we advanced, she became sadder. Often she trembled without cause, and turned her head about anxiously. I caught her throwing me a passionate look, which she transferred to the sky with deep melancholy. What frightened me most of all, was a secret, a thought hidden in the depths of her soul, which I saw in her eyes. Always pulling at me and pushing me away, reviving and destroying my hopes, when I thought I had progressed a little way into her heart, I found myself at the same point as before. How many times she told me: 'O my young lover! I love you like the shade of the trees in the middle of the day! You are beautiful as the wilderness with all its flowers and breezes. If I lean towards you, I shudder; if my hand falls on yours, I feel as if I am about to die. The other day when the wind blew your hair across my face as you were resting on my breast, I thought I felt the light touch of invisible spirits. Yes, I have seen the young she-goats on the hills of Oconee; I have heard tell of men full of days, but the gentleness of young goats and the wisdom of old men are less delightful and less powerful than your words. Ah, but, my poor Chactas, I shall never be your wife!'

The perpetual conflict between Atala's love and her religion, her abandonment to tenderness and yet the chasteness of her morality, the pride of her character joined to a profound sensibility, the elevation of her soul in great matters, its susceptibility in small ones, made her a being incomprehensible to me. Atala could have no small influence on a man; filled with passion, she was filled with power; a man was forced either to love her or hate her.

After a precipitous march of fifteen nights' duration, we entered the Allegany Mountain Range, and reached a branch of the Tennessee River, which empties into the Ohio. On Atala's advice, I made a canoe by stitching bark together using fir-tree roots, and coating it with plum-tree resin. Then I embarked with Atala, and we abandoned ourselves to the river's flow.

The Indian village of Sticoe, with its pyramidal tombs and ruined huts, appeared on our left, on turning a promontory; we passed the Keowee Valley on the right, terminated by a view of the huts of Jore, hanging from the face of the mountain of the same name. The river that swept us

onwards flowed between high cliffs, beyond which they the setting sun could be seen. These profound solitudes were undisturbed by the presence of man. We saw only a solitary Indian hunter who, leaning on his bow, and motionless on the brow of a cliff, appeared, on the mountain, like a statue raised to the Spirit of this wilderness.

Atala and I united our silence with the silence of that landscape. Suddenly that daughter of exile, in a voice full of emotion and melancholy, sang of her lost country:

‘Happy are those who have not seen the smoke of a stranger’s feast; who have only ever sat at their father’s table!

If the Mississippi blue jay asked the nonpareil (*cyanospiza ciris*: the painted bunting) of Florida: “Why do you complain so sadly? Do you not possess here beautiful waters and lovely shade, and all kinds of pasture as in your forests?” “Yes,” the fugitive nonpareil would reply; “but I nest in the jasmine, who can bring me that? And do you have with you the sunshine of my savannah?”

Happy are those who have not seen the smoke of a stranger’s feast; who have only ever sat at their father’s table!

After hours of painful travel, the passenger sits sadly. He gazes around him at the roofs of men; the traveller has nowhere to lay his head. The traveller knocks at the cabin door; he places his bow behind the door, he asks for hospitality; the owner gestures and the traveller takes up his bow again, and returns to the wilds!

Happy are those who have not seen the smoke of a stranger’s feast; who have only ever sat at their father’s table!

Marvellous tales told beside the hearth; tender effusions of the heart; enduring habits of love so necessary to life; you fill the days of those who never leave their country! Their tombs are in their homeland, with the setting sun, the tears of their friends and the charms of religion.

Happy are those who have not seen the smoke of a stranger’s feast; who have only ever sat at their father’s table!’

So sang Atala. Nothing interrupted her plaints, except the unintelligible voice of our canoe among the waves. At two or three points only, they were repeated by a faint echo, to which a second fainter echo replied; and to that a third fainter still: one would have believed that the souls of two lovers, once wretched as we, attracted by that touching harmony, were pleased to sigh with those last sounds in the hills.

However, the solitude, the constant presence of the beloved object, even our troubles, increased our love with every moment. Atala’s strength began to fail her, and passion, by exhausting her body, was near to conquering her virtue. She continually prayed to her mother, whose angry shade she seemed to wish to appease. Sometimes she asked if I could not hear a plaintive voice, if I could not see flames rising from the earth. As for me, exhausted, but ever

burning with desire, thinking that I might be irretrievably lost in the midst of the forest, I prepared a hundred times to seize my bride in my arms, a hundred times I offered to build a hut on these shores, and bury ourselves there together. But she always resisted: 'Consider,' my young friend, she said, 'what a warrior owes his country. What is a woman beside the duties you must discharge? Take courage, son of Outalissi, do not murmur against your destiny. The human heart is like the fresh-water sponge, which now absorbs pure water in times of calm, and now swells with clouded water when the sky troubles the wave. Has that sponge the right to say: "I thought there would be no storms; that the sun would never burn?"'

O René, if you fear the miseries of the heart beware of solitude: great passions are solitary, and to transport them to the wilderness is to grant them their power once more. Overwhelmed by anxieties and fears, at risk of falling into the hands of hostile Indians, of being engulfed by the waters, bitten by snakes, devoured by wild creatures, finding a meagre supply of food hard to come by, and not knowing which way to turn our steps, it seemed our troubles could be no greater, when accident arrived to crown them.

It was the twenty-seventh sun since we had left the cabins: the moon of fire (July) had begun its course, and everything around us signalled a storm. Towards the hour when Indian mothers hang up their hoe on a branch of a sabin bush (*juniperus sabina*; creeping juniper), and parrots retreat into cypress hollows, the sky began to cloud. The noises of solitude died away, the wilderness fell silent, and the woods rested in a universal calm. Soon the rumbling of distant thunder, spreading through forests as old as the earth, brought forth sublime sounds. Fearful of being swamped, we hastened to gain the river bank, and take shelter in the woods.

The place was a marsh. We moved with difficulty under a canopy of wild sarsaparilla (*aralia nudicaulis*, false sarsaparilla), among vines, indigo plants (*indigofera*), haricots, and rampant lianas that hindered our feet like nets. The spongy ground shook around us and at every instant we were near to being engulfed in some quagmire. Innumerable insects and huge bats blinded us; rattlesnakes rustled on all sides; and wolves, bears, wolverines, and wildcats that were hiding in these retreats, filled them with their cries.

But the darkness increased: lowering clouds entered the forest shade. The sky was torn and lightning traced a fleeting diamond-shape of fire. A strong wind out of the sunset, piled cloud on cloud; the forest bowed; the sky was rent in swift succession, and through the crevasses fresh heavens and fiery landscapes were seen. How terrible, how magnificent a spectacle! Lightning set fire to the woods; the blaze spread like flaming hair; columns of sparks and smoke assailed the clouds that vented their lightning-strikes amidst the vast conflagration. Then the Great Spirit covered the mountains with dense shadow; amidst the chaos a huge confused howling arose created by the roar of the winds, the moaning of the trees, the cries of wild creatures, the crackling of the flames, and the repeated claps of thunder, muttering as they died over the waters.

The Great Spirit knows that in that moment I saw only Atala, I thought only of her. Under the leaning trunk of a birch-tree, I managed to protect her from the torrential rain. Seated beneath the tree, holding my beloved in my lap, and warming her bare feet between my hands, I was more joyful than a new mother who feels for the first time the infant leap in her womb.

We listened to the noise of the storm; suddenly I felt Atala's tears fall on my breast: 'Storm of my heart,' I cried, 'is this a drop of your rain-shower?' Then closely embracing her that I loved: 'Atala,' I said, 'you are hiding something from me. Open your heart to me, O my beautiful

one! It is best for a friend to look into one's soul! Tell me of that other secret sorrow, you persist in hiding. Ah! I see, you are weeping for your homeland.' She replied swiftly: 'Child of mankind, how should I weep for that country, when my father was not from its land of palm trees?' 'What,' I replied, in great surprise, 'your father was not from the land of palms! Who then set you on this earth? Tell me.' Atala then spoke these words:

'Before my mother brought by her marriage, to the warrior Simaghan, thirty mares, twenty buffaloes, a hundred measures of oil pressed from acorns, fifty beaver skins and many other riches, she had known a white man. However, the mother of my mother threw water in her face, and forced her to marry the magnanimous Simaghan, a kingly man, honoured like a god among the tribes. But my mother said to her new husband: 'My womb has conceived; kill me.' Simaghan replied: 'May the Great Spirit guard me from any evil action! I will not mutilate you, I will not cut off your nose or ears, for you have proven true and have not dishonoured my bed. The fruit of your womb will my fruit and I will not come to you until after the departure of the birds of the rice-field, when the thirteenth moon shines.' At that time, I broke the waters of my mother's womb, and began to grow, till I was proud as a Spaniard or a Savage. My mother made me a Christian, so that her God and my father's God was also my God. Then heartache overcame her, and she descended into that little cave adorned with animal-skins, from which no one returns.'

Such was Atala's tale. 'And who then was your father, poor orphan?' I said. 'What name did men give him on earth, and what name did he bear among the Spirits?' 'I have never bathed the feet of my father,' said Atala, 'I only know he lived with his sister at St. Augustine, and has always been faithful to my mother: Philip was his name among the angels, and men called him Lopez.'

At these words I uttered a cry that rang throughout the solitude; the sound of my transports mingled with the noise of the storm. Claspings Atala to my heart, I sobbed out: 'O my sister! O daughter of Lopez, daughter of my benefactor!' Atala, frightened, asked me what caused my outburst; but when she learned that Lopez was the generous host who had adopted me at St. Augustine, and whom I had left in order to be free, she too was seized by confusion and joy.

The arrival of this fraternal friendship which came to join its love to our love overwhelmed our hearts. Now Atala's resistance would be rendered ineffectual; I felt her vainly raise a hand to her breast, and make a signal movement; I had already clasped her, I was already intoxicated by her breath, I had already drunk all the magic of love from her lips. Eyes lifted to heaven, illuminated by lightning flashes, I held my wife in my arms, in the presence of the Eternal. Nuptial glory, worthy of our misfortunes and the grandeur of our love: proud forests stirring your lianas and tree-tops as curtains and canopy to our bed, blazing pine-trees forming flaming torches for our marriage, swollen river, roaring mountains, Nature terrible and sublime, were you not a mere device intended to deceive us, unable to cloak one man's bliss for even an instant with your mysterious horrors!

Atala offered no more than a feeble resistance; I had achieved a moment of happiness, when suddenly a fiery flash, followed by a burst of lightning, furrowed the dense shadows, filled the forest with sulphurous smoke, and shattered a tree at our feet. We fled. To our surprise, in the silence that succeeded, we heard the sound of a bell! Both listened, in astonishment, to that sound, so foreign to the wilderness. A moment later, a dog barked in the distance; it drew nearer,

redoubled its howls, reached us, then yelped with joy at our feet; an old Hermit, carrying a little lantern, followed behind through the darkness of the forest. 'Let Providence be blessed!' he cried out, when he saw us. 'I have been seeking you for some time! The dog sensed you were there at the start of the storm, and led me here. Great God! How young they are! Poor children! How they must have suffered! Come: I have brought a bear-skin, it will cloak this young woman; there is a little wine in this gourd. Praise God in all his works! His mercy is very great, and His goodness infinite!'

Atala fell at the feet of the priest: 'Chieftain of all prayer,' she said, 'I am a Christian. Heaven it is that has sent you to save me.' 'My daughter,' said the hermit, raising her, 'we always ring the Mission bell at night and during storms, to summon strangers; and, like our brothers in Lebanon and among the Alps, we have taught our dog to seek out lost travellers.'

As for me I barely comprehended the hermit; such charity seemed to me so far beyond mankind, I thought I must be dreaming. By the light of the little lantern the hermit was holding, I saw that his beard and hair were soaked with water; his feet, hands and face had been bloodied by the thorns. 'Old man', I cried, at last, 'what a heart you must have, not to fear the lightning-bolts!' 'Fear!' the priest replied, with a show of warmth, 'fear, when there are human beings in peril, and I can be useful to them! I would be then an unworthy servant of Jesus Christ!' 'But do you know,' I said, 'that I am no Christian?' 'Young man,' replied the hermit, have I asked your religion? Jesus Christ did not say: "My blood will cleanse this man, but not that." He died for Jew and Gentile, and he simply viewed all men as brothers and unfortunates. What I do for you here is so very little, and elsewhere you will find much greater assistance; but the glory ought not to redound to the priests. What are we feeble solitaries but the crude instruments of a heavenly work? Ah! How cowardly would a soldier prove if he retreated, when his leader, cross in his hand, his forehead crowned with thorns, went before him for the salvation of mankind?'

These words gripped my heart; tears of admiration and tenderness fell from my eyes. 'My dear children,' said the missionary, 'I govern in these forests a small tribe of your brother savages. My cave is quite near here on the mountain; come and warm yourselves in my dwelling; you will not find there the conveniences of life, but you will have shelter; and we must thank God's goodness for it, since there are many for whom it is lacking.'"

THE LABOURERS

"There are just men whose conscience is so tranquil, that one cannot approach them without participating in the peace they exhale, so to speak, from their hearts and their speech. The more the Hermit spoke, the more I felt the passions in my breast subside, and even the storm in the heavens seemed to die away at the sound of his voice. The clouds had soon dispersed enough to allow us to leave our retreat. We emerged from the forest, and began to climb the slopes of a high mountain. The dog trotted ahead, carrying the quenched lantern on the end of a stick. I held Atala's hand, and we followed the missionary. He often turned round to look at us, gazing in pity at our youth and wretchedness. A book was suspended from his neck; he leaned on a white stick. He was tall, his visage pale and thin, his looks simple and sincere. He had not the cold and unprepossessing manner of a man born without passions; it was evident that he had seen hard

times, and the furrows on his brow revealed the true scars of passion, healed by the power and love of God and mankind. When he spoke to us, standing erect and motionless, with his long beard, his modestly downcast eyes, the affectionate tone of his voice, all revealed in him something calm and sublime. Anyone who has seen, as I have, Father Aubry walking alone with his stick and his breviary in the wilds, has a true idea of the Christian pilgrim on earth.

After half an hour of dangerous passage along the mountain paths, we reached the missionary's cave. We entered through moist trailing ivy and squashes (*cucurbita maxima*), which the rain had dragged from the rocks. Inside there was only a mat of papaya leaves, a calabash to hold water, a few wooden pots, a spade, a tame snake, and on a stone that served as table, a crucifix and the Christians' book.

The man of ancient days hastened to light a fire of dry vine-stems; he broke some maize between two stones, and having made it into a cake, he set it to bake in the ashes. When the cake had taken on a beautiful golden colour in the fire, he served it to us piping hot, with walnut butter from a maple-wood pot.

The evening having brought serenity once more, the servant of the Great Spirit proposed that we go and seat ourselves at the entrance to the cave. We followed him to a place which commanded an extensive view. The remnants of the storm stretched in confusion eastwards; the fires from the conflagration that lightning had ignited in the forest still shone in the distance; at the foot of the mountain, a whole grove of pine-trees had been hurled into the swamp, and the river drove onwards pell-mell waterlogged clay, tree-trunks, the corpses of animals, and dead fish, whose silvery bellies could be seen floating on the surface of the water.

In the midst of this scene, Atala recounted our story to this aged Spirit of the Mountain. His heart seemed touched, and tears flowed down his beard: 'My child,' he said to Atala, 'you must offer your sufferings to God, for whose glory you have already done so much; it will bring you repose. See these forests filling with smoke, these torrents ebbing, these clouds dissipating; do you think that He who can calm such a storm can not soothe the pain of a human heart? If you have no better retreat, my dear girl, I offer you a place in the midst of the little flock that I have had the joy of summoning to Jesus Christ. I will instruct Chactas, and I will give him to you as your husband when he is worthy of being such.'

At these words, I fell at the Hermit's feet, shedding tears of joy; but Atala became pale as death. The old man raised me in a kindly manner, and it was then that I realised that both hands had been mutilated. Atala understood his sufferings at once. 'Barbarians!' she cried.

'My daughter', the priest said with a smile, 'how can this compare with what my Divine Master suffered? If the idolatrous Indians tortured me, they are poor blind creatures whom God will one day enlighten. I cherish them even more in proportion to the evils they have done me. I could not settle in my homeland to which I returned, and where an illustrious queen did me the honour of wishing to see these trivial marks of my ministry. And what more glorious reward could I receive for my work, than to have obtained permission from the head of our religion to celebrate the divine sacrifice with these mutilated hands? It only remained for me, following such an honour, to try and make myself worthy of it: I returned to the New World, to consume the rest of my life in serving my God. I will soon have inhabited this solitude for thirty years, and tomorrow it will be twenty-two years, since I took possession of this cave. When I arrived in these parts, I found only wandering families, whose manners were ferocious and way of life

wretched. I made them listen to words of peace, and their manners have gradually softened. They now live together at the foot of this mountain. I have tried, in teaching them the ways of salvation, to teach them the finer arts of life, but not to excess, so keeping those honest people in that simplicity that makes for happiness. As for myself, afraid to worry them by my presence, I retired to this cavern, where they come to consult me. It is here that, far from men, I worship God in the grandeur of these solitudes, and prepare for death, that speaks to me of old age.'

With these words, the Hermit knelt down, and we imitated his example. He began a prayer aloud, to which Atala responded. Silent lightning rent the heavens again in the east, and above the sunset clouds, three suns shone together (twin parhelia, sundogs, or phantom suns alongside the sun). A family of foxes, scattered by the storm, stretched out their black muzzles at the edge of a cliff, and the rustling of plants could be heard, drying in the evening breeze, their battered stalks lifting again on every side.

We returned to the cave, where the hermit spread a bed of moss from the cypress-trees for Atala. A profound languor was visible in the eyes and movements of the girl; she gazed at Father Aubry, as if she wished to communicate a secret to him, but something seemed to hold her back, either my presence, or a certain sense of shame, or the futility of its avowal. I heard her rise in the middle of the night; she sought the Hermit, but since he had yielded his bed to her, he had gone to contemplate the beauty of the heavens and pray to God on the mountaintop. He told me, the next day, that it was often his custom to do so, even during the winter, loving to see the bare summits of the forest swaying, the clouds flying through the sky, and to hear the winds and torrents moaning in the solitude. My sister was therefore obliged to return to bed, where she fell asleep. Alas, filled with hope, I merely saw in Atala's languidness the signs of a transient weariness!

The next morning, I awoke to the songs of mockingbirds and cardinals, roosting in the acacias and laurels which surrounded the cave. I went to pick a magnolia flower, and I laid it, moistened with morning tears, beside the sleeping Atala's head. I hoped, in accord with the religion of my country, that the soul of some child which had died in infancy would descend upon this flower in a drop of dew, and a happy dream would carry it to the womb of my future wife. Then I sought out my host; I found him, the hem of his robe tucked into his pockets, a rosary in hand, waiting for me seated on the trunk of a pine tree that had fallen due to its venerable age. He proposed I should go with him to the Mission, while Atala was yet asleep; I accepted his offer, and we set off at once.

In descending the mountain, I came across oak-trees on which the Spirits appeared to have incised strange characters. The hermit told me he had traced them himself, that they were verses by an ancient poet named Homer, and a few sentences by another poet still more ancient, named Solomon. There was some sort of mysterious harmony between the wisdom of those ages, those verses carved into the moss, the old Hermit who had etched them, and the old oak-trees which served as books.

His name, age, and the date of his mission were also marked on a reed from the savannah, at the foot of these trees. I was astonished at the fragility of this last monument: 'It will last longer than me' replied the priest, 'and will still possess more value than the little that I have achieved.'

From there, we arrived at the entrance to a valley, where I saw a marvellous object: it was a natural bridge, similar to that in Virginia, of which you may have heard. Men, my son, especially those in your country, often mimic nature, and their copies are always of a limited size, it is not thus with nature when she seems as if imitating the work of men, offering them, in effect models. It is then that she throws bridges from the summit of one mountain to the summit of another, suspends roadways in the clouds, extends rivers as canals, sculpts mountains to form pillars, and for ponds excavates seas.

We passed under the single arch of the bridge, and found ourselves before another wonder: it was the cemetery of the Indians from the Mission, or the Groves of the Dead. Father Aubry had permitted his neophytes to inter their dead in their own manner and retain the Indian name for their place of burial; he had merely sanctified the place by a cross. The ground was divided, like the communal cornfield, into as many lots as there were families. Each lot possessed an individual stand of timber, which varied according to the taste of those who had planted it. A stream meandered noiselessly through the midst of these groves, which was called the Stream of Peace. This felicitous sanctuary of souls was closed to the east by the bridge under which we had passed; two hills bordered it to the north and south; it was only open towards the west, where stood a large wood of pine-trees. The trunks of these trees, red mottled with green, ascending without branching to their summits, resembled tall columns, and formed the peristyle of this temple of the dead; a religious sound reigned there, like the dull murmur of an organ beneath the arched vaulting of a church; but when one penetrated the depths of the sanctuary, one heard only the hymns of birds celebrating an eternal festival in memory of the dead.

Leaving this wood, we discovered the Mission village, situated beside a lake in the middle of a savannah dotted with flowers. It was reached along an avenue of magnolias and live oaks that bordered one of those old roads which are found near the mountains that divide Kentucky from the Floridas. As soon as the Indians saw their pastor on the plain, they abandoned their work and ran to meet him. Some kissed his robe, others aided his footsteps; mothers lifted their young children in their arms to allow them to see the follower of Jesus Christ, who shed tears. He inquired, as he walked, about events in the village; he gave advice to one, gently chided another, he spoke of the harvest to be gathered, children to be educated, sorrows needing consolation, and mingled talk of God with all his speeches.

Thus escorted, we arrived at the foot of a large cross beside the path. It was there that the servant of God was accustomed to celebrate the mysteries of his religion: 'My dear neophytes,' he said, turning to the crowd, 'you have a new brother and sister; and as an additional happiness, I see that Divine Providence spared your harvest yesterday: here are two great reasons to thank him. Therefore let us offer holy sacrifice, and let each bring to it profound meditation, a lively faith, infinite gratitude and a humble heart.'

As soon as the divine priest had donned a white tunic of mulberry bark, sacred vessels were taken from a tabernacle at the foot of the cross, the altar was prepared on a piece of rock, water was drawn from a nearby stream, and a bunch of wild grapes furnished the sacrificial wine. We all knelt in the long grass, and the mystery commenced.

Dawn appearing behind the mountains, lit the east. All was of gold or rose-colour in the solitude. The sun, announced by all this splendour, emerged at last from an abyss of light, and its first rays fell on the consecrated host, which the priest, at this very same moment, raised in the

air. O the charm of religion! O the magnificence of Christian worship! As priest an old hermit; for an altar a rock; for a church the wilderness; as assistants innocent Savages! No, I have no doubt; that at the moment when we prostrated ourselves, the great mystery was accomplished, and that God descended on earth, because I felt Him descend into my heart.

After the sacrifice, from which as far as I was concerned only Lopez's daughter was lacking, we returned to the village. There appeared, in that place, the most moving blend of social life with the life of nature: at the corner of a cypress grove in the ancient wilderness, burgeoning agriculture could be seen; ears of maize rolled in waves of gold over the trunk of a felled oak, and the sheaf of one summer replaced the tree three centuries old. Everywhere one could see the forest in flames sending thick smoke into the air, while the plough progressed slowly through the remains of tree-roots. Surveyors with long chains were measuring the field; arbitrators were establishing primary ownership; the bird yielded its nest; the lair of the wild beast gave way to a cabin; the rumbling of forges could be heard, and the blows of the axe creating last echoes, themselves expiring with the trees that gave them birth.

