

CALLIOPE AND PSYCHE
OR STYLE AND MAN

At least since Aristotle, and up to the end of the seventeenth century, the form of literary works, envisaged and appreciated for itself, independent of content, has never ceased to be one of the major concerns of critics and lovers of *belles lettres*. Theories of style, poetics, phraseology and grammar form an imposing and coherent collection; each generation has enriched it; opinions have changed but not methods or intentions: the formulation of rules of the art of writing is itself a genre with its own laws. All of this was true up to the day when there appeared, at first rather modestly, a new spirit manifesting itself in the nineteenth century by two tendencies, apparently contradictory but deriving from the same source, and each vigorously developing. On the one hand, the notion of style is widened, and the word expressing it, which up to that time only affected the domain of letters, is extended bit by bit to the fine arts, to all arts, to all kinds of activities. Diderot was the first to apply it to painting;

Translated by Sidney Alexander.

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

today we speak casually about the style of a swimmer or of a tennis player. On the other hand, and concurrently, literary art found itself affected by a sense of inferiority. Having become pejorative, the word "literature" is pronounced as such by the poets themselves:

... et tout le reste est littérature,

by the artists (to mention literature with regard to a painting is rarely to praise it) and by most cultured people. Criticism and literary history, also yielding to this current, more and more reduce the role assigned to formal analysis, and, instead, linger complacently in the realm of discussions of ideas. It is also not surprising that a professional theoretician of style like M. Albert Kies feels the need to put his readers on guard against literary history which tends to become lost in philosophical history, and to remind them that the writer, insofar as he is such, is first of all an artist.¹

Let us reassure ourselves: these errors belong to an already distant past and M. Kies, far from being alone in denouncing them, is only one witness among many who may now admire the results of a salutary reaction. Our time has seen the rebirth and new blossoming of studies in style, the comparative literature of which extends its learned hand beyond the frontiers; special reviews are published, congresses meet, and of course, to the degree that efforts are made to formulate certain ideas, confusion grows. The experts, we have no doubt, know very well what they want to say, but we are certain and we ourselves have had the experience of knowing that the initiated or the amateur who follow their work, led astray by the swarming of definitions, sometimes remain perplexed.

Search for truth often begins with the fiction of complete ignorance: this method has been proven. Desirous of learning what style is, let us therefore feign to know nothing whatever about it, let us question our authors and shamelessly have recourse to the dictionary. A great number of definitions are offered us. We will take note of four, rather different definitions

¹ "Stylistique nouvelle et études baroquistes," in *Les Lettres romanes*, Louvain, Oct.-Dec. 1954, p. 354.

but all thought-provoking. First of all, here is the definition of Littré (article *style*, first paragraph): "A metal or ivory stylus, or a bone pointed at one end and flattened at the other with which the ancients, from the time of the origin of writing, traced their thoughts on wax or any other soft surface." "Style is the man," says Buffon; and theoreticians of stylistics today maintain that style is the distinctive mark of a writer, concluding that it is "a deviation" (Bally, Spitzer), "a digression with respect to a norm" (Paul Valéry). Finally, let us quote the precise closely-reasoned definition of Pierre Guiraud: "Style is the aspect of the statement resulting from the choice of means of expression determined by the nature and intentions of the subject speaking or writing."² I don't know whether in this otherwise excellent formulation one should most admire the absence of all coquetry or, on the contrary, a supreme coquetry consisting of scorning the charm of literary form in order to nakedly set forward its activities. This is treating the subject like a philosopher.

First of all, let us consider Littré's definition; undoubtedly it takes us far away from our subject but it will bring us back to it. The organ of creation, its first and necessary instrument, is the hand, the symbol of power, which makes possible the transition from potential to action. In ancient Roman paintings up to the creation of Adam as Michelangelo depicts it on the Sistine ceiling, there seems to emanate a sort of effluvium from the hand of God, mysterious vehicle of thought about to give birth to a new being. Now, the stylus, a material object, a writing-tool, is, like all tools, a prolongation of the hand. From this point, as from the Creator's finger, is effused a thought expressed, if not in terms of realities, at least in decipherable signs which can thus be communicated.

For us, therefore, style is an instrument of creation. In other words, an instrument of expression: the use of which responds to a desire to reach others, a longing which each of us feels to communicate something of ourselves to others. This point, serving to write, indicates a need to write which assumes a life in society, and implies, on the other hand, that all thought is born

² *La Stylistique*, Paris, 1954, p. 107.

