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Impressionism to Surrealism: Art and Culture, 1880 to the Eve of WWII

Readings, Part 1

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150 years of Impressionism: how a small group of artists changed the way we see

https://www.christies.com/en/stories/anniversary-of-impressionism-1874-2024-983a47535a444c8fa9fa0c46a0752c3b?cid=EM_EMLcontent04144C82Section_A_Story_1_0&COSID=43179471&cid=DM507085&bid=402926979

As France gears up to celebrate one of the most momentous exhibitions in art history, Alastair Smart traces the genesis and growth of a movement synonymous with the world's favourite artists, from Monet to Renoir, Pissarro to Morisot

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Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *Bal du moulin de la Galette*, 1876 (detail). Oil on canvas. 131.5 x 176.5 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Bridgeman Images

In 1867, Frédéric Bazille wrote to his parents that he and a group of fellow painters had failed to fulfil their dream of launching an independent art exhibition. They simply couldn't raise the funds. 'We'll have to re-enter the bosom of the administration whose milk we have not sucked,' he said ruefully, referring to the all-powerful Académie des Beaux-Arts.

Bazille and his young friends — Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and Camille Pissarro among them — disliked the way that, to succeed as an artist in mid-19th-century France, one had to have work shown at the official Académie-run exhibition, the Salon. He dubbed the situation 'ridiculous', on grounds that the Salon's selection panel was stuffy and consistently favoured academic art over anything innovative.

Tragically, Bazille would die on a battlefield three years later, shortly after enlisting in a light infantry regiment at the start of the Franco-Prussian War. He was 28. The war ended in ignominious defeat for the French, culminating in a victory march through the streets of Paris by enemy forces and an indemnity payment of five billion francs (due to the Germans within five years).

photograph by Félix Tournachon, known as Nadar, of his studio at 35 Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, which in 1874 became the site of the first Impressionist exhibition. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des estampes et de la photographie, EO-15(1)-FOL. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France

Remarkably, belying such a context, Monet, Pissarro and Renoir soon helped launch the independent exhibition that they and Bazille had craved. It opened on 15 April 1874 in Paris, in the erstwhile studio of the photographer Nadar, at 35 Boulevard des Capucines. The exhibition, perhaps the most momentous in art history, featured work by 30 artists who went under the collective name of the *Société Anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc*.

We know them better today as the Impressionists.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the first Impressionist show — there were eight in total, the last of which took place in 1886. A number of celebratory events are planned, including a whole festival dedicated to the movement in Normandy. Exhibitions will also be held in cities such as Strasbourg, Bordeaux and Nantes. In Paris, the Musée d'Orsay is hosting the biggest show of all, *Paris 1874: Inventing Impressionism*, focusing on the movement's advent. (This later transfers to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.)

Nowadays, the Impressionist painters — collectively and individually — are beloved worldwide, their names all but guaranteed to attract huge crowds. The challenge for any curator in 2024, though, is how to recreate a sense of the sheer radicalism of the work when it first appeared — not just the aesthetic, but also the way the artists staged the whole debut show themselves and engaged directly with their audiences. A look at the reviews from 150 years ago may help.

Claude Monet (1840-1926),* Impression, soleil levant*, 1872. Oil on canvas. 50 x 65 cm. Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet. Photo: © Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris / Studio Baraja SLB

Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Impression, soleil levant*, 1872. Oil on canvas. 50 x 65 cm. Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet. Photo: © Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris / Studio Baraja SLB

Some were positive, some were negative, with very few neither one nor the other. Ernest d'Hervilly, writing in the newspaper *Le Rappel*, called the works 'fresh and gripping', adding that 'one cannot encourage this daring undertaking too much'.

A critic who went by the name of A.L.T., by contrast, wrote in the conservative newspaper *La Patrie* that seeing the show left 'you sorry you didn't give the franc you paid to enter to some poor beggar'.

It was an exhibition review, in fact, that gave the movement we now know as Impressionism its name. The critic in question, Louis Leroy, was distinctly underwhelmed by what he saw. Aiming particular barbs at Monet's painting of the port of Le Havre, *Impression, soleil levant (Impression, Sunrise)*, he claimed (among other things) that 'a preliminary drawing for a

wallpaper pattern is more finished than this'. Appearing in the satirical magazine *Le Charivari*, Leroy's review ran with the disparaging headline: 'The Exhibition of the Impressionists'.

That name ended up sticking, and the artists themselves even came to adopt it by the time of their third exhibition in 1877.

It's worth saying that the Impressionists didn't emerge out of a vacuum. Influences on them included Edouard Manet; the Realist master Gustave Courbet; painters of the Barbizon school, such as Charles-François Daubigny; and the Englishman J.M.W. Turner. That said, there were a whole host of ways in which Impressionism proved groundbreaking — and, as such, polarising.

Berthe Morisot (1841-1895),* Reading, *1873. Oil on fabric. 18⅛ x 28¼ in (46 x 71.8 cm). Gift of the Hanna Fund 1950.89. The Cleveland Museum of Art

Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), *Reading*, 1873. Oil on fabric. 18⅛ x 28¼ in (46 x 71.8 cm). Gift of the Hanna Fund 1950.89. The Cleveland Museum of Art

There were the short, broken brushstrokes, for a start, which barely conveyed forms, instead capturing an overall impression of subjects and emphasising the effects of light in a fleeting moment. This was a far cry from the smooth surfaces, careful finish and fully developed forms associated with the Académie.

The Impressionists also adopted a brighter palette than viewers were used to, thanks in part to the recent development of synthetic pigments. They even chose to render shadows in colour rather than, as had hitherto been usual, grey or black.

The advent of squeezable metal paint tubes in the mid-19th century proved significant, too. They were more portable and resilient than pigs' bladders — which had previously been used to store paints — and facilitated the Impressionist practice of painting pictures *en plein air*. Light effects could now be captured in situ, in an unprecedentedly faithful manner. (Artists had long painted outdoors, but before the 19th century tended to create preparatory sketches in this manner and produce finished paintings in the studio.)

Edgar Degas (1834-1917),* The Dance Class, *1874. Oil on canvas. 32⅞ x 30⅜ in (83.5 x 77.2 cm). Bequest of Mrs Harry Payne Bingham, 1986. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *The Dance Class*, 1874. Oil on canvas. 32⅞ x 30⅜ in (83.5 x 77.2 cm). Bequest of Mrs Harry Payne Bingham, 1986. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Another innovation was the dramatic cropping that certain Impressionists adopted — Edgar Degas most notably, in his off-centre pictures of ballet classes. This was a technique borrowed from photography and *ukiyo-e* prints, which had recently been introduced into the West from Japan.

Impressionists, then, responded to the modern world in numerous ways, and this extended to their subject matter. Rather than produce history painting — a genre long favoured at the Salon and inspired by biblical, mythological or historical episodes — they depicted modern life. Which is to say, scenes taking place amid the wide boulevards, public gardens and grand buildings that newly characterised Paris, thanks to Baron Haussmann's drastic renovation of the city in the 1850s and 1860s. Everyday people were portrayed going about everyday activities, often in burgeoning new spaces of recreation such as cafés and theatres. A famous example is Renoir's 1876 painting, *Bal du moulin de la Galette*, a portrayal of Parisians enjoying themselves on a Sunday afternoon at a popular dance spot on the Butte Montmartre.

Auguste Renoir (1841-1919),* Bal du moulin de la Galette, *1876. Oil on canvas. 131.5 x 176.5 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Bridgeman Images

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With good reason, Impressionism is remembered as a movement that revolutionised painting. That revolution took a while to catch on, though. Some 3,500 people visited the debut exhibition during its month-long run, significantly fewer than attended the 1874 Salon on an average *day*.

What they saw was an eclectic mix of works in different media: not just paintings but also prints, pastels and watercolours, as well as sculptures in marble, terracotta and plaster. It's true that the big names we associate with Impressionism showed the most works: Degas with 10, Monet and Berthe Morisot with nine apiece. However, several artists featured whose work was much more traditional in style, and who in some cases had even shown at the Salon before, such as Auguste de Molins and Louis Debras, both of whom were in their fifties.

Their inclusion was the source of disagreement. Pissarro, arguing that it compromised the group's integrity, eventually lost out to Degas, who felt that established artists would attract more visitors. As Anne Robbins, the co-curator of *Paris 1874: Inventing Impressionism*, points out, 'the movement was not born fully formed' — and there 'wasn't a common aesthetic that bound the artists' at first, so much as 'a common desire to show away from the Salon'.

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903),* The Public Garden at Pontoise*, 1874. Oil on canvas. 23⅝ x 28¾ in (60 x 73 cm). Gift of Mr and Mrs Arthur Murray, 1964. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Public Garden at Pontoise*, 1874. Oil on canvas. 23⅝ x 28¾ in (60 x 73 cm). Gift of Mr and Mrs Arthur Murray, 1964. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

There would be other 'in-house' disagreements in the years ahead. The ever-combative Degas, for example, disdained his comrades' fondness for working *en plein air*. He quipped that 'if I were the government I would have a special brigade of gendarmes to keep an eye on artists who paint landscapes from nature'.

On the plus side, the Impressionists now had something of the financial security that had been lacking in 1867. This came partly courtesy of dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who paid the artists

stipends and bought hundreds of their paintings. ‘We Impressionists would all have died of hunger without him,’ said Monet (with perhaps some exaggeration) late in life.

When we think of Impressionism today, a group of core figures comes to mind — Degas, Monet, Morisot, Pissarro, Renoir and Alfred Sisley — painters who expounded all or most of the Impressionist traits outlined above. It’s worth noting, though, that a total of 58 artists showed work across the eight exhibitions, with only Pissarro featuring in every one.

Monet actually opted against participating in the fifth exhibition, in April 1880, and showed at that year’s Salon instead. *Le Gaulois* newspaper reported the news with dark humour, informing readers of the ‘painful loss’ of ‘one of [Impressionism’s] revered masters’ — and announcing that ‘the funeral of Monsieur Claude Monet will be celebrated on 1 May [the opening day of the Salon]’.

Georges Seurat (1859-1891),* A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884, *1884-86. Oil on canvas. 81¾ x 121¼ in (207.5 x 308.1 cm). Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection. The Art Institute of Chicgo

Georges Seurat (1859-1891), *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884*, 1884-86. Oil on canvas. 81¾ x 121¼ in (207.5 x 308.1 cm). Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection. The Art Institute of Chicago

All of which is to say that Impressionism was a less homogeneous movement than is sometimes believed, with its aims continually being negotiated. Indeed, although the 1886 exhibition is — for obvious reasons — deemed a last hurrah, one might see it instead as a further example of evolution.

Included in that show was George Seurat’s painting *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884*, the founding masterpiece of Neo-Impressionism. As its name makes clear, this was a movement born out of Impressionism, the key development being a more systematic application of brushstrokes. Alongside Seurat and Paul Signac, Pissarro would become a chief exponent.

The influence of Impressionism also extended into the 20th century. In privileging *how* we see over *what* we see, it heralded movements such as Cubism — while in liberating art from its purely descriptive function, it anticipated a huge swathe of avant-garde practice and ultimately paved the way to abstraction. Not for nothing is 1874 considered by many the birth date of modern art. The movement in question left a lasting impression.

Toulouse-Lautrec

The Noble Dwarf

Henri Marie Raymond de Toulouse-Lautrec-Montfa was born on a stormy night of 1864 in his grandmother's fortresslike old house which had grown over the centuries around a donjon of the medieval ramparts of the city of Albi.

Admiring relatives and servants made him aware from his earliest childhood that he was heir to an old and proud name in Europe. His ancestors had been counts of Toulouse, ruling over most of the South of France, inventing romantic love and entertaining troubadors at the most civilized court in Europe. A younger son of Count Raymond V had married the daughter of the Count of Lautrec in 1196, and an unbroken line had run from father to son ever since. The family glittered with diadems: dukes and counts without number, even a brother-in-law of Richard the Lion-Hearted. Henri Marie Raymond was to take a path of his own: he would lead a disorderly unconventional life and do things that would horrify his family, but in his way, down to his wretched end when he lay dying of alcoholism, syphilis and whatever else he could pick up on his primrose path, he never forgot family tradition. He was always an aristocrat, though an aristocrat built to his own specifications..

He was one of the cluster of French painters who at the end of the 19th century changed the world's way of looking at things and launched the adventure of modern art. He was a man of such penetrating eye and such vivid touch that he has impressed his own vision of Paris in the 1890s on posterity. It has all become so familiar that it takes a wrench to remember that, after all, this is only one narrow corner of Paris, that there were millions of people in the 1890s who never went to ogle the ladies at the Moulin de la Galette, who never saw Jane Avril dance or Yvette Guilbert sing at the Moulin Rouge, never visited the racecourse at Longchamps or the fancy brothels of Montmartre.

Lautrec never had to worry about money. His family had come through the

French Revolution successfully by lying low, and had held on to most of their immense possessions of land. They had once been at the heart of the ruling class and filled prominent positions in state and church. But in 19th-century France they had nothing to do. French governments distrusted them, and besides, they regarded all French governments after 1830 as usurpers. They were waiting for the restoration of the rightful Bourbon King, the Count of Chambord, who the family thought should be crowned as Henri V (Lautrec was named for him.)

