

Camus, Albert. (1956) "Rebellion and Art [excerpts]." *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage.

Art is the activity that exalts and denies simultaneously. "No artist tolerates reality," says Nietzsche. That is true, but no artist can get along without reality. Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is. Rebellion can be observed here in its pure state and in its original complexities. Thus art should give us a final perspective on the content of rebellion¹.

. . . In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion, from this point of view, is a fabricator of universes. This also defines art. The demands of rebellion are really, in part, aesthetic demands. All rebel thought, as we have seen, is expressed either in rhetoric or in a closed universe. The rhetoric of ramparts in Lucretius, the convents and isolated castles of Sade, the island or the lonely rock of the romantics, the solitary heights of Nietzsche, the primeval seas of Lautreamont, the parapets of Rimbaud, the terrifying castles of the surrealists, which spring up in a storm of flowers, the prison, the nation behind barbed wire, the concentration camps, the empire of free slaves, all illustrate, after their own fashion, the same need for coherence and unity. In these sealed worlds, man can reign and have knowledge at last.

This tendency is common to all the arts. The artist reconstructs the world to his plan. The symphonies of nature know no rests. The world is never quiet; even its silence eternally resounds with the same notes, in vibrations that escape our ears. As for those that we perceive, they carry sounds to us, occasionally a chord, never a melody. Music exists, however, in which symphonies are completed, where melody gives its form to sounds that by themselves have none, and where, finally, a particular arrangement of notes extracts from natural disorder a unity that is satisfying to the mind and the heart.

"I believe more and more," writes Van Gogh, "that God must not be judged on this earth. It is one of His sketches that has turned out badly." Every artist tries to reconstruct this sketch and to give it the style it lacks. The greatest and most ambitious of all the arts, sculpture, is bent on capturing, in three dimensions, the fugitive figure of man, and on restoring the unity of great style to the general disorder of gestures. Sculpture does not reject resemblance, of which, indeed, it has need. But resemblance is not its first aim. What it is looking for, in its periods of greatness, is the gesture, the expression, or the empty stare which will sum up all the gestures and all the stares in the world. Its purpose is not to imitate, but to stylize and to imprison in one significant expression the fleeting ecstasy of the body or the infinite variety of human attitudes. Then, and only then, does it erect, on the pediments of teeming cities, the model, the type, the motionless perfection that will cool, for one moment, the fevered brow of man. The frustrated lover of love can finally gaze at the Greek caryatides and grasp what it is that triumphs, in the body and face of the woman, over every degradation.

The principle of painting is also to make a choice. "Even genius," writes Delacroix, ruminating on his art, "is only the gift of generalizing and choosing." The painter isolates his subject, which is the first way of unifying it. Landscapes flee, vanish from the memory, or destroy one another. That is why the landscape painter or the painter of still life isolates in space and time things that normally

¹ (For Camus, any effort to change the world is an act of rebellion. It goes above and beyond political revolt, encompassing any time when someone says "no" to something or someone. He declares that a rebel actually says 'yes' and 'no' simultaneously: in rejecting one thing, they are actually affirming another thing that they value and uphold. E.g., when a rebel says 'no' to unfair wages, they are saying 'yes' to the importance of just compensation for work and the value of every individual's labor. In this chapter, Camus extends his general theory of rebellion to explain why artists are driven to create the works that they make. – LRA)

change with the light, get lost in an infinite perspective, or disappear under the impact of other values. The first thing that a landscape painter does is to square off his canvas. He eliminates as much as he includes.

Similarly, subject-painting isolates, in both time and space, an action that normally would become lost in another action. Thus the painter arrives at a point of stabilization. The really great creative artists are those who, like Piero della Francesca, give the impression that the stabilization has only just taken place, that the projection machine has suddenly stopped dead. All their subjects give the impression that, by some miracle of art, they continue to live, while ceasing to be mortal. Long after his death, Rembrandt's philosopher still meditates, between light and shade, on the same problem.

