

Baudelaire

The Painter of Modern Life

(Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne)

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Introduction

'The Painter of Modern Life', Baudelaire's essay, written in 1860 and published in instalments in *Le Figaro* in 1863, is his 'manifesto' of Modernity, the latter a word first employed in French by Chateaubriand. Baudelaire's poetry, often addressing the swiftly-changing and intense nature of contemporary, in particular urban, life, drew further attention to the term. An art critic of considerable note, Baudelaire in this essay uses Constantin Guys (his *Monsieur G.*) as an embodiment of the modern approach in the pictorial arts, as he ranges over various aspects of Modernity, a term hard to define but readily apparent in its manifestations, including rapid commercial and technological development, the alienation of the individual amidst the crowd, and the questioning of inherited wisdom and practice. Baudelaire's central importance is as the lightning-conductor of such ideas, and as the evoker of the set of troubling emotions associated with Modernity. His work reinforced the advent, in the pictorial arts, of Impressionism, and presaged that of Post-Impressionism, and Surrealism, while in poetry it established the path which the Symbolist, and later the Surrealist, poets followed. The essential elements of Modernity that Baudelaire articulated in his complete works remain with us, not as a label for an artistic movement, but as fundamental aspects of secular, commercial, and technological urbanised society, with its practical and spiritual issues and challenges, the majority of which remain unresolved.

The Painter of Modern Life

I. Beauty, Fashion and Happiness

There are people in this world, even the world of artists, who go to the Louvre, pass, swiftly, before a host of paintings, full of interest though of a *lower order*, without giving them a glance, and plant themselves in reverie before a Titian or a Raphael, one of those popularised by the art of the engraver; then depart, satisfied, more than one saying 'I know my Louvre,' just as there are others who once having read Bossuet and Racine think they comprehend the history of literature.

Happily, righters of wrongs, critics, amateurs, the curious, appear from time to time to affirm that Raphael is not everything, Racine is not everything, that the *minor poets* contain things which are good, solid, pleasurable; and finally that however much we admire beauty in general, as expressed by the classical poets and artists, we are no less wrong in neglecting specific beauty, the beauty of circumstance and the play of manners.

I have to say that, for some years now, the world has shown itself somewhat improved in this respect. The value that amateur collectors attach these days to the pleasant coloured engravings of the last century proves that a much-needed reaction in public taste has occurred; Debucourt, the brothers Saint-Aubin, and many others have been entered in the dictionary of artists worthy of study. Yet they represent the past; it is to the painting of modern manners that I wish to address myself today. The past is interesting not only for the beauty extracted from it by those artists for whom it was their present, but also, being past, for its historical value. It is the same with the present. The pleasure we derive from the representation of the present is due not merely to the beauty with which it can be invested but also to its essential quality of being present.

I have before my eyes a series of fashion plates, commencing with the Revolution and ending, more or less, with the Consulate. Those modes of dress which appear ridiculous to unreflective people, serious people without true seriousness, have a dual charm, both artistic and historical. They are often very fine, and executed with spirit, but what to me is every bit as important, and what I am pleased to find in all or almost all of them, is the morality and aesthetic of their age. The idea of beauty Humanity creates for itself imprints itself on all its attire, rumples or stiffens its clothing, rounds out or aligns its gestures, and even, in the end, penetrates, subtly, its facial features. Humanity ends by resembling that which it aspires to be. Those engraved forms can be viewed as works of beauty or ugliness, of ugliness as caricature, of beauty as ancient statuary.

The women dressed in those costumes resemble the one or the other, to a greater or lesser degree, according, that is, to the degree of poetry or vulgarity by which they are marked. Living flesh rendered flowing what to us seems too rigid. The spectator's imagination can, even today, impart a stir or rustle to this *tunic* and that *shawl*. One day, perhaps, a play will be performed in some theatre, in which we shall see the resurrection of those

costumes, dressed in which our ancestors found themselves every bit as enchanting as we ourselves in our poor garments (the which possess their own grace, in truth, but rather of a moral and spiritual nature), and if they are then worn and brought to life by intelligent actors and actresses we will be astonished that we mocked them so foolishly. The past, without losing a pleasing air of fantasy, will recover the light and movement of life, and become the present.

If an impartial person were to leaf through in turn all the modes of fashion from the first age of France to the present day, they would find nothing to shock or surprise. The transitions would be as abundantly evidenced as they are in the ranks of the animal kingdom. Not a single gap; thus, not a single surprise. And if to the vignette representing each epoch were added the philosophical thought with which it was most occupied, and by which it was most agitated, the memory of which thought the vignette inevitably invokes, it would be seen that a profound harmony reigns in all the elements of its history, and that even in those centuries that seem to us the most monstrous and insane the undying appetite for beauty has always found its satisfaction.

This grants us a fine opportunity, in fact, to establish a rational and historically-grounded theory of beauty, as opposed to the theory of a unique and absolute beauty; to demonstrate that beauty is always, inevitably, of a dual composition, even though the impression it produces is unified; for the difficulty of discerning the varying elements of beauty within the unity of impression in no way obviates the need for variety in its composition. Beauty is formed of an eternal and invariable element which is exceedingly difficult to quantify, and a relative and circumstantial element which embodies, if you like, aspect by aspect or all at once, the epoch, its manners, its morality, its passion. Without this second element which is like the delightful, seductive, appetising icing on the divine cake, the first element would be indigestible, beyond our appreciation, neither adapted nor suited to human nature. I defy anyone to reveal a single instance of beauty that does not contain these two elements.

I shall select, if you wish, two extreme instances in our history. In hieratic art the duality is visible at first glance; the element of eternal beauty only reveals itself with the permission and under the rule of the religion to which the artist adheres. In the most frivolous work of a refined artist, belonging to one of those epochs which we denote, in our immense

vanity, as civilised, the duality is equally revealed; the eternal element of beauty will be, at the same time, hidden and expressed, if not by the fashion of the age at least by the particular temperament of the artist. The duality of art is a fatal consequence of the duality of humankind. Consider, if you will, that the eternal element exists as the soul of art, and the variable element as its body. That is why Stendhal, an impertinent spirit, teasing, repugnant even, but one whose impertinences are a useful spur to reflection, approached the truth more closely than many another, in saying: '*Beauty is no more than the promise of happiness.*' Doubtless that definition overshoots the mark. It renders beauty excessively subject to the infinitely variable ideal of happiness. It strips beauty too readily of its aristocratic quality; but it possesses the great merit of distinguishing itself decisively from the errors of the academicians.

I have explained these things more than once before; these lines will have said enough on the subject for those who enjoy these diversions of abstract thought. But I know that my French audience have, for the most part, little taste for these, and I myself am impatient to embark upon the positive and substantial elements of my subject.

II. The Portrayal of Manners

For the portrayal of manners, the representation of bourgeois life, and the spectacle of fashion, the most expeditious and least costly means are evidently the best. The more beauty the artist instils in it, the more precious will be his work; but there is in the trivialities of life, in the daily metamorphosis of external things, a rapid movement that demands from the artist an equal speed of execution. The multi-coloured engravings of the eighteenth century have once more attracted the attention of the fashionable, as I was saying but now; pastels, etchings, aquatints have, one by one, contributed their contingents to that immense dictionary of modern life distributed throughout the libraries, among the portfolios of collectors, and behind the windows of the meanest of shops. And then lithography appeared, instantly showing itself as most aptly suited to this enormous task, so trivial at first sight. We have some veritable monuments in this genre. The works of Gavarni and Daumier have rightly been named as complementary to the *Comédie Humaine*. Balzac himself, I am more than convinced, was not far from adopting this idea, which is all the more valid

in that the genius of the painter of manners is of a mixed nature, that is say one into which there enters a strong element of the literary spirit. Observer, *flâneur* (saunterer), philosopher; call them what you will, you will certainly be led, in characterising such artists, to employ an epithet that you would not apply to a painter of eternal, or at least more long-lasting subjects, those of a heroic or religious nature. Sometimes such an artist is a poet, but more often closer to being a novelist or moralist in painting the circumstantial, and all which it suggests of the eternal. Every country, to its delight and glory, has possessed such artists. To Daumier and Gavarni, in our present epoch, being the first names that come to mind, one may add Devéria, Maurin, and Numa, historians of the more questionable charms of the Restoration, Wattier, Tassaert, and Eugène Lami, the latter almost English in his love of aristocratic elegance, and even Trimolet and Traviès, those chroniclers of poverty and the humble life.