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

in an interior solitude without which we would be nothing, but from which we ceaselessly attempt to find ways and means of escape. There, perhaps, is the root of a well-known paradox. When we read the *Réveries du promeneur solitaire*, we are immediately struck by a kind of hesitation between two opposed feelings, and we wonder if loneliness is destiny's punishment or reward for the author of these admirable pages. A punishment, insofar as men, whom he believed good, deceived him, persecuted him, drove him away: "here I am, then, alone on the earth... outcast by unanimous agreement." But also a reward, inasmuch as he has taken refuge in nature which restores him to himself and brings him peace: "Brilliant, almost enameled flowers, fresh shadows, brooks, groves, verdure, all purify my imagination soiled by all sorts of hideous objects... It seems to me that in forest shades I am forgotten; free and at peace..." Of course, it will be said that Jean-Jacques suffered from melancholy, was a maladjusted being; are we going to draw conclusions from his aberrations? Why not? His case is exceptional, but exemplary, in the sense that it results from common attitudes carried to an excessive degree.

Every man comes to feel the need of fleeing from his kind and seeking solitude, if not that of a desert, at least of a backwater where, unconscious of his uniqueness, he turns in on himself. But, at the same time, every man knows that society's help is indispensable and he cannot forego communicating with others, not only to obtain their assistance but also to make himself known to them, to give them something of his inner self. After having taken delight in his secret visions, he seeks to express them, to render them accessible to others. From that point on, he must submit to common rules of language, and, at the same time, avoid them, or at least make them supple enough that they will not prevent the expression of thoughts prior to all language. And by this detour, we have returned to the definition of style which Valéry proposed.

Our century has not only reinstated the value of stylistics, it has made stylistics a new science with its own problems, methods and vocabulary. Schools of diverse tendencies have been born: "microstylistics," occupied with details of expression, applies itself to minute statistics (the Saussurian school): "macro-

stylistics," dealing with the work as a whole, encroaches on literary criticism, guarding itself, at the same time, against being confused with it, and setting forth, as its primary goal, the taking better cognizance of its object (Leo Spitzer and Hatzfeld).

The new stylistics, whose projects are vast and ambitions grandiose, is founded on the very simple idea that style is a *particular* manner of expressing oneself in a *common* language, the common language being the "norm" and the particular manner providing the degree of "deviation." It has also been said that stylistics is "the science of deviations," or (since such a science necessarily implies taking at least two modes of expression under consideration) that "comparison is the essence of stylistic analysis" (Pierre Guiraud). Since the two concepts of norm and deviation lend themselves to many interpretations, let us advance on this terrain with extreme caution. However, the formulations which we have just recalled already bring us, it would seem, within reach of two certainties: one is that style is brought about by opposition, that there must be *styles* in order that *a* style may be perceived, just as, for example, there must be *colors* in order that the idea of color may be born out of experience; the other is that this plurality itself has a condition that the same thought may be expressed in several ways, the same object named with several names.

With regard to this last point, the new theory of style is simply picking up again and reviving one of the basic propositions of classical rhetoric, namely, that an author's style is most sharply revealed by his choice of a particular term among several synonyms. Texts still in use scarcely more than a century ago still taught students that *face* and *demeure* belong to an elevated style, *visage* and *maison* to a "mediocre," that is, average style, *frimousse* to the familiar style and *manoir* (who would have believed it?) to comic style.

Having recognized synonymy as one of the bases of stylistics, we will be prepared to agree that it will be easier to qualify a style (lofty, pompous, trivial, etc.) to the degree that it offers more unusual terms and locutions, far from the average, the mediocre, swerving from the "norm." Terms and locutions, because it goes without saying that what is true for words is equally true for the most complex expressions. In his book

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

entitled *Jugement de tout ce qui a été imprimé contre le Cardinal Mazarin*, better known under the name of *Mascurat*, Gabriel Naudé presents two characters, Saint-Ange, a book-seller, and Mascurat, a printer. "The French," says Saint-Ange, "will never realize the services which the Cardinal is rendering them until their calumnies and slander have forced him to retire from public affairs, just as the bull never knows how much he needs his tail until he's lost it, *Quid valeat cauda, noscit bos cum caret ipsa*." Mascurat appears surprised at this way of talking: "Fine, comparing France to a bull and the Cardinal to its tail!" "If it's not fine," replies Saint-Ange, "at least, it's good... and more apt than yours." Here is a dispute that really comes to grips with problems of style. "What Mascurat is criticising his interlocutor for is the grotesqueness of his comparison; in short, for having abused style by deviating from the norm beyond permissible limits and in an unfortunate direction. Furthermore, this criticism is hurled back at him: his comparisons are worth no more than Saint-Ange's. But, alas, neither he nor Saint-Ange teach us what the norm is. What is the use of specifying what everybody is supposed to know? Ancient rhetoric fails to tell us (since every word in it reveals a style) any more than do modern theories of style, except for the fact that both implicitly identify "mediocre" and normal, a confusion setting both of them off on a dangerous path.