They might accept commissions in the armed forces, as did the painter's father, Count Alphonse, until his royalist principles and his total allergy to discipline led him to resign. For a man of his station, there was nothing to do afterward except look after his estates, hunt game and chase women.

Count Alphonse made a love match with his first cousin Adèle Tapié de Celeyran, who came of another landed and aristocratic family. Intermarriage was not uncommon in these families, and the results for their only surviving son (a younger brother, Richard, died a year after birth) were catastrophic. The parents blamed themselves for their child's afflictions, and modern medical opinion seems to hold that they were right. According to the latest study of the medical evidence, the boy suffered from a rare form of dwarfism called pyknodysostosis, which is more common in children of consanguineous parents than of others.

Bones of the arms and legs of those suffering from this condition do not have the spurt of growth common to other adolescents. The features of the face coarsen, the lips thicken and drool, the nose has a constant sniffle. All this was to happen to little Henri, who for the first 13 years of his life was known in the local dialect as *Bébé lou poulit*, the little beauty, the bright madcap child who was everyone's idol.

Life was a perpetual round of pleasures and excitements for him at the paternal Chateau du Bosc north of Albi, or the maternal estate, Celeyran, on the Mediterranean, or the beaches and harbors of the Atlantic coast. He was brought up surrounded by forests and gardens, grainfields and vineyards, kennels and stables. There were animals everywhere. His grandmother Lautrec often went walking with a monkey on her shoulder. There were hawks and hounds, ferrets

and cormorants. Above all, there were horses.

"In our family," his father once said, "we christen a child at once, and then put him on a horse." One of the artist's earliest memories was of his grandfather Count Raymond, known as the Black Prince, who was out hunting alone one winter day and rolled down a precipice, blew a blast on his horn with bloodied lips, and died.

The three sons of the Black Prince spent most of their lives on horseback; they could not wait till Henri was big enough to join the hunt. As soon as he could walk, he was riding a pony. Soon he was forming his swarms of little cousins into cavalry troops. He spent happy hours with the grooms in the stables. Later on in life, when they asked him what he missed most from the days before his debility, he answered, "Horses."

He was self-willed, mischievous, a leader in all the children's games. He designed the costumes and the disguises, he spoke all the voices in the Punch-and- Judy shows.

His parents, after the first flush of romance, found themselves totally incompatible in character and tastes, and it was not long before they were living apart, though Alphonse in his unpredictable way might turn up at any time for dinner and might stay on, unwelcome but irremovable, for months or years as part of the household.

In their radically dissimilar ways, they both had a great influence on the little boy. Adèle, the mother, was quiet, pious, well-read, practical in money matters, straitlaced, narrow-minded, totally devoted to her son. She never really appreciated his work; when she was asked once to name her favorite painter, her reply was: "Certainly not my son." But she was fiercely proud of any success he had in his lifetime and fought fiercely for his fame after he died. She preserved every scrap of his work that he had not sold or given away. A selection was offered to the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris, which chose only one. She then gave the whole collection to the city of Albi, which now has one of the most popular provincial museums in the world.

Adèle always provided him not only with all the money he needed but with a home he might come back to anytime he was tired of his dissipations. She knew all about the dissipations, but she accepted with a steely resignation what she could see only as a deliberate destruction of body and soul. He was always glad to curl up in a chaise longue at her Paris apartment or at the Chateau de Malromé near Bordeaux, which she bought. "I can do anything I like," he used to say, "since Mama keeps nuns in our old castle of Boussagues [still another family estate] who have nothing to do but pray for the salvation of my soul."

Count Alphonse was quite another kettle of fish, an eccentric of almost English proportions, a big bearded man who on occasion danced around the living room with a knife between his teeth, who went out hunting in coat of mail and cowboy hat. He used to ride his favorite white mare in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris wearing an Uzbek helmet with a red pennant fluttering from it; he would rein in the mare halfway through the ride, dismount and milk her, drink the milk, remount and continue. This inveterate huntsman and womanizer lost interest in his son when he realized the child could no longer hope to mount a horse. He did pass on to him, however, along with a taste for fancy costumes and disguises, a talent for gourmet cooking. He evidently liked his steak rare. A family recipe for Steak à la Lautrec: "Grill three steaks placed horizontally on top of each other. Serve the middle one." He also passed on a passion for drawing.

Count Alphonse and his two brothers shared a traditional family fascination with art. They used to sit by the fire for hours after the hunt and draw or paint or model clay. Their mother said of them that when they hunted a game bird they got three pleasures out of it, shooting it, drawing it and eating it. The little Henri was watching and imitating them from the start. When he was taken, at age two and a half, to the christening of his brother, he asked to be picked up so that he could sign the register and, not being able to write, he announced that he would draw an ox.

The margins of Lautrec's schoolbooks were crammed with lively sketches of dogs, galloping horses and farm scenes. It has been speculated that he might have grown up as the family expected – to be a country squire in the family tradition, who would have casually turned out some lively works of art for his cousins and friends. But his life was changed for good when two falls, at ages 13

and 14, condemned him to months of immobility, his thighs in plaster, confined to bed or a wheelchair. At first his parents believed that his increasing physical debility was the result of the falls. They could not believe that anything constitutionally was wrong and he was dragged for years from doctor to doctor and beach to spa, subjected to all kinds of treatments and relentlessly prayed for. At the age of 16, when his features had long since thickened as the disease dictated, his father did a drawing of him showing the traditionally lean, handsome face of a Toulouse-Lautrec.

Bébé lou poulit was not fooled. He could look in a mirror. His growth stopped at just under five feet, and he knew he would spend the rest of his life tottering around on stunted legs. "I am alone all day," he wrote in a letter. "I read a little but it gives me a headache. I draw and I paint, as much as I can, so much so that my hand gets tired and when it begins to get dark I wait to see if Jeanne d'Armagnac [one of the cousins] will come and sit by my bed. She comes sometimes and tries to distract me and play with me, and I listen to her speak without daring to look at her, she is so tall and so beautiful! And I am neither tall nor beautiful." It was the closest he ever came to complaining. Generally, he turned a resolutely cheerful countenance to the outside world.

Drawing and painting filled all his hours, and so they were to do when he could get around with crutches or a cane. He was a phenomenally hard worker. He studied with two fashionable Parisian painters and though they could never make a conventional painter out of him, he doggedly learned everything they had to offer. He had a sketchbook everywhere he went, and his pen or pencil was always running in fluid nervous lines through it, or on any other surface that was handy: tablecloths, menus, the plaster walls at Chateau du Bosc, where many of his sketches survive to this day. People who knew him could hardly count the hours he spent drinking at the nightspots and tomcatting through the sordid streets of Montmartre, and sometimes it led them to think of him as an amiable dilettante. But the sheer volume of his work is remarkable: before he died at 36, he had turned out more than 500 paintings, more than 350 lithographs and posters, more than 5,000 drawings.

He was 19 when he moved to Montmartre and plunged into the reckless, rowdy life of his bohemian artist friends. But he never cut himself off from his past. He

went on visiting his mother regularly; he was unfailingly polite and affectionate with her. He was unfailingly polite and affectionate with all his family and with the servants back home in Albi. He could be a pleasant companion to everyone he chose to come in contact with. He never forgot, because he never had to remember, that he came from the top, the social pinnacle. The social distinctions which count so much in the lives of lesser people meant nothing to him. He found it perfectly natural to pass out at the opening of his show in London and snore through the visit of the Prince of Wales. The Prince, he was told, had insisted that he not be awakened. "A nice chap!" Lautrec commented, and went back to sleep. He was not impressed by being introduced to Milan, the former King of Serbia: "After all, you're only an Obrenovich." He had the same ready smile, the same barbed wit for everyone from the stuffiest members of the Jockey Club to the pimps and whores with whom he rubbed shoulders nightly in the back streets of Montmartre. With his fellow artists and with the nightclub performers he might dress like an apache and speak the fashionable underworld argot which in his time became a kind of parallel language for the French. When he went to dine with his mother, he wore natty evening clothes and he spoke the French of the Académie Française.

Lautrec kept his political opinions to himself and his religion was a duty he had learned as a child, the conventional Catholicism of the French nobility. When in his apprentice years in Paris his master picked him to collaborate on a big Biblical painting, his mother wrote home to Albi asking for a family Bible as it wasn't fitting for him to do his research in a Protestant version. When he lay dying, he asked for the priest who had been both chaplain at the Chateau du Bosc and family tutor.

The only thing he took seriously was art. "So cynical and foul-mouthed on all other occasions," said his friend Vuillard, "he became completely serious when art was mentioned." When he heard his friend Van Gogh being maligned by a Belgian painter at a banquet, he bounced up, waving his arms in the air, shouting that it was an outrage to criticize so great an artist and challenging the wretch to a duel. The wretch slipped ignominiously away

It was not the only service which Lautrec would render his friend. It was he who told Van Gogh, Go south, young man, to soak up the liberating light which would

transform his painging..

Art for Lautrec meant life, the life of the world around him. He never looked for subjects. "I aim for the true, not the ideal," he said. He had come through the agonies of his adolescence stripped of illusion; he kept his big nearsighted eyes fixed coldly, dispassionately, relentlessly, on what he saw around him. The world he chose to see was naturally the one he felt at home in. It was, as he said, a double world. Half his time he was spent in the aristocratic life he had been born into, a life of elegant salons, racecourses, cruises, yachts. He always traveled first-class. He went home often to savor the life of the old-fashioned chateau, warm and easygoing, with all the servants who had brought him up running out to greet Monsieur Henri. The children loved him on these visits, he was their size—when he sat at the grownups' table, his legs dangled over the edge of his chair just like theirs—and he spoke their language. But they couldn't help noticing how his eyes kept turning to the bottle of absinthe which was always somewhere nearby.

The absinthe was everywhere in his other world, the seamy world of Montmartre, then still partly country with its vineyards and gardens and its strange fauna of criminals, prostitutes, vagabonds, artists and well- dressed slummers. He wrote piously to his grandmother that he went there at first only out of a sense of duty to keep up with his fellow artists, but his dwarf's profile was soon a regular feature of the landscape. He was a familiar and welcome figure in all the cafés, the dance halls, the cabarets, the bars where he could keep drinking after the cabarets closed. It pleased him, too, he said, "to set up my tent in a brothel." There were any number of *maisons closes* in the neighborhood and Lautrec might move into one of them for months at a time, keeping a room to himself and using it as a temporary business address. He was Monsieur Henri, the painter, to these women, too; he took his meals with them and they cheerfully posed for him day or night. (Presumably it was during these years that he contracted the syphilis that was probably a contributing factor in his death.)

Lautrec had no moral or political ax to grind. He drew and painted his prostitutes just as he saw them while living among them, women going about a job, lining up for medical inspection, waiting in bovine repose in the parlor under the madam's prim eye, waiting for the American millionaire or Russian grand duke who would

give the signal for the orgy to begin. When Van Gogh painted a prostitute, he labeled the picture *Sorrow*. When Lautrec did the same, he simply called it by the girl's nickname, *Madame Poupoule*.

Whichever of his two worlds he was in, Lautrec had the same eagerness to seize upon the men and women (and animals) who populated it, to strip them down to their essentials with a few sure strokes, show them unposed and unrehearsed, in the raw. He wanted the spontaneity of a snapshot and he cropped his figures, had them come ballooning out of the picture frame in startling ways. There was nothing slapdash about it, however. His effects of spontaneity were carefully calculated and he may have done six or eight complete versions of a subject before it came out with the look he wanted.

He was capable of all kinds of technical tricks, but he was not particularly interested in the painstaking construction of three-dimensional spatial illusion. He saw things up close. He was primarily interested in character and drama and the presence of living flesh, and he deliberately left his backgrounds vague and even confused. If he put a landscape behind one of his figures, it was often little more than a jumble of colored strokes. He did more than 30 paintings of the Moulin Rouge, creating an unforgettable gallery of human forms among the performers and the spectators, but it would be hard to get more than a sketchy idea from them of what the Moulin Rouge itself looked like.

During the 1890s he worked out his distinctive style and it hardly varied till he began to go to pieces at the end. Influenced by Degas and even more by the Japanese prints which were then all the rage in Paris, the style depended on broad areas of solid color bound by an elaborate network of lines. This is a style admirably adapted for printing by lithography, in which each color is applied to the paper by a separate stone, and Lautrec, a hard worker and a superb technician, rapidly became a great innovator in this field—in the view of many, the greatest lithographer of all time. He had learned as a magazine illustrator the ways of getting a maximum of effect with a minimum of means. When, in 1891, the owners of the Moulin Rouge asked him to design a poster advertising the autumn season of the music hall, he knew just what to do. The resulting poster, which made him famous overnight, sums up all the possibilities of the medium. It is instantly legible, for posters are made so that he who runs may read; one

look at La Goulue kicking up her skirts and Valentin le Désossé, her dance partner (he was also a wine merchant), identifies the place forever. And it is so expertly designed at the same time that it can be studied at length and with pleasure. In fact, people began collecting Lautrec posters as soon as they began to go up on the walls of Paris. What had previously been only a commercial medium was now fine art, fit for entry into museums. Lautrec himself made no distinction between fine and commercial art; he worked with the same zeal and competence on theater programs, book covers, magazine illustrations, calling cards, menus, invitations (there is one showing the little artist dressed as a cowboy complete with spurs and a whip in his hand, standing before a very placid-looking cow and inviting his friends over for a glass of milk). He was a master of layout, blending text with eye-catching illustration, and advertising men have been in his debt ever since.