I wandered with delight in the midst of these scenes, made sweeter by thoughts of Atala and the dreams of happiness with which I indulged my heart. I admired the triumph of Christianity over the savage life; I saw the Indian becoming civilised at the bidding of religion; I attended the wedding of primitive man to the Earth: Man, by this mighty contract, abandoning to the land the legacy of his sweat, and the land engaging, in return, to bear faithfully the harvest, offspring and ashes of Man.

Meanwhile, they brought a child to the missionary, who baptised him among the jasmine flowers, beside a spring, as a coffin, in the midst of games and toil, was carried to the Groves of the Dead. A husband and wife received the nuptial blessing beneath an oak tree, and we then went to help them settle in a corner of the wilderness. The pastor went before us, granting his blessing here and there, on rock, tree, and fountain, as formerly, according to the Christians' book, God blessed the untilled earth, in granting his legacy to Adam. This procession, which with its flocks followed its venerable leader, pell-mell, from rock to rock, seemed to my softened heart like those migrations of the first peoples, when Shem, with his children, walked through the unknown world, following the sun that went before him.

I wished to know, of the holy hermit, how he ruled his children; he replied to me with great kindness: 'I have laid down no laws for them; I have only taught them to love, to pray to God, and to hope for a better life: all the world's laws are there. You can see, in the centre of the village, one hut that is larger than the others: it serves as a chapel in the rainy season. They assemble there, morning and evening, to praise the Lord, and when I am absent, an old man takes the prayers; since old age is, like motherhood, a kind of sacred office. Then they go to work in the fields, and though the holdings are separate, so that everyone can learn social economy, the harvest is placed in communal granaries, to maintain fraternal love. Four old men distribute equally the proceeds of labour. Add to this religious ceremonies, many hymns, the cross where I celebrated the mysteries, the young elm tree under which I preach on fine days, our graveyard near our fields of corn, our waters into which I plunge the little ones and the Saint Johns of this new Bethany, and you will have a complete idea of this kingdom of Jesus Christ.'

The Hermit's words delighted me, and I felt the superiority of this calm and busy life over the idle wanderings of the Savage.

Oh, René, I do not murmur against Providence, but I confess that I never remember that evangelical society, without feeling the bitterness of regret. If only a hut, with Atala, on these shores, might have rendered my life happy! There all my journeys would have ended; there with my wife, unknown to mankind, hiding my happiness in the depths of the forest, my life would have flowed onwards like these rivers of the wilderness, that lack even a name. Instead of this peace which I had dared to promise myself then, with what trouble have I not filled my days! A continual plaything of fortune, shipwrecked on every shore, long exiled from my country, and finding on my return, only a ruined hut and my friends in the grave: such was to be the destiny of Chactas.”

THE DRAMA

“If my dream of happiness was yet alive, it was also of short duration, and my awakening awaited me at the Hermit’s cave. I was surprised, on arriving there at midday, not to see Atala running to meet our steps. Some sudden horror seized me. Approaching the cave, I hardly dared to call to Lopez’s daughter: my imagination was equally terrified, as to whether sound or silence would succeed to my cries. Even more afraid of the darkness which prevailed at the rocky entrance, I said to the missionary: ‘O you, whom the heavens support and strengthen, penetrate these shadows.’

How weak is the man whom passions dominate! How strong the man who trusts in God! There was more courage in that religious heart, burdened by its seventy-six years than in all my youthful ardour. The man of peace entered the cave, and I stood outside filled with terror. Soon a low murmur, like a complaint, issued from the depths of the rock, and struck my ear. Heaving a cry, and regaining my strength, I rushed into the darkness of the cavern ...Spirits of my Fathers: you alone know the sight that met my eyes!

The Hermit had lit a torch of pine; he grasped it with a trembling hand over Atala’s bed. That lovely young woman half-raised on one elbow, appeared pale and dishevelled. Drops of sweat, the product of agony, glistened on her forehead; her eyes half-extinguished still seeking to express her love for me, and her mouth attempting to smile. Struck as if by a lightning-bolt, staring, arms outstretched, lips parted, I remained motionless. A profound silence reigned for a moment among the three personages at this scene of sorrow. The Hermit was first to break it: ‘This,’ he said, ‘is merely a fever brought on by fatigue, and if we resign ourselves to the will of God, he will take pity on us.’

At these words, the flow of blood, which had seemed suspended, resumed its course through my heart, and with the adaptability of the Savage, I passed suddenly from excessive fear to excess trust. But Atala allowed me but a moment. Her head swaying sadly, she beckoned us to approach her bed.

‘My father,’ she said, in a faint voice, turning to the priest, ‘I am near to death. O Chactas! Listen without despair to the fatal secret I have concealed, in order not to render you wretched too, and to show obedience to my mother’s memory. Try not to interrupt me with expressions of sorrow, which would hasten the few moments I have left to live. I have many things to tell, with

a heart whose beat is fading ... with an icy burden that my breast can scarcely bear ... I feel I cannot be too swift.'

After a few moments silence, Atala continued:

'My sad fate began almost before I had seen the light. My mother conceived me in misfortune; I exhausted her womb, and her flesh was torn in giving birth to me: they despaired of my life. To preserve it, my mother uttered a vow: she promised to the Queen of Angels that I would dedicate my virginity to her, if I escaped death ... A fatal vow that sends me onwards to the tomb!

I had just turned fifteen, when I lost my mother. A few hours before she died she called me to her bed. "My daughter," she said, in the presence of the missionary who was bringing consolation to her last moments, "my daughter, you know the vow I made for you. Would you deny your mother? Oh, my Atala! I leave you in a world that is not worthy of possessing a Christian amidst all these idolaters, who persecute the God of your father and mine, that God who, after having granting you life, saved you by a miracle. Ah, my dear child, by accepting the virgin's veil, you will simply be abandoning the cares of the wilderness and the fatal passions that have troubled your mother's womb! Come, my beloved, come; swear on this picture of the Saviour's Mother, held in the hands of this holy priest, and between those of your dying mother, so as not to compromise me in the sight of heaven. Remember that I gave a promise on your behalf in order to save your life, and if you do not keep my promise, you will plunge your mother's soul into eternal torment."

O my mother! Why did you speak thus! O Religion that brings me both pain and happiness, that destroys and consoles me! And you, dear and sad object of a passion that consumes me to the very point of death, you see now, O Chactas, what has determined the severity of our fate! ... Bursting into tears, and throwing myself into my mother's arms, I promised all that I was asked to promise. The missionary pronounced the terrible words over me, and handed me the scapular that binds me forever. My mother threatened me with her curse if I ever broke my vows, and after having recommended me to keep that secret hidden inviolably from the heathen persecutors of my religion, she died, while holding me in her embrace.

I did not at first realise the danger of my oaths. Full of enthusiasm, and a true Christian, proud of the Spanish blood flowing through my veins, I could see only men around me who were unworthy to receive my hand; I congratulated myself on having no other spouse but my mother's God. I saw you, a young handsome captive, I was moved by your fate, I dared to speak to you at the stake in the forest; thus I felt the whole weight of my vows.'

As Atala finished speaking these words, clenching my fists, and glaring at the missionary with a menacing expression, I exclaimed: 'This then is the religion you praised so highly! Have done with this vow that snatches Atala from me! Have done with this God who thwarts nature! Man, priest, why have you come to these forests?'

'Calm your self,' said the old man, in a dreadful voice, 'subdue your passions and avoid, blasphemer, bringing the wrath of heaven upon you! It ill suits you, young man, having barely entered upon life, to complain of your sorrows! Where are the marks of your suffering? Where are the injustices you have endured? Where are the virtues which alone might give you some right to complain? What service have you rendered? What good have you done? Ah! Wretch, you offer me only passion, and dare accuse Heaven! When you have, like Father Aubrey, spent thirty

years in exile among the mountains, you will be less swift to judge the designs of Providence; you will realise that you know nothing, that you are nothing, and that there is no punishment so severe, no evil so terrible, that the corrupt flesh does not deserve to suffer it.'

The lightning which shot from the old man's eyes, the beard that beat on his breast, his violent words, made him resemble a god. Overcome by his majesty, I fell at his knees and asked forgiveness for my anger. 'My son,' he replied in a tone so sweet that remorse entered my soul, 'my son, it is not on my own behalf that I reprimanded you. Alas, you are right, my dear boy: I came to do a little good in these forests, and God has no servant more unworthy than I. But, my son, Heaven, Heaven; behold what one should never accuse! Forgive me if I have offended you, but listen to your sister. There may be a cure, let us not lose all hope. Chactas, a religion as divine as this, has made a virtue of hope!'

'My young friend,' Atala continued, 'you have witnessed my struggles, and yet you have only seen a small part; I have hidden the rest from you. No, the black slave who waters with his sweat the burning sands of Florida is less miserable than Atala has been. Urging you to flee, yet certain to die if you left me; fearing to fly with you into the wilderness, and yet panting after the shade of the woods... Ah! If it had only been a question of leaving family, friends, home; if it had even meant merely (a fearful thing) the loss of my soul! But your shade, O my mother, your shade was always there, reproaching me for its suffering! I heard your complaint; I saw the flames of hell consuming you. My nights were arid and filled with phantoms, my days were desolate; the evening dew dried as it fell on my burning flesh; I parted my lips to the breeze, and the breeze, far from bringing me its freshness, blazed with the fire of my breath. What agony to see you constantly beside me, far from all others, in profound solitude, and feeling between you and me an unconquerable barrier! To pass my life at your feet, to serve you like a slave, to prepare your meals and your bed in some unnoticed corner of the universe, would have proved the ultimate happiness to me; this happiness, I touched, and could not enjoy. What plans have I not dreamed of! What dreams have not issued from this sad heart! Sometimes, fixing my eyes on you, I was on the point of forming desires as foolish as they were culpable: sometimes I wanted to be the only other living creature on earth; sometimes, feeling a divinity that restrained me in my dreadful transports, I would have wished that divinity annihilated, as long as, I might have been hurled, clasped in your arms, from abyss to abyss with the remnants of God and the world! Even now ... Shall I tell you? Even now, when eternity is about to engulf me, as I prepare to appear before the inexorable Judge, at the instant when, in obedience to my mother, I see with joy my virginity consume my life; well, by a terrible contradiction, I endure the regret of not having been yours!'

'My daughter,' the missionary interrupted, 'your pain leads you astray. This excess of passion in which you indulge, is seldom wholesome, it is not even natural; and in that it is less culpable in the eyes of God, because it is rather something errant in the mind than vicious in the heart. You must therefore give over these outbursts, which are not worthy of your innocence. But also, my dear child, your ready imagination, has made you too anxious concerning your vows. Religion exacts no greater sacrifice than accords with humanity. Its true sentiments, its temperate virtues are even above the exalted sentiments and virtues of so-called heroism. If you have succumbed, well then, poor lost sheep, the Good Shepherd will have been seeking you, to return you to the flock. The treasures of repentance are open to you: it requires torrents of blood to

wash away our sins in the eyes of mankind; a single tear suffices God. Rest assured, then, my dear daughter, your situation demands calm; let us address ourselves to God, who heals all the wounds of his servants. If it is His will, as I hope, that you escape this suffering, I will write to the bishop of Quebec; he has the required authority to relieve you of your vows, which are only simple vows, and you will live out your days beside me with Chactas as your husband.'

At these words, spoken by the old man, Atala was seized with a lengthy convulsion, from which she only emerged with signs of being in terrible pain. 'What!' she said, clasping her hands passionately, 'there was a remedy! I could be relieved of my vows!' 'Yes,' my daughter,' replied the priest, 'and you still may.' 'It is too late, it is too late!' she cried. 'I must die, at the moment when I learn that I might have been happy! If only I had met this saintly old man earlier! What happiness I might have enjoyed, beside you, with Chactas a Christian...comforted, reassured by this august priest... in this wilderness ... forever ... Oh! That would have been too great a happiness!' 'Be calm,' I cried, seizing the wretched girl's hand; 'be calm, we shall taste of this happiness.' 'Never, Never!' cried Atala.' 'Why should we not?' I replied. 'You do not know all,' the virgin girl cried: 'Yesterday, it was...during the storm...I was about to violate my vows, I was about to plunge my mother into the flames of the abyss; her curse was already upon me; I had already betrayed that God who had saved my life...When you kissed my trembling lips, you did not know, you could not know that you clasped one who was already dead!' 'Oh, Heavens!' exclaimed the missionary, 'dear child, what have you done?' 'I have committed a crime, my father,' said Atala, her eyes wandering, 'but I have only destroyed myself, I have saved my mother.' 'Have done, then,' I cried filled with terror. 'Well!' she said, 'I anticipated my weakness; leaving the village, I brought with me...' 'What?' I replied, in horror. 'Poison!' said the priest.' 'It is in my veins,' cried Atala.

The torch fell from the Hermit's hand; I fell, half-dead, beside Lopez's daughter; the old man clasped us both in his arms, and all three, in the darkness, mingled our tears for an instant over that funereal couch.

'Let us stir ourselves, stir ourselves!' the courageous hermit soon cried, lighting a lamp. 'We are wasting precious moments: intrepid Christians, let us brave the assaults of adversity; the halter at our neck, ashes on our heads, let us throw ourselves at the feet of the Most High, to implore His mercy, or to submit to His decrees. Perhaps there is yet time. My daughter, you should have warned me last night.'

'Alas! My father,' said Atala, 'I looked for you, last night but Heaven, as a punishment for my sins, kept you from me. Any help would anyway have been useless; since the Indians themselves, so skilled in what concerns poison, know no remedy for that which I have taken. O Chactas! Judge of my astonishment when I saw that the effect was not as sudden as I had anticipated! My love has increased my strength; my soul was not able to part from you so readily.'

It was no longer with my sobs that I punctuated Atala's story, it was by those transports only known to Savages. I rolled furiously on the ground, arms writhing, biting at my hands. The old priest, with a wonderful tenderness, ran from brother to sister, lavishing his attention on us. In the quiet of his heart and under the burden of years, he knew how to hearken to our youth, and his religion furnished him with accents softer and even more intense than our own passions. That priest, who for forty years had consumed himself each day in the service of

God and mankind in those mountains, surely he recalled for us the image of those burnt sacrifices of the tribes of Israel, sending up their smoke before the Lord, in the high places?

Alas, in vain he attempted to remedy Atala's ills. Fatigue, pain, poison and a passion more deadly than all poisons put together, united to rob that solitude of its flower. Towards evening, frightening symptoms became manifest, a general numbness seized Atala's limbs, and the extremities of her body began to grow cold: 'Touch my fingers,' she said to me, 'do you not find them cold as ice?' I did not know how to answer, and my hair stood on end with horror; then she added: 'Yesterday, my beloved, your touch alone made me shudder, and now I can no longer feel your hand, I can barely hear your voice, the objects in this cave are vanishing one by one. Are there no birds singing? The sun must be near setting now? Chactas, its rays in the wilderness, will shine so beautifully on my grave!'

Atala realizing that these words might plunge us into tears, said: 'Forgive me, my dear friends, I am very weak; but perhaps I will grow stronger. Yet to die so young, in an instant, when my heart is so full of life! Priest: take pity on me, sustain me. Do you think my mother will be content, and that God will pardon me for what I have done?'

'My daughter,' the good priest replied, shedding tears, and wiping them away with his trembling, and mutilated fingers; 'my daughter, all your troubles arise from ignorance; it is your savage education and lack of necessary instruction that has misled you; you did not know that a Christian must not dispose of her own life. Console yourself, my dear lamb; God will forgive you, because of the innocence of your heart. Your mother, and the foolhardy missionary who directed you, were more culpable than you; they applied their powers to leading you into an indiscreet vow; but the peace of the Lord be with them! You show all three a terrible example of the dangers of enthusiasm, and lack of enlightenment in matters of religion. Rest assured, my child that He who sounds out hearts and minds will judge you according to your intentions, which were pure, and not your action which is reprehensible.

As for life, if the time has come to rest in the Lord, ah, my dear child, how little you lose, in losing this world! Despite the solitude in which you lived, you have known sorrows; what then would you have thought if you had witnessed the evils of society, if, landing on the shores of Europe, your ear had been struck by the long cry of pain that rises from those ancient lands? The inhabitant of the cabin, and the palace, all suffer, all groan here on earth; queens have been seen to weep like the simplest of women, and you would marvel at the quantity of tears the eyes of kings may contain!

Is it your love that you regret? My daughter, that is as much as to cry over a dream. Do you know the heart of man, and can you enumerate the vagaries of his desire? Rather you might calculate the number of waves that the sea displays in a storm. Atala, acts of sacrifice and generosity are not eternal bonds: one day, perhaps, disgust would have followed satiety, the past would have counted for nothing, and only the disadvantages of a poor mistaken union would have been apparent. Without doubt, my daughter, the most beautiful love was that of the man and woman first formed by the hand of the Creator. Paradise had been created for them, they were innocent and immortal. Perfect in soul and body, they were completely suited: Eve was created for Adam and Adam for Eve. If they could not preserve that state of happiness, how should any couple after them? Not to speak of marriages between the first-born of men of these ineffable unions, where the sister was the brother's wife, where love and fraternal affection mingled in the

same heart, and the purity of the one increased the delight of the other. All these unions were troubled; jealousy crept to the altar, made of turf, on which goats were sacrificed; it reigned in Abraham's tent; and in these same beds where the patriarchs tasted so much joy that they were consoled for the deaths of their mothers.

Do you flatter yourself then, my child that you would be more innocent and happy in your relationship, than those holy families from whom Jesus Christ was descended? I will spare you the details of household cares, quarrels, mutual recriminations, and all the hidden anxieties that watch over the pillow of the conjugal bed. Woman renews her pain every time she becomes a mother, and she marries with tears. What ill there is simply in the loss of a newborn, to whom she has yielded her milk, and who dies at her breast! The mountain echoed with grief and nothing could console Rachel whose children were no more. The bitterness attached to human affections is so deep, that I have seen in my own country great ladies, loved by kings, quit the court to bury themselves among cloisters, and scourge that rebellious flesh, whose pleasure is merely pain.

But perhaps you will say that these examples do not concern you; your whole ambition reduced to living in a secluded cabin with the man of your choice; that you looked less for the sweetness of marriage than the charms of that folly youth calls love? Illusions, chimeras, conceits, the dreams of a faulty imagination! For I too, my daughter, I too have experienced the troubles of the heart: this head was not always bald, nor this breast as calm as it seems today. Trust to my experience: if Man, constant in his affections, could endlessly nourish a feeling constantly renewed, no doubt solitude and love would make him the equal even of God; because those are the two eternal delights of the Great Being. But the soul of man becomes wearied, and never loves the same object deeply for long. There are always some points at which two hearts fail to meet, and they are sufficient at last to render life unbearable.

Finally, my dear girl, the great error men make in their dreams of happiness is to forget the infirmity of death attached to their nature: life must end. Sooner or later, whatever your happiness might have been, that beautiful face would have altered to the universal visage that the grave imparts to the family of Adam; even the eye of Chactas could not then distinguish you from your sisters in the grave. Love does not extend its empire beyond the coffin. What shall I say? (O vanity of vanities!) What shall I say of earthly friendship? Would you, my dear girl, know its extent? If a man returned to the daylight, years after his death, I doubt he would be received with joy, even by those who have shed the most tears in his memory; so quickly are fresh relationships formed, so readily do we adopt new habits, so natural to man is inconstancy, so small a thing is our own life even in the hearts of our friends!

Thank Divine Goodness therefore, my dear girl, that withdraws you so swiftly from this vale of misery. Already the white robe and shining crown of the virgin is being prepared for you among the clouds; already I hear the Queen of Angels calling to you: "Come, my worthy servant, come, my dove, to be seated on the throne of innocence amidst all those girls who have sacrificed their beauty and youth in the service of humanity, the education of children, and the master-works of penitence. Come, mystic rose, to rest on the breast of Jesus Christ. That coffin, the bridal bed you have chosen, will not prove false; and the embraces of your heavenly spouse will never end!"

As the last rays of sunlight quell the breezes, and spread calm over the sky, so the peaceful words of that old man calmed the passions in my beloved's breast. She seemed concerned only with my pain, and the means of helping me to bear her loss. Now she would tell me that she would die in happiness if I promised to dry my tears; now she would talk of my mother, my home; she sought to distract me from present pain, by awakening past sufferings in me. She exhorted me to patience, to virtue. 'You will not always be unhappy,' she said: 'if Heaven tests you today, it is only to render you more sympathetic to the troubles of others. The heart, O Chactas, is like those trees that only give their balm for the wounds of men when the axe has wounded them themselves.'

When she had thus spoken, she turned to the missionary, sought from him the solace that she had made me feel, and, by turns consoling and consoled, she gave and received the word of life on the bed of death.

But the hermit's zeal redoubled. His old bones were revived by the ardour of charity, and ever preparing remedies, relighting the fire, smoothing the bed, discoursed admirably concerning God and the happiness of the righteous. With the torch of religion in hand, he seemed to precede Atala to the grave, to show her marvellous secrets. The humble cave was filled with the grandeur of this Christian death, and heavenly spirits were no doubt attending at the scene where religion fought alone against love, youth and death.

It triumphed, this divine religion, and its victory was indicated by a saintly sorrow that succeeded the first transports of passion in our hearts. Towards midnight Atala seemed to revive so as to repeat the prayers that the priest pronounced at the side of her bed. Shortly afterwards, she gave me her hand, and with a voice that was barely audible, said to me: 'Son of Outalissi, do you remember that first night when you took me for the Virgin of Past Loves? What a singular omen of our destiny!' She paused; then continued: 'When I realise I am leaving you forever, my heart makes so profound an effort to revive, that I almost feel the power to make myself immortal by force of love. But, Oh, my Lord, may your will be done!' Atala was silent for a few moments; then she added: 'It only remains for me to ask forgiveness for the evils I have caused you. I have tormented you greatly through my pride and my whims. Chactas, a little earth thrown on my body will set a whole world between us, and deliver you forever from the weight of my misfortunes.'

'Forgive you!' I replied, drowning in tears, 'Is it not I who have caused all your troubles?' 'My friend,' she said, interrupting me, 'you have made me very happy, and if I were to begin life again, I would still prefer the happiness of having loved you for a few moments in wretched exile, to a lifetime of rest in my homeland.'

Here Atala's voice faded; the shadow of death spread around her eyes and mouth; her wandering fingers searched for something to hold; she conversed softly with invisible spirits. Soon, making an effort, she tried, but in vain, to remove the little crucifix from her neck; she asked me to unfasten it myself, and she said:

'When I spoke to you for the first time, you saw this cross shining on my breast, in the glow of the fire; it is the only property Atala possesses. Lopez, your father and mine, sent it to my mother a few days after my birth. Receive this legacy from me, O my brother; keep it in memory of my misfortunes. You will have recourse to that God of the unfortunate among the sorrows of your life. Chactas, I have a last request to make. Friend, our union was fated to be

brief on earth, but after this life there is another longer one. How terrible it would be to be parted from you forever! Today, I merely go ahead of you, and go to await you in the heavenly empire. If you have loved me, take instruction in the Christian religion, which will prepare you for our meeting. It reveals a miracle to your sight, that religion, since it enables me to leave you, without my dying in an agony of despair. Yet, Chactas, I only ask a simple promise from you, I know exactly what demanding a vow may cost. Perhaps such a vow would part you from some woman happier than me ... O my mother, forgive your daughter. O Virgin, restrain your anger. I fall into weakness once more, and steal from you, O my God, thoughts that should only be yours!’