Geometricians say that a line, perpendicular to the tangent of a curve and passing through the point of tangence, is "normal," thus contrasting it with any other straight line which would fall obliquely on the tangent in order to reach the same point. Here, "normal" is the adjective which applies, since *norma* in Latin means *square*, but the term runs the risk of being somewhat misleading, if, forgetting its etymology, we apply it in a figurative sense. The "normal" is a line which departs from the average, as may be attested by numerous properties possessed by it alone. Normal, if one likes, but not just any line whatever. On the level of written language, therefore, what would be the "normal" whose deviation presents us with a "style?" We would be easily led to compare it with a straight line, the perpendicular, the shortest road, the simplest, were it not for the fact that the infinite number of obliques and the

uniqueness of the perpendicular did not arouse our suspicion that the latter as well as the former could serve as the attribute of a style. Would the norm then be the most trivial, that kind of writing which is closest to spoken language, a sort of "zero style?" But then, there are qualifications to denote what should not be qualified. Just as to Jourdain's astonishment, all language is prose when we're not speaking verse, in the same way we can say nothing, write nothing, draw nothing, and in general do nothing which does not reveal qualities of style. We must resign ourselves: all expression is style, whether we are aware of it or not, even despite us; and if one wishes absolutely to interpret style as a "deviation," it will be necessary to reject the norm into the limbo of the unexpressed in which it will serve as the idea prior to any formulation. In this new perspective, the norm exists, and its role in the genesis of styles is considerable. Comparing it not to the more common or simpler, but to the better, not to the ordinary but to the ideal, it becomes the "rule" (the image of the straight line pursues us), or at least it sets itself as the goal to be attained, the observation of a rule being the means: thus the Aristotelians of the seventeenth century imposed on the tragic poet the rule of the three unities, among so many other servitudes. From then on, the model set before the writer is not borrowed from actual literature; it is not an already existent work which he just tries to reproduce, but a scheme of perfection to which the work being written will conform, if its author obeys all the ancient or recent laws which will keep him on the right path. Here the law-maker or his interpreters come forth with the pretension of a perfect language. The happy expression—which will become "the norm"—is not the one which is habitually selected among all possible expressions, but the one which must be chosen when one chooses well. Unfortunately, in this case, choosing "well" does not possess all the privileges of the absolute Good: eternity is lacking to it; and no sooner have we turned our eyes from the ideal than we catch a glimpse of problems set forth by history. The man of letters, it has been said, appears to be in turn a legislator and a subject of the laws.³ No rule has existed forever. When a

³ Giacomo Devoto, *Cinquant'anni di studi linguistici italiani, 1895-1945*.

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

rule is set up, it draws its inspiration from the successes of spontaneous free creation; it sanctions their deviations; it, therefore, defines a style in the sense that we have accepted; while once instituted, it is and wishes to remain the norm. But alas, in the long run the beneficent effects of this law proclaimed in enthusiasm are exhausted. It then becomes, for some people, a constraint against which all revolt is legitimate; for others, a simple convenience, a current usage to which they conform out of laziness. Finally, the time comes when it is forgotten or worn out. Thus, a fresh metaphor is admired as a happy discovery, a deviation compared with the less imagined expression of which it makes a double use; but with usage it fades, becomes in its turn a common locution or, worse yet (if something remains of its meaning and charm), a superannuated elegance, a banality which one avoids "in terror".