Lautrec himself was not given to esthetic theories.He went on painting what he saw around him, developing a passion, sometimes an obsession, for a single subject and then letting it drop abruptly. There are whole cycles of drawings, paintings and lithographs devoted to the circus, to the theater, to the singer Yvette Guilbert who at first liked them but whose friends thought he was making fun of her, to the operating room of the famous surgeon Dr. Péan, who was teaching Lautrec's "bony cousin" Gabriel Tapié de Céleyran, a young medical student who regularly accompanied the painter on his tours of the haunts of Montmartre at night.

All the while, he was more or less deliberately drinking himself to death. In 1898 he began to have convulsions and deliriums and had to be taken off to a clinic in Neuilly. The doctors were delighted to have a wealthy artist in their grip and might have kept him there indefinitely, but he was anxious to get out and stirred up his friends to demand his release. When he was sufficiently dried out, he asked a friend to send “prepared stones and a box of watercolors with sepia, paint brushes, litho crayons, good quality Chinese ink and paper,” and to prove that his hand and mind were still in first-class shape, he drew from memory a whole series of circus scenes. The doctors let him go and for a while he listened to their advice and stayed sober. But not for long. His friends had once given him as a joke a hollow walking stick which they said was used by Belgian smugglers bringing untaxed absinthe into France. He could use it now when the cousin who

was supposed to be guarding him looked away.

In 1901 he suffered a couple of strokes, and knew that it was hopeless. He neatly signed and stacked all the works in his studio and went off to Malromé to sit and doze in the garden with a bottle by his side and his mother faithfully watching over him. "It's awfully hard to die," he said as he waited, and took a long painful time doing it.

Count Alphonse turned up unexpectedly. "Ah, Papa," said Lautrec to the old huntsman, "I knew you'd be in at the death." The old man wrote a grief- stricken letter about the "inoffensive child" who had never spoken a bitter word to him. He sat decorously with the mourners till he heard a strange noise upstairs. When they said it was some owls who had got into the tower, he rushed out to hunt down the owls. At the funeral the next day, he climbed up beside the driver of the hearse to make sure that he held the reins properly and that his son "could go to his last resting place in a manner befitting a gentleman."

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"Oh, yes. Lois says she's a handful." Mother looks at me with a wry smile.

"The children will love the country."

Mother nods. "May will have to take them on lots of expeditions."

"She's been talking about showing them Versailles too."

"Versailles would be splendid. They can see the fireworks."

"Maybe May will paint the children."

"*If* they can sit still," says Mother. "You know May has no patience for wriggling."

Children are excellent medicine.

x.

I am awoken, mid-afternoon, out of a troubled sleep by May sitting on my bed. She's breathless from her walk up the five flights to our apartment. My dream disperses (*a soldier, his face blasted, my own hands red with blood*).

I rub my eyes and look at May, as she unbuttons her gloves, pulling at the buttons in her impatience.

"I've found a new model, Lyd. Actually, two."

"I'm glad," I say, although I catch another feeling before it tries to slip away: jealousy, is it?

"One of them is quite young."

"*Ah bon*?" My jealousy bites more sharply.

"Yes. And quite restless."

"Restless?"

"Wriggly."

I stare at May, and she laughs. "*En effet*, it's hard to sit still when you're under a year old."

"Ah." I'm aware of my relief. "You've found a child?"

"Our landlady's great-nephew. Her niece is visiting, from Dieppes."

"How did you ask them to model? You've asked the child's mother, too?"

"Yes." May looks very satisfied with herself. "I met them just outside Madame Phillippe's apartment. The baby lay asleep in his carriage. He has golden hair, Lyd, like a cherub, a Tiepolo cherub."

"I'd love to see him." My bedroom feels small suddenly, even smaller than usual, as confining as a hatbox.

"I'm sure you'll have a chance to see him. They're staying for a week with Madame Phillippe."

"Bring them up for tea, May."

"If you feel well enough."

"I'll feel well enough. In a day or two. I'm sure the baby would love Batty."

"I'm not sure Batty would love *him*. But I'll try to bring them up anyway."

xi.

This afternoon, May has brought a picture home, a pastel. Two figures, a woman and a baby, embrace, the child's arm tight around her neck. I'm amazed by the way she's shown only the delicate sides of their heads; you can't see their faces at all. The mother bends in, to kiss the baby, and all one can see is the line of the mother's cheek and part of her brow, the soft cheek of the baby. How astonishing, to place the kiss just out of our vision. It's as if May's saying, *this is something you can only imagine, for these figures have no need of you. Your look can only go so far.*

"How did you do this, May?"

"I had to get it down quickly, especially the shapes, and this line." She traces the soft "V" of the mother's cheek, cradled between the baby's small arm and head.

"*Mais*, how did you think of this pose?"

"I wished for two figures, so close they seem to mesh. I wanted the faces to be a mystery."

"I can almost feel the baby's cheek."

May is quiet for a moment. Then she adds, "I wished to create the sense of a moment of utter closeness. It's quick and spontaneous, but, in the painting, it holds, it stays."

I think of Degas' dancers, exhausted, hard at work, isolated from each other and from the dance master, or from the men who linger in hallways off-stage. Sometimes you see only legs, the torso cut off by the painting's frame, and often you find yourself in an odd relationship to his figures: spying on them, or looking down at them. The space between them is fraught, nervous. I can't remember seeing a picture of Degas' in which two figures embrace, right at the center, so close you could touch them, and I certainly can't imagine him painting a subject like this, so fresh and joyous, so spontaneous: a mother and a baby, utterly in love. The strength of the lines, the boldness of the colors and the design, is pure Mary Cassatt.

"I know of no one else who could have created this, May."

She looks at me, flushed, triumphant. "I know."

I look again at the pastel: the rich blue color of the armchair, the deep green of the woman's dress, the gold and white of the child's hair and chemise, the auburn of the mother's hair, the restless greens and reds of the wallpaper pattern behind them, the myste-

rious and gorgeous shadow, in red, between the mother's face and the baby's. The whole composition centers there, in that red shadow, in that ardent and unseen kiss.

I carry them inside me now, those two figures, holding each other in a fierce embrace. *Arm and arm, cheek and cheek, in a swirl of color and brightness. Two figures bending in to each other.*

xii.

Today I am well enough to be brought into the parlor, in honor of Isabelle's and Michi's visit. May has just finished her oil of them; I hope to see it soon. May says it's a bathing picture, in a *déshabillé*. She borrowed one of my white morning dresses, and the Delft washing bowl from my room. "You'll like this one, Lyddy," she says.

Michi in the flesh holds a chocolate éclair as he sits, happy as a drunken sailor, on Isabelle's knee. He's dressed in a Tartan frock with a white pinafore, and his little brown shoes seem to be conducting a frenzied, happy orchestra. Isabelle has a gentle manner. She listens politely to May and to Mother and Father, as they describe our nieces and nephews in America. I present Michi with

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PAUL GAUGUIN'S INTIMATE JOURNALS

TRANSLATED BY
VAN WYCK BROOKS

PREFACE BY
EMIL GAUGUIN

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THIS is not a book. A book, even a bad book, is a serious affair. A phrase that might be excellent in the fourth chapter would be all wrong in the second, and it is not everybody who knows the trick.

A novel—where does it begin, where does it end? The intelligent Camille Mauclair gives us this as its definitive form; the question is settled till a new Mauclair comes and announces to us a new form.

"True to life!" Isn't reality sufficient for us to dispense with writing about it? And besides, one changes. There was a time when I hated Georges Sand. Now Georges Ohnet makes her seem almost supportable to me. In the books of Emile Zola the washerwomen and the concierges speak a French that fills me with anything but enthusiasm. When they stop talking, Zola, without realizing it, continues in the same tone and in the same French.

I have no desire to speak ill of him. I am not a writer. I should like to write as I paint my pictures,—that is to say, following my fancy, following the moon, and finding the title long afterwards.

Memoirs! That means history, dates. Everything in them is interesting except the author. And one has to say who one is and where one comes from. To confess oneself in the manner of Jean Jacques Rousseau is a serious matter. If I tell you that, on my mother's side, I descend from a Borgia of Aragon, Viceroy of Peru, you will say it is not true and that I am giving myself airs. But if I tell you that this family is a family of scavengers, you will despise me.

If I tell you that, on my father's side, they are all called Gauguin, you will say that this is absolutely childish; if I explain myself on the subject, with the idea of convincing you that I am not a bastard, you will smile sceptically.

The best thing would be to hold my tongue, but it is a strain to

hold one's tongue when one is full of a desire to talk. Some people have an end in life, others have none. For a long time I had virtue dinned into me; I know all about that but I do not like it. Life is hardly more than the fraction of a second. Such a little time to prepare oneself for eternity!!!

I should like to be a pig: man alone can be ridiculous.

Once upon a time the wild animals, the big ones, used to roar; today they are stuffed. Yesterday I belonged to the nineteenth century; today I belong to the twentieth and I assure you that you and I are not going to see the twenty-first. Life being what it is, one dreams of revenge—and has to content oneself with dreaming. Yet I am not one of those who speak ill of life. You suffer, but you also enjoy, and however brief that enjoyment has been, it is the thing you remember. I like the philosophers, except when they bore me or when they are pedantic. I like women, too, when they are fat and vicious; their intelligence annoys me; it's too spiritual for me. I have always wanted a mistress who was fat and I have never found one. To make a fool of me, they are always pregnant.

This does not mean that I am not susceptible to beauty, but simply that my senses will have none of it. As you perceive, I do not know love. To say "I love you" would break all my teeth. So much to show you that I am anything but a poet. A poet without love!! Women, who are shrewd divine this, and for this reason I repel them.

I have no complaint to make. Like Jesus I say, The flesh is the flesh, the spirit is the spirit. Thanks to this, a small sum of money satisfies my flesh and my spirit is left in peace.

Here I am, then, offered to the public like an animal, stripped of all sentiment, incapable of selling his soul for any Gretchen. I have not been a Werther, and I shall not be a Faust. Who knows? The syphilitic and the alcoholic will perhaps be the men of the future. It looks to me as if morality, like the sciences and all the rest, were on its way toward a quite new morality which will perhaps be the opposite of that of today. Marriage, the family, and ever so many good things which they din into my ears, seem to be dashing off at full speed in an automobile.

Do you expect me to agree with you?

Whom one gets into bed with is no light matter.

THE DAY OF THE GOD (MAHANA NO ATUA)

The Louvre, Paris

In marriage, the greater cuckold of the two is the lover, whom a play at the Palais Royal calls "the luckiest of the three."

I had bought some photographs at Port Said. The sin committed —*ab ores*. They were set up quite frankly in an alcove in my quarters. Men, women and children laughed at them, nearly everyone, in fact; but it was a matter of a moment, and no one thought any more of it. Only the people who called themselves respectable stopped coming to my house, and they alone thought about it the whole year through. The bishop, at confession, made all sorts of enquiries; some of the nuns, even, turned paler and paler and grew hollow-eyed over it.

Think this over and nail up some indecency in plain sight over your door; from that time forward you will be rid of all respectable people, the most insupportable folk God has created.

I have known, everyone knows, everyone will continue to know, that two and two make four. It is a long way from convention, from mere intuition, to real understanding. I agree, and like everyone else I say, "Two and two make four." . . . But this irritates me; it quite upsets my way of thinking. Thus, for example, you who insist that two and two make four, as if it were a certainty that could not possibly be otherwise,—why do you also maintain that God is the creator of everything? If only for an instant, could not God have arranged things differently?

A strange sort of Almighty!

All this apropos of pedants. We know and we do not know.

The Holy Shroud of Jesus revolts M. Berthelot. Of course the learned chemist Berthelot may be right; but of course the Pope. . . . Come, my charming Berthelot, what would you do if you were Pope, a man whose feet are kissed? Thousands of imbeciles demand the benediction of all these Lourdes. Someone has to be the Pope and a Pope must bless and satisfy all his faithful. Not every one is a chemist. I, myself, know nothing about such matters, and perhaps if I ever have hemorrhoids I shall set about plotting how to get a fragment of this Holy Shroud to poke it into myself, convinced that it will cure me.

This is not a book.

Besides, even if he has no serious readers, the author of a book must be serious.

I have here before me some cocoanut and banana trees; they are all green. I will tell you, to please Signac, that little spots of red (the complementary colour) are scattered through the green. In spite of that—and this will displease Signac—I can swear that all through this green one observes great patches of blue. Don't mistake this; it is not the blue sky but only the mountain in the distance. What can I say to all these cocoanut trees? And yet I must chatter; so I write instead of talking.

Look! There is little Vaitauni on her way to the river. . . . She has the roundest and most charming breasts you can imagine. I see this golden, almost naked body make its way toward the fresh water. Take care, dear child, the hairy gendarme, guardian of the public morals, who is a faun in secret, is watching you. When he is satisfied with staring he will charge you with a misdemeanour in revenge for having troubled his senses and so outraged public morals. Public morals! What words!

Oh! good people of the metropolis, you have no idea what a gendarme is in the colonies! Come here and look for yourselves; you will see indecencies of a sort you could not have imagined.

But having seen little Vaitauni I feel my senses beginning to boil. I set off for some amusement in the river. We have both of us laughed, without bothering about fig-leaves and . . .

