

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY
WOMEN SEEKING
EXPRESSION**

Translations from the French

Edited by

Rosemary Lloyd

**Liverpool Online Series
Critical Editions of French Texts**

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Critical Editions of French Texts

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**Nineteenth-Century Women
Seeking Expression**

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Liverpool Online Series
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Timothy Unwin
Series Editor

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MADAME DE STAËL

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Together with Rousseau and Chateaubriand, Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, baronne de Staël, is one of the greatest French preromantic authors. The daughter of Jacques Necker, a Swiss banker who served Louis XVI as Minister of Finance at the outset of the Revolution, she was the precocious star of her mother Suzanne Churchod's brilliant Parisian salon. There she met the chief "philosophes" of the French Enlightenment. Forced into an arranged marriage with the Swedish ambassador to Paris, she had three children with him but rarely lived with him and obtained a legal separation in 1798. Then, until her expulsion by Napoleon, she led one of the most scintillating literary and artistic salons in Paris. She had affairs with several famous men, notably the statesman Bishop Talleyrand, and the author Benjamin Constant (from 1794-1811).

A prolific author, Madame de Staël wrote critical and political essays as well as fictions, at a time when women were expected to write only sentimental novels. Social issues interested her, and she pioneered in calling attention to the links between literature and society. She developed a theory of character types based on climate and country of origin, and was the first to spell out the difference between classicism and romanticism in literature. She stressed the importance of "enthusiasm" (in the etymological sense of being divinely inspired), of privileged moments during which one can intuit a higher truth, and of the power of the imagination. The translation provided here illustrates these ideas.

Independent and courageous, she became the chief intellectual adversary of Emperor Napoleon I. Rejecting his vision of a Europe destined to dominate Europe, she advocated a cosmopolitan ideal that would blend the best ideas and virtues of each country. Napoleon, who hated her, had his spies watch her closely, and his police destroyed the plates of her masterpiece, *On Germany* (1810), which he considered unpatriotic. Published abroad in 1813, the work is the leading manifesto of French romanticism. It familiarized the French with the works and the thought of Goethe, Schiller, Kant, and other leading representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) period that preceded German romanticism.

Her novels and novellas denounce the oppression of women by society. (The Napoleonic Code, promulgated in 1804, suppressed most of the rights granted to women by the Revolution.) The novels *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807) portray two independent women (Corinne is also a creative genius) who cannot find lasting love with conventional men. (See George Sand's great novel *Lélia*, especially the 1839 version, for a later parallel.) These two heroines finally abandon hope and die (Delphine commits suicide): their resignation has led some critics to deny that these two novels could be called "feminist." Nevertheless, the finest women scholars of recent times have begun to reveal the richness and timeliness of these works. In any event, Madame de Staël's wit and range is

displayed in her little-known play, *Le Mannequin* (The Puppet, 1811): it offers a rollicking feminist satire of a man who unwittingly prefers a stuffed doll, docile and silent, to a live woman.

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(An energetic and prolific writer, Mme de Staël has a voluminous bibliography. What follows is a selection of recent editions.)

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On Literature (1800), chapter XI

Translated by Laurence M. Porter

It seems to me there are two completely different literary traditions: the one that Homer originated in the South, and the one that Ossian founded in the North. The Greeks, Romans, Italians, Spanish, and the French during the Age of Louis XIV belong to the mode of literature that I shall call the literature of the South. English and German works, and some writings by the Danish and the Swedes [Norway was part of Sweden at the time], must be classified as the literature of the North. This tradition was initiated by the Scottish bards, and by the Icelandic and Scandinavian epic poets. Before characterizing the English and the German writers, I should provide an overview of these two different hemispheres of literature.

Granted, the English and the Germans often imitated the Ancients [the Greeks and Romans]. They derived useful lessons from that prolific school; but their original beauties bear the mark of Northern mythology. They have a family resemblance: a kind of lyric grandeur of which Ossian is the prototype. [Between 1760 and when the originals were published in 1807, the Gaelic poetry of this legendary third-century Scottish bard was known only through forgeries by James Macpherson.] One could object that their philosophical bent is what makes the English poets noteworthy; this outlook appears in all their compositions; whereas Ossian rarely offers thoughtful discussions: he relates a series of events and impressions. To this objection I would reply that the most common images and thoughts in Ossian are those that recall the brevity of life and commemorate the dead: they reflect the cult of survivors toward those who are no more. Ossian may not have added moralizing aphorisms or philosophical reflections when he expressed such feelings, but in his day the human mind was still incapable of fruitful abstract thought. Nevertheless, the upheaval that Ossianic songs produce in the imagination predisposes one to the profoundest meditations.

The poetry of melancholy is the mode of poetry that harmonizes most closely with philosophy. More than any other disposition of the soul, sadness allows one the most deeply to penetrate the personality and destiny of humankind. The English poets who followed the Scottish bards added to their dramatic scenes the reflections and ideas that those very scenes inevitably elicited: these ideas were still shaped by the imagination of the North, which has a predilection for the sea shore, the howling winds, the wild heath—in a word, an imagination that bears the weary soul toward the future, toward another world. The imagination of the men of the North darts beyond the confines of this earth; it darts through the clouds that ring their horizon and that, hanging between land and sky, seem to suggest the mysterious transition from this life to eternity.

[...]

The climate is certainly one of the main reasons for the differences between the images that one finds pleasing in the North and those that one loves to recall in the South. Poets' daydreams can give birth to extraordinary objects, but impressions from the everyday appear inevitably in everything one composes. To fail to exploit those impressions would be to lose the greatest advantage a writer can have: the chance to depict one's own experience. Among all their emotions, the southern poets mingle images of coolness, dense woods, and limpid brooks. They don't even evoke the heart's delights without mingling with them the idea of kindly shadows destined to protect their characters from the burning sun. So intense is the natural world that surrounds them that it stirs in them instincts rather than reflection. It's a mistake, I believe, to claim that passions are more violent in the South than in the North. In the south one finds a greater variety of interests, but less intensity concentrated in a single thought: whereas it is a fixed resolve like that of the North that produces miracles of passion and of will.

The peoples of the North are more occupied with pleasure than with pain; and their imagination is all the richer for it. The spectacle of nature acts strongly on them; it creates moods that correspond to their climes, always overcast and hazy. No doubt life's varying circumstances can alter this proclivity for melancholy; but leaving those circumstances aside, one still finds that the Northern literatures bear the impress of the national mind. In a nation, as in a person, one should seek only the essential characterizing trait; all the rest depends on a thousand chance events.

Far more than that of the South, the poetry of the North is suited to the spirit of a free people. The first known inventors of the literature of the South, the Athenians, formed the most fiercely independent nation in the world. Nevertheless, it was easier to mould the Greeks to servitude than it was to do the same to the peoples of the North. The love of the arts, the lovely climate, all these delights that the Athenians possessed in abundance could provide them with compensations for political subjugation. But for northern peoples, independence was the primary and the sole happiness. A certain pride and a sense of detachment from life, which the rocky soil and the gloomy skies of the North inspire, were destined to render servitude unbearable. Long before the theory of constitutions [that limit the power of a king] and the advantages of representative government became familiar in England [with the Magna Carta of 1215], the warlike spirit that the poetry of Northern Scotland and of Scandinavia celebrated so enthusiastically gave those peoples a prodigious conception of their individual might and the power of their will. Each one had the idea of independence before freedom was institutionalized for all.

[...]

Humanity owes its grandest accomplishments to a painful sense that in this life its destiny remains incomplete. Mediocre minds, for the most part, are content with everyday routines; you might say that they round off their existence by substituting the illusions of vanity for what they still lack. [Mme de Staël appears influenced by the Aristotelian idea of a hierarchy of existents based on their relative completeness or "privation" of attributes.] One cannot achieve sublimity

of mind, emotions, and actions without yearning to escape the limitations with which imagination itself is circumscribed. Moral heroism [willingness to sacrifice one's life for a noble cause], divinely inspired eloquence, and the desire for glory afford supernaturally intense delights that only souls both exalted and melancholy require, souls weary of all that can be measured, of all that is transient—in a word, of any limits, no matter how remote. It is this disposition of the soul, this source of all magnanimous impulses and of all philosophical ideas, that the poetry of the North especially inspires.

[...]

The great dramatic effects of English, and later, of German literature, do not derive from Greek subjects nor from their mythological beliefs. The English and the Germans arouse terror by using other conceptions of the supernatural more attuned to the nature of belief in recent times. In particular, they arouse terror by depicting unhappiness, which these deep, energetic souls can feel so painfully. As I have already noted, the effect produced in our minds by the idea of death depends mainly on our religious ideas. In every age, the Scottish bards have practiced a religion darker and more spiritualized than that of the South. Christianity, which, apart from priestly inventions, is rather close to pure deism, has therefore dispelled the imaginary array of tutelary deities that, in Antiquity, used to surround humanity at the brink of the tomb. Nature—which the ancients had peopled with protective spirits who dwelled in forests and rivers, and presided over both the night and the day—nature became a wilderness once more, and in consequence, humanity's terror in the face of death increased. The Christian religion, the most philosophical of all, is the one that leaves people most completely on their own. The tragic poets of the North were not always satisfied with the natural effects produced by the depiction of affect: they enlisted apparitions, ghosts, a kind of superstition analogous to their gloomy imagination—but however deep the terror that one can create momentarily through such means, they are flaws rather than beauties.

[...]

Unlike the peoples of the South—if we may judge by the traditions that remain to us, and by the mores of contemporary Germans—the northern peoples have in every period respected women, whereas elsewhere women were condemned to servitude. This attitude is yet another major cause for the kind of sensibility that characterizes the literature of the North.

Let us consider the cultural history of love from a philosophical viewpoint. One would think that the literary expression of love ought to depend solely on the feelings of the writer. And yet, the culture in which they live has such ascendancy over writers that they let it govern the language in which they speak of even their most intimate sentiments. It may be that Petrarch was more deeply in love during his life than was [Goethe,] the author of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, or than were several English poets such as Pope, Thompson, or Otway. Nevertheless, when you read the Northern writers, wouldn't you think that their environment, their society, their whole world were different? No doubt the perfection of certain literary works from the North depends on the individual genius of their authors;

but it is equally certain that, had they lived in Italy, the same authors would not have created the same works, even if they had felt the same passions. Popular success is such an overriding goal for authors that in their works you ordinarily find fewer traces of their personal character than traces of the general spirit of their country and their age.

To conclude, what in general gives the Northern peoples a more philosophical turn of mind than the Southern peoples have is the Protestant religion which nearly all the Northern nations have adopted. The Reformation was the historical era in which humankind accomplished its most effective progress. [In the original, Mme de Staël uses the term “perfectibility” here, reflecting an Enlightenment faith in the unlimited potential of human beings.] The Protestant religion harbors no viable seeds of superstition, and yet gives virtue the most support that public opinion can provide. In those countries where the Protestant religion is professed, it in no way hinders philosophical research, and it effectively maintains moral purity. I would digress if I dwelled any longer on such an issue. But I ask enlightened thinkers to consider whether there is any means to link morality to the idea of a God, without this means becoming an instrument of coercion. If such a non-coercive religion could be conceived, wouldn't that be the greatest good fortune humanity could enjoy? For in our time, human nature every day becomes more arid and pitiable, and every day it severs some of the traditional social bonds that scrupulousness, sentiment, or fellow-feeling had forged. [Mme de Staël is lamenting the French Revolution which disrupted her life and embroiled France in civil war; she is also being compelled to witness the rise to power of Napoleon, who intensely disliked her.]

MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Born in Flanders, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore learned early in life to be tough-minded and independent. Her adventures began at age 13; for two years she and her mother toured as actresses to earn their passage to Guadeloupe. They arrived in the middle of Louis Delgrès's slave revolt; yellow fever killed her mother; and after she returned to France alone, she continued her itinerant career until age 36. Her elegies are not self-pitying; they usually offer consolation to someone else. In the first of these three poems, "Native Soil," she comforts a young Flemish poet who also longs for his home. Memory shows her painful impressions of her lost past; one cannot recall one's childhood without realizing one has lost it. The surface of memory's pool becomes a mirror where the distant Flemish homeland can be seen. Desbordes-Valmore transcends her own grief by protecting both the young poet and her children—a not unreasonable concern at the time and place of writing, Lyons in the early 1830s. Bitter workers' revolts were brutally suppressed, blood ran in the streets, and stray bullets went everywhere. As the poem ends, she suppresses her anxiety so as not to frighten her children, but acknowledges that she will never feel at home anywhere. The solemn alexandrines are rendered into English iambic pentameter, and the heptasyllabic sections whose rhythm imitates the unstable life of the wanderer are translated by hexasyllables. The original rhyme schemes have been respected, with few changes.

"The Fitful Dream of a Sad Night" is a prosodic tour de force, composed (in the French) in subtle eleven-syllable lines that were to inspire Verlaine. It beautifully evokes the Flemish homeland. Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, who cannot go herself, sends her elder daughter for a visit there, commending her to surrogate mothers: the fertile, verdant landscape and the Blessed Virgin Mary. "Sobs" presents an extraordinary cosmic vision unsurpassed by either Romantic or symbolist male poets. Forced to descend into purgatory after her death, the poet suffers from hearing the moans of the damned nearby in Hell; they can neither be rescued nor consoled. But the second couplet following the third and last instance of the refrain initiates an extraordinary feminocentric vision: Marceline's mother comes down from Heaven to rescue her, and together they accomplish a dramatic Harrowing of Purgatory (modeled on Christ's Harrowing of Hell by rescuing virtuous pagans from there during His three days in the tomb). Kindred souls are summoned to ascend to Heaven, the eternal home toward which Marceline's mother gives birth to them transformed into angels. Desbordes-Valmore renders her oneiric, recollective, and supernatural landscapes with acuity, vivid detail, and

originality that would lead some to rank her among the greatest nineteenth-century poets, less tuneful than some, but much less dilute.

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The Elegies

Translated by Laurence M. Porter

Native Soil

His Flemish sister shall do as he asks,
Since Henry's written sadness sets her tasks.

I shall give him that portion of my heart
Where my intimate thoughts go to seek quiet,
Serious, happy, far from any riot,
Taking refuge there in a dream apart;

So that, if he has no mother nearby
To help him bear life's bitter enmity,
Surprised, discontented in the world's hands,
He never need say: "No one understands!"

Aren't there some days when your faith plays the fool;
Thoughts rise from bitter depths of memory's pool
Where everything stirs up the layers of slime,
Beneath the surface skimmed by passing time?

Memory! Covered with delicate flowers!
Where sleeping fish huddle inside reed bowers,
When time, pityingly, and calm, and sure,
Pushes the past beneath liquid azure,
Memory! But the least rain squall's pretext
Makes you reveal your secrets, show your wrecks.
Then, on your candid veil the gentlest breeze
Makes nothing stir but tears and cypress trees!
Henry! If some days make his life bow low,
Days that before or after mine all go,
And if the artist's talents cost him so
While proclaiming the poet, making tears flow,
Memory! If you hide some hope's last shred,
Illusions betrayed, and, from suffering, dead,
Let them do no more than make pale his brow,
Bury this affront deep in your waves now:
Let him knock at my heart's door as he will,
There where my native land is never still;
Let him bring word from there if he should pass
Like comforting rain on the withered grass,
That revives the homeland in my dulled sleep;
And like living metal, my heart shall leap!
His soul contemplates mine as I awake;
Its blossoming wings open for my sake;
In his young book you can hear his heart speak:
He was saying: "Sister, it's you I seek."
As in reflections filled with shade and sky
You see the valleys quiver, and green trees
Dance with the water, in the laughing breeze,
In our green Flanders, I've seen, passing by,
The church paintings where a sweet scent exudes,
And our ramparts' tranquil attitudes,
For I have sojourned by that limpid brook
As at a celebration where friends look
For me; there, in my mother's land, the light

Flooded my eyes, shone from his pages bright!
There, on our flowering thatch I saw the dove
Outcast from some lost paradise above,
Mourning for it with an assiduous tear;
Next, little children jumping on tombs drear,
In nearby fields girt with humble homes,
Where you hear humming, germinating loams;
The children pass through these unguarded walls,
Light as gossamer that among trees falls.
Through summer days that stretch out in the sun,
The children think the dead awake, they run,
Though no noise stirs these sleepers, nor their ear
Can either children or the church bells hear.
Like those innocent souls, I used to go
To play amid the scents of death, just so;
Never thinking my father, mother, child,
My schoolmates, whether they were good, or wild,
One day would lie beneath a cross-shaped mound,
Forever unmoving, cold, without sound!
Oh! I nearly lose control saying this
About those dead ones whom I love! And miss!
And want! Those I reach with my memories' touch,
Knowing that we all must become as such!

When thoughts go where I struggle to follow
You'd say that it seems my life were hollow;
I seem to slip from my parents' embrace,
And can find no eternal resting place.

Musing how my quiet childhood was dear
In my mother's hut I recall each year,
For my fervent instincts always demand,
Brother! My native air! My native land!
Those far-off voices slake my thirsty soul,
For your sorrowful book has filled its bowl;
Imagine how sweet to breathe in your songs
That fragrance of home for which the soul longs!
To find a voice that's singing through its tears,
Like all those vanished voices, lost for years!
From our cool brooks, thirsty harvesters drink;
Can our thirst be quenched here, far from their brink?
I always languish when I celebrate:
Wherever laughing dancers lead the way,
The music weeps and tells me: "Not today!"
And my feet wander from the cheerful fete.

Foreign each doorway seems:
Wherever I may go,
I find no home I know;
They seem like passing dreams.

See this frail traveler,
Slogging through miry clay,
How sad life seems to her;
She stumbles on her way!
A pauper on a road
Where no one shares her load,
Her soul does not forget
The moans of human pain
She succors once again;
And more sensitive yet,
She understands the word
Of the shuddering spring
And of the leaves unheard,
Falling from where they cling.
Nature's deep book of prayer
Tells her its meanings where
Every place gives them birth:
From mossy clumps that crawl,
To the oaks' lofty wall,
A lament from the earth.

Its then that she gives a voice to her tears,
Finding endless charms in regrets and fears.
It's then she listens, and she hears her name
Spoken with no more reticence or shame.
She sings, cricket in the vast harmony
Whose cry moves even wise infinity:
Then, climbing on her knees to her road's peak,
She'll make her suffering tunefully speak!

Come then! Like a pilgrim in ancient times
Who in a wayside cross feels calvary's death,
Come where at moments I can catch my breath
While God sends tears to purify my rhymes.
Bring your poems so that I can answer there;
Mine have no echoes; all is lost in air:
I am obscure, and my children today
Still know only the words they use in play.
Time will teach other words, trembling with tears;

From their smooth foreheads I drive away fears
As from a flower one would brush an insect
That threatened its tender down to infect.
Oh! Would I could prolong their childish age
During which, lovingly, they part my hair
To contemplate in depths of my eyes there,
Not hidden worries, but their clear image:
Delighted God made a mirror in me,
A dark crystal that sees and lets them see.
When alone, I live on mothers' torment,
Preserving their lovable lack of guile;
Their teeth, their young teeth are still too fragile—
Aren't they?—to crush life's bitter nourishment!
Love the kind master of my humble house,
Whose misfortunes matured him in his youth;
I quiver like the ivy on his roof;
My children adopt all who seek my spouse...

In this strange town I always feel forlorn!
In this bloody bazaar my children born
Where the household hums but us, scarcely knows;
Beneath the high window their garden grows,
For during the day a ray of sunlight
Makes children sturdy, and their garden bright!

The Fitful Dreams of a Sad Night

Ancestral fields stippled with hedgerows
Where girls glide wavelike as the evening goes.

Ô cool pastures where limpid waters ring;
They make the goat bound, they make the reeds sing.

Ô native land! My soul hears your dear name
And feels an ecstasy keener than flame.

My soul sings out naturally as a dove,
And it cries, too, with the strength of my love!

Living on love, I've had to live on tears,
Yet lamentation holds more charms than fears.

I miss my home where my gravestone can't lie;
Dear home, I love you even though I cry;

Seeing my cradle, the enchanted hill
On whose velvety dress I strolled my fill;

That's why I dream of your horizons sweet,
Skimming over the golden fields of wheat.

For her pasturage there having good hopes,
The cow lows from along your gentle slopes,

And, as if calling passers-by to rest,
Watches them damply from her mossy nest.

Nowhere do shepherds wandering with their sheep
Find water so much as in your springs' deep.

I first climbed there when I was frail and young,
My face flushed pink from the songs that trees sung.

Then the tanned ploughman set me on the plain
Where, on young wheat stalks, I caught breath again.

Albertine, akin to the butterfly,
Sought flowers there where the brown furrows lie;

For, laughter and ripeness, freedom is there,
Looks skyward, needs no sword or shield to wear.

Fearless, modest, without austerity,
Declares, "I am your freedom, you, love me!"

I am the forgiveness that dissolves rage!
I give people the clear voice of a sage.

On the cross, I speak forth the faithful will,
Crying: "Father! I believe, though they kill!"

At the executioner's kiss, I love,
For he is my brother, Father above!

Benighted brother blindly drawn to me,
And whom my love shall lead back home to Thee!"

Ô my lost homeland! Fertile fields blest,
Where ardent Spanish armies came to rest!

Lords of this place, the ancient walnuts sigh
And cast deep shadows where our forebears lie.

The echoes vibrate with my father's call
Which sang out: "Hope! Hope! Hope!" for all,

And with the chant the pious soldiers brought,
Eager to raise the crosses they had wrought,

And with the ringing brass bell towers there,
Filled with remembrance at the hour of prayer.

I shall send you my child, lively and fair,
Who laughs when the wind plays with her long hair.

Despite all the children born at your breast,
She is by far more charming than the rest.

An old man said, looking into her eyes,
"Her mother saw this vision in the skies."

Indeed, when to her back my embrace clings,
I'd swear I felt the first sprouting of wings.

This fruit cultivated in my soul's dew,
I could relinquish her only to you.

With milk that wells in you from holy springs,
Feed the heart of my water sprite who sings;

Milk gushing from your blooming virgin soil
Will compensate for mine, grown sparse from toil.

To veil her brow where sacred flames pour down,
Spread your cornflower blossoms like a crown:

Such little feet will not trample the flowers;
Her innocence has more their hue than ours.

One evening, women blessed her near the shore;
In harmony, my deep heart blessed her more.

In this heart, musing her future to see,
Your name sounded, prophetic memory;

And to your wandering breath's fragrant breeze,
I answered in a full voice, "If you please."

Toward your musical nests let her go;
The child knows she was born to fly so.

Her mind, where thought taste for silence imparts,
Already soars where the meadowlark darts,

And swims along in that deep azure lake
Where it can find pure air, its thirst to slake.

May the lofty, pious hymn of the bird
Make forever tuneful the soul that heard! ...

May your rills, whose sweet gurgling spoke to me,
Make her voice supple with their rippling glee!

Before she finds her bed of ferns at night,
Let her, ever inquisitive and light,

Run through the wood where the weeping moon gleams,
Through the trembling trees dreaming in its beams,

So that while she sleeps beneath their green form
Moonlight may keep her childhood graces warm.

Chaste depths the woods' moving curtain contains
Will keep the air around her free from stains.

If for playmate she can no longer find
Faithful Albertine, walking close behind,

Then, facing flowers that tremble at a touch,
She will go dancing, never gathering such,

For she believes flowers have families too,
And, bereft, would weep as little girls do.

From your bees she will have nothing to dread;
They'll teach her to walk with a measured tread,

For the insects armed with their muffled drum
Impose even rhythms on thoughts that come.

Off she will go, content, tranquil and free
Like living water to a joyous sea;

And from an oak the Madonna you pass
Will contemplate her kneeling on the grass.

When on my knees I cradled her sweet weight,
My songs and kisses told her you await,

Ô ancestral fields stippled with hedgerows,
Where girls glide wavelike as the evening goes.

May my daughter ascend your round green hills,
You dear, blessed place the Universe fills!

Sobs – For Pauline Duchambge

Oh! Hell is here; I fear the other less:
Yet purgatory makes me feel distress.

They've told me of that dismal place so much
That my heart is still marked by its foul touch;

And when the wave of days lays waste my flowers,
Purgatory looms beyond my last hours.

If they've told the truth, that's where we must pass,
God of life, before reaching you at last!

That's where we must descend, beyond the light,
Bearing the cross of love, burdened by fright,

Obliged to hear the damned souls' dreadful grief
With no chance to tell them: "God grants relief!"

With no chance to console those anguished sighs,
Sensing tears seeping from their weeping eyes,

To stumble into cages in the dark,
For ages never wakened by the lark;

Not to know where to call out for Jesus:
“Alas, Sweet Christ! Didn’t you come for us?”

I fear my fear, I fear the cold; I hide,
A wounded bird afraid of being tied.

Sadly, I try to embrace memory ...
But purgatory is awaiting me!

That’s where I feel I shall be led to stay,
Like a guilty slave after her work day,

Hiding her withered forehead in her hand,
Treading on her heart wounded by the land.

That’s where my thoughts precede me; in despair,
I have no hope to see those I love there.

So nothing charming in my heart will stay
Except their joy, echoing fall away.

Lord! Where will I go
With no feet to flee!
Lord! Where can I knock
Without any key?

Condemned, my prayers rejected from the skies,
I shall never again see the sun rise

To conceal this awful world from me,
These scenes too grim for anyone to see.

No more sun! Why? When that light that we love
Still shines on wicked men on earth above.

On the wretch led to the gallows to die
The orb still shines like a sweet lullaby.

No hearth fires! No birds soaring in the air!
No more breezes bearing a humble prayer.

Beside the dry lakes, no more waving reeds,
None of the atmosphere that all life needs.
The fruits ingrates still enjoy from God's grace
No longer will help cool my feverish face

And from my absent heart that sorrowéd
I'll gather tears I can no longer shed.

Lord! Where will I go
With no feet to flee!
Lord! Where can I knock
Without any key?

No more memories that I hold so dear
And that would sustain me many a year;

No more family singing by the door
To bless the repose of the ancestor;

No more loved voices, whose grace unalloyed
Would have awakened feelings in the void!

No more books, like a heavenly surprise,
Concerts all my senses heard through my eyes.

I no longer dare live, but fear life's end,
With no hope of deliverance from a friend!

Parents, on our cradles why flowers place
If heaven has cursed the tree and its race?

Lord! Where will I go
With no feet to flee!
Lord! Where can I knock
Without any key?

Without the cross that shields the soul forlorn,
Punished for the ill fate of being born!

But what if, in a death condemned to die,
I heard hope echo in some far-off cry?

If some dim star deep in a darkened sky
Sent its rays to comfort melancholy!

Nineteenth-Century Women Seeking Expression

If under their brows, sad and shadowy,
Some anxious eyes had brightened to see me.

Ah! That would be my mother, fearless, sent
To put an end to her child's punishment.

My mother will soften the heart of God
And come to save me from His vengeful rod

To raise, like a flag of hope in the night,
Her last fruit, badly scarred by suffering's bite.

I shall feel her arms, beautiful and strong,
Embracing me, carrying me along;

I shall feel, flowing through my budding wing,
The pure air that makes the free swallows sing.

My mother, fleeing these abysmal climes,
Will bear me, living, through the future times!

But before leaving this place where hope ends,
We shall go summon souls to be our friends,

From the depths of this fatal field of fumes,
We'll swoop down where my tears conceived perfumes,
Our ardent voice, in purgatory's holes,
Will shout: "Join us!" to all those sorrowing souls.

"Come forth toward the summer that blooms anew,
With no more weeping or dying for you –

We will be God's doves; over us He looms;
Cast off your winding sheets, Heaven has no tombs;

Love everlasting is our destiny;
There, my mother gives birth to you and me!"

SOPHIE DOIN

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Sophie Mamy was born of wealthy parents in Paris on May 1, 1800. In 1820 she married a Protestant doctor and author Guillaume-Tell Doin. The debts he incurred exacerbated the marital discord that culminated in their legal separation in 1842. She is the author of some 14 works in such varied genres as poetry, novel, drama, religious writing, autobiography, and journalism. Her writings include *La Famille noire, ou la traite de l'esclavage* (1825), *Cornélie, nouvelle grecque* (1826), and *Nouvelles blanches et noires* (1828).

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A Black Woman and A White Man

Translated by Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney

A whirlwind of flames rose over the city of Le Cap. Human blood foamed in the streets. Everywhere torrents of vengeance paid for murder with murder, torture with torture. The independence of blacks had just been proclaimed, and degraded creatures, brutish slaves flocked from everywhere, with hatred in their hearts and weapons in their hands, asking that barbarous masters account for having destroyed their intelligence and crushed their freedom. The sea was already covered with small vessels; several rescue ships were already taking on board the unfortunate fugitives, victims of all the hatred, all the fury let loose on this desolate land. They ran, they rushed, they collapsed as they neared this beacon of hope and salvation. Some, pushed back violently by the crowd, which every minute grew larger, fell and met their death in the sea. Others clung to the ropes, and the air echoed with their desperate cries while their companions, no less

unfortunate, were crammed together beneath the feet of those who could still stand up on the deck. In one place I noticed an unfortunate father tearing out his hair after having seen his son drown before his very eyes; in another I saw a woman making vain efforts to save her wounded husband, who was about to disappear beneath the waves. The two arms of this poor woman were wrapped around his and she fought valiantly; but her husband dragged her down ... they both would perish.

Arrogant colonists, foolish whites: what horrors have you brought forth! what crimes have you wrought! for you, yes you alone, have brought about these bloody disasters, these devastating wars that have led to your destruction. Without your awful despotism, your base desires, your ferocious greed, your execrable vengeance, Saint-Domingue would have remained at peace, the unhappy slave would have died a slave. But you wanted to teach him war, and then he demanded war. You put the word Vengeance in his mouth, and the whole colony resounded against you with this rallying cry: Vengeance! Vengeance!

You say you have suffered; you call blacks barbarians and assassins. Ah! why didn't you just leave the child of Africa in the middle of his desert? He would have lived simply, innocently, hospitably. He would have farmed his land. Happiness would have brought him industry, art, enlightenment. Happiness would have produced Christians, and you have produced monsters! ... How can you complain? Did you think then that the God who punishes all crimes would protect the ones you committed? that this God, who condemns theft, kidnapping, murder, treason would approve of them when they are committed by whites against blacks? that this God, who said "All men are brothers," would have wanted to create one species of men who would be the slaves and victims of another species of men? Wretched madmen that you are!

Chaos was at its worst and deserted houses were being looted. Frightened by the ominous cries coming from all sides, Nelzi drew near the window. She saw the crowd moving in the direction of the coast, she heard the threats coming from blacks, the exclamations of rage, fear, and despair from whites. "Oh my master!" she said. "Can I stand by and watch you massacred before my very eyes? My poor young master, weak, wounded, almost unconscious, how can I carry you from this bed where you lie dying? Alas! all your friends are far away: some in battle, others deceased, still others in flight. All have abandoned you. Your slaves are free and will return as your enemies. The only one who remains is me, just me. Can I, alone, save you? Ah! at least I'll try. Dear God, protect your Nelzi. Oh! how poor Nelzi will love you!"

Her need to do a good deed, to save the one she loved, her ardent enthusiasm for virtue set her afire with resolution. Nelzi moved rapidly, lifted the victim from what would have been his deathbed, wrapped her arms around him, supported him on her shoulders, descended the stairs as rapidly as the weight of her burden allowed, making her way through a house about to be destroyed by fire at any moment. She arrived at the coast: a rowboat was departing ... "Save him!" she cried with a heartrending sound. A white-haired officer heard her voice and signaled the impatient sailors to stop. He reached out to the young black woman.

She handed over into his arms the wounded man, who had fainted. She too jumped into the boat. Then, hastening to kneel and raising her wide, tearful eyes toward heaven, she rejoiced, "He is saved! Oh my God how I love him!"

The old officer's boat soon reached a vessel setting sail for America. When Charles had revived, when the officer had presented Nelzi to him as the guardian angel who had saved him from the most awful massacre, the young Frenchman held out his hand to his friend, and looking at her tenderly: "Oh my Nelzi," he said to her, "I owe everything to you. How will I ever be able to repay you? You are all that's left to me in the world. Ah! may I forget all my woes in caring for your happiness."

Nelzi rapturously kissed the hand that Charles had placed in hers. Then she lovingly answered him: "I am near you, my dear master, I want nothing more." – "I am not your master, Nelzi. You don't belong to me, you belong only to yourself." – "Dear God! do you want to abandon me?" – "I shall never abandon you, Nelzi. We will always live together, but I will not be your master. I will be your friend, your father." – "My friend, my father, Oh! whatever you wish."

Charles de Méricourt was thirty years old. An orphan since he was very young, heir to a great name, but poor, he owed his brilliant education and social position in the colonies to his uncle, M. de Bellerive. Charles happened to be in Le Cap at that time. Amidst the chaos and hatred that reigned there, even within the parties at war with one another, he had managed to retain his gentleness and moderation until the events that we have just recounted. It was only then that, forced to participate, he was seriously wounded in the general turmoil and was saved only thanks to the devotion of his black slave.

America, that hospitable land, opened its arms to the fugitives. It consoled them, helped them, gave them the means to return to Europe or allowed them to use their talents in the New World. Charles accepted a modest job and established himself in a city in the great state of New York.

Nelzi took care of the household. Charles treated her like a sister, spending all his free time with her. He enjoyed forming this new soul, developing the intelligence that prejudice had repressed until that time. Sometimes he asked himself whether whites hadn't perhaps had some valid reason for treating blacks as a brutish race. A thousand times he had heard rich colonists and beautiful ladies say, with complete conviction: Blacks are only too happy to be our slaves: what would become of them otherwise? They are really only animals, far beneath monkeys. "Can I believe, he asked himself, that for several centuries, a horrible crime has been committed? Or shouldn't I think instead that the intellectual faculties of blacks are, in fact, out of proportion with human intelligence?" Then he would look at Nelzi and notice that fire in her eyes, that mark of a lively intelligence, that expression of deep feeling. He explained to Nelzi the phenomena of nature, the marvels of art, the consolations of virtue, the charms of friendship; and Nelzi understood everything, felt everything, and answered with that eloquence of the soul, with that pure enthusiasm that are proof of an elevated mind, a noble heart, a deep sensitivity. "How then does this soul differ from mine? How is this interesting being inferior to beings of my species? No, no, it is

false, it is impossible. Oh cruel prejudice! No, her body alone has been less favored ... But doesn't she have her own beauty? Aren't her eyes beautiful, large, expressive? Aren't her teeth admirable? And what expression in her smile! And her dear voice is so sweet to my ear! Even her color has its glow, its nuances. I see it darken when a reproach passes my lips; it shines when I smile. Her figure is perfect, her curves are graceful. Her whole person is endowed with a poise, a piquant beauty ... Oh Nelzi, Nelzi, nature has adorned you too with a thousand charms!"