III. The Artist: Man of the World, Man of the Crowd, Child

Today I would like to tell the public of a singular man, of an originality so decided and powerful that it is sufficient to itself and requires no approbation. Not one of his drawings is signed, if by a signature you mean the few, readily imitated letters that spell a name, and which so many other artists add, ostentatiously, to the base of their most trivial sketches. But all his works are signed with his brilliant spirit, and collectors, having viewed and appreciated them, easily recognise them from the description I am about to give. A great lover of crowds and incognitos, Monsieur C.G. (*Constantin Guys*) takes originality to the furthest point of modesty. Mr. Thackeray, who, as is known, is deeply interested in works of art, and who himself designs the illustrations for his novels, mentioned Monsieur G. one day in a lesser-known London journal. This enraged the artist, as though it were an attack upon his virtue. More recently, when he learnt that I intended to pen an appreciation of his spirit and talent, he begged me, in a most imperious manner, to suppress his name, and to speak of his works as if they came from an anonymous hand. I shall bow, humbly, to this strange request. We shall feign to believe, the reader and I, that Monsieur G does not exist, and concern ourselves with his drawings and watercolours, for which he professes a patrician disdain, as do those scholars who pass judgement on rare historical documents, preserved by chance, whose

authors remain eternally unknown. We will even suppose, to satisfy my conscience completely, that all I have to say regarding his nature, so strangely and mysteriously brilliant, is more or less genuinely suggested by the works in question; pure poetical hypothesis, conjecture, the work of my imagination.

Monsieur G. is old. Rousseau, it is said, started writing at forty-two years of age. It was at about that age, perhaps, that Monsieur G. obsessed with all the images crowding his brain, had the audacity to fling ink and colour onto a blank sheet of paper. To tell the truth, he drew like a barbarian, like a child, impatient with the clumsiness of his fingers, and the disobedience of his implement. I have viewed a large number of these primitive barbarous scribbles, and I declare that the majority of those who understand, or pretend to understand art, are blameless for not having divined the latent genius inhabiting those shadowy preliminaries. Today, Monsieur G. who has discovered, by his own sole efforts, all the little tricks of his trade, and who has undertaken, without guidance, his own education, has become a powerful master, in his own manner, and has retained of his own initial artlessness only that which was needed to add an unexpected seasoning to his rich gifts. When he encounters one of these *youthful* attempts of his, he tears it to bits, or burns it, with a most amusing display of embarrassment.

For ten years I desired to make Monsieur G's acquaintance, he who is, by nature, a great traveller and cosmopolitan. I knew he had long been employed by an English illustrated journal, and that he had published there engravings of his travel-sketches (done in Spain, Turkey, the Crimea). Since then I have seen a considerable quantity of such drawings, improvised in those same places, and thus been able to *read* a minutely detailed account of the Crimean campaign, preferable indeed to any other. The same journal also published numerous compositions by the same hand, always unsigned, depicting new ballets and operas. When, at last, I met him, I saw at once that I had to do not with an *artist* exactly, but rather a *man of the world*. Understand here, I beg you, the term *artist* in a very restricted sense, and the term *man of the world* in a very broad one. *Man of the world*, that is to say man of the whole world, one who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons for its many behaviours; *artist*, that is but to say specialist, a man attached to his palette as a serf is to the soil. Monsieur G. does not like to be called an artist. Is he not right,

in a sense? He is interested in the whole world; he wishes to know, understand, appreciate all that takes place on the surface of our globe. The artist lives little of his life in the world of politics and morals. He who lives in the Breda quarter ignores what comes to pass in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Save for two or three exceptions, whom it is pointless to name, most artists are, it must be said, highly-skilled brutes, mere artisans, village intellects with the brains of peasants. Their conversation, necessarily limited to a very small circle, proves quickly unbearable to the man of the world; in spirit, a citizen of the universe.

Thus, to enter into an understanding of Monsieur G. take note, at once, of this: that *curiosity* may be considered the starting-point for his genius.

Do you recall a picture (it is a picture, in truth!), drawn by the most powerful pen of this era (*that of Edgar Allan Poe*), which has for its title '*The Man of the Crowd*'? Behind a café window, a convalescent, contemplating the crowd with pleasure, mingles his thought with all the thoughts stirring about him. Recently returned from death's shadow, he breathes in, with delight, all the essences and odours of life; since he has been on the point of total oblivion, he remembers and wishes, ardently, to remember everything. Finally, he flings himself into the crowd, in pursuit of some unknown, whose physiognomy, glimpsed in the blink of an eye, has bewitched him. Curiosity has become a fatal, irresistible passion!

Imagine an artist who is always, spiritually, in that convalescent's state, and you will hold the key to Monsieur G's character.

Now, convalescence is like a return to childhood. The convalescent, like the child, enjoys, to the highest degree, the ability to interest himself keenly in things, even those which appear the most trivial. Let us return, if possible, by means of a retrospective effort of the imagination, to our earliest, most youthful impressions, and we will recall that they had a singular relationship to those impressions, so vividly coloured, which we later received following a physical illness, provided that illness left our mental faculties pure and intact. The child sees everything as *novelty*; he is forever intoxicated. Nothing more closely resembles what we call inspiration than the joy with which a child absorbs form and colour. I dare to go further; I affirm that inspiration is somewhat akin to *convulsion*, and that every sublime thought is accompanied by a nervous shock, more or less violent in nature, which strikes the deepest part of the brain. The

man of genius has strong nerves; those of the child are weak. In the former, reason occupies a significant place; in the latter, sensibility occupies almost the whole being. But his genius is simply *childhood recovered* at will, a childhood now equipped for self-expression, with mature faculties and an analytic spirit which permit him to set in order the mass of raw material he has involuntarily accumulated. It is to this profound and joyous curiosity that one must attribute the fixed and animalistically ecstatic gaze of children confronted by the *new*, whatever it might be, a face or a landscape, light, gilding, colour, lustrous materials, or the enchantment of beauty enhanced by cosmetics. One of my friends told me that, when he was a small child, he was often present when his father dressed himself, and that, with a mixture of amazement and delight, he would contemplate the muscular arms, the transitions of colour in the pink and yellow tints of the skin, and the bluish network of veins. The tableau of external life had already filled him with awe, and seized his brain. Already, form obsessed and possessed him. Destiny had already revealed, precociously, the tip of its nose. His *damnation* was certain. Need I add that the child is today a celebrated painter?

I begged you, a moment ago, to consider Monsieur G. as an eternal convalescent; to complete your conception of him, consider him also as a man-child, a man possessed at each instant of the genius of infancy, that is to say a genius for whom no aspect of life has been rendered *dull*.

I have said that I was reluctant to call him simply an artist, and that he himself declined that title, with a modesty touched with aristocratic reserve. I would willingly name him a *dandy*, and own to several good reasons for that; since the word *dandy* implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of the whole moral mechanism of this world; yet on the other hand the dandy aspires to insensitivity, and it is in this that Monsieur G., dominated himself by an insatiable passion that of seeing and feeling, parts company, forcefully, with dandyism. '*Amabam amare: I love to love*', said Saint Augustine. 'I love passion, passionately' Monsieur G. might choose to say. The dandy is blasé, or pretends to be so, for reasons of policy and caste. Monsieur G. has a horror of blasé people. He is a master of that most difficult art (refined spirits will comprehend me) of being sincere without appearing ridiculous. I would happily award him the title of philosopher, to which he has more than one right, if his excessive love of things visible, tangible, condensed to their plastic state, did not inspire in

him a certain repugnance to all that forms the impalpable realm of the metaphysician. Let us be content to consider him then as a purely pictorial moralist, akin to La Bruyère.

The crowd is his domain, as the air is that of the birds, and the water the fishes. His passion, and profession, is to *espouse the crowd*. For the perfect *flâneur* (*saunterer*), for the passionate observer, it is an immense joy to take up one's dwelling among the multitude, amidst undulation, movement, the fugitive, the infinite. To be absent from home and yet feel oneself everywhere at home; to view the world, to be at the heart of the world, and yet hidden from the world, such are some of the least pleasures of those independent spirits, passionate and impartial, that language can only inadequately define. The spectator is a prince who rejoices everywhere in his incognito. The lover of life makes the world his family, like the lover of the fair sex who makes a family from all those beauties found, or to be found, or never to be found; or, like the picture-lover, lives in the enchanted company of dreams painted on canvas. Thus, the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as into an immense reservoir of electrical energy. One might compare him, also, to a mirror, immense as that crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness which, with its every movement, conveys the multiplicity of life, and the grace in motion of every element of that life. He is an 'I', insatiable in his appetite for the 'not-I', who at every instance renders it, and expresses it in images more vibrant than life itself, which is forever unstable and fugitive. 'Any man', Monsieur G. said one day, in the midst of one of those conversations which he illuminates with intense gaze and evocative gesture, 'any man, not crushed by one of those sorrows so great as to rob him of all his faculties, *who can be bored at the heart of a multitude* is an idiot! An idiot! And one whom I despise!'