"How vain a thing is painting that beguiles us by the resemblance to objects that do not please us at all." Delacroix, who quotes Pascal's celebrated remark, is correct in writing "strange" instead of "vain." These objects do not please us at all because we do not see them; they are obscured and negated by a perpetual process of change. Who looked at the hands of the executioner during the Flagellation, and the olive trees on the way to the Cross? But here we see them represented, transfigured by the incessant movement of the Passion; and the agony of Christ, imprisoned in images of violence and beauty, cries out again each day in the cold rooms of museums. A painter's style lies in this blending of nature and history, in this stability imposed on incessant change. Art realizes, without apparent effort, the reconciliation of the unique with the universal of which Hegel dreamed. Perhaps that is why periods, such as ours, which are bent on unity to the point of madness, turn to primitive arts, in which stylization is the most intense and unity the most provocative. The most extreme stylization is always found at the beginning and end of artistic movements; it demonstrates the intensity of negation and transposition which has given modern painting its disorderly impetus toward interpreting unity and existence. Van Gogh's admirable complaint is the arrogant and desperate cry of all artists. "I can very well, in life and in painting, too, do without God. But I cannot, suffering as I do, do without something that is greater than I am, that is my life—the power to create."

But the artist's rebellion against reality, which is automatically suspect to the totalitarian revolution, contains the same affirmation as the spontaneous rebellion of the oppressed. The revolutionary spirit, born of total negation, instinctively felt that, as well as refusal, there was also consent to be found in art; that there was a risk of contemplation counterbalancing action, beauty, and injustice, and that in certain cases beauty itself was a form of injustice from which there was no appeal. Equally well, no form of art can survive on total denial alone. Just as all thought, and primarily that of non-signification, signifies something, so there is no art that has no signification. Man can allow himself to denounce the total injustice of the world and then demand a total justice that he alone will create. But he cannot affirm the total hideousness of the world. To create beauty, he must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it. Nietzsche could deny any form of transcendence, whether moral or divine, by saying that transcendence drove one to slander this world and this life. But perhaps there is a living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other. Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history. We shall understand this better in considering the art form whose precise aim is to become part of the process of evolution in order to give it the style that it lacks; in other words, the novel.

It is possible to separate the literature of consent, which coincides, by and large, with ancient history and the classical period, from the literature of rebellion, which begins in modern times. We note the scarcity of fiction in the former. When it exists, with very few exceptions, it is not concerned with a story but with fantasy (*Theagenes* and *Charicleia* or *Astrcea*). These are fairy tales, not novels. In the latter period, on the contrary, the novel form is really developed—a form that has not ceased to thrive and extend its field of activity up to the present day, simultaneously with the critical and revolutionary movement. The novel is born at the same time as the spirit of rebellion and expresses, on the aesthetic plane, the same ambition.

"A make-believe story, written in prose," says Littré about the novel. Is it only that? In any case, a Catholic critic, Stanislas Fumet, has written: "Art, whatever its aims, is always in sinful competition with God." Actually, it is more correct to talk about competition with God, in connection with the novel, than of competition with man's civil status. Thibaudet expresses a similar idea when he says of Balzac: "The *Comédie humaine* is the Imitation of God the Father." The aim of great literature seems to be to create a closed universe or a perfect type. The West, in its great creative works, does not limit itself to retracing the steps of its daily life. It consistently presents magnificent images which inflame its imagination and sets off, hotfoot, in pursuit of them.