Thus spoke Charles, and with each day Charles cursed ever more European prejudices and colonial cruelty. At first he pitied Nelzi. Soon he admired her: how could he not love her? He was everything for her, she became everything for him. He gave her his heart and his faith before the God of nature.

Nelzi saw nothing above Charles. She had given herself to him from the first day she had known him. She believed that God himself spoke to her through his voice and consented with joy to find a husband in the person who for her gave meaning to the past, the present, and the future.

Charles wanted to teach his friend the precepts of our divine religion. The dogma of the immortality of the soul was adopted by her with all the gratitude of a heart full of the immense goodness of the Creator. She admired the pure morality of Christianity, that immutable basis of sound philosophy, tolerance, and freedom. She was touched by the divine order of the divine Redeemer: Love your neighbor like yourself; do unto others as you would have them do unto you. "Your religion must be mine," she said to Charles. "What you love, Nelzi will love. What you admire, how could Nelzi not admire it? But, my beloved, among all your brothers, are you thus the only Christian?" – "What do you mean, Nelzi?" – "Are they Christian, they who took my brothers from their families, from their country? they who repay their thankless work with lashes of the whip? they who have used our blood to irrigate their land of misery? they who answer bitter tears with menaces and just complaints with torture? Is that how Christians treat their neighbors, and is that how they do unto others what they would have done unto them?"

Charles often felt somewhat embarrassed in answering the objections of the innocent black woman, but he made her envision another life where the unjust would be punished, regardless of their color, and the virtuous would triumph, whatever skin covering they might have had on earth. Nelzi was reassured then. She raised her eyes to heaven, thought she saw black legions there crowned as martyrs, and thanked her friend for having opened her heart to this consoling religion.

A letter that arrived from Europe changed their fate. An unknown aunt had sent it to report that M. de Bellerive had lost his son and that his sorrow at this loss, combined with the terrible commotion caused by the events of the French Revolution, had led him too to the grave. The aunt added that having arrived from England two years before M. de Bellerive's death, she had consoled him in his last moments, and that the unfortunate old man had named in his will as his only heirs her daughter and Charles de Méricourt, but on one condition that surely Charles would hasten to accept. The aunt, Madame Darbois, ended her letter with

these words: "Come back then, my dear nephew, so that I can embrace you. I know that you have a black woman who has served you faithfully. I know this story. Bring us this heroine of the black race. I assure you that I am ready to treat her more as a friend than as a black."

"I can hesitate no longer," cried Charles. "My country, my country, I shall be able to see you again! You beckon me, ah! who could resist your enchanting voice? ... I lead an aimless life here. I am only employed thanks to the generosity of the American government, which supports me. Oh my Nelzi, I shall possess a little fortune, I shall surround you with the pleasures of a life of ease. I shall show you off with pride as a model of all virtues. You shall help me fight the prejudices that my compatriots hold against your oppressed brothers. Come, my Nelzi, let us go."

Madame Darbois was a good woman; she engaged in good works but she had kept many of her ancestors' prejudices. Thus, after welcoming her nephew with open arms, she looked at Nelzi with a curiosity typical of a white person, came up to her with a familiar benevolence, then, in appreciation of what she had done for Charles, gave her a kiss, but a patronizing kiss. Madame Darbois put up her nephew as well as she could; as for Nelzi, she was given a small room, tucked away. But she did not dare complain. Charles himself was not complaining.

Charles had read the will: the condition that his uncle had put to the gift of his fortune had quite stunned him. It had to do with his marrying Mademoiselle Darbois; it was a whim of his uncle, a strange whim, an unthinkable whim if you will, but still it was on this whim that all of his future affluence depended. Charles was hesitating; he knew Nelzi; he knew that he was the only man she would ever love, and could he think that his beloved, because she was black, would patiently endure the presence of a rival and a happy rival? He had sworn to make her happy; he had sworn to love her forever. And if he married Mademoiselle Darbois, he would have to give up the intimacy which made Nelzi's happiness and proved to her that she was still loved. But if he refused the marriage, he bid farewell to any hope of wealth. The condition was clear; the one who refused to abide by it, gave up his share of the inheritance in favor of the other heir. Then, he would no longer have the means to support Nelzi in a prosperous manner; and what would he do? Apply for a job? What job? And what would Nelzi do, deprived of everything, accused of everything, and who would only have her love to help her fight both misery and dire poverty? Charles was wavering.

Mademoiselle Darbois was very young and very pretty: she seemed to have a sweet and tender disposition; she looked at Charles with pleasure; she smiled at him willingly. Charles could flatter himself that he was not disliked; he could even hope to be happy with this lovely girl; but would Nelzi, Nelzi, ever be happy? Would she not reproach him for his perjury? What shall he do? Whom could he consult? Well, he could ask her. Yes, yes, that is it. I shall speak to her, she will know my trouble today. No, tomorrow. Tomorrow comes, no, tomorrow, Charles would say, and tomorrow went by.

Madame Darbois had said a few words; Charles had answered without committing himself, but politely. His good aunt, who wanted the marriage to take

place, could see that she would not meet any opposition from her daughter; she did not expect any from the nephew either, and was intensifying the development of their intimacy. As she would never have thought on her own that a black woman could be an obstacle to her plans, and as she spoke in her presence the way one speaks in front of a table, a chair, a dog, or a bird, at every moment, she showed her joy, her hope, her impatience and her wishes. In Nelzi's presence, she would call Charles her son; in her presence she sung the praises of her future husband to her daughter. Nelzi quivered, looked at Charles, did not dare ask him questions in front of other people, never saw him alone, and could not take advantage of the commotion of a large circle since Madame Darbois had decided to stop entertaining until the marriage was celebrated. At last, enlightened by the aunt's speeches, dismayed by Charles's tenderness when he looked at the young lady, no longer doubting her misfortune, she felt her tears dry in her eyes; her mind clouded, a somber despair took hold of her senses, she escaped in great hurry from the house; she thought she was walking to her death.

An old man, followed by a servant, walked by her; he looked at her insolently, examined her carefully, let her take a few steps, still looked at her from behind, smiled, made a sign to his servant, hastily whispered a few words to his ear and went away.

The servant kept on following Nelzi; he noticed her nervousness, saw that her gait was uneven, that she stopped, wavered. "What are you looking for, Miss?" he said with an assiduous politeness. "Alas! I do not know myself," the unfortunate woman answered, informed about her present condition by this simple question. A stream of tears made its way; her hands covered her burning face.

"Come to my master; he will find a way to alleviate your misfortune." "Ah, if he is powerful, if he is sensitive, if he is rich, let him give me the means to leave this country, to go back to America. I shall see again the places full of the one I have loved too much; there perhaps..."

The unfortunate girl stopped and followed without thinking the stranger who guided her. She came to a magnificent mansion; she climbed a hidden stairway, went through a small waiting room, and found herself in a delightful boudoir. The servant left her; a door opened, a man came forward. His age should have inspired respect but his affected manners, his piercing eyes, his impertinent smile, only aroused disgust. He made her offers that, at first, she did not understand, but which then soon revolted and frightened her; she moved away indignantly; then the odious old man took her hand threatening to take her to the police as if she were a criminal whose flight he had stopped. Nelzi let out a cry, made an effort that knocked down her opponent, ran toward the first door she saw, found herself on a large stairway, quickly went up, threw herself in an apartment that was unlocked, went through several rooms, and fell at the feet of a young and beautiful woman. "Save me, I beg you, save me" she cried out. "What do you want from me, child?" answered an extremely soft voice. Encouraged by this expression of goodness, by the charm of an attractive face, Nelzi thought she had found a consoling angel. Her ideas were confused but she felt the need for empathy. With passion and energy she told her about running away from Madame Darbois and

the odious meeting which followed. At the portrait she drew of the nasty old man, Madame de Senneterre blushed profusely and, as a young and beautiful woman may have an old libertine of a husband and not care for scandals, the charming lady had all the doors closed, sent away all the servants who were frightened by the sudden entrance of the black woman and, making poor Nelzi sit on a stool at her feet, she sweetly took her hands and wanted to know the smallest details of her misfortunes. Nelzi told everything and she told it with love, with distraction, with frenzy. The kind woman was moved. "Let them say that Blacks do not have the same feelings as we do. Is this not the eloquence of a burning love? Is it not the expression of a soul of fire? Poor blacks, poor child. I love you; I love what suffers; I love what loves." Madame de Senneterre said this with abandon; Madame de Senneterre was looking for tears; she found them. Several bells were heard; Madame de Senneterre kissed Nelzi, led her to a bedroom, promised to take care of her and to spare nothing to bring her back her happiness. "Happiness" Nelzi answered, looking at her protectress quite sadly and tenderly, "ah, without him, without him, happiness is always impossible!"

A young man whose whole appearance announced taste and elegance, came in hurriedly; he came up to Mme de Senneterre with the air of the most flattering attention, but without bowing to her. "Ah, here you are, my dear Count," she said, "at this time, your presence is more pleasant to me than ever; yes, you are going to help me do a good deed. My dear friend, you see me preoccupied with a very important thing; here, stay over there, not so close to me. You are laughing, you do not believe me, you are not behaving, Sir, but I shall prove to you that I want to be serious. First, I forbid you to move from where you are; my dear, you know that I would be quite annoyed to be annoyed with you. Listen to me. Imagine the most interesting creature, a black woman as I did not know there were any, as I am happy to know there are some, a black woman victim of love, of faithfulness: what an example for us white women! A young black woman who did everything for a white man, who devoted her life to him, who called him her spouse, who loves this spouse as I would have loved mine...if mine had been a man; ah, what a wife I would have been to him then; you know it, Count, you know if ever..." "I know that you are adorable," answered the Count, kissing her hand softly, "but my dear Eugénie, what can I do for you on this occasion?" "You'll have to figure that out yourself." Then she told him the story of Nelzi's sorrows, suggested to the Count the predicament of the young man. "Perhaps, she said, the fear of seeing poor Nelzi tormented by contempt, suffering, and poverty is the only reason for his decision to perjure himself." "I see what my Eugénie expects from me. My uncle is a minister in the government. He can do as he pleases; we shall have a job for your protégé, who will then be free to love his Nelzi all his life." While saying these words with intensity, the Count moved closer, and began playing with the beautiful blond curls that covered Eugénie's forehead. "Yes, my dear!" she exclaimed, "this is wonderful; oh, what a pleasure for us two to be able to perform a miracle, to ensure the happiness of a black woman! Ah, believe me, dear Count, a little good done by chance will hardly be compensation for all the evil we have heaped upon this unfortunate race! But are you no longer listening to me?" Then

the Count was kissing Madame de Senneterre's pretty fingers, one by one. "You do know, my charming friend, that I cannot remain long in your presence without feeling distracted, but I heard you so well that I am only waiting for your order to inform our young friend who must have been brought near despair by his mistress's absence." "My dear, go there yourself." "I agree, right away, but won't I be rewarded for my obedience?" "You know that I reward you even when you disobey me."

The Count flew to Charles, who thought he had ruined his life; Nelzi's flight had enlightened him; he blamed himself for his uncertainties; he was losing his mind; he called himself ungrateful, treacherous; he was not attempting to control his outbursts, on the contrary, in the excess of his sorrow, he threw himself at the feet of Madame Darbois, he apprized her of the oaths he had made to Nelzi, revealed to her the way he had lived with her until then, begged her to put all of her friends on the tracks of the beloved girl, adding that he would be a monster if he abandoned her, that he could not live without her, that he happily forswore his share of the inheritance, not having any other wish than to marry his friend, to go back to America with her or to use his talents, anywhere in the world, as long as he was with her, happy if she was happy, without crime nor remorse.

At the first sentence spoken by the Count, Charles threw his arms around him, rushed into the carriage, rushed into Madame de Senneterre's sitting room; there, however, respect held him back. His face displayed the strongest emotion; Madame de Senneterre smiled; she quite liked him.

"So I read you correctly, Sir? Count, I shall not forget your eagerness to please me; quickly arrange for him to have the position and I shall give him his friend."

While saying these words, the beautiful Eugénie opened a door, brought in Nelzi. "Do you forgive me?" asked Charles, kneeling in front of the tender-hearted black woman. "I am only too happy to still belong to you, as long as I am the only one to belong to you, Charles!" There was such a sensitive and passionate expression of jealousy in these few words that Charles was quite moved. "The man who possesses you," he said lovingly, "cannot want anyone but you. Nelzi, there are no charms worth your tears!"

"Such is love, and love without blame," sighed Eugénie, "whether white or black, how pretty that love is!"

A White Woman and A Black Man

Translated by Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney

Domingo lost his father when he was six years old, and his mother died of sorrow at having seen her husband die from his master's ill treatments. All Domingo had ahead of him was tears and slavery when old Marguerite, Madame de Hauteville's trusty servant, saw him cry, learned about his misfortunes, and led him to her mistress. Madame de Hauteville was a good, sympathetic, sensitive woman. She was what every rich colonist's wife should have been. Who can say exactly what spark lights the fire of revolutions? Who can say exactly what drop of water can put out the fire? The balm that provident nature puts in the hands of women to heal so many kinds of wounds is more powerful, more effective than we think, but too often women neglect it or fail to apply it. Perhaps Saint-Domingue and many other colonies would still have masters if the owners' wives had not scorned their sweetest power so often. Would it have been a blessing? Fewer horrible events would have ravaged the world but some poisons are necessary!

Madame de Hauteville took Domingo in, bought him from his master, wished to have him brought up in her household, and obtained permission from her husband to devote him exclusively to her newborn daughter's service. Here was Domingo who grew up side by side with his little mistress, here he was, having no other duty than to serve her in her games, to guide her steps, to rescue her with all his little boy's strength. Really, Domingo was not ill treated. He was so good, so obliging, he grew so fond of the one who was one day to command him; and, on her side, the young Pauline was by nature so affectionate that the poor little Negro was happy. The idea of slavery did not yet spoil his innocent joy; Domingo did not yet feel his chains.

While growing up, the little black boy attended Pauline's lessons. It was even his mistress' pleasure to have him receive some instruction so as to tempt the little girl to emulate him. Domingo applied himself and learned how to read and write in a short time. He was even given a few drawing lessons. It was a lot for a Negro and for a Negro like Domingo. Gifted with an ardent soul and a thoughtful character, he very much enjoyed the pleasure of acquiring knowledge and the charms of learning, which were denied to most all his peers.

However, in becoming enlightened he observed the brutalized blacks, his wretched brothers. Soon he shuddered when beholding the degradation of the species and the fatal effects of a bloodthirsty power. This kind of natural philosophy was quite dangerous at the time, when the arrogance of a caste wanted to crush everything beneath it.

Monsieur de Hauteville was arrogant, haughty, full of prejudices. He was like all the rich colonists of his caste, who would almost have preferred to see the colony burn rather than follow in the steps of the American colonists. One can imagine what was his contempt for the slaves! In his eyes, they were only some kind of animal without souls, whose ears and eyes were made only to see and hear hard work and strict orders. But Monsieur de Hauteville was a father. He loved his daughter and he happily saw her at twelve shaped as a sixteen-year-old girl is in

our climate. Pauline, who was brought up by her mother in perfect innocence with a charming naivete, had at twelve a mature character, high principles, a steadfast firmness. She had beautiful eyes, a kind demeanor, and a fresh, shapely form. In order to carry out long standing plans, Monsieur de Hauteville had welcomed into his family young Leopold, the son of one of his childhood friends and whose parents lived in France.

Leopold was eighteen years old; he was charming, witty, subtle, gracious. Nothing was more elegant than his manners, nothing more attractive than his language. He was more learned than most eighteen-year-olds; his conversation was varied, striking, animated. A constant originality embellished his countenance and shined in his speech. His voice had a charm beyond words; and when he was silent, one forgot what one was about to answer in order to think only about what he had said. Leopold was easily moved by generous actions, but for only a moment; soon he moved on to something else, talked, laughed, did a pirouette, felt moved again, and started laughing all over. He was truly a charming young man: many belles had thought so, many eyes had told him so. Leopold had known pleasure but not yet love. He knew of his father's intentions and eagerly came to fulfill them. As soon as he saw Pauline, he congratulated himself on his obedience; as soon as he got to know her, he became quite eager to prove to her that submission was not the only feeling that kept him at her feet.

A storm was brewing in the French Caribbean. Every day clouds were gathering, troubles and disturbances broke out everywhere. For a long time, Monsieur de Hauteville, who was busy attending to his estate, took no part in the seditious and murderous affairs brought on by the hatred among parties and the fatal divergence of opinions. Soon he openly shared the prejudice against men of color. Soon he too, like his peers, made the fatal error of putting into the hands of the blacks the weapons that they were later to turn against their masters.

Domingo, devoted through his employment to the personal service of Mademoiselle de Hauteville, kept to the plantation; but he was among the first to have been struck by the electric spark of freedom. The hope or rather the possibility of freedom had come to him as a strange but entrancing dream. Still not able to explain his thoughts himself, the entrancing idea of freedom had made his heart pound. He looked everywhere worriedly, he sought solitude, he gave out long sighs, and became remarkably absent-minded. Sometimes he would go near the blacks, ask them questions, pity their fate more bitterly than usual, attempt to impart some energy to them, to pull them away from the state of lethargy into which suffering had thrown them. The overseers watched him with suspicion. They called him an impudent favorite, and denounced him to Monsieur de Hauteville, who frowned, threatened Domingo with the most terrible punishments; and Domingo, when threatened, shook. A secret indignation stirred his blood.

Meanwhile, Monsieur de Hauteville announced his plans regarding the marriage of his daughter. Leopold, authorized by his father, offered his wishes and his hand to Pauline: "Shall I be fortunate enough," he said to her, "to obtain your hand because you wish to give it? Dear Pauline, will you deign respond to all

the love of a husband?" –"What is love, my dear Leopold?" Pauline asked, blushing.–"It is an exclusive and delicate feeling. The person who inspires it in us is for our heart the dearest of beings, the joy of our life, and our greatest good." –"Leopold, my father and my mother are dearer to me than you are. I even prefer a few childhood friends to you; I feel friendship for you, of course, but I do not feel love."–"Charming friend, be mine. Your heart is free and pure. My attentions will do the rest."

The education of the mind broadens the soul and extends natural dispositions. Domingo, raised above the common fate of slaves by the circle of his occupations and the knowledge he had acquired, dared to think, and develop within himself all the feelings of a free man. Love, that impetuous feeling, was made for this new and burning soul. It was meant to tear it apart and make it pay dearly for the expansion of his whole being. Although still a slave because of all the institutions, his mind was beginning to lift its chains. He could thus experience the feelings of a free man, without the joys that accompany them.

Love, dearest son of freedom, you who alone can bear the chains that you give, you changed your pleasures into a cruel poison for the unfortunate black! You fired him with your devouring flames for an adored mistress. You distressed his eyes with the horrible spectacle of a triumphant rival. Finally, you broke all the faculties of his heart, and filled it with a barren despair, an impotent furor.

The news of Pauline's marriage had opened poor Domingo's eyes. He wished he could have escaped from himself. All he could do was make senseless vows and strike his limbs with rage. A convulsive agitation had overcome him.

The threat of major disaster loomed on the horizon; and Monsieur de Hauteville, despite his daughter's extreme youth, wanted to move up the day of her union with Leopold. Suddenly the most sinister news circulated. On all sides great uprisings took place. Blacks advanced with fury. Everywhere massacres and fire followed in their wake. Already numerous properties belonging to Monsieur de Hauteville were burned and destroyed. Fields of sugar cane only offered the spectacle of ashes to terror-stricken eyes. Monsieur de Hauteville's plantation in the middle of his lands could no longer be defended against these destructive torrents. The city of le Cap offered the only refuge. He hastened to escape there with his family, his slaves, and his whole household.

But self-interest and resentment speak louder than fear. A colonist's arrogance takes nothing into account, not even safety. He becomes even more of a tyrant when he should be making minds more reasonable. He seeks to vanquish by cruelty those whose hearts should be won over and whose souls should be calmed and soothed. From then on the slightest fault that a slave committed was pursued with severity and punished by a barbaric torture. The most inoffensive speech, even the slightest word, was treated as a sign of revolt and silenced by execution.

Domingo himself could no longer claim to be a favorite. Perturbed by his sorrow, he would lose his temper and get carried away. One moment he would appear brazenly before his master; one minute he would look at him haughtily; one second he would stand up to him.... It was enough. His punishment was imminent and would be awful! Domingo wouldn't wait for it. This time the orders

were given for the next day. A lingering concern for him kept them from putting him in shackles. Knowing all the property inside and out, he stole away at night to Pauline's room and threw himself at her feet: "Until now I was able to adore you as a white and suffer as a black," he said. "I can no longer bear slavery. Its tortures are not made for me. Farewell, my mistress and my idol. Freedom awaits me. In gaining my rights as a man, my right to love and be happy, may I be able to protect you from the furor of the blacks and their attempts at vengeance! Domingo will watch over you." He fled as the new day appeared. Domingo had joined the rebels.

Soon the city of le Cap would be destroyed with all its riches. Soon the disastrous troubles of the colony would be at their worst! Madame de Hauteville wouldn't live to see them. All the fears, the sorrows experienced by a wife and mother, tore her soul apart. The cruelest agitations completed the ruin of a temperament already withered by the burning climate. She succumbed. With her last glance upward to heaven she asked for her husband to be forgiven and her daughter to find a protector.

There was no more salvation. All the factions were on the scene and broke out with fury. They no longer had allegiance to any country. The rights of France were ignored by all of these madmen. There had never been any concessions, nor would there be any compromises. Chaos was at its deepest. The commissioners of the government—enemies among themselves, terrified by so many dangers, uncertain in all the steps they took—finally chose the most decisive and dangerous path: crushing the whites whom they came to help and losing the colony that they came to save. The general emancipation of black soldiers was announced, and from all quarters blacks were summoned to come to the aid of a government that soon they would no longer want to recognize. They ransacked the treasures, torched all the properties, assassinated those they had called their assassins. The city of le Cap was plundered, gunfire covered the congested streets.

Monsieur de Hauteville, fighting at the head of his family, defended himself bravely against a band of blacks hounding him. Leopold used his own body to shield Monsieur de Hauteville, but to no avail. Both were on the brink of defeat. "Stop," cried a familiar voice; "have pity on this old man whose son seeks to rescue him from your blows; stop, I implore you ... But, watch out, a terrible ouaga¹ protects them from your fury."

Indeed the sky darkened, and the sun disappeared for several instants.² The frightened blacks dispersed. But unfortunate d'Hauteville had received a mortal blow. Domingo lifted him up in his arms and, followed by Leopold, laid him down in a garden adjoining the house in which d'Hauteville had lived until that time. Daylight returned gradually. D'Hauteville recognized his slave. He looked at him with astonishment and shook his hand. Domingo raised his eyes to heaven and then, looking straight at Pauline's father, he cried: "Oh my master, oh unfortunate old man, can't I save you?"—"No," Monsieur de Hauteville answered

1 Ouaga: spell, enchantment

2 Solar eclipses occurred at the time in the Antilles

with difficulty, “but do not linger. Save my cherished daughter. Run, Domingo, and carry my farewell to her. Go hither. You deserved to be white.”

These were the old man’s last words. Domingo ran off, crossed courtyards, and arrived at the main plantation. In disarray Pauline had fled from her slaves and was running desperately, wildly, to come to the aid of her father. She recognized Domingo and fainted in his arms. The brave black man felt his forces redouble in strength. He pressed his precious weight against his beating heart. He wanted to save Leopold too. He found him near the remains of his friend. Together they made their way through the last houses in flames. They went deep into the swamps, they climbed lonely hills. Finally they arrived, breathless, in a thick forest that could protect them from their pursuers. Then, happy to have saved his beloved, Domingo knelt near her and prayed to God. In turn he gave in to his enthusiasm for having gained his freedom, and then to the human feelings that arose in him at the thought of the sorrows that would befall the whites. Like anyone else, perhaps, he could have let himself be led astray by the desire for vengeance. But love lifted him above color prejudice; love taught him clemency.

Domingo then led Leopold to the seaside. From there small vessels were sailing to neighboring coasts. After exchanging several signals Leopold finally conceived the hope of fleeing to some friendly land, from whence he could then set sail for France. “Pauline,” he said to Mademoiselle de Hauteville, “will you deign to trust yourself to the one whom your father chose to be your husband? I swear to escort you to the heart of my country, and there, at the foot of the altar ...” Pauline interrupted him: “No, Leopold,” she said with a firm tone; “no, I shall not compound the rigors of your destiny and the difficulties of your travels. No, I shall not leave this place where so many cruel memories would inevitably bring me back. What would I do in another place? Domingo’s honor will be my protection here where I wish to finish my days. Farewell, Leopold, the ship is leaving. Go, it is my wish; my resolution is unshakable.”

The certainty of being unable to bend her resolve or be of use to her settled the question for Leopold. With a torn soul he left and directed his thoughts to his family. Domingo, kneeling before Pauline, his eyes shining with gratitude and love, swore to himself to live and die for her. “Ah,” he cried, “would that I were worthy of being your husband!” – “Domingo, you calmed my father’s last moments and saved the life of the one whom my father called his son. You have risen above prejudices. I will follow your example. But I want to flee these scenes of carnage. May a forest be our refuge, may it hide us from the whole universe. Agree to live for me alone, and I will be yours.”

For a long time Domingo remained prostrate before his divinity. Twelve years later, when the Republic of Haiti was gloriously established on a solid basis, a carefully built hut was discovered by chance in the heart of a thick forest. A black man and a white woman lived there. They lived by hunting and picking wild fruit. Everyone admired the love and the good character of the couple, but the blacks were unhappy that a black man worshipped a white woman. The object of his adoration was respected, however. “It’s too bad,” they said longingly, “she deserved to be black.”

HORTENSE ALLART DE MÉRITENS

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Hortense Allart (1801-1879), known for her largely autobiographical novel, *Les Enchantements de Prudence* of 1872, and her apologia in favor of free love, *La Femme et la démocratie de notre temps* of 1836, was also the author of a long, rich, and witty series of letters to the critic Sainte-Beuve. After marrying in her 40s, a decision she amusingly examines by casting herself in the role of Britain's Queen Elizabeth deciding among her many lovers, she discovered that marriage was not her vocation and returned to the calmer pleasures of spinsterhood.

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Letters to Sainte-Beuve

Translated by Rosemary Lloyd

Montauban, October 19, 1843

You say that workshops are every bit as destructive as convents. But what a difference there is! The workshop is excellent, if it's well run, if the workers are well paid and cared for once they get old, and all of that is quite feasible. But religious houses are never good; if you live there (so the Italian doctors tell us) you're surrounded by dreadful illnesses, madness, or shameful vices, even if they

are vices that can be helped. The thing is, I knew those ills at Rome, from first hand, from confessors and doctors. I accused these doctors of not taking care of the sisters, but they were afraid of pregnancies and the only intrigues they feared were the intrigues of those poor women, although not all doctors are as harsh as that. To sum up, workshops are a good solution for men, because they need work, but convents are an error inspired by the devil.

And marriage, now that's another error inspired by the devil! How I'll make you laugh come spring, for that's when I'll be going to Paris and not before. But don't talk to me about that trip or about me, stick to banal subjects. Ajax is Ajax,¹ more than I knew, with his rages and his jealousies. I'm delighted to have learnt what a woman's lot really is, I spoke about it before, and then I wasn't married! It's only now that I know. But I've reached an age when I'm no longer frightened, and feelings of love I inspire in someone else could never torment me long. But hush! Talk only about letters. He doesn't read yours, but a chance word would be enough to inspire scenes.

Montauban, October 20, 1842

I'm a little sorry about my last letter, which you will have found frivolous, particularly coming from a *sensible* woman. The end was not much in accord with my feelings of eternal love, but you try wearing the yoke! It makes the most moderate abandon their normal behavior. I thought that what was oppressive and bad in the marriage laws had nothing to do with love and the promises a man could make, but the most generous, if he is violent and jealous, leans on the law in his transports and says to the woman: "I want." Well, I'm perfectly capable of forgiving love and of judging with indulgence, but I detest the law. I don't have any time for women who have submitted to it, and if my youth had not been free, I would have lost half of my strength and happiness.

You men will never know what it is. There is in it the oppression of brute strength and, in the end, the oppression of the fist. So all honor to Marie, to Lélia,² to all those who did not go on bearing the yoke! I like the husband well enough, it's marriage I detest. Ajax understood none of this, but that is the fate of Ajax.

I won't speak to you any more on this note. Moreover, I'm generalizing the question and applauding myself for having found out for myself what I never understood before. It's a lesson, it's an explanation of the whole human race. There has never been any kind of happiness with this law. We must have done with it, and find something better for humanity. You cardinals, you've been pretty successful in doing without it. I've returned to the church's celibacy, which at last I accept. Only unmarried women and especially unmarried mothers have known how to live, to breathe, to lead a proud and happy life. And that's what men were afraid of letting us know. The truth must be known. You're going to say: it's only your truth! No, the poor stupid woman mustn't be oppressed either, nor the shy or

1 A reference to her husband.

2 Marie is Marie d'Agoult, Lélia the protagonist of George Sand's novel of the same title.

devoted woman. – I too found you frivolous in talking of Marie and her court, immediately after another lovely woman who was sadder and more deeply loved. I believe as she does that it's you now who are in the wrong. The floods! They did not sweep away the living, and as long as those hearts breathe, which are loved, they can still feel together. That's a surer law than that of Calchas¹ and marriage. Farewell, may your frivolity pardon me for mine. I will be sensible although oppressed.

P.S. Don't mention any of this in your replies.

Montauban, March 2, 1844

Don't ever accuse me, just believe that if I don't write to you it's because no one who lives a life of oppression can continue to be amiable. In a month, I'll be in Paris and my worries will be over. Not all of them, for my little child, as a result of an old accident that happened at Herblay, a little slip made in playing, may well remain lame. He was poorly cared for here by the town's first doctor, the hospital supervisor. The good doctors in Toulouse told me that it was still possible to repair the damage but they repaired nothing. I'll take advice in Paris. My mother was lame, and I believe she suffered the same accident, and that a good doctor could have fixed the damage, but I'm hopeful my boy won't limp a great deal. It's the first unhappiness I've suffered in my life, but it was a deep unhappiness. Sapayo's death made me feel that he would be better where he was going than here on earth, and that brought consolation to my suffering, but this one has nothing to console it. It's in vain that Mlle de Savignac quotes Walter Scott, Byron, Talleyrand, Agésilas and Tamerlane² to me and tells me that if Henri V returns all will be better. My husband is very good to this little boy, who moreover has never been ill and is the prettiest and happiest child in the world, for it all came about without our being aware of it, and when he still seemed on the road to recovery. He's good for the boy and would like to be good to me, too, since he loves me, but he is hard, despotic, jealous and passionate. I detest the bonds that bind us. No proud woman would bear anything like them, and I would have broken them had it not been for my child whom I cannot take away for another month. Had it not been for that accident I would be congratulating myself on all that's happened as a source of *knowledge*. I spoke of marriage but I did not know it.

The law is bad in subjugating a free being, a being capable of freedom. There is not even any parity since the man can do anything and the woman can do nothing without him. That men should accept it for their part, well and good! but that they should accept it for their daughters! That's incomprehensible to me.

1 Calchas was the Greek seer who took part in the Trojan war. It was he who ordered that Iphigenia be sacrificed and advised the Greeks to build the Trojan horse.

2 Walter Scott (1771-1832) Scottish novelist; Byron (1788-1824), romantic poet; Talleyrand (1754-1838) French politician; Agésilas, King of Sparta in 399-360 BCE; Tamerlane (1334-1405), great warrior whose lack of organizational and political skills prevented him from founding an empire.

You'll say: "Don't judge on the basis of exceptions and Ajax is an exception." Well put. But you still have to accept that fifty percent of women make the same complaint as I do or even more than I do. And now there's Bulwer who has set up shop on the other side of the Pyrenees that I can see from my window!

O my lovers, my dear lovers, lovers of a day or ten years, lovers of my imagination, lovers of my heart, how much those memories return charmingly to our memories when we live alone and oppressed! How can it be, poet and zephyr, that you could ever have thought of marrying that lovely young girl?¹ But what madness that would have been! Even greater than my own madness. I was really touched by what you told me about your health, your letter was returned to me crumpled and torn. Fortunately it showed just how innocent you were. Don't send me any more letters since I'm leaving in two or three weeks.

Herblay, Sunday 3 November

[...] I've abandoned you for Buffon², for, as my forest changes color, as the armies of crows Virgil sings of arrive in our plains, I sought out this bird in the writings of the great naturalist, who rather confused me by calling them armies of rooks which fits neither with their shape nor with Virgil. In our climes, the crow represents the bird of prey, it has that bird's bold, high flight, its recklessness, its elegance high in the clouds, with its wings outstretched and undulating. But it's not the warrior bird of the seas, that bird of the tropics, the most noble of them all, which has a wing span of 14 feet whereas the eagle has only 10, which can cover a thousand leagues without rest, which is light, and which, when the storm breaks, soars above the tempests and sees them below its feet. And why does Leroux not allow us to return sometimes as sea birds? As far as I am concerned, I'd prefer that than to have to come back eternally as a woman. What a joy it would be if you could be a bird of the tropics, with that powerful flight, that lightness, that rivalry with the wind! Buffon seems greater to me than Cuvier, for he made the paths the other followed, but what a pity he isn't a deist! Voltaire was able to be a deist and the greatest wrong the 18th century perpetrated was to have prevented Buffon from being religious. Shall I tell what I really think? I'd rather see him a student at Port Royal than so hard, so stupid, laughing at obvious final causes and constantly imagining that these causes are the lucky and chance effect of matter. For you poets, those sea birds could offer fine comparisons, and the most eloquent poet of our times has already made good use of them. No doubt God is no longer in his work as humans enjoy being in theirs; one sees a marvelous imagination, an exceptional sense of light; it must be that Dante is right when he represents beatitude with light, and in everything, including morality, argues that the most beautiful thing is light. Yet this autumn season is the dearest, the most intimate,

1 Sainte-Beuve had considered marriage to General Pelletier's daughter.

2 Buffon (1707-1788) French naturalist whose *Histoire naturelle* captivated the imagination of a large percentage of the French public. Cuvier (1769 - 1832), French paleontologist and zoologist. Creator of comparative anatomy and of paleontology.

the best when one is in the country. I've told you everything the season inspires in me. [...]

