CONTENTS

Asides

I

Painting

THE OBJECT of painting is indeterminate.

If it were quite clear—as for example, to produce the illusion of things seen or to amuse the eye and mind by a "musical" arrangement of forms and colors—the problem would be much simpler and there would surely be more works of art having the quality of beauty (meeting, that is to say, certain precise requirements), but no works *inexplicably* beautiful.

There would be none of those whose appeal is inexhaustible.

*

I stop in front of a famous picture, the *Reclining Venus*, and begin by contemplating it from a fair distance. And this first glance reminds me of something I often heard Degas say: "It's smooth, like all fine painting."

A hard remark to comment on. Yet its meaning is marvelously clear when one looks at a fine portrait by Raphael. "Divine platitude"; no illusionism, no slabs of thick impasto, no ridges, no splashed-on highlights, no savage contrasts. And I tell myself that perfection is achieved only by disdaining all the devices used by artists to heighten their "effects."

My eyes begin to see again, and settle once more on the *Reclining Venus*. The picture displays a white, amply molded figure. It is also a happy distribution of light and shade. Also a wealth of charming passages, delightful areas, a cleanly modeled belly, a highly skillful, seductive rendering of the join of arm and shoulder, a fairly deep expanse of country, all in blue and gold. It is also a system of values, colors, curves, and fields of reference: the presence of a goddess, a complex of contacts, an act of art. Were it not all these things at once, it would not be the *poem* that it is.

This plurality is essential. Quite opposed to it is the wholly abstract train of thought that follows its own path (and is solely what it follows). It must not lose its way, or it would never find itself again.

But the artist has brought together, accumulated and assimilated by means of the physical materials of his art, a host of desires, intentions, and conditions coming from all the regions of his mind and being. Sometimes he was thinking of his model, sometimes of the mixing of his pigments, his tone, his oils; sometimes of the flesh itself and sometimes of the absorbent canvas. But, though so independent, these objects of his attention coalesced, inevitably, in the act of painting, when all the discrete, scattered moments, followed up, caught on the wing, suspended or elusive, were in process of becoming the *picture* on his easel.

*

Art is, then, this *externalized* conjunction of a living, mobile diversity whose activities are crystallized and interlocked in a substance that undergoes their collective impact, resists, stimulates, and transforms them; which often baffles and

irritates the artist, but sometimes gives him satisfactions of the highest order.

While each of his movements has a simple, specific purpose, and though each is definable and corresponds to an abstraction, their joint effect is, paradoxically enough, to reinstate the concrete and give back to the artist what he saw in the first instance: the plenitude and multiple power of every real object, the diversity, even the simultaneous infinity of some precise *thing*—and this by the operation of the sensory and symbolic virtues of our perception of colors.

*

Works of art give us the idea of men who are more accurate, more masters of themselves, of their eyes and hands, more strongly differentiated and better organized than the spectator who, looking at the finished work, fails to see all that went to its making: all the first attempts, the repaintings, the artist's moments of despair and sacrifice, his borrowings and subterfuges, the years of study, and—last but not least—his strokes of luck. Thus they know nothing of what is unapparent in the finished work, all that now is hidden, resolved, or dissolved into it, is left unsaid or gainsaid: all, in short, that is consonant with human nature and adverse to that craving for the marvelous which is, none the less, one of human nature's basic instincts.

*

Painting is undoubtedly the form of art in which the artist is most apt to leave us with a sense of impotence.

"Look at that foot," I say to him. "Could anybody walk with a foot like that?"

"That's not what I'm after," he retorts.
"'What you're after'? Well, you haven't found it."

*

Taste is made of a host of distastes.

*

In making any "useless" thing, one needs to be godlike. Or else refrain from tackling it.

*

After a short time music gets on my nerves—a time that's all the shorter the more the music has affected me. Because it now tends to obstruct all that, to start with, it had called to life: thoughts, insights, archetypes, and premises.

Rare indeed is music that does not cease being what it was, that does not spoil and counteract what it has created, but nourishes what it has brought to birth within me.

From which I conclude that the true connoisseur of music is bound to be a man to whom it *suggests nothing*.

*

So far ballet is almost the only art that gives us a *sequence* of colors. To the ballet, therefore, we should look for the rendering of a dawn or sunset.