Racked with pain, I promised Atala that I would embrace the Christian religion some day. At this spectacle, the Hermit, rising, in an inspired manner, and extending his arms towards the roof of the cave, cried: ‘It is time; it is time to call on God here!’

Scarcely had he uttered those words, when a supernatural power forced me to bow my head, and kneel at the foot of Atala’s bed. The priest opens a secret hiding-place which contained a gold ciborium, covered with a silken veil; he bowed in profound adoration. The cave seemed suddenly illuminated; the voices of angels were heard in the air and the tremor of celestial harps and when the Hermit took the sacred vessel from its tabernacle I thought I saw God himself emerge from the mountain slopes.

The priest opened the ciborium; he took the host, white as snow, between two fingers, and approached Atala, pronouncing mysterious words. The saint raised his eyes towards Heaven, in ecstasy. All his sorrows seemed suspended, all his life gathered on his lips; they parted, and moved respectfully to meet the God hidden within the mystical bread. Then the divine old man dipped a little piece of cotton into consecrated oil; he rubbed Atala’s temples, he gazed for a moment at the dying girl, and suddenly firm words escaped him: ‘Depart, Christian soul: go to join your Creator!’ Raising my bowed head, I cried out, as I looked towards the vessel of holy oil: ‘My father, will this remedy grant Atala life?’ ‘Yes, my son,’ said the old man falling into my arms, ‘eternal life!’ Atala had just expired.”

At this point, and for the second time since beginning his story, Chactas was obliged to stop. His tears flooded down, and his voice gave out only broken phrases. The blind Sachem opened the clothes at his breast, and drew forth Atala’s crucifix.

“Behold,” he cried, “the pledge of Adversity! O René, O my son, you see what I can no longer see! Tell me, after so many years, is the gold altered? Do you see there the traces of my tears? Could you recognize the place where a saint touched it with her lips? Why is Chactas no Christian, still? What frivolous reasons of politics and homeland hold him as yet to the errors of his fathers? No, I wish for no more delay. The earth cries out to me: ‘When will you descend into your grave, why are you waiting to embrace a divine religion?’...O earth, you will not have long to wait: as soon as some priest has plunged this head white with sorrow beneath the wave, I hope to rejoin my Atala. But let me complete what is left to tell of my story.”

THE FUNERAL

“O René, I shall not describe to you now the despair that seized my soul, when Atala had breathed her last. It would require more passion than I retain; it would require that the sun be

visible once more to my darkened eyes, that they might ask it how many tears they shed then in its light. Yes, this moon that shines now on our heads, weary of illuminating the wilds of Kentucky; yes, this river that now bears our canoes, will suspend the flow of its waters before my tears for Atala cease their flow! For two whole days, I was insensible to the hermit's speech. In trying to soothe my sorrows, that excellent man did not employ the vain reasoning of this earth, he contented himself with saying: 'My son, it is the will of God,' and clasped me in his arms. I had never thought there could be so much consolation in these few words of Christian resignation, if I had not experienced it for myself.

The tenderness, the unction, the unfailling patience of that old servant of God, finally overcame my obstinate suffering. I was ashamed of the tears I had forced him to shed. 'My father,' I said, 'enough: let the passions of a young man no longer trouble the peacefulness of your days. Let me carry away the remains of my wife; I will bury them in some corner of the wilds, and even though I am condemned to life, I will try to make myself worthy of that eternal marriage which Atala promised me.'

At this unexpected show of renewed fortitude, the good father leapt for joy; he cried out: 'O blood of Jesus Christ, blood of my Divine Master, I recognize your merit in this! Without doubt, you have saved this young man. My God, complete your work. Bring peace to this troubled soul, and leave him nothing of his misfortunes, but humble and useful memories.'

The righteous man refused to grant me the body of Lopez's daughter, but he proposed to call together his neophytes, and bury her with all Christian ceremony; I in turn refused. 'The misfortunes and virtues of Atala,' I said, 'were unknown to man; let her grave dug secretly by our hands, share in that obscurity.' We agreed that we would leave the next day, at sunrise, to bury Atala beneath the arch of the natural bridge at the entrance to the Groves of the Dead. It was also resolved that we would spend the night in prayer beside the body of that saintly girl.

Towards evening, we carried her precious remains to the opening of the cave, which faced north. The hermit had wrapped her in a piece of linen from Europe, woven by his mother: it was the only possession remaining from his homeland, and had long been destined for his own shroud. Atala was lying on a bed of sensitive plants (*mimosa pudica*) culled from the mountain; her feet, head, shoulders and part of her breast were uncovered. A faded magnolia flower was visible in her hair... the same one I had placed on that virgin's bed, to render it fruitful. Her lips, like a rosebud, plucked two mornings past, seemed to languish, and smile. In her cheeks, which were dazzlingly white, a few blue veins could be distinguished. Her lovely eyes were closed, her small feet were together, and her hands like alabaster pressed an ebony crucifix to her heart; the scapular belonging to her vows was round her neck. She seemed under an enchantment cast by the Angel of Melancholy, and the dual sleep of innocence and the grave. I have not seen anything more heavenly. Whoever was unaware that the young girl had ever been alive would have taken her for a statue of Virginité portrayed in sleep.

The priest did not cease from prayer all that night. I sat quietly beside the funeral bier of my Atala. How many times, in her sleep, had I supported that lovely head on my lap! How many times had I leant above her, to hear and to breathe her breath! But now no sound came from that immobile form, and I awaited beauty's awakening in vain!

The moon lent her pale torch to that funereal wake. She hung in the midst of night, like a white vestal come to weep over the coffin of a dear companion. Soon, through the woods, she spread her great melancholy secret, that she likes to relate to the old oak-trees and the ancient sea-shores. From time to time, the priest plunged a flowery branch into consecrated water, then shaking the wet bough, perfumed the night with heavenly balms. Sometimes he repeated, in a traditional chant, a few plaints of that ancient poet Job; saying:

‘I fade like a flower; I am cut down like the grass of the fields.

Wherefore is light given to those that are in misery; and life unto the bitter in soul?’

So the old man chanted. His deep rhythmic voice echoed through the silence of the wilderness. The names, of God and of the grave, sounded among all those echoes, a host of torrents, the whole forest. The cooing of the Virginian doves, the fall of a stream in the mountain, the ringing of the bell which called to travellers, mingled with those dirges, and it seemed as if one heard a distant choir of otherworldly voices from the Groves of the Dead, responding to that of the Hermit.

But a bar of gold formed in the East. Kestrels (*falco sparverius*) cried among the rocks, and martens (*martes americana* – south of their present range, but here located in a mountainous area) returned to their hollow elms: it was the signal for Atala’s cortège. I raised the body on my shoulders; the hermit walked in front of me, spade in hand. We began to descend from rock to rock; old age and death slowed our steps equally. At the sight of the dog we had found in the forest, that now, leaping with joy, traced a far different path for us, I burst into tears. Often Atala’s long hair, toyed with by the morning breeze, extended its golden veil over my eyes; bowing frequently under the burden, I was obliged to lower it onto the mossy ground, and sit beside it, to regain my strength. Finally, we arrived at the place marked out by my sorrow, and we descended beneath the arch of the bridge. O my son, you should have seen the young Indian and the old hermit, kneeling face to face in the wilderness, digging a grave with their hands for the poor girl whose body was lying nearby, in the dry gully of a stream!

When our labour was complete, we deposited the lovely girl in her bed of clay. Alas, I had hoped to prepare another bed for her! Then taking a little dust in my hand, and maintaining a fearful silence, I gazed for the last time on Atala’s face. Then I poured the dust of sleep over her eighteen-year old brow; I saw the features of my sister, gradually vanish; and her graces hidden behind the veil of eternity; for a while her form conquered the dark soil, like a white lily rising from the midst of dark clay. ‘Lopez,’ I cried then, ‘behold your son burying your daughter!’ and I finished covering Atala with the dust of sleep.

We returned to the cave, and I told the missionary of the intention I had formed of settling near to him. The saint, who had a wonderful knowledge of the human heart, exposed my motives and the self-deceit of sorrow. ‘Chactas, son of Outalissi,’ he said, ‘while Atala lived, I myself asked you to stay with me; but now your fate is altered: you owe your life to your tribe. Believe me, my son, sorrow is not eternal, sooner or later it must end, as the heart of man ends; it is one of our great miseries: we are not even capable of remaining wretched for long. Return to the Mississippi: go and comfort your mother, who weeps for you every day, and needs your

support. Obtain instruction in your Atala's religion, whenever you can find the opportunity, and remember that you promised her to be virtuous and a Christian. I myself will watch here over her grave. Go, my son! God, the soul of your sister, and the heart of your old friend will go with you.'

Such were the words of the man of the rocks; his authority was too great, his wisdom too profound, for me not to obey him. The next day I left my venerable host, who pressing me to his heart, gave me his last advice, his last blessing, and his last tears. I went to the grave; I was surprised to find a small cross there erected above the site, as we see the mast of a shipwrecked vessel yet standing. I judged that the Hermit had come to pray at the tomb during the night; this mark of friendship and religion made my tears flow in abundance. I was tempted to reopen the grave, and see my beloved once more; a religious fear prevented me. I sat down on the freshly turned earth. Elbow on knee, and head in hand, I remained buried in the most bitter reverie. O René, it is there that I first indulged in serious reflection on the vanity of our days, and the greater vanity of our projects! Oh, my child, who has not countenanced such reflections! I am no more than an old stag whitened by many winters; my years vie with those of the raven: well, despite the many days burdening my head, despite a long life experience of life, I have never yet met a man who has not been deceived in his dreams of happiness, no heart that does not suffer some hidden wound. The heart that appears calmest resembles the natural wells of the Alachua savannah: the surface appears calm and clear, but when you look into the depths of the basin, you see some monstrous alligator that the well nourishes with its waters.

Having thus seen the sun rise and set on this place of sorrow, the next day at the first cry of the wood stork (*mycteria americana*), I prepared to leave that sacred burial-ground. I left, as if I left a bourn from which I wanted to launch myself on the path of virtue. Three times I evoked the soul of Atala; three times the Spirit of the wilderness echoed my cries from beneath the funereal arch. Then I saluted the East and saw, far off on the mountain trail, the hermit on his way to the hut of some unfortunate. Falling to my knees, and clasping the grave tightly, I cried out: 'Sleep in peace in this foreign land, oh, too unhappy girl! As the reward for your love, your exile, and your death, you are abandoned, even by Chactas!' Thus, shedding floods of tears, I parted from Lopez's daughter, thus I tore myself away from that place, leaving at the foot of a natural monument, a monument nobler still: the humble tomb of virtue."

EPILOGUE

Chactas, son of Outalissi, the Natchez, had finished telling his tale to René the European. Fathers repeated it to their children, and I, a traveller in distant lands, I have faithfully reported what the Indians told me. I saw in this story a portrait of a nation of hunters and a nation of labourers; religion, the highest legislature for mankind; the dangers of ignorance and religious enthusiasm, as opposed to enlightenment, charity and the true spirit of the Gospel; the war of passions and virtues in a simple heart; and finally the triumph of Christianity over the most ardent of emotions and the most terrible of fears, love and death.

When a Seminole told me this story, I found it deeply instructive and lovely in its perfection, because within it were enclosed the flower of the wilderness; the charm of the woodland cabin; and a simplicity in telling of sorrow that I cannot flatter myself as having

retained. But one thing remained for me to discover. I asked what had become of Father Aubry, and nobody could tell me. I would have remained forever ignorant, if Providence which directs everything, had not found what I sought. Here is how it came to pass:

I had traversed the banks of the Mississippi, which once formed the southern gateway to New France, and I was curious to see, in the north, the other wonder of that empire, the Falls of Niagara. I was close to those cataracts, in the ancient lands of the Agononsioni (the Iroquois), when one morning, crossing a plain, I saw a woman sitting under a tree and holding a dead child on her knees. I approached the young mother, quietly, and I heard her say:

“If you had stayed with us, dear child, how gracefully your arm would have bent the bow! Your grasp would have tamed the angry bear; and the mountain-tops, your feet would have outpaced the deer in the race. White ermine of the rock, so young, to enter the land of souls! How will you live there? Your father is not there to nourish you with the spoils of the chase. You will be cold, and no Spirit will give you furs to cover yourself. Oh, I must hasten to join you, to sing you songs, and hold you to my breast.”

And the young mother sang in a quivering voice, rocked the child on her lap, moistening his lips with maternal milk, and lavished on the dead all the care given to life.

This woman wanted to mummify the body of her son on the branches of a tree, according to the Indian custom, before bearing it to the graves of his ancestors. She therefore stripped the newborn, and breathing a few moments into its mouth, she said: “Soul of my son, sweet soul; your father once created you with a kiss on my lips; alas, mine has not the power to grant you a second birth!” Then she uncovered her breast, and embraced those chill remains, which would have revived at the fire of the maternal heart if God had not withheld the breath which gives life.

She rose, and looked around for a tree on whose branches she could expose her child. She selected a maple with red flowers, festooned with garlands of flowering bean (*apios Americana*, or *priceana*), which gave off the sweetest of perfumes. With one hand she bent one of the lower branches down, with the other she placed the body upon it; then letting the branch go, it returned to its natural position, bearing the remains of innocence, clothed in fragrant foliage. Oh! How touching is that Indian custom! I saw you in your desolate surroundings, proud monuments to Crassus and Caesar, and I still prefer these aerial tombs of the savages, these mausoleums of flowers and greenery that the bee perfumes, the breeze sways, and in which the American nightingale (*Mimus polyglottos*, the northern mockingbird) builds its nest, and utters its plaintive melody. If it is the remains of a young girl that the hand of a lover suspends from the tree of death; if it is the remains of a beloved child that a mother has placed where small birds nest, the charm of it is redoubled. I approached the woman who moaned at the foot of the maple; I laid my hands on her head, giving the customary three cries of grief. Then, without speaking to her, taking a branch as she had, I drove off the insects that buzzed around the child's body. But I took care not to frighten a neighbouring dove. The Indian mother spoke to it, saying: “Dove, if you are not the soul of my son who has flown, you are doubtless a mother searching for something from which to make a nest. Take this hair, which I will no longer wash in sarsaparilla water; take it for your little ones to sleep in: may the Great Spirit preserve them to you!”

Meanwhile the mother was weeping with joy on finding such kindness from a stranger. As this was happening, a young man approached, and said, “Daughter of Celuta, remove our child's

body, we will spend no more time here, and will leave at sunrise." I said, then: "Brother, I wish you clear skies, deer in plenty, a beaver coat and hope. You are not of this wilderness?" "No," replied the young man, "we are exiles, and we go to find a home." In saying this, the warrior bowed his head on his breast, and with the tip of his bow, he broke the heads of the flowers. I saw there was a grief of some kind behind his story, and I was silent. The woman removed her son's body from the branches, and gave it to her husband to bear. Then I asked: "Would you allow me to visit your hearth tonight?" "We have no cabin," replied the warrior; "if you wish to follow us, we camp near the falls." "I would be pleased to do so," I replied, and we left together.

We soon arrived at the edge of the cataract, which was announced by a mighty roar. It is formed by the Niagara River, which flows out of Lake Erie, and into Lake Ontario; its vertical height is a hundred and forty-four feet. From Lake Erie to the Falls the river runs through a steep incline, and at the Falls is less a river than a flood, whose torrents rush toward the gaping mouth of an abyss. The cataract divides into two branches, and bends in a horseshoe. Between the two falls a hollow island juts out below, hanging, with all its trees, over a chaos of waves. The mass of the river rushing through the midst, curves to form a wide semi-circular arch, then unrolls in a snowy sheet, shining in the sunlight with a whole spectrum of colours. The eastern fall plunges into fearful darkness; like a column of water from the Flood. A thousand rainbows arch and curve above the abyss. Striking the worn rocks, the water breaks in foaming eddies, which rise above the trees, like the smoke of a vast conflagration. Pines, wild walnut trees, rocks carved in the shapes of phantoms, decorate the scene. Eagles, driven on the currents of air, descend wheeling into the abyss; and wolverines cling by their flexible tails to the end of low branches, to seize broken carcasses of elks and bears from the abyss.

While I contemplated this spectacle, with a pleasure mingled with terror, the Indian woman and her husband left me. I sought them up-river, above the falls, and soon discovered them in a place appropriate to mourning. They were lying on the grass with a group of old men, beside a few human remains wrapped in animal skins. Astonished at all I had seen over the past few hours, I sat down with the young mother, and asked her: "What is all this, my sister?" She replied: "My brother, this was our homeland, and the ashes are those of our ancestors, which will follow us into exile." "And how," I cried, "have you been reduced to such misery?" The daughter of Celuta replied: "We are the remnants of the Natchez. After the massacre the French made of our nation to avenge their brothers, those of our brothers who escaped the victors found sanctuary among the Chickasaw our neighbours. We have lived here peacefully for many years; but seven moons ago the white people of Virginia seized our lands, saying they had been granted to them by a king in Europe. We raised our eyes to heaven, and carrying the remains of our ancestors, we made our way across the wilderness. I gave birth during the march; and as my milk was tainted because of our sufferings, it has killed my child." In saying this, the young mother wiped her eyes with her hair; I wept too.

Now, I addressed her again: "My sister, let us worship the Great Spirit, everything happens by his command. We are all wanderers; our fathers were as we; but there is a place where we will all rest. If I were not afraid of speaking as thoughtlessly as white men do I would ask you if you have heard of Chactas, of the Natchez?" At these words, the Indian woman gazed at me and said: "Who has spoken to you of Chactas, the Natchez?" I replied: "A wise man." The Indian replied: "I will tell you what I know, because you drove the flies away from the body of my son, and you

have spoken true words concerning the Great Spirit. I am the grand-daughter of René the European, whom Chactas adopted. Chactas, who received baptism, and René my unfortunate grandfather, perished in the massacre.”

“Man always journeys from suffering to suffering,” I replied, bowing my head. “Perhaps, then, you can also give me news of Father Aubry?” “His fated has proved no happier than that of Chactas,” said the Indian woman. “The Cherokee, enemies of the French, entered his mission; they were led there by the sound of the bell that rang to summon travellers. Father Aubry could have saved himself, but he would not abandon his children, and he remained behind to sustain them in dying, by setting them an example. He was burned to death, enduring dreadful torment; they could not extract a cry from him that could bring shame on his God or dishonour on his country. He did not cease, during the ordeal, from praying for his executioners, and sympathizing with the fate of their victims. To force him to reveal some sign of weakness, the Cherokee led to his feet a Christian savage whom they had mutilated horribly. But they were truly surprised when they saw the young man throw himself to his knees and kiss the wounds of the old hermit who cried to him: “My child, we have been made a spectacle for angels and men.” The Indians, infuriated, plunged a red-hot iron down his throat, to prevent him from speaking. Then, no longer able to console mankind, he died.

They say that the Cherokees, accustomed as they were to seeing Savages endure suffering with fortitude, could not help but confess that there was in the humble courage of Father Aubry something unknown to them, which surpassed all earthly courage. Several of them, struck by his death, became Christians.

A few years later, Chactas, on his return from the lands of the white man, having learned of the priest’s misfortunes, departed to gather his ashes and those of Atala. He arrived at the place where the Mission was located, but he could barely recognize it. The lake had overflowed, and the savannah was changed to a marsh; the natural bridge, in collapsing, had buried Atala’s grave and the Groves of the Dead beneath its ruins. Chactas wandered for hours in that place; he visited the Hermit’s cave which he found full of brambles and raspberries, and in which a doe was nursing her fawn. He sat on the rock of the Vigil of Death, where he saw only a few feathers fallen from the wings of some bird of passage. While he wept, the missionary’s tame snake emerged from the brush nearby, and came to coil at his feet. Chactas warmed at his breast that loyal friend, the sole one remaining amidst the ruins. Outalissi’s son told us that several times at the approach of night, he thought he saw the shades of Atala and Father Aubry arise in the twilight mist. Those visions filled him with a religious fear and a sorrowful joy.

After searching in vain for his sister’s grave, and that of the hermit, he was about to abandon the place, when the deer from the cave leapt in front of him. She paused at the foot of the Mission cross. This cross was then half-surrounded by water, the wood was eaten away by moss, and a wild pelican was wont to use its rotten arms as a perch. Chactas realised that the grateful deer had led him to the grave of his host. He dug under the rock that once served as an altar, and found the remains of a man and a woman. He had no doubt that they were those of the priest and the virgin, which the angels perhaps had buried in that place; he wrapped them in bear pelts, and made his way back to his own land carrying the precious remains, which rattled at his shoulders like a quiver of death. At night, he put them beneath his head, and dreamed of love and virtue. O stranger, here you may gaze on those ashes, along with those of Chactas himself!”

As the Indian woman finished pronouncing these words, I rose; I approached the sacred ashes, and prostrated myself before them in silence. Then I strode away, exclaiming: “Thus passes on earth all that is good, virtuous, and sensitive! Man, you are no more than a swift thought, a sorrowful dream; you exist solely in misfortune; you are no more than the sadness in your soul, and the eternal melancholy of your mind!”

These reflections occupied me all night. The next morning, at daybreak, my hosts left me. The young warriors led the way, and the wives followed; the former were in charge of the holy relics, while the latter carried their infants; the old men walked slowly in the midst, between their ancestors and their posterity, between memory and hope, between their lost homeland and the homeland to come. Oh, what tears are shed when our native land is abandoned thus, when from the brow of the hill of exile, we turn for the last time to see the roof under which we were nourished, and that river, beside our cabin, which continues to flow sorrowfully through the deserted fields of our homeland!

Unhappy Indians, whom I have seen wandering, bearing the ashes of your ancestors, in the wilderness of the New World, you who have shown me hospitality despite your misery, I can not repay that hospitality today, for I wander, as you do, at the mercy of mankind; and less happy than you in my exile, I do not carry with me the bones of my fathers.

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<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Chateaubriand/ChateaubriandAtala.htm>

**From the School of Barbizon:
Jean Baptiste Camille Corot's
“Montefontaine” 1864**

Corot summarized his painting in these words. "Beauty in art is truth bathed in an impression received from nature. I am struck upon seeing a certain place. While I strive for a conscientious imitation, I yet never for an instant lose the emotion that has taken hold of me. Reality is one part of art; feeling completes it... .. Before any site and any object, abandon yourself to your first impression. If you have really been touched, you will convey to others the sincerity of your emotion.



CHAPTER VII
19th Century
The Fall of Humanity in Nature

Les fleurs du mal (1857)
Evil Flowers

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Invitation to a Journey

My sister, my dear
Consider how fair,
Together to live it would be!
Down yonder to fly
To love, till we die,
In the land which resembles thee.
Those suns that rise
'Neath erratic skies,
—No charm could be like unto theirs—
So strange and divine,
Like those eyes of thine
Which glow in the midst of their tears.



Gustave Courbet's Portrait of Baudelaire 1847

There, all is order and loveliness,
Luxury, calm and voluptuousness.

The tables and chairs,
Polished bright by the years,
Would decorate sweetly our rooms,
And the rarest of flowers
Would twine round our bowers
And mingle their amber perfumes:
The ceilings arrayed,
And the mirrors inlaid,
This Eastern splendour among,
Would furtively steal
O'er our souls, and appeal
With its tranquillous native tongue.

There, all is order and loveliness,

Luxury, calm and voluptuousness.

In the harbours, peep,
At the vessels asleep
(Their humour is always to roam),
Yet it is but to grant
Thy smallest want
From the ends of the earth that they
come,
The sunsets beam
Upon meadow and stream,
And upon the city entire
'Neath a violet crest,
The world sinks to rest,
Illumed by a golden fire.