When Monsieur G. on waking opens his eyes to see the sun making its assault, beating on his window-pane, he cries, remorsefully and regretfully: 'What an imperious command! What a fanfare of light! Several hours of light, everywhere, already gone! Light, lost to sleep! How many brightly-lit things I might have seen that I have failed to see!' And he goes out! And he watches the river of life in its flow, so majestic, so brilliant. He admires the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amidst the tumult of human liberty. He contemplates the landscapes of the

great metropolis, landscapes of stone caressed by the fog or struck by gusts of sunlight. He delights in fine carriages, proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the dexterity of the footmen, the flowing movement of the women, the beautiful children, happy to be alive and finely-dressed; in a word, in universal life. If a fashion, the cut of a garment, has been slightly altered, if ribbon in bows, if curls, have been dethroned by cockades, if the *bavolet* (*the neck-hanging at the back of a bonnet*) has been enlarged, if the *chignon* (*a coil of hair at the back of the head*) is a fraction nearer the nape of the neck, if the waist is raised, the skirt fuller, believe that *his eagle eye* will already have divined it, from an enormous distance. A regiment passes by, on its way perhaps to the ends of the earth, sending into the air of the boulevards its fanfares as light and lively as hope; and behold, the eye of Monsieur G. has already inspected the arms, the allure, the physiognomy of that troop. Glittering harnesses, determined glances, heavy solemn moustaches, all this enters into him, pell-mell; and in a few moments the resulting poem is virtually composed. Behold how his soul is alive with the soul of that regiment marching like a single creature, a proud image of joy in obedience!

But now evening has fallen. It is that strange and uncertain hour when the curtains of the heavens are drawn and the cities are illumined. The gas-light stains the purple of sunset. Honest or dishonest, rational or mad, all say to themselves: 'At last, the day is done!' Both the wicked and the wise think of pleasure, and each hastens to their chosen place to drink the cup of forgetfulness. Monsieur G. will be the last to linger, wherever may be a gleam of light, an echo of poetry, a tremor of life, a vibration of music; wherever a passion may pose *for* his eye, wherever the natural and the conventional reveal themselves in a peculiar beauty, wherever the sun lights the brief joys of the *depraved creature*! 'Behold, a day well-employed, indeed!' a certain reader, whom we all know, remarks to himself 'every one of us has sufficient genius to fill his day in the same fashion.' No! Few are gifted with the ability to see; even fewer possess the power of expression. Now, at a time when others sleep, he is bowed over his table, darting the same look at a sheet of paper he directed a moment ago towards external things, skirmishing with his crayon, his pen, his brush, splashing his glass of water towards the ceiling, wiping his pen on his shirt, urgent, violent, active, as if he fears the images might escape him, contentious though alone, elbowing himself on. And those external things are reborn on

paper, lifelike and more than lifelike, beautiful and more than beautiful, singular and endowed with the liveliness of their creator's soul. The phantasmagoria has been drawn from nature. All the material that the memory has burdened itself with is ranked, arranged, harmonised, and subjected to that imposed idealisation which is the result of a *childlike* perception, that is to say an intense and magical perception, by reason of its innocence!

IV. Modernity

So away he goes, hastening, searching. What does he seek? Of a surety, this man, such as I have depicted him, endowed with an active imagination, endlessly voyaging over *the great desert of humanity*, has a loftier aim than that of the mere flâneur, a more general aim than the fleeting pleasures of circumstance. He is in search of something that we may be permitted to call *modernity*, since there seems no better word to express the idea in question. He strives, for his own part, to extract from the fashionable whatever it may contain of the poetical within the historical, to draw the eternal from the transitory. If we cast a glance over our contemporary art exhibitions, we are struck by the general tendency among artists to dress all their subjects in the costumes of the past. Almost all of them employ the fashions and furnishings of the Renaissance, as David employed the fashions and furnishings of ancient Rome. There is this difference however, that David, having chosen specifically Greek or Roman subjects, could do no other than dress them in the ancient manner, while the painters of today, choosing subjects of a general nature applicable to all epochs, insist on clothing them in the costumes of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or the Orient. This is evidently the sign of great idleness; since it is easier to decide, at the outset, that everything about the modes of dress of an epoch is ugly, rather than applying oneself to extracting from it the mysterious beauty it might perhaps contain, however minimal or slight that might be. Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, that half of art of which the other is the eternal and immutable. Every old master possessed his own modernity; the vast majority of fine paintings left to us by former generations are clothed in the costumes of their era. They are perfectly harmonious because costumes, coiffures, and even the gestures, glances, smiles (every epoch has its own bearing, glance and smile) form a whole

filled with vitality. This element, transitory and fugitive, whose metamorphoses are so frequent, you must on no account despise or ignore. In suppressing it, you fall unavoidably into the depths of an abstract and undefinable beauty, like that of the sole woman before the primal fall. If you substitute for the costume of the age that necessity requires, an alternative, you create a nonsense, which is only excusable in the case of some masquerade demanded by fashion. Thus, the goddesses, the nymphs, the sultanas of the eighteenth century, are still convincing portraits, morally speaking.

It is doubtless excellent to study the old masters so as to comprehend the art of painting, but it can be no more than a superfluous exercise if your aim is to understand the nature of present-day beauty. The draperies of Rubens or Veronese will not teach you how to depict *moire antique*, *satin à la reine*, or any other fabric of our age, supported, balanced upon, crinoline or starched muslin petticoats. The texture and weave are not the same as those of the materials of ancient Venice, or those worn at Catherine's court. In addition, the cut of the skirt and bodice is completely dissimilar, the pleats are arranged according to a different system, and finally the gesture and carriage of a woman of today gives her dress a life and appearance unlike those of a woman of the past. In short, for any *modernity* to prove worthy of becoming antiquity it is necessary for the mysterious beauty which human life accidentally sets there to be extracted. It is to this task, in particular, that Monsieur G. applies himself.

I have said that every age has its own bearing, glance, and gesture. It is above all in a vast gallery of paintings (such as Versailles, for example) that this proposition may readily be verified. But the principle may be taken further. Within the entity we call a nation, the professions, classes, and centuries introduce variety, not only in gestures and manners but also in the actual shape of the face. Certain types of nose, mouth, forehead, will be found to represent a period of time which I do not pretend to determine but which could certainly be subject to calculation. Such considerations are not sufficiently familiar to our portrait-painters; and the great failing of Monsieur Ingres, in particular, is that he seeks to impose on every type that poses before his eyes a perfection, more or less despotic, derived from the repertoire of classical ideas.

In a matter of this nature, it would be easy, and indeed legitimate, to argue *a priori*. The perpetual correlation between what we term *the soul*

and what we term *the body* explains, most clearly, how everything which is material, or flows from the spirit, represents, and will always represent, the spirit from which it derives. If a patient and scrupulous painter, but one of limited imagination, having to paint a present-day courtesan, is *inspired* (such is the consecrated word) by a courtesan of Titian's or Raphael's, it is all too likely that he will produce a work which is false, ambiguous, obscure. By the study of a masterwork of that period and genre he will learn neither the attitude, nor the glance, nor the smile, nor the vital aspect of any one of those creatures whom the dictionary of fashion has successively classified under the coarse or playful titles of *impures, kept women, lorettes* and *biches*.

The same criticism may be applied rigorously to the study of the soldier, the dandy, even animals, dogs or horses, all that composes the external life of an age. Woe to any who study the antique for anything other than the artistry itself, the logic, the general method! By immersing in it too thoroughly, they will lose all memory of the present, and renounce the rights and privileges afforded by circumstance, for almost all our originality comes from the stamp which the *age* imprints on our sensations. The reader will comprehend that I could readily prove my assertions with reference to many other instances than women. What say you, for example, to a marine painter (I take the hypothesis to its extreme) who, required to reproduce the sober and elegant *beauty* of a modern ship, wearied his eyes in studying the over-burdened, involved shape, the monumental stern of the antique vessels and complex rigging of the sixteenth century? What, again, would you think of an artist you had charged with painting a thoroughbred, celebrated in the sacred annals of the turf, if he had restricted his observations to museums, if he had been content to view the horse in the galleries of the past, in Van Dyck, Bourguignon, or Van der Meulen?

Monsieur G., guided by nature, tyrannised by circumstance, has followed an altogether different path. He began by contemplating life itself, and only later concerned himself with acquiring the means of expressing life. This has resulted in a striking originality in which what remains of the barbarous or naive appears as a new proof of his faithfulness to the *impression*, as a flattering compliment paid to truth. For the majority of us, especially people involved in business affairs, in whose sight nature exists not, unless it is useful as applied to those affairs, the marvellous reality of

life is singularly diluted. Monsieur G. absorbs it endlessly; with it, his memory and his sight are filled.

V. The Art of Memory (Mnemonic Art)

That word *barbarous* which has emerged too often, perhaps, from my pen, might lead some people to believe that we are concerned here with unfinished drawings which only the spectator's imagination can transform to perfect things. That would be to misunderstand me. I am speaking of an inevitable barbarousness, a childlike synthesis, which is often visible in perfect art (such as that of Mexico, Egypt, Nineveh), and which derives from the need to view things broadly, and to consider them, above all, in their combined effect. It is not superfluous to observe here that all those artists whose vision creates synthesis by abridgment have been accused of being barbarous, for example Monsieur Corot, who first applies himself to tracing the principal lines of a landscape, its bones, its physiognomy. Thus, Monsieur G. faithfully transmits his true impressions, marking, with instinctive energy, the salient or luminous features of an object (salient or luminous perhaps from the dramatic point of view), or its principal characteristics, sometimes even with a degree of exaggeration that aids human memory; and the spectator's imagination, submitting in turn to this most despotic of mnemonic devices, sees, with great clarity, the impression produced on Monsieur G.'s mind by external things. The spectator is here the translator, in creating a translation always clear and intoxicating.