Variation or norm, as may be seen, appear in two different perspectives, according to the sense attributed to those words. If all style is variation, norm is absence-of-style; if on the contrary, the norm is synonymous with good style, then it is the digression which tends toward the mediocre, the bad, the nullity. Set in this latter perspective, the writer finds himself "subjected to the law." His duty is clear. He strives to correspond with a defined ideal by bowing himself to a formulated rule—or to a rule, perhaps not formulated but no less imperative, which is the taste of the time, the fashion, the style reigning in an epoch and which later, will characterize it (Gothic, Baroque) or be characterized by it (Louis XIV, Empire). In this regard, certain centuries are particularly sure of themselves, impatient to reject past errors as if to prevent future errors, in order to assure the triumph of a truth finally impervious to all change. If one believes Houdart de la Motte, Homer was "as far from perfection as he was fitted to attain it, had he lived in more propitious times." Attenuated, limited by classic prejudice, the homage paid to genius still exists. One does not have to search in vain through the pages of a Poggio or a Filelfo or of any other humanist when it is a question of avowing the medieval heritage. "We see paintings of two hundred years ago," says Aeneas Sylvius, "and they are deprived of all art (*nulla arte politas*)". As for the writings of that time, they are "rude, insipid and gross (*rudia, inepta, in-*

compta)". Only after Petrarch and Giotto were literature and painting born (or reborn).

Thus the past is scorned, and one congratulates oneself for having seen the end of what was all too close. One could say with a relieved heart: only *yesterday* there was revealed a change in taste and the bringing forth of a new style. Literary and art historians find a particularly instructive field of studies in these transitions. They state that the passage from one style to another takes place in very different ways. Disavowal is not always the rule. Of course, the new style may well spring out of a violent reaction, a revolt against what preceded it, especially if the latter pretends to take advantage of an already dead authority, such as classicism in 1830. But it also happens that the new style succeeds without shocks, being the result of a slow transformation of which no one is aware. Sometimes, indeed the sliding over is so slow that such art forms, such literary genres—furnished with their corresponding rules—seem fixed forever, or at least for a limitless period of time. On the other hand, certain generations live in the feeling that they are witnessing the last days of a reign, dominated as they are by an admiration for the past which destroys their own audacity, or by the obsession of a future awaited in trembling impatience. Furthermore, facts are interpreted differently according to the spiritual atmosphere surrounding them (the imitation of the ancients can very well be the refuge of mediocrities as well as the stimulus for innovators), and in any case, both certainties and doubts are made up in large part of illusion. Illusion about "the golden age," which some believe still endures and which is maintained only by a vocabulary whose terms vary in meaning; illusion about the romantic years, proud of the sudden reversals authors boast about, but whose preparations history later recognizes.

Illusion of permanence or illusion of total rupture are both indications of a reality, namely, that all style is destined to die and that each style will find its own death, either naturally or violently. Some become etiolated, others become inflamed. Some exhaust themselves in monotonous repetitions, others become deformed until they present a caricature of themselves, not always intentional and satirical, but sometimes resulting, without any satiric intention, from the complacent exaggeration of a style,

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

of a fashion, or a clumsy imitation of a too-much-admired model. In these later cases, one may find many examples among the Italian Marinists of the seventeenth century or among certain of our "precious" writers, unaware of how ridiculous they are.

Whatever be the diversity and complexity of facts, all of them corroborate this idea that a new style is a variation from a norm, that is, from another style considered normal as a result of longer usage. But also to consider the matter from a less lofty point of view, the new style appears to us as the product of numberless deviations for which each writer or artist taken separately is responsible: some because they are in rebellion against precepts, fashion, or an established rule; others because, despite their docility and attachment to tradition, they betray themselves in their works, allowing, despite themselves, those aspects which are truly theirs to appear, and which the future will adopt. Also, there is not a single one who does not contribute for his part, and in his own way, to an evolution whose main lines seem to be drawn outside himself, as a result of historical fatality. In his own mind his style is a deviation; and a style, a historical phenomenon, is born of a sum of analogous deviations.

Thus the individual intervenes and we are all quite ready to believe with Buffon that "style is the man." But what does Buffon think? His intention, clearly revealed in context, is to distinguish and even to oppose what an author says in substance and the way in which he says it. The facts, the knowledge belong to everybody; "these things are outside the man; the style is the man himself." Introduced in such a way, this affirmation is clear but its range notably reduced. It implies a preliminary definition of style which today seems too narrow inasmuch as style, in the broadest meaning of the word, begins on this side of the writing and extends beyond. On this side, it is in the thought itself: a writer does not always state facts and knowledge. And, in the "beyond," style resides in what we willingly term tone and accent. For, if the same thought may be expressed in several ways, inversely, the same expression may render several thoughts. The simplest example—common in the theatre—is that of a phrase which a character may pronounce gravely or angrily and which another character responds to, word for word, in order to parody it. Similarly, the same out-of-use manner

reveals different styles according to the attitude of those employing it; the involuntarily archaicism of an artist or backward writer lost in the provinces, is not that of a defender conscious of a tradition still alive but threatened, any more than it is that of a dilettante satisfied with learned resurrections.