There, all is order and loveliness,
Luxury, calm and voluptuousness.

William Turner's Burning of the House... (1835)

Man and the Sea

Free man! the sea is to thee ever dear!
The sea is thy mirror, thou regardest thy soul
In its mighteous waves that unendingly roll,
And thy spirit is yet not a chasm less drear.

Thou delight'st to plunge deep in thine image down;
Thou tak'st it with eyes and with arms in embrace,
And at times thine own inward voice would'st efface
With the sound of its savage ungovernable moan.

You are both of you, sombre, secretive and deep:
Oh mortal, thy depths are foraye unexplored,
Oh sea—no one knoweth thy dazzling hoard,
You both are so jealous your secrets to keep!

And endless ages have wandered by,
Yet still without pity or mercy you fight,
So mighty in plunder and death your delight:
Oh wrestlers! so constant in enmity!

Spleen

The rainy moon of all the world is weary,
And from its urn a gloomy cold pours down,
Upon the pallid inmates of the mortuary,
And on the neighbouring outskirts of the town.

My **wasted** cat, in searching for a litter,
Bestirs its **mangy** paws from post to post;
(A poet's soul that **wanders** in the **gutter**,
With the **jaded** voice of a **shiv'ring ghost**).

The smoking pine-log, while the drone laments,
Accompanies the **wheezy** pendulum,
The while amidst a **haze** of **dirty scents**,

—Those fatal remnants of a **sick man's room**—
The gallant knave of hearts and queen of spades
Relate their ancient amorous escapades.

The Set of the Romantic Sun

How beauteous the sun as it rises supreme,
Like an explosion that greets us from above,
Oh, happy is he that can hail with love,
Its decline, more glorious far, than a dream.

I saw flower, furrow, and brook.... I recall
How they swooned like a tremulous heart 'neath the sun,
Let us haste to the sky-line, 'tis late, let us run,
At least to catch one slanting ray ere it fall.

But the god, who eludes me, I chase all in vain,
The night, irresistible, plants its domain,
Black mists and vague shivers of death it forbodes;

While an odour of graves through the darkness spreads,
And on the swamp's margin, my timid foot treads
Upon slimy snails, and on unseen toads.

Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36098/36098-h/36098-h.htm>

Une saison en enfer (1873)
A Season in Hell

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891)

The Drunken Boat (1871)

As I was floating down unconcerned Rivers
I no longer felt myself steered by the haulers:
Gaudy Redskins had taken them for targets
Nailing them naked to coloured stakes.
I cared nothing for all my crews,
Carrying Flemish wheat or English cottons.
When, along with my haulers those uproars were done with
The Rivers let me sail downstream where I pleased.
Into the ferocious tide-rips
Last winter, more absorbed than the minds of children,
I ran! And the unmoored Peninsulas
Never endured more triumphant clamourings
The storm made bliss of my sea-borne awakenings.
Lighter than a cork, I danced on the waves
Which men call eternal rollers of victims,
For ten nights, without once missing the foolish eye of the harbor lights!
Sweeter than the flesh of sour apples to children,
The green water penetrated my pinewood hull
And washed me clean of the bluish wine-stains and the splashes of vomit,
Carrying away both rudder and anchor.
And from that time on I bathed in the Poem
Of the Sea, star-infused and churned into milk,
Devouring the green azures; where, entranced in pallid flotsam,
A dreaming drowned man sometimes goes down;
Where, suddenly dyeing the bluenesses, deliriums
And slow rhythms under the gleams of the daylight,
Stronger than alcohol, vaster than music
Ferment the bitter rednesses of love!
I have come to know the skies splitting with lightnings, and the waterspouts
And the breakers and currents; I know the evening,
And Dawn rising up like a flock of doves,
And sometimes I have seen what men have imagined they saw!
I have seen the low-hanging sun speckled with mystic horrors.
Lighting up long violet coagulations,

Like the performers in very-antique dramas
Waves rolling back into the distances their shiverings of venetian blinds!
I have dreamed of the green night of the dazzled snows
The kiss rising slowly to the eyes of the seas,
The circulation of undreamed-of saps,
And the yellow-blue awakenings of singing phosphorus!
I have followed, for whole months on end, the swells
Battering the reefs like hysterical herds of cows,
Never dreaming that the luminous feet of the Marys
Could force back the muzzles of snorting Oceans!
I have struck, do you realize, incredible Floridas
Where mingle with flowers the eyes of panthers
In human skins! Rainbows stretched like bridles
Under the seas' horizon, to glaucous herds!
I have seen the enormous swamps seething, traps
Where a whole leviathan rots in the reeds!
Downfalls of waters in the midst of the calm
And distances cataracting down into abysses!
Glaciers, suns of silver, waves of pearl, skies of red-hot coals!
Hideous wrecks at the bottom of brown gulfs
Where the giant snakes devoured by vermin
Fall from the twisted trees with black odours!
I should have liked to show to children those dolphins
Of the blue wave, those golden, those singing fishes.
- Foam of flowers rocked my driftings
And at times ineffable winds would lend me wings.
Sometimes, a martyr weary of poles and zones,
The sea whose sobs sweetened my rollings
Lifted its shadow-flowers with their yellow sucking disks toward me
And I hung there like a kneeling woman...
Almost an island, tossing on my beaches the brawls
And droppings of pale-eyed, clamouring birds,
And I was scudding along when across my frayed cordage
Drowned men sank backwards into sleep!
But now I, a boat lost under the hair of coves,
Hurlled by the hurricane into the birdless ether,
I, whose wreck, dead-drunk and sodden with water,
neither Monitor nor Hanse ships would have fished up;
Free, smoking, risen from violet fogs,
I who bored through the wall of the reddening sky
Which bears a sweetmeat good poets find delicious,
Lichens of sunlight [mixed] with azure snot,

Who ran, speckled with lunula of electricity,
A crazy plank, with black sea-horses for escort,
When Julys were crushing with cudgel blows
Skies of ultramarine into burning funnels;
I who trembled, to feel at fifty leagues' distance
The groans of Behemoth's rutting, and of the dense Maelstroms
Eternal spinner of blue immobilities

I long for Europe with it's aged old parapets!

I have seen archipelagos of stars! and islands
Whose delirious skies are open to sailor:

- Do you sleep, are you exiled in those bottomless nights,

Million golden birds, O Life Force of the future? -

But, truly, I have wept too much! The Dawns are heartbreaking.

Every moon is atrocious and every sun bitter:

Sharp love has swollen me up with heady langours.

O let my keel split! O let me sink to the bottom!

If there is one water in Europe I want, it is the
Black cold pool where into the scented twilight

A child squatting full of sadness, launches

A boat as fragile as a butterfly in May.

I can no more, bathed in your langours, O waves,

Sail in the wake of the carriers of cottons,

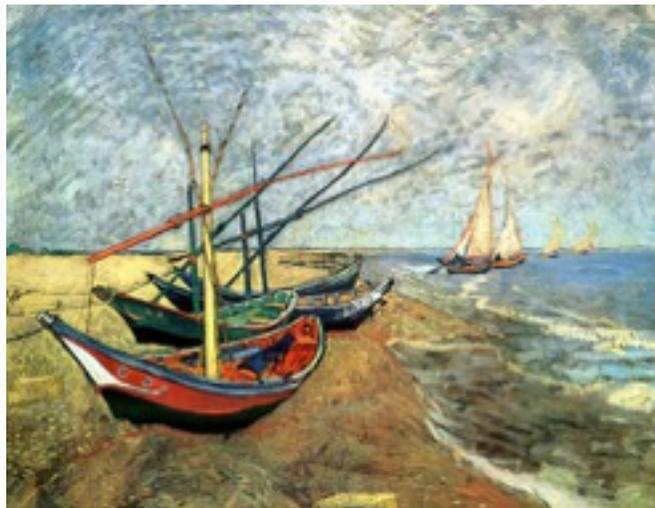
Nor undergo the pride of the flags and pennants,

Nor pull past the horrible eyes of the hulks.

- As translated by Oliver Bernard: Arthur Rimbaud, Collected Poems (1962).

<http://www.mag4.net/Rimbaud/Poesie.html>

**Vincent Van Gogh's
"Boats on the Beach
of Sainte Marie"
(1890)**



CHAPTER VII

19th Century

**The Human Beast in Nature
“*La Bête Humaine*” (book 1890)
The Human Beast**

Emile Zola (1840-1902)
Jean Renoir, film director (1938)



Claude Monet's “The Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil” (1874)

Watch the full movie on Youtube: (1hr41min)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6GVt8HQCmI&playnext=1&list=PLxS-VbBmJqWf6NHk2yT0COOQo_Enh4Nzl&feature=results_video

CHAPTER VIII
20th Century
Nature and the Feminine Psyche

The Beauty and the Beast (complete film)
***La Belle et la Bête* (1946)**
Jean Cocteau (1889-1963)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EchAF_f19SU&list=PL462A0A8BADA6AF80
(English subtitles; full movie 1hr30; nine separate sections)



(Original story from Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de
Villeneuve (c.1695–1755))

From Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête*



Psyche Revived by the Kiss of Amor
Antonio Canova (1757–1822)

CHAPTER IX
Existentialism and Nature
Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre

The Stranger (excerpt pg 57-59)

***L'étranger* (1942)**

by Albert Camus (1913-1960)

(New York: Vintage Books, 1988)



There was the same dazzling red glare. The sea gasped for air with each shallow, stifled little wave that broke on the sand. I was walking slowly toward the rocks, and I could feel my forehead swelling under the sun. All that heat was pressing down on me and making it hard for me to go on. And every time I felt a blast of its hot breath strike my face, I gritted my teeth, clenched my fists in my trouser pockets, and strained every nerve in order to overcome the sun and the thick drunkenness it was spilling over me. With every blade of light that flashed off the sand, from a bleached shell or a piece of broken glass, my jaws tightened. I walked for a long time.

From a distance I could see the small, dark mass of a rock surrounded by a blinding halo of light and sea spray. I was thinking of the cool spring behind the rock. I wanted to hear the murmur of its water again, to escape the sun and

the strain and the women's tears. And to find shade and rest again at last. But as I got closer, I saw that Raymond's man had come back.

He was alone. He was lying on his back, with his hands behind his head, his forehead in the shade of the rock, the rest of his body in the sun. His blue overalls seemed to be steaming in the heat. I was a little surprised. As far as I was concerned, the whole thing was over, and I'd gone there without even thinking about it.

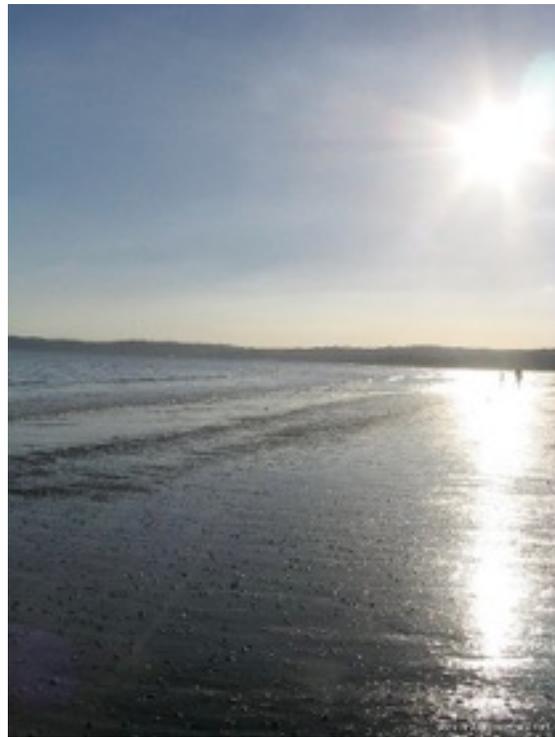
As soon as he saw me, he sat up and put his hand in his pocket. Naturally, I gripped Raymond's gun inside my jacket. Then he lay back again, but without taking his hand out of his pocket. I was pretty far away from him, about ten meters or so. I could tell he was glancing at me now and then through half-closed eyes. But most of the time, he was just a form shimmering before my

eyes in the fiery air. The sound of the waves was even lazier, more drawn out than at noon. It was the same sun, the same light still shining on the same sand as before. For two hours the day had stood still; for two hours it had been anchored in a sea of molten lead.

On the horizon, a tiny steamer went by, and I made out the black dot from the corner of my eye because I hadn't stopped watching the Arab.

It occurred to me that all I had to do was turn around and that would be the end of it. But the whole beach, throbbing in the sun, was pressing on my back. I took a few more steps toward the spring. The Arab didn't move. Besides, he was pretty far away. Maybe it was the shadows on his face, but it looked like he was laughing. I waited. The sun was starting to burn my cheeks, and I could feel drops of sweat gathering in my eyebrows. The sun was the same as it had been the day I'd buried Maman, and like then, my forehead especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward.

I knew it was stupid, that I wouldn't get the sun off me by stepping forward. But I took a step, one step, forward. And this time, without getting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun. The light shot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead. At the same instant the sweat in my eyebrows dripped down over my eyelids all at once and covered them with a warm, thick film. My eyes were blinded behind the curtain of tears and salt. All I could feel were the cymbals of sunlight crashing on my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear flying up from the knife in front of me. The scorching blade slashed at my eyelashes and stabbed at my stinging eyes. That's when everything began to reel. The sea carried up a thick, fiery breath. It seemed to me as if the sky split open from one end to the other to rain down fire. My whole being tensed and I squeezed my hand around the revolver. The trigger gave; I felt the smooth underside of the butt; and there, in that noise, sharp and deafening at the same time, is where it all started. I shook off the sweat and sun. I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of the beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness.



Selection from Nausea

Nausea (1938)

by Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/nausea.htm>

6.00 p.m.

I can't say I feel relieved or satisfied; just the opposite, I am crushed. Only my goal is reached: I know what I wanted to know; I have understood all that has happened to me since January. The Nausea has not left me and I don't believe it will leave me so soon; but I no longer have to bear it, it is no longer an illness or a passing fit: it is I.

So I was in the park just now. The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn't remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, stooping forward, head bowed, alone in front of this black, knotty mass, entirely beastly, which frightened me.

Then I had this vision. It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of "existence." I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, "The ocean is green; that white speck up there is a seagull," but I didn't feel that it existed or that the seagull was an "existing seagull"; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is us, you can't say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it. When I believed I was thinking about it, I must believe that I was thinking nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word "to be." Or else I was thinking . . . how can I explain it? I was thinking of belonging, I was telling myself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects, or that the green was a part



of the quality of the sea. Even when I looked at things, I was miles from dreaming that they existed: they looked like scenery to me. I picked them up in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But that all happened on the surface. If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, in good faith, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing anything in their nature. And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder—naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness.

I kept myself from making the slightest movement, but I didn't need to move in order to see, behind the trees, the blue columns and the lamp posts of the bandstand and the Velleda, in the midst of a mountain of laurel. All these objects . . . how can I explain? They inconvenienced me; I would have liked them to exist less strongly, more dryly, in a more abstract way, with more reserve. The chestnut tree pressed itself against my eyes. Green rust covered it half-way up; the bark, black and swollen, looked like boiled leather. The sound of the water in the Mas-queret Fountain sounded in my ears, made a nest there, filled them with signs; my nostrils overflowed with a green, putrid odour. All things, gently, tenderly, were letting themselves drift into existence like those relaxed women who burst out laughing and say: "It's good to laugh," in a wet voice; they were parading, one in front of the other, exchanging abject secrets about their existence. I realized that there was no half-way house between non-existence and this flaunting abundance. If you existed, you had to exist all the way, as far as mouldiness, bloatedness,



obscurity were concerned. In another world, circles, bars of music keep their pure and rigid lines. But existence is a deflection. Trees, night-blue pillars, the happy bubbling of a fountain, vital smells, little heat-mists floating in the cold air, a red-haired man digesting on a bench: all this somnolence, all these meals digested together, had its comic side. . . . Comic ... no: it didn't go as far as that, nothing that exists can be comic; it was like a floating analogy, almost entirely elusive, with certain aspects of vaudeville. We were a heap of living creatures, irritated, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason to be there, none of us, each one, confused, vaguely alarmed, felt in the way in relation to the others. In the way: it was the only relationship I could establish between these trees, these gates, these stones. In vain I tried to count the chestnut trees, to locate them by their relationship to the Velleda, to compare their height with the height of the

plane trees: each of them escaped the relationship in which I tried to enclose it, isolated itself, and overflowed. Of these relations (which I insisted on maintaining in order to delay the crumbling of the human world, measures, quantities, and directions)—I felt myself to be the arbitrator; they no longer had their teeth into things. In the way, the chestnut tree there, opposite me, a little to the left. In the way, the Velleda. . . .

And I—soft, weak, obscene, digesting, juggling with dismal thoughts—I, too, was In the way. Fortunately, I didn't feel it, although I realized it, but I was uncomfortable because I was afraid of feeling it (even now I am afraid—afraid that it might catch me behind my head and lift me up like a wave). I dreamed vaguely of killing myself to wipe out at least one of these superfluous lives. But even my death would have been In the way. In the way, my corpse, my blood on these stones, between these plants, at the back of this smiling garden. And the decomposed flesh would have been In the way in the earth which would receive my bones, at last, cleaned, stripped, peeled, proper and clean as teeth, it would have been in the way: I was in the way for eternity.

The word absurdity is coming to life under my pen; a little while ago, in the garden, I couldn't find it, but neither was I looking for it, I didn't need it: I thought without words, on things, with things. Absurdity was not an idea in my head, or the sound of a voice, only this long serpent dead at my feet, this wooden serpent. Serpent or claw or root or vulture's talon, what difference does it make. And without formulating anything clearly, I understood that I had found the key to Existence, the key to my Nauseas, to my own life. In fact, all that I could grasp beyond that returns to this fundamental absurdity. Absurdity: another word; I struggle against words; down there I touched the thing. But I wanted to fix the absolute character of this absurdity here. A movement, an event in the tiny coloured world of men is only relatively absurd: by relation to the accompanying circumstances. A madman's



ravings, for example, are absurd in relation to the situation in which he finds himself, but not in relation to his delirium. But a little while ago I made an experiment with the absolute or the absurd. This root—there was nothing in relation to which it was absurd. Oh, how can I put it in words? Absurd: in relation to the stones, the tufts of yellow grass, the dry mud, the tree, the sky, the green benches. Absurd, irreducible; nothing—not even a profound, secret upheaval of nature—could explain it. Evidently I did not know everything, I had not seen the seeds sprout, or the tree grow. But faced with this great wrinkled paw, neither ignorance nor knowledge was important: the world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence. A circle is not absurd, it is clearly explained by the rotation of a straight segment around one of its extremities. But neither does a circle exist. This root, on the other hand, existed in such a way that I could not explain it. Knotty, inert, nameless, it fascinated me, filled my eyes, brought me back unceasingly to its own existence. In vain to repeat: "This is a root"—it didn't work any more. I saw clearly that you could not pass from its function as a root, as a breathing pump, to that, to this hard and compact skin of a sea lion, to this oily, callous, headstrong look. The function explained nothing: it allowed you to understand generally that it was a root, but not that one at all. This root, with its colour, shape, its congealed movement, was . . . below all explanation. Each of its qualities escaped it a little, flowed out of it, half solidified, almost became a thing; each one was In the way in the root and the whole stump now gave me the impression of unwinding itself a little, denying its existence to lose itself in a frenzied excess. I scraped my heel against this black claw: I wanted to peel off some of the bark. For no reason at all, out of defiance, to make the bare pink appear absurd on the tanned leather: to play with the absurdity of the world. But, when I drew my heel back, I saw that the bark was still black.

Black? I felt the word deflating, emptied of meaning with extraordinary rapidity. Black? The root was not black, there was no black on this piece of wood—there was . . . something else: black, like the circle, did not exist. I looked at the root: was it more than black or almost black? But I soon stopped questioning myself because I had the feeling of knowing where I was. Yes, I had already scrutinized innumerable objects, with deep uneasiness. I had already tried—vainly—to think something about them: and I had already felt their cold, inert qualities elude me, slip through my fingers. Adolphe's suspenders, the other evening in the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous." They were not purple. I saw the two inexplicable stains on the shirt. And the stone—the well-known stone, the origin of this whole business: it was not . . . I can't remember exactly just what it was that the stone refused to be. But I had not forgotten its passive resistance. And the hand of the Self-Taught Man; I held it and shook it one day in the library and then I had the feeling that it wasn't quite a hand. I had thought of a great white worm, but that wasn't it either. And the suspicious transparency of the glass of beer in the Cafe Mably. Suspicious: that's what they were, the sounds, the smells, the tastes. When they ran quickly under your nose like startled hares and you didn't pay too much attention, you might believe them to be simple and reassuring, you might believe that there was real blue in the world, real red, a real perfume of almonds or violets. But as soon as you held on to them for an instant, this feeling of comfort and security gave way to a deep uneasiness: colours, tastes, and smells were never real, never themselves and nothing but themselves. The simplest, most indefinable quality had too much content, in relation to itself, in its heart. That black against my foot, it didn't look like black, but rather the confused effort to imagine black by someone who had never seen black and who wouldn't know how to stop, who



would have imagined an ambiguous being beyond colours. It looked like a colour, but also . . . like a bruise or a secretion, like an oozing—and something else, an odour, for example, it melted into the odour of wet earth, warm, moist wood, into a black odour that spread like varnish over this sensitive wood, in a flavour of chewed, sweet fibre. I did not simply see this black: sight is an abstract invention, a simplified idea, one of man's ideas. That black, amorphous, weakly presence, far surpassed sight, smell and taste. But this richness was lost in confusion and finally was no more because it was too much.

This moment was

extraordinary. I was there, motionless and icy, plunged in a horrible ecstasy. But something fresh had just appeared in the very heart of this ecstasy; I understood the Nausea, I possessed it. To tell the truth, I did not formulate my discoveries to myself. But I think it would be easy for me to put them in words now. The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply to be there; those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. I believe there are people who have understood this. Only they tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift. All is free, this park, this city and myself. When you realize that, it turns your heart upside down and everything begins to float, as the other evening at the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous": here is Nausea; here there is what those bastards—the ones on the Coteau Vert and others—try to hide from themselves with their idea of their rights. But what a poor lie: no one has any rights; they are entirely free, like other men, they cannot succeed in not feeling superfluous. And in themselves, secretly, they are superfluous, that is to say, amorphous, vague, and sad.