*

Critics at large.

Scene: an exhibition of painting. A picture with two men in front of it.

One of them, leaning on the rail, is talking, explaining, raising his voice. The other says nothing. His air of bland politeness suggests that his thoughts are elsewhere. He lends his ear, but not his mind. He is in the Park, at the Stock Exchange, or visiting some lady friend; one couldn't be further away with so much tact and physical proximity.

Two paces behind them, a man who looks like an artist is watching me; his eyes convey all his scorn for these booming explanations, audible some distance off.

As for me, posted in the foreground of this little scene, observing simultaneously the picture, the two friends, and the painter behind them, able to hear all the talker says and read the look in the eyes of the man who's sizing him up—I feel I contain them all and so possess a consciousness of a higher order, a supreme jurisdiction; I can bless or sentence everybody, *misereor super turbam*. . . .

But soon another thought dislodges me from this god-like eminence whence I have been surveying the strata of opinions. I feel only too well that chance has placed me here; so in the end I don't know what to think . . . and nothing gives more food for thought.

II

Works of art of the rarest beauty, subtleties of drawing, the enjoyment of the fine shades and harmonies of a perfect piece of writing, the delicacy of certain mathematical ambiguities, the precision sometimes attained in studies of the psyche—all these are private delights reserved to a few persons. Eliminate them—and who will have any inkling of the greatness of the loss?

*

Fine works are daughters of their form; it was born *before* them.

*

The value of men's works is not in the works themselves but in their later development by others, in other circumstances.

We never know in advance whether a work will *live*. It is a seed endowed with more or less vitality and it needs special conditions; even the frailest may be favored by circumstances.

*

Some works are created by their public; others create their public.

The former cater to the needs of the average natural sensibility. The latter create artificial needs and at the same time satisfy them.

*

Nothing is more "original," nothing more "oneself" than to feed on others. But one has to digest them. A lion is made of assimilated sheep.

*

The hallmark of the greatest art is that imitations of it are legitimate, worthwhile, tolerable; that it is not demolished or devoured by them, or they by it.

*

The fear of being laughed at, and the dread of being dull; of having people point at you, and of passing unnoticed—parallel abysses.

*

Novelty. The cult of novelty.

The new is one of those poisonous stimulants which end up by becoming more necessary than any food; drugs which, once they get a hold on us, need to be taken in progressively larger doses until they are fatal, though we'd die without them.

It's a curious habit, growing thus attached to that perishable part of things in which, precisely, their novelty consists. But it is surely obvious that these upstart ideas need to be given a certain air of nobility; that they should seem not the fruit of haste but gradually matured; not unusual, but ideas that have existed for ages; not made and found this morning, but merely forgotten and retrieved.

*

An exclusive penchant for what is new and merely new points to a degeneration of the critical faculty, for nothing is easier than to gauge the "novelty" of a work.

*

Those works, perhaps, are "classical" which can grow cold without dying or decomposing. It would be interesting to trace the will to lastingness implicit in the notions of perfection and flawless form, and to bring to light the part it played in the rules, laws, or canons of the arts in the ages we style "classical."

*

Our disciples and successors would have a thousand times more to teach us on this score than our masters—if we could live long enough to see their works.

III

Literature

When all is said and done a book is merely a selection from its author's monologue. The man is talking to himself, or the soul communing with itself, and in the flow of words the author makes a choice. This choice is always self-regarding; in one thought he likes himself, in another hates himself. Pride or self-interest selects or rejects what passes through his mind; *the man he would like to be* chooses out of *the man he is.* This is an inescapable law.

Supposing *all* the monologue were given us, we would be capable of arriving at a fairly accurate answer to the most crucial question that enlightened criticism can set itself regarding any work.

So far as it does not confine itself to an expression of opinion fathered by the critic's mood and tastes—when, that is to say, he is really talking about himself, while fancying he is talking about another man's work—criticism, in so far as it is an *appraisal*, should take the form of a comparison between what the author set out to do and what he actually did. Whereas the *value* of a work depends on a variable and personal relation between some reader and the work in question, the proper and intrinsic *merit* of the author is a relationship between himself and his original intention. This merit is proportioned to the "distance" between them and to the difficulties the author encountered in carrying out his plan.