This is not a book.

Let me tell you something that happened long ago.

General Boulanger, you may remember, was once hiding in Jersey. Just at this time—it was winter—I was working in Pouldu on the lonely coast at the end of Finistère, far, very far from any farmhouses.

A gendarme turned up with orders to watch the coast to prevent the supposed landing of General Boulanger in the disguise of a fisherman.

I was shrewdly questioned and so turned inside out that, quite intimidated, I exclaimed: "Do you by any chance take me for General Boulanger?"

Of What Are You Thinking? I Do Not Know.

He—"We have seen stranger things than that."

I—"Have you his description?"

He—"His description? It strikes me that you're a bit impudent. I'd better just take you along."

I was obliged to go to Quimperlé to explain myself. The police-sergeant proved to me immediately that, since I was not General Boulanger, I had no right to pass myself off for the general and make fun of a gendarme in the exercise of his duties.

What! I pass myself off for the general?

"You will have to admit that you did," said the sergeant, "since the gendarme took you for Boulanger."

As for me, I was not so much stupefied as filled with admiration for such a magnificent intelligence. It was like saying that one is more easily taken in by imbeciles. I don't want to be told that I am repeating La Fontaine's fable about the bear. What I say has quite another meaning. Having done my military service, I have observed that non-commissioned officers, and even some officers, grow angry when you speak to them in French, thinking, no doubt, that it is a language meant for making fun of people and humiliating them.

Which proves that, in order to live in the world, one must be especially on one's guard against small folk. One often has need of someone humbler than oneself. No, not that! I should say one often has reason to fear someone humbler than oneself. In the antechamber, the flunkey stands in front of the minister.

Having been recommended by someone of importance, a young man asked a minister for a position, and found himself promptly bowed out. But his shoemaker was the minister's shoemaker! . . . Nothing was refused him!

— With a woman who feels pleasure I feel twice as much pleasure.

The Censor—Pornography!

The Author—Hypocritography!

Question: Do you know Greek?

Reply: Why should I? I have only to read Pierre Louys. But if Pierre Louys writes excellent French it is just because he knows Greek so well.

As to morals, they well deserve what has been written by the Jesuits:

Digitus tertius, digitus diaboli.

What the devil, are we cocks or capons? Must we come to the artificial laying of eggs? *Spiritus sanctus!*

Marriage is beginning to make its appearance in this country: an attempt to regularize things. Imported Christians have set their hearts upon this singular business.

The gendarme exercises the functions of the mayor. Two couples, converted to the idea of matrimony, and dressed in brand new clothes, listen to the reading of the matrimonial laws; with the "yes" once uttered they are married. As they go out, one of the two males says to the other, "Suppose we exchange?" And very gaily each goes off with a new wife to the church, where the bells fill the air with merriment.

The bishop, with the eloquence that characterizes missionaries, thunders against adulterers and then blesses the new union which in this holy place is already the beginning of an adultery.

Or again, as they are going out of the church, the groom says to the maid of honour, "How pretty you are!" And the bride says to the best man, "How handsome you are!" Very soon one couple moves off to the right and another to the left, deep into the underbrush where, in the shelter of the banana trees and before the Almighty, two marriages take place instead of one. Monseigneur is satisfied and says, "We are beginning to civilize them. . . ."

On a little island of which I have forgotten the name and the latitude, a bishop exercises his profession of Christian moralization. He is a regular goat, they say. In spite of the austerity of his heart and his senses, he loves a school-girl,—paternally, purely. Unfortunately, the devil sometimes meddles with things that do not concern him, and one fine day our bishop, walking in the wood, catches sight of this beloved child quite naked in the river, washing her chemise.

Petite Thérèse, on the river bank,
Washed her chemise in the running water.
It was spotted by an accident
Which happens to little girls twelve times a year.

"Tiens," he said, "but she is just at the point. . . ."

I can well believe she was at the point! Just ask the fifteen vigorous young men who that very evening enjoyed her embraces. At the sixteenth, she hung back.

The adorable child was married to the beadle who lived in the enclosure. Neat and brisk, she swept out the bishop's bedroom and saw to the incense.

At divine service the husband held the candle.

How unkind the world is! Evil tongues began to wag and I, for one, was profoundly convinced of what they said when a pious Catholic woman remarked to me one day:

"Vois-tu" (and at the same time without a wink she emptied a glass of rum); *"vois-tu, mon petit,* it's all nonsense about the bishop's sleeping with Thérèse; he merely confesses her to try to appease his passion."

Thérèse was the queen bean. Don't try to understand. I'll explain it to you.

On the Epiphany, Monseigneur had had a superb cake made by the Chinaman. Thérèse's slice had contained a bean, so that she was made the queen, Monseigneur being the king. From that day on Thérèse continued to be the queen and the beadle the husband of the queen.

But alas! the famous bean grew old, and our goat, who was a sly one, found a new bean a few miles further off.

Imagine a Chinese bean, as plump as possible. Anyone would have eaten it.

You, painter in search of a gracious subject, take your brushes and immortalize this picture: our goat, with his episcopal trappings, well planted in the saddle, and his bean, whose curves both before and behind would be enough to bring to life a pope's choir-boy. And besides, one whose chemise . . . you understand . . . it is useless to repeat. Four times he got down off his horse. And Picpus' money-box was lightened by ten piastres.

There's gossip for you . . . but . . .

This is not a book.

For a long time I have wanted to write about Van Gogh, and I shall certainly do so some fine day when I am in the mood. I am going

to tell you now a few rather timely things about him, or rather about us, in order to correct an error which has been going round in certain circles.

It so happens that several men who have been a good deal in my company and in the habit of discussing things with me have gone mad.

This was true of the two Van Gogh brothers, and certain malicious persons and others have childishly attributed their madness to me. Undoubtedly some men have more or less influence over their friends, but there is a great difference between that and causing madness. A long time after the catastrophe, Vincent wrote me, from the private asylum where he was being cared for. He said, "How fortunate you are to be in Paris. That is where one finds the best doctors, and you certainly ought to consult a specialist to cure your madness. Aren't we all mad?" The advice was good and that was why I didn't follow it,—from a spirit of contradiction, I dare say.

Readers of the *Mercure* may have noticed in a letter of Vincent's, published a few years ago, the insistence with which he tried to get me to come to Arles to found an atelier after an idea of his own, of which I was to be the director.

At that time I was working at Pont-Aven, in Brittany, and either because the studies I had begun attached me to this spot, or because a vague instinct forewarned me of something abnormal, I resisted a long time, till the day came when, finally overborne by Vincent's sincere, friendly enthusiasm, I set out on my journey.

I arrived at Arles toward the end of the night and waited for dawn in a little all-night café. The proprietor looked at me and exclaimed, "You are the pal, I recognize you!"

A portrait of myself which I had sent to Vincent explains the proprietor's exclamation. In showing him my portrait Vincent had told him that it was a pal of his who was coming soon.

Neither too early nor too late I went to rouse Vincent out. The day was devoted to my getting settled, to a great deal of talking and to walking about so that I might admire the beauty of Arles and the Arlesian women, about whom, by the way, I could not get up much enthusiasm.

The next day we were at work, he continuing what he had begun, and I starting something new. I must tell you that I have never had

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*The Nightingale and the Rose**

'SHE said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses,' cried the young Student; 'but in all my garden there is no red rose.'

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

'No red rose in all my garden!' he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. 'Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.'

'Here at last is a true lover,' said the Nightingale. 'Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his face like pale ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow.'

'The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night,' murmured the young Student, 'and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in my garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break.'

'Here indeed is the true lover,' said the Nightingale. 'What I sing of, he suffers: what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the market-place. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.'

'The musicians will sit in their gallery,' said the young Student, 'and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her;' and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

'Why is he weeping?' asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

'Why, indeed?' said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

'Why, indeed?' whispered a Daisy to his neighbour, in a soft, low voice.

'He is weeping for a red rose,' said the Nightingale.

'For a red rose!' they cried; 'how very ridiculous!' and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student's sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden.

In the centre of the grass-plot was standing a beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it, she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

'Give me a red rose,' she cried, 'and I will sing you my sweetest song.'

But the Tree shook its head.

'My roses are white,' it answered; 'as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want.'

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

'Give me a red rose,' she cried, 'and I will sing you my sweetest song.'

But the Tree shook its head.

'My roses are yellow,' it answered; 'as yellow as the hair of the mermaiden who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the Student's window, and perhaps he will give you what you want.'

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the Student's window.

'Give me a red rose,' she cried, 'and I will sing you my sweetest song.'

But the Tree shook its head.

'My roses are red,' it answered, 'as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean-cavern. But the winter has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year.'

'One red rose is all I want,' cried the Nightingale, 'only one red rose! Is there no way by which I can get it?'

'There is a way,' answered the Tree; 'but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you.'

'Tell it to me,' said the Nightingale, 'I am not afraid.'

'If you want a red rose,' said the Tree, 'you must build it out of music* by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine.'

'Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,' cried the Nightingale, 'and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?'

So she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove.

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his beautiful eyes.

'Be happy,' cried the Nightingale, 'be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense.'

The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

'Sing me one last song,' he whispered; 'I shall feel very lonely when you are gone.'

So the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song the Student got up, and pulled a note-book and a lead-pencil out of his pocket.

'She has form,' he said to himself, as he walked away through the grove—'that cannot be denied to her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good.' And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep.

And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rose-tree, and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn, and the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her.

She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the topmost spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvellous rose, petal following petal, as song followed song. Pale was it, at first, as the mist that hangs over the river—pale as the feet of the morning, and silver as the wings of the dawn. As the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, as the shadow of a rose in a water-pool, so was the rose that blossomed on the topmost spray of the Tree.

But the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. 'Press closer, little Nightingale,' cried the Tree, 'or the Day will come before the rose is finished.'

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and louder and louder grew her song, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.

And a delicate flush of pink came into the leaves of the rose, like the flush in the face of the bridegroom when he kisses the lips of the bride. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, so the rose's heart remained white, for only a Nightingale's heart's-blood can crimson the heart of a rose.

And the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. 'Press closer, little Nightingale,' cried the Tree, 'or the Day will come before the rose is finished.'

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

And the marvellous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky. Crimson was the girdle of petals, and crimson as a ruby was the heart.

But the Nightingale's voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat, and a film came over her eyes. Fainter and fainter grew her song, and she felt something choking her in her throat.

Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo* bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.

'Look, look!' cried the Tree, 'the rose is finished now;' but the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon the Student opened his window and looked out.

'Why, what a wonderful piece of luck!' he cried; 'here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name;' and he leaned down and plucked it.

Then he put on his hat, and ran up to the Professor's house with the rose in his hand.

The daughter of the Professor was sitting in the doorway winding blue silk on a reel, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

'You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose,' cried the Student. 'Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it to-night next your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you.'

But the girl frowned.

'I am afraid it will not go with my dress,' she answered; 'and, besides, the Chamberlain's nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers.'

'Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful,' said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it.

'Ungrateful!' said the girl. 'I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don't believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain's nephew has;' and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

'What a silly thing Love is,' said the Student as he walked away. 'It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics.'

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

Labour and Sorrow', stated: 'Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.'

78 *the Angel*: in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale 'The Angel', an angel carries both the body of a good child who has died, and what is left of a neglected, withered field flower to heaven. God presses both to his breast, and the child receives angel's wings, and the flower a voice with which it joins the heavenly chorus in praising God.

The Nightingale and the Rose

79 [title]: Wilde here transforms the medieval legend that the nightingale is afraid of snakes and so keeps awake at night by pressing against a thorn: it sings mournfully because of the pain. The theme is well known in English literature: see e.g. Richard Barnfield, 'Address to the Nightingale' (1594), and Byron, *Don Juan*, vi. 87 (1824). He also uses the ancient Persian myth of the love of the nightingale for the rose: his most likely source in English is the book-length poem *Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance* by the Dublin-born poet Thomas Moore (1779–1852).

81 *out of music*: Amphion is said to have built the walls of Thebes by the music of his lyre. Wilde refers elsewhere to this legend, and was well aware of Tennyson's Camelot: 'built | To music, therefore never built at all, | And therefore built for ever' ('Gareth and Lynette' (1872), ll. 272–4, in *Idylls of the King*).

83 *Echo*: see note to p. 12.

The Devoted Friend

92 *blue spectacles*: the modern equivalent of sunglasses; here opposed to the proverbial rose-tinted spectacles of the optimist. See Mrs Cheveley in *An Ideal Husband* (Act 1): 'Optimism begins in a broad grin, and Pessimism ends with blue spectacles.'

The Remarkable Rocket

106 *glee-club*: a choir, glee being a part-song scored for three or more voices.

109 *Gold Stick*: the official bearer of a gilt rod carried on State occasions by a colonel of Life Guards or captain of gentlemen-at-arms.

THE PORTRAIT OF MR. W. H.

111 *Macpherson, Ireland, and Chatterton*: all literary forgers. James Macpherson (1736–96), 'translator' of the Ossianic poems; William Henry Ireland (1777–1835), began by forging Shakespeare autographs and went on to produce whole 'lost' plays; Thomas Chatterton (1752–70) forged

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God bless thee, dearest love! Pardon thy last pang! God bless thee in thy dear widowhood: I hope Sir Robert will consider I have earned a pension for thee. A thousand kisses – Thy dear husband – and love to the last.