How long will this fascination last? I was the root of the chestnut tree. Or rather I was entirely conscious of its existence. Still detached from it—since I was conscious of it—yet lost in it, nothing but it. An uneasy conscience which, notwithstanding, let itself fall with all its weight on this piece of dead wood. Time had stopped: a small black pool at my feet; it was impossible for something to come after that moment. I would have liked to tear myself from that atrocious joy, but I did not even imagine it would be possible; I was inside; the black stump did not move, it stayed there, in my eyes, as a lump of food sticks in the windpipe. I could neither accept nor refuse it. At what a cost did I raise my eyes? Did I raise them? Rather did I not obliterate myself for an instant in order to be reborn in the following instant with my head thrown back and my

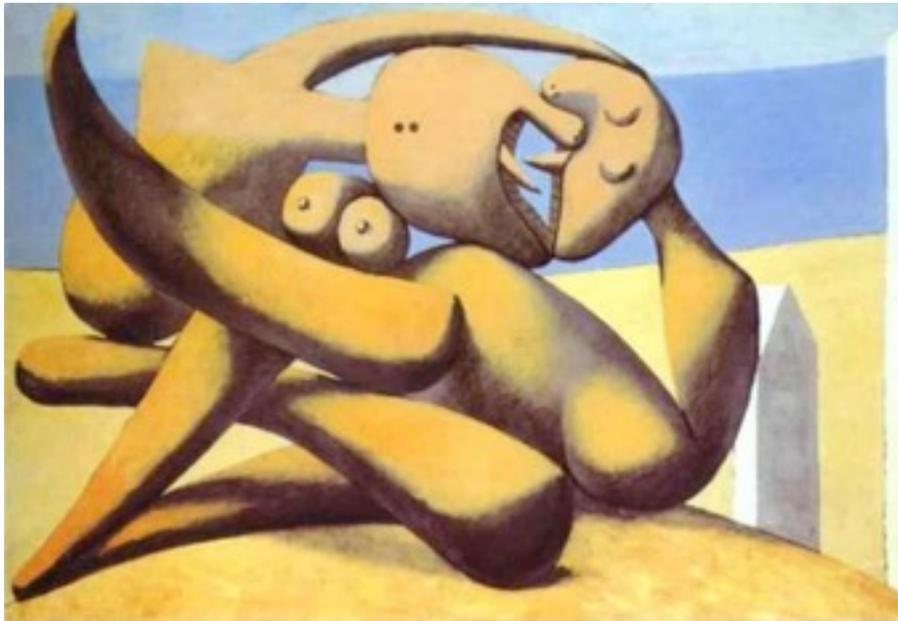
eyes raised upward? In fact, I was not even conscious of the transformation. But suddenly it became impossible for me to think of the existence of the root. It was wiped out, I could repeat in vain: it exists, it is still there, under the bench, against my right foot, it no longer meant anything. Existence is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance: it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart like a great motionless beast—or else there is nothing more at all.

There was nothing more, my eyes were empty and I was spellbound by my deliverance. Then suddenly it began to move before my eyes in light, uncertain motions: the wind was shaking the top of the tree.

It did not displease me to see a movement, it was a change from these motionless beings who watched me like staring eyes. I told myself, as I followed the swinging of the branches: movements never quite exist, they are passages, intermediaries between two existences, moments of weakness, I expected to see them come out of nothingness, progressively ripen, blossom: I was finally going to surprise beings in the process of being born.

No more than three seconds, and all my hopes were swept away. I could not attribute the passage of time to these branches groping around like blind men. This idea of passage was still an invention of man. The idea was too transparent. All these paltry agitations, drew in on themselves, isolated. They overflowed the leaves and branches everywhere. They whirled about these empty hands, enveloped them with tiny whirlwinds. Of course a movement was something different from a tree. But it was still an absolute. A thing. My eyes only encountered completion. The tips of the branches rustled with existence which unceasingly renewed itself and which was never born. The existing wind rested on the tree like a great bluebottle, and the tree shuddered. But the shudder was not a nascent quality, a passing from power to action; it was a thing; a shudder-thing flowed into the tree, took possession of it, shook it and suddenly abandoned it, going further on to spin about itself. All was fullness and all was active, there was no weakness in time, all, even the least perceptible stirring, was made of existence. And all these existents which bustled about this tree came from nowhere and were going nowhere. Suddenly they existed, then suddenly they existed no longer: existence is without memory; of the vanished it retains nothing—not even a memory. Existence everywhere, infinitely, in excess, for ever and everywhere; existence—which is limited only by existence. I sank down on the bench, stupefied, stunned by this profusion of beings without origin: everywhere blossomings, hatchings out, my ears buzzed with existence, my very flesh throbbed and opened, abandoned itself to the universal burgeoning. It was repugnant. But why, I thought, why so many existences, since they all look alike? What good are so many duplicates of trees? So many existences missed, obstinately begun again and again missed—like the awkward efforts of an insect fallen on its back? (I was one of those efforts.) That abundance did not give the effect of generosity, just the opposite. It was dismal, ailing, embarrassed at itself. Those trees, those great clumsy bodies. . . I began to laugh because I suddenly thought of the formidable springs described in books, full of crackings, burstings, gigantic explosions. There were those idiots who came to tell you about willpower and struggle for life. Hadn't they ever seen a beast or a tree? This plane-tree with its scaling bark, this half-rotten oak, they wanted me to take them for rugged youthful endeavour surging towards the sky. And that root? I would have undoubtedly had to represent it as a voracious claw tearing at the earth, devouring its food?

Impossible to see things that way. Weaknesses, frailties, yes. The trees floated. Gushing towards the sky? Or rather a collapse; at any instant I expected to see the tree-trunks shrivel like weary wands, crumple up, fall on the ground in a soft, folded, black heap. They did not want to exist, only they could not help themselves. So they quietly minded their own business; the sap rose up slowly through the structure, half reluctant, and the roots sank slowly into the earth. But at each instant they seemed on the verge of leaving everything there and obliterating themselves. Tired and old, they kept on existing, against the grain, simply because they were too weak to die, because death could only come to them from the outside: strains of music alone can proudly carry their own death within themselves like an internal necessity: only they don't exist. Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance. I leaned back and closed my eyes. But the images, forewarned, immediately leaped up and filled my closed eyes with existences: existence is a fullness which man can never abandon.



Strange images. They represented a multitude of things. Not real things, other things which looked like them. Wooden objects which looked like chairs, shoes, other objects which looked like plants. And then two faces: the couple who were eating opposite to me last Sunday in the Brasserie Vezeuse. Fat, hot, sensual, absurd, with red ears. I could see the woman's neck and shoulders. Nude existence. Those two—it

suddenly gave me a turn—those two were still existing somewhere in Bouville; somewhere—in the midst of smells?—this soft throat rubbing up luxuriously against smooth stuffs, nestling in lace; and the woman picturing her bosom under her blouse, thinking: "My titties, my lovely fruits," smiling mysteriously, attentive to the swelling of her breasts which tickled . . . then I shouted and found myself with my eyes wide open.

Had I dreamed of this enormous presence? It was there, in the garden, toppled down into the trees, all soft, sticky, soiling everything, all thick, a jelly. And I was inside, I with the garden. I was frightened, furious, I thought it was so stupid, so out of place, I hated this ignoble mess. Mounting up, mounting up as high as the sky, spilling over, filling everything with its gelatinous slither, and I could see depths upon depths of it reaching far beyond the limits of the garden, the houses, and Bouville, as far as the eye could reach. I was no longer in Bouville, I was nowhere, I was floating. I was not surprised, I knew it was the World, the naked World suddenly revealing

itself, and I choked with rage at this gross, absurd being. You couldn't even wonder where all that sprang from, or how it was that a world came into existence, rather than nothingness. It didn't make sense, the World was everywhere, in front, behind. There had been nothing before it. Nothing. There had never been a moment in which it could not have existed. That was what worried me: of course there was no reason for this flowing larva to exist. But it was impossible for it is not to exist. It was unthinkable: to imagine nothingness you had to be there already, in the midst of the World, eyes wide open and alive; nothingness was only an idea in my head, an existing idea floating in this immensity: this nothingness had not come before existence, it was an existence like any other and appeared after many others. I shouted "filth! what rotten filth!" and shook myself to get rid of this sticky filth, but it held fast and there was so much, tons and tons of existence, endless: I stifled at the depths of this immense weariness. And then suddenly the park emptied as through a great hole, the World disappeared as it had come, or else I woke up—in any case, I saw no more of it; nothing was left but the yellow earth around me, out of which dead branches rose upward.

I got up and went out. Once at the gate, I turned back. Then the garden smiled at me. I leaned against the gate and watched for a long time. The smile of the trees, of the laurel, meant something; that was the real secret of existence. I remembered one Sunday, not more than three weeks ago, I had already detected everywhere a sort of conspiratorial air. Was it in my intention? I felt with boredom that I had no way of understanding. No way. Yet it was there, waiting, looking at one. It was there on the trunk of the chestnut tree ... it was the chestnut tree. Things—you might have called them thoughts—which stopped halfway, which were forgotten, which forgot what they wanted to think and which stayed like that, hanging about with an odd little sense which was beyond them. That little sense annoyed me: I could not understand it, even if I could have stayed leaning against the gate for a century; I had learned all I could know about existence. I left, I went back to the hotel and I wrote.



Pablo Picasso's Guernica (1937)

CHAPTER X
“Primitivism” vs. Deracination
Claude Lévi-Strauss and Simone Weil

Tristes Tropiques (excerpts) (1955)
Claude Lévi Strauss (1908-2009)



It was perhaps then, for the first time, that I understood something which was later confirmed by equally demoralizing experiences in other parts of the world. Journeys, those magic caskets full of dreamlike promises, will never again yield up their treasures untarnished. A proliferating and overexcited civilization has broken the silence

of the seas once and for all. The perfumes of the tropics and the pristine freshness of human beings have been corrupted by a busyness with dubious implications, which mortifies our desires and dooms us to acquire only contaminated memories. (37-38)

Now that the Polynesian islands have been smothered in concrete and turned into aircraft carriers solidly anchored in the southern seas, when the whole of Asia is beginning to look like a dingy suburb, when shanty-towns are spreading across Africa, when civil and military aircraft blight the primeval innocence of the American or Melanesian forests even before destroying their virginity, what else can the so-called escapism of traveling to than confront us with the more unfortunate aspects of our history? Our great Western civilization, which has created the marvels we now enjoy, has only succeeded in producing them at the cost of corresponding ills. The order and harmony of the Western world, its most famous achievement, and a laboratory in which structures of a complexity as yet unknown are being fashioned, demand the elimination of a prodigious mass of noxious by-products which now contaminate the globe. The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into the face of mankind.

So I can understand the mad passion for travel books and their deceptiveness. They create the illusion of something which no longer exists, but still should exist, if we were to have any hope of avoiding the overwhelming conclusion that the history of the past twenty thousand years is irrevocable. There is nothing to be done about it now; civilization has ceased to be that

delicate flower which was preserved and painstakingly cultivated in one or two sheltered areas of a soil rich in wild species which may have seemed menacing because of the vigor of their growth, but which nevertheless made it possible to vary and revitalize the cultivated stock. Mankind has opted for monoculture; it is the process of creating a mass civilization, as beetroot is grown in the mass. Henceforth, man's daily bill of fare will consist only of this one item.

In the old days, people used to risk their lives in India or in the Americas in order to bring back products which now seem to us to have been of comically little worth, such as brasil or brazilwood (from which the name Brazil was derived) – a red dye – and also pepper which had such a vogue in the time of Henry IV of France that courtiers used to carry the seeds in sweetmeat boxes and eat them like sweets. The visual or olfactory surprises they provided, since they were cheerfully warm to the eye or



exquisitely hot on the tongue, added a new range of sense experience to a civilization which had never suspected its own insipidity. We might say, then, that, through a twofold reversal, from these same lands our modern Marco Polos now bring back the moral spices of which our society feels an increasing need as it is conscious of sinking further into boredom, but that this time they take the form of photographs, books and travelers' tales... (38)

When I open one of these travel books, I see, for instance, that such and such a tribe is described as savage and is said still to preserve certain primitive customs, which are described in garbled form in a few superficial chapters; yet I spent weeks as a student reading the books on that tribe written by professional anthropologists wither recently or as much as fifty years ago, before contact with the white races and the resulting epidemics reduced it to a handful of pathetic rootless individuals. Another community, whose existence is said to have been discovered by a youthful traveller who completed his study in forty-eight hours, was in fact seen (and this is an important point) outside its habitual territory in a temporary camp, which the writer naively assumed to be a permanent village. Moreover, the mans of approach to the tribe are carefully glossed over, so as not to reveal the presence of the mission station which has been consistently in touch with the natives for the past twenty years, or of the local motor-boat service reaching into the heart of the territory. But the existence of the latter can be deduced by a practiced eye from small details in the illustrations, since the photographer has not always been able to avoid including the rusty petrolcans in which this virgin people does its cooking... (39-40)

The fact is that these primitive peoples, the briefest contact with whom can sanctify the traveller, these icy summits, deep caverns with impenetrable forests—all of them august settings for noble and profitable revelations—are all, in their different ways enemies of our society, which pretends to itself that it is investing them with nobility at the very time when it is completing their destruction, whereas it viewed them with terror and disgust when they were genuine adversaries.

The savages of the Amazonian forest are sensitive and powerless victims, pathetic creatures caught in the toils of mechanized civilization, and I can resign myself to understanding the fate which is destroying them; but I refuse to be the dupe of a kind of magic which is still more feeble than their own, which brandishes



before an eager public albums of colored photographs, instead of the now vanished native masks. Perhaps the public imagines that the charms of the savages can be appropriated through the medium of these photographs. Not content with having eliminated savage life, and unaware even of having done so, it feels the need feverishly to appease the nostalgic cannibalism of history with the shadows of those that history has already destroyed... (41)

Can it be that I, the elderly predecessor of those scourers of the jungle, am the only one to have brought back nothing but a handful of ashes? Is mine the only voice to bear witness to the impossibility of escapism? Like the Indian in the myth, I went as far as the earth allows one to go, and when I arrived at the world's end, I questioned the people, the creatures and things I found there and met with the same disappointment 'He stood still, weeping bitterly, praying and moaning. And yet no mysterious sound reached his ears, nor was he put to sleep in order to be transported, as he slept, to the temple of the magic animals. For him there could no longer be the slightest doubt: no power, from anyone, had been granted him...' (41-42)

Excerpt electronic text at:

<http://www.greatissuesforum.org/pdfs/levi%20strauss.pdf>

The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration (excerpts)

L'ennracinement (1949)
Simone Weil (1909-1943)

The fact that a human being possesses an eternal destiny imposes only one obligation:



respect. The obligation is only performed if the respect is effectively expressed in a real, not a fictitious way; and this can only be done through the medium of Man's earthly needs. (6)

A lot of people think that a little peasant boy of the present day who goes to primary school knows more than Pythagoras did, simply because he can repeat parrot-wise that the earth moves round the sun. In actual fact, he no longer looks up at the heavens.

This sun about which they talk to him in class hasn't for him, the slightest connexion with the one he can see. He is severed from the universe surrounding him, just as little Polynesians are severed from their past by being forced to repeat: 'Our ancestors, the Gauls, had fair hair.' What is called today educating the masses, is taking this modern culture, evolved in such a closed, unwholesome atmosphere, and one so indifferent to the truth, removing what whatever it may still contain of intrinsic merit—an operation known as popularization—and shoveling the residue as it stands into the minds of the unfortunate individuals desirous of leaning, in the same way as you feed birds with a stick.

Moreover, the desire to learn for the sake of learning, the desire for truth, has become very rare. The prestige of culture has become almost exclusively a social one, as much for the peasant who dreams of having a schoolteacher son, or the schoolteacher who dreams of having as son at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, as for the society people who fawn upon savants and well-known writers.

The youth of our schools are as much obsessed by their examinations as our workmen engaged in piece-work are by their pay packets. There is something woefully wrong with the health of a social system, when a peasant tills the soil with the felling that if he is a peasant, it is because he wan't intelligent enough to become a schoolteacher.

The mixture of confused and more or less false ideas known under the name of Marxism, a mixture to which, since Marx's day, it is, generally speaking, only very ordinary middle-class intellectuals who have contributed, is also for the working-class a completely outlandish

doctrine, which they are incapable of assimilating, and which is besides devoid of any nutritive value, for it has been emptied of nearly all the truth contained in Marx's writings. From time to time, a scientific presentation for popular consumption is added. The effect of all this can only be to bring about the most intense uprootedness among the working class.

Uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, for it is a self-propagating one. For people who are really uprooted there remain only two possible sorts of behavior: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death, like the majority of the slaves in the days of the Roman Empire, or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, or only partly so.

The Romans were a handful of fugitives who banded themselves together artificially to form a city, and deprived the Mediterranean peoples of their individual manner of life, their country, traditions, past history to such an extent that posterity has taken them, at their own valuation, for the founders of civilization in these conquered territories. The Hebrews were escaped slaves, and they either exterminated or reduced to servitude all the peoples of Palestine. The Germans, as the time Hitler assumed command over them, were really—a nation of proletarians, that is to say uprooted individuals. The humiliation of 1918, inflation, over-



industrialization and above all the extreme gravity of the unemployment crisis had infected them with the moral disease to the acute point where irresponsibility takes possession. The Spaniards and Englishmen who, from the sixteenth century onwards, massacred or enslaved colored peoples, were adventurers almost without any contact with the fundamental life of their own respective countries. The same may be said in regard to a part of the French Empire, which moreover was built up at a time when the French tradition was suffering from a decline. Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others. Whoever is rooted himself doesn't uproot others...

Peasant uprootedness has been, over the course of the last few years, as mortal a danger for the country as working-class uprootedness. One of the most serious symptoms was, seven or eight years ago, the desertion of the land in the very middle of an employment crisis. (80)



It is obvious that a depopulation of the countryside leads finally, to social death. We can say it will not reach that point. But still, we don't know that it won't. So far, there seems to be nothing which is likely to arrest it.

With regard to this phenomenon, two things require to be noted:

The first is that the white man carries it about with him wherever he goes. The disease has even penetrated into the heart of the African continent, which had for thousands of years nevertheless, been made up of villages. These black people at any rate, when nobody came to massacre them, torture them, or reduce them to slavery, knew how to live happily on their land. Contact with us is making them lose the art. That ought to make us wonder whether even the black man, although the most primitive of all colonized peoples, hadn't after all more to teach us than to learn from us. The benefits we have conferred on them resemble the one conferred by the financier on the shoemaker. Nothing in the world can make up for the loss of joy in one's work. (81)

CHAPTER XI

**Colonialism and the Wretched of the Earth
Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon**

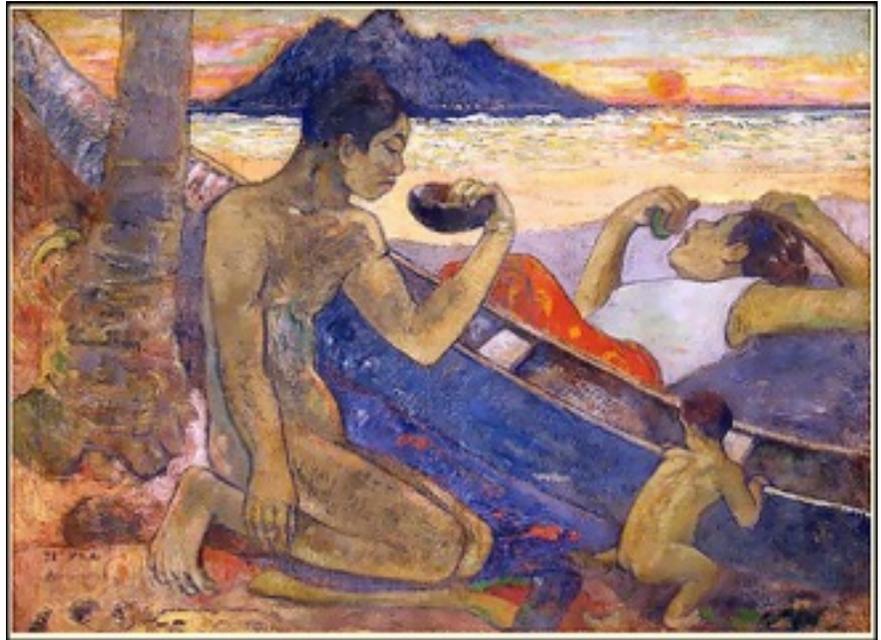
Notebook of a Return to the Native Land (excerpt)

Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (1939)

Aimé Césaire (1913-2008)

1-At the end of daybreak ...
Beat it, I said to him, you
cop, you lousy pig, beat it.
I detest the flunkies of order
and the cock-chafers of hope.
Beat it, evil grigri, you
bedbug of a petty monk.
Then I turned toward paradises
lost for him and his kin,
calmer than the face of a
woman telling lies, and there,
rocked by the flux of a never
exhausted thought I
nourished the wind,
I unlaced the monsters and
heard rise,
from the other side of disaster,
a river of turtledoves and savanna clover which I
carry forever in my depths height-deep as
the twentieth floor of the most arrogant houses and as
a guard against the putrefying force of crepuscular surroundings,
surveyed night and day by a cursed venereal sun.
At the end of daybreak burgeoning with frail coves,
the hungry Antilles, the Antilles pitted with smallpox,
the Antilles dynamited by alcohol,
stranded in the mud of this bay,
in the dust of this town sinisterly stranded.

2-At the end of daybreak, the extreme,
deceptive desolate eschar on the wound of the waters;
the martyrs who do not bear witness;
the flowers of blood that fade and scatter in
the empty wind like the screeches of babbling parrots;
an aged life mendaciously smiling,
its lips opened by vacated agonies;
an aged poverty rotting under the sun, silently;



an aged silence bursting with tepid pustules,
the awful futility of our raison d'être.
At the end of daybreak,
on this very fragile earth thickness exceeded
in a humiliating way by its grandiose future --
the volcanoes will explode, the naked water will
bear away the ripe sun stains and nothing will
be left but a tepid bubbling pecked at by sea birds --
the beach of dreams and the insane awakenings.

3-At the end of daybreak,
this town sprawled-flat, toppled from its common sense, inert,
winded under its geometric weight of an eternally renewed cross,
indocile to its fate, mute, vexed no matter what,
incapable of growing with the juice of this earth,
self-conscious, clipped, reduced,
in breach of fauna and flora.

At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat ...
And in this inert town, this squalling throng so astonishingly
detoured from its cry as this town as been
from its movement, from its meaning,
not even worried, detoured from its true cry,
the only cry you would have wanted to hear because
you feel it alone belongs to this town;
because you feel it lives in it in some deep refuge
and pride in this inert town, this throng detoured
from its cry of hunger, of poverty, of revolt, of hatred,
this throng so strangely chattering and mute.
In this inert town, this strange throng which does not pack,
does not mix: clever at discovering the point of disencasement,
of flight, of dodging.
This throng which does not know how to throng,
this throng, so perfectly alone under the sun,
like a woman one thought completely occupied with her lyric cadence,
who abruptly challenges a hypothetical rain and
enjoins it not to fall;
or like a rapid sign of the cross without perceptible motive;
or like the sudden grave animality of a peasant,
urinating standing, her legs parted, stiff.

4-In this inert town, this desolate throng under the sun,
not connected with anything that is expressed, asserted,
released in broad earth daylight, its own.
Neither with Josephine, Empress of the French,
dreaming way up there above the nigger scum.



Nor with the liberator fixed in
his whitewashed stone
liberation.
Nor with the conquistador.
Nor with this contempt, with
this freedom, with this
audacity.
And the end of daybreak, this
inert town and its beyond of
lepers,
of consumption, of famines,
of fears crouched in the
ravines,

fears perched in the trees, fears dug in the ground,
fears adrift in the sky, of piled up fears and their fumaroles of anguish.

5-At the end of daybreak, the morne forgotten, forgetful of leaping.

At the end of daybreak, the morne in restless, docile hooves ---
its malarial blood routs the sun with its overheated pulse.

At the end of daybreak, the restrained conflagration of the morne like
a sob gagged on the verge of a bloodthirsty burst,
in quest of an ignition that slips away and ignores itself.

At the end of daybreak, the morne crouching before bulimia on
the outlook for tuns and mills, slowly vomiting out its human fatigue,
the morne solitary and its shed blood,
the morne bandaged in shade, the morne and its ditches of fear,
the morne and its great hands of wind.

At the end of daybreak, the famished morne and no one knows better
than this bastard morne why the suicide choked with a little help
from his hypoglossal jamming his tongue backward to swallow it,
why a woman seems to float belly up on the Capot River
(her chiaroscuro body submissively organized at the command
of her navel) but she is only a bundle of sonorous water.

