

Homage to the Apple Tree

Forty years ago, Roger Caillois approached the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences and proposed that the Council establish a most unusual journal. At the request of UNESCO, the council had brought together a number of learned organizations in the realm of the humanities; Jacques Rueff had just assumed the presidency. In Caillois's mind, the objective was to put an end to the isolation enjoyed by most disciplines, which jealously guarded their prestige and authority and cared little to have their neighbors meddle in their affairs. For Caillois, the musicologist needed the classicist, the prehistorian the philosopher and, of course, the religious historian the linguist and the economist. The interdisciplinarian, at that time, attracted a fair amount of attention. But Caillois was not satisfied. Too often, it seemed to him, the interdisciplinarian was content with arbitrary and superficial juxtapositions. Caillois wanted to raise the transdisciplinary to the level of a methodology, and he wanted to try to draw together the different scholarly sectors reluctant to step beyond historical boundaries all too often frozen by time. Haunted by the theme of the chess board at least as much as by the medusa or by fulgora lantern flies, he coined a term of his own for all this, a term destined to a brilliant future: the *lateral sciences*.

The lateral sciences constituted the methodology. The goal was to put at the disposal of what he called the great cultured public, each day more numerous and more exacting, the most recent and fecund discoveries of science in action. In no case would vulgarization be permissible. On the contrary, the purpose was to hide nothing of the difficulties of knowledge, to bring them to light when necessary, and to contribute to the progress of science by articulating them without compromise. Caillois loved mystery and clarity with equal passion. He detested jargon. He believed that a good historian should be able to descend into the abyss of metaphysics and that all archeologists must perforce be linguists – and the obverse as well, of course. Obviously he was not unaware that the division of scientific work had become strict. But he feared its ravages. When he

spoke of the great cultivated public, he had in mind the specialist of a given discipline in the process of taking an interest in a discipline other than his own. In 1952, when he addressed a group of specialists in the human sciences – who had gathered at the behest of UNESCO – he described a journal intended for philologists who wanted to know a little more about political economy, and for Orientalists fascinated by the Italian Renaissance.

Caillois's journal also proposed to assess the progress of research in any given field of learning. How are Mycenaean studies doing? What are the goals of mathematical logic today? What have we learned recently about the origins of man? Pointed research never intimidated him, no matter its difficulty, as long as this difficulty was not intentional or ostentatious. On the other hand, all monographs, all programmatic reports, and all general and unfocused material were unconditionally excluded. There would be no discussions of the battle of Malplaquet, the transcendental schematic in Kant, or the project for the constitution of a new Academy, or any such matter, nor of the best way to lift humanity out of all present or future crises. Yet the journal would gladly include a theory on the *Sephiroth* in the Kabbalah, the adaptation of the evangelical message to the populations of a newly discovered America, or the language of bees – things that might seem paradoxical, but were not, for a journal of human sciences. Thus was *Diogenes* born.

The International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences adopted Caillois's proposal enthusiastically. And, except for its title, suggested by Richard McKeon, professor at the University of Chicago, and accepted with the proper amount of humor and irony, the new journal owed everything to Caillois. It bears his stamp. From the first day until his death he was its inspiration and its soul. As in any human enterprise, a journal is first tied to its creator. For *Diogenes* this was Caillois.

There were difficulties. What *Diogenes* published was not always to the liking of everyone – nor to all the governments which, through UNESCO, brought generous and constant subsidies to the journal. *Diogenes* cannot, I believe, be reproached for taking an ideological stance. One can find authors from the right and the left, believers and atheists, Marxist and liberal texts, partisans and adversaries of almost all theories that have coursed through this half-century. To say that the parties responsible for the journal were never mistaken would be to exaggerate. They published their share of insignificant articles, and it undoubtedly happened that they

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rejected articles of great value. They did what they could. But it is permissible to assert that each issue contained pages that deserved to be read. That is already an accomplishment of sorts.

The print runs of *Diogenes* have never reached astronomic proportions. Far from it. The journal, on the other hand, has held an honorable place in contemporary intellectual life. It prides itself on striking collaborations. It has served as a vehicle for many great debates of our age. It is cited in many theses and learned works. It appears in all the great university libraries of the world.

Parallel editions and anthologies of *Diogenes* have been printed in English, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, French, Hindi, Japanese, and Portuguese. Only the hardship of the times prevents us from spreading out further. We hope and pray some day to be able to present to our readers editions in other languages. We dare to believe that *Diogenes* has been, and remains to this day, an exceptional instrument of culture.

The most difficult blow dealt to the journal is obviously the death of Roger Caillois. Until his last breath he was actively interested in what he considered his *oeuvre*. Now that he is gone, we have asked ourselves if the journal, so closely tied to his person, his choices and his style, must disappear with him. To be faithful to a Chinese proverb he liked to quote, "Better to light a little lantern than to curse the darkness," it has been decided to continue, in his absence, this endeavor that owes everything to him. This was a risky bet. Whether this bet has paid off or not, the journal is today forty years old, a good age for a journal. And to celebrate the forty lanterns of *Diogenes* is to remember Roger Caillois at the same time, without whom the journal would never have seen the light of day.

Many things have changed in *Diogenes* since its beginnings. Caillois initially reviewed summaries of the works. That choice, necessarily restricted, quickly proved too arbitrary. It was necessary to abandon this method. Thematic issues continued to alternate with open issues. In response to readers' expectations, little by little the former began to increase in number. But on the whole the journal continued to draw inspiration from the program outlined, at the beginning, by Roger Caillois, a program that was inseparable from his person and his work. This is why celebrating the fortieth anniversary of *Diogenes* likewise means celebrating the memory of Roger Caillois.

In a dazzling article¹, entitled "Pierres lisibles" (Readable Gems),

1. *Le Monde*, 14 May 1991.

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written a year and a half ago, Octavio Paz sketched a synthetic portrait of the work of Roger Caillois. He described Caillois, whom he had at first "imagined as a subtle and ironic intellectual, a mandarin," beneath the features of "a direct, robust man, with a flushed face which reminded one a little of an apple tree, a little of a herdsman." He was not a mandarin, but he was a skilled herdsman. He was an ironic apple tree. Octavio Paz justly called attention to "the extreme diversity of the subjects" among which Caillois endeavored to "discover the unity of the world." "More than intellectual construction," wrote Paz, "his work aspires . . . to describe. Not the things we see, but the web of invisible relations and hidden correspondences among the worlds that make up this one."

After Octavio Paz we are not going to undertake, less successfully than he, an exegesis of Caillois's work. Let it suffice for us to say that *Diogenes* had its place among the concerns that run through the body of Caillois's work. "He conceived of the universe," wrote Octavio Paz, "as a vast and rigorous system of reflections." And again: "In this world of resonance and echo, in which silence itself is part of a universal correspondence, what is the role of man?" The method of *Diogenes*, the questions which, after the death of Caillois, the journal continues to ask itself, will remain forever inscribed in the perspective to which the name of Caillois will always be attached.

The memory of Roger Caillois and the future of *Diogenes* thus remain forever joined. On this fortieth anniversary of the journal, we have turned toward the past and the future alike. Toward the past, in an attempt, come what may, to remain true to him. Toward the future, in an attempt to adapt the journal, as much as possible, to the new problems that never cease to arise and to which *Diogenes* strives to respond as far as its means will allow.

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