After all, writing or even reading a novel is an unusual activity. To construct a story by a new arrangement of actual facts has nothing inevitable or even necessary about it. Even if the ordinary explanation of the mutual pleasure of reader and writer were true, it would still be necessary to ask why it was incumbent on a large part of humanity to take pleasure and an interest in make-believe stories. Revolutionary criticism condemns the novel in its pure form as being simply a means of escape for an idle imagination. In everyday speech we find the term 'romance' used to describe an exaggerated description or lying account of some event. Not so very long ago it was a commonplace that young girls, despite all appearance to the contrary, were "romantic," by which was meant that these idealized creatures took no account of everyday realities. In general, it has always been considered that the romantic was quite separate from life and that it enhanced it while, at the same time, betraying it. The simplest and most common way of envisaging romantic expression is to see it as an escapist exercise. Common sense joins hands with revolutionary criticism.

But from what are we escaping by means of the novel? From a reality we consider too overwhelming? Happy people read novels, too, and it is an established fact that extreme suffering takes away the taste for reading. From another angle, the romantic universe of the novel certainly has less substance than the other universe where people of flesh and blood harass us without respite. However, by what magic does *Adolphe*, for instance, seem so much more familiar to us than Benjamin Constant, and Count Mosca than our professional moralists? Balzac once terminated a long conversation about politics and the fate of the world by saying: "And now let us get back to serious matters," meaning that he wanted to talk about his novels. The incontestable importance of the world of the novel, our insistence, in fact, on taking seriously the innumerable myths with which we have been provided for the last two centuries by the genius of writers, is not fully explained by the desire to escape. Romantic activities undoubtedly imply a rejection of reality. But this rejection is not a mere escapist flight, and might be interpreted as the retreat of the soul which, according to Hegel, creates for itself, in its disappointment, a fictitious world in which ethics reigns alone. The edifying novel, however, is far from being great literature; and the best of all romantic novels, *Paul et Virginie*, a really heartbreaking book, makes no concessions to consolation.

The contradiction is this: man rejects the world as it is, without accepting the necessity of escaping it. In fact, men cling to the world and by far the majority do not want to abandon it. Far from always wanting to forget it, they suffer, on the contrary, from not being able to possess it completely enough, estranged citizens of the world, exiled from their own country. Except for vivid moments of fulfillment, all reality for them is incomplete. Their actions escape them in the form of other actions, return in unexpected guises to judge them, and disappear like the water Tantalus longed to drink, into some still undiscovered orifice. To know the whereabouts of the orifice, to control the course of the river, to understand life, at last, as destiny—these are their true aspirations. But this vision which, in the realm of consciousness at least, will reconcile them with themselves, can only appear, if it ever does appear, at the fugitive moment that is death, in which everything is consummated. In order to exist just once in the world, it is necessary never again to exist.

At this point is born the fatal envy which so many men feel of the lives of others. Seen from a distance, these existences seem to possess a coherence and a unity which they cannot have in reality, but which seem evident to the spectator. He sees only the salient points of these lives without taking into account the details of corrosion. Thus we make these lives into works of art. In an elementary fashion we turn them into novels. In this sense, everyone tries to make his life a work of art. We want love to last and we know that it does not last; even if, by some miracle, it were to last a whole lifetime, it would still be incomplete. Perhaps, in this insatiable need for perpetuation, we should better understand human suffering if we knew that it was eternal. It appears that great minds are sometimes less horrified by suffering than by the fact that it does not endure. In default of inexhaustible happiness, eternal suffering would at least give us a destiny. But we do not even have that consolation, and our worst agonies come to an end one day. One morning, after many dark nights of despair, an irrepressible longing to live will announce to us the fact that all is finished and that suffering has no more meaning than happiness.