B R Haydon

There were other sombre ends to artists' lives in an age when medicine had less to offer than more recently, or the force of circumstances gave an unexpected twist, say exile, to a career. On the other hand, there were also last years for some artists of comfort and distinction, friendship and support.

Latter days

Letters from some artists speak of the conditions or the moods of later years, including several which document unexpected turns of fortune.

Delacroix is no longer carefree

This letter was written when Delacroix was 52, but it is tinged with a melancholy that might be more readily expected in an older man.

(to Charles Raymond Soulier)[2] Paris 23 March 1850

Dear friend,

I was sorry not to have been at home when your dear boy called and left your letter. I was very glad to have news of you, although your letter was sad on account of your son's departure. Life is just a series of shocks, and they are nearly always sorrows. The times we live in provide a fuller measure of these than life normally entails. The present causes grief, the future anxiety; only the past remains, and to take refuge in memory is a great consolation. Where is our carefree life now? I never cross the Place Vendôme without looking up at the little window which is still the same; but how many things, or rather how many men have changed, not to speak of all that has vanished! A month or two ago I was shown the paintings of animals that I did at Beffes, some four-and-twenty years ago! The poor marquis having died

EDMUND DE WAAL

THE HARE WITH AMBER EYES

A Hidden Inheritance

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THE ILLUSTRATED EDITION

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EPHRUSSI FAMILY TREE

Charles Joachim Ephrussi *m 1* **Belle Levensohn**
b 1793 Berdichev d 1864 Vienna — d 1841

m 2 **Henriette Halperson** *
b 1822 Lemberg d 1888 Vienna

Leon Ephrussi *m* Mina Lindau
b 1826 Berdichev d 1871 Paris — b 1824 Brody d 1888 Paris

Jules *m* Fanny Pfeiffer
b 1846 Odessa d 1915 Paris

Ignace
b 1848 Odessa d 1908 Paris

Charles
b 1849 Odessa d 1905 Paris

Betty *m* Max Hirsch Kann
b 1851 Odessa d 1871 Paris

Fanny Kann *m* Theodore Reinach
b 1870 Anvers d 1917 Paris
four sons

* *m 2* **Henriette Halperson**
b 1822 Lemberg d 1888 Vienna

Michel *m* Liliane Beer
b 1845 Odessa d 1914 Paris
three daughters

Therese 'Bacha' *m* Leon Fould
b 1851 Odessa d 1911 Paris
one son one daughter

Maurice *m* Charlotte Beatrice de Rothschild
b 1849 Odessa d 1916 Paris

Marie 'Mascha' *m* Guy de Percin
b 1853 Odessa d 1924 Paris
one daughter

Ignace von Ephrussi *m* Emilie Porges
b 1829 Berdichev d 1899 Vienna — b 1836 Vienna d 1900 Vichy

Stefan *m* Estiha
b 1856 Odessa d 1911

Anna *m* Paul Hertz von Hertenreid
b 1859 Odessa d 1938 Vienna
one son one daughter

Viktor *m* Emmy Schey von Koromla
b 1860 Odessa d 1945 Tunbridge Wells

Elisabeth *m* Hendrik de Waal
b 1899 Vienna d 1991 Monmouth

Victor *m* Esther Moir
b 1929 Amsterdam

John
b 1962 Cambridge
one son one daughter

Alexander
b 1963 Cambridge
two sons one daughter

Edmund *m* Susan Chandler
b 1964 Nottingham

Benjamin
b 1998 London

Matthew
b 1999 London

Anna
b 2002 London

Thomas
b 1966 Nottingham
one daughter

Gisela *m* Alfredo Bauer
b 1904 Vienna d 1985 Mexico
three sons

Constant Hendrik de Waal *m* Julia Jessel
b 1931 Vienna
two sons

Ignace
b 1906 Vienna
d 1994 Tokyo

Jiro Sugiyama
b 1926 Shizuoka

Rudolf *m* Mary Raley
b 1918 Vienna d 1971 New York
two sons four daughters

8. MONSIEUR ELSTIR'S ASPARAGUS

I am in the library again, hesitating. Dürer's self-portrait – Christ-like, long-haired and bearded – stares back at me as I open Charles's *Albert Dürer et ses dessins*. There is a challenge in this stare. I have spent ages thinking about how this careful, delicate skein of thinking, and all these properly edited tables and lists, could have been written in a study with Monet's breezy summer day *there* on the wall.

When I read of Charles's animation as he describes his search for Dürer's lost drawings, I can hear the catch of his voice: 'We traced the drawings of our master wherever we suspected they might be hidden: museums of capital cities and secondary towns abroad, of Paris and the provinces, famous collections and little-known private ones, the *cabinets* of amateurs and of forbidding people, we rummaged and raked up, we examined everything.' Charles might be a flâneur, might take his time in the salons, be seen at the races and the Opéra, but his 'vagabonding' is done with real intensity.

Vagabonding was his phrase. It sounds recreational rather than diligent or professional. As an extremely rich Jewish *mondain*, it would have been contrary to social practice to be seen to work. He was an '*amateur de l'art*', an art lover, and his phrase is carefully self-deprecating. But it does get the pleasure of the searching right,

the way you lose your sense of time when you are researching, are pulled on by whims as much as by intent. It makes me think of the rummaging that I am doing through *his* life as I track the netsuke, the noting of other people's annotations in the margins. I vagabond in libraries, trace where he went and why. I follow the leads of whom he knew, whom he wrote about, whose pictures he bought. In Paris I go and stand outside his old offices in the rue Favart in the summer rain like some sad art-historical gumshoe and wait to see who comes out.

I find that as the months pass I have a strangely increased sensitivity to the quality of paper.

And I find that I have fallen for Charles. He is a passionate scholar. He is well dressed *and* good at art history *and* dogged in research. What a great and unlikely trinity of attributes to have, I think, aspirationally.

Charles had a very particular reason to do his research work. He believed that 'all of Dürer's drawings, even the lightest of sketches, merited a special mention, that nothing that was attributed to the hand of our master should be omitted . . .' Charles knows that it is intimacy that matters. Picking up a drawing enables us to 'catch the thought of the artist in all its freshness, at the very moment of manifestation, with perhaps even more truth and sincerity than in the works that require arduous hours of labour, with the defiant patience of the genius'.

This is a wonderful manifesto for drawing. It celebrates the moment of apprehension and the fugitive moment of response – a few traces of ink or a few strokes of the pencil. It is also a beautifully coded claim for a conversation between a particular kind of the old and the very new in art. Charles intended this book to 'make better known in France the greatest German artist', the

first artist he fell in love with during his childhood in Vienna. But it also gave Charles an emotional as well as an intellectual platform from which to argue that different ages informed each other, that a sketch by Dürer could talk to a sketch by Degas. He knew that it could work.

Charles was becoming an advocate in print for the living artists he was getting to know. He was a critic both in his own name and under pseudonyms, arguing the merits of particular paintings, fighting for the cause of Degas's *Little Dancer*, 'standing in her working clothes, tired and worn out ...' Now, as editor of the *Gazette*, he started to commission reviews of the exhibitions of painters he admired. And, passionate and partisan, he had also started buying pictures for the room with the yellow armchair.

Charles's first pictures were by Berthe Morisot. He loved her work: 'She grinds flower petals onto her palette, in order to spread them later on her canvas with airy, witty touches, thrown down a little haphazardly. These harmonise, blend, and finish by producing something vital, fine and charming that you do not so much see as intuit ... one step further and it will be impossible to distinguish or understand anything at all!'

In three years he put together a collection of forty Impressionist works – and bought twenty more for his Bernstein cousins in Berlin. He bought paintings and pastels by Morisot, Cassatt, Degas, Manet, Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and Renoir: Charles created one of the great early collections of the Impressionists. All the walls of his rooms must have been filled with these pictures, they must have been hung above each other three deep. Forget the Degas pastel glowing solitary on a gallery wall at the Metropolitan, five feet from another picture on either side, nothing above or below. In this room this pastel (*At the Milliner's*, 1880) must have

shaded the Donatello, knocked against a score of other glowing pictures, rubbed up against the vitrine of netsuke.

Charles was in the vanguard. He needed audacity. The Impressionists had their passionate supporters, but were still assailed in the press and by the Academy as charlatans. His advocacy was significant; he had the gravitas of a prominent critic and editor. He also had straightforward utility as a patron for painters who were struggling: it was 'in the mansion of an American or of a young Israelite banker' that you would find these paintings, wrote Philippe Burty. And Charles acted as a mahout to other

wealthy friends, persuading Madame Straus, giver of the fiercely aesthetic salon, to purchase one of Monet's *Nympheas*.

But he was much more than this. He was a real interlocutor, a visitor to their studios to see work in progress, to buy a picture from the easel, 'an older brother to young artists', as one critic wrote. He and Renoir talked at length about which paintings might be best to send to the Salon, Whistler asked him to check one of his pictures for damage. 'It was due to him,' wrote Proust in a later character sketch of Charles as '*un amateur de peinture*', 'that many paintings, which had been left at a half-way stage, were actually completed.'

And he was a friend of the artists. 'It is now Thursday,' writes Manet to Charles, 'and I still haven't heard from you. You are evidently enthralled by your host's wit ... Come on, take up your very best pen and get on with it.'

Charles bought a picture of some asparagus from Manet, one of his extraordinary small still lifes, where a lemon or rose is lambent in the dark. It was a bundle of twenty stalks bound in straw. Manet wanted 800 francs for it, a substantial sum, and Charles, thrilled, sent 1,000. A week later Charles received a small canvas signed with a simple M in return. It was a single asparagus stalk laid across a table with an accompanying note: 'This seems to have slipped from the bundle.'

Proust, who knew Charles's paintings well from visits to his apartment, retells the story to his credit. In his novels there is an Impressionist painter, Elstir, modelled partly on Whistler and partly on Renoir. The Duke de Guermantes fumes that 'There was nothing else in the picture. A bundle of asparagus exactly like what you're eating now. But I must say I declined to swallow Monsieur Elstir's asparagus. He asked three hundred francs for a bundle of asparagus. A Louis, that's as much as they're worth, even if they are out of season. I thought it a bit stiff.'

Many of the pictures on the walls of Charles's working study were of his friends. There was a pastel by Degas of Edmond Duranty, captured in a description by the young writer J. K. Huysmans: 'Here is Monsieur Duranty, among his prints and his books, sitting at a desk. And his neighbouring tapering fingers, his sharp mocking eyes, his acute searching expression, his wry smile of an English humorist ...' There was a canvas by Constantin Guys, the 'painter of modern life', as well as a portrait of him by Manet, looking very unkempt and bushy and slightly wild-eyed. From Degas, Charles bought the double portrait of General Mellinet and the Chief Rabbi Astruc, in which the heads of these two redoubtable men – friends from their shared experiences of the war of 1870 – are seen in half-profile together.

Then there were Charles's pictures of his Paris life: a scene by Degas of the start of the races at Longchamp, where he would go to see his uncle Maurice Ephrussi's famous racehorses. 'Courses – Ephrussi – 1000 [francs],' writes Degas in his notebook. And images of the demi-monde, of dancers and a scene at the milliner's with the backs of the heads of two young women on a sofa (2,000 francs), and one of a solitary woman in a café nursing a glass of absinthe.

Most of Charles's pictures were of the country, of the fast-moving clouds and wind in the trees that spoke to his feeling for the disappearing moment. There were five landscapes by Sisley and three by Pissarro. From Monet he purchased, for 400 francs, a view of Vétheuil with scudding white clouds across a field with willows, and a picture of apple trees, *Pommiers,* painted in the same village. He also bought a scene of a wintry early morning on the Seine, *Les Glaçons,* with the break-up of the ice, a painting beautifully described by Proust in his early novel *Jean Santeuil* as 'a day of thaw ... the sun, the blue of the sky, the broken ice, the mud, and the moving water turning the river to a dazzling mirror'.

Even the portrait of the 'dishevelled little savage' to whom Laforgue asked to be remembered captures this feeling of impermanence, of imminent change. *La Bohémienne,* the red-headed gypsy girl with her unkempt hair, is in country clothes standing amongst grasses and trees in fierce sunlight. She is clearly part of her landscape, about to run off and keep running.

These were all paintings, Charles wrote, that could 'present the living being, in gesture and attitude, moving in the fugitive, ever-changing atmosphere and light; to seize in passing the perpetual mobility of the colour of the air, deliberately ignoring individual shades in order to achieve a luminous unity whose separate elements melt together into an indivisible whole and to arrive at a general harmony even by way of discords'.

He also bought a spectacular painting by Monet of bathers, *Les Bains de la Grenouillère.*

Back in London, on my way to the library, I go into the National Gallery to see this picture and reimagine it near the yellow *fauteuil* and the netsuke. It shows a popular place on the Seine in midsummer. Figures in bathing costumes walk along a narrow wooden gangway out into the sun-dappled water, while the non-bathers in their dresses walk towards the shore, a single patch of vermilion on the hem of a dress. Rowing boats – Laforgue's 'gloriously imagined boats' – jumble up into the foreground, a canopy of trees hangs over the scene. The water ripples away, becoming enmeshed with the bobbing heads of the bathers, the 'perpetual mobility of the colour of the air'. It is only just warm enough to go in the water, you think, almost too cold to come out. You feel alive looking at it.