6-And neither the teacher in his classroom, nor the priest at catechism will
be able to get a word out of this sleepy little nigger,

no matter how energetically they drum on his shorn skull,
for starvation has quicksanded his voice into the swamp of hunger

(a-word-one-single-word and
we-will-forget-about-Queen-Blanche-of-Castille,
a-word-one-single-word,

you-should-see-this-little-savage-who-doesn't-know-anyof-The-Ten-Commandments)

for his voice gets lost in the swamp of hunger,

and there is nothing, really nothing to squeeze out of this little brat,
other than a hunger which can no longer climb to the rigging

of his voice
a sluggish flabby hunger,
a hunger buried in the depth of the Hunger of this
famished morne
7-At the end of daybreak, the disparate stranding,
the exacerbated stench of corruption,
the monstrous sodomies of the host and the sacrificing priest,
the impassable beak-head frames of prejudice and stupidity,
the prostitutions, the hypocrisies, the lubricities,
the treasons, the lies, the frauds, the concussions ---
the panting of a deficient cowardice,
the heave-holess enthusiasm of supernumerary sahibs,
the greeds, the hysterias, the perversions,
the clownings of poverty, the cripplings, the itchings, the hives,
the tepid hammocks of degeneracy.
Right here the parade of laughable and scrofulous buboes,
the forced feedings of very strange microbes,
the poisons without known alexins, the sanies of really ancient sores,
the unforeseeable fermentations of putrescible species.
8-At the end of daybreak, the great motionless night,
the stars deader than a caved-in balafon,
the teratical bulb of night, sprouted from our villainies and our self-denials.
And our foolish and crazy stunts to revive the golden
splashing of privileged moments,
the umbilical cord restored to its ephemeral splendor, the bread,
and the wine of complicity, the bread, the wine,
the blood of honest weddings.
And this joy of former times making me aware of
my present poverty,
a bumpy road plunging into a hollow where it scatters a few shacks;
9-an indefatigable road charging at full speed a morne
at the top of which it brutally quicksands into a pool of clumsy houses,
a road foolishly climbing, recklessly descending,
and the carcass of wood, which I call our house, “ ”
comically perched on minute cement paws,
its coiffure of corrugated iron in the sun like a skin laid out to dry,
the main room, the rough floor where the nail heads gleam,
the beams of pine and shadow across the ceiling,
the spectral straw chairs, the grey lamp light,
the glossy flash of cockroaches in a maddening buzz ...
At the end of daybreak, this most essential land restored to my gourmandise,
not in diffuse tenderness,
but the tormented sensual concentration of the fat tits of the mornes

with an occasional palm tree as their hardened sprout, the jerky orgasm of torrents and from Trinité to Grand-Rivière, the hysterical grand-suck of the sea.

Electronic text of excerpt found at:
<http://kboo.fm/node/14002>



The Wretched of the Earth (1965)
(Chapter 6 Conclusion)
Les damnés de la terre (1961)
Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)

Come, then, comrades; it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent and resolute.

We must leave our dreams and abandon our old beliefs and friendships of the time before life began. Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience. Look at them today swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration.

And yet it may be said that Europe has been successful in as much as everything that she has attempted has succeeded.

Europe undertook the leadership of the world with ardour, cynicism and violence. Look at how the shadow of her palaces stretches out ever farther! Every one of her movements has burst the bounds of space and thought. Europe has declined all humility and all modesty; but she has also set her face against all solicitude and all tenderness.

She has only shown herself parsimonious and niggardly where men are concerned; it is only men that she has killed and devoured.

So, my brothers, how is it that we do not understand that we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe?

That same Europe where they were never done talking of Man, and where they never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of Man: today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind.

Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something



different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe.

Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that she has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and she is running headlong into the abyss; we would do well to avoid it with all possible speed.

Yet it is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring. We

have therefore seen in the preceding pages to what mortifying set-backs such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off our balance.

When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.

The human condition, plans for mankind and collaboration between men in those tasks which increase the sum total of humanity are new problems, which demand true inventions.

Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.

Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

Comrades, have we not other work to do than to create a third Europe? The West saw itself as a spiritual adventure. It is in the name of the spirit, in the name of the spirit of Europe, that Europe has made her encroachments, that she has justified her crimes and legitimized the slavery in which she holds four-fifths of humanity.

Yes, the European spirit has strange roots. All European thought has unfolded in places which were increasingly more deserted and more encircled by precipices; and thus it was that the custom grew up in those places of very seldom meeting man.

A permanent dialogue with oneself and an increasingly obscene narcissism never ceased to prepare the way for a half delirious state, where intellectual work became suffering and the reality was not at all that of a living man, working and creating himself, but rather words, different combinations of words, and the tensions springing from the meanings contained in

words. Yet some Europeans were found to urge the European workers to shatter this narcissism and to break with this un-reality.

But in general the workers of Europe have not replied to these calls; for the workers believe, too, that they are part of the prodigious adventure of the European spirit. All the elements of a solution to the great problems of humanity have, at different times, existed in European thought. But Europeans have not carried out in practice the mission which fell to them, which consisted of bringing their whole weight to bear violently upon these elements, of modifying their arrangement and their nature, of changing them and, finally, of bringing the problem of mankind to an infinitely higher plane.

Today, we are present at the stasis of Europe. Comrades, let us flee from this motionless movement where gradually dialectic is changing into the logic of equilibrium. Let us reconsider the question of mankind. Let us reconsider the question of cerebral reality and of the cerebral mass of all humanity, whose connexions must be increased, whose channels must be diversified and whose messages must be re-humanized.

Come, brothers, we have far too much work to do for us to play the game of rear-guard. Europe has done what she set out to do and on the whole she has done it well; let us stop blaming her, but let us say to her firmly that she should not make such a song and dance about it. We have no more to fear; so let us stop envying her.

The Third World today faces Europe like a colossal mass whose aim should be to try to resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find the answers.

But let us be clear: what matters is to stop talking about output, and intensification, and the rhythm of work.

No, there is no question of a return to Nature. It is simply a very concrete question of not dragging men towards mutilation, of not imposing upon the brain rhythms which very quickly



obliterate it and wreck it. The pretext of catching up must not be used to push man around, to tear him away from himself or from his privacy, to break and kill him.

No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, in the company of all men. The caravan should not be stretched out, for in that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and men who no longer recognize each other meet less and less together, and talk to each other less and less. It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his unity. And in the framework of the collectivity there were the differentiations, the stratification and the bloodthirsty tensions fed by classes; and finally, on the immense scale of humanity, there were racial hatreds, slavery, exploitation and above all the bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of fifteen thousand millions of men.

So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her.

Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature.

If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us.

But if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries.

If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe.

Moreover, if we wish to reply to the expectations of the people of Europe, it is no good sending them back a reflection, even an ideal reflection, of their society and their thought with which from time to time they feel immeasurably sickened.

For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.

Electronic excerpt found at:

<http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/fanon/conclusion.htm>

CHAPTER XII
Gardens of Paradise

The Man Who Planted Trees
L'homme qui plantait des arbres (1953)

Jean Giono (1895-1970)

The following novel by Jean Giono was written around 1953 and is not so well known in France. On the other hand, the book has diffused through out the world. It was widely appreciated and has been translated into thirteen languages. Many questions were asked about the personality of Elzéard Bouffier and about the forest of Vergons. Even though the man who planted oaks is the product of the imagination, there indeed has been an enormous effort to reafforest that region since 1880. One hundred thousand hectares were planted before World War I, mainly with Austrian Black Pine and European Larch. Today those forests have transformed the landscape and hydrology of the region.

Here is the text of the letter that Giono wrote to the Waters and Forests Manager of Digne, Mr. Valdeyron, in 1957, about this novel :

Dear Sir,

Sorry to disappoint you, but Elzéard Bouffier is an invented character. The aim was to encourage love for trees or, more exactly, to stir the love to plant trees (which always has been one of my dearest ideas). Now, judging by the result, the aim was met by this imaginary character. The text that you read in Trees and Lifewas translated into Danish, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, English, German, Russian, Chekoslovakish, Hungarian, Spanish, Italian, Yiddish, Polish. I gave my rights freely for all those reproductions. One American came recently to ask me



for the authorization to allow him to print 100,00 copies to distribute free of charge in America and of course I agreed. The University of Zagreb is translating it into Yugoslavish. It is one of my texts of which I am the proudest. It does not bring me one cent and that is why it is doing the very thing for which it was written.

I would like to meet you, if it is possible, to speak precisely about the practical use of that text. I believe it is time for us to have a "policy of the tree", although "policy" seems to be the wrong word.

Very cordially,

Jean Giono

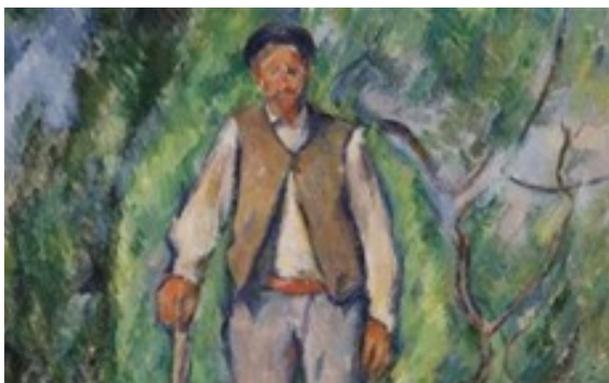
In order for the character of a human being to reveal truly exceptional qualities, we must have the good fortune to observe its action over a long period of years. If this action is devoid of all selfishness, if the idea that directs it is one of unqualified generosity, if it is absolutely certain that it has not sought recompense anywhere, and if moreover it has left visible marks on the world, then we are unquestionably dealing with an unforgettable character.

About forty years ago I went on a long hike, through hills absolutely unknown to tourists, in that very old region where the Alps penetrate into Provence.

This region is bounded to the south-east and south by the middle course of the Durance, between Sisteron and Mirabeau; to the north by the upper course of the Drôme, from its source down to Die; to the west by the plains of Comtat Venaissin and the outskirts of Mont Ventoux. It includes all the northern part of the Département of Basses-Alpes, the south of Drôme and a little enclave of Vaucluse.

At the time I undertook my long walk through this deserted region, it consisted of barren and monotonous lands, at about 1200 to 1300 meters above sea level. Nothing grew there except wild lavender.

I was crossing this country at its widest part, and after walking for three days, I found myself in the most complete desolation. I was camped next to the skeleton of an abandoned village. I had used the last of my water the day before and I needed to find more. Even though they were in ruins, these houses all huddled together and looking like an



old wasps' nest made me think that there must at one time have been a spring or a well there. There was indeed a spring, but it was dry. The five or six roofless houses, ravaged by sun and wind, and the small chapel with its tumble-down belfry, were arrayed like the houses and chapels of living villages, but all life had disappeared.

It was a beautiful June day with plenty of sun, but on these shelterless lands, high up in the sky, the wind whistled with an unendurable brutality. Its growling in the carcasses of the houses was like that of a wild beast disturbed during its meal.

I had to move my camp. After five hours of walking, I still hadn't found water, and nothing gave me hope of finding any. Everywhere there was the same dryness, the same stiff, woody plants. I thought I saw in the distance a small black silhouette. On a chance I headed towards it. It was a shepherd. Thirty lambs or so were resting near him on the scorching ground.

He gave me a drink from his gourd and a little later he led me to his shepherd's cottage, tucked down in an undulation of the plateau. He drew his water - excellent - from a natural hole, very deep, above which he had installed a rudimentary windlass.

This man spoke little. This is common among those who live alone, but he seemed sure of himself, and confident in this assurance, which seemed remarkable in this land shorn of everything. He lived not in a cabin but in a real house of stone, from the looks of which it was

clear that his own labor had restored the ruins he had found on his arrival. His roof was solid and water-tight. The wind struck against the roof tiles with the sound of the sea crashing on the beach.

His household was in order, his dishes washed, his floor swept, his rifle greased; his soup boiled over the fire; I noticed then that he was also freshly shaven, that all his buttons were solidly sewn, and that his clothes were mended with such care as to make the patches invisible.

He shared his soup with me, and when afterwards I offered him my tobacco pouch, he told me that he didn't smoke. His dog, as silent as he, was friendly without being fawning.

It had been agreed immediately that I would pass the night there, the closest village being still more than a day and a half

farther on. Furthermore, I understood perfectly well the character of the rare villages of that region. There are four or five of them dispersed far from one another on the flanks of the hills, in groves of white oaks at the very ends of roads passable by carriage. They are inhabited by woodcutters who make charcoal. They are places where the living is poor. The families, pressed together in close quarters by a climate that is exceedingly harsh, in



summer as well as in winter, struggle ever more selfishly against each other. Irrational contention grows beyond all bounds, fueled by a continuous struggle to escape from that place. The men carry their charcoal to the cities in their trucks, and then return. The most solid qualities crack under this perpetual Scottish shower. The women stir up bitterness. There is competition over everything, from the sale of charcoal to the benches at church. The virtues fight amongst themselves, the vices fight amongst themselves, and there is a ceaseless general combat between the vices and the virtues. On top of all that, the equally ceaseless wind irritates the nerves. There are epidemics of suicides and numerous cases of insanity, almost always murderous.

The shepherd, who did not smoke, took out a bag and poured a pile of acorns out onto the table. He began to examine them one after another with a great deal of attention, separating the good ones from the bad. I smoked my pipe. I offered to help him, but he told me it was his own business. Indeed, seeing the care that he devoted to this job, I did not insist. This was our whole conversation. When he had in the good pile a fair number of acorns, he counted them out into packets of ten. In doing this he eliminated some more of the acorns, discarding the smaller ones and those that that showed even the slightest crack, for he examined them very closely. When he had before him one hundred perfect acorns he stopped, and we went to bed.



The company of this man brought me a feeling of peace. I asked him the next morning if I might stay and rest the whole day with him. He found that perfectly natural. Or more exactly, he gave me the impression that nothing could disturb him. This rest was not absolutely necessary to me, but I was intrigued and I wanted to find out more about this man. He let out his flock and took them to the pasture. Before leaving, he soaked in a bucket of water the little sack containing the acorns that he had so carefully chosen and counted.

I noted that he carried as a sort of walking stick an iron rod as

thick as his thumb and about one and a half meters long. I set off like someone out for a stroll, following a route parallel to his. His sheep pasture lay at the bottom of a small valley. He left his flock in the charge of his dog and climbed up towards the spot where I was standing. I was afraid that he was coming to reproach me for my indiscretion, but not at all : It was his own route and he invited me to come along with him if I had nothing better to do. He continued on another two hundred meters up the hill.

Having arrived at the place he had been heading for, he began to pound his iron rod into the ground. This made a hole in which he placed an acorn, whereupon he covered over the hole again. He was planting oak trees. I asked him if the land belonged to him. He answered no. Did he know whose land it was? He did not know. He supposed that it was communal land, or perhaps it belonged to someone who did not care about it. He himself did not care to know who the owners were. In this way he planted his one hundred acorns with great care.

After the noon meal, he began once more to pick over his acorns. I must have put enough insistence into my questions, because he answered them. For three years now he had been planting trees in this solitary way. He had planted one hundred thousand. Of these one hundred thousand, twenty thousand had come up. He counted on losing another half of them to rodents and to everything else that is unpredictable in the designs of Providence. That left ten thousand oaks that would grow in this place where before there was nothing.

It was at this moment that I began to wonder about his age. He was clearly more than fifty. Fifty-five, he told me. His name was Elzéard Bouffier. He had owned a farm in the plains, where he lived most of his life. He had lost his only son, and then his wife. He had retired into this solitude, where he took pleasure in living slowly, with his flock of sheep and his dog. He had concluded that this country was dying for lack of trees. He added that, having nothing more important to do, he had resolved to remedy the situation.

Leading as I did at the time a solitary life, despite my youth, I knew how to treat the souls of solitary people with delicacy. Still, I made a mistake. It was precisely my youth that forced me to imagine the future in my own terms, including a certain search for happiness. I told him that in thirty years these ten thousand trees would be magnificent. He replied very simply that, if God gave him life, in thirty years he would have planted so many other trees that these ten thousand would be like a drop of water in the ocean.

He had also begun to study the propagation of beeches. and he had near his house a nursery filled with seedlings grown from beechnuts. His little wards, which he had protected from his sheep by a screen fence, were growing beautifully. He was also considering birches for the valley bottoms where, he told me, moisture lay slumbering just a few meters beneath the surface of the soil.



We parted the next day.

The next year the war of 14 came, in which I was engaged for five years. An infantryman could hardly think about trees. To tell the truth, the whole business hadn't made a very deep impression on me; I took it to be a hobby, like a stamp collection, and forgot about it.

With the war behind me, I found myself with a small demobilization bonus and a great desire to breathe a little pure air. Without any preconceived notion beyond that, I struck out again along the trail through that deserted country.

The land had not changed. Nonetheless, beyond that dead village I perceived in the distance a sort of gray fog that covered the hills like a carpet. Ever since the day before I had been thinking about the shepherd who planted trees. « Ten thousand oaks, I had said to myself, must really take up a lot of space. »

I had seen too many people die during those five years not to be able to imagine easily the death of Elzéard Bouffier, especially since when a man is twenty he thinks of a man of fifty as an old codger for whom nothing remains but to die. He was not dead. In fact, he was very spry. He had changed his job. He only had four sheep now, but to make up for this he had about a hundred beehives. He had gotten rid of the sheep because they threatened his crop of trees. He told me (as indeed I could see for myself) that the war had not disturbed him at all. He had continued imperturbably with his planting.

The oaks of 1910 were now ten years old and were taller than me and than him. The spectacle was impressive. I was literally speechless and, as he didn't speak himself, we passed the whole day in silence, walking through his forest. It was in three sections, eleven kilometers long overall and, at its widest point, three kilometers wide. When I considered that this had all sprung from the hands and from the soul of this one man - without technical aids - , it struck me that men could be as effective as God in domains other than destruction.

He had followed his idea, and the beeches that reached up to my shoulders and extending as far as the eye could see bore witness to it. The oaks were now good and thick, and had passed the

age where they were at the mercy of rodents; as for the designs of Providence, to destroy the work that had been created would henceforth require a cyclone. He showed me admirable stands of birches that dated from five years ago, that is to say from 1915, when I had been fighting at Verdun. He had planted them in the valley bottoms where he had suspected, correctly, that there was water close to the surface. They were as tender as young girls, and very determined.

This creation had the air, moreover, of working by a chain reaction. He had not troubled about it; he went on obstinately with his simple task. But, in going back down to the village, I saw water running in streams that, within living memory, had always been dry. It was the most striking revival that he had shown me. These streams had borne water before, in ancient days. Certain of the sad villages that I spoke of at the beginning of my account had been built on the sites of ancient Gallo-Roman villages, of which there still remained traces; archeologists digging there had found fishhooks in places where in more recent times cisterns were required in order to have a little water.

The wind had also been at work, dispersing certain seeds. As the water reappeared, so too did willows, osiers, meadows, gardens, flowers, and a certain reason to live.

But the transformation had taken place so slowly that it had been taken for granted, without provoking surprise. The hunters who climbed the hills in search of hares or wild boars had noticed the spreading of the little trees, but they set it down to the natural spitefulness of the earth. That is why no one had touched the work of this man. If they had suspected him, they would have tried to thwart him. But he never came under suspicion : Who among the villagers or the administrators would ever have suspected that anyone could show such obstinacy in carrying out this magnificent act of generosity?

Beginning in 1920 I never let more than a year go by without paying a visit to Elzéard Bouffier. I never saw him waver or doubt, though God alone can tell when God's own hand is in a thing! I have said nothing of his disappointments, but you can easily imagine that, for such an accomplishment, it was necessary to conquer adversity; that, to assure the victory of such a passion, it was necessary to fight against despair. One year he had planted ten thousand maples. They all died. The next year, he gave up on maples and went back to beeches, which did even better than the oaks.

To get a true idea of this exceptional character, one must not forget that he worked in total solitude; so total that, toward the end of his life, he lost the habit of talking. Or maybe he just didn't see the need for it.

In 1933 he received the visit of an astonished forest ranger. This functionary ordered him to cease building fires outdoors, for fear of endangering this natural forest. It was the first time, this naive man told him, that a forest had been observed to grow up entirely on its own. At the time of this incident, he was thinking of planting beeches at a spot twelve kilometers from his house. To avoid the coming and going - because at the time he was seventy-five years old - he planned to build a cabin of stone out



where he was doing his planting. This he did the next year.

In 1935, a veritable administrative delegation went to examine this « natural forest ». There was an important personage from Waters and Forests, a deputy, and some technicians. Many useless words were spoken. It was decided to do something, but luckily nothing was done, except for one truly useful thing : placing the forest under the protection of the State and forbidding anyone from coming there to make charcoal. For it was impossible not to be taken with the beauty of these young trees in full health. And the forest exercised its seductive powers even on the deputy himself.

I had a friend among the chief foresters who were with the delegation. I explained the mystery to him. One day the next week, we went off together to look for Elzéard Bouffier, We found him hard at work, twenty kilometers away from the place where the inspection had taken place.

This chief forester was not my friend for nothing. He understood the value of things. He knew how to remain silent. I offered up some eggs I had brought with me as a gift. We split our snack three ways, and then passed several hours in mute contemplation of the landscape.

The hillside whence we had come was covered with trees six or seven meters high. I remembered the look of the place in 1913 : a desert... The peaceful and steady labor, the vibrant highland air, his frugality, and above all, the serenity of his soul had given the old man a kind of solemn good health. He was an athlete of God. I asked myself how many hectares he had yet to cover with trees.

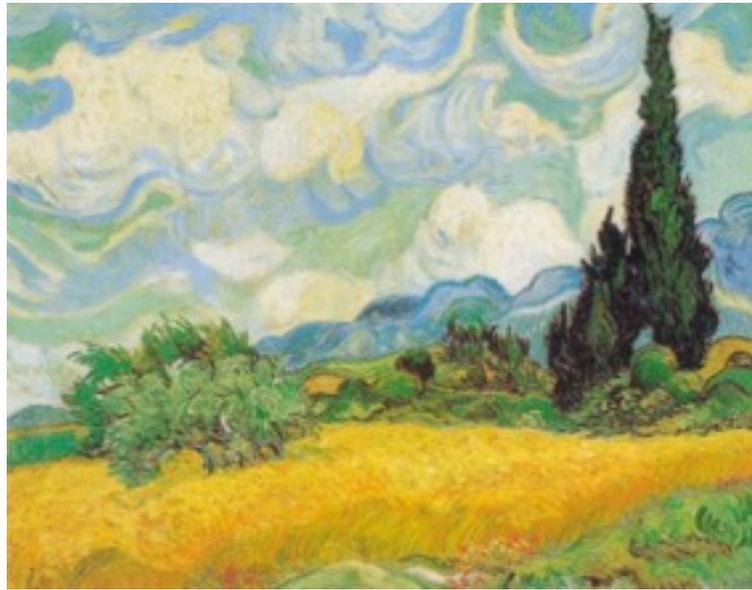
Before leaving, my friend made a simple suggestion concerning certain species of trees to which the terrain seemed to be particularly well suited. He was not insistent. « For the very good reason, » he told me afterwards, « that this fellow knows a lot more about this sort of thing than I do. » After another hour of walking, this thought having travelled along with him, he added : « He knows a lot more about this sort of thing than anybody - and he has found a jolly good way of being happy ! »

It was thanks to the efforts of this chief forester that the forest was protected, and with it, the happiness of this man. He designated three forest rangers for their protection, and terrorized them to such an extent that they remained indifferent to any jugs of wine that the woodcutters might offer as bribes.