Herblay, 31 March 1845

I've received from you a little note, the sort society men write, and I'll reply as a country woman, returning again for a moment to that question of morals for I'm less interested in myself than in other questions.

Well, Sir! Why put any other limit to the number of lovers than the generosity of the gods? You insolently said that three lovers were enough, and that more lead to goodness knows what. Just remember that a woman loves from the age of 20, that she's betrayed, that in most cases it's her parents who arrange her marriage, etc., etc. It's only in Italy that I've seen an admirable judgment passed about women. In judging them there is never any thought about their lovers. The Italians say: Julia is good, she's sincere, she's witty (they say she has talent.) And if a Frenchman asks them: "Does she have lovers?" they laugh and say: "Why would there be any question but that a woman has lovers?" "How many?" "What does that matter? After all, these women have energy, tender hearts and strong souls." Ever since I left my husband, I have stayed alone in the country without any lovers, for there are none around here, but if some exile from Spain or Poland came and stayed with me, someone sad and likeable, what wrong would I commit in consoling him, and in talking as we strolled of love? As my husband is my husband, I didn't need to seek out opportunities to do things that he would hate, if he knew about them, but if fate had put them in my way, if chance had brought them about one day, I owed him no more faithfulness than he no doubt shows me, and my real reason for restraint would be my age. So it really is my age that has held me back more than anything else, if the chance of an overly young exile offered itself. Well, would I be worthy of blame if I'd been less prudent or more youthful? Why can't a woman love just as you men do? Amaury¹ felt that happiness consisted in having *three women at any one time*. If you don't remember, I'll find the exact page!

So don't say that one must never go beyond the count of three in a life time. Don't put numbers on this. Say merely that one must remain honest, worthy of esteem, do only those things that are not endless passion but that God sees and accepts, for it's his compelling and invisible law that he imposes.

Don't speak of a woman you have so long *adored* (I'm not talking about myself, for I merely passed through like a dream) in terms as thoughtless as those you used in your letter. I'm willing to believe what you say of her, that she has poor taste, but I admire her. She was capable of love, and was never able, faithless or wounded, to tear herself free from the sympathy and pleasures of her youthful affair.² I have my own reasons for feeling such sympathy with her. She was mistreated by the Queen, and yet she still admires her, and pardons everything. The depths of her soul are better and more beautiful than you think. I just don't

1 Hero of Sainte-Beuve's novel, *Volupté*.

2 The woman in question is Marie d'Agoult, the love affair in question being that with Liszt.

know why you talk about anything to do with politics or literature with her, but do other women talk about these matters much better than she does?

Paris, 2 September

I am truly sorry not to have seen you last night, your visit would have been the dearest in the world to me. I'm spending yet another day with the invalid.¹ He is going to die. I think of Solomon's words: "Give not your substance to women." How profound that is. Those who do, those who don't differentiate between vice and pleasure, are soon dead or lost. Women never do that. I'm not dissatisfied with him, he's good, he's gentle, he wanted to put me up in his house, but I came back here to weep, dream, go out and take my mind off things. I weep for delicious passions that are so intense, when I see him again, and realize all that was 15 year ago and that for everyone else I am old, but not for him, and I would be better for him than all those dolls. But he understands nothing, he doesn't choose, he is amiable and that's enough. High ambitions, he's none of those. He will die, and why should one grow old when one has neither knowledge nor order, study or the muses? Thinking of you again, I find that you too have given your substance too often, you have made, as everyone says, the atrocious mixture, and then you have been somewhat severe, I believe, for that woman of your youth whom you loved to the point of dying.

If you are all culpable, then we'll be more indulgent toward all of you. But life and health, men don't give them a thought.

Herblay, 3 October

This morning I received from you a very nice letter, that charms this solitude where I am enjoying the rain, for have I ever told you how much I love the rain and autumn and the long evenings by the fire in this calm village? There'd be no wisdom in comparing myself to the rich and regretting the pleasures of towns, but here there's a pleasure in existing peacefully, belonging to the human race, informing oneself by reading books, and when a few letters from Paris bring us delights that are different from everything we have, we're happy than you think. I never have any conversations in this village, but just now my son is having fun telling me about women, his desire to marry, his longing to have a child and so forth. He has the mind, the face and the originality of his father.

I read you, sir, but I find you somewhat cold in that garb of your literary royalty. You are too rich, too busy, too much a man of the world, you feel too distant from me in all that and the poet reassured me more. The article on La Fontaine strikes me as admirable. You'll say mockingly: "What masterpieces!" Well, yes. I'd have taken pleasure in writing to you on all those things had I not feared overwhelming you with my letters. Your piece on Corneille was excellent and you climb to the level of your subjects. Dare I say that here and there I would

1 Bulwer (Edward George Bulwer-Lytton), 1803-1873, author of historical novels.

have liked more simplicity, and that Louis XIV and the ladies of the court (those are the women you need) shower you with too many flowers. You were serious and profound in depicting old M de Sacy and discussing those fine questions of free will.

Can I, finally, find the courage to say that it's too flattering for women to put Coppet above Ferney?¹ You don't have enough respect for Voltaire; bear in mind that both tenderness and nobility have never been so well represented as by him and that he is the *poet, the inspired one*, above all others. The most noble and the most tender love in the world is the one he portrayed in places that are masterpieces of passion if not of tragedy. Mme de Staël felt it but she didn't sufficiently respect the entirety of the life lead by this man of intrepid action.

I know lyres that are more gentle, more melancholy, more penetrating and that pierce you, so to speak, like sensations, but what you're talking about there is neither theater nor time. It is, moreover, above what is noble and earthly.

Marmont, so it seems to me, worked like Bacon or Machiavelli, establishing principles supported by facts, which he knows and quotes admirably. It's well above history, but time will tell if Marmont equaled these great men in his knowledge. History sometimes gets bogged down in fens and that's why it disgusts us. I wanted to avoid those fens by trying to trace a history of public skill, but I'll probably be crushed by my subject. The history of France should be a military history, a history of battles. There were subjects for epic poems under Louis XIV, and there have been a hundred since then. One wants to create a civil history and yet there was no civilian existence until 1816; Marmont sheds new light on this merit of France and the offensive wars in which we have excellent soldiers and which are the great wars.

Herblay 6 October

Reason is less sure of itself at night than by day and often, half asleep and half conscious, I find you again as in Paris, with the same sweetness and the same peril, o my divine sufferer, and a fire is lit that nothing can calm. But let's leave in the shadows these nights, fragile and tender as they are, and entirely yours.

I'm reading you to strengthen those noble impressions (not you as poet for that would have the opposite effect), and I can assure you that I'm charmed by your work that I consider myself in no way worthy to judge and or to critique. I had in the past read the five volumes (when I was living in the rue Bleu, I think) and I remember *Racine*, *Corneille*, that I much admired then, but here there are things I didn't know. *Diderot* and *Ampère* are admirable. You are truly cut out for this kind of work, a literary Plutarch, something full, complete, a great emotion, many ideas, and that's your main quality; finally, in the depths of all that, something so profound and so profoundly felt, with the result that these books would suffice to make you known and respected in the most tender way possible,

1 Coppet was the meeting place of Mme de Staël, Constant and their circle, whereas Ferney is Voltaire's home.

if your reader had never seen you.

But I don't see why you want to include Bonstetten and people who aren't worth the bother. Your articles on the great minds are the best you write, the strongest, those in which you are able to reveal the best of yourself. The one on Bayle is a perfect model, something I think no one else of this time could do. I hope you're not going to give us Victor Hugo as he used to be. A fine scruple! A writer has the right to choose, to modify, to leave everything that addressed the true beauty of love but take out that exaggerated praise of his exceptional talent. And I would also suppress two or three of his sonnets.

I can understand why that book should be sought out by the Schools, even by seminaries (although secretly) and that all those who want to devote themselves to literature should look for lessons and examples in it. This morning before mass I gave your article on Diderot to that young seminarian who is distressed that you're not for sale on the quays. Your women don't please me as much as your men and if I were your muse I would get you always to take the strongest subjects, the most serious, the most elevated; in the rest you put too many rhetorical flourishes, you sacrifice too much to the graces, at least for my taste, which is perhaps rather rough, but in the great subjects you show your riches, your breadth and all your advantages. For instance, in your piece on Jouffroy¹ the only good part is the bit on philosophy. Do you remember that 8 or 10 years ago I wrote to you from Italy saying that there were two men in France who stood above the rest, Thiers² and you? In those days I was very impartial. I haven't read everything because I read slowly, and I often go back and reread, but I'll discuss this with you again. The idea of making all this into a volume that will be very important is a fine one.

I've returned to Pitt, which I'm just finishing. If the high point of politics is to combine public power with freedom, then certainly Pitt is the world's greatest politician. He did just that, and it's most amusing to put that against the Emperor breaking everything. The exaggerated attacks, the sarcastic comments, the sublime hatred of Fox and Sheridan are alike Pitt's halo, by revealing how much a minister in his country upholds and respects freedom and the first merit of it is no doubt due to that strong nation.

As you've focused on politics in your article on Thiers in 1830 and with results that are rather different from his current work, I hope that you'll also write about some of those men, French or foreign. And what about Royer-Collard?³

Farewell, my poet and my love, my last love, my dying love, since this is a love I must renounce. Ah! How many other things are with you, and how successfully one can combat and repulse those weaknesses, those languors that slip through all aspects of your mind. We will succeed in sending them back to heaven from which they descend with the speed and the piercing power of an arrow.

1 Jouffroy (1751-1832) French engineer.

2 Thiers (1797-1877), French historian and politician.

3 Pierre Paul Royer-Collard (1763-1845) was a lawyer and politician, the leader of the "Doctrinaires" during the Restoration (1815-1848).

Farewell, all too tenderly yours.

Why don't you do a piece on Royer-Collard? That's great politics and philosophy. It would be a part of the history of the Restoration. A real subject for you.

Herblay, 10 November 1845

This is too much, my dear thinker, can you be allowed to say this: "Things are so vast and so infinite that there are in them enough to justify all personal judgments, however contradictory, that we hold about them, and when each of us has sliced off some of that immensity with our intellect, there is still some left over." Does this mean you don't recognize such a thing as wisdom or knowledge? Does this mean we can kill our father, eat stones, walk on our heads, suppress the liberty of the press? If little men like Holbach, Condillac¹ (whom you put in their place, praise be), if those people force the Schools and are wrong, all the heads of the Schools reach an understanding and those great men share a common view of morality, politics, and religion. Machiavelli in this little discussion merely talks like Aristotle or Royer-Collard, partly from above and partly from below. Open the house of parliament and you create public freedom. Servants and their like spoil everything and oblige Kant to return to Plato by way of Condillac. But you're right, if you are talking in the lower rank of questions and it hardly matters whether the senator is wearing purple or linen. That's exactly Benjamin Constant's thinking and yet you criticize him for it!

There are five volumes of Constant that in my view contain the finest things on representative politics that have ever been stated in France. They are axioms like those of Bacon. He sets out his knowledge in masterly fashion and it's convincing. In these volumes he is luminous and cogent, unfolding the truths he finds. You must have read these books when they came out.

You are setting yourself apart from the men of the moment in granting in *all* your writing a large part to individual power. Today, it's only the masses who are seen, but that's wrong, and you alone reestablish people with their personal worth. I forgot to say to you that Machiavelli quotes Plato as a man of action, but of political action. Machiavelli himself is hardly a man of action. I don't find that there are abysses between thought and action; stupidity alone is an abyss.

This is how you destroy knowledge and wisdom, sir, by granting everything to health. I didn't have very good health when I fainted in the streets of London, when, as a young girl, Bourdais (a great doctor) wanted to burn my notebooks and when later concerned about another aspect of my health, he told me to read a great deal. I created my own health through prudence, through the friends of those sages who are *all in agreement* more or less on the rules of life. Here are the exact words of the Stoics: "Reason was granted to humans to make them live according to the greatness of their condition and the laws of nature." – How profound that is,

1 Holbach (1723 -1789), erudite and philosopher who collaborated on the *Encyclopédie*; Condillac (1714-1780), philosopher and priest.

how honorable, and how beautiful!

All thinkers are in agreement on certain points. I'm not talking about Bayle¹ and Voltaire, who fight in the breeches and do what they do well. My clay is merely Leibnitz's *Theodiceus*.² It's perfectly clear that matter has something that forces us, and this is also the thinking of Aristotle, Plato, and you'll see that the great thinkers have always granted this. What a life it would be if we believed nothing! It would be tantamount to seeing nothing. But you, you are one of the best and one of the truest believers according to your poet's instincts; a poet and a thinker, now that's a believer.

I'd be cross if you were soon to do a Mignet, if it were not that it's a subject that offers you many different routes.³ But I'd rather you tackled the dead and the most difficult among them, the most complex, the most renowned. You have plenty of strength beneath your gracious manners and it's real strength, the strength of God that bursts forth in moments of delight. You are now the master in the *Revue des deux mondes*, and it's up to you to give us good taste and to remind us of what is beautiful. Yet it seems to me that you accuse yourself rather too much in your notes for the past. You praised Racine so much that you have no cause to apologize for a few mild criticisms and if I were in your shoes I would have said nothing on that head. Ah! dear sir! how enthusiastic you are. You can do nothing with moderation. Now here you are too much in love with the time of Louis XIV. But you won't return to that. The portrait of Boileau⁴ was also very good, you can praise more later on without their being any contradiction and without indicating that there is any contradiction.

Farewell, amiable race of Plato and René, send me your thoughts when you're not in a mood for working and I'll receive them and return them to you with respect. When I have no letters from you, it makes me sad and I take up one of those *Portraits* finding in it many graceful things, those bees of Hymettus that I could never reach but that my lips would have liked to seek out on your lips.

When I come to Paris soon, I'll bring with me *Cousin* and *Villemain* for what you say about them amuses me and I believe it to be very true.⁵

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- 1 Bayle (1647-1706), French writer whose study of superstitions points forward to the thinking of the eighteenth century.
 - 2 Leibnitz (1646-1716), German mathematician and philosopher.
 - 3 Auguste Minet (1796-1884), French historian, author of a *History of the French Revolution* (1824).
 - 4 Boileau (1636-1711), French writer, author of satirical and moral poems whose works helped established the idea of a French classical style.
 - 5 Victor Cousin (1792-1867), French philosopher and politician; Abel Villemain (1790-1870), French critic and politician.

LA COMTESSE DE SÉGUR

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Mme de Ségur (1799-1874) played a central role in the imaginations and memories of generations of French people through her collaboration with the publishing house Hachette, responsible for the beautifully produced collection of children's literature, *La Bibliothèque rose*. A prolific writer, Mme de Ségur created a vast series of child-characters, and while her works have an undeniable moralizing quality, often associated with undercurrents of violence verging on the sadistic, what is more remarkable about her representations of childhood is the liveliness of her children, whose fascination with the external world and all it entails offers a salty realism and an uncomplicated sense of humor that very few of her contemporaries were able to produce. It was a combination that gave her novels an immense appeal for her child and adult readers. The character for which she is probably best-known, the semi-autobiographical Sophie, reveals the complex elements of cruelty and pity, selfishness and altruism, that mark all childhoods, and most remarkably perhaps it refuses the conventional gender demarcations of the time. Ségur's vast production, written in large part to support her family after her husband's death, presents a complex and vivid portrayal of French society during the Second Empire, and wittily reveals the changing perception of childhood that was taking place through the nineteenth century.

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Enormously productive, Mme de Ségur published numerous stories for children. Many of these have been translated. The work below is a useful compendium in a modern edition.

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Sophie's Misfortunes (1859)

Translated by Valérie Lastinger

I THE WAX DOLL

“Oh, nurse, nurse,” exclaimed Sophie, running into her room one day, “come quick and open this box papa has sent me from Paris. I believe there is a wax doll in it, for he promised me one.”

NURSE

Where is the box?

SOPHIE

In the hall; please, nurse, come as fast as you can.

The nurse put down her work, and followed Sophie into the hall. A white wooden box lied on a chair, and as the nurse opened it, Sophie saw the blond curly hair of a wax doll. She uttered a cry of joy, and tried to seize the doll still enveloped in its paper wrappings.

NURSE

Take care! don't pull it out yet, you will break it; it is tied in with strings.

SOPHIE

Break them, pull them off, quick, nurse, so I may get my doll.

Instead of jerking and pulling, the nurse cut them with her scissors; she then unwrapped the papers, and Sophie was able to clasp to her heart the most beautiful wax doll she had ever seen. Its rosy cheeks were dimpled, its eyes a bright blue, and its waxen neck, breast, and arms, plump and charming. Its dress was very simple, being merely a robe of festooned percale, a blue sash, cotton stockings, and high boots of black patent leather.

Sophie kissed it over and over, and, holding it in her arms, she began to prance about the room. Her cries of joy attracted the attention of her cousin, Paul, a little boy of five, who was visiting her.

“O, Paul! look at this beautiful doll papa sent me!” she exclaimed.

PAUL

Give it to me, so that I can see it better.

SOPHIE

No, you would break it.

PAUL

I promise you I will be very careful; I will give it back to you immediately.

Sophie handed her cousin the doll, still cautioning him not to drop it. Paul took it, and, after a careful scrutiny, returned it to her, shaking his head.

SOPHIE

Why do you shake your head?

PAUL

Because this doll is not sturdy; I am afraid you will break it.

SOPHIE

Oh! Don't worry about that, I am going to take such good care of it, that I shall never break it. I am going to ask mamma to invite Camille and Madeleine to have lunch with us, so that they, too, may see my pretty doll.

PAUL

They will break it for you.

SOPHIE

Oh, no! they are too fond of me to hurt me by breaking my dear doll.

The next day, Sophie combed and dressed her doll in readiness to receive her friends. While dressing, it she thought that the doll looked pale.

"Perhaps she is cold," said Sophie, "her feet feel frozen. I will put her in the sun a little while, so that my friends may see how well I take care of her, and keep her warm and comfortable." And with these words, Sophie laid her in the sun on the windowsill in the drawing room.

"What are you doing at the window, Sophie?" inquired her mamma.

SOPHIE

I am warming my doll, mamma, she is very cold.

MAMMA

Be careful, you might melt her.

SOPHIE

Oh no! mamma, there is no danger; she is as hard as wood.

MAMMA

But the heat will soften her; I am warning you, she might be hurt.

Sophie would not listen to her mamma, but laid her doll full length in the broiling sun.

At that instant, she heard the noise of a carriage; her little friends had arrived, and she ran to meet them. Paul had been waiting for them at the entrance, and they ran into the room, all talking at once. In spite of their impatience to see the doll, they stopped to say good morning to Mme de Réan, Sophie's mamma; then, they followed Sophie, who, picking up the doll, stared at it with consternation.

MADELEINE

The doll is blind, she has no eyes.

CAMILLE

What a pity! how pretty she is!

MADELEINE

But how did she become blind? she must have had eyes.

Sophie said nothing, but looked at her doll and wept.

MME DE RÉAN

I warned you, Sophie, not to lay your doll in the sun, yet you persisted in doing it. Fortunately, her face and arms have not had time to melt. Come now, don't cry any more, I am a very skilful doctor, and perhaps I can restore her eyes.

"It's impossible, mamma," said Sophie, crying, "her eyes are gone."

Smiling, Mme de Réan took the doll and shook it gently; something rattled in its head. "The eyes are making that noise in the head," said she, "the wax has melted around them and they have fallen in. I think I can get them out. Undress the doll, children, while I prepare my instruments."

Immediately, Paul and the three little girls rushed to the doll to undress it. Sophie dried her tears, and impatiently awaited the result of her mother's attempts to restore its eyes.

Mme de Réan returned, and cut with her scissors the stitches fastening the doll's head to the body. Its eyes which were in the head fell out in her lap. She took them up with tweezers, replaced them in the cavities, and then to prevent their falling out again, she poured in the head, just around the sockets of the eye, some melted wax she had brought in a little saucepan. Waiting a few minutes till the wax had hardened, she sewed the head on to the body again.

Meanwhile the little ones had not moved an inch. Sophie watched all the proceedings, fearfully, very dubious of their success; and when she saw her doll restored to its former beauty she threw her arms around her mother's neck and kissed her ten times.

"Thank you, dear mamma," she cried, "another time I will certainly listen to you." The doll was soon dressed again, and seated on a little armchair which the children carried about in triumph, singing the praises of Mme de Réan's skill in the following lines:

*Long live Mamma!
I cover her with kisses
Long live Mamma!
She is our good angel.*

The doll lived a long life, well cared for and much loved; but gradually, her charms disappeared, as the following anecdotes will show.

One day, thinking her doll ought to be washed since children were always washed, Sophie took water, a sponge and soap, and set about the operation, which succeeded so well, that all the color was washed out of the doll's face, its lips and cheeks becoming as white as if she were ill, and remaining colorless ever after. Sophie wept, but that did not restore her doll's color.

Another day, wishing to curl her hair, she put it up in papers, and then pinched them with a warm iron. But alas! when the papers were removed, the hair came off as well; the iron was too hot, Sophie had burnt all the hair off her doll's head, who was now quite bald. Sophie wept, but the doll remained bald.

Another time, greatly engrossed with the education of her doll, Sophie decided to teach it to whirl around. She held it up by a cord tied to its arms; and the poor doll insecurely fastened, fell and broke an arm. Mme de Réan tried to mend it, but as some pieces were missing, and she had to heat up the wax quite a bit, and the arm remained shorter than the other. Sophie wept, but the arm remained shorter.

Another time, Sophie reflected that a footbath would be very useful to the doll, since grown-ups took them. She poured boiling water in a small tub, plunged her doll's feet in it, and when she pulled her out, the feet had melted and remained

in the bucket. Sophie wept, but the doll remained footless.

After all these mishaps, Sophie no longer loved her doll who had become quite ugly, and who had become an object of ridicule to her friends. At last, one day, in trying to teach her to climb a tree she held her up to a branch and seated her there; but not being secure in her position, the doll fell, her head striking against the stones, broke into a hundred pieces. Sophie did not weep this time, but invited her friends to the doll's funeral.

II THE FUNERAL

Camille and Madeleine arrived one morning for the doll's funeral: they were delighted, and Sophie and Paul were just as excited.

SOPHIE

Come quick, we are waiting for you to help make the doll's coffin.

CAMILLE

What shall we use to make it?

SOPHIE

An old toy box I had, that nurse has covered with pink percale. It looks very pretty. Come and see it.

The children ran to Mme de Réan's room, where the nurse was just finishing the pillow and mattress for the box; the children admired the charming coffin. The doll was placed in it, and so that the crushed head, melted feet and hairless state could not be seen, they covered her with a coverlet of pink silk.

The box was placed on a litter which Sophie's mamma had had made for the purpose. Of course, they all wished to carry it, but as this was impossible since there was room for two only, it was agreed, after some pushing and disputing, that Sophie and Paul, the two smallest, should carry the bier, while Camille and Madeleine would walk, one before, other behind, bearing a basket of flowers and leaves to scatter over the grave.

When the procession reached Sophie's little garden, they set down the litter with the box containing the remains of the unfortunate doll, and began to dig the grave, into which they lowered the coffin, covered it with flowers and leaves, then replaced the earth, and promptly planted two lilacs at the site. To close the ceremony, they ran to the kitchen-garden pond and filled their little watering-cans to water the lilacs. This was the opportunity for renewed sports and mirth, as they watered each other's legs, chasing one another, laughing and screaming. Such a lively funeral was never before witnessed. To be sure, the deceased was only an old doll, colorless, bald, without legs or head, and neither loved nor regretted by any one. The day ended gaily, and when Camille and Madeleine said good-bye, they urged Paul and Sophie to break another doll, so as to be able to renew the experience of such an amusing funeral.

IV THE LITTLE FISHES

Sophie was scatterbrained and often did a great deal of mischief without meaning to.

Here is what happened to her one day:

Her mother had some little fishes no longer than a pin, and no thicker than the quill of a pigeon's feather. Mme de Réan was very fond of these little fishes which she kept in a vessel of water, the bottom covered with sand in which they could bury and conceal themselves at will. Every day, Mme de Réan fed them bread; and Sophie loved to watch them dart after the crumbs, and fight each other for them.

One day, her papa gave her a pretty little tortoise-shell knife; Sophie, delighted with her knife, used it to cut her bread, apples, biscuit, flowers, etc.

One morning she was playing; the nurse had given her some bread that she cut in little pieces, some almonds that she also sliced and some lettuce leaves. She asked the nurse for oil and vinegar to make salad.

"No" said the nurse, "I can give you some salt, but not oil and vinegar, as they could soil your clothes."

After sprinkling her salad leaves with salt, Sophie still had a great deal of it left.

"If I only had something to salt " said she, "I don't wish to salt my bread, I need some meat or fish... Oh! what a splendid idea; I will salt mamma's little fishes; I will slice some up with my little knife, and I will salt the others whole. What fun that will be, and what a nice dish they will make!"

Sophie fails to reflect that her mother will no longer have her pretty little fishes, which she loves, or that the poor little things will suffer from being salted alive or cut in pieces. Sophie runs into the room where they are and approaching the bowl, fishes them all up out of the water, puts them in one of her dishes, and returns to her little table, takes a few of these poor little fishes and puts them on a platter. But the little fishes, feeling ill at ease out of the water, struggle and flop about with all their might. To quiet them, Sophie pours salt, upon the head, back, and tail. Indeed, soon, they lay motionless: the poor little creatures were all dead. When her plate was filled, she took more of them, and began to cut them in pieces. At the first gash of the knife, the poor fishes writhed in pain, but they soon became motionless for they too were dying. After cutting up the second one, Sophie realized that she had killed them; she glanced fearfully at the salted fish, and seeing that they did not move, she examined them attentively and to her consternation, discovered that they also were dead. At this Sophie became as red as a cherry.

"What will mamma say? " she said to herself. "What will become of me, poor wretch! How shall I hide this?"

She thought for a moment. Her face brightened; she had devised a most excellent means of preventing her mother to find out the truth.

Quickly collecting both the salted and the cut up fishes, she put them in a

little dish, stole softly out of the room and stealthily replaced them in their bowl.

“Mamma,” said she to herself, “will think they have killed one another fighting among themselves. I must now wipe off my dishes and knife and put the salt away. Fortunately, nurse does not know that I had gone to get the fishes; she was busy with her work and not thinking about me.” Sophie noiselessly returned to her room, sat herself at the little table again, and continued her play. Soon she rose, went to pick up a book and began to look at the pictures. But she was worried, she was not paying any attention to the pictures, at every moment thought she could hear her mother coming in.

Suddenly, Sophie starts nervously and blushes,—she hears Mme de Réan’s voice, summoning the servants in a tone of severity and displeasure, she hears the servants come and go, and she trembles, fearing her nurse would be called, fearing she would be called; but the noise dies down, she can no longer hear anything.

The nurse, who had likewise heard the noise and who was curious, puts down her work and leaves the room. In a quarter of an hour she returns. “How fortunate for us,” said she to Sophie, “that we have both been in our room all the while! Just imagine, your mamma just went to see the fishes and found them all dead, some whole, and others cut in pieces. She has questioned all the servants as to who could have killed the poor little creatures, but no one can or will tell anything about it. I have just seen your mother, and she asked me if you had been where the fishes were. Luckily, I could say that you had not left this room, and that you had been busy playing house with your little dish set. ‘It is strange,’ said your mamma, ‘I would sworn that Sophie was responsible for this masterful deed.’ ‘Oh! Madame,’ I answered, ‘Sophie does not have it in her to commit such a mean act.’ ‘Very well,’ said your mamma, ‘for I should have punished her severely. It is lucky for her that you can vouch that she did not leave your side and that you assure me she could not have killed my poor fishes.’ ‘Oh! Madame, as for this, I am sure of it,’ said I.”

Sophie made no reply, but remained motionless with her head cast down, her cheeks a bright red, and her eyes filled with tears. For an instant, she thought of confessing the deed and telling nurse who had wrought so much mischief, but her courage failed her. The nurse, seeing her so sad, thought that it was the fishes’ death that afflicted her so.

“I knew,” said the nurse, “that you would be as distressed as your mother at what has happened to these poor little creatures. But think that the fishes were not happy in their prison, for the bowl was only a prison to them; now that they are dead, their sufferings are over. Don’t think of them any more, but come and let me get you ready to go to the drawing room, soon it will be dinner time.”

Sophie let her wash her and comb her hair without uttering a word. When she entered the drawing-room her mother was there.

“Sophie,” said she, “has your nurse told you what has happened to my little fishes?”

SOPHIE

Yes, mamma.

MADAME DE RÉAN

If nurse had not assured me that you were in your room with her after you left me, I should have charged you with the deed; all the servants positively deny it. But I believe that Simon, who took care of the fishes, changing the water and sand every morning, was the one who killed them—it was to rid himself of the trouble they gave him, so, I shall fire him tomorrow.

SOPHIE, *frightened*

Oh! mamma the poor man! What will become of his wife and children?

MADAME DE RÉAN

So much the worse for him; he ought not to have killed my little fishes that had never done him any harm! Just think how he made them suffer, cutting them in pieces!

SOPHIE

But it was not he, mamma, who killed them! I assure you it was not!

MADAME DE RÉAN

How do you know it was not? I believe it was he; it could not have been anyone else, and tomorrow, I shall send him away.

Sophie, bursting into tears and clasping her hands, cried out:

“Oh, no! mamma, don’t send him away. It was I who took the little fishes and killed them.”

“You!” exclaimed Mme de Réan in surprise, “what nonsense! you who were so fond of the little creatures! you tortured and killed them! I can see that you say this to excuse Simon.”

“No, mamma,” answered Sophie: “I assure you it was I! yes, it was I! I didn’t intend to kill them; I wished only to salt them, and I thought salt would do them no harm. And when I cut them in pieces, I didn’t know it hurt them, because they didn’t cry. When I saw that they were dead, I took them back to the fishbowl, and nurse, who was at her work, didn’t notice me when I went or came.”

For a few moments, Mme de Réan was mute with astonishment at Sophie’s confession; and when the latter timidly raised her eyes, she encountered those of her mother fixed upon her, but without the slightest expression of anger or severity.

“Sophie,” said Mme de Réan at last, “if I had learned by accident, or rather because of God’s grace, what you have just told me, I should have punished you most severely, without pity. But the good spirit you have shown in confessing your fault, to exonerate Simon, insures your pardon; so I shall not reproach you, for I am sure you feel most sensibly how cruel you have been to the poor little fishes, in not reflecting both that the salt must kill them, and also, that it would be impossible to cut in pieces and kill any creature without inflicting suffering.”

And, seeing that Sophie wept bitterly, she added:

“Don’t cry any more, Sophie; but never forget that to obtain pardon for our faults, we must confess them.”

Sophie dried her tears, and thanked her mother; but she remained very sad all day at the thought of having killed her little friends, the fishes.

V THE HONEY BEE

Sophie and her cousin Paul were playing in their room one day, amusing themselves catching the flies that crawled about over the window panes. As soon as they captured one, it was put in a little paper box Sophie's papa had made them.

When quite a number had been caught, Paul wished to see what they were doing in the box.

"Give me the box," said he to Sophie who held it, "let us see what the flies are up to."

Sophie gave it to him, and they very carefully opened its little door to peep in. Paul put his eye to the aperture and exclaimed:

"Ah! how funny! they are moving all about and fighting with one another; here is one that has pulled off its companion's leg ... the others are angry... Oh! what ruckus! some are falling down and some are getting up! "

"Let me have a turn, Paul," said Sophie.

Paul made no reply, but continued to look and recount what he saw.

Sophie became impatient, and taking a corner of the box, she pulled on it gently; Paul did the same; Sophie got angry and pulled a little harder, Paul followed her example: Sophie gave such a jerk that she tore the box. All the flies rushed out, settling themselves on the eyes, nose and cheeks of Paul and Sophie, who slapped and brushed away at them most vigorously.

"It is all your fault, Paul," said Sophie, "if you had been more kinder, you would have given me the box, and we would not have torn it to pieces."

"No, it is your fault," replied Paul: "if you had been less impatient, you would have waited a little for the box, and we should still have had it."

SOPHIE

You are selfish, and think of no one but yourself.

PAUL

And you, you are angry now, just like the turkeys on the farm.

SOPHIE

I am not at all angry, sir, but I think you are mean.

PAUL

I am not mean, miss; but I speak the truth and that is why you get red with anger, just like the turkeys with their red combs.

SOPHIE

I no longer want to play with a boy as mean as you, sir.

PAUL

Nor I play with a mean girl like you, miss.

Each retired to a corner of the room, sulking. Sophie soon grew tired of this, but, wishing to make Paul think she was enjoying herself, she set about catching flies again, singing as she did so. But there were few remaining, and they were not easily caught. Suddenly, she was delighted to see a big bee quietly resting in a corner of the window. Remembering that bees could sting she did not try to pick it

up with her fingers, but, taking out her pocket handkerchief, she threw it over the poor bee, and thus seized it, before it had time to save itself.

Paul, who was also tired in his corner, was looking at Sophie and saw her catch the bee.

“What are you going to do with that bee?” he asked her.

SOPHIE, *rudely*

Let me alone, bad boy; it is none of your business.

PAUL, *ironically*

Pardon, pardon, Miss Furious; I, indeed beg your pardon for having spoken to you, and for having forgotten that you were so ill-bred and impertinent.

SOPHIE, *making a mock reverence*

I will tell mamma, Sir, that you find me ill-bred, and no doubt she will be pleased to hear it, since she raises me.

PAUL, *anxiously*

Oh! no, Sophie, don't tell her that, I will be in trouble.

SOPHIE

Yes, I will tell her, and if you are scolded, so much the better; it will please me greatly.

PAUL

Wicked thing! I don't want to speak another word to you.

And Paul returned his chair, so as not to see Sophie, who, delighted at having worried and frightened him, began to busy herself with the bee again. Cautiously lifting one corner of the handkerchief a little, she lightly squeezed the bee between her fingers through the handkerchief, to disable it from flying, then took out her little pocket knife.

“I am going to cut off its head,” said she to herself “to punish it for all the stings it has given in its life.”

She immediately put the poor insect on the floor, still holding it in the handkerchief, and with one stroke of her knife, cut off the head. Finding this quite amusing, she proceeded to cut it into pieces.

She was so engrossed with the bee that she did not hear her mamma enter the room. Seeing Sophie kneeling, bent over, and almost motionless, Mme de Réan approached quietly to see what she was doing; she saw her cut off the poor bee's last leg.

Horrified at Sophie's cruelty, Mme de Réan pulled on her daughter's ear sharply.

Sophie screamed, jumped on her feet, and remained trembling in front of her mamma.

