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## To The Reader

THIS BOOK is the child of haste. It should be taken for what it is: an occasional work, improvised from start to finish. Though it was intended for a highly critical audience—the medical profession—it had to be done quickly, thus taking on all that hurried work involves in the way of risks, rashness, and impurities. When the mind is pressed for time, that outer compulsion prevents it from applying those within. Its own ideal standards are put aside: it relaxes its rigor, finds the quickest way out, by way of its least resistances, and relies for results on its own chance responses.

But this is just what happens in familiar talk. Between people who know each other well enough to avoid any misunderstanding as to how much is serious, how much not so serious, in what they say, everything comes down to a light-hearted game of give and take. Like the painted kings on playing cards, the most solemn subjects can be tossed on the board, along with any and every trifle the world and the moment happen to offer. . . .

The same applies in this instance. What is offered for the reader's consideration is not the "ideas" which our two men by the sea happen to be exchanging, but the exchange in itself: the "ideas" are simply the pieces in a game where rapidity is the essential thing. Our two men are wasting their time at a

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great rate: what they say amounts only to the elementary forms of what they could say, and such terms as “Implex” and “Omnivalence” are not to be taken for more than a kind of harmless amusement. True, most of the terms actually current in Psychology are hardly more “convenient” or precise than these.

As to the form, since the Author was hard pressed (as already pointed out) and had to make quick work of it, he decided to match the disarray of a mind under pressure with the random to-and-fro, the natural disorder of a free and easy conversation; so he had to “write as one talks”—good advice perhaps, in the days when people knew how to talk.

*En roscas de cristal serpiente breve.*

DON LUIS DE GÓNGORA

I WAS prey to real torments: certain very acute, very active preoccupations were destroying the rest of my world and my mind. Any distraction that might occur simply threw me back the more desperately into my plight. Added to this was the bitterness and humiliation of being bested by things of the mind—things, after all, that are made for oblivion. The kind of disturbance that has a thought for its apparent cause keeps that thought in being, and hence renews, prolongs, and reinforces itself. More than that: it *perfects* itself in a way: grows ever more subtle, cunning, powerful, resourceful, and impregnable. A thought that can torture a man escapes the conditions of thought: it becomes *another*, a parasite.

However much I tried to regain my mental equanimity, and reduce what were only ideas to the state of ideas pure and simple, it meant only an instant of effort followed by deeper anguish. It was useless reminding myself that worry, anger, *this enormous weight on the chest*, *this grappled feeling round the heart*, were no justifiable consequences of a few mental images. “Someone else,” I would tell myself, “if he could see them in my mind, would remain quite unmoved. . . .” Or, “In three years’ time,” I would say, “these very phantoms will have lost all their power. . . .” And I would feel an insane

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longing to achieve mentally in a few moments what it would take two or three years to do. But how can we manufacture time?

And how destroy the *absurd*—the very thing we indulge and encourage when we delight in it?

I cannot say what saved me from desperate remedies. . . . I kept to the simplest: work and movement. Violently, capriciously, I treated my body and mind like a tyrant. I set them difficult tasks: on a small scale I did what humanity does by its researches; digging deeper so as not to see. But I would quickly tire of my self-imposed trials. Their indirect purpose would suddenly ruin their immediate one. There was no way of cheating my appetite for pain and worry: the substitution would not work.

I began a series of day-long wanderings, making the town and sea front my beat. But mere walking on a level only stimulates the action of thought, which can hurry the pace or slow it down, but is in no way hindered by it. A steady pace will lend itself to any kind of madness, being equally the slave of our demons or our gods. In earlier years I had known the pace prompted by happy invention, the exhilaration of a body driven gaily on by the impulse of song and its divine birth. Now I was driven in flight from my own thoughts. Here, there, and everywhere I carried this killing burden of irritation, fury, tenderness, and impotence. Something dreaming in my hands would make them grasp and twist, unconsciously shaping forms and acts; and then I would find them clenched and murderous. And every moment I was in some other place than where I was: and in place of whatever I might be looking at, I would see every possible cause for lamenting.

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What could be more resourceful than an incarnate and virulent obsession whose poisonous sting drives life on, against and beyond itself? Ceaselessly it retouches and revives all the inexhaustible scenes and crises of hope and despair, with an ever-growing precision far surpassing the *finite* precision of any reality.

I would walk and walk; well aware that being driven on by the exasperated mind in no way deterred the atrocious insect whose sting in my spiritual body kept up a scalding pain inseparable from my very existence. This inner burning destroyed the values of the visible world. Neither the sun, nor the earth reflecting its glitter, seemed able to dazzle me. Objects simply thwarted and irritated my obsessions; and passers-by were less noticeable than their shadows on the road. I could concentrate on nothing but earth or sky.

This particular road led seawards. A lighthouse lantern glittered above the foliage.

An immense clear screen of the tenderest color stretched bare and smooth to eye level, beyond the pliant golden masses of the trees that rocked in the offshore wind; and someone inside me called me a fool and madman.

At once I could feel the force, and the vanity of the force, that kept me from enjoying this calm magnificence, from being a part of the present moment. I drew to a halt, and hesitated, as if between . . . appearances and phantom imaginings, reality and life.

Then it occurred to me that the only thing is to break the vicious circle of imaginary ills and the rhythm of their attacks. An anguish of mental origin, created by a whole complex of

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contributory causes, should be countered by recourse to some strong and basic instinct.

This was why, after a feverish rush to the shore, where all was broken rocks of every size and every possible shape, I set myself the laborious task of picking my way among the *total* disorder of their shattered forms and weirdly precarious angles. Here was a way of forcing that amazing machine, the human body, to produce at each moment a new and particular adjustment that demanded the utmost concentration of its powers of foresight and adaptation, and its most contradictory faculties.

Involved as I was in leaps and clamberings, with *all* the difficulties of a rigorously broken-up surface, beset with every obstacle and cleft with always unforeseen little canyons, at the same time I could feel, on the alert inside me, that black point from which, at the slightest respite, the fever of inner convulsions, of intolerable arguments for and against, would once again break loose. The absurd was still lying in wait for me. I chose the riskiest paths among the rocks. As if my plague might lose track of me! Reason and presence of mind were here at a natural advantage. For my own safety I had to act without error or delay, on pain of injuring myself. In this chaos of stone there was never a step or a concerted movement that resembled another or could serve my purpose twice.

The sea kept vanishing and reappearing before my eyes. I could hear it contentedly lapping, very softly, and then beginning again: beating out its measure of infinite time.

Drawing nearer I found, below the rocks, heaped-up masses of the concrete blocks that protect the outworks of a seaport.

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I began jumping from one cube to another, and while doing so, suddenly noticed a man, down there between two of these gigantic dice.

A line led out from him to the water. A basket and a small painter's outfit lay in his shadow.

I was feeling in anything but a *humane* frame of mind. To someone running away from himself, worn with the effort of trying to escape that self, anyone else's company is odious, since other people infallibly make us think of ourselves.

I cursed the man. Turning round before I could climb back among my rocks, he smiled. I recognized him as a doctor I had met quite a few times, with one set of friends or another.

And he recognized me from what he remembered of these encounters—and certain remarks of my own or other people's.