These elementary remarks, so often repeated, must warn us that we are on the wrong track when we believe we can penetrate into a work without relating it to its author, to an author, although he might be unknown. Certain theoreticians of style believed that an undisturbed study of forms could better achieve its purpose by forgetting the individual, and they have made stylistics a prolongation of grammar. Now we know that they were mistaken: all style is the mark of a man and can be truly grasped only as a kind of vestige; it is as Pierre Guiraud defines it: "the statement resulting from the choice of means of expression determined by the nature and intentions of the subject speaking or writing." *The nature and the intentions*, because the way in which we express ourselves (and it goes without saying that this remark applies to every mode of expression) will reflect one or the other. The style of a written page may result from the deliberate selection of each word, indeed, from a laborious search for every effect; or at the opposite extreme, it might spring forth out of the most obscure regions wherein all language is elaborated. This is one reason the more not to consider the result independently of the conditions in which it is obtained. The same metaphor may be natural or studied: derived from a craft, it will be natural to the man of that craft, and only in our ear does it become a metaphor. Jean Paulhan has noted this, as well as the fact that the natural may result from habit, second nature: we say the Milky Way without thinking about milk, or we say *Liane du Ciel* (vine of heaven) without being in any way aware of *lianes* (tropical vines).⁴ Let us add that there are figures of style which can only be precious or erudite; an ample collection of these may be found in the work which the seventeenth century theoretician Emanuele Tesauro entitles (practicing what he preaches) *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (The Aristotelian Telescope).

⁴ *Jacob Cow le pirate ou Si les mots sont des signes*, Paris, 1921.

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

Furthermore, spontaneity and intentionality do not reveal themselves in their pure state except in extreme cases. Among most writers, they form a compound which cannot always be easily analysed. The theoreticians of the Renaissance clearly distinguished between these two modes of all style, in poetry as in the fine arts. For them, the sources were study and genius: on the one hand, imitation of the masters and especially knowledge of Antiquity; on the other, the personal touch, what Vasari will call "the benignity of the stars and the dosage of humours".⁵ As for the importance and relative value of these primary elements, opinions were very divided. Giordano Bruno wanted the poet—if he is truly a poet—to abandon himself to his *fury* in scorn of rules;⁶ Cosimo the Elder took the part of spontaneity when he declared that "every painter paints himself";⁷ but Leonardo thinks altogether differently: his theory, as André Chastel sums it up, is that "it is necessary to beware of spontaneity," to counteract "by the objective study of forms" "the tendency to imitate and repeat one's own forms," to correct "the subconscious tendency of the soul... toward images resembling it," and to subject "every instinctive operation" to self criticism.⁸

This debate, renewed in every century, as to the correct proportions of inspiration and study in artistic creation does not, however, in any way alter the essential character and indispensable condition of style such as it has been defined: style always remains a "deviation," and always results, in the final analysis, from a selection among possibilities, a succession of choices—whether instinctive or meditated, is of little importance. A choice among synonyms, on the level of writing; a choice of instruments of work, of means, of methods; a choice of subjects

⁵ Exordium of the *Life of Michelangelo*.

⁶ *Gli eroici furori*, 1st part, Dialogue I.

⁷ This remark attributed to Cosimo de' Medici, is quoted by André Chastel, *Art et humanism à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris, 1959, p. 102. Delacroix told a young painter who asked his advice on the choice of a subject: "Everything is a subject; the subject is yourself."

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

also (the scorn which we too often affect toward the question of theme does not alter the fact that it plays a part in stylistics); a choice of signs and symbols; a choice of the elements of a written description or motifs of a painted landscape. Reality is so abounding, both in its physical and psychological aspects, that it will never be grasped and reproduced in all its details by even the most meticulous minded artists; the "primitive" painter cannot depict all the leaves of a tree one by one even if he wants to; therefore he chooses, he abstracts and in this sense we may say that all art is abstract, that there is nothing but abstract art.