The desire for possession is only another form of the desire to endure; it is this that comprises the impotent delirium of love. No human being, even the most passionately loved and passionately loving, is ever in our possession. On the pitiless earth where lovers are often separated in death and are always born divided, the total possession of another human being and absolute communion throughout an entire lifetime are impossible dreams. The desire for possession is insatiable, to such a point that it can survive even love itself. To love, therefore, is to sterilize the person one loves. The shamefaced suffering of the abandoned lover is not so much due to being no longer loved as to knowing that the other partner can and must love again. In the final analysis, every man devoured by the overpowering desire to endure and possess wishes that those whom he has loved were either sterile or dead. This is real rebellion. Those who have not insisted, at least once, on the absolute virginity of human beings and of the world, who have not trembled with longing and impotence at the fact that it is impossible, and have then not been destroyed by trying to love halfheartedly, perpetually forced back upon their longing for the absolute, cannot understand the realities of rebellion and its ravaging desire for destruction. But the lives of others always escape us, and we escape them too; they have no firm outline. Life from this point of view is without style. It is only an impulse that endlessly pursues its form without ever finding it. Man, tortured by this, tries in vain to find the form that will impose certain limits between which he can be king. If only one single living thing had definite form, he would be reconciled!

There is not one human being who, above a certain elementary level of consciousness, does not exhaust himself in trying to find formulas or attitudes that will give his existence the unity it lacks. Appearance and action, the dandy and the revolutionary, all demand unity in order to exist, and in order to exist on this earth. As in those moving and unhappy relationships which sometimes survive for a very long time because one of the partners is waiting to find the right word, action, gesture, or situation which will bring his adventure to an end on exactly the right note, so

everyone proposes and creates for himself the final word. It is not sufficient to live, there must be a destiny that does not have to wait for death. It is therefore justifiable to say that man has an idea of a better world than this. But better does not mean different, it means unified. This passion which lifts the mind above the commonplaces of a dispersed world, from which it nevertheless cannot free itself, is the passion for unity. It does not result in mediocre efforts to escape, however, but in the most obstinate demands. Religion or crime, every human endeavor in fact, finally obeys this unreasonable desire and claims to give life a form it does not have. The same impulse, which can lead to the adoration of the heavens or the destruction of man, also leads to creative literature, which derives its serious content from this source.

What, in fact, is a novel but a universe in which action is endowed with form, where final words are pronounced, where people possess one another completely, and where life assumes the aspect of destiny?² The world of the novel is only a rectification of the world we live in, in pursuance of man's deepest wishes. For the world is undoubtedly the same one we know. The suffering, the illusion, the love are the same. The heroes speak our language, have our weaknesses and our strength. Their universe is neither more beautiful nor more enlightening than ours. But they, at least, pursue their destinies to the bitter end and there are no more fascinating heroes than those who indulge their passions to the fullest, Kirilov and Stavrogin, Mme Graslin, Julien Sorel, or the Prince de Cleves. It is here that we can no longer keep pace with them, for they complete things that we can never consummate. . . .

Here we have an imaginary world, therefore, which is created by the rectification of the actual world—a world where suffering can, if it wishes, continue until death, where passions are never distracted, where people are prey to obsessions and are always present to one another. Man is finally able to give himself the alleviating form and limits which he pursues in vain in his own life. The novel creates destiny to suit any eventuality. In this way it competes with creation and, provisionally, conquers death. A detailed analysis of the most famous novels would show, in different perspectives each time, that the essence of the novel lies in this perpetual alteration, always directed toward the same ends, that the artist makes in his own experience. Far from being moral or even purely formal, this alteration aims, primarily, at unity and thereby expresses a metaphysical need. The novel, on this level, is primarily an exercise of the intelligence in the service of nostalgic or rebellious sensibilities. . . .

Rebellion and Style

By the treatment that the artist imposes on reality, he declares the intensity of his rejection. But what he retains of reality in the universe that he creates reveals the degree of consent that he gives to at least one part of reality—which he draws from the shadows of evolution to bring it to the light of creation. In the final analysis, if the rejection is total, reality is then completely banished and the result is a purely formal work. If, on the other hand, the artist chooses, for reasons often unconnected with art, to exalt crude reality, the result is then realism. In the first case the primitive creative impulse in which rebellion and consent, affirmation and negation are closely allied is adulterated to the advantage of rejection. It then represents formal escapism, of which our period has furnished so many examples and of which the nihilist origin is quite evident. In the second case the artist claims to give the world unity by withdrawing from it all privileged perspectives. In this sense, he confesses his need for unity, even a degraded form of unity. But he also renounces the first requirement of artistic creation. To deny the relative freedom of the creative mind more forcibly, he affirms the immediate totality of the world. The act of creation denies itself in both these kinds of work. Originally, it refused only one aspect of reality while simultaneously affirming another. Whether it comes to the point of rejecting all reality or of affirming nothing but reality, it