The forest did not run any grave risks except during the war of 1939. Then automobiles were being run on wood alcohol, and there was never enough wood. They began to cut some of the stands of the oaks of 1910, but the trees stood so far from any useful road that the enterprise turned out to be bad from a financial point of view, and was soon abandoned. The shepherd never knew anything about it. He was thirty kilometers away, peacefully continuing his task, as untroubled by the war of 39 as he had been of the war of 14.

I saw Elzéard Bouffier for the last time in June of 1945. He was then eighty-seven years old. I had once more set off along my trail through the wilderness, only to find that now, in spite of the shambles in which the war had left the whole country, there was a motor coach running between the valley of the Durance and the mountain. I set down to this relatively rapid means of transportation the fact that I no longer recognized the landmarks I knew from my earlier visits. It also seemed that the route was taking me through entirely new places. I had to ask the name of a village to be sure that I was indeed passing through that same region, once so ruined and

desolate. The coach set me down at Vergons. In 1913, this hamlet of ten or twelve houses had had three inhabitants. They were savages, hating each other, and earning their living by trapping : Physically and morally, they resembled prehistoric men . The nettles devoured the abandoned houses that surrounded them. Their lives were without hope, it was only a matter of waiting for death to come : a situation that hardly predisposes one to virtue.



All that had changed, even to the air itself. In place of the dry, brutal gusts that had greeted me long ago, a gentle breeze whispered to me, bearing sweet odors. A sound like that of running water came from the heights above : It was the sound of the wind in the trees. And most astonishing of all, I heard the sound of real water running into a pool. I saw that they had built a fountain, that it was full of water, and what touched me most, that next to it they had planted a lime-tree that must be at least four years old, already grown thick, an incontestable symbol of resurrection.

Furthermore, Vergons showed the signs of labors for which hope is a requirement : Hope must therefore have returned. They had cleared out the ruins, knocked down the broken walls, and rebuilt five houses. The hamlet now counted twenty-eight inhabitants, including four young families. The new houses, freshly plastered, were surrounded by gardens that bore, mixed in with each other but still carefully laid out, vegetables and flowers, cabbages and rosebushes, leeks and gueules-de-loup, celery and anemones. It was now a place where anyone would be glad to live.

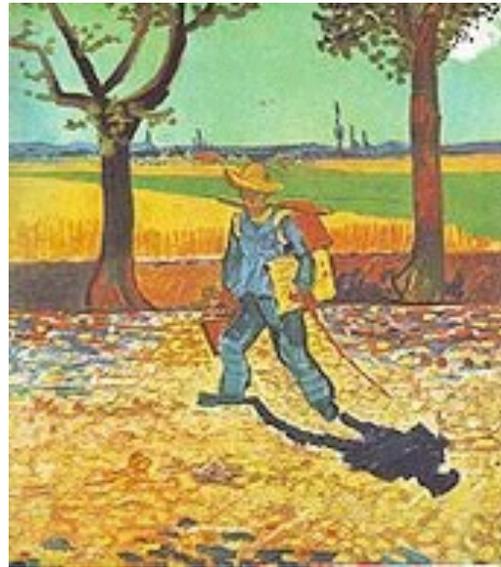
From there I continued on foot. The war from which we had just barely emerged had not permitted life to vanish completely, and now Lazarus was out of his tomb. On the lower flanks of the mountain, I saw small fields of barley and rye; in the bottoms of the narrow valleys, meadowlands were just turning green.

It has taken only the eight years that now separate us from that time for the whole country around there to blossom with splendor and ease. On the site of the ruins I had seen in 1913 there are now well-kept farms, the sign of a happy and comfortable life. The old springs, fed by rain and snow now that are now retained by the forests, have once again begun to flow. The brooks have been channelled. Beside each farm, amid groves of maples, the pools of fountains are bordered by carpets of fresh mint. Little by little, the villages have been rebuilt. Yuppies have come from the plains, where land is expensive, bringing with them youth, movement, and a spirit of adventure. Walking along the roads you will meet men and women in full health, and boys and girls who know how to laugh, and who have regained the taste for the traditional rustic festivals. Counting both the previous inhabitants of the area, now unrecognizable from living in plenty,

and the new arrivals, more than ten thousand persons owe their happiness to Elzéard Bouffier.

When I consider that a single man, relying only on his own simple physical and moral resources, was able to transform a desert into this land of Canaan, I am convinced that despite everything, the human condition is truly admirable. But when I take into account the constancy, the greatness of soul, and the selfless dedication that was needed to bring about this transformation, I am filled with an immense respect for this old, uncultured peasant who knew how to bring about a work worthy of God.

Elzéard Bouffier died peacefully in 1947 at the hospice in Banon.



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CHAPTER XIII

Globalization: The Death of Nature and Humanity

“The World is Alive” From *Fever* and excerpt from *The African*

J.M.G Le Clézio (1940-)



**Paul Gauguin’s “*D'où venons-nous ? Que sommes-nous ? Où allons-nous ?*”
“Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?” (1897-98)**

“The World is Alive”
(London: Penguin Books, 1965)

THIS is what one has to do: one has to go out into the country, like a Sunday painter, with a big sheet of paper and a ball-point pencil. To choose a deserted spot, in a valley set between mountains, sit down on a rock, and look about one for a long time. And then, when one has had a good look, one must take the sheet of paper and draw, in words, what one has seen. You understand the thing is to write down the landscape, piece by piece, not overlooking anything; deliberately, methodically, one must map out this scrap of the earth’s surface, indicating the smallest pebble, the smallest clump of grass, charting its sights and smells, writing it all down, drawing the whole thing. Then, when one has finished and evening has come, one can go home. On the sheet, there, in this rectangle of paper measuring 21 X 27 cm., one has scrawled a patch of the earth. One has made the portrait of a few kilometers of light, of sounds and smells. One gas flattened them out as though on a postcard, so very easily. And now they’re yours, those kilometers, they’re saved from rotting away, forgotten; they will remain there, in your head, hammered in little signs, to all eternity. Or at any rate, as long as you’re alive.

At this point the mountains had frowned up everywhere, just anyhow; they filled the entire horizon, with tall, hard, furrowed masses and sharp peaks rising on all sides. Down below, the

plain narrowed suddenly into a triangle, and chaos began. The bed of the stream, a sort of stony desert split down the middle by a trickle of water, was scattered with enormous rocks that had fallen there as a part of an avalanche, a thousand years back. Between the rocks the smooth pebbles lay in waves, moulded by the currents and whirlpools of the last period of spate. On the far side of the stream a mountain rose steeply, higher than the others, standing at the mouth of the defile like a wall.

One approached this at the speed of an aeroplane, and little by little its details came to light, its countless asperities, the clusters of bushes clinging to the naked rock, the dried-up rivulets, the holes, the patches of scree; the wall ran the whole length of the valley, rising to a height of something like 1,800 feet, sheer, naked, and massive. The mountain was motionless, ponderous, standing alone against the blue sky where clouds drifted in shreds. It was like that. The line of the mountain climbed northwards in a gentle slope, then the slope became steeper and turned into a cliff; the first speak had two summits, with a dip between them. Behind the second peak the sun was glinting on a queer, white-painted object that looked just like a crucifix. Another dip, a rounded one this time, and one came to the second summit; not so high as the first, the consisted of a succession of broken rocks, fitting one into another. After than, the outline of the mountain ran down again into a sort of gorge, and then sloped gently up to the highest summit of all. This consisted of a single speak, a kind of broad obelisk, its flanks covered with trees which projected from its massive profile like a succession of little springs. On the other side, after you had crossed the empty, frozen space, the bald point that was culminating all the time, the peak fell down almost vertically into the valley. Half-way down, however, the fall was arrested by and outcrop of the mountain, a twist in its body which tan off to the right and linked it to another block of stone. Just like the neck of some gigantic animal, the rocky mass curved away in a long, sinuous, heavy movement, and the crest of this mis-shapen wall seemed to be continually stretched in a terrible effort, worthy of a cataclysm.

And indeed they were still there, the traces of the ancient cataclysm that had moulded the earth. The boulders had shot up like rockets, amid torrents of scalding mud, lakes as big as seas had poured out through breaks in the lodes, and chasms had suddenly yawned, real upside down volcanoes, to swallow millions and millions of cubic kilometres of stone and marsh. One could still see the disaster in the form in which it had petrified centuries before; chaos was at rest there, tranquil, crushed beneath its own force, deathly faces rising desperately above the seeping tide of life: forests of waving bushes, a gentle, winding stream of turbid water, a drift of dust and sand covering the primeval ridges. The world was half buried under active silt, but one could tell it had been there. That one upon a time it had exploded, burst out with the full strength of its living bones, knocking over everything around it, to take the heavens by storm.

To the north, further upstream, the circle of mountains has close in. The space has become too small, and the blocks of stone have pushed up against one another. The river has to run through an awkward defile, full of shadows, and the mountain crests are lined up, overlapping one another.

On the left bank there's another mountain, a shapeless thing that overhangs the road. Its belly bulges out over the stream and the scrawny bushes clinging to its flanks twist their branches in a despairing effort to grow upwards.

Downstream, the circle ends with the flight of the mountains down to the hills, of the hills down to the plains, and of the plains down to the sea.

But it's within the circle that things happen. One has to go down into this chasm carved out of the earth, where a stream flows softly through olive groves, into this funnel which is full of peace and colour. Facing the wall-like mountain, counting the clumps of trees clinging to the livid rock; feeling the serrated crest against the sky and the rotary movement of the clouds moving forward, forward . . . Listen to the sounds and determine them; sniff the smells; be hurt by the sting of a horsefly; see the shapes of pebbles and grasses and not forget them; and above all, stare at the landscape.

At the foot of the mountains, as I said, there's a river; it's wide where it enters the circle, but narrows as it climbs up the sloping ground, with many windings. At first the water is clear, almost grey. It flows tirelessly towards the sea, making a steady sssshing sound, no movement to be seen on its surface. It glides like this, all in one piece, opaque yet translucent, reflecting nothing, through the middle of a pebbly plain. Other channels have been traced in its bed, and there are kinds of muddy pools stagnating in them, a refuge for mosquitoes. Nothing moves over the stones; the water may perhaps be flowing under the surface as well, filtering painfully between one pebble and the next, with bright drops that fall and fall incessantly, silently. On the surface the pebbles are laid down in long diagonal stripes, some pinkish grey, some mauve, some slate-coloured. Deep down, under the layers of stones, the rock lies every-where. The millennial fracture running along the ground and worn down, ceaselessly, by the imperceptible underthrust of the stream. For the stream is advancing, that's a certainty, water and pebbles, like a body, like a boa-constrictor in fragments. The top layers of pebbles are carried along by the current and rub against the middle layers, which rub against the bottom layers, which rub, in their turn, against the rocky wall. All this friction goes on slowly, very slowly. But a supernatural strength dwells in the river, and the water is pushing all the time, it has no respite it is tearing dust from the earth, crushing, emptying, gnawing away. The water flows on, eternal, briskly at the surface, drop by drop in the depths; when it has flowed, the sun shines down on the pebbles and evaporates it. Then it rises into the sky and trails there in long, white clouds; after that, the wind drives the clouds together, turns them grey, brown, blue, inky black; and then, suddenly, the sky bursts and the water falls down to earth again, flows towards the river, enters its bed, saturates everything, and begins again to push, to wear down, to gnaw away like a set of teeth.

Higher up, the river is squeezed between the mountain walls; here, the erosion has not yet widened the space between the rocky masses, and there are few pebbles. Along one bank there is a ribbon of land covered with reeds, along the other the steep, naked wall. The water flows at the foot of this wall, deep and blue. The rock goes straight down into the streams, with no intervening bank, and a black line running above water level; the mossy mark left by times of spate, no doubt, when the river is swollen by the autumn rains and writhes and swirls along beside the mountain.

Along the other bank, however, the rock was less tough, and has given way. Or perhaps it was the eccentric force of the current, because of the way the stream curves, that has thrown all the water against the other wall. At the river's edge, near the bend, reeds and grasses have found a hold in the sticky soil. The wind sends a ripple through them in passing, and the sun has warmed their stems all day. Birds shoot out of them, twittering, and zigzag up into the sky. Here,

on this spongy soil, vegetation has managed to flourish. The living roots have grown in the earth, and the water has nourished them. Between the grasses and reeds the opposite wall can be seen, barer than ever. Further on, lower down, where the river widens out and the stony plains begin, greets, sad trees, fastened to the rock one knows not how, bend over towards the bed of the stream. And under their drooping foliage there are dark hiding-places; animals, snakes, toads, live in them, perhaps. Those shady holes must smell of decay, of dead leaves, and the air is surely cold. What id those holes conceal some loathsome corpse, all white and blue, its skin pierced by a hundred knife-stabs?

Near the sandy ground where the reeds grow, the hillside begins; covered with maize=fields and plots of waste ground, an old thing, even a kind of ruin, it slopes gently up to the road. The last few yards of ground are set with espaliers and planted with olives; there are a great many insects here. They rush through the air with funny creaking sounds, may-bugs, blow-flies, horse-flies, dragon-flies, mosquitoes, bumble bees, wasps, and long winged ants whose bodies quiver nervously. Along the ground, among the seeds, the little stones and the dry grass, a snake is gliding slowly; it stops now and then and sways its head from side to side. The plants stick up, motionless. One would say things were waiting, like this, for some awe-inspiring event. But nothing happens.

Planted stiffly on the terraced ground, the olive-trees are drying up. There is a silent, mysterious strength in them; it keeps them upright in the soil, it climbs up their contorted branches and spreads through their fibers. A determination to be a tree, perhaps, an implacable, intense, perfectly inanimate hardness. Inside the bark, in the narrow recesses of the wood, it works at its vertical task, perfuming, feeding, gently curving the edges of the little glossy leaves. It is in the earth, too, in the sucked-up earth that climbs into them through their roots and turns into the reinforced concrete of their branches, the dry, brittle cement that stretches their countless fingers well up towards the zenith. The stalks of the leaves point up very straight, as though straining towards an invisible sun, and the tree seems to be attached in this way to the breast of the electric clouds, so as to receive their lightning manna.

Along the edge of the road, between the blocks of stone, flowers have grown. A tall, slender stalk, covered with a kind of silvery down, with a cluster of buds and half open flowers at the top, and at the bottom a –shaped root with several hairs growing out of it. All along the grass the leaves lie open, offering their tiny hollows to the dust and wind. Between two arms growing from either side of the body and each ending in a huge leaf, there is a rosette of new-born leaflets, and flowers that have not yet opened. It is like a microscopic heart, crumpled, folded in on itself, where nothing is distinct. Something delicate and soft, a little green and grey ball, like a minute face, that is living withdrawn into itself, waiting until the time comes for it to open. At the top of the plant, at the end of a down-curved thread, a cluster of little white flowers, five-petalled stars with faintly yellow-tinted centres, clings in a bunch. From that, too, life must emerge, from these little hairy, scented nests. A muted, indolent life that carries you through the changing seasons, the regular succession of days and nights, the cool hours, the hot hours, the hours of dew, the hours of light, like that, without impatience, without desire.

Around the plant the world is circular, fixed, invisible; things exist without phenomena, or with phenomena so tiny that they're not worth mentioning. Things are there in blocks, in islets; they are far away; nothing comes to the plant, nothing enters into it, except through the

fibres of its leaves or the filaments of its roots. Nothing communicates with it. And yet this is not death. On the contrary, it is a strange life, unrelated to the rest of the world. It is the scrap of the common life, the little stick planted all alone in its earth, without bonds or chains. It is truth isolated, serene, the majesty of being oneself, naked, and alone, of being a crumb of reality and not even knowing that one is that crumb. Just as for the olive-trees, the bushes, the brambles, the thistles, time does not exist, noise does not exist, action does not exist; and this nothingness that is so full, so intense, is the initial, victorious truth of matter, of the thing plunged into the whole, living neither against others nor towards them, but for itself, for itself only.

In the valley this vegetable strength had taken hold everywhere; it was bursting the crust shells of the earth, breaking up the clods in the depths of the soil, crawling, digging, seeking its outlet. The paths it was thus softly opening for itself in the powdery element were the evidence of its life and its power. Nothing stopped them. The world was really at the mercy of the plants and roots. For centuries they had been laboring this inert domain, gnawing away the rocks, dissolving the phosphate pitilessly, as a cluster of humble forces. A world without pain and without joy, a peaceful, murderous world, so close to death, yet so alive.

Through the forests of leaves and plants, rare insects were moving: a centipede went past a scrap of rotten wood; a giant ant, at least three centimeters long, walked along the edge of a wall. It had a squat, reddish body and a big black head with powerful mandibles. The ant advanced over the stones of the wall, its feet starting off landslides of dust-specks; it went up to a fly, which flew away at once; it patted a straw, stopped, and then, seized all of a sudden by some incomprehensible panic, began running like mad and vanished into a crack.

Other ants were walking along the road and on the branches of the trees; they were in incessant, grovelling movement with a sort of meticulous fury, full of feet and antennae, something like animated paths.

Clumps of tough grass had managed to pierce the tarred surface of the road and were living at ground level, impossible to uproot despite repeated blows from the tyres of cars. The wind blows, warm, noisy at times; it follows the gradient of the hillside, advances along the valley, moves slabs of coolness on its course, wrinkles the surface of the water in the stagnant ponds, carries off a wasp, rushes into a hole in the mountain. It will go on like this for a very long way, tight to the source of the river. For the air, too, is alive; it moves softly, stops, then blows harder. In the transparent, perfumed gas, now cold, now hot, bacteria are swept along; tiny animals with spherical bodies travel in a group on a speck of dust. Seeds fall from a tree or rain down from a dandelion. They will sink into the ground to join the drops of water and the grubs, and there they will decay slowly in the matrix of warmth, in the womb of the secret distended with torpor; when the moment arrives they will burst, and a new leaf-head will seek gently and powerfully for its particular route.

Here in this circle ringed with mountains, everything was to be found; countless animals, river, brooklets, the brooklets of brooklets, lumps of soil, plats, nothing was lacking; one was living in a series of concentric worlds that fitted perfectly inside one another: the world of giant ants, the world for beetles, the world for black masterwort, the world for reeds, the world for olive trees, for umbrella pines, or for chipped flint instruments; the world for the body of water, the world for earthworms, the world for flies; the world for snakes, the world for people, the world for dwarf wants. And yet this was merely appearance. For in point of fact there was only

one world and all these lived together in it. But there was to be no sharing of it. Reality lay beyond, and always beyond. Vast, multiform, spherical. The peace of this valley was inexorable torture, a pain which challenged the independence of every creature. There was no peace. There could be no peace. On the contrary, there was something mad, demented, durably cruel, which reigned within these beings. Neither grief nor enjoyment, but a terrible obstruction, an indescribable conflagration, a tempestuous ascent, full of dizziness and excitement. The violent sensation of existing, no doubt; like fear, which emptied you and at the same time filled you up. The idea of inhabiting, of being an inhabitant, here, in this valley, in this harsh, harsh site, and of never again being able to be otherwise; an inhabitant, unalterable, in front of his place of habitation; being an occupant, with might and main, in spite of oneself, far beyond oneself, almost in the future. And never able to do otherwise. The infinite malediction of being merely and inhabitant.

When you're close to the water's edge you see the great, silent movement going down towards the sea with a sound like a fountain. The water is deep, thick, steel-coloured. It flows along by the pebble beach in a single block, like a mass of ice. Inside there are fish, perhaps; glassy-eyed fish, busy watching their glaucous universe. Debris is drifting on the surface of the water, blade of grass torn from the banks, splinters of wood, roots. The soil, too, is crumbling, imperceptibly, silently; one doesn't see it break away, but one knows it is there, mixed with the water, dissolved into a thin grey substance.

In some places the stream has soaked into the bank, making muddy peninsulas, as it were; these gulfs are swarming with life: mosquitoes hovering just above the surface, midges, wasps, water-spiders. And there are thousands of these little pools up and down the stream. No lack of pebbles, either. They lie in heaps, one on top of another, in all shapes and colours some of them are surrounded by a thin white circle encrusted in the stone; others show signs of blows, or have holes through them. Polished by time, worn away by the river, they have come down from the highest mountain walls. They are crumbling away, a little more each day. In a thousand centuries, or sooner perhaps, the whole surface of the earth will have been reduced to sand.

The wind blows, and moves the dead leaves along the road. The bushes crackle. Lizards shoot across flat stones and then stop dead, only their throats palpitating. The thorns of a plant are quiet stiff, with points as sharp as finger-nails, and they are waiting. In the thickets, extreme wilderness prevails; branches are intertwined, leaves crackle, and pungent odours rise in the half-light; the insipid odour of sap, the smell of incipient fires, of crushed pulp. The stalks are green, they dazzle. Spiders' webs are stretched over hollows and between twigs, and the shadow is peopled with hairy blobs, tragic-eyed, always on the watch. Fatigue is heavy, it prowls low down, close to the ground, between the feet of the bushes. And a sort of milk-colour gradually invades the membranes of the plants, bends the slender stalks as it passes, covers the furrowed skin of the old laurel bushes with little cracks.

High in the sky, a buzzard is circling, unhurried. A bird's-eye view shows the earth as an immense, desolate chaos, a thing of ruins, where white torrents flow, thin as trails of spittle. A cry rises from a shrub, and one sees nothing; and unknown 'rak-rak-rak-rak' that catches at one's throat and stirs ripples of anxiety.

Still higher up, against the flat, blue-painted canopy of the sky, the clouds are still swimming. One of them is very long, with a kind of filiform tail that melts into the ether. They

are constantly altering their shape, by imperceptible changes; they form and dissolve, assemble, separate, turn round the mountain peaks, fray out, are swallowed.

At the other end of the valley, where the streams disappears, there are two uprights, rather like gateposts, on each bank. Beyond them lies the unknown. The river must continue its winding course, and the banks must be green, no doubt, with more olive-trees and more reeds. But here, in this enclosed corner, one would think everything has been daubed in; the clean air, the cool, the shade, the wind---its all bare, incredibly bare. The contours of the ground are fixed, almost glazed. Between the mountain walls, lines run criss-cross, some of them slender, others heavy, for ever and ever. Nothing will move, nothing will change. The rocks are impassive, balanced, the trees and plants stand erect and a peopled silence reigns. The whole thing is an untidy weave, with knots, patches of colour, blackish blots. One has to live in there, one has to be one spot among others, a little speck of ink indicated by an arrow. In the heart of the show, an insect belonging here, a real grasshopper, kneeling in meditation. To see everything. To live everything.

A tiny hollow is your domain: around you the horizon is close in by gigantic banks with things like hairy tree-trunks growing on them. Down along the bumpy ground the air is hot, laden with scents, and wavers as it rises. Impossible to see any higher: a few centimeters above ground-level the atmosphere suddenly becomes opaque, traversed by blisters like a liquid surface. One lives no higher than the dust, a terrible weight shackles on to the cortex of the earth. Ah, if one had wings! But there's nothing to be done, one has to crawl over the slipping blocks of leaf-mould. And here there is no rest: the ground is alive, bubbling all the time, groaning, opening and shutting like a mouth; bubbles burst under your feet, slow, musical vibrations shake the earth's crust, and the waves of the air pass shrieking between the columns of the reeds. The vegetation is so thick that the sun's rays never touch the ground. The animals walking there are pallid, blind, groping. They are the prey of the other winged creatures that fly above their heads, searching the dark corners with voracious eyes beneath glossy shells. The earth is really terrible when you know it well. Monsters are not rare there, no, monsters are not rare there.