But these very difficulties are in a way a preliminary operation on the author's part; they are the work of his "ideal." This mental operation precedes, impedes, holds up and challenges the work he eventually turns out. And it is

here that character and intellect sometimes treat Nature and her powers as the rider treats the horse.

An ideal critique would be based solely on this merit, for all we have the right to ask of any writer is that he should "bring off" what he set out to do. A mind can be judged only by its own laws and almost without any *personal* intervention on the critic's part—as though by an operation independent of the man who is carrying it out, since all he has to do is to collate a work and an intention.

You set out to make a certain book?

"Well," I ask, "have you made it? What were you aiming at?

"Were you aspiring to scale the heights or to gain material rewards: pecuniary success or a feather in your cap? Or perhaps you had a less obvious purpose; perhaps you wished to appeal only to a few of your acquaintances, or even to a single one whom you hoped to 'get at' by the detour of a published work?

"Whom did you want to entertain? Whom did you want to beguile, to rival, to madden with envy; whose mind to preoccupy, and whose nights to haunt? Tell me, gentle Author, was it Mammon, Demos, Caesar, or maybe God, whom you were serving? Venus, perhaps—and perhaps a little of all five together.

"So now let's see how you went about it. . . ."

*

According to our pundits the idea of writing "purely" in French (or some other language) is an illusion. I don't altogether agree with them. Rather, the illusion would consist in thinking that a language can have an intrinsic, definite

"purity," i.e., a "purity" definable by perceptible, indisputable characteristics. But a language is one long, continuous creation. Everyone adds a bit of himself to it, mangles or enriches it, receives it and dispenses it as (within certain limits) the fancy takes him. The need for our understanding each other is the only law that controls and retards its changes, these changes being feasible owing to the *arbitrariness* of the correspondences between the signs and meanings that are basic to language. At every moment it can be likened to a system of conventions, unformulated for the most part, though sometimes we can see how they arose, as is always the case when we learn a new word.

So far, then, we have no "purity," but somewhat haphazard phenomena governed only (or restrained in their vagaries) by the need for communication, by the automatic reflexes of individuals, and their propensities for imitation.

Yet there may exist—there *does* exist—a conventional purity which, conventional though it be, has its merits. This purity enjoins, to start with, *correctness*, that is to say, conformity with certain written conventions, the knowledge and usage of which are a criterion of all "cultured" persons. More subtle are the other conditions of this pure, premeditated language, for whose appreciation a special sensitivity is needed. (I need not list them here.) Broadly speaking, they are taboos whose reasons are hard to elucidate; certain "effects" with which one dispenses; the quest of an exquisite coherence in expression and a constant care neatly to dovetail the members of a phrase, and the phrases of a paragraph, each with each.

But there are men whose hearing, healthy though it is, fails to distinguish sounds from noises.

Writing really "pure" French is a hobby and an amusement which relieve to some extent the tedium of writing.

*

Syntax is a faculty of the soul.

*

Knowledge of a language has too often been regarded as merely a matter of memory. The idea of treating orthography as a sign of culture is a sign of the times—and of stupidity.

But what matters is the *handling* of the language, the continuity in the activity of writing, and the independence thus given to the activities of the mind. And, once these have free play, the freedom of combination in the text.

Syntax is a set of habits to be formed, habits which it is sometimes well to renovate and brush up, in full awareness of what one is doing. In this field of literary action, as in all others, we must abide by the rules of the game, but accept them for what they are worth and without attaching too much authority to them. Nor should we pride ourselves on remembering a number of exceptions. It must be borne in mind that in the days of our greatest writers the liberties permitted were, also, far greater. True, their language was more complex, better built, more "organized" than ours; but I must admit that they were of several minds as to the concordance of tenses, unsure about grammatical agreements, inconsistent and sometimes surprising in their handling of participles.

IV

Any production of the mind is important when its existence resolves, summons up, or cancels other works, whether previous to it or not.

It sensitizes the mind to quite different works. Either it opens up or it exhausts some lode. . . .

*

What is most "human."

Some think that the duration of works depends on their "humanness," their endeavor to be *true to life*.