² Even if the novel describes only nostalgia, despair, frustration, it still creates a form of salvation. To talk of despair is to conquer it. Despairing literature is a contradiction in terms.

denies itself each time either by absolute negation or by absolute affirmation. It can be seen that, on the plane of aesthetics, this analysis coincides with the analysis I have sketched on the historical plane.

But just as there is no nihilism that does not end by supposing a value, and no materialism that, being self-conceived, does not end by contradicting itself, so formal art and realist art are absurd concepts. No art can completely reject reality. The Gorgon is, doubtless, a purely imaginary creature; its face and the serpents that crown it are part of nature. Formalism can succeed in purging itself more and more of real content, but there is always a limit. Even pure geometry, where abstract painting sometimes ends, still derives its color and its conformity to 1 perspective from the exterior world. The only real formalism is silence. Moreover, realism cannot dispense with a minimum of interpretation and arbitrariness. Even the very best photographs do not represent reality; they result from an act of selection and impose a limit on something that has none. The realist artist and the formal artist try to find unity where it does not exist, in reality in its crudest state, or in imaginative creation which wants to abolish all reality. On the contrary, unity in art appears at the limit of the transformation that the artist imposes on reality. It cannot dispense with either. This correction³ which the artist imposes by his language and by a redistribution of elements derived from reality is called style and gives the recreated universe its unity and its boundaries. It attempts, in the work of every rebel, to impose its laws on the world, and succeeds in the case of a few geniuses. "Poets," said Shelley, "are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Literary art, by its origins, cannot fail to illustrate this vocation. It can neither totally consent to reality nor turn aside from it completely. The purely imaginary does not exist, and even if it did exist in an ideal novel which would be purely disincarnate, it would have no artistic significance, in that the primary necessity for a mind in search of unity is that the unity should be communicable. From another point of view, the unity of pure reasoning is a false unity, for it is not based on reality. The sentimental love story, the horror story, and the edifying novel deviate from art to the great or small extent that they disobey this law. Real literary creation, on the other hand, uses reality and only reality with all its warmth and its blood, its passion and its outcries. It simply adds something that transfigures reality.

Likewise, what is commonly called the realistic novel tries to be the reproduction of reality in its immediate aspects. To reproduce the elements of reality without making any kind of selection would be, if such an undertaking could be imagined, nothing but a sterile repetition of creation. Realism should only be the means of expression of religious genius—Spanish art admirably illustrates this contention—or, at the other extreme, the artistic expressions of monkeys, which are quite satisfied with mere imitation. In fact, art is never realistic though sometimes it is tempted to be. To be really realistic a description would have to be endless. Where Stendhal describes in one phrase Lucien Leuwen's entrance into a room, the realistic artist ought, logically, to fill several volumes with descriptions of characters and settings, still without succeeding in exhausting every detail. Realism is indefinite enumeration. By this it reveals that its real ambition is conquest, not of the unity, but of the totality of the real world. Now we understand why it should be the official aesthetic of a totalitarian revolution. But the impossibility of such an aesthetic has already been demonstrated. Realistic novels select their material, despite themselves, from reality, because the choice and the conquest of reality are absolute conditions of thought and expression⁴. To write is already to choose. There is thus an arbitrary aspect to reality, just as there is an arbitrary aspect to the ideal, which makes a realistic novel an implicit problem novel. To reduce the unity of the

³ Delacroix notes—and this is a penetrating observation—that it is necessary to correct the "inflexible perspective which (in reality) falsifies the appearance of objects by virtue of precision."