There is one circumstance which adds greatly to the vital force of this *legendary* translation of external life. I speak of Monsieur G.'s method of drawing. He draws from memory, and not from the model, save for those instances (his drawings of the Crimean War, for example) where he has urgent need of taking immediate and hasty note of the principal lines of his subject in order to capture them. In fact, all good and true artists draw from the image imprinted on their brains, and not from nature. If one presents us with the admirable sketches of Raphael, Watteau, and many another, as counter-examples, we would reply that those are notes, very detailed ones, it is true, but simply notes. When the true artist embarks on the definitive execution of a work, its model would be more an *embarrassment* than an aid. It may even be that artists like Daumier and Monsieur G., long accustomed to exercising their memory and filling it

with images, confronted with the model and the multiplicity of details which comprise it, find their primary faculty stunned, and likewise paralysed.

Thus, a duel is initiated between the desire to grasp every detail, to forget nothing, and the faculty of memory which has formed the habit of absorbing, in a lively manner, the general colour and outline, the arabesque of contours. Artists possessing a perfect feeling for form, but accustomed to exercising their memory and imagination above all will find themselves assailed by a riot of details, all clamouring for justice with the fury of a crowd enamoured of absolute equality. Justice is everywhere trampled underfoot; all harmony is destroyed, sacrificed; many a triviality becomes an enormity; many a trifle a usurper. The more the artist thinks to treat the details with impartiality, the greater the anarchy. Whether myopic, or long-sighted, all sense of hierarchy or subordination vanishes. It is an outcome often present in the works of one of our most fashionable painters, whose faults moreover are so well suited to the faults of the masses that they have served his fame in a singular manner. The analogy may likewise be divined in the art of acting, an art so mysterious, so profound, yet fallen today into a mire of confusion. Monsieur Frédérick-Lemâitre builds a role with the breadth and amplitude of genius. However bright with luminous details his performance, it is always sculptural, a work of synthesis. While Monsieur Bouffé creates his roles with a precision myopic and bureaucratic. With him all is lightning, but nothing makes itself visible, nothing demands retention in the memory.

Thus, two things are revealed in Monsieur G.'s execution of his works: the first an intense effort of memory that resurrects and evokes, a memory that says to each thing: 'Lazarus, arise!' the other a fire, an intoxication of the pencil or the brush, seeming almost a frenzy. It is the fear of not working swiftly enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis can be extracted and seized upon; the dreadful fear that grips all great artists, and drives them to appropriate, so passionately, every means of expression so that the mind's commands may never be perverted by the hand's hesitations, and that above all the execution, the ideal execution, of the work may be as unconscious as *spontaneous* as is the process of digestion to the mind of a healthy man who has dined. Monsieur G. begins with a few light indications in pencil, which do no more than mark the position objects must occupy in space. The principle planes are

then indicated in tinted wash, vague masses, lightly coloured at first, but revisited later and charged, repeatedly, with more intense colours. At the last moment, the contours of objects are outlined, definitively, in ink. Without seeing them, one could not imagine the surprising effects he attains by this method, so simple, and almost elementary. It possesses this incomparable advantage, that no matter at what stage of its execution it may be, each design has a sufficiently finished air; call it a *study* if you will, but it is a perfect study. All the values are in complete harmony, and if he wishes to develop them further, they will march in unison towards the degree of perfection desired. He prepares, thus, twenty drawings at a time, with an impatience and a delightful joy amusing even to himself. The sketches pile up, heaped in tens, hundreds, thousands. From time to time he reviews them, leafing through them, examining them, and then selects a few, whose intensity he more or less augments, deepening the shadows and progressively heightening the lights.

He attaches enormous importance to his backgrounds, which, vigorous or slight, are always of a quality and nature suited to the figures. The tonal scale and general harmony are strictly observed, with a genius that derives rather from instinct than study. For Monsieur G. possesses, by nature, that mysterious talent of the colourist, a true gift that study may augment but which it is, of itself, I think, powerless to create. To say all in a single word, our singular artist expresses at once the gestures and attitudes, solemn or grotesque, of living things, with their luminous *explosion* in space.

VI. The Annals of War

Bulgaria, Turkey, the Crimea, Spain, have provided a grand feast for the eyes of Monsieur G. or rather of that imaginary artist we have agreed to call Monsieur G. For I am reminded, from time to time, that I have promised myself to maintain, the better to preserve his modesty, the pretence that he does not exist. I have pored over his archives of the Eastern War (battlefields littered with funereal debris, baggage trains, shipments of cattle and horses), astonishing *tableaux vivants*, traced from life itself, precious elements. picturesque in nature, that many a renowned painter, in the same circumstances, would have foolishly neglected; though, in that regard, I would willingly make an exception of Monsieur Horace

Vernet, in truth a reporter rather than essentially a painter, with whom Monsieur G., a more subtle artist, has manifest affinities, if you choose to consider him simply as an archivist of life. I can affirm that no newspaper, no written account, no book has so readily expressed in all its painful detail and grim entirety, this great military epic of the Crimea. The eye wanders, in turn, from the banks of the Danube to the shores of the Bosphorus; to Cape Kherson; over the plain of Balaclava; over the fields of Inkerman; into the encampments of the English, French, Turks and Piedmontese; through the streets of Constantinople; among the hospital wards, and amidst every religious and military ceremonial.

One of these compositions most deeply imprinted on my mind, represents: *The Consecration of a Burial-Ground at Scutari by the Bishop of Gibraltar*. The picturesque character of the scene, which lies in the contrast between the Eastern setting and the Western attitudes and uniforms of those taking part, is realised in a striking manner, evocative, and pregnant with dreams. The soldiers and officers possess the ineradicable air of *gentlemen*, resolute and yet reserved, that they bear with them to the ends of the earth, as far as the garrisons of the Cape colony, and the cantonments of India: the English clergymen give the vague impression of being beadles or money-changers who have dressed themselves in caps and gowns.

Here we are at Schumla, with Omar Pasha: Turkish hospitality, pipes and coffee; the guests all disposed on divans, holding pipes the length of speaking-tubes, whose bowls rest on the ground at their feet, to their lips. Here we view *The Kurds at Scutari*, strange-looking troops, whose aspect makes one dream of some invading barbarian horde; here are the Bashibazouks, no less singular, with their European officers, Hungarian or Polish, whose dandified physiognomies contrast oddly with the baroque Oriental character of their men.

I recall a magnificent design, showing a lone standing figure, a large and robust man, with an air at once pensive, unconcerned, and bold; in top-boots extending above his knees; his uniform hidden beneath a vast, heavy, tightly-buttoned greatcoat. Through the smoke from his cigar, he gazes at the threatening, mist-bound horizon; one arm, wounded, is bound in a sling. At its base I read these words, in English, inscribed in pencil: *Canrobert on the battlefield of Inkerman. Taken on the spot.*

And who is this cavalryman with the white moustaches, his expression so vividly depicted, who, head raised, has the air of savouring all the dread poetry of the battlefield, while his horse, picks its way, sniffing the ground, among the corpses with shrunken faces, piled, feet in the air, in strange attitudes? At the foot of this drawing, in one corner, can be read these words, again in English: *Myself at Inkerman*.

I perceive Monsieur Baraguay d'Hilliers, with the Seraskier, reviewing the artillery at Beshiktash. I have rarely seen a more lifelike military portrait engraved by a bolder or more spirited pen.

A name, of sinister repute since the Syrian disasters, offers itself to my view: Ahmed Pasha, General in Chief to the Caliphate, standing with members of his staff in front of his hut, receiving two European officers. Despite the amplitude of his Turkish paunch, Ahmed Pasha displays, in face and attitude, the grand aristocratic air that generally applies to the dominant races.

The Battle of Balaclava is represented several times in this intriguing collection, and under varying aspects. Among the most striking here is that historic cavalry-charge celebrated by the heroic trumpet of Alfred Tennyson, the English poet laureate; a horde of cavalry galloping at prodigious speed towards the horizon amidst dense clouds of artillery smoke. In the background, the landscape is barred by a line of verdant hills.

From time to time, religious scenes relieve the eye saddened by all this chaos of gunpowder and turbulent slaughter. In the midst of a varied group of English soldiers, among whom the picturesque uniforms of the kilted Scots are most striking, an Anglican priest conducts the Sunday service; three drums, the one supported by two others, serve him for a pulpit.

In truth, it is difficult, simply with a pen, to translate this poem made of a thousand sketches, a poem so vast and so complicated, or express the intoxication released by all this picturesque detail, often melancholy but never sentimental, gathered on several hundred pages, whose stains and lacerations reveal, in their own way, the confusion and tumult, amidst which the artist set there his memories of the day. Each evening, the courier would carry Monsieur G.'s notes and drawings to London, and often he would entrust thus to the post more than ten sketches drawn on the thinnest of paper, which the engravers and the journal's subscribers eagerly awaited.