Yet what could be more enduring than certain works of fantasy?

The untrue and the wonderful are more *human* than the "real" man.

*

Triangulation.

There are works, famous or otherwise, which for the purpose of triangulating the mental world are preferable to others; they provide us with guidemarks.

For a long time I have owned a fifty-page pamphlet, dealing with a technical subject, in which what are called exactness, profundity, originality of approach, are constantly and admirably present.

With this little work I compare a book I've just been reading; or, to be more precise, I try to compare the intellectual power and, above all, discipline implied in that pamphlet with what the book I have just been reading implies about the mind of its author.

*

Books.

Nearly all the books I prize, and absolutely all that have been of any use to me, are books that don't make easy reading.

One's mind may stray from them, it cannot skim them.

Some have helped me, despite their difficulty; others, *because* they were difficult.

*

Two sorts of books: those which act as stimulants and merely stir up what I already have within me; and those which provide nourishment whose substance will be transmuted into mine. From these latter I shall derive forms of speaking or thinking, or else precise resources and ready-made answers—for we are bound to borrow the results of other men's researches and enrich ourselves with what they have seen and we have not.

*

An author looks at his work.

Sometimes a swan that has hatched out a duck; sometimes vice versa.

*

In the long run every poet's value will equal his value as a critic (of himself).

*

The greatness of poets: that of strongly grasping with their words things of which they had but fleeting glimpses in their minds.

*

There are people who sparkle, talkers to the manner born, who dazzle you with a steady flow of unexpected remarks, verbal fireworks, striking conjunctions of ideas, some of which seem almost *too* apt, *too* finely phrased—and the quantity of which is no less amazing than their brilliance and felicity. Yet all this wordplay, all these inventions, richly varied and copious as they are, leave one with a curious impression that they are automatic. You can't help being reminded of a clockwork bird in a gilded cage warbling its prefabricated ditties. Certainly there is invention—but you know the wheels are turning. In short, the flow of bright remarks might be the output of a competent machine.

*

Verdict on a modern writer:

His lucky finds are superb, but his substance comes to little.

*

Inspiration is an hypothesis that reduces the author to the role of an observer.

*

"The spirit bloweth where it listeth." We may leave it to spiritualists and votaries of "inspiration" to explain why that spirit does not blow in animals and blows so ineffectively in fools.

*

If a bird could say exactly what he sings, why he sings it, and *what*, within himself, is singing, he would not sing.

He creates in space a point peculiar to himself and, unwittingly, tells all the world that he is there, playing his part. He has got to sing at such and such an hour. Nobody knows just what he feels, himself, about his song—except that he brings a high seriousness to it. The seriousness of animals, of children at their meals, of dogs in love, the shrewd, implacable physiognomy of cats. It would seem that this precisely ordered life allows no place to laughter, to any flippant interludes.

*

Another world.

Fatigue opens our eyes, at long last, on a *new* world. The somnolence that comes in theaters crushes out forms, makes the lights seem garish and everything grow tremulous; voices sound preternatural or false.

We have an impression of having left the world which we can still see and whose *absolute movement* now becomes perceptible—as though we were no longer in the same ship. Ceasing to keep track of the voyage, we watch everything slide past *en bloc*: the whole body of things on which we, just now, were standing. We have lost our bearings.

Literature takes the same course in a young mind exhausted from having read too much, or "foreseen" too much, in two laborious years. Such a mind generates foreshortenings, jagged brushstrokes, and can no longer tolerate anything but a restive incoherence. It's the "new" at work—a sure sign of *fatigue*.

*

A poetic idea is one which, stated in prose, still calls for verse.

*

The expression of true feelings is always commonplace, and the more sincere one is, the more commonplace one is. For, to avoid banality, we need to choose our words.

All the same, if a man is genuinely unsophisticated or the feeling so strong as to rule out even banality, even the memory of the phrases commonly thought appropriate to the occasion, this blind groping for one's words may give rise—by a fluke—to remarks having a beauty of their own.

*

Perfection is a barrier. One puts perfection between oneself and others. Between oneself and one's self.

*

We should be as light as a bird, not as a feather.

*

The "ornate" style. How to embellish a style.

Only the man who is capable of a spare, clean style can truly embellish it.