⁴ Delacroix demonstrated this again with profundity: "For realism not to be a word devoid of sense, all men must have the same minds and the same way of conceiving things."

world of fiction to the totality of reality can only be done by means of an a priori judgment which eliminates form, reality, and everything that conflicts with doctrine. Therefore so-called socialist realism is condemned by the very logic of its nihilism to accumulate the advantages of the edifying novel and propaganda literature.

Whether the event enslaves the creator or whether the creator claims to deny the event completely, creation is nevertheless reduced to the degraded forms of nihilist art. It is the same thing with creation as with civilization: it presumes uninterrupted tension between form and matter, between evolution and the mind, and between history and values. If the equilibrium is destroyed, the result is dictatorship or anarchy, propaganda or formal insanity. In either case creation, which always coincides with rational freedom, is impossible. Whether it succumbs to the intoxication of abstraction and formal obscurantism, or whether it falls back on the whip of the crudest and most ingenious realism, modern art, in its semi-totality, is an art of tyrants and slaves, not of creators.

A work in which the content overflows the form, or in which the form drowns the content, only bespeaks an unconvinced and unconvincing unity. In this domain, as in others, any unity that is not a unity of style is a mutilation. Whatever may be the chosen point of view of an artist, one principle remains common to all creators: stylization, which supposes the simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind that gives reality its form. Through style, the creative effort reconstructs the world, and always with the same slight distortion that is the mark of both art and protest. Whether it is the enlargement of the microscope which Proust brings to bear on human experience or, on the contrary, the absurd insignificance with which the American novel endows its characters, reality is in some way artificial. The creative force, the fecundity of rebellion, are contained in this distortion which the style and tone of a work represent. Art is an impossible demand given expression and form. When the most agonizing protest finds its most resolute form of expression, rebellion satisfies its real aspirations and derives creative energy from this fidelity to itself. Despite the fact that this runs counter to the prejudices of the times, the greatest style in art is the expression of the most passionate rebellion. Just as genuine classicism is only romanticism subdued, genius is a rebellion that has created its own limits. That is why there is no genius, contrary to what we are taught today, in negation and pure despair.

This means, at the same time, that great style is not a mere formal virtue. It is a mere formal virtue when it is sought out for its own sake to the detriment of reality, but then it is not great style. It no longer invents, but imitates—like all academic works—while real creation is, in its own fashion, revolutionary. If stylization must necessarily be rather exaggerated, since it sums up the intervention of man and the desire for rectification which the artist brings to his reproduction of reality, it is nevertheless desirable that it should remain invisible so that the demand which gives birth to art should be expressed in its most extreme tension. Great style is invisible stylization, or rather stylization incarnate. "There is never any need," says Flaubert, "to be afraid of exaggeration in art." But he adds that the exaggeration should be "continuous and proportionate to itself." When stylization is exaggerated and obvious, the work becomes nothing but pure nostalgia; the unity it is trying to conquer has nothing to do with concrete unity. On the other hand, when reality is delivered over to unadorned fact or to insignificant stylization, then the concrete is presented without unity. Great art, style, and the true aspect of rebellion lie somewhere between these two heresies.

Creation and Revolution

In art, rebellion is consummated and perpetuated in the act of real creation, not in criticism or commentary. Revolution, in its turn, can only affirm itself in a civilization and not in terror or tyranny. The two questions that are posed by our times to a society caught in a dilemma—Is

creation possible? Is the revolution possible?—are in reality only one question, which concerns the renaissance of civilization.