Now, ambulances appear, in sketches where the very atmosphere seems sick, sad and heavy; each litter therein seems a bed of pain; now, the hospital at Pera, where in conversation with two nuns, tall, pallid, and erect like figures by Le Sueur, I see a visitor in casual dress, identified by this curious legend in English: *My humble self*. And now along rough, twisting paths, strewn with debris from a battle already long past, beasts of burden, mules, donkeys, horses, pass by slowly, bearing on their backs, in pairs of crudely-made chairs, the pale and inert wounded. Amidst the snowy waste, camels, of majestic bearing, heads high, led by Tartars, bear provisions or munitions of every kind: it is a whole world of warfare, alive, busy, silent; a world of encampments, bazaars displaying samples of every kind of ware, like barbarous towns improvised for the occasion. Among these barracks, along these stony or snow-packed tracks, through these ravines, circulate the uniforms of several nations, more or less damaged by battle, or transformed by the addition of large greatcoats and heavy boots.

It is unfortunate that this album, now scattered in several places, precious pages of which have been retained by the engravers charged with reproducing them or by the editors of the *Illustrated London News*, has not passed before the Emperor's eyes. I am sure he would have been pleased to peruse, and not without emotion, the deeds and affairs of his soldiers, all minutely depicted, day by day, from the most dazzling of military actions to the most trivial occupations of life, by the firm and intelligent hand of this military artist.

VII. Pomp and Circumstance

Turkey also provided our beloved Monsieur G. with some admirable motifs for composition: the Bayram or holiday festivals, gloomy rain-soaked splendours, in the midst of which, like a pale sun, appeared the late Sultan's permanent ennui; ranged on the Sultan's left all the officers of the civil service; on the right all those of the military service, of whom the commander was Said Pasha, Sultan of Egypt, at that time present in Constantinople; solemn cavalcades and processions filing towards the little mosque neighbouring on the palace, and, among the crowds, Turkish functionaries, veritable caricatures of decadence, overwhelming their magnificent steeds with the weight of their fantastic bulk; great heavy carriages, like Louis XIV coaches, gilded and decked out with oriental

caprice, from which, now and then, dart forth glances of feminine curiosity, from the restricted gap allowed the eyes by the bands of muslin wound about them; frenetic dances of the acrobats of the *third sex* (never has Balzac's amusing expression proved more applicable than in the present case, for beneath the palpitations of trembling light, beneath the agitation of their ample garments, beneath the ardent cosmetics lining those cheeks, eyes and eyelids, in those hysterical convulsive gestures, in the floating waist-long hair, it would prove difficult not to say impossible to divine the marks of virility); and finally the *femmes galantes* (if one can even employ the word gallantry in connection with the Orient), generally composed of Hungarians, Wallachians, Jewesses, Poles, Greeks and Armenians; for, under a despotic government, it is the oppressed races, and among them those above all that suffer the most, who provide most of the women subjected to prostitution. Of these, some keep their national costume, short-sleeved embroidered jackets, flowing sashes, full trousers, turned-up slippers, striped or spangled muslins, and all the tinsel of their native land; others, and they are the most numerous, have adopted the principal mark of civilisation, which, for a woman, is invariably the crinoline, yet always preserving, in some corner of their attire, some small, characteristic memory of the East, so that they have the air of Parisian ladies seeking to adopt fancy-dress.

Monsieur G. excels in depicting the splendour of official functions, the national pomp and circumstance, yet not coldly, didactically, like those painters who see in such work no more than lucrative drudgery. He works with all the ardour of a man revelling in space, perspective, sheets of light or its explosive clinging, in droplets or gleams, to the roughness of uniforms, and court dress. *The Commemoration of Independence in the Cathedral at Athens* furnishes an interesting example of his skill. All those little figures, each taking its true place, renders more profound the space that contains them. The cathedral is immense and decorated with ceremonial hangings. King Otto and the Queen, both standing on a dais, are clothed in traditional costume, which they wear with marvellous ease, as if in witness to the sincerity of their adoption and a most refined Hellenic patriotism. The King's waist is belted tight like that of the most elegant of palikars, and his kilt spreads with all the exaggeration of the national style of dandyism. Towards them walks the patriarch, an old man with bowed shoulders and a great white beard, whose little eyes are protected by a pair

of green spectacles, exhibiting, in his whole being, the signs of a consummate Oriental impassivity. All the figures that people this composition are portraits; one of the most curious, by reason of the alien physiognomy, which is as little Hellenic as could be, being that of a German lady, placed at the Queen's side, and attached to her service.

In the collected works of Monsieur G., one often comes across the Emperor of the French, whose figure he has reduced to an unerring sketch, without impairing the likeness, which he executes with the self-assurance of a signature. Sometimes the Emperor is reviewing his troops, on horseback and at the gallop, accompanied by officers whose features are easily recognisable, or by foreign princes, European, Asiatic, or African, to whom he is, so to speak, doing the honours of Paris. Sometimes he is immobile on a steed whose hooves are as firmly planted as the four feet of a table, with, on his left, the Empress riding side-saddle and, on his right, the little Prince Imperial, wearing a grenadier's cap, and holding himself, in a military manner, on a little horse as shaggy as the ponies that English artists love to send careering over their landscapes. Sometimes the Emperor disappears, amidst a whirlwind of dust and light, along one of the rides in the Bois de Boulogne. At other times he is walking slowly through cheering crowds on the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. One, especially, of these water-colours has dazzled me with its magical character. At the front of a theatre-box of massive and princely opulence, the Empress appears, in an attitude of tranquil repose. The Emperor is leaning forward slightly, to obtain a better view of the stage; below him two bodyguards stand, in military, almost hierarchic, immobility, receiving on their brilliant uniforms the lightning-splashes of the footlights. Behind this arc of fire, within the ideal atmosphere of the stage, the actors sing, declaim and gesticulate in harmony; on the near side yawns an abyss of dim light, an encircling space crowded with tier on tier of human figures: it is the chandelier's glow, and the audience.

The popular movements, Republican clubs and pageantry of 1848 equally furnished Monsieur G. with a series of picturesque compositions of which the majority were engraved for the *Illustrated London News*. A few years ago, after a sojourn in Spain that proved most fruitful for his genius, he also composed an album, of a like nature, of which I have seen only a portion. The carelessness with which he gifts or lends his drawings, often exposes him to irreparable losses.

VIII. The Military Man

To define, once more, the kind of subjects preferred by our artist, we might say that it is the *pageantry of life*, such as offers itself to the eye in the capital cities of the civilised world, the pomp of military life, fashionable life, the life of gallantry. Our observer is always at his proper post, wherever deep and impetuous desires flow, those Orinocos of the human heart; war, love, gaming; wherever the feasts and fictions are celebrated that represent those great elements of happiness or misfortune. Yet he shows a marked predilection for the military man, the soldier, and I think this affection derives not only from the qualities and virtues that pass, inevitably, from the warrior's soul into his physiognomy and bearing, but also from the outward splendour with which his profession clothes him. Monsieur Paul de Molènes has written a few pages, as sensible as they are charming, on military coquetry and the moral significance of those glittering costumes in which all governments are pleased to dress their troops. Monsieur G. would willingly sign his name to those lines.

We have already spoken of the idiomatic beauty specific to each epoch, and have observed that each century has, so to speak, its own particular grace. The same remark applies to the various professions; each derives its external beauty from the moral laws to which it is subject. In some this beauty will be marked by energy, in others it will bear visible signs of idleness. It seems an emblem of character; it is the stamp of fate. The military man, taken as a class, has his beauty, just as the dandy and the courtesan have theirs, though of an essentially different flavour. You will note that I naturally ignore those professions in which exclusive and violent exercise distorts the muscles and mars the face with the signs of slavery. Accustomed to being surprised by events, the military man is hard to confound. The characteristic mark of beauty here will thus be a martial nonchalance, a singular mixture of calmness and audacity; it is a beauty that derives from the necessity of being prepared for death at any moment. And the face of the military man will, of necessity, be marked by great simplicity; for living a communal life, like monks or schoolboys, and accustomed to shift the daily cares of life onto an abstract paternity, soldiers are, in many ways, as simple as children; and like children, their tasks being done, they are easily amused and given to rowdy entertainment.

I exaggerate not, I believe, in affirming that all these moral considerations readily flow forth from Monsieur G.'s sketches and watercolours. No military type is absent, and all are seized upon with a kind of enthusiastic joy; the old cavalry-officer, serious and sad, weighing his horse down with his bulk; the handsome staff officer, trim in the waist, arching his shoulders and bending unabashed over ladies' chairs, who when seen from behind brings to mind the slimmest and most elegant of insects; the *zouave* and the sharpshooter, whose allure derives from an exceptional strain of boldness and independence which seemingly bestows a livelier sense of responsibility; the agile and joyous nonchalance of the light cavalymen; the vaguely professorial and academic appearance of the special corps, the artillery or the engineers, often confirmed by the unwarlike addition of spectacles; not one of these models, not one of these nuances, is neglected, and all are assessed, defined with the same love and intelligence.