To the south, the valley flows its slope, the stream with its grey water flows down to the sea, placidly; the fall of the ground is almost imperceptible, and the mountains melt round the horizon into a sort of undulation with soft curves. Down there, close to the sea, the sky has taken on tallow and pink colours, and the clouds have completely dissolved into the atmosphere. Only a pearly curtain of mist reminds us that there is humidity in the air, that the pulverized drops of water are floating like specks of dust, miles above the ground.

This, far away from the dislocated cubes of the mountains, is the place where people live; they have built their houses on the sides of the hill, overlooking the river-mouth, and they live there, cook their meals, light fires in the middle of plots of waste land. The roads insinuate themselves through the thickets of trees, follow the windings of the streams, constantly cross and recross one another. Along these little white lanes cars follow one behind another, like columns of insects. The olive-trees are more numerous, and sometimes, from very high up, one discovers hexagons of ground with rows of maize-plants growing on them. The people live at the bottom of the great slope of the river. They lead their toilsome lives, bent over by the fall of the ground, in the open spaces where the sun shines from morning till night. Where they live there are no

clouds and no walls of rock. Everything is gentle, shaken by a tranquil fever, and time passes quickly.

The trees must be fine ones, not stunted as they are up here; strong, prolific trees, heavy with fruits and leaves, with branches as regular as the prongs of a fork. Sounds and smells must multiply there, and there must always be an air full of promise for the human being, full of anxiety and hatred for the wild animals.

Here, in the circus made up of fissures and projections, stifling and yet free, the animals have nothing to fear. The earth and the rocks belong to them, and their cruel, significant games can be played out to the full. The light does not shine on them; the ants have no need to fear the terrible midday sun that dehydrates them and dries them up on a flat stone. Only water, cold and shade surround them.

The sun is rarely seen: it passes behind the mountain peaks, appearing and disappearing in accordance with the line of the crests. The light does not come from the sun, one would say; it seems to gush out all over the vault of the sky and rush down, a furious avalanche, into the hole, the valley. There it reverberates like an echo from the precipitous walls, it bounces back and flies in all directions, it collides with spears of rock-work, it bashes into the mouths of caves and against the sheets of pebbles. It slides over the quivering surface of the stream, is cut off and does not penetrate it. It covers everything as it passes, it glazes, coats everything. The boulders and grass-banks turn white, their hermetically-close shells are saturated with this pitiless light. It seems as though nothing had the power to stop this bleaching rain; for its very origin is unknown. There is no sunlight to quench, no moon to cover with clouds. The light is part of the violence of the landscape, and the earth, reduced to submission, can only offer itself to that light, immolating its wrinkled, smarting skin.

On the ground, the little reddish stones are shining like diamonds, and washed-out fire flies up in sparks from the pebbles laid out in rows along the riverside. The colours are burning, side by side; the green of the leaves, the pink of the river-bed, the blue of the sky, the white of the flower petals. Everything is hardened, stiffened, possessed. But is it really what is called light? For ever sounds and smells are imbued with it, it would seem; the wasps are flying with a noise as straight as a pencil stroke, and the pine-needles are giving off a zigzag, brittle, deep perfume, full of prickles and glue.

To left, to right, in front, behind, stand the mountains; it is they who have modified life in the valley in this way. They are responsible for this asperity and this mystery. For the mountains are living creatures; they have bodies, they have eyes, they breathe. Their vast domes are bellies, their crests bare the awe-inspiring traces of the orders they have given, once and for all, to everything around them: be hard, be hard. In the silence, in the emptiness, be hard. They rise up, bloated, sharp-pointed, massive, into the four corners of the sky; some of them even appear to be petrified in a dizzy equilibrium, seated, immovable, yet tilted in such a way that they out to have fallen centuries ago, to have fallen softly in on themselves and dissolved into avalanches of sand. They have grown according to some confused plan, wide wrinkles of molten lava, waves of magma petrified in the act of rushing down-wards. They then they stayed like that, just as the pacified earth left them, grotesque and inaccessible. The harmony of silence is already at the heart of their contortions. Their life is no longer the life of movement, of a volcano, but a weight

of simple calm and menace. Tons, millions of tons of stubborn, grandiose silence, a paralyzed anger that crushes everything, holds everything quelled beneath its plinth.

Between their pyramids is the other life, the life of the stream and valley, does the best it can do for itself; it nibbles away, it weathers down, year by year, century by century. But all the same it is defeated by eternity. The rock will be there long after the streams have evaporated and the bones of the animals have been reduced to nothing. When the planet has become a mere shriveled core, a target for meteorites, there will still be walls of rock, with faults, chasms, columns of implacable strength. There will still be mountains.

One needs to know that; for no aspect of the sinuous devouring life, no part of this wearing-down process in the valley-prison is extraneous to the power of the rock. Even the sand, even the flat pieces which break away from the mountain-sides during the rainy season, are full of a victor's strength. Here, life is not warfare: it is simply a natural movement of things, as a result of which every scarp of the landscape is inhaled by the rocky matter and mingles with it. There is a cold air-current that leads towards the ore, and objects tremble with the wild desire to enter, living, into the stone. The water of the stream, for example: it appears to be wasting the walls that hem it in. And yet *its life is the same as theirs*; the water is merely a rock, a form of rock, the unknown eternity of the mountain. The air, too, is made of rocks, is built up of broad prisms of limitless matter which has the power of enduring; differences of nature, aspect or finality, what do they matter? On earth, in the sky, in the water, all is stone, because all is but infinity, the glorious eternity of matter, the insolubility of what is and can never cease to be.

The mountain rears its vertical wall, so high that it seems impossible not to crash against it. From every peak a ridge runs down towards the valley in an almost straight line, with other lines slanting off from it and dicing the surface of the rock into irregular prisms. In the middle of the mountain, escaping from the denuded curve of a saddle, a ravine hurtles down the slope with cascades of stones and long black furrows full of repulsive shadow. On the face of this gigantic wall shrubs have grown in clumps, like seaweed clinging to an under-water rock. The stone is greyish-white, the seaweed is dark green, or sometimes red. It covers the whole visible surface of the mountain, and the odds are that it grows on the surfaces that are out of sight, as well; a regular pattern of rough flecks, twisting towards the summit in order to survive. The roots run along the face of the rock, visible, spreading out in star shapes like the claws of a bird of prey. Rain and trickles of dust filter, no doubt, through their scrawny branches, and when the rising sun shines on the rock-face it must send a fierce electrical heat, drawn straight from the precipitous wall, surging through the fibres of green wood. Some places are quite bare of vegetation; at the base of the mountain, to the left, a triangle of yellow earth has been dug out. Other ravines run down from the top of the mountain; the spring or autumn rains have traced their course, thin veins winding like roads, tremendous torrents of dust and stone hardened by months of drought.

The masses of rock have thrust up on all sides, dented, cracked, millions of years old; heavy, rugged backs, elephantine forms, swarming with life. The trees and animals are parasites, their roots and claws perpetually foraging the rock. Occasionally a thunderstorm settles on a peak, and the lightning shakes the columns of rock with its repeated attacks, while rain and mud run down their flans like floods of voracious tears.

In the hollow places, the holes in the ravines, there isn't a soul; nothing remains except the deserted stone and air, alone in their contact. The cold wind slips past, vibrating; the rock never moves. The silence, there, is almost total, and movement has close up into very hard crystals; there is nothing on the rock or underneath, not an animal, not a worm, not a blade of grass. Not a perfume quivering in the air. The soil is absent, and the sand that forms, a grain every six months, evaporates instantly, one doesn't know where to. Poverty, extraordinary poverty of the stone, a stone that is naked, immobile, serene, cold, amid passing time. Vertically there is nothing either; one might perhaps have to travel for millions of light years before meeting anything else.

All the stretches of rock were made in the same way: tons of hard flaking matter, scored with oblique striae. Tons of coolness and calm, laid down there, in front, one on top of another; between them, sometimes, there are valleys, lakes, little houses with tiled roofs in which people live among olive groves in soft shades of grey. That's possible. Roads, churches with villages round them, names of place, Marie, Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage, Les Baux. Cow-byres, green meadows, ponds, brook inhabited by the fish. There may be pleasant things and delicate scents, here and there. But it's nothing compared with these immense walls, towering straight into the clear sky, these pallid mountains where nothing is tranquil, these mute darts hurled at infinity, these blocks of stone covered with angle and striae, where a sort of hatred echoes unceasingly, unaccountably, like a mystery of long-ago violence which may be the very nature of their upthrust out of the seething marshes of the earth.

If the circle of mountains was alive, it was with this kind of life; this unparalleled strength which had caused it to rise up and battle against the soft erosion of time. Like a crater, spreading round it the overflow of energy from the expanding world, the mountain had heaved its gigantic breath once and for all. It stood erect, all its matter utilized to the utmost, in opposition to nothingness, so that emptiness should not prevail. All round it, as the shadow moved, it projected its beam of broken lines and sent this surging in all directions, moved by a majestic fury. Everywhere it intervened. In front, it ran against one like an obstacle, it thrust one back; its white brow pushed towards you, stunned you. On the sides it hugged your chest and gradually smothered you, squeezing you in a vice. It was coldness, vertigo. And behind, it overhung you, it crushed you beneath its feet. More than vertical, it was toppling over on you; it was twisting the back of your neck and the dazzling burden, worse than an icy breath, was making your forehead sweat gently, unfolding before your uprolled eyes such visions of terror as came only to the defeated. Every-thing was going to fall; landslides were about to start off, avalanches would be thundering down, burying everything beneath tons of rubble; the mountain, so high that one could see no end to it, was an unimaginable disaster, bursting out on all sides like an active death of which one had to be the victim. One was nothing. One was a crumb, a frail, bending bramble, an old rust tin that a single pebble would flatten out.

Better still: the mountain was not falling; *one was falling one-self*. One was knocked down, pushed into the runnel of the bottomless pit; vanquished at the far end of a black shaft where the moist gleam of the stars reigned, and the pungent smell of the hammering rocks.

Lying face to the ground, one saw the flat hardness setting in; the rock crumbling where it stood, not into dust but into rough, grating slabs, as it were sharp weapons ready to chop up the flesh, to bury everything that was not themselves. All was defenestration.

And yet from this landscape, so beautiful and so powerful, a contrary passion was rising as well, tearing you apart and setting you erect, skywards. The brute strength, heavy as concrete, entered into you and made a mountain of you. Ascending lines planted themselves in your limbs. And you were suddenly imbued with a stirring, direct, architectural intoxication, you positively took off for the upper layers of the atmosphere and went on rising, gorged with oxygen. Facing the rampart, shooting up like an arrow. A longing to grasp everything, to hold everything in your arms. In the silence, in the cold. A longing to eat. To have stone in your stomach.

The trees and animals were no longer viable. Instead there was an absolute lunar landscape, full of craters and peaks, covered with faults and striations, a sea of pyramids. Spread over the entire surface of the ground, you are suddenly open like a calyx, you are holding up the vault of the sky with your outstretched arms.

You are no longer yourself. You have ceased to live. Have you ever lived, in fact? Nothing counts here any longer except the rock, the impassive rock, the rock laid upon rock, the whetted, serene, victorious stone. The years go by. Water may seep out, leaves may scratch the soil in passing. That's your skin, it is over your body they are advancing. The wind may hollow the sand, at the cliff edge, into soft, round shapes. It's nothing. You will win. Time is on your side. In mineral crystals it is hardening, time that was once so liquid. In the permanently open space, where the air is as though vitrified, the purity of slowness reigns, Majesty. Long minuets, long seconds. Years. Centuries. Day, night; night, day. Little cracklings, as though of vertebrae. Little landslides. It's nothing. Here, time is un-hewn marble. The impulses that are felt are never resolved. They are stopped before that, for stopping is the perfect form of their existence. Slowness of the rocks. Virtue of the rocks. Little stones, enormous stones. Life is a cube.

Another time one would stand facing the sea, in an immense sunset. Night would fall softly, with slow withdrawals of colours; they would sink below the horizon, one by one, following the route taken by the ball of fire. Ash-grey shades began to cover the sky, and the shadows turned blue, then mauve, then black. The cape jutted out into the sea, and the bay suddenly lit up with street lamps. A sort of peace could be heard there, too: it had scraping sounds in it, the splash of waves on the shingle, rubbing of bats; wings, the monotonous sizzling of sound of the electric standards.

The sea was flat, wide. Rays of light, coming in from some undetectable source, struck the crest of each wave and made it sparkle. The horizon was bare and stiff and queer red haloes hovered in the west, close to the atmosphere.

Under the sea, beneath the expanse now turning green, the whirlpools and reefs were innumerable. Silently they were rendering the layers of water, devouring space; but a sort of opaque paralysis enfolded them, slipping into their crevices, intruded into their wounds and kept them motionless. There, hundreds of yards down, in muted listlessness, life had its roots too. Fish swam blindly round and round near the mouths of caverns. For them it was always night. Never did the sun set amid flaming clouds. Never did the moon shine with frozen brilliance in the centre of the darkness. Light and darkness had intermingled below the liquid surface, and there was reigned perpetually a sort of blurred glimmer, coming from nowhere and never lighting up anything.

But on land one didn't suspect that. Standing on a sticky rock a few inches from the fringe of the sea, one could only see masses of black matter, probing into the liquid sphere. The

sheet of silence was purplish-blue, moving its tiny wrinkles imperceptibly; it was undulating smoothly, swaying forward, breaking, returning, spreading out like a patch of oil, retreating a little, then advancing again, without fatigue, without end, with a sort of melancholy, mawkish, inscrutable obstinacy.

This was motion but not movement; the waves advanced landwards from the furthest horizon, but so to speak without moving. It was motion in the heart of immobility, the sound of silence, the aggression of flat, lethargic zones, nothing more.

To the left the bay ended with a tongue of land, almost transparent amid the fluidity of the atmosphere, which sloped gently down into the sea. On the cape, umbrella pines were planted, their complicated outlines silhouetted against the mild sky. Along the shore were invisible creeks, hidden by the dark-ness, and others which gleamed faintly in the light of the street lamps, crowded with stranded boats and huts.

While night was falling and the shadows thickened, the heat seemed to be gathering towards the liquid surfaces, round the bay. Big crimson patches, like pools of blood, floated in the trough of the waves not far from the shore. Other blisters, sheets of fuel oil, pools of petrol, were drifting along, continually changing shape, glinting or being temporarily extinguished, with the indolent gesticulations of jellyfish. Shoals of fish broke surface, and a few bellies shone for an instant. A thick, heavy smell, pungent yet sweet, rose from the deserted waves. The wind carried it in puffs to the shore, and one might have taken it for the breath of some animal. The night, no doubt about it, had sunk down into the sea; it was awakening mysterious impulses, it was kneading the flabby flesh of the lampreys, dilating the mouths of the anemones. One heard the same lapping sound all the time; but by listening attentively, one could make out a great, confused clamour rising from the depths of the water, a deep, nasal chant, the bursting of bubbles, the hissing of branchiae, the yawning of shells; objects were undoubtedly growing larger, under the weight of the darkness. The heat, stored up all through the day, could at last escape from the depths, and the invisible tumult was swelling the liquid matter like a tide.

On land, the last reddish flares were fading out along the horizon. Three rocks standing in a row near the shore still had tiny crimson star on their brows. The three wet gleams would shine for a few minutes alone in the darkness, and then abruptly go out, and nothing would be left. Round the open bay, despite the white perforations of the street lamps, darkness was continuing its advance. It was steadily taking away the colour from things; the grains of sand on the beach, at one time many-coloured, were turning grey; they were melting into one another, liquefying, become gaseous. The earth had been hard and burning in the sunshine; now it was going to mingle with the air. The water was going to climb up its slopes, to invade the hollows between the dunes, to flow along the little valleys; the rich, salty, smooth liquid would filter into the fields. It would rise into the branches of the trees, it would enter the darkened houses. It would even get into men throats, it would invade their veins and muscles, it would nourish them gently while they slept and knew nothing about it.

Near the cape a cemetery was resting in the darkness, surrounded by a high stone wall and cypress hedges. Under the marble roof of a superb mausoleum erected into the memory of someone unknown, an owl had built her nest; she kept watch there every night, breathing with the hoarse, regular sound of a sleeping chest, and men all had their different legends about her; sinister tales of people buried alive, of vampires or necrophagi.

In the distance, in the opposite direction from the surface of the sea, the hills rose gently skywards. Invisible in the night, they lifted up their chaos of vineyards and pine-woods. The hollows between their ridges were purple-coloured and silent, and the cold air crawled over the undergrowth, leaving dewy tracks behind it. In the tall grass somewhere towards the centre of the cape, a crazy grasshopper was uttering its saw-toothed call. A dog was barking in the garden of the villa, its discordant cries awakening long echoes all round.

Breathed upon by the sea, the tangled branches of the laurel bushes were gradually retracting and their colourless flowers were closing their petals. Lethargy was rising from every point of the land, an unerring delicacy which was entering into all the leaves and holding them rigid. And yet, it was not sleep; sleep was not current here. Everywhere, beings and objects were beginning to crackle, to stir. The earth buried in darkness was trembling imperceptibly, with the kind of shivering of vermin at work. The clamours were innumerable; the black odours were multiplying in every corner; they were emerging from burrows, from hiding-places under the carpets of leaves, like so many reptiles.

The regular spectacle of daytime had been destroyed. No more lines, no more colours, no more relief. The bay was constantly changing shape, at times it was so wide that one couldn't see across it, at other times it was so narrow, its curve closing in like a circle. The cape either advanced far out into the sea, or drew back until it was no more than a ridiculous stump. The outlines of the trees were dancing. The rounded hilltops, stretching away out of sight, were always changing their position or softening like fleece; sometimes three hummocks would vanish simultaneously, over towards the skyline, and one would see a big black hole dug out of the earth.

As for the sea, there were moments it suddenly rose up on the horizon vertically, like a rampart; or else it took on the appearance of the corrugate iron, and colours began to shimmer miraculously on it----clusters of rubies, golden iridescence, deep, violet pulps gazing out. The landscape was trembling like this, tirelessly composing and demolishing itself. The earth's calm, ecstatic beauty was made up of these orgies and metamorphoses. One couldn't prevent them. One had to be content with staring, eagerly, with all one's eyes. Standing on this little promontory with the noise of the surf at one's feet, one had to understand it all, to love it all, just for a second. The immense curve of the bay. The cape. The hills and the mountains. The indelible sky. The reflections of the street lamps, and the red gleam of the light-house, going out, lighting up again, going out, lighting up, going out, lighting up. The muffled smell and the veils of shadow. The fierce cries of animals. The twinkling houses. The menacing clumps of trees, where two or three mysteries lie concealed. The invisible air. The asthmatic breathing of the necrophagous owl in the cemetery. The strata of fat earth, populated by torpid insects. The flight of the blind bats. The shimmering of the stars, of the millions of stars sunk deep in the sky, so far away that it's really not worth thinking about. The ripples that move forward of their own accord over the deep water, over the black water, over the water that is a horizontal chasm in which the dizzy mind of man is lost, over the boundless liquid that hides abysses, over the great, enteral surface, so flat, deserted, where night and day are mixed together like seeds of two different qualities.

There you are. The world is alive, like that in tiny, hard blows, in slidings, in seepings. In the shrubs, in the caves, in the inextricable tangle of plants, it sings, with the light or with the shadows, it lives and explosive, restless life, heavy with cata-clysms and murders. We must live with it, like that, every day, lying with cheek to the ground and listening ears, ready to hear all the galloping and all the murmuring. Thrust out nerves right into the earth like roots and draw nourishment from its martial, incoherent strength; we must drink long draughts from its spring of life and death, and remain invincible.

The African by J.M.G Le Clézio
From the chapter “Bodies”

(Adult narrator Le Clézio; **Child Le Clézio**; *Mother of Le Clézio*)

Part I

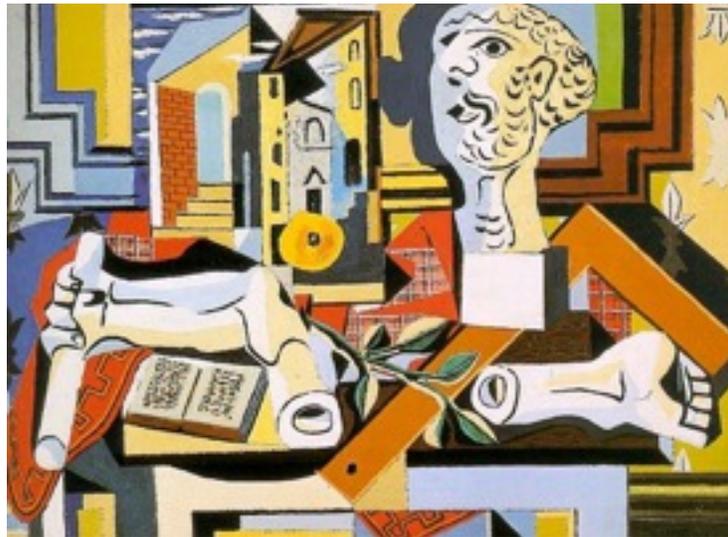
Also dating back to that moment, or resulting directly from it, if you will, is the emergence of bodies. My body, my mother’s body, my brother’s body, the bodies of the young boys in the village with whom I played, the bodies of African women on the paths around the house or at the market by the river. Their stature, their heavy breasts, the shiny skin on their backs. The boys’ penises, their pink, circumcised glands. Faces, no doubt, but like leather masks, hardened, stitched with scars, with ritual markings. Protuberant bellies, navels that looked as if a flat stone had been sewn under the skin. The smell of bodies too, the touch of them, the skin that was not rough, but warm and light, bristling with thousands of hairs. I recall a feeling of extreme closeness, of many bodies all around me, a feeling I had never known before, a feeling that was both new and familiar, one that ruled out fear.

Hands are touching me, running along my arms, over my hair, around the brim of my hat. Among all the people milling around me, there is an old woman – well, I didn’t know she was old. I assume it’s her age that I remarked first because she was different from the naked children and the men and the women of Ogoja, dressed more or less in Western clothing. When my mother comes back (perhaps slightly uneasy about the gathering), I motion toward the woman, “**What’s wrong with her? Is she sick?**” I remember asking my mother that question. The naked body of that woman, full of folds, of wrinkles, her skin sagging like an empty water pouch, her elongated, flaccid breasts hanging down on her stomach, her dull, cracked, grayish skin, it all seems strange to me, but at the same time true. How could I have ever imagined that woman as my grandmother? And I didn’t feel pity, or horror, but rather love and interest, kindled by having glimpsed a truth, a real-life experience. All I can remember is that question, “**Is she sick?**” Strangely enough it still burns in my mind today, as if time had stood still. And not the answer – probably reassuring, perhaps a bit embarrassed – my mother gave, “*No, she’s not sick, she’s just old.*”

Part II

Old age, probably more shocking for a child to see on a woman's body, since ordinarily in France, in Europe – land of girdles and petticoats, of brassieres and slips – women are still exempt, as they've always been, from the disease of aging. I can still feel my cheeks burning, it goes hand in hand with the naïve question and my mother's brutal response, like a slap. All of that remained unanswered inside of me. The question probably wasn't: Why has that woman become deformed and worn with old age in that way? But rather: Why have I been lied to? Why has that truth been hidden from me?

Le Clézio, J. M. G. (2013-06-07). *The African* (Kindle Locations 76-82 & 103-106). David R. Godine, Publisher. Kindle Edition. Le Clézio, J. M. G. (2013-06-07). *The African* (Kindle Locations 93-103). David R. Godine, Publisher. Kindle Edition.



Pablo Picasso's "Studio with Plaster Head" (1925)