V

A man bent on his work says to himself: "I want to be stronger, cleverer, luckier than—Myself."

*

A great man is one who leaves others at a loss after he is gone.

*

The greatest men are men who have had the courage of their own convictions—and this goes also for the stupidest.

*

An artist wants to inspire jealousy till the end of time.

*

What we write to amuse ourselves is read by someone else with passion, at high tension.

What we write with passion, at high tension, is read by someone else for his amusement.

*

Celebrity is a sort of disease one catches from going to bed with an idea.

*

To love fame one must set much store by people in general; one must *believe* in them.

*

Anyone who has never tried to make himself like the gods is less than a man.

*

Statues and fame are forms of the cult of the dead, which is a form of ignorance.

*

True pride is the homage paid to what one would wish to do, scorn for what one can do, and a lucid, fierce, implacable preference for one's own "ideal." "My God is a stronger god than yours."

In every religion "false gods" mean other people's gods; they are called false not because their existence is denied but because they lack the supreme prestige and power reserved to the god whom we personally adore.

*

The notion of the "great poet" has brought into the world more minor poets than the laws of chance would lead one to expect.

*

Man preens himself on his strokes of luck.

*

Our strongest, most vital hatred goes to those who are what we would like to be ourselves; a hatred all the keener because this state is so closely wrapped up with the person whom we hate. It's a form of "theft" to have the wealth or the honors that we would like to have; and it is downright murder to have the physique, brains, or gifts that are someone's ideal. For the fact of another man's possessing them shows at a glance that this ideal is not unattainable and also that the place is bespoken.

But our jealous man forgets the great and genuine advantage of not having what he wants: the advantage of being able to contemplate it from an angle denied the man who has it, and of having to learn how to belittle it, simply

to keep alive! Whereas its possessor tends to underrate it simply because he is used to having it. . . . Every ideal is vulnerable on two fronts; both the formula "the grapes are sour" and its counterpart, "they're rotten," conspire against it.

*

We dislike a man who forces us not to be ourselves, but neither do we like the man who obliges us to show ourselves in our true colors.

But we like the man who believes that we are what we'd wish to be, and this is the source of the pleasure given by fame, a pleasure against which it takes so many heartburnings combined with so much will power to steel ourselves completely.

*

The height of vulgarity, as I see it, consists in making use of arguments that can appeal only to a large public, in other words, to a type of listener or an audience necessarily scaled down to the lowest level of intelligence; arguments that have no hold on a man who thinks them out dispassionately, by himself. Yet whatever lasts owes its lastingness solely to the approval of such a man.

*

Attacks on us alienate only those on whose defection we should congratulate ourselves; they are either people so constituted as not to take an interest in us anyhow, or of such a kind that we could not wish to feel uncertain of their attitude toward us.

*

Scorn and envy are the two verdicts of the tribunal of Pride.

You don't exist; I do.

You exist too much; I don't.

*

Our true enemies are silent.

*

A man who attacks you is merely a man relieving himself. Picture, then, the face of a man who has thought up and written down a really fine attack on you. He strikes it out and thinks up a still better one.

Always keep this picture hanging on the wall of your mind.

*

The wild men.

All practitioners of fierceness in literature verge on comical effects. Insult is the easiest, and most traditional, mode of "poetic" exaltation.

*

The ballistics of insult.

As seen by a witness posted sufficiently far off, an insult does not settle on the point it's aimed at; each jet of spittle *describes a closed curve.*

*

Hide your god.

One should attack not other people, but their gods. But the first step is to discover them; for people take care to hide the gods they *really* worship.

*

If the Ego is hateful, "Love your neighbor as yourself" becomes a cruel irony.

*

It's better to forgive offenses—than to forget them. But the forgiveness is never real; nothing can annul one's present sense of pain. And the man who forgives while it is still rankling pretends to be what he is not—as yet. A truly noble piece of play-acting.

*

We are told to love our enemies.

I love those who stimulate me and those whom I stimulate. For our enemies are stimulants. And at every moment the mood of the moment comes to us from outside.

*

On relishing injustice.

Injustice is a bitter that gives a zest to solitude, whets the appetite for separation and singularity, and opens up to the mind its deepest avenues, those leading to the unique and the inaccessible.