I have, in actuality, before my eyes one of these compositions, whose general character is truly heroic, which depicts the head of a column of infantry; perhaps these men are returned from Italy, and have been brought to a halt on the boulevard amidst the acclamations of the crowd; perhaps they have just completed a seemingly endless march along the roads of Lombardy; I know not. What is visible, and plainly intelligible, is the bold and resolute character, even in repose, of all those faces scorched by the rain, wind, and sun.

Here, that uniformity of expression is clearly evident created by obedience and suffering mutually endured, that resigned air of courage tested by long labour. Trousers tucked into, and imprisoned by gaiters; greatcoats stained with dust, and much discoloured; all their equipment, in sum, has itself taken on the appearance of these indestructible beings who return from afar having encountered strange adventures. One might say that all these men are more solidly set on their legs, more squarely planted on their feet, with more aplomb, than other men could be. Charlet, who was always in search of this kind of beauty and often found it, would have been singularly struck by it, had he seen this design.

IX. The Dandy

A man who is rich and idle, and who, even though blasé, has no other occupation than to pursue the road of happiness; a man, raised amidst

luxury, and accustomed from his youth to others' obedience; he, in short, who has no other occupation than elegance; will never cease to possess, at all times, a distinctive physiognomy, one wholly his own. Dandyism is a strange institution, as bizarre as that of the duel; ancient indeed, since Caesar, Catiline, and Alcibiades furnish us with striking examples of the type; widespread, also, since Chateaubriand discovered its presence among the forests and beside the lakes of the New World. Dandyism, which is an institution outside the laws, has rigorous laws of its own that all its subjects must strictly obey, however fiery and independent of character they may otherwise be.

The English novelists have cultivated, more than others, the novel of *high life*, and the French who, like Monsieur de Custine, have made it their speciality to pen love-stories, have at once, and most judiciously, taken care to endow their characters with fortunes vast enough to cover, without hesitation, all their fantasies; they have then dispensed with any sort of profession. These beings have no other role than to cultivate the idea of beauty in their persons, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think. They thus possess, at their disposal and in ample measure, the time and money without which fantasy, reduced to a state of mere passing reverie, can scarcely be translated into action. It is, sadly, all too true that without money and leisure love can be no more than a plebeian orgy or the fulfilment of conjugal duty. Instead of a passionate or dreamlike caprice, it proves merely a repugnant *utility*.

If I speak of love with regard to dandyism, it is because love is the natural occupation of the idle. But the dandy does not see love as a particular aim. If I have spoken of money, it is because money is indispensable to those who make a cult of their passions; but the dandy does not aspire to money as to something essential, he leaves that gross passion to vulgar mortals; endless credit suffices him. Dandyism does not even consist of, as many thoughtless people seem to believe, an immoderate taste for fashion and material elegance. To the perfect dandy these things are no more than the symbols of his aristocratic superiority of spirit. Moreover, to his eyes, preoccupied above all by *distinction*, perfect elegance resides in absolute simplicity, which is, in effect, a finer way of distinguishing himself. What then is this passion, become a doctrine, which has produced such tyrannical adherents, this unofficial institution which has formed so haughty a caste? It is a burning need, above all, to display an

originality bounded only by the limits of propriety. It is a kind of cult of the self, that can nonetheless endure the search for a happiness to be found in another, in a woman for example; that can even endure all that goes by the name of illusion. It is the pleasure derived from astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction gained by never oneself being astonished. A dandy may be blasé, or he may be a man who suffers; but in the latter case, he will smile like the Spartan lad though bitten by the fox beneath his tunic.

It can be seen that, at certain points, dandyism borders on the spiritual and stoical. But a dandy can never be a common man. If he were to commit a crime, though he might not be ruined yet, if the crime arose from a trivial source, the dishonour would be irreparable. Let not the reader be scandalised by this gravity amidst the frivolous, recalling that there is a grandeur in all folly, an energy in all excess. A strange spirituality! For those who are both its priests and its victims, all the complex material conditions to which they submit themselves, from their irreproachable standards of dress, at every hour of the day or night, to the most perilous sporting feats, are no more than a kind of gymnastics designed to strengthen the will and discipline the soul. In truth, I was not wholly wrong in treating dandyism as a kind of religion. The strictest monastic rule, the inexorable order of the *Old Man of the Mountain (the order of Assassins)*, who demanded suicide of his disciples if they became inebriated, was no more despotic nor more rigorously obeyed than this doctrine of elegance and originality, which imposes, it too, upon the ambitious yet humble members of its sect, men often full of fire, passion, courage, restrained energy, the terrible formula: *Perinde ac cadaver: compliant as the dead!* (*Ignatius of Loyola*)

Whether such men are called exquisites, incroyables, beaux, lions or dandies, all issue from the same source; all partake of the same characteristic of opposition or revolt, all are representatives of what is best in human pride, of that need, only too rare these days, to combat and destroy triviality. From this is born, among dandies, the haughty attitude of their caste provocative, even, in its coldness. Dandyism appears in periods of transition in particular, where democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only partially weakened and debased. Amidst the disorder of such times, certain men, rootless, restless, idle, but rich in native energy, may conceive the idea of establishing a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to dislodge because founded on the most precious, the most

indestructible of qualities, and on the divine gifts that toil and wealth are unable to confer. Dandyism is the last lightning-flash of heroism in an age of decadence; and the type of dandy discovered by our explorer (*Chateaubriand*) in North America does nothing to diminish this idea: for nothing prevents us from supposing that those tribes we call *savage* are the remains of great but vanished civilisations. Dandyism is a setting sun; like the declining star, it is brilliant, without heat, and fills the mind with melancholy. But, alas! the rising tide of democracy which invades and levels all, overwhelms, day by day, those last representatives of human pride, and pours its waves of oblivion over the footprints of those prodigious Myrmidons. Dandies are becoming rarer and rarer in our country, whereas amongst our neighbours, in England, the social order and the constitution (the true constitution, revealed by behaviour) will leave, for a long time yet, a place for the heirs of Sheridan, Beau Brummel, and Byron, as long as men worthy of filling it, present themselves.

What may have seemed a digression, to the reader, is not one, in truth. The moral reflections and considerations which are aroused by an artist's drawings are, in many cases, the best interpretation of them the critic can produce: such suggestions are part of the originating idea, which may be divined by revealing them, one after another. Is it necessary to say that when Monsieur G. sketches one of his dandies on paper he always grants him his historical character, his legendary character, I would dare to say, if we were not speaking of the present time, and of things generally considered frivolous? It is all there, the lightness of step, the composed manner, the simplicity with an air of authority, the manner of wearing a coat, and managing a horse, those attitudes outwardly calm but revealing an inner energy, which makes one think, when one's gaze discovers one of these privileged beings, in whom the attractive and the formidable are so mysteriously blended: 'Behold a man, wealthy perchance, yet more likely a Hercules lacking employment.'

The characteristic beauty of the dandy consists above all in that air of coldness that derives from an unshakeable determination not to be moved; a latent fire, one might say, hinting of the ability but not the desire to shine forth. This it is which is expressed, perfectly, in these drawings.

X. Woman

That being who is, for the majority of men, the source of the liveliest and even, be it said to the shame of the philosophical pleasures, the most lasting delights; that being towards whom, or to whose benefit, all their efforts are directed; that being as dread and incommunicable as the Deity (with this difference, that the infinite fails to communicate because to do so would dazzle and overwhelm the finite, while the being of which we speak is only incomprehensible, perchance, because it has nothing to communicate to us); that being in whom Joseph de Maistre saw a *beautiful animal* whose graces enlivened and eased the serious game of politics; for whom, and through whom, fortunes are made and unmade; for whom, but above all through whom, artists and poets create their most exquisite gems; from whom derive the most enervating pleasures and the most productive pains – Woman, in a word, for the artist in general, and Monsieur G. in particular, is not simply the female of man. Rather she is a divinity, a star, that presides over all the conceptions of the male brain; she is the glittering reflection of all the graces of nature condensed in a single being; she is the object of the liveliest admiration and curiosity that the tableau of life can offer to our contemplation. She is a species of idol, dumb perchance, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds willpower and destiny suspended by her glance. She is not, I may say, an animal whose members, correctly assembled, furnish a perfect example of harmony; she is not even a model of pure beauty, such as the sculptor dreams of in his most profound meditations; no, that would still prove insufficient to explain her mysterious and complex power of enchantment. We are not concerned here with Winckelmann in regard to Raphael, and I am certain that Monsieur G., despite the breadth of his intelligence (this may be said without doing him injury) would neglect a fragment of ancient statuary if it cost him an opportunity to savour thus her portrait by Reynolds or Lawrence. All that adorns woman, all that serves to illustrate her beauty, is a part of herself; and the artists who apply themselves particularly to the study of this enigmatic being, adore all of the *mundus muliebris* (*feminine world*) as much as they do the woman herself. Woman is doubtless a light, a glance, an invitation to happiness, a word, on occasion; but above all she is a general harmony, not only in the allure and movement of her members, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast, iridescent clouds of fabric in which she envelops herself, which are the attributes and pedestal of her divinity; in the metals and minerals that wind about her arms and neck, add

sparks of fire to her glance, or whisper gently at her ears. What poet, in depicting the pleasure caused by such an apparition of beauty, would dare to separate the woman from her costume? Where is there a man who has not, in the street, at the theatre, in the park, enjoyed, in the most disinterested manner, a skilfully composed attire, and carried away an image of it, inseparable from the beauty of her to whom it belonged, making thus of the two, the woman and her dress, an indivisible whole? This is the moment, it seems to me, to return to certain questions regarding fashion and finery, which I merely touched upon at the commencement of this study, and to vindicate, given the inept slanders with which certain equivocating lovers of nature have attacked it, the art of adornment.