“You are a very bad girl, young miss, tormenting and killing this poor insect after all I said to you when you salted and killed my poor little fishes!

SOPHIE

Indeed, mamma, I forgot.

MME DE RÉAN

Well, Miss, I shall help you to remember, first, by depriving you of your knife for a year, and also, by making you to wear a necklace made of the pieces of this bee,

threaded on a ribbon, until it crumbles to pieces.

Sophie begged and implored her mamma not to punish her in this way, but Mme de Réan called the nurse, had someone bring her a piece of black ribbon. She soon prepared the dreaded necklace, and tied it around Sophie's neck. Paul dared not say anything; he was dismayed; but when Sophie was left alone, sobbing and ashamed of her necklace, Paul tried to console her by every means possible. He kissed her, begged pardon for all the unkind things he had told her, and tried to convince her that the yellow, orange, blue and black colors of the bee made a most charming combination and reminded him of a pendant made of jet and precious stones. Sophie thanked him for his kindness; her cousin's friendship was somewhat of a consolation; but she could not help feeling chagrined at her new ornament. For the whole week it remained intact; but finally, one lucky day, playing with her, Paul handled it so roughly that the pieces of the bee were crushed, and fell off, leaving nothing but the black ribbon. He ran immediately to tell his aunt, who now permitted her to discard it. Thus was Sophie cured of a fault, for never again did she seek amusement in what gave any creature pain.

XIV THE SCRATCHED CHEEK

Sophie was very quick tempered—another fault of which we have not yet spoken.

One day, she was amusing herself painting in one of her little coloring books, and Paul was cutting out cards to make salad baskets, tables and benches out of them. They were seated at the same little table, facing each other. In moving his legs, Paul shook the table.

“Be careful,” said Sophie impatiently; “you shake the table, so I can't paint.

For a few moments, Paul was very careful; then, he forgot and accidentally shook the table again.

“Paul, you're most annoying!” cried Sophie; “I already told you that you are preventing me from painting.”

PAUL

Ah! Bah! For the pretty things that you paint, why should I inconvenience myself?

SOPHIE

I know very well that you never inconvenience yourself; but as you are bothering me, I beg you to keep your legs still.

PAUL, *mockingly*

My legs don't like to stay still, they move in spite of me.

SOPHIE, *angry*

I will tie them up with a string, your bothersome legs; and, if you keep on moving them, I will send you out.

PAUL

Why don't you just try? You will see what the feet that are at the end of my legs can do.

SOPHIE

Are you going to kick me, you wicked boy?

PAUL

Most certainly, if you punch me.

Sophie, decidedly angry, throws some water at Paul's face, and he, getting angry in turn, kicks the table, upsetting all that was on it. Sophie runs to Paul and scratches his face so hard that blood runs down his cheek. Paul screams; Sophie, beside herself with anger, continues to slap and kick him. Paul, who does not like to fight Sophie, finally flies and lock himself in a closet. Sophie knocks on the door in vain. In the end, Sophie regains her calm. When her anger is gone, she begins to repent; she remembers that Paul had risked his life to save her from the wolves.

"O my poor Paul!" thought she, "how dreadfully I have treated him! What can I do to put him in a good humor. I shouldn't like to beg his pardon; it is so trying to have to say, 'Pardon me.' Yet," she added, after a little reflection, "it is a great deal more shameful to behave as I have just been behaving, and how can Paul pardon me, if I don't ask him to do so?"

Having pondered the matter a few moments, Sophie arose and rapped gently at the locked door, but this time not angrily and giving great blows to the door, but gently. "Paul, Paul!" she called in a quiet, humble tone; but there was no reply. "Paul," she continued in the same gentle manner, "my dear Paul, please pardon me, I am very, very sorry I was so bad, and treated you so shamefully. Indeed, I will never do it any more."

The door was quietly opened a little bit, and Paul's head appeared. He looked at Sophie with distrust.

"You are no longer angry? really?" said he.

"Oh! yes, yes, indeed, I have, dear Paul; and I am very sorry for having been so bad." Paul opened the door wide, and Sophie raising her eyes, beheld with grief how she had scratched his face. With a cry, she fell upon Paul's neck

"Oh? my poor Paul." said she, "how I have hurt you! how I have scratched you! What can I do to heal your face?"

"That's nothing," replied Paul, "it will take care of itself. Let us get a basin and some water. When the blood is washed off my face, it will be all right again."

Sophie ran to help Paul get a basin full of water: but vainly did he bathe his face, rub and wipe it, the scratches showed very plainly. Sophie was most distressed.

"What will mamma say?" she murmured, "what will she say? She will be very angry with me, and punish me severely, I know."

Paul, a very forgiving child, was also distressed, and could think of nothing except how to avert Sophie's anticipated punishment.

"I can't say I got scratched by thorns, because that would not be true," said he. "But, oh! just wait now, and you'll see what I can do."

Paul immediately starts off at a run, followed by Sophie. They enter into the little woods near the house; Paul, walking towards a holly-bush, dashes into it, and throws himself about in such a manner as to be pricked and scratched by the sharp, pointed leaves. He comes out of it looking more badly scratched than

before.

When Sophie sees his poor face all bleeding, she despairs and cannot not restrain her tears.

“Oh!” said she, “I am the cause of your sufferings, my poor Paul! It is to prevent my being punished that you have scratched yourself worse than I scratched you in my passion! Oh! dear Paul, how good you are! How I love you!”

“Let us go to the house,” he replied, “as fast as we can, so that I can bathe my face. Oh! don’t look so sad, my poor Sophie. I assure you I suffer very little; tomorrow it will be gone. Only I ask you now not to tell that you scratched me. If you did, I would be very sad, and I would know no reward for my holly-bush scratches. Do you promise me?”

“Yes,” said Sophie, embracing him, “I will do all that you wish.”

They went to their room and Paul bathed his face. When they entered the parlor, both of their mammas exclaimed at sight of his scratched and swollen face:

“Where did you fix yourself up like that, my poor Paul?” asked Mme d’Aubert. “It looks as if you had been rolling among thorns.”

PAUL

That is just what has happened, mamma. I ran into a holly-bush, and in struggling to get out of it, I scratched my face and hands.

Mme D’AUBERT

You were very awkward to have fallen into the holly; and you should not have struggled, but extricated yourself gently.

MME DE RÉAN

Where were you then, Sophie? You should have helped Paul to get up.

PAUL

She ran after me, aunt; but before she had time to help me, I was already up.

Mme d’ Aubert led Paul out of the room to put some cucumber ointment on his scratches. Sophie remained with her mamma, who, feeling somewhat suspicious of her little daughter, eyed her attentively.

MME DE RÉAN

Why are you sad; Sophie?

SOPHIE, *blushing*

I am not sad, mamma.

MME DE RÉAN

Oh! yes, you most certainly are; you are sad and anxious, as if something tormented you.

SOPHIE, *in a quivering voice, and with tears in her eyes*

Nothing is the matter, mamma; nothing is the matter with me.

MME DE RÉAN

Yes, there is, for I see that even in telling me there is nothing the matter, you are ready to cry.

SOPHIE, *breaking into tears*

I...I...can’t...tell you.... I...I...promised Paul...not... to tell...you.

MME DE RÉAN, *reaching for Sophie*

Listen to me, Sophie; if Paul has done something wrong, you should not keep

your promise to him of not telling me. I now promise you that I will not scold him for it nor will I tell his mamma. I wish to know what makes you so sad, and why you cry so bitterly, and you must tell me.

Sophie buries her face in her Mme de Réan's lap and sobs so hard that she is unable to speak. The latter continues to soothe and encourage her, and, at last Sophie said:

"Paul has done nothing wrong, mamma; on the contrary he has been very good, and done a noble thing. I am the one who was bad, and to keep me from being scolded and punished, poor Paul rolled in the holly-bush."

With growing surprise, Mme de Réan questioned Sophie, who now recounted all that had happened between Paul and herself.

"Noble little Paul!" exclaimed Mme de Réan; "what a good heart he has! What courage and kindness! And you, my dear Sophie.—what a difference there is between you and your cousin! Just see how you let your temper carry you away and how ungrateful you are toward this excellent Paul, who always forgives and always forgets your acts of injustice, and who, today again has been so generous to you.

SOPHIE

Oh! yes, mamma, I see indeed how bad I have been, and I'll never get angry with Paul any more.

MME DE RÉAN

I shall add no reprimand or punishment, Sophie, to that which your own heart has given you. Paul's sufferings are a sufficient punishment for you; you will learn from it more than by any I could inflict. Moreover, you have been so sincere in confessing your fault when you could have concealed it, that I pardon you also on account of your frankness.

XV ELIZABETH

One day, Sophie was quietly seated in her little armchair; she was doing nothing and was just thinking.

"What are you thinking about?" inquired her mother.

SOPHIE

I was thinking about Elizabeth Chéneau, mamma.

MME DE RÉAN

What were you thinking about her?

SOPHIE

Yesterday, I noticed that she had a great scratch on her arm, and when I asked her how she got it, she blushed, hid her arm, and said to me in a whisper: "Don't speak of it; it was for my punishment." I wonder what she was trying to tell me by that.

MME DE RÉAN

I can explain it to you, if you wish; for I also noticed this scratch, and her mamma

told me how it had happened. Listen well, now, for the act shows a fine trait in Elizabeth.

Sophie, delighted at the thought of hearing a story, brought her little armchair close to her mother's side the better to catch every word.

MME DE RÉAN

You know that Elizabeth is a good child, but unfortunately very high-tempered. (Here Sophie casts her eyes down.) Sometimes, when she has a fit of anger, she even slaps her nurse. She is very sorry for it afterwards; but she should think of the consequences before the fact, rather than after. The day before yesterday she was ironing her doll's underclothing and dresses, her nurse always putting the irons on the fire, for fear Elizabeth would burn herself. Elizabeth was much annoyed at not being allowed to heat up the irons; her nurse forbade her doing so, and stopped her every time she attempted to sneak her iron into the fire. At last, Elizabeth succeeded in reaching the fireplace, and she was about to set her iron in the fire when the nurse saw her, took the iron away and told her: "Since you will not listen to me, Elizabeth, you won't iron anymore. I'll take the irons and I put them back in the armoire." "I want my irons," cried Elizabeth, "I want my irons!" "No, Miss, you shall not have them." "Wicked Louise, give me back my irons!" screamed Elizabeth enraged. "You shall not have them; they are locked up," replied Louise, taking the key out of the armoire. Elizabeth, furious, tried to snatch the key from Louise's hand, but was unable to take it. So in her fit of anger, she scratched Louise's arm so hard that she broke the skin and made it bleed. At sight of blood, Elizabeth was distressed; she begged Louise's pardon, kissed her arm and bathed it in water. Louise, who is a very good woman, seeing her so afflicted, told her that her arm did not hurt. "No, no," said Elizabeth in tears, "I deserve to suffer just as I have made you suffer. Scratch my arm, nurse, just as I have scratched yours, so as to make me suffer what you have suffered." You know very well that the nurse refused to do any such thing, and Elizabeth did not say anything more. Elizabeth was very good the remainder of the day; and went to bed without the least resistance. The next morning, when her nurse took her up, she noticed blood on her sheet, and looking at Elizabeth's arm, she saw that it was terribly scratched. "What has hurt you thus, my poor child?" she exclaimed. "I, I did it, nurse, to punish myself for having scratched you the way I did yesterday. When I went to bed, I thought it only right that I should suffer just as I had made you suffer, and so I scratched my arm until it bled." The nurse, much touched at this, kissed Elizabeth, who promised her to be good in future. Do you understand now the meaning of what Elizabeth said to you, and why she blushed?

SOPHIE

Oh! yes, mamma, I understand perfectly. It was beautiful in Elizabeth to do that. I think she will never get angry again, since she knows how wrong it is.

MME DE RÉAN, *smiling*

Don't you ever do anything that you know to be wrong?

SOPHIE, *greatly embarrassed*

But, mamma, I am younger than she is: I am only four years old, and Elizabeth is

five.

MME DE RÉAN

It does not make a big difference. Remember how angry you were about a week ago with poor Paul, who is so gentle.

SOPHIE

Yes, mamma; but I believe, all the same, that I will never behave so again, or do anything that I know to be wrong.

MME DE RÉAN

I hope that you will not, Sophie; but take great care not to think yourself better than you are. That is what we call pride, and you know that pride is a very ugly fault.

Sophie made no reply, but a smile of satisfaction on her lips seemed to say that she felt certain she would always be good.

Poor Sophie was soon humiliated again [...]

LOUISE ACKERMANN

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Memory alone does not suffice to write the story of one's life: imagination is also needed. By this I mean the imagination of recollection—not the inventing imagination, but the one that gathers together and revives.

(Ackermann, *Pensées d'une solitaire*)

Louise Ackermann (1813-1890), born Louise-Victorine Choquet, distinguished herself by writing poetry that defied stereotypes of feminine lyricism as sentimental, pious, and derivative. Her *Poésies philosophiques* (1871) in particular place Ackermann among the most intellectual and erudite of nineteenth-century French women poets. Rather than referring to strictly domestic themes such as maternity and childhood, Ackermann's poetry refers to philosophical and scientific concerns of her time (see, for example, "A la Comète de 1861," "Le Positivisme"). Once called "the Sappho of atheism" (Haussonville), she is often placed in the tradition of positivist poets (Charlton) for her profound skepticism. These attributes have had the stereotypical effect of defeminizing and even masculinizing her. Critics from Ackermann's era to our own have accused her of aesthetic sterility (Barbey) and referred to her "quite virile tenacity and vigor" (Barbet-Massin) or her "male voice" (Somoff). Despite her characterization as a blue stocking, Ackermann had, in fact, a conflicted relationship to feminism and her own poetic aspirations. Indeed, several contradictions, endemic to women writers living in cultures of masculine dominance, emerge from a reading of Ackermann's autobiographical essay, "My Life," translated below. This text, along with her collection of aphorisms, *Pensées d'une solitaire* (1882), sheds light on the woman behind the poetry.

While brief, "My Life" leaves a striking impression of a complex writer and highlights several of the quandaries that faced women poets in the 19th century. Ackermann describes herself as unsociable and solitary, painting a picture of a proud woman often more interested in books than in human companionship. While such attributes (and the concomitant devaluation of the emotional, long associated with femininity) might seem transparently natural for a man of letters, Ackermann's life illustrates to what extent the intellectual pursuits of a woman wrought havoc with cultural expectations and, indeed, with the woman poet's own identity. As Ackermann wrote herself, "the woman who writes poetry is always more or less ridiculous." Since being a woman and writing poetry were deemed incompatible, and since "being a woman" meant marriage and tending a

household, Ackermann chose, during her own short marriage, to abandon writing and devote herself to her husband's work. Indeed, she entirely hid her literary aspirations from her husband, a man who, even so, had been attracted to Ackermann's intellectualism.

A portrait therefore emerges of a highly cerebral woman divided between rigorous principles of intellectual honesty and moments of self-betrayal: just as she declined to share her writing with her husband, she failed to confess her atheism to her theology teacher. Nurtured by the works and ideas of great men of letters (Corneille, Voltaire, and Hugo, to name only a few) and of science, she was ill at ease when sharing her own writings and thoughts with male role models. Ackermann herself suggests that she was much more timid personally than intellectually. Such reticence demonstrates her internalization of 19th-century France's patriarchal codes of conduct, which were backed up by stringent laws that treated women like minors. Ackermann was consequently left to oscillate between two unsatisfying options: either renouncing her literary talents and ambitions to become a traditional housewife, or sacrificing a private life to become a working "woman of letters."

Ackermann's discussions of her poetic practice also find her at odds with her gender and cultural expectations. At times she refers to her intellectual rigor and the care with which she crafted her verses, while at other times she falls into clichés of female poetic production, in which women write unconsciously, ideas coming to them "by chance." While deriding women's propensity for sentimentality and subjective poetry, she nonetheless describes her happiest moments as those spent reading books by the great thinkers of her day or engaged in intellectual exchange with friends and family. Her own preference is clearly for understatement rather than hyperbolic sentiment: "When the poet sings his own sadness, he should do so soberly. Heartrending cries of anguish are not made for poetry" (*Pensées*, 21).

Ackermann appeared to feel little affinity for other women, or at least to express conflicting views on female comportment and expression. Critical of her mother's concern for propriety and dismissive of her sisters' typically feminine pursuits, at times Ackermann nonetheless preaches docility in women. Her poem, "Aux femmes," for example, calls upon women to perform their "austere task" in devoting themselves to the support of their husbands, just as she did. And in *Pensées d'une solitaire*, she sounds a decidedly anti-feminist note, asserting that "If freedom's door were to open for all women, as some demand, the honest and the wise would not want to pass through it" (48). Exceedingly critical of certain traits associated with normative femininity, such as piety, sentimentality, and coquetry, Ackermann is nonetheless adamant about married women's duties to their husbands:

Woman exists in society for the benefit of man alone. Without her, he would be without a family and without a home. She must therefore confine herself to the duties of her destiny; in these she will find the only happiness and, above all, the only dignity possible for her (*Pensées*, 54-55).

Perhaps Ackermann's alienation from conventional femininity determined that her closest intellectual allies would be men, beginning with her father and her husband. One senses her distance from a feminine culture for which she had little respect; consequently, this intelligent, independent woman left behind very little indication of solidarity with other women. She blamed her mother for barring her way to a career as a writer. And yet at the same time, Ackermann appeared to believe that the world of thought and letters was necessarily a masculine domain, one into which a woman strayed at her own peril: "A woman artist or writer has always struck me as an anomaly [...]. She places her soul in circulation, at her own risk" (*Pensées*, 18-19).

Ultimately, Ackermann strikes the reader as a proud woman desirous of shielding herself from ridicule. Rather than face condemnation, this profoundly private woman retreated into voluntary obscurity at several points in her life. Her choice to opt for independence and tranquility, and to avoid big battles and confrontations, was perhaps a self-protective gesture. One glimpses as well her carefully controlled despair, with which, however, she dealt as a consummate intellectual, by working personal disappointments through with abstract concepts, be those scientific, theological, or philosophical.

In spite, or perhaps because of such contradictions, Ackermann kept coming back to the need for self-expression: she says that by writing down an idea, she freed herself from it. At times a model for feminism in her outspokenness and quest for intellectual liberty and material independence, at others seemingly a mouthpiece for feminine conformity, Louise Ackermann cannot be reduced to a single image. As indicated by this autobiographical essay, in which she traces the contours of her life and recalls the influences on her writing, Ackermann's ambivalence about gender collided with her unwavering devotion to critical thought in such a way as to provoke some of the most atypical writing of the nineteenth century.

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My Life

Translated by Gretchen Schultz

I was born in Paris on 30 November 1813. My parents were Parisian although from the Picardy region; my ancestors were ploughmen and artists. My father, an attorney for the trade commission in the Seine, left business at the age of 33 for health reasons, but especially because of his love for independence. He retired to the country with his young wife, his library, and his three little girls. I was the oldest. I had an unhappy childhood. As far back as I can remember, I see only darkness. It seems to me that the sun never shone during this time. I was by nature an unsociable loner. The little affection I was given was intolerable to me; I preferred rebuffs a hundred fold. In fact, these were not in short supply, especially from my mother. The poor young woman was horribly bored by the solitude in which her husband confined her and was always in a bad mood. My happiest moments were those I spent sitting in a corner of the garden watching the midges, the ants and other insects scurry about. I felt a particular sympathy for the woodlouse, a little beast both ugly and fearful. Like it, I wanted to be able to withdraw into myself and hide. From this activity I retained a great fondness for all living things. But I avoided children my age, knowing neither how to play nor defend myself.

I had a world of trouble learning to read, in spite of my willingness and great desire for knowledge. I still remember the covetous looks I cast on the paternal library. I waited impatiently for the moment when its treasures would open for me. The readings that my father and mother shared already gave me a taste of what was to come. Molière, La Fontaine, Racine, and Corneille resonated incessantly in my ears. I understood nothing, but I was thrilled.

As soon as I knew how to read, I threw myself avidly into all the books that I found within reach. I will never forget the pleasure I had once when my father gave me the complete works of Corneille as a New Year's gift. This was certainly one of the most vivid joys of my life. And so I reached twelve years of age.

My father, a hardened Voltairian, had shielded me from all religious training until this point. He would gladly have spared me my first communion, which he

himself had done very well without. But my mother, who felt very strongly about social proprieties, insisted upon it. To this end I was placed as a boarder in Montdidier, a small neighboring town. The first days of catechism school had a violent effect on me. Both serious and gullible, I took literally the stories of sin and redemption that were poured out to me; I even embraced them with a passion that one would hardly have expected from a child of my age. I was an object of edification for my pious circle, something like a saint in embryo. Without a doubt, had I been allowed to follow the slope I was on at the time, I was heading straight for the convent.

When I returned home, my father was frightened by the damage that religion had inflicted upon my young soul. In order to correct it, he slipped Voltaire between my hands. I gradually calmed down and resumed the course of my readings, interrupted by my first communion. I read everything and in no particular order. A translation of Plato enchanted me, but the prize went to Buffon's *Epochs of Nature*; this book suddenly broadened my horizon. Around this time I also began to write verse. It was my mother's turn to become alarmed; indeed, there was reason to be. My passion for reading, especially my aimless poetic fancy, disturbed her sensible, bourgeois ideas. My books were taken away. I fell ill; they had to give them back to me.

During a trip that she took to Paris around this time, my mother voiced her worries about me to Mrs Massin, her cousin. The latter, who by nature attached great importance to the talents that others wanted to stifle in me, persuaded my mother that she should instead encourage them. I was therefore sent to boarding school in Paris at a large institution directed by the mother of Abbot Saint-Léon Daubrée, an intelligent and kind-hearted woman. As soon as I arrived, the older girls made fun of my unsociable manner; I was immediately nick-named "the little bear." And yet it was not long before I held the esteem of my teachers. This was in 1829, during the full flowering of romanticism. It happened that the literature teacher, Biscarat, was a habitué of the place Royale and an intimate friend of the Hugo family. While rummaging through my desk, my classmates had found some verses I had written. They laughed heartily at them, but not for long. Mrs Daubrée had barely learned of their discovery when she thought of having her students write poetry. Suddenly the entire class was placed on a regimen of alexandrines. I was given the very special favor of choosing the topics. I did not do things by halves: Napoleon, Charlemagne, Roland, and others emerged as subjects. My classmates cursed their curiosity and told me to go to the devil. The teacher was sometimes so enchanted by my compositions, especially by certain verses, that he carried them hot off the press to Victor Hugo. The great poet himself did not consider it beneath him to give advice to a schoolgirl about rhythm; I have never forgotten what he told me. The same teacher, whose pet I was, provided for my literary needs; his pockets were always full of recent publications for me. Add to these readings the study of English and German—Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, Schiller, who all together opened a new poetic world to me—and you will have an impression of my active and delightful life in boarding school. Everyone agreed in predicting a successful literary future for me.

For his part, Abbot Daubrée felt obliged to attend to me. Fresh from the seminary, he gave me some chapters from his theology notebooks. The effect was not long in coming. This dogma, which I neither accepted nor rejected and about which I no longer even thought since I was occupied in other pursuits, seemed suddenly to be monstrously absurd. I could only dismiss it out of hand. The good abbot never knew the results of his theological teachings. Indeed, I refrained from informing him; he would have been too unhappy. And yet I did not lack the desire to believe. I was clearly of a fundamentally religious nature, since I later had relapses into mysticism. But faith itself had forever become impossible for me.

After three years in boarding school, I returned to the bourgeois and rural life of my family, a life that was not without its attractions. During the day, we each went about our preferred tasks. My father tended his flowers, my mother watched over her crops (she finally acquired a taste for the country and was no longer bored at all), my sisters sewed or took care of the housework; as for me, I studied and wrote. In the evenings, we would come together and take turns reading aloud to each other. We abandoned the classics; in their place, I introduced contemporary authors: Sénancour, Hugo, Vigny, Musset, and others. Moreover each of us subscribed to a newspaper or journal of his or her choosing.

There was only one dark spot for me in this way of life, and it concerned some neighbors, a widow and her daughter who lived and still live in an old chateau in the nearby countryside. Social relations were quickly established between the ladies of Belinglise and the inhabitants of the Reverie (for this was the name of our home). These women entertained many people during vacation. People danced at the chateau and played charades. My mother, fearing that her daughters should develop overly rustic manners in their complete isolation from society, seized this opportunity to present them in a salon. My sisters were delighted. But I could only be dragged to Belinglise against my will. I would have given anything in the world to stay home with my father. The guests of the chateau soon learned of my secret aversion, which in any case I did not hide. They all wanted to play tricks on me, and the worst was to ask me to dance. Léopold Double, the well-known lover of *objets d'art* and then a student at the Ecole Polytechnique, was among these practical jokers. Nor was I spared by his sister Mélanie, now Mrs Libri, one of the most intelligent and witty women I have met.

My father falls ill. He returns to Paris and dies there soon after. I lost the best of fathers. We had the same temperament, the same tastes. It was he who protected me against my mother's constant badgering and my sisters' teasing.

In my family there reigned both a marked appreciation for literature and an insurmountable prejudice against people of letters. Literary acquaintances were therefore forbidden to me, although these were the only kind that might have interested me. They certainly would have overcome my unsociable nature. I was only allowed to frequent a few respectable scientists: Stanislas Julien, Letronne, and Eichhoff. Deprived of all advice and encouragement in my poetic endeavors, I abandoned writing without, however, losing my love for poetry. Poets remained my only friends, and my studies were entirely devoted to understanding and being penetrated by them.

With respectful but determined resistance, I continued to oppose my mother's attempts to introduce me into society. Seeing that she was making absolutely no progress with me, she allowed me to live as I pleased, which was closed up in my room with my books. In 1838, I even managed to induce her to let me leave for Berlin with a woman whose sister and brother-in-law directed a school for young girls there. The director, Schubart (who already seemed old at the time, but who must still be living, since I read recently in the *Augsbourg Gazette* that he had just published the correspondence of his friend, the poet Rückert), took full charge of my German, and by the time I left him I was completely fluent. When my year-long leave had expired, I returned to Paris, but not without regret. The Berlin of those days was very much the city of my dreams. With few exceptions, its inhabitants lived solely to learn or to teach. Only philosophical and literary matters inflamed minds there. It is true that Hegel had died, but Schelling was making a show of coming back to life.

Back in Paris, I resumed my former studious and solitary way of life for two years. –My mother's illness. She dies. A highly virtuous woman with extreme good sense, she often tormented me, but always with the best intentions and with the righteous conviction that she was fulfilling a duty. Women who write are, alas, naturally inclined to indulge in deplorable misconduct. Such a danger frightened my mother. She is therefore responsible for me not having become a woman of letters. I cannot feel overly grateful to her.

One of my sisters was already married but living in the provinces; the other soon married a landowner from Nice and left for that city. There was no longer anything to keep me in Paris, neither duties nor any kind of attachment. My first inclination was to return to Berlin to rejoin my good friends the Schubarts, with whom I had passed such a pleasant year. I intended to live with them until I reached an age when I could live alone. While I can be bold in my philosophical speculations, I have always been extremely circumspect in my behavior. This, I might add, is understandable. One nearly always associates imprudence with matters of the heart, but I have only ever behaved rashly in matters of the mind.

It was thanks to the Schubart family that I had the opportunity of meeting Paul Ackermann. He had just arrived in Berlin. On the recommendation of Pastor Cuvier and Professor Eichhoff, the Schubart women welcomed him as a fellow countryman and friend. He was a gentle, serious, and austere young man. Although destined for the evangelical ministry from an early age, after he had finished his theological training he realized that he was no longer even Christian. However this strong, sound Protestant education had left him, for want of faith, with very strict principles. Far from displeasing him, my unsociability and taste for study attracted him. Little by little, without my even realizing it, he fell passionately in love with me. At first I was more frightened than enchanted, but I soon came to be touched. While my natural disposition is to be extremely sensitive to feelings of affection that others experience for me, I nonetheless do without them comfortably. I would therefore have easily gone without any love in my life; but having encountered such a sincere and profound man, I did not have the strength to reject him. I therefore got married, but without any strong impetus;

I simply married for moral convenience. Indeed, I had always had an image of the ideal conjugal union in mind; judging it impossible to achieve, from a very early age I had resigned myself to living and dying alone. With my excessive moral demands and my austere and exclusive nature, marriage could only be either exquisite or detestable for me: it was exquisite. I became extremely attached to my husband. I abandoned my own studies, which had merely filled an empty existence; devoting myself entirely to his work, I became a precious aid to him. This even occasioned my making the acquaintance of our storytellers of yore and their delightful language. There was no further mention of my own poetry. My husband never knew that I wrote verse; I never spoke to him of my poetic exploits. To see me attending to household duties from dawn to dusk, how would he have suspected that he had married an ex-Muse? The real reason for my silence was that I valued his esteem very highly. There is no need to conceal the fact that a woman who writes poetry is always more or less ridiculous.

We saw few people, but those few were of the elite: Alexandre de Humboldt, Vernhagen, Jean Müller, Bøekh, etc. No intellectually distinguished French person who passed through Berlin failed to visit us. This tranquil, intimate happiness lasted hardly more than two years. My husband's illness. I bring him back to the Jura Mountains. He dies among his family, in Montbéliard, on 26 July 1846. He was thirty-four years old. My sadness knew no bounds. My two sisters both urged me to spend the early days of my widowhood with them. The one in Nice carried the day. Although seen through my tears, Nice enchanted me. The serenity of its lovely sky alone kept my grief from turning to despair. Feeling incapable of living elsewhere, I bought a small, admirably located property, formerly owned by Dominicans. The residence was still divided into cells. I had a tower built, whose view on one side encompassed a splendid blue gulf and, on the other, extended to the white peaks of the Piedmont mountains. Because my house could be reached only by way of difficult pathways, my solitude was all the more assured. I was incapable of returning to my studies, at least during the first years, and so I abandoned myself to farmwork. I was known in the area as a planter and as a determined land-clearer. Peace finally returned. Books, newspapers, and journals from all countries followed my hilltop path. From this point on, never again a moment of emptiness or boredom.

And so it was that one fine morning, when such things were farthest from my mind, I suddenly heard poetry humming in my ears. Old French came back to me at the same time, with its procession of subtle and charming expressions. I was then in the process of reading a great Indian poem in which I had found some passages that delighted me because they dealt with conjugal love. In my initial surprise and, as it were, unconsciously, I found that in the space of a few mornings I had woven them into French, regardless of local color and of the respect due to such weighty subjects.¹ My only excuse in committing such a lapse

1 The following passages from my diary bespeak the sincere and vivid expression of my astonishment at what I will call my senile blossoming:
 “3 November 1852. A new life began for me a month ago. Imagination is smiling at me from all points of the horizon. I have only one worry: I fear that the source will run dry, so

in literary judgment is that I never imagined it would reach the awareness of people of taste. I gave in rashly to the pleasure of setting down, at the first opportunity, all the pretty pearls of language that encumbered my memory. Incidentally, I would like to point out that I am not cut from a single cloth. Although naturally serious, I do not hate laughter. I appreciate a subtle joke and quickly grasp the comic side of things. This poetic escapade at least had the advantage of rekindling my verve. After so many years I was quite astonished to discover myself still capable of writing poetry. At this time I was also reading Greek poetry; a few of my poems are attributable to this influence. I paid great attention to the task of composition so as not to fall too short of the models I admired.

From the depths of my retreat, I followed the works of modern science with an intense interest. Theories of evolution and of the transformation of energy were in complete harmony with my pantheistic tendencies. I found in them the natural solution to problems that had long preoccupied me. Nor did the poetic aspects of this perspective escape me. With its revelations, science had created a new sensibility and opened to the mind ideas in which poetry clearly had its place. I am quite surprised that some of our young poets did not reach this ground before me. It would have been so easy for them to pull the poetry out from under my feet!

Be that as it may, I have only ever written in a meandering fashion, aimlessly following my interests and my emotions, most frequently for myself alone. My attempts at making a name for myself had not been successful. My *Contes*, which were published at the prompting of a few lovers of old French and, in particular, of Gérusez, had not sold well. The piece "A Musset," which my friend Mr Havet submitted to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, had been refused. Although accepted by the *Revue moderne*, "Prométhée," "L'Amour et la mort," "Le Positivisme," and "Le Nuage" had gone unnoticed, as had "Les Malheureux," which was quoted in its entirety by Deschanel in an article appearing in *Débats*. A poet who is ignored ends up falling silent. I therefore kept quiet, or nearly so. Between one piece and the next there were often years of silence. Only when I was too strongly gripped by an idea did I decide to express it; this was the only way to free myself from it.

From this short account of my poetic development it is easy to discern the varied sources from which I drew my rare inspirations. In the process, I have also answered the two questions often asked of me today: "Why so late? Why so little?" My entire life can be summarized in a few words: a dull and sad childhood, an absent adolescence, two short years of happy union, twenty-four years of willing solitude. This is not exactly cheerful, but there is nothing in it to justify my complaints and my curses. I was spared the big battles and bitter

energetically am I drawing from it.

25 May 1853. My idleness and apathy would manage quite easily to keep my *Contes* unpublished. My recent talent reminds me of children who arrive late in the lives of parents who are no longer counting on them. They upset plans terribly and threaten to unsettle the peace and quiet of old age."

disappointments. In sum, my existence was mild, easy, and independent. Fate granted me what I wanted most from it: free time and liberty.

As for recent advances in science, these never troubled me personally; I was prepared for them ahead of time. I can even say that I expected them. Indeed, with a kind of dark satisfaction I accepted my fleeting, apparitional role at the heart of the ceaseless activity of being. But if I was easily resigned to my individual fate, I encountered very different feelings when it concerned the human race. Its misfortunes, its grief, its futile yearnings all filled me with profound pity. Considered from the distance of my solitary meditations, humanity resembled the hero of a pitiful tragedy that unfolds in a lost corner of the universe, subject to arbitrary laws, in the face of an indifferent Nature, with nothingness as its outcome. Christianity's explanation has brought humanity only an excess of shadows, battles, and torments. With the intervention of divine caprice, it has complicated and denatured the order of human concerns. Hence my hatred for it, and above all for the champions and disseminators who are more or less convinced by its fables and its doctrines, but always motivated by self-interest. As an interested and indignant observer, I was sometimes too moved to stay silent. But I always raised my voice in the name of humanity. I even thought I was doing the work of a poet finding words to express the horrors of human destiny.