*

After all, this wretched life isn't worth the sacrifice of being to seeming, when we know to whose eyes—and to what eyes—that seeming must be directed.

*

The meeting.

Suppose two men running away from each other and unaware that the world is round were suddenly to find them-

selves face to face, at the antipodes of their starting place—what a strange fluke this would seem to be!

We find the same thing happening in our dealings with our worst enemies.

In the structure of the Time through which life moves are curves leading imperceptibly from the impossible to the real, from the unthinkable to the achieved.

VI

Powers of the gaze

A curious give-and-take begins when glance meets glance.

No one would think freely if his eyes could not detach themselves from another's eyes which followed them persistently.

Once gazes interlock, there are no longer *quite* two persons and it's hard for either to remain *alone*.

*

On "exchanging looks."

This exchange (the term is apt) effects in a very short space of time a transposition, a metathesis or intercrossing of two "lifelines," two viewpoints. The result is a sort of simultaneous, reciprocal limitation. You take my appearance, my image, and I take yours. You are not I, since you see me and I don't see myself. What is missing for me is this "I" whom you can see. And what *you* miss is the "you" I see.

And the better we get to know each other, you and I, the more we shall reflect each other, yet the more "other" we shall be. And all the rest will be identical, perhaps shared between us. And the more our looks diverge, the more

we lose sight of each other, the more indistinguishable we shall be.

I see you so as not to be you, since I am not You.

This type of analysis can also be applied to one's relations with one's Self.

*

Smiles.

Two persons meet. They exchange smiles, as if thrilled to see each other, and "hold" them for a while. Then the smiles take a rest and let one or two serious remarks get by. The smiles come back, part company, and, once separated from each other, unwrinkle and fade out.

*

Small talk.

Small talk is conversation in which the remarks exchanged could be transferred from one pair of lips to another, indifferently.

Such remarks are distinguishable only by the speakers' tones of voice. It is by the tone of voice that I judge or prejudge people I don't know, and even those I know. And it rarely misleads me.

For the voice suggests to me certain qualities of the mind. This is rather like the method of graphologists, who decipher a man's character from his writing. But my "phonology" is less objective.

*

Between ourselves.

Human relations are based on "ciphers." To decode them leads to confusion. For this code language has the merit of saying things without really saying them and keeping our

reciprocal opinions in suspense—in a state of *reversibility*. It saves us from enouncing as dogmatic, definitive judgments opinions that are always only momentarily true.

*

All that people say of us is false, but no falser than what we think about it. Only it's a different kind of falsity.

*

Polite society.

Supposing all the bodies around us were perfectly "polished," we would see on every hand only images of ourselves, though in greatly distorted states.

This is exactly what happens in "polite society," where an identity of manners, a punctilious give-and-take of words and smiles, and a semblance of perfect reciprocity encircle us with our own gestures and remarks.

*

Intimacy.

We can be truly intimate only with people having our own standard of *discretion*. Other qualities—character, culture, tastes—count for little.

True intimacy rests on a common sense of what things are *pudenda* and *tacenda*. And that is why it permits an incredible freedom of speech; with these exceptions you can say anything you like.

But there are false intimacies, and total friendships are rare. The *complete* friend is rarely come by—which is why one usually has several friends of very different species.

"He has as many friends as he has personalities within him."

And it's not the most intimate that he prefers. Is it likely that a man reveals himself (or thinks that he reveals himself) most completely to the person he loves most? We try to beautify ourselves in the eyes of those whom we prefer.

When two persons quarrel it is because they got on a shade too well. Superficial relations are always satisfactory, whereas intimacy makes the slightest variation keenly felt. We must not forget that intimacy resides in a *permitted indiscretion*, proffered or invited, whose limits are ill defined: one that produces greatly varying responses and needs watching with punctilious care for it to be exercised with impunity and without secret consequences that can be highly dangerous to friendship.

*

When relations between two sensitive people are becoming intimate, there is a curious mixture of a fear of not being understood and a dread of being understood too well.

"You must understand me without conveying by your look the idea of a man who has 'given himself away.' Do not forget that I can see myself in your attitude and I don't want to see anything intolerable in it.

"Let your silence be a mirror without flaws" . . . and so forth.