XI. In Praise of Adornment

I recall a popular song, so trivial and inept that it should scarce be cited in a work that has pretensions to seriousness, but which expresses quite well, in vaudeville style, the aesthetics of unthinking people. '*Nature embellishes Beauty!*' Presumably the *poet*, if he had been able to write French, might have said: '*Simplicity embellishes Beauty!*' which is equivalent to the following *truth*, of a kind startling and unknown: '*Nothing embellishes what is.*'

Most of the errors regarding beauty are born of a false premiss of the XVIII century regarding ethics. Nature was considered, at that time, to be the ground, source, and type of all good, and all possible beauty. The denial of original sin played no small part in the general blindness of the epoch. If, nonetheless, we simply agree to refer to facts evident to all the ages, no less than to readers of the *Law Reports*, we will see that Nature teaches us nothing, or virtually nothing; that is to say she *constrains* human beings to sleeping, drinking and eating, and protecting themselves from the inclemency of the weather. She also compels them to murder their like, cannibalise, incarcerate, and torture them; for as soon as we depart from the realm of needs and necessities, to enter that of luxury and pleasure, we see that Nature advises nothing but crime. It is this infallible Nature which has engendered patricide and cannibalism, with a thousand other abominations that shame and modesty prevent us from naming. It is philosophy (I speak of sound philosophy) and religion that command us to care for our parents if they are poor or infirm. Nature (which is nothing more than the voice of

our own self-interest) would have us slaughter them. Contemplate, analyse all that is natural, all the actions and desires of the natural human being, you will find nothing that is not dreadful. Everything beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation. Crime, for which the human creature has acquired a taste in its mother's womb, is natural in origin. Virtue, on the contrary, is *artificial*, unnatural since, at all times and among all nations, gods and prophets were necessary to teach virtue to animalistic humanity, which humanity *alone* was unable to discover. Evil occurs without effort, *naturally*, through fatality; good is always the product of artifice. All that I say of Nature as an ill counsellor in matters of morality, and of reason as a true redeemer and reformer, can be applied to the realm of beauty. I am thus led to view adornment as one of the marks of primitive nobility as regards the human spirit. Those races that our civilisation, confused and perverse, with laughable pride and fatuousness, is pleased to treat as savage, comprehend, as does a child, the noble spirituality of adornment. The savage, and the infant, through their naïve aspiration towards what is brilliant, such as multi-coloured feathers, iridescent fabrics, the superlative majesty of artificial forms, bear witness to their disgust for the real, and thus prove, in their unknowingness, the immateriality of the spirit. Woe to one who, like Louis XV (the product not of true civilization but of a revival of barbarism) carries his degeneracy to the point of no longer possessing a taste for anything except *unadorned nature*. (We know that Madame Dubarry, when she wished to avoid meeting the king, made a point of employing rouge. It was a sufficient deterrent. In this manner she shut the door on him. It was by adorning herself that she would frighten away that royal disciple of nature.)

Fashion should thus be considered as a symptom of the taste for the ideal, floating in the human mind above all that natural life accumulates of the gross, terrestrial, and loathsome; as a sublime deformation of Nature, or rather a permanent and continuous attempt at the reformation of Nature. And it has been pointed out, quite sensibly, (though without discovering the reason) that every fashion is charming, that is to say relatively charming, each being a fresh, and more or less happy effort, aimed at beauty, some sort of approximation to the ideal, the desire for which endlessly titillates the unsated human spirit. But fashions, if one would appreciate them, should not be considered as dead things; one might as well admire the garments suspended, slack and lifeless as the skin of Saint

Bartholomew, in a clothes-dealer's wardrobe. One must imagine them vitalised, vivified, by the beautiful women who wore them. Only thus will one comprehend the sense and spirit within them. If the aphorism: *All fashions are charming*, shocks you, by seeming too absolute, then say, for you will be certain of perpetrating no error: All were once truly seen as charming.

Woman is quite within her rights, and even performs a kind of duty, in devoting herself to appearing magical and beyond Nature, it is necessary for her to astonish and charm; an idol, she must adorn to be adored. She must borrow from all the arts the means to raise herself above Nature, the better to conquer hearts and captivate minds. It matters little that her ruses and artifices are known to all if their success is certain and their effects always irresistible. It is by means of such considerations that the philosopher-artist will find an easy justification for all the practices employed in every age to consolidate and render divine, one might say, their fragile beauty. To enumerate these would be an endless task; but to confine ourselves to what in our day is commonly called *maquillage* (*the application of cosmetics*), who does not see that the use of rice-powder, so foolishly anathematised by our naturalistic philosophers, has, as its aim and result, the ridding from the complexion of all the blemishes that Nature has outrageously scattered there, and thus to create an abstract unity of skin in texture and colour, which unity, similar to that created by a dancer's tights, immediately likens the human being to a statue, that is to say a being superior and divine? As for the black mascara that outlines the eye, and the rouge that paints the upper cheek, though their use derives from the same principle, the need to surpass Nature, the result is made to satisfy a wholly opposite need. Red and black represent life, a supernatural and excessive life; that black surround renders the glance more penetrating and singular, grants the eye a more decided look of a window opening on the infinite; the rouge, that lends fire to the cheekbone, augments still more the brightness of the pupil and adds to the lovely feminine face the mysterious passion of the priestess.

Thus, if I am to be understood aright, adorning one's face should not be employed with the vulgar and unavowable aim of imitating fair Nature and rivalling youth. Moreover, it has been observed that artifice fails to embellish ugliness and is only capable of serving beauty. Who would dare assign to art the sterile function of imitating Nature? *Maquillage* has no

need to hide itself, or seek to evade being divined; let it, on the contrary, display itself, if not without affectation, at least with a sort of candour.

I willingly permit those whose burdensome gravity prevents them seeking out beauty in its most minute manifestations, to laugh at these reflections of mine and to accuse them of a puerile solemnity; their austere judgement touches me not; I will content myself with appealing to true artists; as well as to women who have received at birth a spark of that sacred fire with which they would illumine themselves entirely.

XII. Women and 'Girls'

Thus, Monsieur G., setting himself the task of seeking out and expounding the beauty in *modernity*, happily represents women elaborately dressed and embellished with every display of artifice, to whatever order of society they appertain. Moreover, in the collections of his works, no less than in the swarming ant-heap of life itself, differences of race and class, in whatever luxurious apparel the subjects present themselves, spring immediately to the spectator's eye

Here, bathed in the diffuse glow of an auditorium, receiving and reflecting the light with their eyes, their jewels, their shoulders, there appear, splendid as portraits, in theatre-boxes that serve to frame them, young girls of the finest society. Some grave and serious, others blonde and giddy. Some flaunt a precocious bosom with aristocratic unconcern, others, frankly, display the chest of a young boy. Fans to their lips, eyes vacant or set, they are as solemnly theatrical as the opera or drama they pretend to follow.

There, we see elegant families nonchalantly strolling along the walks of some public park, wives leaning with a tranquil air on the arms of their husbands whose solid and complacent air reveals a fortune well-made and their own self-contentment. Here comfortable affluence has replaced sublime distinction. Meanwhile scrawny little girls, with billowing skirts, resembling little women in figure and gesture, skip, or play with hoops, or make social visits in the open air, thereby repeating the comedy performed at home by their parents.

Emerging from an inferior world, proud of appearing in the limelight at last, the girls from the minor theatres, frail, slender, as yet still adolescent, flaunt absurd travesties of fashion on their puny and virginal

shoulders, travesties which belong to no particular era, and which are their delight and joy.

At a café doorway, lounging against a window lit without and within, one of those imbeciles spreads himself, whose elegance is created by his tailor, and his head by his barber. Beside him, her feet supported by one of those indispensable footstools, his mistress sits, a gross hussy, who lacks virtually nothing (the virtually nothing being virtually everything: true distinction, that is) that would make her a great lady. Like her elegant companion the whole orifice of her little mouth is filled with an enormous cigar. These two beings possess not a thought. Is it certain they can even see? Unless each, like some Narcissus of imbecility, contemplates the crowd as if it were a flood reflecting their own image. In truth they exist more for the pleasure of the observer than their own.

Behold, now, they are throwing open the arcades, full of light and movement, at Valentino's, Prado, the Casino (as once it would have been Tivoli, Idalie, the Folies and the Paphos) those shambolic places where the exuberance of idle youth is given full rein. Women who exaggerate fashion to the point of altering its charm and destroying its intent ostentatiously sweep the floor with their trains and the fringes of their shawls. They come, they go, pass and repass, opening astonished eyes like those of animals, with an air of seeing nothing, yet examining everything.