Nice, 20 January 1874

Several critics have naturally attributed my pessimism to the supposed influence of German philosophy. And yet my views on human destiny go back much farther and are completely personal. Here is the proof: among some old family papers, one of my sisters recently discovered a small notebook where in a sisterly fashion she had gathered my schoolgirl verses as they slipped from me. Among the various pieces dedicated to my classmates, there is one that is undedicated called "Man." It dates from 1830 and starts like this:

Wretched speck of dust
Rejected by the void,
Your life on earth lasts a day;
You are nothing before infinity.

.....
.....

Your mother moaned while giving birth to you:
You were the child of her pain;
And you greeted existence
With piercing screams and tears.

It ends with these lines:

Under the weight of your sorrows your worn body succumbs,
And, tasting the forerunning calm of night,
Your eye finally closes with the sleep of the tomb:

Nineteenth-Century Women Seeking Expression

Rejoice, old man, this is your first happiness.

This last passage proves sufficiently that my pessimism declared itself before Schopenhauer.

Paris, May 1877

CÉLESTE MOGADOR

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

If ever a woman might be said to embody *la bohème* of nineteenth-century Paris, that woman is Céleste Mogador. Less famous than notorious, “la Mogador” lived the life of a courtesan much as Balzac chronicled it in his *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. She was considered to have brought ruin to at least one scion of the French nobility in a way later described by Zola in *Nana*, and ultimately married into that nobility, trailing behind her, as Proust’s Odette de Crécy would do, a past with dim beginnings in brothels.

Born the illegitimate daughter of a hatmaker in 1824, Elisabeth Vénard (“Céleste”) spent time in Saint Lazare prison at the age of fifteen, becoming a registered prostitute in a brothel at sixteen. The next ten years of her life constitute a remarkable social “ascent” with occasional relapses into squalor. The small-time prostitute triumphs at the Mabilles dance hall where she is baptized “la Mogador,” becomes, in addition, a celebrated equestrian performer at the Hippodrome, all the while being the kept mistress of any number of wealthy men. Bedecked with jewels, covered in cashmere, “la Mogador” was to be seen promenading along the Champs Élysées in an exquisite blue carriage, the gift of her husband-to-be, the comte Lionel de Moreton de Chabrillan.

Such would be one telling of her story. And it is a story which practically amounts to a script so often has it been “performed” in novels, on the stage and at the opera. Yet, as a script, how often is it written from the woman’s point of view? Or, to put it another way, when has the standard *vie de bohème* account been dismantled, rid of its mythic dimensions and restored to its historical and human context? This is precisely what *Céleste Venard* achieved through her multivolume *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador* (1854; 1858) and its sequel, *Un Deuil au bout du monde* (1877). “If one really wishes to destroy the power of courtesans,” she writes in the *Mémoires*, “... the best way is to study the facts. The true history of women who have lived this infernal life would be more eloquent ... than the touching idylls with their forced contrasts which the Paris public so delights in laughing and crying at” (*Mémoires*, 1858, 2: 4). Rejecting these “forced contrasts,” the *Mémoires* collapse the convenient binary pillars supporting 19th-century French morality and its literatures by presenting us with loving mothers who are also whores, whores who have become what they are through rape, incest and prison terms served, all enforced by a system of police regulation which ensured that women in these circumstances remain there.

Beyond the numerous portraits of maids, actresses, prostitutes, garment workers and others, the reader of this autobiographical document also witnesses

an extraordinary woman's process of coming-into-writing. This is quite literally a *venue-a-l'écriture*, in fact, since *Céleste* must first undertake her own education by learning to write. Whereas Jean-Jacques Rousseau had the luxury of beginning his *Confessions* by erecting God as his witness and posterity his judge, Céleste Mogador writes her life as part of her defense in an unjust foreclosure litigation in an attempt to bring nuance to the "knowledge" her judges might already have of her in her capacity of "public" woman. Of her project, she notes: "A friend proposed that I write my entire past life, that I write a confession which might shed some light on my case for my judges. I thus wrote my entire life in the hopes of facilitating my defense Studying during the day, writing during the night: nothing stopped me. I began this work and I found in it an interest which surprised and enchanted me. In replaying my life, I was astonished to find its bitter moments dissipate. I discovered within myself resources unsuspected by me" (*Mémoires*, 1858, 4: 178).¹ Ultimately, Céleste Mogador's process of self-transformation culminates in the writing of a series of novels, plays and short libretti.

As a writer/autobiographer, Céleste Mogador repeatedly gives voice to the unspeakable, breaking taboos around what may be written about sexuality, venal love, class hierarchy, the theater and the world of artists and *litterati*. Far from being a racy expose of the social mores of the *demi-monde* from 1830 through the Second Empire (hardly a novel project, in any case), what the *Mémoires* offer instead is a remarkable document about working class women and the conditions under which they lived and died.

The text which follows is the translation of most of Chapter 7 of Volume 1 of the *Mémoires*. The fifteen-year old Céleste's mother had to leave their household to care for her ailing father. This left Céleste alone with Vincent, her stepfather, with whom she already had an adversarial relationship. Vincent attempts to seduce her and having failed, tries to rape her. Céleste escapes, but having nowhere to go, wanders the streets of Paris for days with no resources. She is found late one night on the steps of Saint Paul church by Thérèse, the proverbial prostitute with the heart of gold, who houses her while attempting to contact her mother. Alas, during a police raid, Céleste, a minor, is discovered in the prostitute's quarters. The police, suspecting Thérèse of the worst, take both to prison. Thérèse will be acquitted, but young Céleste is forced to remain at Saint-Lazare since she has not been claimed by family members. Chapter 7 opens as the prison van holding Céleste and the other female suspects rolls into the imposing entry of the Saint-Lazare prison.

1 See Claire Marrone's article, "Male and Female *Bildung*" for a reading of these memoirs which situates them within the feminine autobiographical tradition. While Marrone makes excellent points on the "literariness" of Mogador's project, one of the strengths of the *Mémoires*, in my opinion, is that by the very authenticity with which they present lived experience, they tend to deconstruct the literary representations of prostitution so abundant during this period (*L'Education sentimentale*, *la Dame aux camélias*, *Scenes de la vie de Bohème*, *Carmen*, and on and on and on).

Regarding the editions and the following translation

The first half of these memoirs was published in 1854. Céleste, now the Countess of Chabrillan, attempted to halt their publication in deference to her husband's family (and her future). While the 1854 edition did circulate, at some point, publication was halted and a litigation ensued in which Céleste de Chabrillan lost her bid to halt publication definitively. As a result, the *Mémoires* were republished in 1858, with a new preface by the author and very few—but significant—changes. The following translation is based largely on the 1858 edition.

Nonetheless, at one important juncture, indicated by a note, I have restored a short phrase referring to the existence of sapphic *liaisons* in prison, a phrase deleted in the 1858 edition. The restoration of the original version has led me, as a translator, to make translation choices that stress the strength of certain relationships. For instance, I have chosen to translate “aimer” as to love rather than its more pallid alternative, “to like.” Similarly, “amie” is rendered as “girlfriend” rather than “friend.” Well into the twentieth century, there have been attempts to censor these references to lesbianism by toning them down or simply casting doubt on the veracity of the account itself. The various attempts to silence this aspect of the text will be chronicled in a note. In this same context, it is worth noting that Alfred de Musset, having recognized himself as the brutal and violent client in Mogador's anonymous portrait of one of the “greatest writers of the century,” avenged himself by publishing what masqueraded as a chapter of her *Mémoires*. The topic of the “fake” chapter was lesbian eroticism.

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A Cell of One's Own

Translated by Carol Mossman

Chapter VII: *Denise*¹

For some time we stood at a standstill. The door [of the prison van] opened. We moved under an archway; the sound of the wheels produced a lugubrious rolling noise. I was unable to breathe. If a carriage had been running over my chest, it would not have been more painful. The doors closed behind me.

I heard a voice shouting: "It's the prison van! Come and see the new women. Are there many of them?" Another voice, our driver's no doubt, answered: "I declare, I'm full up."

They made us get out. A man emerged in front of us: he was given a sheet of paper. "Ah," he said, "there are some juvenile reform cases. Where are the thieves?" The idea that I might be confused with those girls made me look at the two sisters, as if to designate them. "Come along. Follow me."

We went through doorways, courtyards, and hallways and proceeded into a large room where we were left. There was a double partition in the middle of this room; two feet of space separated one gated area from the other. This was a parlor where you could talk albeit at a distance.

The convicted women still did not know how much time they would have to do. The nature of their concern was quite different [from ours]. One of them was saying: "I hope I only get a month! I was fighting with my man at a liquor store. A policeman happened to be there: it's not my fault." "Ah," muttered an old woman seated on a bench, "my only fear is that they don't give me enough time. I just got out a week ago; I have no shelter; I'm only happy in Saint-Lazare."

The idea that someone might like prison made me shudder. "Do you know, Ma'am, when you're sent to juvenile reform, how long they leave you there?" "That depends on your age. They can keep you until you're twenty-one." "Six years!" I cried ... "Oh, you're saying that to scare me! They don't have the right to keep me for six years against my will, do they?" I was addressing a streetwalker, one of those filthy women, heartless, soulless, arrogant in the face of misfortune, who never help those in trouble, who curse every second, and glory in their vices.

These women say things to each other like: "I drank a bottle of hard liquor! I knifed somebody or somebody knifed me! My lover is a famous thief." The woman who can brag about that is admired by the others. These women wear a kerchief over one ear and they have communication signals. They are a terror for the inspectors because when they are arrested, they defend themselves. There are often very dangerous brawls between them and the wardens.

1 Mogador, Céleste, *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador*. Paris: Librairie nouvelle, 1858, 4 vols. Except where indicated, all references in the text will be to this edition. I wish to thank and acknowledge Mary Isaacson for her invaluable suggestions on the translation.

Since it was one of these creatures I had spoken to, she took pleasure in making me suffer. She said loudly: “All these petty whores make us look bad. I wouldn’t mind if they were locked up in cages. You can count on it—you won’t be laughing anytime soon! When I see one of them, I turn her in.” I started to cry and she began to sing:

“No pleasure’s without pain
La faridondaine”

“Don’t cry, kid,” the other one said, “You do time like you eat a loaf of stale bread.” Fortunately they came to get us because I was about to utter some impertinence that would really have got me into trouble.

Night came. The man who entered the room raised his light to see us and, recognizing several faces, said, “Oh, here are some regulars!” We were led into an office. They called our names in order. “La Huche!” The woman who had caused me such pain came forward, head held high, fists on her hips. The man read from his sheet of paper: “The woman la Huche, for disturbing the peace: three months.” She ran at the warden with clenched fists, heaping abuse on him. The guards took her away. She was fuming. For several seconds we heard terrific swearing. “One week of solitary confinement,” said the warden, still pale from the scare, and he noted it at the bottom of his paper.

Each woman’s sheet was read like that. It was the two sisters’ turn: “The Thion girls! For having stolen a lady’s purse on the Champs-Élysées: three years of juvenile detention. Put them with the other convicted girls.” Only the beggar girl and I were left. I waited; I hoped they would decide on my time. “Which of you is named Céleste?” “I am, sir,” I said, advancing into the light. “You have never been here?” “No, sir.” “You have never been arrested?” “No, sir.” “Put these two with the *insoumises*,”¹ he said pointing us out to the guard. “Make favorable mention of the girl Céleste.” Then he added as if talking to himself: “It’s pointless. Even if she’s only half gone now, she’ll wind up completely corrupt.”

We wove our way until we reached an enormous hallway. All along the hallway to the left and the right were little numbered doors. About midway, we were told to stop. They opened two of the doors and we were each put into a cell. Groping, I entered: I found an iron bed; I sat down on it and ended up falling asleep with my clothes on.

Dawn had hardly broken when I was awakened by someone talking in a low voice at the foot of my bed. In each cell there was one large, square window, with no panes, covered by wire mesh. This window gave onto the hallway. The talking was coming from the hall. “Get out of here,” a voice was saying. “You know it’s forbidden to talk with the *insoumises*. If you want to do an extra month, be my guest.” Total silence after that! I did not go back to sleep. A bell rang. Someone opened my door and in came a woman carrying clothes.

1 Translated literally, *insoumises* is “the insubordinate females,” in this case, girls. I shall be leaving the term in its original French partly because it constitutes a nomenclature of the French penal system and partly in order to retain the notion of submission which is at the root of this term.

She told me to get undressed, and had me put on one of the institutional shifts. Written across the chest was: *Saint-Lazare Prison*. I put my hand underneath to prevent the shift from touching my skin there. It felt to me as if the inscription would be branded onto my body. "Hold out your arms so I can try a dress on." And she put a kind of coarse gray woolen sack on me, a blue pin-striped smock, a three-piece black wool bonnet without lace, a flowered cotton shawl. Since none of their wooden clogs fit me, she let me keep my shoes.

I saw several heads, outfitted like mine, waiting at the door to see me. It's always like that when a new girl arrives. One of them, bolder than the others, opened my door and said: "you can leave; the bell has rung. If you like, I'll take you to the refectory." "Order in the ranks!" Everyone lined up two by two. I was put last with a girl my size.

We went to what they called the refectory. There were three very long tables with wooden benches on each side. A prayer was said together, and then we were given soup. Everyone finished at the same time. We went to a classroom set up so that we could take lessons in writing, singing and arithmetic. This lasted for two hours. Next we went to a prison workshop. Each girl went to her seat. We embroidered *crepes de Chine*. Between the two windows was a high desk where the assistant teacher, Mlle Bénard, sat. She was a pleasant-looking woman of about thirty. She called us up so that she could assign us seats, and to me she spoke some kind words. I took an immediate liking to her. She was an excellent person, too good and gentle for the devils she had to manage.

At noon, we had a second meal and then we went out for recess in a kind of enclosure with no trees or flowers surrounded by fifty-foot walls. We played all sorts of games. The oldest girls were in pairs, and hardly spoke to the younger ones. They liked each other to the point of being jealous of each other's friendships. There was one girl, Denise, who formed an attachment to me from my first day. She gave me small gifts; here a needle, there some pens. She wasn't stingy with her compliments. One day, her girlfriend became so jealous over this that she made a scene. Mlle Bénard asked me not to talk to her anymore.

She wrote me. One day someone found one of her letters. She was put into solitary confinement in a cell. When she came out a week later, she came over to my embroidery frame, kissed me and said: "They can put me in solitary confinement my entire life, that won't stop me from loving you forever." Mlle Bénard scolded me for allowing myself to be kissed like this. I told her that I couldn't prevent people from taking a fancy to me.

In temperament, Denise was a real boy. Her face was open, brash. Nothing scared her. When she was punished, she would sing. She was a devil. She wasn't mean, but rather indomitable. Since she had been forbidden to speak to me in private, she arranged meetings with me. She always had something to tell me. She was so affectionate with me that I became attached to her, and instead of avoiding occasions of seeing her, I sought them out. Soon it was my turn to be hurt when she spoke to other girls and I would sulk. Then she would send me charming drawings she had done herself, along with the silk ribbons of all colors which were used to embroider shawls, or she would draw flowers and birds: these we

would send each other. The school mistress saw no harm in this.

In the evenings, when the others went out to play after work, I would go sit by a window, not in order to see the street (that was impossible because there was an overhang outside with a vent which let in daylight), but in order to hear the carriages going by and to hear the vendors calling out. The Normans selling romaine lettuce from baskets on their backs seemed to me so fortunate to be free! I would have given ten years of my life to go out for one day.

Denise would come up to me and say: “Ingrate! You want to leave! To leave me. What does it matter to you if I stay here.” Then she would cry. “It’s true, I want to leave. I’ll try to help you get out.” “Who me? There’s nothing to be done. I still have six months to go. I want to become a registered prostitute.¹ You have to be sixteen... If no one comes to claim you, you can do the same thing. I know of some wonderful brothels where we’ll be given a lot of money.” And she gave me the address of the one where she wanted to go. I paid no attention to this ... at the time. “You will come to see me, won’t you?” she’d say. She was so insistent that I promised her.

However, I told her to give up on the idea—that this kind of existence was the unhappiest in the world. I was thinking of Theresa. “That’s a mistake,” she told me. “You have only seen the lowest class of these women, the ugly ones or the dumb ones. But myself, I’ve known some who have made small fortunes, have beautiful apartments, jewels, carriages and who know only people of the highest society. If I were as pretty as you, the matter would be as good as settled. What good will it do you to marry a worker who may beat you, or who will force you to do the work of two people? And then, you’ve been here. Try as you might to hide it, people will know and will blame you for it.” “I’m not afraid of that. I have done nothing wrong.” She started to laugh and said: “How will you prove that?” I didn’t have an answer.

She continued: “It doesn’t matter. Whatever you are doing, come and see me when we’re out. I don’t want to become like those shameless women who proudly show off what they do so that all of Paris knows who they are. I’ll stay in one *salon*, put money aside, and then afterwards, I’ll live how I want to. You can come with me, if you like.”² It was time to return to the dormitory; we went

1 As part of its public health program, Paris law in the 19th century required that prostitutes register with the police. While this measure allowed them to exercise their profession legally, registered prostitutes were forced to submit to regular health inspections at the Prefecture. (According to Céleste Mogador, these inspections took place every two weeks.) Those who failed to be inspected were subject at all times and in all places to arrest and incarceration. Once registered, it was practically impossible to have one’s name removed from the registry. In Alain Corbin’s words, “Administrative regulation implies coercion. Elaborated in the margins of the penal code ... was a subtle system of administrative punishment and forced hospitalization. Prison and the infirmary-prison quickly became the usual stops ... on the circular itinerary ... of the registered prostitute... . Incarceration now has as its goal to maintain levels of terror ... thereby ensuring obedience to the rules” (*La prostituée*, 45, my translation).

2 Lise does in fact become the “pensionnaire” of a brothel where Céleste will join her ultimately. Céleste loses sight of her friend until one day, many years later, she is summoned to a tiny bedroom where Lise lays dying. Lise, having attempted to reform

quietly. Everything she had said danced in my head all night long. I saw myself rich, covered with jewels and lace. I looked in my small piece of mirror. I really was pretty, even though the uniform was hardly flattering. Then suddenly, I was ashamed of what I was thinking.

It was Sunday. As usual we went to Mass. All the sections of Saint-Lazare were there, but precautions were taken to keep them separate. The chapel was constructed like the Chanteraine theater house. On each side of the altar was a stairway leading to a gated gallery. On one side sat the young thieves who were called the *petites jugées*¹; on the other side where I was were the “*insoumises*.” A huge distinction was made between the *jugées* and the *insoumises*. Surveillance was heavy. The lines exited one after the other so that no one could mingle. All communication was severely punished.

The lower part of the chapel was also arranged like a theater. There were separations resembling orchestra boxes, orchestra seats, and the pit. Juvenile reform always entered first and exited last. Denise, seated behind me, gave me details on whomever was coming in. “Hey, do you see the ones coming in now being seated up front? Those are the adulteresses and the brawlers. The ones being seated on the other side are those still awaiting judgment. Some of them have been here for six months. They may be acquitted, but they will still have done six months’ time.” A third line came in and was seated behind the first two. “Take a good look at them,” she told me, “so you can watch out for them later on if you run into them. They are the thieves ... when their sentences are on the short side, they are detained here.”

These women had all come in quietly, with some composure. Soon, however, we heard noise. A mass of women surged into the rear of the building, the area I’ve compared to the pit. They shoved each other, trying to get to the front benches, perhaps to hear Mass better, but with such a commotion that the female wardens had to intervene. It was most strange to watch. They wore more or less the same uniform as we did. All convicted women worked in the prison workshop. At this time, they were required to make matches. Some are very good workers, and since they are forced to work, they amass small sums of money by the time they leave. Together, they form a jumble which is hard to picture.

Many were the proud and elegant women I would recognize later that I first saw here in this sad and shameful uniform. There are old ones, disfigured by scars and illness. There are the very young and pretty ones. Almost all of these are flirtatious. Some wear a lace bonnet under the uniform bonnet; others have white camisoles and silk shawls. The most elegant among them belonged to brothels.

The madames of these brothels take care of their women, and send them

herself, had lived faithfully with a man for eight years. The latter, abetted by his mother, coerced Lise to leave when an advantageous marriage prospect appeared on his horizon. Lise remained on the prostitution registry and died as a result of giving birth to her common-law spouse’s son. “No one would pardon my fall. Love, devotion, maternity: nothing could rehabilitate me ... (*Mémoires* 4, 141).

1 Literally “girls who had already been convicted.” I once again retain the original French because it is prison nomenclature.

linens, money and supplies every week. In speaking of them, we would say: “That one! She gets special delivery.” They are the aristocracy of the place. And the old, abandoned women even serve them and do their handiwork. There are also those who have money: the men who live off them when they are free send them a lot. Usually they are generous. They pay for everyone. They are called *Panuches*. During the service these women look around, chat, send little notes to the women in the infirmary, to the thieves, and to those awaiting judgment. They send signals to the juvenile delinquents; these are answered. While the guards are listening to Mass, all these little intrigues are going on. Fingers are held up showing how much time they have to do. Good-bye kisses are sent! Sunday is truly a holiday.

Denise had been in juvenile detention for three years. She had had a girlfriend who was now with the women and who was in one of the lines which had just come in. She bent over and stuck a couple of fingers outside of the gate. Denise hastened to show me “the Blond,” as she called her. “Now, do you see a woman with a checkered handkerchief on the last bench next to the one-eyed woman? The one with the blond hair whose head is lowered and who’s wearing a blue and white scarf around her neck?” “Yes, but I can’t make out her face.” And I moved closer to the grate. “She’s writing on her knees.” “There, she’s looking up. What do you think of her?” I looked closely before answering. She was a girl who might have been eighteen to twenty years old. Her hair was so lovely that I looked above her head to see if a ray of sunlight were not giving it that golden hue and shine. Her eyes were large, and light blue. Their expression of great gentleness bespoke a weak character. Two curls framed her forehead. This hairstyle was probably the most flattering to her. She knew it and defied the rules by curling it every day. Her face was long; her nose was long and flat at the tip. Her lower lip stuck out below the upper one. Her mouth was large with crooked teeth, which were white nonetheless. She had some ugly features, but the whiteness of her skin, her lovely eyes and her hair worn long enough to hide her pointy chin made for a pleasant-looking girl. She looked to be four and a half feet tall. Her shoulders were broad but a bit high.

I said to Denise who was awaiting my opinion: “She has a strange face. The lower part is awful, common; the upper part is admirable. What is her personality like? She must be a good person.” “Yes,” Denise told me, “but her personality is split like her face: she is unpredictable and careless. You can say or do unpleasant things to her: she won’t get angry. Then, one day, when nobody has said anything to her, she can flare up for no reason. She might be a bit crazy. She received a decent upbringing. She ran away from home because she had a step-mother. I don’t know how she came to be locked up here. When she left here, she joined a brothel.”

I turned my head and saw, at the end of my gated partition, a girl between twelve and thirteen years old who was making unbelievable attempts at being noticed from down below. “Just look at how that young girl is twisting around.” “That’s so that her mother, who’s down with the women awaiting judgment, will notice her. Do you see that fat woman who’s looking in our direction? That’s her mother. She sold her daughter, and she’s going to be sentenced to at least three

years. The little one you see there did her best to defend her, but the other daughter she sold two years ago, turned her in, and asked for the stiffest penalty in order to get some money.” The woman horrified me; I looked the other way.

At the other end of the bench holding those awaiting trial, there was a small, delicate, dark woman who seemed to be ill. I pointed her out to Denise. “Oh, that’s the woman in child-bed! She made quite a fuss when she arrived here. She was married to a nice fellow who adored her. He gave her whatever she wanted and, since he was doing a good business, nothing was too nice for his wife. It seems that she was very prim, very hard on other people. She was not well liked. Her husband made a long trip: he was absent for a year. When he returned, one of the neighbor women announced that he had been a father for one week. It seems that this news did not please him as one might have supposed because he did not go home and then he returned during the night with the superintendent of police. He had his wife arrested along with the nursing aide who had come to care for her. The husband, who was a sheep, had been transformed into a wolf.” “Poor woman!,” I said looking at her, “I feel sorry for her.” “You feel sorry for her,” replied Denise, astonished. “I don’t. It’s her fault. You don’t steal from people. If that man was not to her liking, she shouldn’t have married him. When you have a tongue to say yes, you can say no. If someone wants to marry me when I get out of here, I would refuse because I want to be free. There are those—that woman for example—who get married and want to be free at the same time.”

“There, look at the second woman on the sixth bench. Now there’s a woman to feel sorry for! See how pretty she is? She’s from Bordeaux. A man—a good-looking one—proposed to her. She married him believing he loved her. Not at all! He set her up in a store where her beauty attracted people and he ended up telling her just what he expected of her. He sold her himself to the highest bidder and would beat her to a pulp when she refused. The police got mixed up in it and they were both arrested. He gave his consent for her to be registered so that she could be more free. Me, I would strangle him. But she adores him, it seems. I think it’s fear.” “Well, I don’t feel sorry for her at all. She’s a heartless woman with no character: a machine.” “Who told you that?” “The female guard for the courtyard: she’s a friend of mine.”

When Mass was over, everyone left in the order in which they had entered. We climbed down: at the last step, Denise bent over and picked up something she put in her shawl. Once in the garden, she took me over to a corner and pulled out a piece of paper folded up very small. “You see,” she told me, “she loves me more than you do. It’s been two years since she left juvenile detention and she hasn’t forgotten me.” Then she read:

“My dearest, the time has come for you to take wing. If I had it to do over, perhaps I would not repeat what I’ve done. I have not been lucky. This is my third sentence. I was spending the night in the Latin Quarter and I was caught in a police raid. So here I am for a month. I am sad. There is a big gap between what I had imagined and what is. It won’t be my fault if you don’t receive my note. I fear I may have misunderstood your signal. I often think of you. I’ve reached the point of missing juvenile detention.”

Marie the Blond

“See, you were wrong yesterday to say that some women were happy in that kind of life.” “But I still claim it,” answered Denise, folding up her letter. “Marie has no will power. She fell in love with a student who’s stringing her along. She won’t leave him. They must have caught her at his place.”

At that time, there were about forty of us in juvenile detention. It was a real republic. We were constantly arguing and fighting. One day two of the worst were quarreling in the workshop. Mlle Benard came in. “Shut up,” one said to the other. “We’ll meet in the garden.” I thought this meeting had been forgotten: not at all. They went into a corner and kicked and punched each other. Some of the girls were incredibly perverse and stunningly brazen. One twelve-year old girl, for instance, fled over walls at least seventy to eighty feet high. Another escaped by replacing a laundress.

Finally, since everything forbidden becomes a passion, these children, these women, found ways to talk and to write to each other. What caused the most ravages in that institution, during the period of which I am speaking, were the *liaisons* [1854 version later suppressed: “were the affections to which I dare not give a name”] between girls twelve to fifteen years old and women from thirty to forty.¹ They manage to fool the most active surveillance.

Every letter which enters and leaves is read and censored. In spite of these precautions, recruiters manage to ply their infamous trade. “Recruiters” are women who find the pretty girls and give them the addresses of the houses of ill-repute which they represent and which they tout. They get these poor children excited and then they set them up in filthy brothels near the universities or in town. They die young if they are weak. The most horrible part is the perverse corruption of this hellish place. It is not unusual to hear ten-year old children say what they want to become and where they will go when they’re old enough.²

1 While reediting the *Mémoires* for their 1858 release, Céleste Mogador receives the visit of an abbé Mullois, one of the authorities in the juvenile reform system. She writes: “The abbé came to see me several times. He spoke to me of a certain passage of my Memoirs relating to juvenile reform in which the perversity of children is only increased by their stay in the reformatory ... He advised me to make some modifications on the subject of certain admissions which I should only have made to my priest ...” (*Un Deuil*, 190-91). The incriminating passage about “affections one dare not name” is indeed dropped from the 1858 edition, resulting in incoherence of the new expurgated version. In one of the two biographies of Céleste Mogador, by way of introducing her account of the prison chapter, Françoise Moser calls into question Mogador’s credibility: “In this tragic situation, so obligingly described in Mogador’s *Memoirs*, how much is fiction and how much is truth?” (*Vie et aventures*, 35, my translation). Even the modern biography by Pierre-Robert Leclercq, while acknowledging the nature of Denise’s affection for Céleste, completely passes over the short passage regarding lesbianism in prison. Whether a deliberate act of censorship or simply because the author relied exclusively on the (already-censored) 1858 edition, the issue of sapphic attachments has become completely invisible.

2 In *French Feminism of the Nineteenth Century*, Claire Moses notes that the Parisian prostitute population tripled in the first three decades of the century, adding that two-thirds of this number were clandestine; that is, unregistered (29-30).

The parlor is on the ground floor; juvenile detention is on the third. In the wall is a shaft which comes from downstairs. When the bell is rung, that is the signal to put your ear against the shaft. Someone is being summoned to the parlor: every head is raised; everyone hopes. The girl who is called runs like a wild woman; the others are sad. Then, when she comes back up with supplies, all of the others surround her. She has seen someone from the outside. It feels like she is bringing news from another world.

I had been there a month and no one had given me a sign of life. That's when you suffer. When you have been sentenced, you count each hour, each minute which brings you closer to deliverance. When a friend writes, you know someone is thinking of you. But nothing, nothing! So I had moments of rage when, carried away by my violent temperament, I would swear to take revenge and be worse than anyone else. These moments of exasperation would not last long, but they poisoned my heart.

We had with us a girl named Augustine who was about my age. This girl was unflinchingly cheerful. When I was sad, Denise would go get her. I can only compare her to a monkey. She announced to us that her father had decided to take her out of juvenile detention. "I convinced him that I would become worse here than I already am, and he thought that was possible," she added, bursting out laughing. "Poor old dad: I'm going to run for it as soon as I hit the end of the street." I told her this was bad. "Thanks," she said. "He promised me, if I am bad, to apply a corrective measure which is not at all gentle with his shoemaker's stirrup. But I know how that works, and I prefer to give myself some space." That evening, she came and found me in the courtyard, and said to me gravely: "I'd like to ask you something." I thought she was going to joke around with me. I followed her a bit mistrustfully into a corner. She stopped me, looked around to see if anyone was listening, and said: "I'm getting out tomorrow. I have no clothes. You are my size, could you lend me yours? I'll return them in a couple of days. I'm going to join a brothel and they'll give me some. I'll have what you lend me sent back immediately. Just don't tell anyone because this is forbidden."

I pointed out that they were all I had and that if I lent them to her, she'd have to send them back immediately. She made so many promises that I trusted her and consented. She left. Several days later, since she hadn't returned anything to me, I confided my concern to my girlfriend. "Dummy! Why didn't you say something to me? It'll be fun when you leave." "Oh as to that, the institution will supply me a shroud: I'll never get out of here." "There you go with your negative ideas. Come on. There's the recreation bell. Come downstairs." I followed her.

In our enclosure, there was a door that was the subject of general curiosity. This door, which was arched, was raised above ground level. You had to go up two steps to get to it. We had never seen it open. We were always trying to see, through a window or a hole, what went on inside. And, because no one had managed to discover anything, each girl had her own idea. It was the infirmary amphitheater.

Medical interns worked there. But they weren't allowed to open it from our side. They had to enter and leave by another door, which opened onto the hospital

courtyard. I shared the general ignorance on the subject of this mysterious door. But I was no less intrigued than the others. That day— perhaps the key had been lost—the small door was being used and someone had pushed it back without quite closing it. I went down with Denise, who left me there to go talk to another girl. I approached the door, went up the two steps, and pushed the door quietly. It opened. I leaned forward. Suddenly, I straightened back up as if released by a spring. What I had just seen was awful. I hugged the stone door frame almost as if I were attached to it.

I had seen, laid out on a marble table, a girl whose stomach and chest had been opened up with long incisions. She had not been disfigured. Her eyes were half-open. The light cast by the open door shimmered on her face. I thought she had moved. I looked at her so steadily that my sight blurred. I clung to the wall with my two hands behind me. I stayed there, neck taut, mouth open, and eyes motionless. “What are you doing there?” Denise said, coming up to me. I made an inconceivable effort to tear myself from the wall to which I felt stuck and I threw myself into her arms. She brought me down the steps, saying, “Crazy girl! So that’s how you distract yourself from your somber ideas. Good choice!” I wanted to forget what I had just seen but it was stronger than me. “What a fate,” I said to myself. “So young! So pretty! Dying alone, without family or friends there to collect the remains! My God, is it you who decides people’s fate like this?”

I spent a dreadful night. One of us had just died. So saddened was I by this event that I was visibly transformed.

Sequel: The chapter ends as Céleste’s mother finally comes to claim her and have her released. In spite of Céleste’s efforts to reveal to her mother the perfidy of her lover, Vincent, her mother cannot seem to detach herself from him. In the face of this maternal denial, the strong mother/daughter bond is traumatically broken for Céleste, an abandonment which, coupled with Vincent’s ongoing hostility, leads Céleste—with permission from her mother—to register as a prostitute with the Parisian police at the age of sixteen.

LOUISE MICHEL

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Louise Michel (1830-1905), a school teacher, poet, and political activist, was the most famous woman of the 1871 Paris Commune. After the trial of the Communards, she was sentenced to exile in New Caledonia, a South Pacific archipelago colonized by the French. There she befriended the native Kanaks and offered them informal schooling. Sympathetic to the plight of the Kanaks, Michel shocked her compatriots by supporting the unsuccessful 1878 Kanak revolt against the French.

The following piece was published by Michel in her 1884 collection of Kanak legends entitled *Légendes et chant de gestes canaques*. Though she claims that the legends were recited to her verbatim by a Kanak named Daoumi, evidence from the original handwritten manuscript (housed in the Institute of Social Research in Amsterdam) suggests that she invented some, if not most of “Idara”. In any case, it is clear that Michel sought to convey a certain foreign flavor but writing in a French that smacks of translation from a non-European language. I have attempted to preserve this flavor in my own translation from the French. Additionally, Michel included Kanak words in her text, providing the French equivalent alongside them or not at all. Authentic or not, “Idara” is a movingly lyrical and poignant prose work, representing one of the earliest anti-colonialist documents to be penned by a French citizen.

“Idara (Song of the Whites)” (1884)

Translated by Kathleen Hart

We have said that the woman in Caledonia does not count, that she is called *nemo* “nothing,” *popinée*, which means “useful object” in the language of the tribes. It is she who carries the fishing tackle or harvested crop, who trails the children behind her and serves her lord and master.

At Sifou, where she is less degraded, the race is more beautiful. There was once a great man hunt led from Sifou to the main island. The Sifous were strong;

they came to get meat with their hunter's appetite. The human animal can be terrible when hungry.

Daoumi, Kanak from Sifou, this *tayo* (man) of progress of whom we spoke earlier, knows a great many songs from his own island as well as those of several Caledonian tribes.