The revolution and art of the twentieth century are tributaries of the same nihilism and live in the same contradiction. They deny, however, all that they affirm even in their very actions, and both try to find an impossible solution through terror. The contemporary revolution believes that it is inaugurating a new world when it is really only the contradictory climax of the old one. Finally capitalist society and revolutionary society are one and the same thing to the extent that they submit themselves to the same means—industrial production—and to the same promise. But one makes its promise in the name of formal principles that it is quite incapable of incarnating and that are denied by the methods it employs. The other justifies its prophecy in the name of the only reality it recognizes, and ends by mutilating reality. The society based on production is only productive, not creative.

Contemporary art, because it is nihilistic, also flounders between formalism and realism. Realism, moreover, is just as much bourgeois, when it is "tough," as socialist when it becomes edifying. Formalism belongs just as much to the society of the past, when it takes the form of gratuitous abstraction, as to the society that claims to be the society of the future—when it becomes propaganda. Language destroyed by irrational negation becomes lost in verbal delirium; subject to determinist ideology, it is summed up in the slogan. Halfway between the two lies art. If the rebel must simultaneously reject the frenzy of annihilation and the acceptance of totality, the artist must simultaneously escape from the passion for formality and the totalitarian aesthetic of reality. The world today is one, in fact, but its unity is the unity of nihilism. Civilization is only possible if, by renouncing the nihilism of formal principles and nihilism without principles, the world rediscovers the road to a creative synthesis. In the same way, in art the time of perpetual commentary and factual reporting is at the point of death; it announces the advent of creative artists.

But art and society, creation and revolution, to prepare for this event, must rediscover the source of rebellion where refusal and acceptance, the unique and the universal, the individual and history balance each other in a condition of acute tension. Rebellion in itself is not an element of civilization. But it is a preliminary to all civilization. Rebellion alone, in the blind alley in which we live, allows us to hope for the future of which Nietzsche dreamed: "Instead of the judge and the oppressor, the creator." This formula certainly does not authorize the ridiculous illusion of a civilization controlled by artists. It only illuminates the drama of our times in which work, entirely subordinated to production, has ceased to be creative. Industrial society will open the way to a new civilization only by restoring to the worker the dignity of a creator; in other words, by making him apply his interest and his intelligence as much to the work itself as to what it produces. The type of civilization that is inevitable will not be able to separate, among classes as well as among individuals, the worker from the creator; any more than artistic creation dreams of separating form and substance, history and the mind. In this way it will bestow on everyone the dignity that rebellion affirms. It would be unjust, and moreover Utopian, for Shakespeare to direct the shoemakers' union. But it would be equally disastrous for the shoemakers' union to ignore Shakespeare. Shakespeare without the shoemaker serves as an excuse for tyranny. The shoemaker without Shakespeare is absorbed by tyranny when he does not contribute to its propagation. Every act of creation, by its mere existence, denies the world of master and slave. The appalling society of tyrants and slaves in which we survive will find its death and transfiguration only on the level of creation.

But the fact that creation is necessary does not perforce imply that it is possible. A creative period in art is determined by the order of a particular style applied to the disorder of a particular time. It gives form and formulas to contemporary passions. Thus it no longer suffices, for a creative artist, to imitate Mme de La Fayette in a period when our morose rulers have no more time for love.

Today, when collective passions have stolen a march on individual passions, the ecstasy of love can always be controlled by art. But the ineluctable problem is also to control collective passions and the historical struggle. The scope of art, despite the regrets of the plagiarists, has been extended from psychology to the human condition. When the passions of the times put the fate of the whole world at stake, creation wishes to dominate the whole of destiny. But, at the same time, it maintains, in the face of totality, the affirmation of unity. In simple words, creation is then imperilled, first by itself, and then by the spirit of totality. To create, today, is to create dangerously.