Against a background of infernal light, or that of an aurora borealis, red, orange, sulphur, pink (the pink expressing the idea of ecstasy amidst frivolity) and sometimes purple (the favourite colour of canonesses, dying embers behind a blue curtain), against these magical backdrops, imitating the diversity of Bengal Lights, arises the varying image of wanton beauty. Now majestic, now playful; now slender even scrawny, now cyclopean; now small and sparkling, now heavy and monumental. She has invented an elegance provocative and bizarre, or aspires, with more or less success, towards a simplicity customary in a higher world. She advances upon us, glides, dances, sways the burden of her embroidered petticoats, which play the role of both pedestal and balancing-rod; her glance darts from beneath her hat, as from a framed portrait. She perfectly represents savagery within the civilised. She has a beauty granted her by Evil, always devoid of spirituality, but sometimes tinged with a weariness that pretends melancholy. She gazes at the horizon like a beast of prey, with the same wildness, the same idle distraction, and also, at times, the same fixity of

attention. A kind of bohemian wanderer on the borders of acceptable society, the triviality of her life, one of cunning and conflict, fatally reveals itself through its envelope of pretence. One might justly apply to her the words of that inimitable master La Bruyère: 'In some women there is a false nobility associated with the movement of her eyes, a tilt of her head, her way of walking, yet which goes no further.'

These reflections regarding the courtesan can, to a certain degree, be applied to the actress also; for she too is a creature of pretence, an object of public pleasure. But here the conquest, the prize, is of a nobler and more spiritual nature. She seeks to win general favour, not only by sheer physical beauty, but also through talent of the rarest order. If in the one aspect she touches on the courtesan, on the other she is close to being a poet. Let us not forget that apart from natural and even artificial beauty there is in all human beings the mark of their trade, a characteristic that can translate into physical ugliness, yet also into a kind of professional beauty.

In that vast gallery which is Parisian life or London life, we will encounter all the different types of errant womanhood, women in rebellion at every level; first the courtesan in her early flowering, striving after patrician airs, proud at once of her youth and that luxury into which she puts all her genius and all her soul; delicately, with two fingers, tucking in a wide panel of silk, satin or velvet that billows around her, or pointing a toe whose over-ornate shoe would be enough to denounce her for what she is, if that were not already achieved by the somewhat unnecessary extravagance of her whole attire; then, to descend the scale, reaching the slaves confined to those stews often decked out as cafés; wretches subject to the most avaricious of 'guardians', and possessing nothing of their own, not even the eccentric finery which serves to spice up their beauty.

Some among these latter, instances of a monstrous yet innocent self-conceit, express in their faces, and their bold uplifted glances, an evident joy at being alive (why, in all verity?). Sometimes they find, without seeking, poses of a daring and nobility that might enchant the most sensitive of sculptors, had the sculptors of today the courage and spirit to find nobility wherever it might be, even in the mire; at other times they show themselves, prostrated, in attitudes of desperate boredom, bar-room apathy, masculine cynicism, smoking cigarettes to kill the time, with a resignation oriental in its fatalism; sprawled out on settees, skirts hooped up before and behind in a double fan, or balanced precariously on stools

and chairs; sluggish, mournful, stupid, extravagant, eyes glazed with brandy, brows swollen with stubborn pride. We have descended to the last turn of the spiral, to Juvenal's *femina simplex* (*Woman, plain and simple*). Now we see depicted, in the depths of an atmosphere where tobacco and alcohol have mingled their vapours, the emaciated flush of the consumptive, or the rounded contours of adiposity, that hideously healthy state of the slothful. In a misted and gilded chaos, unsuspected by the chaste and the indigent, macabre nymphs and living dolls stir and convulse, whose eyes betray a sinister glitter, while behind a counter charged with bottles of spirits, a gross old harridan presides whose head, wrapped in a dirty kerchief, casts a satanically-pointed shadow on the wall, to remind us that everything consecrated to Evil is condemned to bear horns.

Truly, it is no more to gratify my readers than to scandalise them that I bring such images before their eyes; in either case that would betray a lack of respect. What renders these portraits precious, and sanctifies them, are the innumerable thoughts to which they give rise, thoughts generally sombre and severe. But if, by chance, someone should be so ill-advised as to seek an opportunity, amongst these quite widely disseminated compositions of Monsieur G., for satisfying an unhealthy curiosity, I must charitably warn them that they will find nothing here to stir a perverse imagination. They will find nothing but the inevitable marks of vice, that is to say the Demon's gaze ambushed among the shadows, or Messalina's shoulder gleaming neath the gaslight; nothing but pure art, that is to say the particular beauty of evil, beauty amidst what is dreadful. The general feeling that arises from all this chaos, I repeat in passing, contains more of sorrow than of drollery. What gives these drawings their particular beauty is their moral fecundity. They are pregnant with suggestion, harsh suggestion, which my pen, accustomed though it is to grappling with the plastic arts, has been able only partially to convey.

XIII. Conveyances

Thus, they continue, in their endless branching, these extensive galleries of *high life* and *low life*. Let us leave them for a few moments to consider a world which if not pure is at least more refined; let us breath perfumes no healthier perhaps but more delicate. I have already noted that Monsieur G.'s brush, like that of Eugène Lami, is marvellously skilful in depicting

the pomp of dandyism and the elegance of foppery. The physical attitudes of the rich are familiar to him; he knows how to represent, with a light stroke of the pen, and a certainty of touch that never deserts him, that assurance of glance, gesture and pose, which among privileged beings is the result of monotonous good fortune. In this particular series of drawings are shown, in their thousand aspects, incidents of sport, the hunt, the races, drives through the woods, proud *ladies* and frail *misses* managing mounts of an admirable purity of shape with a sure hand, steeds themselves of a flightiness, brilliance, capriciousness akin to that of their mistresses. For Monsieur G. is not only knowledgeable about horses in general, but has a happy gift for expressing their individual beauty. Here are halts, encampments so to speak, of numerous conveyances, from which, hoisted on cushions, seats, the roof, elegant young men and women, dressed in the eccentric costumes authorised by the season, assist at some solemnity taking place in the distance; there, a horseman rides, gracefully, at the gallop, beside an open caleche, his horse seeming, in its bowing and prancing, to be paying respect in its own way. The carriage drives on at a brisk trot, along an alley barred with light and shade, its bevy of beauties couched indolently as in a cradle, half-listening to the gallantries that meet their ears, and idly yielding themselves to the passing breeze.

Furs and muslins mount to their chins, and billow in waves over the carriage-doors. Their servants are stiff and erect, motionless, and all alike; always the same endless monotonous effigies of punctual, disciplined servility; their distinction that of having none. In the background, the woodland is green or russet, dusty or gloomy according to the hour and the season. The glades are filled with autumnal mist, bluish shadows, golden rays, an effulgence of pink, or sudden flashes of light slicing the darkness like sabre slashes.

If his innumerable water-colours depicting the war in the East had not already revealed Monsieur G.'s powers as a landscape-artist, these would suffice to persuade us. Here, however, we are not dealing with the torn countryside of the Crimea, or the dramatic shores of the Bosphorus; we are once more amidst the familiar, intimate scenery that forms the setting surrounding a great city, where the light creates effects that no truly Romantic artist can ignore.

Another merit worth the observer noting, at this point, is his remarkable knowledge of harness and coachwork. Monsieur G. sketches

and paints a conveyance, every sort of carriage, with the same care and the same ease as a skilled marine-painter captures every kind of vessel. All the coachwork is perfectly correct; each detail in its place and no fault to be found. In whatever attitude it may be seized, at whatever speed it may be making, a carriage, like a vessel, grants its motion a mysterious and complex grace most difficult to set down in shorthand. The pleasure the artist's eye receives seems to derive from the series of geometrical figures which this object, already so intricate, whether vessel or carriage, engenders successively and swiftly in space.

We can doubtless be sure that, in a few years' time, Monsieur G.'s drawings will take their place as precious archives of civilised life. His work will be sought after by collectors, as much as those of Debucourt, Moreau, Saint-Aubin, Carle Vernet, Lami, the brothers Devéria, Gavarni, and all those other exquisite artists, who, while depicting only the familiar and charming, are, in their own way, no less serious as historians. Several of them even sacrificed too much to charm, and introduced, sometimes, to their compositions a classical *style* alien to the subject. Some have deliberately smoothed the angles, planed the rough edges of life, toned down the brilliant highlights. Less adroit than they, Monsieur G. possesses a profound worth wholly his own. He has deliberately fulfilled a function that other artists have scorned, and which demands, above all, a man of the world for its fulfilment. He has sought, everywhere, the passing beauty of present-day life, the fleeting character of that which the reader has allowed us to term *modernity*. Often bizarre, violent, excessive, but always poetic, he has succeeded in concentrating, in his drawings, the flavour, be it bitter or heady, of the wine of Life.

The End of Baudelaire's 'The Painter of Modern Times'