We shall begin with the oldest one: *The Whites*, sung by Idara, a woman who was a *takata*, meaning doctor, witch, or rather one who mesmerizes.

Idara is a *popinée* (woman), a *nemo* (nothing), and the tribes still chant her songs all the while treating their women like animals. Human irrationality is everywhere, though at least one can say in the Kanaks' favor that they don't flatter women the better to deceive them.

Idara, seated beneath the tall coconut trees, makes a soft scratching sound with a branch: in front of the hut she sings the evening song.

All about her, the young people slowly perform the acrobatics of the flying foxes, waving their arms like wings.

The *pikinini* (children) sleep on the ground, the old people listen.

Idara can heal wounds with the chewed-up leaves of lianas gathered in the moonlight, she can make one fall asleep with the magical chant of the niaouli flower infused in the water of the *diahot*.¹

Idara has seen many *ignagnes* (years), she is so old that one can no longer count them, it is more than *cana neu neu dé ri* (ninety), the tips of her teeth are worn, but her voice is still strong, it is like the voice of the wind.

She sings the song of the whites.

When the whites came in their giant canoes, we welcomed them as *tayos* (brothers), they cut down the large trees to attach wings to their canoes, that did not bother us.

They ate the yam in the tribal *keulé* (pot), we were pleased.

But the whites began to take the good fertile earth without turning it over, they took the young people and the children to serve them, they took all we had.

The whites promised us heaven and earth, but they gave nothing, nothing but sadness.

They took the inlets of the bank where we put our canoes, they put their villages next to the flowing water, beneath the coconut trees where we put our own villages.

They walk in our gardens with contempt because we use only sticks to turn the earth, and yet they needed what we have and they must have been unhappy where they were to come from so far away, from the other side of the sea, to the land of tribes.

What then brings you here white men? What winds drive you along?

Will all the tribes one day be mixed together across the seas?

Tayos strike the reeds, Idara has spoken enough.

1 The use of definite instead of indefinite articles in the original manuscript, is in keeping with Michel's apparent wish to reproduce the sound of a non-native speaker's French. In order to respect this stylistic choice, I have also retained the run-on sentences punctuated by a series of commas.

CÉLINE RENOZ

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Born and educated in Liège, Céline Renooz (1840-1928) moved in 1875 to Paris where she began her studies in natural history and religion. Renooz's earliest intellectual interests actually developed in response to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, notwithstanding her autobiographical article, "A Revelation" (1888) translated below. An ardent anti-positivist, Renooz went on to write a series of books that critiqued the scientific method and its applications, first to the study of the physical universe (*La Nouvelle Science*, 5 vols., 1890-1920) and then to the history of Western religions (*L'Ere de vérité*, 6 vols., 1921-33). Supported by the Société Néosophique, an association that Renooz founded in 1897, her work also shared in the woman's movement, more as a utopian vision than as a call to political action. Most of her publications and her personal papers, including her unpublished memoirs, are now in the Marie Louise Bouglé collection in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. None of Renooz's work and very few studies of her life and work are available in English.

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“A Revelation” (1888)

Translated by James Smith Allen

Of all terms used in metaphysical rumination, the word *revelation* must certainly be noted.¹ The modern mind condemns it emphatically and rejects it with the utmost disdain. It is generally agreed today that the human intellect privileges knowledge obtained by the scientific method. Empiricism dominates everything.

Pushing this epistemology to the extreme, everyone rejects as self-evident and without any further thought all mental activities that are not based on formal experimentation carried out by consecrated and reputedly infallible means. This scant confidence in innovation comes from what we mistrust in others, while suspecting the same in ourselves and in our own abilities.

The contemporary mind no longer seems up to those great luminous leaps of insight which suddenly make hidden truths perceptible. False theories, absurd conceptions, assorted extravagances, and intellectual frauds have all too often laid claim to the respect and the authority appropriate to true science. They have inspired a justified suspicion of what human beings today can know.

Nonetheless, this senseless pride severely limits the faculties of all humanity. In acting this way we assume that we possess the ultimate sum of enlightenment and that no one can exceed it. This does genius an injustice.

Yet history shows us that great mental moments, all serious intellectual challenges to the status quo, have always come to people who suddenly surpassed the common run, who suddenly leapt ahead of their time. Genius, sudden inspiration, the unforeseen and unexpected impetus to think abstractly must therefore not be denied. These events in human history are produced in all periods and can still arise in our time, despite the multitude's prevailing mental mediocrity.

Everyone has some ideas which exist in the latent state. In former times they were called innate, today we call them hereditary. But to take shape, these ideas require instigation. They do not arise spontaneously; an unforeseen opportunity makes them possible. In antiquity these sudden illuminations were called a revelation. They nearly always marked the beginning of a new era, such that whoever first conceived of them was considered as a prophet. They laid the foundations for a new world.

When one of these events is about to occur, intellectual life everywhere seems in ferment. Everyone seems to anticipate an upheaval; it is expected; it is even proclaimed; it is sometimes dreaded. But it is nearly always the individual who thinks about it least who conceives the idea that will change the world.

Since the Revolution of 1789, but especially since the second half of the

1 Céline Renooz, “Une révélation,” *La Religion laïque et universelle*, deuxième série, deuxième année, nos. 57-58 (15 mai 1888): 26569. Translated from the French by James Smith Allen. Emphases in the original text.

nineteenth century, this effervescence of ideas has prevailed. It is not the Revolution that marks its origins; it is the awakening of the sciences by Lavoisier, Priestly, Scheele, Linnaeus, Cuvier, and the other initiators of modern thought.¹ But until now the work of all these men has been only a tentative effort. Based solely on the experimental method, their work has lacked *the conception* of what ties them together – all the scattered facts, all the branches of SCIENCE – into a complete and harmonious whole, in fact, which provides for intellectual synthesis.

The data furnished by empiricism are the contributions that everyone makes to the elaboration of a project. The conception is the plan that shows what everyone should do. Modern science has made many contributions, but it has not provided a master plan.

Still there have been premonitions of this movement to give definitive substance to science. Its origins lie in human history itself, that is, in the history of organic evolution. All religious law-givers, it should be recalled, have begun their Bible with the story of life's origins. The starting point of life, of course, also marks the beginning of the social sciences.

This obvious truth suggests that if the natural sciences have been so important lately, it is because humanity has come to a period of renewal, one of those moments in the life of the universe where everything is ripe for renovation. Everything is ready for a new beginning. Just as in antiquity, we know, the reform will commence with the story of life's genesis.

For the last twenty years in particular, the natural sciences have experienced an extraordinary development. Everyone has made a contribution in the creation of the new order, but the conception of the future is still lacking. Darwin came forth with his theory; his insight was the principle of evolution. Unfortunately, no one can be pleased with his inconclusive efforts, which are without scientific value; and so work from his plan has continued merely for the lack of one better. In this research the experimental method has been powerless, because it can reveal nature only in the present. Humanity's past escapes it, even though this past is the foundation needed for the new science.

Therefore the idea to integrate all the diverse data offered by various people for the past twenty years can only come from something other than empiricism. And this eagerly sought conception – that everything is as simple as it is in nature – remains very far from the ideas ruling today, since it is sought everywhere without ever being found. We can get there only by absolutely new means, seeing how we have gotten nowhere by the old methods.

But science today does not take scholars in these new directions.

1 Lavoisier, Antoine Laurent de (1743-1794), one of the creators of modern chemistry.
Priestley, Joseph (1733-1804) English chemist who discovered oxygen and other gasses.
Scheele, Carl Wilhelm (1742-1786), Swedish chemist who discovered chlorine and glycerine, and who isolated various organic acids including lactic acid.
Linné, Carl von, (1707-1778). Swedish naturalist who classified plants, and whose binomial nomenclature assured his fame.
Cuvier, Georges, (1769-1832), French paleontologist and zoologist. Creator of comparative anatomy and of paleontology.

On the contrary, it encloses them in routine. Forsaking contemporary science altogether, rather than trying to learn more from it, is therefore necessary. In order to arrive at real knowledge of human origins, a sudden conception must arise in a mind otherwise unencumbered, either consciously or unconsciously, by formal conventions.

This idea, the object of a revelation, must come suddenly to the person who has thought about it least. The history of this event, which we recount in the following pages, will show to people who are able understand its significance that the word *revelation* must be broadened from the narrow meaning which the uninformed and the stubborn still give to it. These people will understand that the major revolutions arising at long intervals in the life of humanity, thanks to sudden illuminations, are derived from explicable biological phenomena, however fantastic they may seem to us.

It occurred in 1878. I had gone to spend the summer on Mount Valérien. Here in special physiological conditions made possible by the altitude, I was surprised in my solitude by a luminous conception, which changed my direction in life.

In the first days of June, I had gone to the Bibliothèque Nationale, more to visit the reading room than to work. Yet once there I asked for some books. For a long time I had had the desire to read the works of the eighteenth-century Naturalists and Encyclopedists. I asked for d'Holbach's *Le Système de la nature* and Helvétius's *L'Homme*.

On a hot June day I spent the afternoon with this reading. I don't know what mental work occurred to me. I left the library at four o'clock for the Saint-Lazare train station. From this moment I entered into an extraordinary state which I have never been able to explain. My mind was overwhelmed by a sudden illumination. I had read Helvétius's *L'Homme* for no other reason than that of curiosity. Yet suddenly the question of human origins came to me, and I immediately realized the solution to this problem. The unexpected revelation came very quickly, and in a few minutes my mind awakened to such a multitude of ideas that since then it has taken me several years to develop them.

Only in getting off the train and in moving toward the house where I was staying did this latent idea of mine take on a striking form. It astonished me and threw me into a new world. The walk caused the motor impulsion which stirred the cerebral regions of my brain. No doubt the seat of abstract thought had been subjected earlier to an extraordinary oxidation owing to the situation of the house I occupied.

Much later, when I tried to recover this day lost in memory like a vague dream, I recalled nothing of the things that I must have done during these few hours. I do not recollect how I got to the Saint-Lazare train station, how I took the train, in which car and with which travelers I found myself, who served me my dinner, or at what moment I went to bed. I remember none of that. While my body unconsciously went about these activities, my mind focused on one thing: THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN LIFE.

When I came to myself again, when I found myself faced once more with

ordinary life, this event left me profoundly astonished. It also left me with an impatient desire to transcribe the amazing conception which had just come to me. It had been so swift that it seemed as if this fleeting moment would escape me. If I failed to record it immediately, I was afraid all the important details would be lost.

That evening I was overcome by both this impatience and this fear. I arose at dawn and set immediately to writing my doctrine of evolution, just as I conceived of it, without any book about me, without any document, without a single impulse or instant to consult the books that had been written on the subject. Such is how the history of evolution occurred to me.

The idea which came of itself so suddenly is this: the forms traversed by human and air-born animals at the beginning of their evolution are vegetable forms, which are reproduced faithfully in the first phase of present-day embryonic life, that of primitive vegetation. But the present-day vegetative world, which recommences a slow evolution, *is reversed* in relation to present-day animals. That is to say, in the vegetative stage, the cephalic extremity is below and the caudal extremity is on top.

I had never seen embryos, since I had never undertaken their study. So I did not know that the embryo occupies this reversed station, no more than I knew that it traverses ramified forms similar to those of the tree in the primitive period called the *vascular* era. All this was instantaneously revealed to me, however, and with such evidence that no doubt was possible.

Nonetheless, I should confess that without knowing it I was imbued with the usual scientific prejudices. As a result, I sought the features of the present-day plant in those which resemble present-day animal life. It required of me much study to rid myself of this false notion and to understand that there can be no resemblance between the two extreme end points in evolution, that is, the beginning and the end. An immense period of morphological, anatomical, physiological, and chemical modifications separates the two epochs; and the only resemblance worth seeking is that of the plant with the embryo in its first phases.

Bit by bit I saw all this more clearly. I worked for some time to reconstitute the evolution of tissues with no other source than nature itself. Only after more than two years of research did I have the idea of consulting the works of embryology, which suddenly offered me the solutions that I had long set out to find.

In this research, each step I took was a confirmation of my spontaneous conception. Each day brought me new evidence of the truth which had appeared to me. Everything helped to firmly establish the absolute faith I had in it. I had set out to study tenaciously all the sciences connected in any way with my subject. But because I began to study nature itself, guided in that effort by my revelation, I came to find the *whole truth*. Since then I have become convinced that it can develop only in the inexperienced mind, that is, one not corrupted by the teaching of classic errors in science.

The further I advanced in my study of nature, the more I perceived the distance which separated me already – and which will separate me still more – from present-day scientific research. I apprehended better the errors, the

weaknesses, and the contradictions of men's science. It was impossible, I felt, to find the truth in their books. Moreover, if it was there, it would be evident to everyone; and error would not rule about us everywhere as it has in such sovereign majesty. So as I recovered SCIENCE by other means, I knew I was not far from real knowledge.

The first sentiment I experienced in the wake of this cerebral shock was a profound astonishment, a sentiment I continued to feel for several years. Especially in the silence of the night, I was overwhelmed by the strange impression that I had been the *object* of an equally profound discovery. And I say improperly the *object* and not the *subject*, because I felt strangely detached from what had occurred to me. Because my will had not been part of it, I had been caught, so to speak, by surprise.

Since then, waking up has always been for me a moment of curious lucidity, during which I plunge very briefly into a world of light, but which disappears as soon as the body begins to function again, as soon as it regains movement. In the agitated state of complete wakefulness, it is impossible for me to recover the impressions I experience then. During these fleeting instants I perceive the importance of my discovery and the immensity of its practical consequences. I see myself, as myself, growing morally; and the sheer size of the mission I have to accomplish overcomes me.

My inner light has illuminated other questions, such as that of human origins. At almost the same time (some weeks later), it was a sort of revelation of the physical world. I apprehended all the cosmic laws: the veritable cause of electricity, light, and gravity, so different from what is believed. Then much later but still in the same year, solutions to problems in philosophy started to make sense. I suddenly understood the essence of the *generative-principle* and its intimate link with our smallest actions and our most secret thoughts. Then casting a retrospective glance on the history of humanity, I understood the origins of a divine principle and this idea's development. Finally, much later still, crowning all these solutions, I discovered the mystery of sexual evolution. On this mystery rests the *eternal* law; I found it to be the cause of all *errors* which rule in the world.

The more my perspective grew, the more I understood the need to communicate the truths for which I had become the depository. They would necessarily lead to a change in science, in philosophy, even in religious and social institutions. From the very start, I apprehended the importance of the solution to this enormous problem: the *origin of man* and all the consequences resulting from it. This concatenation of ideas was developed in a succession of books that I have called *La Nouvelle Science*. Every day I saw more and more clearly that the *new earth* and the *new heavens*, promised as they are to humanity, were in the science I was reconstituting.

The enormous power of thought, which overwhelmed me and made me see so clearly into nature's mysteries, was a moral force whose command it seemed to me I had to obey in order to save the old world. I had to accept, it seemed to me, the impulsion which pushed me. If I did not respond, I would be responsible for

the evil resulting from the delay in humanity's illumination by the supreme truth that is to regenerate it. Each time a new crime occurred, a mysterious voice seemed to say to me: You could have stopped it. From then onward, it seemed to me, my destiny was to raise human intelligence, to guide it, to rectify it, and to pacify men, to *re-create* them so to speak, by revealing to them a new moral world.

Soon I was tormented by the need to communicate the *great* news. A feeling of impatience, of anxiety even, eventually overcame me. I was in a hurry to begin the promotion of this doctrine. But no one about me could understand the state of my mind. Those worldly, upright, but ill-informed people, especially women who were all strangers to the studies I had undertaken, would have certainly accused me of madness if I had spoken of it.

I knew that in a skeptical era like ours my narrative here would be received at first with disbelief and mockery. I knew I would be understood only by people – not many – of genuine intelligence. I also did not want to expose to the sarcasms of some and the doubts of others my account of an event which, despite its extraordinary character, was no less the expression of a great truth. So I kept quiet and I waited. I put myself to the arduous task which consumed my entire life; the external world disappeared during this period of my existence.

Thanks to this assiduous work, I finished a first draft of my history of evolution in 1882. I tried to publish it in Paris. The first installment was so badly understood and so poorly received that I renounced publishing the rest. People who understood nothing joked about it; the newspapers and reviews published some absurd articles; those who bothered with me did so merely to distort my work or to diminish my intellectual achievement. Besides stupidity and ignorance, I encountered mischievous envy, petty personal interest, and sexist jealousy.

Because I was unknown, all sorts of malevolent suppositions circulated about me. So then I believed in the duty to make myself known. I made a few efforts with some professors and academics whom I considered competent. And because a real historical interest exists in the origins of this struggle, I have carefully noted all the incidents about it in order to publish an account later on.

In the same way as everyone who has undertaken innovative work, I have been honored by accusations of madness, the obligatory baptism of all major discoveries. I do not complain about these allegations so much as I glory in them. Having already endured ten years of moral suffering, I have now paid my tribute to human stupidity. I hope, therefore, that wise men who have a presentiment of the new order will pay serious attention to what I have to say.

JUDITH GAUTIER

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

A prolific writer of poetry, theater and novels, Judith Gautier (1845-1917) is now best remembered for her three-volume autobiography, *Le Collier des jours* and for her friendship with Richard Wagner, who wrote *Parsifal* for her. She exploited several genres for their potential to offer imaginative escape. Her poems attracted the attention and admiration of Leconte de Lisle, and are steeped in the formal beauty of much Parnassian poetry. Her novels—for instance *Le Dragon impérial* (1869) and *La Conquête du paradis* (1890) from which the following extract is taken—frequently have wildly imagined exotic settings, such as China, India or Japan. She created worlds in which landscape, architecture, and human relationships symbolize intense passions and sexual love.

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Paradise Conquered

Translated by Rosemary Lloyd

When she saw how extraordinarily troubled and shaken the queen was after her meeting with the young barbarian, Lila knew straight away that this heart that hitherto had been able to maintain its haughty coldness was beginning to succumb to love for the first time. Disturbed and curious, she had questioned Ragoonat Dat and had discovered that this stranger, who was so brave and strong, was also very handsome, and claimed equality with the Kchatrias. The Brahman told her the little he knew of Europe, astonishing her with the condition of women, so superior to theirs, the consideration with which they were treated, the respect that was shown them.

“It’s a man from that country that we need for king,” she said to herself; “an intrepid warrior, capable of defending the realm and restoring its authority, a husband who would share power with his wife and would not transform the queen into his top slave. But alas! we are condemned to have a Muslim prince, and that means being shut away in a harem, losing everything that made us happy.”

All the same, she kept her eyes on the queen, smiling secretly at the uselessness of the prayers. At one point, however, she thought she must have been mistaken. The feverish irritation that Ourvaci was suffering, exacerbated by Panch-Anan, became a form of illness, and the strength of prejudice developed a real hatred and disgust in place of this burgeoning love. Then several new symptoms persuaded her that the ill truly was what she had guessed it to be.

“Things are going to go dreadfully wrong for her if I can’t make her see what her true motives are.”

But how could she go about it? How could she, while giving the impression that she believed it, combat that misunderstood hatred, so that she could restore it to its real expression?

After the drama of the Isle of Silence, Lila had pretended to be struck with love for the foreigner. She understood what a precious aid this appearance of passion could be to her, allowing her to praise the enemy to the skies, to speak endlessly of him, or if she was forbidden to talk, to recall him nevertheless to the queen’s mind through sighs and tears.

It was like the gentle slope of a flowery path to which she turned her friend’s feet. Not suspecting that she was being guided, Ourvaci set out obediently in that direction. Lila, fully convinced that she was working for the queen’s happiness, had no hesitation in playing her role with such an appearance of truth that it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of her feelings. Who can tell, what’s more, whether the princess did not to some extent fall into the trap she herself had set?

On that particular day the queen was to see the wonderful celebration that spring was giving in the forest. They set out, all the elephants following one after the other, bearing gracious women, singers, musicians, striking cymbals against

each other, hammering tambourines, striking their nails on the vinas.¹ Under the royal houdah, beside Ourvaci, was Lila, silent and apparently overwhelmed with grief.

“So you’re still thinking of that barbarian, are you?” asked the queen. “Your grief seems worse than ever.”

“That’s because absence is like hunger,” said Lila, “you can bear it for a while and the longer it lasts the more intolerable it becomes.”

“How could you see him? You know quite well that everything is over and that he will never come back!”

“How sadly she says those words!” said Lila to herself. “Do you think then that he’s forgotten you?” she went on aloud. “Do you really think that, just as I long for him, he isn’t devoured by the longing to see you?”

“He’d be more likely to flee from me, after all I have done against him. But can you really want, and want so badly, the arrival of someone who would not be coming for you?”

“The plant that revels in the sun doesn’t ask whether the star has come for her; she simply flowers.”

“Ah my dear Lila,” said the queen, embracing her friend, “what wouldn’t I give to cure you!”

“Listen, grant me one thing. Get rid of your retinue in a moment, and let’s head toward the asoka grove, with its statue of the god of love.”

“What! Do you want to make an offering to him, and abandon Ganesa, your only god! What impiety, and from someone who thinks only of being sensible!

“Being sensible teaches one that no one escapes Kama-Deva, and isn’t it better to implore and move the one who holds us in his power?”

“Very well, we’ll go to the grove, then.”

They were deep in the forest; all the women were looking up, crying out in surprise and admiration, at the incredible splendor that it revealed in its fleeting adornment of flowers. Flowers everywhere and nothing but flowers! The overburdened trees seemed to be shaking them, flowers rained down on them, the ground was covered with them, and the scent was so strong that it was sending the elephants asleep. It was a madness, a waste, a miracle of spring.

Soon the queen gave the order to halt. The animals were drawn up in a circle, everyone dismounted, and groups of princesses scattered joyously through the woods, while Ourvaci, with a gesture that announced she wanted to be left alone, went off with Lila.

At the moment when they entered the path to the asoka grove, a man, breathless and not daring to approach through respect for the queen, signaled to the princess. On seeing him, Lila let out a cry.

“Oh queen! Let me speak to this messenger.”

And without waiting for permission, she rushed toward him.

Ourvaci, following the princess with her eyes, saw the man hand her a letter, that she rapidly read. Then he handed her a pen and palm leaf, and kneeling,

1 Four-stringed Indian lyre.

offered his back as a desk. Lila wrote a brief answer and gave an order to the messenger, who ran off.

The princess returned, deeply moved, but kept silent. She had put the letter in her jeweled belt, so that one of the corners showed and the queen could not refrain from gazing at its whiteness, but she did not want to question her friend, who struck her as excessively discreet.

Lila picked flowers for her offering as they walked, ankle deep in fallen petals.

The purple asoka which seemed covered in a coral of pearls made a parasol for the god of love. He appeared, in marble, painted and gilded, riding a giant parrot, an smiling under his openwork miter, holding his bow, made of the wood of the sugar cane, with a string of golden bees. The five arrows with which he wounds each of the senses thrust out of the quiver, each armed with a different flower. On the arrow that strikes the eyes there was the royal Tchampaka, so beautiful that it dazzles you; on the one destined for the ears, the mango-flower, beloved by singing birds; for the sense of smell, the Ketaka, whose perfume intoxicates; for the sense of touch, the Kesara, whose petals are as silky as a young girl's cheek; for the sense of taste, the Bilva, which bears a sweet fruit.

Next to Love could be seen his companion, spring, and before him kneeling, his two wives, Rati, who is pleasure, and Prîti, who is affection.

Lila walked forward, her arms loaded with flower-strewn branches, and began turning around the statue, reciting in a murmur the appropriate mantra. The queen, leaning against a shrub, watched her, observing above all the disorder and agitation that had taken hold of her since she had received the letter which was now hidden under the armful of flowers. Her cheeks grew crimson, then pale; her eyes gleamed with joy and her lips were half open as if she were overcome with emotion.

"Whatever can she be hoping for?" Ourvaci wondered, "that message was obviously from him. She's filled with impatience, but for what?"

Now, kneeling at the foot of the statue, Lila laid her offering down.

"Well, my queen," she said when she had finished, "so you're not afraid of Kama-Deva's rage, since you go so close to him without even greeting him?"

"Since the law he hands down can only be a sad duty for me, and since my fate is already fixed, why should I greet that god, and what could I have to ask of him?"

"At least ask him to spare you," the princess cried out. "You know what that son of Brahma can do. He can do the impossible, and if he wanted to, he could make you fall in love with ...Panch-Anan."

The queen burst out laughing and shook her head. "I challenge him to make me do that!" she said.

"Unfortunate one! To challenge the god of gods! and not even to prevent his vengeance by the smallest of offerings."

"Very well, here," she said.

And Ourvaci walked forward hesitating a little and holding in her finger tips a blue lotus.

She placed the flower on the marble plinth and at the same time lifted her eyes to the handsome, smiling young man, giving him a look charged with an involuntary prayer.

“Well, now I feel better,” said Lila with a sigh of relief. “I was terrified at the thought of you at war with the all powerful Kama-Deva, for now I believe in him and am convinced that he can perform miracles.”

“He forgets to warn you, however, that you are at this very moment losing that mysterious letter that you so carefully hid in your belt.”

And Ourvaci touched with her toe a letter that had fallen on the ground. Swiftly, the princess picked it up.

“This letter indeed contains the miracle,” she said, “and if you were willing to read it, you would be convinced that it does.”

“Let’s have a look at it,” said the queen, without even trying to hide her impatient curiosity.

She took the letter and held it for a moment, before opening it, interestedly examining the imprint in the wax, which presented a coat of arms surmounted with a crown.

“What is this then?” she asked. “I see stars, and why this crown of gems and foliage?”

“No doubt it’s the sign of some royal lineage”

But Ourvaci wasn’t listening. She had opened the letter and was reading it avidly.

“For me you are the sweeter than Prîti, you bring more consolation than Maya, oh my princess, and you may be sure that the works of no poet have been read with as much passion as yours. But I would need days and days to tell you all I feel; and what is the point of writing, when I could tell you all this aloud. Yes, Lila, I feel that delicious hope that makes me tremble with impatience.

Listen! I shall be traveling with the king of Dekkan, who’s on his way to take possession of his capital, and I’ll be passing a few leagues from Bangalore! You can understand that it is beyond my strength to be so close and yet to go by. So, the king may think what he likes about it, but I’ll escape and come to breathe in this atmosphere, which for me is more life-giving than the amrita of the gods, I’ll snatch a flower from the bushes, a clump of grass from the soil, and see again for a brief moment that country, this palace which transforms the rest of the world for me into a cruel exile.

I know too well the value of your heart not to know that you would perform miracles to grant me an interview.

I’ll arrive a few moments after my letter; may the messenger who brings me my reply lead me to you, without wasting a moment. Alas, I can steal no more than an hour from my duty.”

Lila, pretending to take the queen’s pallor and emotion for anger, threw herself at her feet with an air of supplication.

“Oh, forgive me!” she cried, “I could not resist his plea, and without having received your permission, I yielded to the irresistible impulse of my heart.”

“What have you done?”

“I have done what he asked; I ordered the messenger to lead him to me, just a few steps from here.”

“Here! He’s to come here!”

Involuntarily the queen brought her hand to her heart, to still its disordered beating.

“It’s so dangerous!”

“No one will see him,” Lila replied. “I urged the messenger to lead him on indirect paths and he will alas stay so short a while, that no one will have time to know he is here.”

“Very well, go,” said Ourvaci with feverish liveliness; “I wouldn’t want to make you lose a single one of those minutes which you hold so dear. He may already be there.”

“No, not yet, my messenger will let me know, by giving the cry of the maina, as soon as he has returned.”

All under the asoka grove there were banks of grass, scattered with petals. The queen sank down on one of them as if seized by an unconquerable weariness. Lila knelt beside her, with her arms around her waist.

“How good you are,” she said. “You don’t scold me, you don’t want my joy to be mingled with bitterness, but, I beg you, be yet kinder—see how Kama-Deva, whom people call so cruel, takes pity on the wounds he causes. On the basis of my prayer alone he has granted my dearest wish. Do as he does, a queen may take a god for model, grant the one who, through your fault, lives in flames, the cool dew of your presence.

“See him again, after what happened, that can never be,” said Ourvaci, rising from the ground.

“At least let him see you from a distance, give him that happiness, which you don’t refuse the lowliest of your subjects.”

“No, no, on the contrary, I must go away.”

“If you go, I must follow,” said Lila sadly, “and that will be the end of my happiness.”

The queen sat down again with a smile.

“So I must stay, to protect your love,” she said.

“Oh, thank you, divine friend,” cried the princess, throwing herself into Ourvaci’s arms. “How can it be that with a heart so tender you cause such suffering?”

“Well, let him see me then,” she said, trembling violently, “but don’t let him come closer. Go, go quickly, there’s the maina singing.”

“She heard it before I did,” Lila said to herself as she dashed from the grove.

The marquis arrived on horseback, following his guide through the forest, along very narrow pathways; he came closer, filled with wonder in this springtime splendor and this prodigious flowering. As he caught sight of Lila, who hurried to him, making a shield of her bare arms against the lianas and branches, he dismounted, with a swift and graceful movement, to run towards her.

“I feel as if I am walking in a dream!” he exclaimed. “This is truly the scenery that suits you, the paradise of flowers. But what do I see? My dear

princess adopts French fashions: her hair is completely powdered with white petals!"

Holding her by the tip of his fingers, he looked at her with a happy and tender gaze, while, breathless from running, Lila lowered her eyes, caught by surprise to find herself intimidated to the point of being unable to speak.

He went on, after affectionately kissing her hands: "Can what you wrote to me really be true? If you knew how much that joy you lavish on me fills my heart with gratitude! What have I done to deserve such a sweet friendship, from so delicious a creature?"

"You haven't done anything," replied Lila with a smile. "Friendship can no more be explained than love and there's no need for gratitude, since seeing you happy gives me such pleasure. But, tell me, why don't you talk to me of the only thing that fills your thoughts?"

"I was waiting for you to be ready."

"And I was delaying, to maintain my own prestige; when the sun is away we wonder at the star that reflects it, but we don't even see that star when the bearer of light returns. So you won't be able to bear me any more when I tell you what I've been keeping from you."

"So what is it?" he asked, his eyes ablaze with hope.

"The queen is a few steps away from here, and she is quite willing for you to see her, for an instant."

"She agrees! Ah! this is the first favor she has freely granted me."

"Alas! It terrifies me to see you grow so pale suddenly. One would think your life is ebbing from you," Lila cried out, having seized the young man's hand with an involuntary gesture.

"You see, I must die of this love," he said, "so violent are the joys and despairs that she brings me. But today I'll survive it. Lead me toward her, I beg you."

Left alone, Ourvaci was appalled at the emotion that disturbed her and that she couldn't control. A tumult of thoughts collided in her mind and she saw again, in a dizzying parade, her existence, filled uniquely by this man, since the hunt in which she had all but died. Hatred, scorn, murderous projects, obsessions, he, always he, had been the goal of all of them.

"Why should I seek to deceive myself?" she said. "There can be no doubt that I am lost. The stain has penetrated to the soul, there is no longer any remedy and he knows it. He knows the secret that I stifle in my heart and that he ought never to have known. Ah! why did an unconquerable madness drive me to give him a kiss when I thought he was going to die? And he lives and he's here! I have allowed him to see me again. But he will guess that that kiss, which still burns me night and day, fills me with desire as much as shame. No, it's impossible, I do not want him to see me."

She got up intending to flee and ran a few steps. But before her the branches opened and the young man appeared, a few steps away, so close that she could have touched him.

She choked back a cry, and retreated a little, utterly surprised at the feeling of calm that came to her, at the feeling of well-being, the unknown sweetness that followed the agitation she had been feeling just a moment before.

She was embarrassed at being contemplated like this in silence, like a goddess, and she would have liked to hold down her veil, which was so exquisitely thin that it floated despite the absence of any breeze and wafted from time to time across her face. Weighing on her, his magnetic glance invincibly attracted her own, and unable to fight any more, she yielded abruptly, lifting her head with a kind of defiance.

“Let’s see,” she said to herself, “if I can’t make those staring pupils drop before my gaze.”

But in meeting the blue ray of that gaze, she felt herself seized with fascination, penetrated by a sharp arrow, whose bite, like that of darts steeped in poison, infused a flame into her blood.

What she read in the eyes riveted on her own, subjugated her so completely that she let the minutes fly by unawares. Despite the trembling ecstasy in which he doused his flame, this was not the glaze of a slave, it had the blaze of a ruler, an imperious power, that irritated the queen, attracted her and charmed her. She felt that however much he might adore her, this man would be able to protect her, that leaning on this heart she would be stronger, more of a queen, but that she would have a master for all that. And she fought against the enchantment this idea brought her, trying to rebel against it, seeking shelter, as if behind a rampart, from all the impossibilities that separated her from this barbarian.

But their eyes played with impossibilities, leaping over the barriers, they united in a delicious embrace.

The young man did not even seek to obtain a single word from her. What could she have said? The word, that mask of the thought, might well deny what the eyes so passionately proclaimed, and he wanted to carry away without any shadow, the memory of that dazzling gaze.

With a pleading gesture, she pushed him away, and, incapable of breaking the chain of his gaze, she veiled her eyes with her hand.

Then he fled, crushing against his lips a flower that he had torn off, while the swooning queen slowly stepped back in search of support to the statue of the god of love, on which she lent, her head bending backwards.

And Kama-Deva, brandishing his flower-strewn bow, smiled under his golden miter.

MARIE KRYSINSKA

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Polish-born Symbolist poet Marie Krysinska (1864-1908) is only now beginning to attract the attention of feminist scholars. The author of three books of poetry and several novels, she participated in Parisian literary and musical circles during the period of the *Chat Noir*, only to fall into obscurity soon after her death. Instrumental in—if not responsible for—the birth of free verse in France, Krysinska weathered criticism from a number of writers on both sides of the free-verse debate, those championing the revolution in poetic form as well as those decrying it. Gustave Kahn accused her of stealing his invention, while André Barre suggested that her poems exhibit “l’indolence féminine en matière d’art.”

The prefatory material of Krysinska’s three poetic collections (*Rythmes pittoresques*, 1890; *Joies errantes*, 1894; *Intermèdes*, 1903) are worthy of attention for several reasons, most notably as documents aiming to defend the author against her detractors, to create a record of her accomplishment, and to set forth her innovative poetic method. It is interesting to trace the evolution of these prefaces, which exhibit a growing assurance, or perhaps an increasing investment in establishing her critical voice in poetic matters. J. H. Rosny wrote the preface of her first collection, *Rythmes pittoresques*, in the form of a laudatory letter addressed to its author. Attributing to Krysinska what Mallarmé has called “the crisis of verse,” Rosny writes to her, “Madame, you are at the origin of this literary movement that revolts against predictable perfection and that will unsettle the deified French verse of classicism and romanticism” (vii). This first volume includes as well an extract from the *Annales Artistiques et Littéraires* of April 1, 1890, which credits Krysinska with the invention of free verse and chronicles her participation with the journal, *Le Chat noir*.