This conjunction of Japanese objects and the shimmering new style of painting seems right: though *Japonisme* might be a 'sort of

religion' to the Ephrussi, it was in Charles's circle of artist friends that this new art had the most profound effect. Manet, Renoir and Degas were, like him, avid collectors of Japanese prints. The structure of Japanese pictures seemed to rehearse the meaning of the world differently. Inconsequential gobbets of reality – a pedlar scratching his head, a woman with a crying child, a dog wandering off to the left – each had as much significance as a great mountain on the horizon. As in the netsuke, everyday life went on without rehearsal. This almost violent conjunction of story-telling with graphic, calligraphic clarity was catalytic.

The Impressionists learnt how to cut life up into glances and

interjections. Rather than formal views, you have a trapeze-wire dissecting a picture, the backs of the heads at the milliner's, the pillars of the Bourse. Edmond Duranty, whose portrait in pastels by Degas hung in Charles's study, saw this happening. 'The person ... is never in the centre of the canvas, in the centre of the setting. He is not always seen as a whole: sometimes he appears cut-off at mid-leg, half-length, or longitudinally.' When you see the strange portrait by Degas of *Viscount Lepic and His Daughters: Place de la Concorde*, now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg – three figures and a dog moving across a strange emptiness stretching through the canvas – the influence of the flat perspective of Japanese prints seems palpable.

Like the repeated themes in the netsuke, Japanese prints also give the possibility of the series – forty-seven views of a famous mountain suggested a way of returning in differing ways and reinterpreting formal pictorial elements. Haystacks, the bend of the river, poplars, the cliff face of Rouen Cathedral – all share this poetic return. Whistler, the master of 'variations' and 'caprices', explained that 'On any given canvas the colours must, so to speak, be embroidered on; that is, the same colour must reappear at intervals, like a single thread in an embroidery.' Zola, an early advocate, wrote of Manet's paintings that 'This art of simplification is to be likened to that of Japanese prints; they resemble it in their strange elegance and magnificent patches of colour.' Simplification seemed to lie at the heart of this new aesthetic, but only if it was combined with 'patchiness', with an abstraction of colour or with its repetition.

Sometimes all it took was to paint Parisian life in the rain. A flotilla of patchy grey umbrellas taking the place of parasols turns Paris into a kind of Edo.

When Charles writes – beautifully and with precision – about his friends, he understands how radical they are, both in technique and subject matter. It reminds one of the best critiques of Impressionism. Their aim was:

> to make the figures indivisible from their background, as though they were the product of it, so that to appreciate the picture the eye must take it in as a whole, looking at it from the correct distance – such are the ideals of the new school. It has not learnt its optical catechism, it disdains pictorial rules and regulations, it renders what it sees as it sees it, spontaneously, well or badly, uncompromisingly, without comment, without verbiage. In its horror of platitude it seeks for fresh themes, it haunts the corridors of theatres, cafés, cabarets, even low music-halls; the glare of cheap dance-halls does not alarm its members; and they go boating on the Seine in the Paris suburbs.

This was to be the setting of Renoir's bravura *Le Déjeuner des Canotiers*, the *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. It shows a pleasingly louche afternoon at the Maison Fournaise, a restaurant by the Seine at one of the newly popular places that Parisian day-trippers could reach by train. Pleasure boats and a skiff can be seen through the silvery-grey willows. A red-and-white striped awning protects the party from the glare of the sun. It is after lunch in Renoir's new world of painters, patrons and actresses, and everyone is a friend. Models smoke, drink and talk amongst the detritus of the empty bottles and the meal left on the tables. There are no rules or regulations here.

The actress Ellen Andrée, in a hat with a flower pinned to it, raises her glass to her lips. Baron Raoul Barbier, a former mayor of

colonial Saigon, his brown bowler hat pushed back, talks to the young daughter of the proprietor. Her brother, straw-hatted like a professional oarsman, stands in the foreground surveying the lunch. Caillebotte, relaxed and fit in a white singlet and boater, sits astride his chair looking at the young seamstress Aline Charigot, Renoir's lover and future wife. The artist Paul Lhote sits with a proprietorial arm around the actress Jeanne Samary. It is a matrix of smiling conversation and flirtation.

And Charles is there. He is the man at the very back, in the top hat and black suit, turning slightly away, seen glancingly. You can just see his red-brown beard. He is talking with a pleasantly open-faced, poorly shaved Laforgue, dressed as a proper poet in a working man's cap and what could even be a corduroy jacket.

I doubt that Charles really wore his benedictine clothes, heavy and dark, to a boating party in the summer sunshine, a top hat instead of a boater. This is an in-joke about his Mécène uniform between friends, Renoir suggesting that patrons and critics are needed, somewhere in the background, on the edge, even on the sunniest and most liberated of days.

Proust writes of this picture, noting a 'gentleman . . . wearing a top hat at a boating party where he was clearly out of place, which proved that for Elstir he was not only a regular sitter, but a friend, perhaps a patron'.

Charles is clearly out of place, but he is a sitter, friend and patron and he is there. Charles Ephrussi – or at least the back of Charles's head – enters art history.

17. THE SWEET YOUNG THING

Elisabeth's memoir is a tonic: twelve unsentimental pages written for her sons in the 1970s. 'The house I was born in stood, and still stands, outwardly unaltered, on the corner of the Ring ...' She gives details of the running of the household, she gives the names of the horses, and she walks me through the rooms in the Palais. Finally, I think, I will find out where Emmy has hidden the netsuke.

If Emmy turns right out of the nursery and goes along the corridor she enters the sides of the courtyard with the kitchens and sculleries, the pantry and the silver-room – where the light burns all day – and then on to the butler's room and the servants' hall. At the end of this corridor are all the maids' rooms, rooms whose windows open only into the courtyard, some yellow light filtering in through the glassed roof, but no fresh air. Her maid Anna's room is down there somewhere.

When Emmy turns left she is in her drawing-room. She has hung it with pale-green silk brocade. The carpets are a very pale yellow. Her furniture is Louis XV, chairs and *fauteuils* of inlaid woods with bronze mounts and fat striped silk cushions. There are occasional tables, each with their little set-piece of bibelots, and a larger table on which she could perform the intricacies of making tea. There is a grand piano that is never played and a Renaissance

Italian cabinet with folding doors, painted on the inside, and very small drawers that the children aren't meant to play with, but do. When Elisabeth reached between the tiny gilded twisty columns on either side of an arch and pressed upwards, a tiny secret drawer came out with an exhaled breath.

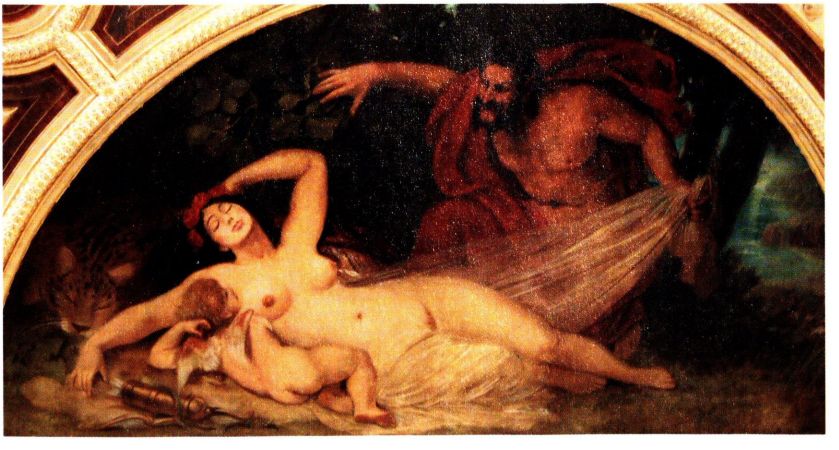
There is light in these rooms, trembling reflections and glints of silver and porcelain and polished fruitwood, and shadows from the linden trees. In the spring flowers are sent up each week from Kövecses. It is a perfect place to display a vitrine with cousin Charles's netsuke, but they are not here.

On from the drawing-room is the library, the largest room on this floor of the Palais. It is painted black and red, like Ignace's great suite of rooms on the floor below, with a black-and-red Turkey carpet and huge ebony bookshelves lining the walls and large tobacco-coloured leather armchairs and sofas. A large brass chandelier hangs over an ebony table inlaid with ivory flanked by the pair of globes. This is Viktor's room, thousands of his books running over the walls, his Latin and Greek histories and his German literature and his poetry and his lexicons. Some of the bookcases have a fine golden mesh over them and are locked with a key that he keeps on his watch chain. Still no vitrine.

And on from the library is the dining-room, with walls covered in Gobelin tapestries of the hunt, bought by Ignace in Paris, and windows overlooking the courtyard, but with the curtains drawn, so that the room is in perpetual gloom. This must be the dining table where the gold dinner service is set out, each plate and bowl engraved with ears of corn and a double Ephrussi E slap-bang in the middle, the boat with its puffed-out sails skimming across a golden sea.

The gold dinner service must have been Ignace's idea. His

furniture is everywhere. Renaissance cabinets, carved baroque chests, a huge Boulle desk that could only be kept in the ballroom downstairs. His pictures are everywhere, too. Lots of Old Masters, a Holy Family, a Florentine Madonna. There are seventeenth-century Dutch pictures by some quite good artists: Wouwermans, Cuyp, something after Frans Hals. There were also lots and lots of *Junge Frauen*, some by Hans Makart; interchangeable young ladies in interchangeable frocks in rooms surrounded by 'velvets, carpets, genius, panther skins, knickknacks, peacock feathers, chests, and lutes' (Musil in acidic mood). All of them framed in heavy gold or heavy black. No Parisian vitrine full of netsuke amongst these pictures, this spectacular, theatrical display, this treasure-house.



Everything here, each grandiloquent picture and cabinet, seems immovable in the light that filters in from the glassed-in courtyard. Musil understood this atmosphere. In great old houses there is a muddle where hideous new furniture stands carelessly alongside magnificent old, inherited pieces. In the rooms of the Palais belonging to the ostentatious nouveaux riches, everything is too

defined, there is 'some hardly perceptible widening of the space between the pieces of furniture or the dominant position of a painting on a wall, the tender, clear echo of a great sound that had faded away'.

I think of Charles with all his treasures, and know that it was his passion for them that kept them moving. Charles could not resist the world of things: touching them; studying them; buying them; rearranging them. The vitrine of netsuke that he has given to Viktor and Emmy made a space in his salon for something new. He kept his rooms in flux.

The Palais Ephrussi is the exact opposite. Under the grey-glassed roof, the whole house is like a vitrine that you cannot escape.

At either end of the long enfilade are Viktor and Emmy's private rooms. Viktor's dressing-room has his cupboards and chests of drawers and a long mirror. There is a life-size plaster bust of his tutor, Herr Wessel, 'whom he had very much loved. Herr Wessel had been a Prussian and a great admirer of Bismarck and of all things German.' The other great thing in the room, never discussed, is a very large – and highly unsuitable – Italian painting of *Leda and the Swan*. In her memoir Elisabeth wrote that she 'used to stare at it – it was huge – every time I went in to see my father change into a stiff shirt and dinner jacket for going out in the evening, and could never discover what the objection might be'. Viktor has already explained that there is no space for knick-knacks here.

Emmy's dressing-room is at the other end of the corridor, a corner room with windows looking out across the Ring to the Votivkirche and onto the Schottengasse. It has the beautiful Louis XVI desk given to the couple by Jules and Fanny, with its gently

bowed legs with ormolu mounts ending in gilt hooves, and drawers that are lined with soft leather in which Emmy keeps her writing paper and letters tied up in ribbons. And she has a full-length mirror hinged in three parts so that she can see herself properly when dressing. It takes up most of the room. And a dressing-table and washstand with a silver-rimmed glass basin and a matching glass jug with a silver top.

And here at last we find the black lacquer cabinet – 'as tall as a tall man' in Iggie's memory – with its green velvet-lined shelves. Emmy has put the vitrine in her dressing-room, with its mirrored back and all 264 netsuke from cousin Charles. This is where my brindled wolf has ended up.

This makes so much sense, and yet it makes no sense at all. Who comes into a dressing-room? It is hardly a social space, and certainly not a salon. If the boxwood turtles and the persimmon and the cracked little ivory of the girl in her bath are kept here on their green velvet shelves, this means that they do not have to be explained at Emmy's at-homes. They do not have to be mentioned at all by Viktor. Could it be embarrassment that brings the vitrine here?

Or was the decision to take the netsuke away from the public gaze intentional, away from all that Makart pomposity; putting them into the one room that was completely Emmy's own because she was intrigued by them? Was it to save them from the dead hand of *Ringstrassenstil*? There was not much in these Ephrussi parade grounds of gilt furniture and ormolu that you might want to have near you. The netsuke are intimate objects for an intimate room. Did Emmy want something that was simply – and literally – untouched by her father-in-law Ignace? A little bit of Parisian glamour?

This is her room. She spent a great deal of time in it. She changed three times a day – sometimes more. Putting on a hat to

go to the races, with lots of little curls pinned one by one to the underside of the hat's wide brim, took forty minutes. To put on the long embroidered ballgown with a hussar's jacket, intricate with frogging, took for ever. There was dressing up for parties, for shopping, dinner, visiting, riding to the Prater and balls. Each hour in this dressing-room was a calibration of corset, dress, gloves and hat with the day, the shrugging-off of one self and the lacing into another. She has to be sewn into some dresses, Anna, kneeling at her feet, producing thread, needle, thimble from the pocket of her apron. Emmy has furs, sable trimming to a hem, an arctic fox around her neck in one photograph, a six-foot stole of bear looped over a gown in another. An hour could pass with Anna fetching different gloves.