In order to dominate collective passions they must, in fact, be lived through and experienced, at least relatively. At the same time that he experiences them, the artist is devoured by them. The result is that our period is rather the period of journalism than of the work of art. The exercise of these passions, finally, entails far greater chances of death than in the period of love and ambition, in that the only way of living collective passions is to be willing to die for them and by their hand. The greatest opportunity for authenticity is, today, the greatest defeat of art. If creation is impossible during wars and revolutions, then we shall have no creative artists, for war and revolution are our lot. The myth of unlimited production brings war in its train as inevitably as clouds announce a storm. Wars lay waste to the West and kill the flower of a generation. Hardly has it arisen from the ruins when the bourgeois system sees the revolutionary system advancing upon it. Genius has not even had time to be reborn; the war that threatens us will kill all those who perhaps might have been geniuses. If a creative classicism is, nevertheless, proved possible, we must recognize that, even though it is rendered illustrious by one name alone, it will be the work of an entire generation. The chances of defeat, in the century of destruction, can only be compensated for by the hazard of numbers; in other words, the chance that of ten authentic artists one, at least, will survive, take charge of the first utterances of his brother artists, and succeed in finding in his life both the time for passion and the time for creation. The artist, whether he likes it or not, can no longer be a solitary, except in the melancholy triumph he owes to all his fellow artists. Rebellious art also ends by revealing the "We are," and with it the way to a burning humility.

Meanwhile, the triumphant revolution, in the aberrations of its nihilism, menaces those who, in defiance of it, claim to maintain the existence of unity in totality. One of the implications of history today, and still more of the history of tomorrow, is the struggle between the artists and the new conquerors, between the witnesses to the creative revolution and the founders of the nihilist revolution. As to the outcome of the struggle, it is only possible to make inspired guesses. At least we know that it must henceforth be carried on to the bitter end. Modern conquerors can kill, but do not seem to be able to create. Artists know how to create but cannot really kill. Murderers are only very exceptionally found among artists. In the long run, therefore, art in our revolutionary societies must die. But then the revolution will have lived its allotted span. Each time that the revolution kills in a man the artist that he might have been, it attenuates itself a little more. If, finally, the conquerors succeed in molding the world according to their laws, it will not prove that quantity is king, but that this world is hell. In this hell, the place of art will coincide with that of vanquished rebellion, a blind and empty hope in the pit of despair. Ernst Dwyer in his Siberian Diary mentions a German lieutenant—for years a prisoner in a camp where cold and hunger were almost unbearable—who constructed himself a silent piano with wooden keys. In the most abject misery, perpetually surrounded by a ragged mob, he composed a strange music which was audible to him alone. And for us who have been thrown into hell, mysterious melodies and the torturing images of a vanished beauty will always bring us, in the midst of crime and folly, the echo of that harmonious insurrection which bears witness, throughout the centuries, to the greatness of humanity.

But hell can endure for only a limited period, and life will begin again one day. History may perhaps have an end; but our task is not to terminate it but to create it, in the image of what we henceforth know to be true. Art, at least, teaches us that man cannot be explained by history alone and that he also finds a reason for his existence in the order of nature. For him, the great god Pan is not dead. His most instinctive act of rebellion, while it affirms the value and the dignity common to all men, obstinately claims, so as to satisfy its hunger for unity, an integral part of the reality whose name is beauty. One can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and the stars. The rebels who wish to ignore nature and beauty are condemned to banish from history everything with which they want to construct the dignity of existence and of labor. Every great reformer tries to create in history what Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, and Tolstoy knew how to create: a world always ready to satisfy the hunger for freedom and dignity which every man carries in his heart. Beauty, no doubt, does not make revolutions. But a day will come when revolutions will have need of beauty. The procedure of beauty, which is to contest reality while endowing it with unity, is also the procedure of rebellion. Is it possible eternally to reject injustice without ceasing to acclaim the nature of man and the beauty of the world? Our answer is yes. This ethic, at once unsubmitive and loyal, is in any event the only one that lights the way to a truly realistic revolution. In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration when civilization will give first place—far ahead of the formal principles and degraded values of history—to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of man and the world he lives in, and which we must now define in the face of a world that insults it.