Krysinska let her own critical voice be heard in her second collection, *Joies errantes*, which she preceded with a short “avant-propos” penned by herself. In this text, the poet aims to position herself in relation to the invention of free verse and to describe its effects of surprise. Finally, *Intermèdes* begins with a lengthy essay entitled “Introduction: On Rational Evolutions.” Here Krysinska expands upon her prefatory comments in *Joies errantes*, situating herself within French poetic history and offering a detailed response to her detractors. The second half of this preface, in which the author comments specifically on her work and its reception, is translated below; following is a summary of the first half, where her scope is broader.

Krysinska’s subtitle, “On Rational Evolutions,” refers to her theory that aesthetic evolution is not a systematic, Darwinian progression, but one that is

spontaneous and unpredictable. It is *rational* because it conforms to the equally arbitrary evolution of the semantic, grammatical, phonetic, and prosodic elements of language. Just as pronunciation changes, so must form. Contemporary poets do not need the archaic conventions of syllabism to express themselves. Indeed, free verse is modeled after current spoken discourse and is just as valid as preceding styles.

Krysinska examines in some detail the history of French prosody, studying the alternating moments of rigor and freedom in poetry. She ultimately aligning herself with formal liberty, which privileges emotional expression, over technical perfection, which is no guarantor of originality. She positions the advent of free verse within the French tradition of innovation, defending free verse's dissonance and unpredictability.

Herself a musician, Krysinska draws liberally upon comparisons to modern music. She details the specific changes that characterize what she calls the "new school" of free verse. She takes to task Sully Prudhomme's theories of regular versification, and freely responds to those who have condemned or ignored her as a poet.

In the second half of her essay, translated below, Krysinska addresses more specifically her own work and its reception. This passage reveals the modernity of an innovative poet, but also the defensiveness of a woman systematically ignored for her work. She sounds quite Mallarméan when writing of the individual aesthetics that together form the new poetic mode, and nearly Saussurian when discussing the arbitrariness of language.

But Krysinska is at times self-promoting and repetitive, quoting at length from her supporters and responding in great detail and with hearty invective to the slights of her detractors. She painstakingly reconstructs the chronology of her publications in order to prove that she was indeed the first to write in free verse. This defensive posture occasionally creates odd bed-fellows, as when Krysinska calls upon the notoriously misogynist and xenophobic Charles Maurras (who in "Le Romantisme féminin" names foreigners and women the greatest threat to the French nation) for support. But rather than condemn Krysinska for her zeal, today's reader should recognize in her words the reaction of a woman who was rarely given credit for her accomplishments and systematically excluded from poetic circles that might have nourished her career.

What is so unusual about this essay is its author's defense of artistic freedom, the description of her poetic project, and her articulation of a concerted misogynist bias against women poets. Before Krysinska, few women dared engage in the presumably masculine meta-poetic practice of writing prefaces, as if theorizing about one's writing somehow might shatter the myth of women's "natural" and "spontaneous" poetic production (although at moments she herself appears to fall victim to this myth of spontaneous creation, she consistently insists on compositional rigor). Fewer still opted to challenge the male literary establishment and name its patronizing, exclusionary stance toward women poets for what it was. Finally, with her ardent defense and illustration of poetic freedom, Krysinska proved femininity to be compatible with innovation instead of the slave

of imitation. Indeed, she places women on the vanguard of change and points to our revolutionary potential.

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"Ingenuousness: An American Custom" (1890)

Translated by Seth Whidden

Originally published as "Ingénuité: Mœurs américaines" in *La Revue bleue: Revue politique et littéraire*, 45.26 (28 June 1890): 808-11

Mrs Robertson indulgently took her time in the bathroom, next to the tub, which still held some of her perfumed opaque Florida Water. In the narrow mirror on the opposing wall, she saw, lost in the curling-papers, her white and pink face, which she softly admitted to be as pretty as the smiling colorful women on Mr Reynolds's cigarette boxes. Adding his first name, David, she pronounced this name in a half-whisper and repeated it several times: David Reynolds. It resonated like some exquisite music, and, evoking her lover's joyous face with its handsome blond mustache, Mrs Robertson rolled around in drunken memories like a cat on a plush carpet.

At that very moment, someone knocked on the door.

"All right," she responded, methodically lacing up her corset.

It was Mr Robertson, her husband, who reminded her that it was almost time to go meet their friends for the excursion to City Point.

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At the corner of the Public Gardens at five past two, the Robertson group met up with the high society, which was made up of Mr Reynolds and Mr and Mrs Armstrong and their fourteen-year-old daughter, who was going to her first social party.

The two gentlemen pulled out their pocket watches at the same time and informed the Robertson group that they were five minutes late, which is very serious in the United States.

After waiting for several minutes, during which conversation was stuck on an uninspired observation of the weather, the sound of the bells announced the desired tramway. Soon they were comfortably seated in the ingenious and comfortable vehicle called the “car,” entirely open with seats as wide as those of a concert hall. The driver, dressed like an Ambassador’s attaché, standing, easily handled the two powerful horses, which easily carried the long, light, elegant, car.

Mr Reynolds sat between Mrs Robertson and little Lizzie, who, in her excitement at finally being on the way to City Point, sat down too quickly and nearly ended up in the gentleman’s lap; then, without being the least bit troubled, she moved on to her next activity:

Bursting with laughter, she pointed out to her mother the fantastic hat and outrageous makeup of a common beauty, who had just sat down at the other end of the tramway, in the section reserved for smokers, where Mr Robertson and Mr Armstrong were also seated, cigars in their mouths.

Mrs Robertson, her arm trembling from being lightly pressed against Mr Reynolds’s, followed the well-known details of Tremont Street, the main street in Boston, with a moist and wandering eye:

Red houses with green shutters, made brighter still by the white laundry that housewives hang out on lines above the terraced roofs. The air blows the garments up and makes them float like a ship’s sails.

In places, in the midst of skirts where the wind comically inflates imaginary stomachs, a pair of black stockings dances a jig.

Then, signs on the front of stores.

The enormous reed-pipe, in nice American red, white, and blue, stands – by some unknown symbolism – for a barber shop.

In front of tobacconists’ shops, Indian women of painted wood – the last vestige of the former American people – offer passers-by a package of oversized cigars or a tablet of chewing tobacco, with half-smiles on their varnished faces, often with deformed noses, while their excessively bare legs, whose mauve nakedness is covered with golden rings, prepare for illusory departures.

Telephone poles extend by the thousands in the opposite direction of the tramway, like skeletons of long fish going about their business.

Lizzie must have been bitten by a mosquito – those insects are terrible in Boston – because she was unusually restless in her little white flannel lawn-tennis blouse.

Mr Reynolds, concentrating on memorizing a corner of Mrs Robertson's neck, was interrupted from his task by one of the little girl's jumps, which almost ended with her elbow in his stomach.

He looked at Lizzie for the first time and realized that she was very pretty.

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How could Mr Armstrong's villainous eyes, with their old rusty-coin color, how could they become his daughter's superb brown eyes with laughing lashes? And Mrs Armstrong's unhappy mouth, with corners ever downward – a herring's mouth – how could it be transformed into this beautiful succulent fruit, with little milky-almond teeth that tempt like a delicacy?

This is what Mr Reynolds was thinking to himself, while Mrs Robertson nervously pressed her knee against his without her face ever losing any of its joyous calmness. She was even excitedly telling Mrs Armstrong about the troubles of being a housewife.

The tramway was now passing through the popular and poorer neighborhoods.

A multitude of children, with bare feet and unkempt hair, crawled around the dirty streets and gathered in heaps – like flies. They played loudly, crouched down in the midst of banana peels and all sorts of garbage thrown on the ground.

Most of them, young Negroes or Mulattos, were gay as little monkeys and comically awkward in their movements, while the children of Irish immigrants kept an unconscious elegance in their tattered yet charming English-baby rags.

They were getting closer to the sea, and fish markets abounded.

Tubs were filled with the creamy flesh of octopuses; live lobsters, armed at all points, crawled along, brutalized, on beds of diamond-gleaming algae and seemed to hold secret funerary meetings with their cooked brethren, dressed in sinister purple.

An odor of iodine floated through the air, overheated by the blazing sun of American summers. The inebriating aroma of pineapples and bananas joined in near the Italian-run open-air fruit stands.

They finally arrived at the beach at City Point, not the meeting place of fashionable bathers like Nantesket [sic], but a beach without character, rarely frequented during the week and not at all organized for bathing; – only the children from nearby neighborhoods and little bare-legged girls splash in the shallow areas and then return to the beach to dry off like young dogs, running around.

Their silhouettes, standing out vigorously against the luminous sea, are reminiscent of those unique Etruscan paintings, so impressive in the physiognomy of their gestures.

Crouching children dug their knives into the wet sand to take out the clams that they ate raw. The women also wanted some of these shellfish, and so the men, still smoking their cigars, rolled up their sleeves and started to search in the mire.

Suddenly, Miss Lizzie, forgetting about her spic and span outfit, ran to crouch down near Mr Reynolds and began to dig as well, with her little schoolgirl knife, her hands and her arms in the mud.

“Look, look!” she cried out with joy at each clam she found. Showing them off to Mr Reynolds, her cheeks were rosy with happiness, while the gentleman’s gaze went automatically to the fine black stockings that her little-girl pose uncovered up to her knees, where the snowy embroidery of her slip started.

Mrs Robertson, rather annoyed by this game and firing angry looks at her lover, said, “Enough of those clams! Shall we go for a stroll?”

But Lizzie was having too much fun and would hear nothing of it. Mr Reynolds wasn’t bored, either.

Lizzie chose to send her straw hat out to sink, like a small shipwrecked boat, and her curls, golden in the sun, seemed like caressing flames next to her milky skin tone, similar to Chinese porcelain, where her slender face with its pretty little Saxon nose, cunning and pure, was delicately glazed.

Mr Reynolds found her exquisite, and she was aware of this. What’s more, she liked him quite a bit; maybe because he admired her, or maybe because he resembled a painting she had seen at a big art gallery.

Her frolicking unfortunately ended, and they went closer to the water to wash their hands.

Lizzie’s handkerchief was soaked before her arms were properly wiped, and Mr Reynolds lent her his own very perfumed handkerchief, which Lizzie kept much longer than necessary. This scent, a mix of musk and tobacco, made her blossom with delight and inebriated her.

When she gave it back to the gentleman who couldn’t stop savoring her with his eyes, she discovered that she was quite madly in love with Mr Reynolds.

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Mrs Robertson found a way to leave her husband behind with the Armstrong group and took Mr Reynolds’s arm.

She was pale with spite, but her eyes had their usual soft look.

Besides, she had never been so in love with her lover.

Her lips were thirsty for kisses and her jealousy exasperated her desires, which were directed at this man with humility and fervor.

“Dear Darling!” she murmured, unable to find anything but these caressing words, instead of everything lofty she had prepared to say to punish him as soon as she could talk to him –

For his part, Mr Reynolds pulled himself out of his previous troubles and passionately pressed against the arm of his mistress, whom he found more charming with her submissive and distraught look.

She had completely reclaimed him, and they walked silently, overwhelmed with a tender weakness.

The transparent blue sky was crossed by long streaks of gold of unalterable purity, and the sea, glistening like a turtle-dove's feathers, seemed to nestle in the loving arms of the horizon, where the green-hilled isles were clothed in an intense sapphire.

The transparent sails of fishing boats, covered with pink hues at the edge of the sky, floated like spread wings.

"Tell me that you are angry for having upset me," said Mrs Robertson, her voice trembling with all the bitter sadness of not being able to be forever and completely with the man she loved, while the sound of her husband's steps behind them saddened her ears.

"But, dear heart, how did I upset you?" responded Mr Reynolds, playing the good apostle with a hypocrisy that almost bordered on sincerity, so successful was he in persuading himself of his admirable innocence.

"Well, well! Don't flirt with my wife! She's a terrible flirt, you know!" said Mr Robertson, coming closer.

"I know, I know," replied Mr Reynolds, placidly smiling and leaving Mrs Robertson's arm for her husband to take.

It was time to decide where to eat, and this question occupied everyone for several moments.

They ended up deciding on one of the restaurants near the jetty, and they proceeded in that direction.

But this time, it was Lizzie who gave her arm to Mr Reynolds, and everyone saw – far ahead – their overlapped silhouettes standing out against the more and more vivid sky.

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A week later, Mrs Robertson finished undoing her curls, which were blown around the curling-papers like beautiful golden moths, gathered high on top of her head: an American hair style that is part clown and part archangel.

Mrs Robertson was preparing to visit Mr Reynolds, whom she hadn't seen since the excursion to City Point, when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" the young woman responded with a start. Her friend Mrs Armstrong, a particularly unwelcome sight, especially at this moment, came into view.

Short of breath, Mrs Armstrong unfolded a letter that she nearly tore into pieces with her emotion. Finally, she handed it to Mrs Robertson without saying anything, and this is what Mrs Robertson read:

Dear Mama, This is to inform you that I was tired of school and of being a good little girl. I love David Reynolds, and he is already my husband. We are going to Chicago for a week. Upon our return, we will come hug you

and Daddy, as always.

Lizzie Reynolds

PS – Don't forget to announce this to all our friends, who will be happy, because Mr Reynolds is well off. For 25 dollars, Reverend Belcome married us in the nicest church in Boston and gave us a first-class sermon.

Mrs Armstrong, troubled but basically happy, marched back and forth on the rug like a soldier, saying, "Ah! Lord! These things happen all the time, I know; but I am shocked just the same... a child so young ... the Davidson's little girl, remember her? Last year, she was at least sixteen, and Lizzie is not yet fifteen."

"But in the end, David Reynolds is well off," she concluded, falling into the rocking chair, which lurched back and forth frantically.

"But you've known Mr Reynolds for a long time," she continued, not seeing Mrs Robertson's pale and troubled face. "You were good friends, weren't you?"

Here she was moved to pity and, getting up with a sudden spring-like motion – while the rocking chair, freed from its weight, rocked with a fury – she took the sufferer's hands and softly whispered endearments with apocryphal emotion:

"Isn't he a dear and decent man? Won't my Lizzie be happy?"

"Yes... she will be certainly... certainly happy," responded Mrs Robertson, victim of unspeakable torture and yet mustering up a superhuman effort to keep her soft, calm look.

"On Rational Evolutions: Esthetics and Philology"

Translated by Gretchen Schultz

Introduction to *Intermèdes: nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* (1903)¹

Here I venture onto perilous terrain, for I will speak of my own works, whose publication happened to precede the formation of the "new school" by five years (in *Vie moderne*, 1882; *Chat noir*, 1882-83; *Libre revue*, *Revue indépendante*, 1883-90). Let me quote a few lines from my article, "Poetic Evolution," published in the *Revue Universelle*. In order to justify my attempts to reform verse, I invoked the need for conformity between written poetry and modern pronunciation:

I have already commented upon my first entirely spontaneous and impulsive poems of *Rythmes pittoresques* in the preface to *Joies errantes* (Editions

1 I would like to thank Dominique Fisher for her help with the following translation.

Lemerre):

The use of poetic artifices such as assonance, rhyme, and symmetrical line breaks originated with a single individual, the first poetic genius who used them: they do not form the essence of Poetry. Its rhythmic nature alone is significant; but rhythm is not the same thing as symmetry. Having abandoned modern versification, what laws will the poet henceforth obey? It is plain that, exactly like the painter, the sculptor, and the musician, the poet will obey the subtle laws of Equilibrium and Harmony, which can be determined only by the Artist.

Since writing this, I have analyzed my work from a technical viewpoint, and have observed that most of my poems conform to regular rhythmic breaks when read according to spoken language. That is, I retain the silence of mute syllables and do not give them the conventional and deforming sound as is now the custom, therefore declining to elide the mute *e*. Can we not presume that common pronunciation was different in Corneille's time, and that the conservation of this mode of syllabism is archaic today? This suggestion will undoubtedly please Sully Prudhomme, who accepts evolution at a steady, circumspect pace.

Thus my new endeavor consists of a very modest contribution. Verses are metered for the ear alone according to modern speech, and assonance is used only for the ear, with the possibility of rhyming plurals and singulars, and all mute finals among themselves, regardless of spelling (2 February 1901).

André Béraunier agreed with this viewpoint, writing ten months later:

Classical prosody froze the scansion of the poetic line in an extremely odd manner, which transformed the usual Parisian pronunciation into a kind of southern dialect that was totally preposterous. Paul Fort wants poetry to follow the natural elisions of language, which is to say that he does not count mute syllables in the meter of his line, even when they end in consonants (*Revue Bleue*, 19 November 1901).

Why Mr Paul Fort?

Let me open a parenthesis here: the new school's particularity is to be composed exclusively of leaders who, at different dates, have each claimed to discover the same technique. In counting the members of their phalanx during the course of numerous manifestos (including one by Jean Moréas published in the *Figaro* in 1891), they have often spoken of an initial group; and yet my name was never pronounced. The group doubtlessly decreed that an initiative coming from a woman could be considered to have come from nowhere and thus as having fallen automatically into the public domain.

Free verse was born in 1883, triggering a strong reaction. What a jumble from the Parnassian masters! What a paucity of new and clearly expressed ideas! What unnecessary and strange uses of metered language! Versified naturalism, plays in five acts of unbearable alexandrines, cheap philosophy, empty words, astronomy,

geography, excessive details about the impassioned state of the author (considered *a priori* to be the most interesting subject in the world), and multiple reports on his relations with his girlfriend.

They padded out three or four pitiful ideas into three or four million feet lined up neatly in a row, into clichés dedicated particularly to musical collaboration, into a compilation from the dictionary of rhymes. Their poetic pathology provoked labored gasping, unacceptable inversions, monotonous purring, like a seesaw or a metronome, or hiccups strangulating the unfortunate creature whose neck is caught in a garrotte and feet enmeshed in an arrhythmic trap.

Hence an avalanche of mediocre poets who embarrass themselves with superfluties motivated by obligatory metering, who drown in gibberish born of poorly-conquered obstacles, who speak pidgin French. They are reduced to such extremities by the tyranny of rhyme, the suzerainty of the caesura, and the intransigence of the supporting consonant.

Moréas himself wrote in virtuosic alexandrines: “Gargotte meat” and “omnibuses in the Villette,” which led me (during my happy, mischievous youth) to nickname this Parisian Greek “Parthenon-Courcelles.”

And yet as a musician I was trying to translate the rhythmic caprices and occasional disorder of musical impressions into literature. I freely used prosodic resources such as ornamentation and embellishments without paying attention to symmetry. This is how I tried to evoke a “Minuet”:

Flowered silk
Of long corsages
Palpitates with discreet, libertine love;
Gallant baskets,
Where embroidered
Roses
Bud,
Rock themselves to the slow and measured rhythm
Of a minuet.

And near the ear, a living rock,
The precious fan
Flaps its wings like a dying bird;
Because the beloved
(In a satin
Doublet)
Comes cooing
Words so daring,
Really,
That under the gentle snow of hair,
And near smiling lips,
The gracious face becomes as pink
As a rose

In Sèvres porcelain.

Or this “Gigue” with brusque attacks:

Heels
Go
At an infernal pace
On yellow sand.

And yet the body,
With no disarray,
Holds itself upright
As if nabbed at the collar
By a cop.

The dancer exhibits her black stockings
On legs as hard
As wood;
But her face remains silent
And her eye, green
Like the woods,
Betrays no emotion.

Then with a sharp tap,
Like wood,
The dancing couple
Lands straight again
In perfect harmony,
With arms folded along
Their bodies.

And in an attitude as serene
As if one bore
The health
Of the queen.

Or this rousing, voluptuous waltz:

–Oh! Why do your eyes
Call my eyes so longingly.
And why tell me with a wild embrace
That all is foolish.
Beyond the surge of our frantic
Hearts, one toward the other ...

I had the opportunity to try out these novelties on the modern ear in a long series of recitals at the Bodinière theater, where Segond Weber triumphantly recited what Paul Bergon called beautiful music. The public seemed to have discovered a language that conformed to casual speech, raised to a poetic tone having rational rhythms.

A few months later, Catulle Mendès and Gustave Kahn organized matinees of old and modern poetry at the Odeon theater. The marvelous Segond Weber once again presented the new method to the masses, but this time she recited verses by Kahn and René Ghil. The public left the theater saying that the new poetry was doubtlessly beautiful, but not overly clear.

For fifteen years, poets in favor of the free method have multiplied.

All artistic fields and mass movements produce works of value and a collection of pretentious incoherencies, mediocrities, and even farces. Indeed, some gullible fools have taken poetic reform as an authorization for them to write anything, any which way. They have no excuse, no special difficulty to invoke in order to explain away the obscurity with which they are reproached—such as the difficulties encountered by poets chained to rigorous versification, the Parnassian disciples who are constrained by the demands of convention. These obscure, shaggy poets are thus particularly unpardonable; since they are freer from prosodic constraints, they can afford to be more rigorous in matters of concision, word choice, and language in general. Their critics are therefore correct.

But why take these bothersome and nebulous specimens to task, as if they represented poetic reform, which in fact they have nothing to do with? We should not classify art according to schools, but rather by the value of the artist. Anatole France wrote with irony and resignation that “One must put up with some obscurity from the Symbolists or one would never open their books.” Whose books is he talking about?

Speaking of Symbolism—which Mr Kahn would have us believe to be a high literary novelty—I would have sworn that the author of the “Song of Songs” was already a Symbolist, as were his colleagues from the Bible. Perhaps Homer as well and, more recently, Gautier, Baudelaire, Hugo, Heine; in general, all the great poets.

The objective of these first pieces was to react against the versified naturalism of the early 1880s: “Symphonie des Parfums” (*Chronique Parisienne*, 1881), “Les Bijoux faux” (*Chat noir*, quoted in *L'Événement* in 1882 by Georges Duval). Moreover, my desire for new prosodic models was based on literary considerations that resist sacrificing the essential in favor of the ornament, or thought and expression to narrow convention. I repeat: the Parnassian formula is not the unique and exclusive Form.

My concern is one of a stylist who demands the absolute from words in poetry as in prose, who mistrusts approximations, and who knows the dangers of superfluity. In reality, these are disadvantages that inexorably subjugate metricians.

I passionately admire the masters of the seventeenth century, the great Romantics, and a few marvelous Parnassians (each an innovator in his or her own style). This does not mean, however, that successive generations should repeat them endlessly, or that poetic evolution ends with Sully Prudhomme.

In terms of poetry, technical quarrels will always exist. For example, this is how, during Louis XVI's reign, the poet Parry consoled himself with mocking verse against the Parnassians of his era:

The Poet:

It is true that today's fashion has changed:
One rarely thinks and always rhymes.

The Muse:

So be it; in my well-chiseled verses I want
My fun and games to rhyme soundly.
When humming the smallest jingle,
I will attach my bell to the end of each line.
But please do not complain if the meaning
Is sometimes lost for the rhyme.

The Poet:

Never mind, you win!

I freely use rhyme and assonance for the sake of the ear alone, without taking plurals or singulars into account, in verses that proceed in alternating measures. I occasionally employ rich rhymes and alexandrines at the end of a stanza in order to tie it together with elegance, thus avoiding monotony.

I am very serious when I say that obscurity of language is quite unbearable among real poets. It is true that many poets claim to despise clarity, and many critics rightly take them to task for this; but some critics wrongly target free verse, which is not responsible for poetic obscurity.

I was praised when Alphonse Lemerre published my first volume, *Rythmes Pittoresques*. Of course, some expressed reservations about free verse, but I was never accused of writing in an obscure language. Aurélien Scholl wrote in *Le Matin*:

Although I am open to innovation I do not appreciate the obscure, confused, and pretentious prose of a school that has already bitten the dust. Have my eyes suddenly opened, or am I the Polyeucte of a new poetry? I have fallen in love with Marie Krysinska's *Rythmes Pittoresques*. Her rhythm sways and inebriates. It is as if she had translated poetry from a foreign language, dismissing rhyme in favor of meaning (18 October 1890).

Philippe Gille wrote in the *Figaro*:

What a singular pleasure it is to read verses that are not verse, and yet are pure poetry. Marie Krysinska's *Rythmes Pittoresques* is a charming surprise. Delivered from the (precious) obstacles of meter and rhyme, her images and

thoughts take on new dimensions. Krysinska's work creates new music for the ears, one that does not belong to French poetry, and yet holds a penetrating and undeniable charm (26 November 1890).

Félicien Champsaur wrote:

I just reread a volume of prose poems by a young woman, Marie Krysinska, previously published in the illustrious newspaper *Le Chat noir*. In his preface to her volume, the distinguished Mr Rosny rightly says to the original artist, whom he escorts before the literary public: "Your poetic prose has delicate harmony. The euphony of its words, its use of assonance, the modulations of its phrases, and its concentration of graceful and unexpected images testify to the undeniable poetic quality of your work." Marie Krysinska's work is new and personal. Indeed, as Rosny says, "these poems, published in 1882, use a technique widely accepted today" (*L'Événement*, 16 October 1890).

And Cadillac wrote that "The cadenced prose of Marie Krysinska produced effects that would be difficult to obtain with classical versification. These short poems have a harmonious suppleness that the severe prosody of the Parnassians cannot always achieve" (*Le Gaulois*, 2 December 1890).

I beg the reader's indulgence for quoting a passage from an article by Charles Maurras, in which he favors eloquent and judicious line spacing, but deplores the radical separation of prose and verse. Both are, above all, *literary*, different means for a single art. Moreover the word "poetry" is used improperly to designate versification.

Just as the beautiful visions in 'Marie' (*Rythmes Pittoresques*, 62) could have been written in regular lines of prose, in my opinion Flaubert, or even Michelet, could have written their work in free verse or short verses. These masters already knew that all written and spoken prose, just like conventional poetry, has its accents, silences, breaks, unfoldings, meters, vibration, and harmony.

There are incorrect sentences, just as there are incorrect lines of poetry.

Marie Krysinska is very nearly an admirable master of prose. She dedicated these beautiful rhythms, which unfold like a Sibylline dress, to the great Parnassian Raoul Ginestre:

[...]
From the sad land, toward the glorious golden sky,
Rises the old stone cross
With its heroic arms that never tire,
Their wide-open gesture on which rain storms
Placed the offering of moss.

And in the gathering shade
The old enlarged cross
Seems to unite earth and zenith

Like a bridge thrown
Over ethereal waves,
Like a sublime and symbolic bridge, leading
From the sad land to the glorious golden sky.

Did I mention that Kryszynska composed free verse eight years ago, before today's poets ever dreamed of it? She therefore practically invented an art and knew immediately how to embellish and enhance it. We are greatly indebted to her. Today's poets are not as useless as politicians believe. Indeed, of all the laws and all the parliaments, rhythm still brings us the greatest honor and happiness (*L'Observateur français*, 16 November 1890).

And this is what Anatole France wrote about me in his magazine, *Le Temps*: "In these pages she was searching for a middle term between verse and prose; it is quite possible that she found it. But in order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to note that this was not at all what Jean Moréas, Henri de Regnier, and Maurice du Plessys had in mind. In short, the work of this young women poet has nothing to do with free verse."

In 1887, Moréas and Kahn introduced themselves to this master as the first pioneers in the field. Their meeting resulted in France's eloquent support of artistic innovation, which one might expect from an open-minded, original artist such as he. His only error was in the attribution of this initiative, which belongs to me. Whence, perhaps, his rather arbitrary qualification, after his generous approbation.

Another detail: the beginning of free verse (1885-1886) coincided with a stay of two years in the United States. But beforehand, in 1882-83, I had published my first poems in the journals mentioned above, which were well known to both Moréas and Kahn. They were also friends of mine, and they could have mentioned me, if only as a barbaric little John the Baptist who, as a precursor, announced with the publication of her works in 1882 the glorious birth in 1886 of the poets of free verse.

Indeed M. Le Goffic restored this humble position to me in an article entitled "Les conquêtes du vers français" (*Revue Universelle*, 19 October 1901). Here, he is quite hard on free verse, which he calls barbaric and amorphous, attributing the genre to both Kahn and myself. Le Goffic's uncertainty about who initiated free verse will end the day he decides to visit the Bibliothèque nationale, where he can find my first free verse poetry in *Vie moderne* (1882), *Le Chat noir* (1882), *La Libre Revue* (1882), *Chronique parisienne* (1881), among others. Not one of my fellow poets can claim precedence over these dates. It was not before 1885 in *Lutèce* (directed by Léo Trézenic) and especially in *La Vogue*, 1886, directed by Kahn, that a real campaign for the new formula began, and without my name ever being mentioned.

Moreover, Kahn takes it upon himself to resolve the issue in his *Symbolistes et Décadents* (29), where he presents the genesis of his own "invention," and

describes how he talked it up along the Paris river banks to several witnesses, since deceased, including Charles Cros, Paul Verlaine, and Jules Laforgue. He also admits to having seen by chance, while he was in the army in Algeria, the first specimen of free verse published in *La Vie moderne* (1883) and “signed by a person *I knew well*.” I was the “person” in question, and my “Le Hibou” was the only poem in free verse that *La Vie moderne* had ever published. Kahn therefore had me in mind when he implied that his unpublished “invention” came to my attention through some illicit means, or that I had stolen it.

If I had truly been his first disciple, instead of an impulsive and very spontaneous musician who wanted to transpose myself in poetry and who had no ambition of creating a literary school, he would have a hard time explaining why he systematically rejected me from his circle and refused to publish my numerous submissions to his journal.

But this is all that the former director of *La Vogue* had left to claim: that my free verse poems were even worse than the worst he ever published, and consequently risked the future of Symbolism. Kahn wrote of my first poem in free verse that “it was signed by a person who knew me well and who was very willing to adopt my approach during my absence. I FORMED MY OWN SCHOOL.” What a nice African climate and a nice life when he can found a school without having published one single line representative of *his* approach!

Le Goffic writes that “free verse is originally a mere shapeless magma, and by this I mean no compliment. However, I have indicated that the *monstrum horrendum informe ingens* of Marie Krysinska and Gustave Kahn is gradually becoming more civilized and acceptable, and that free verse will soon have arrived.” It escapes me how Le Goffic’s analysis of the form’s progression could have led him to determine, after quoting an *alexandrine* by Moréas, that “the evolution is now complete.”

A single poet’s originality or the unexpected beauty of a poem is enough to illuminate the vast field of artistic possibility with blinding light.

Victor Hugo wrote to Wilhelm Temin that “non-syllabic verse is a little more difficult than conventional versification. You have demonstrated that this so-called violation of the rule has many rules. SUCH ARE THE MYSTERIES OF ART.” This is how a great poet makes fun of theoreticians and literary chroniclers, relying on his genius alone to legitimate literary innovation.

In fact (as Sully Prudhomme finally admits in his *Testament Poétique*), the revolt against French versification will serve to reveal that which is merely conventional and therefore open to reform. This means that every time a talented artist successfully uses the new style, we should recognize the possibility of adopting it.

And yet Sully Prudhomme himself deplores the decadence of contemporary orthodox versifiers: “I want to stir their blood, to push them toward heroic labors of our Art; I want to regenerate their languishing inspiration. We need recruits to fight against the new poets’ undertakings.”

Further on, he consoles himself by remarking that mediocrity of thought also

exists in the enemy camp, as well as “a pretentious attempt to obscure expression.”

It is wrong to judge artists by classifying them in groups, clans, or schools. The value of a work of art lies in the specific mark that an individual author leaves upon it; it is by essence unique. We must therefore judge artists singly. The very fact of belonging to a school suggests a failure, and should be of no interest to judicious critics.

An artist must not play Jesus accompanied by the disciples, but simply feel, in the sincerity of her conscience, the desire to express herself and to touch some new cord. In order to do so, she chooses the method that suits her best, without the least pretension of being followed; indeed, on the contrary, she hopes not to be.

Such was my modest point of view when I was the first to write in free verse; and so it would have remained had this method not had an unimagined and damaging fortune these past fifteen years. Since then, I have had to furnish some technical details, and to separate radically my work on prosody from any incitation to anarchy, with which many have associated it.

Without ever having had the ambition to lead a movement, I energetically refuse the title of disciple and quote, as witness of my independence, the *printed* dates that establish me *before* the formation of the *innovative* group. By systematically omitting my name, this group has deemed me nonexistent and unwelcome – “a myth” as Viellé Griffin has written somewhere.

Let me summarize:

Any method, provided that it brings satisfying results, can be ranked next to those that precede it.

Any prosodic system (alexandrines, alternating rhymes, the rondeau, the ballade, terza rima) was originally the discovery of a single poet who invented it for her own use. From his first sonnet, Petrarch was a kind of revolutionary who dared to truncate two quatrains out of four to make tercets. And so it is with all forms, to which modern conservatives insist on limiting the prosodic field.

The frameworks have varied since the first troubadours, with the Pléiade, Classicism, Romanticism, and the Parnasse. All original poets have contributed their variations, to a greater or lesser degree. Meticulousness and rigor characterize the early periods, and they have long since sterilized and enchained poetic thought. Methods can be transformed indefinitely; only the full value of art matters.

Having freed herself from some of the specific difficulties imposed by a conventional technique, the writer-poet who strives to produce a worthwhile work must conquer all essential difficulties and mistrust all the pitfalls that would hinder the aesthetic life of her work. Freed from the rules of a given method, the poet does not in the least hide from the more mysterious laws of form.

Beyond its general meaning, poetry is above all interesting as literature and can be expressed in the freest of prose: Bossuet, Chateaubriand, and Flaubert are poets. “Versification” is a scholastic word whose definition changes according to place and time. If we followed its strict definition, Salomon, David, Homer, and the Latin poets, who did not rhyme, the Englishmen Shelley and Tennyson, and

our La Fontaine (who did not limit himself to any regular syllabic boundaries), would not be poets.

“Form” and “rhythm” are not synonyms for “symmetry;” “measure” is a complex and vast concept that in music reaches far beyond infinitely various subdivisions. How miraculous is the great Schumann for his unforeseeable rhythms and harmony. Words in song most likely gave rise to the first rhythmic combinations. But the evolution of modern music, with its broad recitatives, its cultivated dissonance, and its search for the unexpected, also encourages the diversification and the expansion of the poetic phrase for striking unions.