Emmy dresses to go out. It is winter 1906 in a Viennese street and she is talking to an archduke. They are smiling as she hands him some primroses. She is wearing a pin-striped costume: an A-line skirt with a deep panel at the hem cut across the grain and a matching close-cut Zouave jacket. It is a *walking costume*. To dress for that walk down Herrengasse would have taken an hour and a half: pantalettes, chemise in fine batiste or crêpe de Chine, corset to nip in the waist, stockings, garters, button boots, skirt with hooks up the plaquette, then either a blouse or a chemisette – so no bulk on her arms – with a high-stand collar and lace jabot, then the jacket done up with a false front, then her small purse – a reticule – hanging on a chain, jewellery, fur hat with striped taffeta bow to echo the costume, white gloves, flowers. And no scent; she does not wear it.

The vitrine in the dressing-room is sentinel to a ritual that took place twice a year in spring and autumn, the ritual of choosing a wardrobe for the coming season. Ladies did not go to a dressmaker

to inspect the new models; the models were brought to them. The head of a dressmaker's would go to Paris and select gowns that came carefully packed in several huge boxes, with an elderly white-haired, black-suited gentleman, Herr Schuster. His boxes were piled up in the passage, where he sat with them; they were carried into Emmy's dressing-room one by one by Anna. When Emmy was dressed, Herr Schuster was ushered in for pronouncement. 'Of course he always approved, but if he found Mama inclined to favour one of them to the extent of wanting to try it on again, he waxed ecstatic, saying that the dress absolutely "screamed for the Baroness".' The children waited for this moment and then would race down the corridor to the nursery in panicky fits of hysterics.

There is a picture of Emmy taken in the salon soon after she married Viktor. She must be pregnant with Elisabeth already, but not showing. She is dressed like Marie Antoinette in a cropped velvet jacket over a long white skirt, a play between severity and nonchalance. Her ringlets conform to what is *à la mode* in the spring of 1900: 'coiffure is less stiff than it was formerly; fringes are prohibited. The hair is first crimped into large waves, then combed back and twisted into a moderately high coil ... locks are allowed to escape onto the forehead, left in their natural ringed form,' writes a journalist. Emmy has a black hat with feathers. One hand rests on a French marble-topped chest of drawers and the other holds a cane. She must be just down from the dressing-room and off to another ball. She looks at me confidently, aware of how gorgeous she is.

Emmy has her admirers – many admirers, according to my great-uncle Iggie – and dressing for others is as much a pleasure as undressing. From the start of her marriage she has lovers, too.

This is not unusual in Vienna. It is slightly different from Paris. This is a city of *chambres séparées* at restaurants, where you can eat and seduce as in Schnitzler's *Reigen* or *La Ronde*: 'A private room in the restaurant "zum Riedhof". Subdued comfortable elegance. The gas fire is burning. On the table the remains of a meal – cream pastries, fruit, cheese etc. Hungarian white wine. The husband is smoking a Havana cigar, leaning back in one corner of the sofa. The SWEET YOUNG THING is sitting in an armchair beside him, spooning down whipped cream from a pastry with evident pleasure ...' In Vienna at the turn of the century there is the cult of the *süsse Mädel*, 'simple girls who lived for flirtation with young men from good homes'. There is endless flirtation. Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* with its text by Hofmannsthal – in

which changing costumes, changing lovers and changing hats are all held in suspended amusement – is new in 1911 and is wildly popular. Schnitzler has problems, he confides in his journal of his sexual congresses, in keeping up with the demands of his two mistresses.

Sex is inescapable in Vienna. Prostitutes crowd the pavements. They advertise on the back page of *Die Neue Freie Presse*. Everything and everyone is catered for. Karl Kraus quotes them in his journal *Die Fackel*: 'Travelling Companion Sought, young, congenial, Christian, independent. Replies to "Invert 69" Poste Restante Habsburgergasse'. Sex is argued over by Freud. In Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*, the cult book of 1903, women are, by nature, amoral and in need of direction. Sex is golden in Klimt's *Judith*, *Danae*, *The Kiss*, dangerous in Schiele's tumbled bodies.

To be a modern woman in Vienna, to be *dans le vent*, it is understood that your domestic life has a little latitude. Some of Emmy's aunts and cousins have marriages of convenience: her aunt Anny, for instance. Everyone knows that Hans Count Wilczek is the natural father of her cousins, the twin brothers Herbert and Witold von Schey von Koromla. Count Wilczek is handsome and extremely glamorous: an explorer, the funder of Arctic expeditions. A close friend of the late Crown Prince Rudolf, he has had islands named after him.

I've delayed my return to London – I'm finally on the track of Ignace's will and want to see how he divided his fortune. The Adler Society, the genealogical society of Vienna, is only open to members and their guests on Wednesday evenings after six o'clock. The society offices are through a grand hall on the second floor of a house just down from Freud's apartment. I duck through a lowish door and into a long corridor hung with portraits of

Vienna's mayors. Bookcases with box-files of deaths and obituaries to the left, aristocrats, runs of *Debrett's* and the *Almanach de Gotha* to the right. Everything else and everyone else, straight on. At last I see people at work on their projects, carrying files, copying ledgers. I'm not sure what genealogical societies are usually like, but this one has completely unexpected roars of laughter and scholars calling out across the floor, requesting help in deciphering difficult handwriting.

I ask very delicately about the friendships of my great-grandmother Emmy von Ephrussi, née Schey von Koromla, circa 1900. There is much collegiate joshing. Emmy's friendships of a hundred years ago are no secret, all her former lovers are known: someone mentions a cavalry officer, another a Hungarian roué, a prince. Was it Ephrussi who kept identical clothes in two different households so that she could start her day either with her husband or her lover? The gossip is still so alive: the Viennese seem to have no secrets at all. It makes me feel painfully English.

I think of Viktor, son of one sexually insatiable man, brother of another, and I see him opening a brown parcel of books from his dealer in Berlin with a silver paperknife at his library table. I see him reaching into his waistcoat pocket for the thin matches he keeps there for lighting his cigars. I see the ebb and flow of energy through the house, like water running into pools and out again. What I cannot see is Viktor in Emmy's dressing-room looking down into the vitrine, unlocking it and picking out a netsuke. I'm not sure that he is even a man who would sit and talk to Emmy as she got dressed, with Anna fussing around her. I'm not sure what they really talk about at all. Cicero? Hats?

I see him moving his hand across his face as he readjusts himself before he goes every morning to his office. Viktor goes out

onto the Ring, turns right, first right into the Schottengasse, first left and he is there. He has begun to take his valet Franz with him. Franz sits at a desk in the outer office, so that Viktor can read undisturbed inside. Thank God for clerks who can tabulate all those banking columns correctly, as Viktor makes notes on history in his beautiful slanting handwriting. He is a middle-aged Jewish man, in love with his young and beautiful wife.

There is no gossip about Viktor in the Adler.

I think of Emmy at eighteen, newly installed with her vitrine of ivories in the great glassed-in house on the corner of the Ring; I remember Walter Benjamin's description of a woman in a nineteenth-century interior. 'It encased her so deeply in the dwelling's interior,' he wrote, 'that one might be reminded of a compass case where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet, folds of velvet.'

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By Robert Wernick

A shifty-eyed spy who was likely the nastiest man ever

In many ways, Maj. Ferdinand Esterhazy was to blame for starting the 'Dreyfus Affair,' France's most appalling miscarriage of justice

Lieut. Col. Maximilien von Schwartzkoppen was an aristocrat of the old school, urbane, cultivated, charming and terribly careless. When the papers piled up too high on his desk at the German Embassy in Paris, he would crumple or tear them up and toss them into his wastebasket.

During the years he served as military attaché there, from 1891 to 1897, the colonel never suspected that Madame Bastian, the dear old charlady who cleaned the embassy offices, was leading a double life as agent "Auguste" of the French intelligence service. She was supposed to burn all the wastepaper but, at regular intervals, in clandestine meetings in the gloom of church chapels, she would pass over a bag full of papers to Maj. Joseph Henry of the Statistical Section, which was in fact the French Army's counterintelligence service. In their cramped quarters on the Rue St. Dominique, the five dedicated men who made up his unit would piece the scraps together, photograph and analyze them.

Most of the documents from von Schwartzkoppen's wastebasket were love letters. There were passionate exchanges with the wife of a Dutch diplomat and a whole squadron of ladies of high degree. There were also passionate, and in this case wildly obscene, letters exchanged with the Italian military attaché, Col. Alessandro Panizzardi. "Little red dog" and "little green dog" they called each other, and between the more intimate passages they sometimes slipped in items of business, such as their relations with Frenchmen willing to pass over a military secret or two for small amounts of cash.

The Statistical Section naturally read these documents with great interest. They were particularly anxious to identify the man referred to by the code name Jacques Dubois or on one occasion as "that scoundrel D," who for years had been selling the Germans plans of the fortifications of major French cities. But they never found a single clue. On September 27, 1894, however, a particularly juicy item came in from agent Auguste. It was a memorandum, a *bordereau*, written on onionskin paper, containing a list of items being offered for sale to the Germans, including details of the "120 short" cannon, a highly secret new weapon the French were counting on to take revenge for the humiliating drubbing given them by the Prussians in 1870. The author of the *bordereau* could only have been a French officer, one with connections to the General Staff. It was a flagrant case of treason and all the top military authorities were immediately notified.

Shameless crook and con man, "Count" Esterhazy did the deed that sent Alfred Dreyfus to Devil's Island.

There had been a few similar cases in previous years in which soldiers and officers in the French Army had been caught trafficking with the hereditary enemy and been condemned to stiff prison sentences. Like most treason cases, they were tawdry little affairs, good only for a shocking headline or two, and they had aroused little interest.

This case was quite different. The gentleman in civilian clothes, wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, who had presented himself in Colonel von Schwartzkoppen's office back in July 1894 was obviously an exceptional individual. He introduced himself as Major the Count Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy, a scion of the noble and immensely rich family that at one time owned one-eighth of the kingdom of Hungary. But he was in financial straits and, so he said, only the necessity of saving his wife and children from abject poverty had led him to take the contemptible initiative of offering his services to the German General Staff.

Esterhazy was serving in the 74th Infantry Regiment in the French Army. He was a decorated war veteran, a member of the Jockey Club, a friend of everyone who was anyone in Parisian society, an intimate of generals and cabinet ministers, a brilliant conversationalist, a clever journalist. He was also a compulsive gambler; a compulsive liar; a jewel thief; a blackmailer; a witty, learned, fascinating crook; and, it turned out, one of the nastiest men in the world. Women found him entrancing, and he liked to pick them up in the first-class compartments of trains. It was on the train from Le Havre to Paris that he met and won Marguerite Pays, who would help him forge documents and would remain faithful to him through thick and thin. On the other hand, after a miserably unhappy marriage, his wife—he had described her as a spendthrift and ninny whose only interest in him was "physical passion"—would divorce him in 1899.

The surviving photographs of Esterhazy show the face of a man whom Hollywood would have typecast as a riverboat gambler of the second class. But face-to-face, people found him brilliant. He had encyclopedic knowledge and a prodigiously agile tongue—the tongue that was his sole resource—which enabled him to keep his creditors at bay and let him wriggle out of the hopeless situations that more and more formed the pattern of his life. He had a gift for making things up, for he was not a "Count," and though he did have Esterhazy blood, it came to him through the illegitimate daughter of an illegitimate son.

He loved nothing better than to play both sides of the street. Under the pseudonym Z, he wrote a chronicle of military gossip for *La Libre Parole*, the paper of Edouard Drumont, the leading anti-Semite of his day. He served as a second to a Jewish lieutenant who challenged Drumont to a duel. Then Esterhazy turned to an old schoolmate of his, a Rothschild, and wheedled a good sum of money out of him on the grounds that he was being blackballed for being a friend of the Jews. When his nephew Christian came into an inheritance, Esterhazy offered to put the money into promising investments. He put it into the stock market in his own account.

selling short on the basis of inside information from his friends in high places and losing everything when the market rose. He explained to the poor nephew that his funds had been temporarily blocked by the malevolence of Jews.

If events had followed their normal course, the arrest and trial of this man on charges of passing classified matter to a foreign power would have provided the newspapers with weeks and months of the kind of spicy scandal newspaper readers love. But they took another turn. A series of chance events turned what was basically a minor, run-of-the-mill affair of espionage into the most famous miscarriage of justice of modern times. "The Affair," as the French call it to this day, was to last for 12 years. It would include three courts-martial, a colossal political and military cover-up that blackened the name of the French Army for decades, and years of passionately bitter debate. Governments would fall, careers would be ruined, the whole nation of France would be torn in two and the scars would not heal for generations. They have not, in fact, healed yet.

And all because a young officer visiting the Statistical Section made a suggestion that sent the investigators, who had just about given up hope of finding the author of the *bordereau*, off in a new direction. In a matter of hours they arrested the man they were convinced was the culprit. It was not Major Esterhazy, but another professional soldier who up until that day had been living in perfect contentment as a devoted family man, rich, conservative and conventional: Capt. Alfred Dreyfus.