In these choices operating at every moment, a being expresses himself. It is through these choices that style is the man, and in every case, too, for despite what we consider such striking differences, spontaneous choice and meditated choice both prove this rule. The first is rapid and, at its most extreme, ceases to be a choice, the expression selected springing forth by itself; the second is slow, hesitant, laborious, sometimes troublesome, since to choose in full awareness is first of all to exclude. But both paths are equally revelatory: in the one case, as in the other, man lets himself be known. From this point of view, "nature" and "intentions" should not be opposed. My hesitations, my application, even submissiveness to a rule, are myself as much as their opposites. When Buffon said "style is the man" he certainly did not mean it as a eulogy of "letting go," but as the affirmation of style as the most faithful mirror of genius, that is to say, of a "long patience." It is true that genius might be conceived quite otherwise, which Buffon would have refused to admit. He said disdainfully: "The style of President de Montesquieu?... But has Montesquieu a style?" To which Grimm, indignant, wrote to one of his correspondents: "Wouldn't he deserve to have someone dare reply: It is true, Montesquieu only has the style of genius, and you, Monsieur, have the genius of style." These quarrels about the meaning of words simply prove that style is attained by two extreme routes or by an infinity of average routes, and that all of them may lead us to the goal, that is to say, to avowals.

However, one will undoubtedly think, does there not exist an objective way of expressing oneself? An impenetrable neuter style, which far from betraying us, will conceal us? Thus,

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

Wölflin contrasted "representation" to "expression," a convenient contrast, and basically legitimate if one is concerned only with a classification of works. But this distinction is not absolutely valid. For the author who describes any object whatever, solely to "represent" it, that is to say (admitting the possibility) with an exhaustive minutiae of details, would still be expressing himself, and despite himself, in this very "representation." He who seeks or permits himself to be seen unveiled, he who would not dream of, or refuses to so proclaim himself: he too reveals himself in a thousand ways: by his discretion, by his modesty, by his desire not to have a style, by the idea which he has of style if he is a theoretician, by the confession of his impotence in the face of the ineffable, a feeling so often felt by mystics; and even under the mask of a foreign style, as in *pastiche* or plagiarism.

There is no writer, no artist, no man who, despite himself or even without his knowing it, does not have his style, a certain style characteristic of his personality, a manner of being which we recognize and which makes it possible for us to recognize him even in his bearing, in his clothes. With Buffon and giving a much wider meaning to the word, we therefore can say that "style is the man." But no sooner have we enjoyed the satisfaction of having put forward a correct definition when uneasiness assails us anew: Is style truly the man? But where is man truly? Does he exist outside of the appearances which express him? In the Renaissance the unity of the human person (which hitherto had never been placed in doubt) was still recognized without discussion. An abundance of powerful individuals supported this certainly. But since then, the progress of the physical, biological, and psychological sciences have little by little, at first timidly and then more boldly, caused an erosion of the idea of personality which from the beginning of the twentieth century has rushed toward complete destruction. To take account of our interior life, concurrent and disparate theories were set forth, but all having in common the fact that they emphasized not the unity of the person any longer but the multiplicity of his elements (diversity of origin, impulses, influences to which he is subjected, etc.). The compound prevailed over the simple. Each of us was in himself alone a multitude, soon to become a battlefield. Around 1900, there was a great deal of concern with

heredity; and after the scholars and philosophers had formulated their theories, it was the turn of the novelists and dramatists, impatient to exploit this rich vein. Meanwhile, the public was filled with enthusiasm: it grew intoxicated as a result of this flattering complexity, it became bewildered, it no longer knew itself. When Socrates consulted the oracle of Delphi, he most explicitly confessed a similar ignorance, but with a modesty which was in his manner, while the spectator who attended a "première" by Paul Hervieu some sixty years ago took pride in no longer knowing who he was, in being confused. To denote the individual, philosophers had recourse to charming devices: a bundle of tendencies, a polyp of images. Since then styles have changed and are still changing, but man has not been rediscovered, because the great business of the psychologists seems to be to annihilate the psyche, the object of their study. The substantial unity of the person finds itself attacked by augmented methods and new arms. The psychoanalysts, engaging in mine warfare, worked the underoil, exploring what at first was called the unconscious, then the subconscious, in order to stress that it is a deep region. The roots of psychic life were sought for in the obscure secret places of organic life. Scholars passionately applied themselves to the study of instinctive reactions, automatic acts, uncontrolled thoughts, dreams, repressed feelings, unconfessed phantasies, troubled visions; and it was realized that the roots of our being were not, like those of carrots or beets, taproots, but on the contrary, ramified in a fan of numerous little roots. Once again one came to dispersion and night, and once more the dramatists superimposed on the work of scientists a gloss, flattering for the scientists to whom they gave a vast audience, and at the same time, for the public to whom they revealed the secret of the Gods by showing them that the human being doesn't exist. A character of Pirandello is only the sum of the judgments which others bring to bear on him, in himself nothing. And we, docile spectators, were more and more satisfied: we were not only torn away from the scandalous idolatry of personality but unburdened of the load of our persons. We had the impression that we no longer existed; and each of us drew what we could from this feeling of non-existence: some a sweet vertigo, others a kind of bitter comfort.