The poet, like the artist, has the right to be the arbiter of the methods she employs in her work. But the true artist, even when following her fancy, is imperiously counseled by a tradition of beauty affirmed by the Masters of the Past. The production of a truly beautiful work is an act of artistic faith, which is crowned in museums and libraries by the admiration of the centuries. Later studies find that a work of art conforms to the immutable laws of Equilibrium and Harmony.

To conclude, let us recall again that schools and groups are of little import to an equitable criticism; indeed, an artist has merit only by virtue of her own individuality.

GISELE D'ESTOC

Biographical and Bibliographical Note

Gisele d'Estoc is best known to literary history as the lover of French writer Guy de Maupassant, but she had a career in her own right as a writer and possibly also a sculptor. Establishing her real name and reliable details about her has proved difficult. There are more rumors (for example, that she was painted by Manet) than facts, but according to her death certificate, Paule Courbe, the widow of Parent Desbarres, born in Nancy, died in Nice at the age of 35 on May 8, 1894.

Gisèle d'Estoc's *The Psychology of Joan of Arc* was conceived as a work in three parts: The Idea, The Action, and The Passion. Only one instalment of this work--destined, to judge from the details of its publication, for collectors--seems to have actually appeared (the first instalment of "The Idea"). Published by J. Strauss, Libraire-Editeur, 5, rue du Croissant, Paris, it is dated April 15, 1891 and cost 50 centimes. The only extant copy of this pamphlet is in the Bibliothèque Nationale and is now "hors d'usage," or out of circulation, so this translation is offered in part as a way of making this work more widely available. Also, given how little is known about Gisèle d'Estoc and her work, I am including the information about her other publications that appears on the cover of the pamphlet. To my knowledge, none of the publications listed as forthcoming ever appeared, but the announcements give some insight into d'Estoc's literary plans as of April 1891.

By the same author:

Already published:

Black on White 1 booklet

The Caudine Review 3 issues

Unhealthy Glory 1 volume

In press:

Vengeance of the Heart 1 volume

Goes on sale June 1, 1891

Coming soon:

Human Sorrows (short stories) 2 volumes

The Literary Beggars (a novel of Parisian morals) 1 volume

In preparation:

Killer Love (contemporary novel) 1 volume

The Psychology of Joan of Arc

This work will appear on the 15th of each month in deluxe instalments of 16 super-royal pages [57.5 X 86] in-8°, on buff paper with margins, with floral ornaments and large Elzevier type. Price: fifty centimes each. The 1st part, "The Idea," shall comprise 8 installments from April 15 1891 to November 15.

The 2nd part, "The Action," shall comprise 5 instalments from December 15 1891 to April 15, 1892.

The 3rd part, "The Passion," shall comprise 5 instalments from May 15, 1892 to September 15, plus, the same day, a free supplement containing end papers and titles for binding, a table of contents, and a table of illustrations for the engravings.

Each instalment shall contain a portrait or reproduction.

Terms of subscription:

With the publication of each of the three parts, the instalments shall no longer be sold separately and their price, when collected together, shall be raised from 0.50 centimes to one franc each. Our buyers therefore are advised to subscribe immediately, through any Parisian or departmental bookstore or directly from M. J. Strauss, 5, rue du Croissant, Paris.

The Psychology of Joan of Arc

Translated by Melanie Hawthorne

Dedication

Madame Sarah Bernhardt
Messieurs Charles Gounod
Jules Barbier
Joseph Fabre
Siméon Luce
Emmanuel Frémiet
Louis Carrier-Belleuse

To all the contemporary artists who have been able to make the figure of Joan of Arc seem alive, human, and thought-provoking, I dedicate this book.

I have tried to create, in turn, in the form of an intuitive monograph, what they have so valiantly accomplished in the Theater, in Music, Poetry, Drama, History, Sculpture, Painting.

G. d'Estoc

Foreword

I began this book thinking to write a simple chronicle. The subject took hold of

me, enveloped and tyrannised me. It possessed me so completely that I lived for a full six months surrounded by the fifteenth century, heart to heart with Joan. I spent my days at the Library; I wrote at night and couldn't get my information fast enough. They were good, excellent hours... Two or three novels languished on my work table; I held them as in disdain... Oh! this human drama of heroic suffering lived by a woman, how it makes all fictions and even analyses of the agitations of our modern life pale!

For a long time I thought that everything had been said about Joan of Arc. Mistake. Enough has not been said about what she suffered in the depths of her abnormal and sublime being... I have dared to take on this task. I have dared to pity the eternal misfortune of a woman born to virile work. I have shown her in the grip of cruelty, stupidity, and human cowardice.

Having succeeded only incompletely, no doubt, in raising this trembling, pained and grandiose shadow from the distant past, I hereby ask my heroine that much may be pardoned me for much have I loved her.

G. d'E.

Preface

The Redeemers

“I shall be betrayed!...”

They come to us, across five centuries, these words of a martyr, so poignant in their plaintive gentleness and so sad. They come to our soul like the distant echo of a soul in distress...

You, perhaps you like Joan for her courage, her fervent thoughts, her eloquent words, her valorous actions? As for me, I have loved her for that dolorous sentence:

“I shall be betrayed!...”

Oh! how, beneath those words, I feel the vibrations of unspeakable anguish, profound melancholy, disappointed resignation... Oh! that prescience of pitiless destiny, that vision of human ugliness, that doubt in justice on earth... and in heaven!

And that passing abandonment of the whole being who moans beneath the spell of fatality, beneath the tyranny of predestination, beneath the terrifying gift of her heroic femininity...

“My cottage, my reeds, my sweet native country, my peaceful peasant life that would not have made me hated by men and succumb to my task...”

Yes, she understood, in one cruel minute of clarity, poor girl, that all redeemers of crowds must fall under the hatred of the powerful, that all apostles must be crucified, that all saviours must be martyrs.

Great, austere souls tormented by love of humanity; hearts that bleed for everyone's misery; chosen creatures who pass on earth in the great solitude of a dream of the Intangible; sons and daughters of men so admirable that they say child of or inspired by God!... yes, the multitude loves you, blesses you, acclaims

you, glorifies you.

So, misfortune be upon you! The Sanhedrin meets... The great of the day, the holders of authority, the usurpers of the public good are frightened and consult one another... Hideous counsel, stirring of mud, infamous plots, exultation of hatreds, conspiracies of unworthy criminals! And they are betrayed, sold, tortured, condemned, delivered, those benefactors of the people.

But the crowd? The crowd, exempt from proud or ambitious passions, the crowd that has only instinct and no interest in losing those it loves, it will save them?

No. Terrified, silent, cowardly, puerile, it runs to their execution.

Watch them die, ungrateful crowd! Take comfort in their agony. Ah! no doubt, the putting to death of criminals was meant to make you doubt--supreme iniquity!--that they were heroes. And perhaps you do doubt it! But if you can understand the last look they cast to you, o crowd! you will learn that these chosen ones die with one torment alone: the thought that you are not worth what they have suffered for you.

G. d'Estoc

The Psychology of Joan of Arc

Part One: The Idea

Chapter 1

The atmosphere of a century--The seal of a soul--The child Joan--A Sunday at Domremy.

The epic of Joan of Arc is a page of history both luminous and stained with mud... In a halo of pure mystical light, the image arises and, from a virgin warrior, is transformed into a virgin martyr. Around her, in a dark swirl, slide the pale or hideous faces of cowardice and treason.

It was a century both sad and low. After the religious exaltation that had produced the crusades, the spirit of the Middle Ages seemed to have collapsed, to have fallen into superstition.

Yet one soul had preserved that pure and intransigent faith of earlier ages. Faith! that is, the only conception of an ideal that was available to elite natures in those times of intellectual darkness.

She had managed to preserve it; she did not cause it to be reborn...

Nothing was grand enough, nothing was noble enough to echo the grand and noble sentiments of Joan. What joy was given to her other than the knowledge of fulfilling her mission and, in her own admirable words, "To do that for which she was born"? The confidence of soldiers, the friendship of a few feudal lords, the gratitude of the people of Orleans, the happiness of seeing the king crowned, and that is all. Her sacrifice begins when she is a child, already solemn, thoughtful, with a vague apprehension, an unconscious anxiety about the things unfolding, the destinies that await her. She does not feel that gentle common link

that unites one childhood with others; she loves the other girls her age because she is good and tender, but she feels *different* and does not know why...

On Sundays, after vespers, the girls of Domremy join hands and, laughing joyously, they take the gentle slope up the hill to the crown of hoary woods.¹

“Joan! Joan! Aren’t you coming?” Joan comes. Why leave her companions? They are a little rowdy, these peasants, a little thick, simple, preoccupied by childish and rustic matters; but Joan has grown up with them, has no desire to spoil their happiness and no reason not to follow them. And yet she would prefer to be alone in order to pray, to contemplate God, heaven, the saints...

So it is that she struggles already with a natural taste for isolation, and imperious tendency that she is burdened with and that she guesses already will have dire consequences.

Halfway up the hill, the children stop near a spring bubbling up in the grass surrounded by gooseberry bushes. A little higher up is the old beech tree called “Beautiful May,” the “faerie ladies” tree²; the children dance around it in a circle, jerking and jumping as they sing hymns, the only songs they know.

Joan tries to join in with their games, but right there, just a little higher up, she is drawn to the hoary wood, dark and bosky with its verdant twisted oaks. She moves away from her companions, reaches the top, and as she follows the clearing in the forest, she harvests leaves and ivy as she goes, braiding them into garlands...

Oh! the gentle peacefulness of the vast countryside! Oh! the tranquil and harmonious beauty of the great plain that rolls between the spreading curves of the distant hills!

The Meuse with its dark opaque waters flows along its bed bordered by low reeds whose spear-headed leaves all point south.

Joan loves these familiar horizons, this corner of the earth where she was born, knowing nothing beyond it.³ And yet she knows there are other regions

1 These Sunday walks after services have always formed part of village life. In these years of Joan’s childhood there was also an annual feast (on Laetare Sunday) that brought together the youth of the region at a place called “The Fountain and the Beeches.” The Bourlemont family, so patriarchal in its habits, mixed with the peasants. People brought food, people danced on the grass. This feast day no doubt corresponded to the traditional rejoicing in the middle of Lent.

2 A local legend is associated with this tree. Beautiful ladies would come at night and walk and dance around the beech with handsome knights. Joan of Arc’s godmother claimed to have seen them. But the “faerie ladies” had committed a sin and “could no longer” return to the beech and sometimes at night one could hear them moaning and crying... One wonders if an amorous adventure whose heroine might have been a chatelaine of the region is not at the root of this legend.

3 What remains of the Domremy of Joan of Arc’s time? Almost nothing. The cottage and church have been rebuilt, the wooden bridge over the Meuse no longer exists, the road has been rerouted, the general appearance of the village has completely changed thanks to new construction; nothing remains, except for the general outlines of the countryside. Surely Joan saw with her own eyes this plain and these hills. I have searched and searched for the influence this much contemplated countryside might have had on the soul of Joan of Arc. It is vast, but well-defined, devoured by a lig sky, clearly limited by its farthest horizons; the

where armed men cause great harm... Oh! poor countryside! These cruel armed men who do not love God and who are not beloved of God must be chased away... Yes! they must be chased away...

And solemnly the child thinks about these things of which she yet understands so little.

The clear voices of her young friends, still singing and dancing their rounds, reach her ear. Then she hears fresh laughter and voices:

“Joan, Joan, where are you?”

Joan tears herself away from her thoughts and heads back toward her friends with the garlands that are hung on the lower branches of the big beech. Later, as her piety grows, she will think it better to hang them in the chapel.

But evening is approaching. The chattering little group, in one large gracious tumult, sets off back to the village which can be seen at the bottom of the valley, a heap of little cottages placed on the edge of the water and pulled tight around the church with the low bell tower.

Next to the noisy girls, Joan walks in silence, contemplative, watching the nightfall on the countryside and, very attentively, watching to catch sight of the first star that will come on in the sky.

Chapter 2

A crime against banality--France at the beginning of the 15th century--The robber-barons

When, with his coarse workman's hands, Jacques d'Arc delicately lifted the light bundle that was a little new-born creature and, joyously, he cried out:

“It's a girl!”

He might well have added:

“It's the salvation of France!...”

Isabelle Romée, with her pale smile, might have thought:

“She will die from not being enough of a girl...”

The whole destiny of Joan of Arc is there. A woman in her feelings, virile in thought, she is more than a woman and more than a man, she is the ideal androgyne, using, in order to create a strong work, all the feminine qualities: intuition, tenderness, delicacy, purity, goodness.

We do not know the heights that may be reached in the future by whoever is called upon to replace the religious ascetic; we do not know if there will be a place for such a person in our future societies; but, hitherto, we see them irredeemably condemned. In the 15th century, there was only one definition to blight them and... execute them: a witch. Today we are more ingenious...

It was in 1412, in a village situated on the farthest edges of Champagne, Lorraine and Barrois, that this child was born, the redeemer of a people, come to give the world a sight that would mark history with an immutable trait: the

earth forms a solid material dominated by gray, cloudy and serene immensity. In such a way was the positive idea of action in Joan's mind dominated by a constant, pure and exalted mysticism. The analogy seems plausible to me, but I do not pretend that it is rigorous. I am simply providing my readers with the results of my meditations for what they are worth.

triumph of emotional faith--religious feeling would be the first method of cleansing humanity, the feeling of justice would be the second. Joan arrived at the moment when the spiritual world was conquered by the material world, brute force, and crude instincts. She believed, she loved... she loved France so much that France had no choice but to consent to live again!

There has never been a more sombre time. This phase is unique in our history.

The glorious destinies of the nation seemed to undergo one of those eclipses in which the autonomy of the people seems to disappear. The 15th century rose under a lifeless dawn and the sad omens came to pass:

The rivalry between houses allied with the Crown bringing war; the assassination of a prince of the blood; the English landing in Normandy intent, this time, on the conquest of France as before the Normans has resolved to conquer England; the disaster of Agincourt; a mad king; a foreign queen selling the kingdom to strangers, dispossessing her son; Cravant; Verneuil; the last effort of royalty admitting defeat; Charles VII retreating toward the Loire, like a lost fugitive, hiding out in Chinon, timid, confused, and ridiculous, with his politicking courtiers who would see France fall without a thought if it increased their fortune.

And, while these disasters accumulate; while the Burgundians and the Armagnacs are locked in struggle, setting off revolution in Paris, avenging one murder with another; while the English roll out their victories and gain the heart of France; the grand feudal leaders of the kingdom make war among themselves; local struggles break out everywhere, with a violent, brazen, cynical, and covetous character.

In the east, thanks to its proximity to bellicose Lorraine, brigandage was a permanent feature and the lords became highway robbers.

In 1414, some bishops returning from the Council of Constance with an escort of eighty persons were on their way to Paris, on a mission to the king. At the crossing of the Meuse, between Foug and Void, they are attacked by armed men led by Charlot de Deuilly, marshall of Lorraine, Jean de Chauffour, and the two de la Tour brothers, all four in the pay of Jean-sans-Peur. Two bishops are taken prisoner, a priest is killed, the caravan is robbed. Why this aggression? No reason; for the pleasure of preventing the bishops from taking their message to the king, that poor Charles VI, then in the control of the Armagnacs.

In retaliation, the diocese of Toul which depends on the marsh of Lorraine is placed under an interdict; the fortress of Sancy near Briey belonging to Henri de la Tour is besieged and razed.

At the end of 1415, Charles II, duke of Lorraine, who had taken part in the battle of Agincourt, returned to his duchy with his troops. During the journey from Provins to Troyes, the men at arms in his retinue encounter a convoy of horses; they simply capture it, and seize a cartload of booty.

Justifying the legendary asperity of their character, the men at arms from Lorraine along with the Bretons were reputed to be the biggest pillagers in the world and the Lorrain nobility seemed to make these expeditions and armed thefts

their favourite pastime. Let us not forget however that they took part in some of the great battles against the English such as Agincourt and that although they were not French they let themselves be killed for France.

On the Meuse, it is the squire of Commercy, Robert de Saarbruck, who has some run-ins with the brothers Didier and Durand de Saint-Dié. Whence a bloody fight at Maxey-sur-Meuse, a village situated opposite Domremy. The squire's men have the advantage and take thirty-three prisoners.¹ To buy their freedom, these men must swear henceforth to be the liegemen of the squire and to pay a ransom.

Once this struggle is over, it is Colard de Foug, owner of the fiefs along the Meuse, who opens hostilities against the bishop of Toul. Colard had imprisoned a priest of the diocese. The bishop places the lord under an interdict and the two potentates, the ecclesiastical and the secular, come to blows. Colard is killed in the struggle. The bishop besieges and razes the castles of his enemy's widow and son, ravages their domains and confiscates their goods.

In 1421, the duke of Burgundy Philippe-le-Bon sends a deputation to Verdun to the cardinal of Bar to invite him to the wedding of Catherine of France with Henry V (that shameful stipulation of the Treaty of Troyes). It was forcing the poor old cardinal to declare himself for or against the English government. The reply of Louis-de-Bar is unknown, but on the way back, the deputation entrusted to Gautier de Baufremont, lord of Ruppes, fell into an ambush laid by two partisans of the dauphin, Robert de Baudricourt and Robert de Saarbruck. The lord of Ruppes is taken prisoner. Upon hearing this news, the outraged duke of Burgundy declares war on the poor cardinal. The latter, decidedly overpowered, gives way and transfers his duchy to his nephew René d'Anjou, a member of the Valois family who marries Isabelle, the inheritor of the duchy of Lorraine.²

The duchies of Bar and Lorraine were thus united in resistance to the Anglo-Burgundians. A vain resistance, Barrois being ravaged and the castle of Vaucouleurs being subject to incessant incursions. This time it really is war. Bedford has decided on a reduction in the defenders of the Meuse. The fights, the quarrels among lords had thus far jolted this region of the east without laying waste to it or covering it in ruins. The appearance of the Anglo-Burgundians

1 Among them are Thiesselin de Neufchâteau, the husband of Jeannette, one of Joan of Arc's four godmothers. The bloody conflict at Maxey, which is separated from Domremy only by the Meuse and a meadow, must have been an important event for these three villages so close together: Maxey, Greux, Domremy. Joan was then seven years old (1419). Note nevertheless that this is a struggle between lords, for private interests. The Anglo-Burgundians do not appear in the region until later, the following year.

2 René d'Anjou, who later became "good king René," did not take immediate possession of the duchy of Bar. Its running was entrusted to his father-in-law Charles II, duke of Lorraine, and Jean de Salm was named governor of Barrois. This alliance of the houses of Anjou and Lorraine might have been profitable to the cause of Charles VII, but the dauphin was unlucky and soon, under the pressure of circumstances, first the duke of Lorraine, then René his son-in-law, submitted themselves to Henry V.

brought anarchic war. Instead of uniting against the common enemy, the invader, the partisans of the dauphin, divided among themselves, use against each other according to the needs of their cause bands of Anglo-Burgundians and end up rallying to the party of the regent.

The shame of France did not weigh upon them...

It was a woman who felt this shame and said clearly, opinionatedly:

“The English have to be thrown out of France.”

And, since no one else was doing it, she did it.

Chapter 3

Adolescence--A day with Joan in Domremy--Troubles heralding ecstasies

Joan is growing up. Amid thoughtful brows, worrying reticences, dark silences, hovering anxiety, her solemnity grows. The wide eyes of this child, already ardent, pose questions and, in undecided divination, turn heavenward, whence comes help when men can no longer do anything.

In the family home, beside her mother, she very piously takes part in the communal work. Submissive, gentle, hardworking, she accepts every task. Her great piety would demand frequent prayers, prolonged reverie, vague meditation, but she wants above all to fulfil her obligations and she finds it right to share, to alleviate the work of her family.

This feeling of justice--an indication of an elite nature--we shall see it in all her actions; it will give her this sharp clarity in what is right that she will always apply, even on her standard: “It has been painful, it must be honourable.”

While the men are busy labouring in the fields and often her mother accompanies them, Joan, her thoughts always on higher matters, gives herself to the ordinary cares of the household with that humble and gentle serenity particular to monastics who busy themselves with earthly things while dreaming of heavenly ones.

Sometimes, however, her task finished, she runs to the back of the cottage, to the dark nook that serves as her bedroom and there, kneeling before the narrow window, her face in the light, turned toward the church, she prays...

Our Bonus:

The Triumphal Entry of Joan of Arc into Rheims

by M. Van Driesten

Artistic reproduction in chromotypographic engraving with a value of 10 francs,

Printed by the Goupil establishment and measuring 84 cm. by 64.

This painting by M. Van Driesten, of which we offer a reproduction, is a work of great originality; the artist, who is an eminent miniaturist, was inspired in his composition by illuminated parchments and miniatures of the 15th and 16th

centuries having to do with Joan of Arc. Thus the exactness of the costumes, the variety and richness of the colours, joined to the harmony of the whole, make this painting a work of the first order.

Appreciation

By Monsignor Pagis

Bishop of Verdun

Of our "Entry of Joan of Arc into Rheims"

We have been struck by this painting in which the perfection of the details is in such harmony with the majestic ordering of the whole. M. Van Driesten has made a thorough study of the beautiful and rich miniatures of the 15th century; similarly he possesses the story of Joan of Arc, and he reproduces with a captivating truth one of the most captivating scenes in the life of the heroine.

We have one desire to express to M. Van Driesten: it is that in a series of paintings similar to his first work he present us with the whole life of Joan of Arc. The work would be laborious and long, but we believe that the French public, so sympathetic to Joan, would give the most sympathetic welcome to such a labour.

Jean-Pierre

Bishop of Verdun

Missed Marriage (A Fanciful Story)

Translated by Melanie Hawthorne

To Albert Faurie

I

I got up silently at daybreak and went to saddle Achilles.

Achilles was not, as you might imagine, dear reader, a fiery charger; on the contrary he was a very peaceful and placid donkey; indeed, it was only as an irony that we had given him the name of the turbulent and illustrious warrior who had moreover unleashed no few misfortunes upon his country...

We used Achilles to carry our baggage and provisions when we went to paint in the countryside. He moved along lazily, with his slow, monotonous, mechanical gait, and he would let you kill him before you got him to hurry. In addition, he had the disadvantage of being at odds with Molossus, our dog. As soon as Molossus saw Achilles, he would start growling and stand in front of him with a threatening air. Then Achilles would flare his nostrils and show all his teeth with a ferocious air. Seeing which, the dog would start to howl. Lord, how those animals gave us entertainment!

So, when we wanted peace and quiet and to get on with an expedition, each of us loaded his baggage on his back, and we left Achilles in the stable. That is not what we had purchased him for, however.

But this time there were several of us; we planned an open air picnic and Achilles became indispensable.

The meeting point was the "Big Oak." Each one of us arrived in a strange outfit, weighed down by various instruments: a cup-and-ball, a coffee pot, a hammock, a tin of sardines, a penny whistle, a siphon of seltzer water, etc.... We piled everything up on the back of Achilles, who swayed and set off at his tortoise pace. Acting on the remains of old assumptions, I thumped him on the back; he shook his long ears but didn't move any faster. We ended up going on ahead, leaving the donkey to the care of an amateur who had come out of curiosity to "watch the painting." That's why we gave him our donkey to look after.

Ah! what a beautiful thing it is, a July morning in the beautiful countryside of Lorraine! Here the sun, in these most ardent days, does not burn: it vivifies. The cool valleys, the shady woods, the intensely green prairies seem to bathe in delight in the warm light, and all around one feels a sort of great work of fecundation going on mysteriously; you can feel life melding and fermenting everywhere. A thousand indefinable sounds mix and mingle; the sound of grass growing, of leaves breathing, of insects buzzing, birds calling to each other from the branches and down there, in a fold of the valley, the thin carillon of a little bell coming and going in its pointed belfry that seems to say: "It's the day of rest; but

don't forget the house of the good Lord.”

Indeed, it was a Sunday and the bell was ringing for the first mass.

Each one of us set up in his own way and, as they say in the studios, we knocked off a chunk of work.

Right at noon the sound of a horn made us prick up our ears!... Then, spurred on by hunger, we ran for lunch. The chosen spot was halfway up the hill in a clearing of the woods. On a clean white cloth, spread out on the ground, the victuals were arranged in the most pleasing manner; golden chickens rested on brown glaze, sausages were piled up, the enormous pâté had a venerable air, and the bottles, lying in the little stream that rose up a few feet away, presented their necks drawn up in ranks. Ah, a good lunch!

We drank and ate prodigiously... Then, drunk on the air, the laughter, and also a little wine, we stretched out on our backs, a cigar on our lips, and fell asleep without delay.

The sun was already high when I woke up. It took me several moments to gather my wits. I rubbed my eyes... Below me, behind a field of wheat, I caught sight of a dozen yellow tousled heads. They were little village children who were looking at us with smug curiosity. I said “psst” and they took off like a flock of sparrows. I lay back down, having lit a cigarette that I smoked with my eyes wide open. Not five minutes later the little urchins came back, one by one, each one coming a little closer than the last, drawn by the remains of the feast. I handed out a part of it to them, but it was impossible to get a word out of them. They snatched up what I offered with savage gestures, and while devouring the lot, they jostled each other, with a stupid look and sideways glances. Finally, the biggest one seemed to take courage and, with much twisting, he spoke these words, with the purest Lorraine accent:

“What you showing?”

“Eh? What's that?”

“What you showing?”

A flash of understanding went through my mind... I woke my companions.

“My friends, this child wants to know what we are showing. No doubt he takes us for fairground folk. What if, in fact, we showed them something?... How would you like to go down to Whatnotville and put on a show in the village square?”

“Yes, yes, that's it! But what shall we show them?”

“Our talents. Each one of us has some. You, Tancred, you can be a clown; you know how to walk on your hands; I remember a party one evening, at the studio...”

“Fine, I'll be the clown.”

“Me, I'll play the whistle and I'll present Achilles as the talking donkey. Then too, we can offer wrestling matches.”

“That's it. Let's draw up a program.”

We took a brand new canvas on which we wrote with a brush, in black and vermilion:

G-R-AND spectacle:

1. Harlay the clown goes through his paces.
2. The talking donkey.
3. Wrestling matches.
4. The Princess of Trebizonde, or The Problems of Power. Grand pantomime.

“Monsieur Doublemar, in your capacity as city counsellor you are used to speaking to the authorities, so do us the favour of going to notify the mayor that a travelling troupe would like to give a show in Whatnotville.

The amateur took himself off. They are so valuable to artists, amateurs are!

An hour later, we were in the village square, surrounded by a circular hedge of peasants in their Sunday best.

I took the floor:

“Ladies and gentlemen,

“We ask for your utmost indulgence for the spectacle we are about to present to you. Our props, our costumes, our scenery are all unfortunately being held as security by a pitiless innkeeper ignorant of the laws of hospitality, a tradition, alas, that disappears with each day that passes. Our show will have this special feature, ladies and gentlemen, that we shall charm and entertain you with the help only of our talent.

“Here first is the famous Harlay, an American gentleman. By birth he was destined to succeed his father in the manufacture of cork soles. An irresistible vocation led him to an artistic career, and the laws of equilibrium have no secrets from him. Clown, begin your drill.”

With unflappable seriousness, Tancred stood in the middle of the circle of spectators and began to play with the cup-and-ball with his left hand while, with his right, he juggled eggs. Not once did the ball land in the cup and it was the same egg he kept throwing in the air; but it was all done with such a vertiginous and ... serious air that everyone was dazzled. During this time, I put my whistle to my lips and sounded out in shrill little notes the only melody I could ever manage on that instrument: The bird is fl-y-ing, over there...

Then suddenly, Tancred abandoned his cup-and-ball and his eggs; throwing himself down on his stomach he carried out a few somersaults that he had been working on in the gym and that had become his specialty; he called it the torpedo. Then falling back gracefully onto his hands, with his feet in the air, he set himself to walk right around the spectators in this abnormal position. His face red, his neck congested, his body swaying like a disabled mast, he advanced slowly and carefully; while, to give him courage, I blew furiously into my wooden tube, hurrying through the bars, massacring that poor Creole song so that finally it got on your nerves like the grating of a saw.

At the end of his promenade, Tancred threw himself down on his feet, bowed graciously and retired. It was my turn. I had reserved for myself the thankless task of transforming Achilles into a talking donkey. So I led him to the middle of the precinct and I said: take a bow. He did not budge, naturally. I ignored this omission and pretended to take the thing as a done deed.

“Gentlemen,” I said. “Our disdain for the donkey is unjustified. We like to imagine that this ill-favoured animal cannot be educated. Achille is going to show you the opposite and thereby rehabilitate in your eyes, I hope, the whole bunch.

“Achilles, show me please the most generous man in this group.”

I impressed upon the animal a slight rotating movement; He set off at a walk, at his tranquil pace, and went several times around the track without stopping.

“Well? You can’t find anyone? Look again... Generous, you understand? Don’t confuse it with *grouchy*... nor vain, nor fearful...”

I went through the routine again. The peasants peered at Achilles’s movements as he continued his rounds.

“There’s nothing more I can say, gentlemen, he finds none. Please excuse his frankness... So, miserable donkey! Show us the most *amorous* person in this gathering.”

I pushed the donkey, and as he was about to pass a buxom girl with red cheeks that stuck out like ripe apples, I stopped him by sticking my foot on his hoof. Ah, it wasn’t hard to see that that lass was in love with someone.

Amusement exploded in the assembled company. Men laughed, their fat unbuttoned bellies shaking, women showed their broken teeth with no attempt to hide them and whispered:

“It’s Melie, who’s in love with old Sylvain.”

The big girl, made uncomfortable, threw angry looks at the animal. I pushed him a bit and using the same method made him stop in front of another young gal, no less buxom than the first.

“It seems, ladies and gentlemen, that there are several amorous persons in the company.

The gaiety redoubled:

“Ah! Françoise, Justin’s special friend.”

The donkey set off again. Several girls fled.

“Enough!” I said. “We didn’t ask you this much. You’ll end up compromising the entire village, you rascal.”

I retired with my donkey amidst applause.

Then came the wrestling matches, in which we all excelled what’s more. Then an extravagant pantomime, absolutely incomprehensible, which is how all pantomimes should be and which constitutes their charm. During an intermission, one of us passed round the hat. It produced twenty-three sous, plus four trouser buttons.

I solemnly approached the mayor.

“Mister Mayor,

“In recognition of the welcome we have received at Whatnotville, we beg you to accept our receipts in their entirety for you to add to the community chest. The council shall decide what use shall be made of them; that is, if you have the good fortune to have a city council that concerns itself with regional matters and not with politics.” The astounded mayor took the twenty-three sous, including the four trouser buttons, and thanked us.

After this fine exploit, we went joyously to supper at the inn. At ten in the evening, we thought about going home. We went through the woods. There was a superb light from the moon; nothing moved. The tops of the trees stood out in sharp, black silhouette against the luminous sky like scenery cutouts. Below, shadowy masses were streaked with white stripes of soft light; all of which gave rise to infinitely profound ideas. Ah, such a beautiful night! And we sang at the top of our voices, waking up the animals tucked away in the forest. The loud bass voice of Tancred projected into the sleeping countryside the song of "The bird is fl-y-ing, over there, over there..." while my little wood instrument accompanied him with shrill notes.

It was a fine day of healthy and open gaiety, such as one has few of in one's memories.

II.

One morning the following winter, in Paris, I was still dozing delightfully, though remotely bothered by remorse at my laziness, when the doorbell rang. Jean went to open it and my friend Tancred came unceremoniously into my room.

"Is that you? Hello," I said, without bestirring myself.

"Hello."

"What brings you here?"

"I'm getting married."

With a single jump I was sitting up.

"Wretch!"

"Yes, I know... Spare me the usual jokes. It's a superb match, the girl is pretty, my mother wants it."

"Get married, old chap, get married," I said lying back down. And I grumbled to myself: "Another one off to sea!..."

"Everything is settled; except for an unofficial interview this evening. I'm counting on you to go with me."

"To put a good face on?"

"Yes."

"Fine, I'll pick you up at nine."

A nine I was ready for battle and at nine thirty we made our entrance into the salons of Madame X...

Alas it was a musical evening for Lent. There was a trio. A gentleman with long blond hair revealing a huge forehead, stooping shoulders, and bony hands was seated at the piano, his legs encumbered by his instrument; from time to time he assumed ecstatic poses for no apparent reason. Another gentleman, fat with a brushy grey moustache and a hard and serious face, held a cello between his knees and waved about the two ugly sleeves of his suit, elbows out, with an effort that was painful to watch. The third, younger, brown-haired and nervous, played the violin with the jerky movements of a gypsy, and all three played and played... like it was a godsend. There were *fortes* where they made a lot of noise; then *pianos* where you could hardly hear anything; there were *adagios* where they seemed to take pleasure in dragging out the same note for five minutes, then *allegrettos* at a

hellish pace. They stopped; they mopped their brows and ... continued!... How long would this go on? An eternity, in my opinion; three quarters of an hour, for sure. Finally, the musicians stood up and acknowledged the applause of the audience with modest little bows.

“She’s going to sing,” Tancred told me in a low voice.

The man with the long hair reappeared and sat this time at the piano. A beautiful brunette with a smooth complexion and black eyes--a delicate cameo-like face--came unselfconsciously and stood next to the accompanist. The latter attacked the introduction with a sure and highly-strung hand. It began with a syncopated bar. The beautiful young woman opened her charming mouth and with a fresh and supple voice intoned... the song about “The bird is fl-y-ing, over there, over there...”

Tancred and I shuddered... Our eyes met and a smile passed across our lips. A happy smile, I suppose, that meant “Do you remember that day of gay freedom and joyful madness that we spent together last summer?...” But suddenly, the smile disappeared from our lips and we were silent: Across from us, Tancred’s future mother-in-law was watching us severely, her head stiff with a hard look... Oh that look! We saw there a condemnation that made one think... The evening came to an end, still accompanied by music, alas! Tancred seemed worried. When he went to take his leave of Madame X she said a little dryly:

“You don’t like music, Monsieur?”

“Excuse me, Madame, very much.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize...”

They said goodbye very formally.

A week later I ran into my friend on the boulevard:

“So, your marriage?”

“Broken off!”

“Why?”

“Some pretext; but I think the mother-in-law couldn’t forgive us our smile. What on earth could she have seen in it? Since she didn’t mention it, I wasn’t able to explain to her.”

“Were you in love with the girl?”

“Not yet.”

“Well take comfort; you have been spared a mother-in-law who had nothing worth saying.”

And that’s how my friend Tancred missed a superb marriage, because he walked on his hands to the sound of “The bird is fl-y-ing” in a little lost corner of Lorraine.