Nobody had actually gone looking for Dreyfus. But when his name turned up on a list of officers who had served in sections of the General Staff with access to the information in the *bordereau*, it struck all the investigators as a gift from Heaven. Dreyfus' handwriting looked reasonably like that of the *bordereau*. His name began with a "D," the initial that had popped up in the von Schwartzkoppen-Panizzardi correspondence. And he was a Jew, which to a good part of the French officer corps meant that he was a foreign element in the nation, probably pro-German, and at all events ready to do anything for money.

The fact that the Dreyfuses were fanatical patriots who, in order to maintain French citizenship, had given up their home in Alsace after it was annexed by the Germans, was immaterial, as was the total absence of a motive. Dreyfus was a rich man who had no need for the few hundred francs von Schwartzkoppen was doling out for information. For that matter, he had access to much more sensitive material than the fairly commonplace stuff in the *bordereau*. There was also the troubling matter that no one could be sure the handwriting on the *bordereau* was really that of Captain Dreyfus. Two of the five experts called in to examine the document said he could not have written it. Of the three who said he did, one—the famous Alphonse Bertillon, father of modern criminology—struck most people who dealt with him as a lunatic: he would eventually spend years refining elaborate charts and diagrams to demonstrate that a diabolically clever Captain Dreyfus had actually *forged* his own handwriting.

But to men eager to get a successful spy case behind them, these considerations were of no concern. The only thing that might have stayed their hand was the paucity of the evidence, which consisted, and for all the stormy 12-year course of the Affair was to consist, of that one highly equivocal piece of paper, the *bordereau*. It was Gen. Raoul de Boisdeffre, chief of the General Staff of the army, who insisted that it was necessary to *nourrir le dossier*, fatten the file. And so, to incriminate Dreyfus, over the years busy hands at the General Staff and the Statistical Section would add some 4,000 items to the dossier, all of them irrelevant and some of them forged.

In due course, Captain Dreyfus was dragged before a court-martial. A good deal of what followed has been much publicized. A "secret file" of innocuous but sinister-looking documents was smuggled into the judge's chamber without the knowledge of the defense. The defendant—a proud, stiff, shy man too dazed and too innocent to know what was happening to him—was found guilty of treason, condemned to being broken and stripped of his captain's insignia in a public ceremony (p. 118). In February 1895 Dreyfus was shipped off for life imprisonment in the worst place the French penal system could provide, Devil's Island off the coast of Guiana (SMITHSONIAN, August 1988).

From extreme left to extreme right, all the politicians congratulated the army authorities for the speed and efficiency with which they had acted to safeguard the vital interests of the nation. Except for the captain's wife, Lucie, and his brother Mathieu, who dedicated themselves to exonerating the captain, and one or two punctilious souls who were offended by the irregularities of the court-martial proceedings, almost everyone was satisfied.

There were three people who had reason to follow every detail of the affair with particular concern. Colonels von Schwartzkoppen and Panizzardi were puzzled and, within the limits allowed them by their official status, shocked. Von Schwartzkoppen protested to the French government that he had never laid eyes on Dreyfus, but no patriotic Frenchman was going to believe a word uttered by a representative of the German government. Panizzardi offered to testify to the same effect, and he was told to mind his own business.

As for Major Esterhazy, he must have breathed a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, financial circumstances were no better for him than when he first went knocking at the door of the German Embassy. His creditors were shrill, his wife's dowry had dribbled away, his bank account was down to 43 francs 78 centimes. He returned again and again to von Schwartzkoppen, but the colonel was dissatisfied with the quality of the material supplied and cut his rates. Borrowing the names of two of the oldest families of French nobility, Esterhazy, as Monsieur Rohan-Chabot, became a partner in a new luxurious house of prostitution opening on the Rue du Rocher. He had little capital to offer, but he could provide the names of 1,500 potential customers.

But times remained hard. And there was always the threat that the small but growing number of people who had begun to suspect that an innocent man had been sent to the hell of Devil's Island might stumble on the facts, and drag the name of Esterhazy out into the open.

On November 7, 1897, it happened. A stockbroker named Castro was strolling the boulevards and picked up one of the brochures that Mathieu Dreyfus had had printed in his brother's defense; it contained a facsimile of the *bordereau*. He recognized the writing—Major Esterhazy had dealt with him often, when he had some cash to speculate with. It was the first glimpse of hope to break through to the brave little band of what were beginning to be called "Dreyfusards."

What they did not know was that the French Army had known all about Esterhazy for 13 months. In March of the previous year the new boss at the Statistical Section, Lieut. Col. Georges Picquart, had come across a piece of express mail, the famous *petit bleu*,

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written by Colonel von Schwartzkoppen, ever careless, and addressed to Major Esterhazy. His curiosity piqued, he asked for some material on this officer, and was appalled—for he, like almost everyone else, took it for granted that Dreyfus was guilty—to find that Esterhazy's handwriting and that of the *bordereau* were identical.

A strictly honorable, though somewhat innocent man, he expected to start proceedings against Esterhazy immediately and right the miscarriage of justice. He did not realize that by now the French Army had accepted the guilt of Dreyfus as an article of faith. To challenge the findings of the court-martial was regarded by the French General Staff as an act of treason worse than selling a few papers to the Germans. "What difference does it make to you," reportedly snapped General Gonse, deputy chief of the General Staff, to Picquart, "if that Jew remains on Devil's Island?"

In practical terms, this meant that when presented with devastating information about an officer with a very bad reputation, the Minister of War, the General Staff of the army and the Statistical Section all collaborated in protecting him. Troublesome Colonel Picquart was hustled off on a made-up mission to Tunisia to get him out of the way, and forged telegrams and an anonymous note from Esterhazy were actually sent to him (and intercepted) to suggest that he was part of a pro-Dreyfus conspiracy. With a little help from his wife, Major Henry, who had originally acquired the *bordereau* from Colonel von Schwartzkoppen's charlady, composed a letter signed "Esperance" warning Esterhazy that unscrupulous friends of Dreyfus were plotting against him. Thereafter Esterhazy was regularly informed of developments and coached in the proper attitude to maintain in case anything became public.

When, despite all the efforts of his friends, the charges against Esterhazy did become public, he never dreamed of adopting the low profile they advised him to take. He bubbled with righteous indignation that a French officer, son of a French general, should be the object of such calumny. At first he claimed that the *bordereau* was a forgery, painfully copied from words in a manuscript account of his father's heroic actions at the battle of Eupatoria, an account he had written many years before. When this story began to seem a little thin, he changed it to say that, of course, he had written the *bordereau* at the order of Colonel Sandherr, head of the Statistical Section in 1894, so that he could serve as a double agent. When asked to provide some documentary evidence, he would wave a letter that he said came from Colonel Sandherr's widow thanking him for all he had done. But he never let anyone close enough to the letter to read or copy it.

He wrote to the President of the Republic, threatening that if he did not receive satisfaction he would appeal to the feudal suzerain of the Esterhazy family, the emperor of Germany. He wrote the prime minister that if his good name were not restored and his enemies punished he would make public information that would lead either to war or national humiliation. He wrote at length about a mysterious veiled lady who, at great risk to herself, met him at dusk to hand over documents proving that he was the object of a plot led by the dastardly Colonel Picquart.

And for a while he got away with it. It was Colonel Picquart who was put in jail. Politicians and press hailed Esterhazy as an exemplar of the traditional French values, an honorable soldier pursued by a pack of ruffians. The army arranged to have him vindicated by a court-martial that ran roughshod over the evidence. By tortured logic, it was decided that precisely because the *bordereau* was in Esterhazy's handwriting it was clearly a forgery by someone else trying to frame him. After all, if he had written it, would he not have disguised his hand? He was found innocent of any crime of treason. When the verdict was announced, he was surrounded by hundreds of officers shouting, "Long live France! Down with Jews!"

But every time he seemed triumphant, some new and damaging disclosure would be made. Once it was his cousin and mistress, Madame de Boulancy, despairing of ever seeing 36,500 francs he had borrowed, who decided to publish the letters that Esterhazy had written her over the years. For admirers of traditional French values, they made distressing reading: "If someone were to come tell me this evening that I would be killed tomorrow as a uhlan captain running through Frenchmen with my saber, I would certainly be perfectly happy.... Paris taken by storm and given over to the pillage of 100,000 drunken soldiers! That is a festivity I dream of!" Hardly had this scandal died

own a little when his nephew Chris-
an, belatedly suspicious of what had
appened to *his* money, began a law-
it accusing his uncle of fraud.

Every detail of the affair was by now
ecoming public property, fresh fuel
r the raging political debate that
r a while threatened to tear the
untry apart. Families were divided,
d friendships broken up, political
bate poisoned. An extraordinary
stiness pervaded public life: when
high court handed down an ad-
nistrative decision that helped the
eyfusard cause, *L'Intransigeant*, one
the leading anti-Dreyfusard news-
pers, recommended tying hungry
ders to the judge's eyes and letting
m eat their way in.

Everyone took sides, and there
re great names on both sides. Emile
a took a special edition of Georges
menceau's newspaper *L'Aurore* to
blish his famous open letter to the
sident of the Republic, "*J'Accuse*,"
aking down the wall of silence that
French General Staff had built
und the real details of the case in

the name of state secrets and national security. The mild and skeptical Anatole France astonished everyone by the passion with which he fought for the release of an innocent man. But others, including Degas, Cézanne, Renoir and Paul Valéry, were all equally convinced of Dreyfus' guilt.

Meanwhile the prisoner lived on, now shackled to his bed at night, in a stifling cell, surrounded by a stockade to keep him from getting a glimpse of the sea. He remained throughout his career—to the dismay of many of his most fervent supporters—exactly what he had been before history came down to enfold him, a thoroughly conventional, conservative Frenchman, devoted to family, to honor, to the army, to *la patrie*. He always said that however great were the sufferings he endured, they should have been twice as great if he had been guilty of the crime with which he was charged. He never seemed to doubt that army and *patrie* would one day acknowledge that they had condemned him unjustly, and in the end he was right.

For despite the increasingly hysterical efforts of the authorities to bury the truth, it kept dribbling out. Colonel Henry (promoted for his loyal endeavors) changed a "P---" in one of the incriminating letters to a "D---," forgetting that the Statistical Section photographed all documents with strict bureaucratic regularity the moment they arrived. And so the original "P" remained in the archives while the forged "D" was being waved in the face of skeptical government ministers investigating the case. In a supreme effort to silence the skeptics, Henry took one of the letters, tore off the heading and the signature, and attached them to a new text of his own composition, one in which for the first time in the whole case all seven letters of the name Dreyfus were spelled out. On July 7, 1898, the new Minister of War, Godefroy Cavaignac, read this document to a cheering Chamber of Deputies, which voted to have copies of his speech placarded in every one of the 13,000 communes of France as proof positive of Dreyfus' guilt.

But a month later, the roof fell in, on Esterhazy and the Ministry of War alike. On the night of August 13, a captain on Cavaignac's staff, studying the doctored letter under slanting lamplight, noticed for the first time that the lines of the graph paper on which the body of the text was written were of a different color from those at the top and bottom. Cavaignac was thunderstruck. A man of integrity, he could not ignore the evidence as his predecessors had. He was determined to clean house, and the first thing to do was to get rid of Esterhazy. The military court of inquiry found him guilty of "habitual misconduct" and Esterhazy was thrown out of the army. "A monstrous abuse of power" by a pack of "cowardly and obscene scoundrels," was Esterhazy's comment.

On August 30, Cavaignac summoned Henry to his office and mercilessly browbeat him till he broke down and confessed his forgery. Generals Gonse and de Boisdeffre, who had encouraged if not actually ordered him to do it, sat by without saying a word. The next day, Colonel Henry, loyal French officer and second-rate forger, wrote a confession of guilt and slit his throat in a prison cell.

At that moment the Dreyfus case was over, though Cavaignac and the generals and the anti-Dreyfusard fanatics refused to believe it.

After a moment of shock they rallied to maintain that Colonel Henry was a national hero and that Dreyfus was as guilty as ever. More clairvoyant than his friends, ex-Major Esterhazy knew that the jig was up. The day after the news of Henry's confession was made public, he shaved off his mustache and took the train, third class this time, for Maubeuge, slipped into Belgium and across the Channel to England. He would remain in England for the next 25 years.

It was a long, sad, painful and much deserved descent into oblivion. As the Dreyfus case dragged on to its inevitable end—through the return of Captain Dreyfus from Devil's Island,

through a second court-martial that ended in the incomprehensible verdict of guilty of "treason but with extenuating circumstances," through the annulment of the earlier verdicts in July 1906—Esterhazy was always available for an interview. With a remarkably gratuitous meanness of spirit, he told all he knew and made up much more. He derided French politicians and French generals as fools, fops and madmen. But there were no more intrigues, no more cousins to swindle.

Being Esterhazy, he managed to survive somehow. During World War I, in which Dreyfus, despite his ruined health, served for 20 months as an artillery officer, Esterhazy, under the name of Fitzgerald, wrote articles denouncing the total incompetence of the French Army.

When he died in 1923 in a village in Hertfordshire, no one knew who he was. He was described as a traveling salesman. He was going by the name of Count Jean de Voilemont.