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

But the illness—if it is one—bore in itself a promise of cure. For it is at the moment when a soul loses all coherence, dissolves into its elements and considers itself most hopelessly disintegrated, that its weakness (and what it believes to be its nothingness) delivers it entirely disarmed to the internal force which wearilessly leads it back to itself and restores its form. All the more so, since here and there some little islands of resistance drew the attention of the curious. Some individuals stubbornly persisted in wanting to exist as they were. Of course, they recognized that there was some truth in the new doctrines. They admitted (who could not admit?) that in every man there is a plurality of tendencies: isn't that sufficiently disclosed by the instability of our tastes or our characters? How can one explain change in a being attributed with perfect unity? Now, we change and sometimes to the point of becoming physically and morally the opposite of what we were, so that we render ourselves unrecognizable, as common language bears witness to when we say of a relative or of a friend met again after a long separation: "He is no longer the same man." Let us dwell a bit on this point.

A story by Marcel Jouhandeau has as its hero a certain Mr. Magnin, nicknamed Magnanimous, who after having, in his youth, enjoyed a deserved reputation as an arbiter of elegance, becomes, in his old age, a kind of tramp, a slovenly tatterdemalion. Having contrasted the two portraits of his character, the author adds, "Now I try to imagine God before the soul of Mr. Magnin, and Mr. Magnin's soul before the Eternal: God, the Eternal, has never separated the original elegance and the ultimate abjection of Magnanimous. He always enwraps both together in one and the same glance, and, one enlightening the other, one justifying, explaining, revealing the other, exalting it; both of them inseparably give that man's art all its value, and that man himself all his meaning." More seriously and with more conviction than the proposed example and ironic manner of the story would lead one to believe, Jouhandeau, borrowing the eye of God, makes us realize the oneness of Mr. Magnin, in the very contrast of both his aspects. In that way we become aware of the fact that the most changeable being shelters a stable element in himself, a point of reference for all possible changes, an immutable center around which a personality is organized and to which it

becomes attached, despite all the metamorphoses which it seems to undergo in the course of time and which are only its successive flowerings.

No sooner do we state this conception of an immutable nature than we are led to those mystical interpretations of which Christian and Muslem literature offer us numerous examples. "Human souls have the same relationship with the Angel from whom they emanate," writes Henry Corbin, commenting on Avicennian angelology, "as each celestial Soul has with the Intelligence of the thought from which its being emanates. Therefore, it is in the imitation of the *anima coelestis* that the terrestrial angel or *anima humana* will realize his angelic nature which is still virtual precisely because it is terrestrial." Therefore, a "perfect" nature exists to which the individual may be unfaithful ("the human soul can betray its being"), but which at least is always there, always waiting, without changing its form.⁹ Eugenio d'Ors, in an original, somewhat unorthodox, angelology, develops themes of the same order, giving the guardian angel the character and function of a "perfect nature".¹⁰ Giordano Bruno, in his *Gli eroici furori* locates at the level of the *anima mundi* those supreme refuges which every soul in love with the Sovereign Good longs to reach in order that there they may be freed of change, accident, "vile number",¹¹ all the misfortunes of multiplicity. Now, what these authors and so many others perceive under different symbols whose existence they try to reveal to us, is that realm in ourselves—the unconscious, the subconscious, or better, the "over-conscience"—which we know insofar as it manifests its powers. But we never know it by a direct grasp, nor will it yield itself to analysis, whose simplicity it shuns.

Thus we are led to believe that if by style we mean everything denoting the individual, then style, even under diverse aspects and changing over the course of years, reflects or actualizes the

⁹ H. Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, Teheran, 1954, p. 53.

¹⁰ *Introducción a la vida angélica*, Buenos Aires, 1941.

¹¹ "Basta ch'alto mi tolsi / Et da l'ignobil numero mi sciolsi." *Gli eroici furori*.