*

A man's true secrets are more secret to himself than they are to others.

*

A clever man's secret is less secret than a fool's.

*

Stupid people think that jesting doesn't go with seriousness and that a play on words isn't an answer. Why are they so sure of this?

Because it's in their interest that this should be so; it's an unwritten law, and their very existence hangs on it.

*

When you have had a silly idea and felt that it was silly, don't be in haste to throw it on the scrap heap. It lived its little hour. How could that be? Let's stop and think.

*

"Love" consists in feeling that, against one's will, one has made over to another what was intended only for oneself.

*

You never know who it is you are sleeping with.

*

Meditation of the supremely beautiful, truly seductive woman:

"I've often noticed that hardly any man comes near me without feeling he gets a sort of right over me, and developing a kind of proprietary jealousy. . . . I please them, therefore I belong to them.

"This pretension of theirs I find intolerable—and I couldn't live without it!"

*

Nobody exists who is capable of loving another person just as he or she is. We insist on modifications, since the object of our love is always a phantom. What is real cannot be desired—for the good reason that it's real. I adore you, yes; but oh, that nose of yours, this dress you're wearing . . . !

Perhaps the acme of shared love consists in this frantic urge to transform each other and add new beauty to each other in an act comparable to the creative act in art and, like it, stirring some unknown source of personal transcendence.

*

Sincerity.

The will to sincerity leads to reflection, which leads to doubt—which leads nowhere.

*

Human beings silently entreat each other to say what they do not think. "Tell us what we'd like to hear! Say something *nice*," our eyes implore.

*

Sincerity.

It's quite difficult to say "what one thinks" when (*a*) one is not thinking of anything; or (*b*) one would cause pain by saying it; or (*c*) when one isn't sure if the thought one has is right—or permanent; when we know all too well the effects

of concentration if we try to focus it on our presumed inmost Self. For this kind of attention always contributes what it is looking for; it imports the known into the unknown.

*

"*All ears.*"

People conversing in whispers make a third party (though they are strangers to him) vaguely imagine that what they're saying must be worth overhearing. I say "imagine" because it's a dream that, in such cases, takes hold of the eavesdropper, possesses him, makes him "all ears," and changes him into a listening statue. By a sort of imitative reflex he becomes interested, if unconsciously, in the conversation.

*

A man of action is one who in every predicament chooses instinctively the course that will demand the greatest expenditure of energy. Risk is his stimulant.

*

Cool-headed men—almost always second-raters—are helpful in emergencies, since they steady the others, calm them down, and sometimes provide the simple, stupid idea that saves the situation.

*

Quod verbum in pectus Jugurthae altius quam quisquam ratus erat descendit. (Sallust.)

You never know at what point and upon what fiber of a man's nervous system a word (I mean a trivial one) will

impinge, and how he will be affected by it. "Affected"—that is to say, *changed*. A word suddenly brings to maturity a child. Etc.

VII

When a flash of wit or intelligence backfiring on its author gets him into trouble—what's the difference between it and a stupid remark?

*

Intelligence cuts its way through conventions, beliefs, dogmas, traditions, customs, sentiments, and social codes as an engineer hacks his way through forests and mountains, through peculiarities and local forms of nature, opening them up or slicing them away, forging ahead and forcibly imposing the shortest path.

*

Something we see quite clearly, and which nonetheless is very difficult to express, is always worth the trouble of trying to put it into words.

*

As there are "men of the world," so there also are "men of the universe."

*

A clear-thinking mind makes understandable what it does not understand.

*

"Clarity" in nonpractical things *always* stems from an illusion.

*

Ignorance rings the changes on extreme rashness and extreme timidity.

*

Superiority may give rise to impotence: an incapacity for doing something silly that could be "rewarding."

*

A man is more complex, infinitely more so, than his thoughts.

*

"Intuition" on the lips of many moderns means the mystical union of an image and a miracle. A miraculous image.

A man is languishing in prison. A ray of light strikes in and reveals the key lying on the floor.

The image plays the part of a new dimension or the organ of this dimension. It modifies the *continuity* of a given space by introducing into it a *break*—or the inverse of a break.

*

Intuition without intellection is an accident.

*

(continued...)