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

virtualities of a unique, essentially immutable being; and that even if too-obvious metamorphoses lead us to doubt this unity of the person, we can like Jouhandeau place our trust in the Eternal. However, the style of a life is one thing, and the style, in a more restricted sense, of a written page or a work of art, is something else. The latter, of course, is only one aspect of the former, which comprehends an entire way of behavior, but an aspect whose specific characteristics interest us to the highest degree.

Among these characteristics, one above all distinguishes itself from every other manner of being: is not only the result of nature, but of study, not only of talent, but of craft. And although talent certainly must exist and nature intervene, they are no longer sufficient. One doesn't write a verse tragedy "as one breathes," and the freest work assumes at least a certain amount of preparation. From that point on there is *the labor of style*. A phrase which saddens us, even irritates us, reminding us of the title of a book we read in our youth with quiverings of impatience. An unjust irritation no doubt, but quite easy to understand: so great is the charm of spontaneity that it is vexing merely to think about an effort whose only meaning is to impede the free flow. Often the first rough draft beguiles us more than a page carefully written; the sketch seems better than the painting. In fact it often is: expressing, as it does, an inspiration subsequently altered by retouches up to the moment when, after a thankless unfruitful interval, all the beauty, all the daring, all the strength of the first draft may be found again in the accomplished work which then, certainly, will reflect the personality of its creator even better than the outline. But these successes are rare: they are the privilege of genius as well as the reward of labor. In most cases, the artist stops halfway; and inasmuch as the work is not truly completed, it remains inferior to its promises which we prefer, and justifiably so.

The work in the grand style will be, after all, that which will arise *all at once* "out of nature and out of intentions," in which laborious effort will expand the first burst, and in which, as Nietzsche says, the greater and lesser reason will harmonize. That is said easily enough, but how can such a result be obtained? And if one despairs of it, isn't it worth more to stick to sketches?

Thus, like the sculptor or the painter, the writer finds himself exposed to the two temptations of struggle and facility, both of which conceal their own particular danger, as well as a common danger.

If the particular danger of laborious application is to fail to achieve that condition in which traces of effort are effaced, the peril of facility is to degenerate into a kind of negligent euphoria wherein primordial elements, which it pretends to save, will be fatally travestied: nothing is easier than to follow fashion, no one is more enslaved to his time than he who programmatically abandons himself to his own inclinations. But how can one fail to realize that in the one case as in the other, the danger is basically the same: different roads similarly lead us to disavow those profundities where the most original developments are being prepared. And what is more, in one case as in the other, final defeat results from badly-understood practice, the indiscreet use of introspection.

He who rests his hope of perfection on "the labor of style" will try, in the best hypothesis, not to deviate from his initial *élan*, making the sparkle of the sketch permanent by knowledgeable retouches. He will even want to remember the first tremblings preceding the birth of a work; his inward glance will look in that direction. Unfortunately, that glance alone runs the risk of destroying the undertaking envisaged. As for he who abandons himself, absolved from all rules, priding himself on not knowing the concrete problems of reconciling the subject with the imperatives of a technique and the exigencies of an aesthetic, no one is more canalized in manner than such a man who pours out in one effusion works inevitably characterized by monotony. So-called abstract painting offers only too many examples. In both cases, the poet or the artist shifts his attention from his subject in order to bring it to bear on himself, that is, on something which he can never seize by attention.

The tree is known by its fruits, and in the same way, it is by his fruits, in other words, by studying his own works, that the artist knows himself and discovers his path. He surely will not find himself by undertaking a quest for the origins of his work, which are concealed in depths (or in heights) to which conscience has no access. With regard to the origins of man, Father Teil-

Calliope and Psyche or Style and Man

hard de Chardin observes that their obscurity is that of all origins: it is always difficult to grasp a thing, no matter what, in its birth. Now, if this thing issues out of us, the difficulty is no less; on the contrary, it becomes an absolute impossibility. "I see very well where I end," says Eugenio d'Ors looking at the tip of his shoes, "but in the other direction... in the direction of my head, I don't end".¹² This parable needs no comment. All stories of dreams told by people who have been urged to recall them have this in common—they present episodes directly to us without confiding any of their antecedents. And for good reason: the dreamer no longer remembers. Sometimes sharply-defined images are retained; sometimes an almost coherent action may be followed to the end, that is to say, until the sleeper wakes, but the past that it assumes, remains impenetrable, cloaked in night as are the first moments of artistic creation. "A dream has no beginning."¹³

¹² E. d'Ors, *Jardin des plantes*, Paris, 1930, pp. 168-169.

¹³ Jean Paulhan, *Le pont traversé*, Paris, 1921, p. 7.