Against the Weather

A Study of the Artist

Twice a Year, 1939

WHAT SHOULD THE artist be today? What must he be? What can he do? To what purpose? What does he effect? How does he function? What enters into it? The economic, the sociological: how is he affected? How does his being a man or a woman, one of a certain race, an American enter into it?

If there were more air smelling of the crispness, the chill, the faint flowerless odor of ice and sunlight that reigns here, March 9, 1938, in the neighborhood of New York City today —I could do, and under like circumstances could always have done, any imaginable thing that might unreasonably be or has been expected of a man. But all days are not like today nor is my mind of a consequence always so moved. Quite the contrary.

I've been writing a sentence, with all the art I can muster. Here it is: A work of art is important only as evidence, in its structure, of a new world which it has been created to affirm.

Let me explain.

A life that is here and now is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking: to embody that in a work of art, a new world that is always "real."

All things otherwise grow old and rot. By long experience the only thing that remains unchanged and unchangeable is the work of art. It is because of the element of timelessness in it, its sensuality. The only world that exists is the world of the senses. The world of the artist.

That is the artist's work. He might well be working at it

during a bombardment, for the bombardment will stop. After a while they will run out of bombs. Then they will need something to fall back on: today. Only the artist can invent it. Without today everything would be lost and they would have to start bombing again as they always do, to hide the lack. If the artist can finish before the attack is over it will be lucky. He is the most important artisan they have.

The work an artist has to do is the most important creation of civilization. It is also its creator.

It is a world of men.

It is not an "essence," a philosophic or physiochemical derivative I am seeking but a sensual "reality." Though it *might* be war, it had better be a work of art.

The artist is to be understood not as occupying some outlying section of the field of action but the whole field, at a different level howbeit from that possessed by grosser modes. The artist is to be conceived as a universal man of action—restricted by circumstances to a field in which only he can remain alive, whole and effective. He is the most effective of all men, by test of time, in proving himself able to resist circumstances and bring the load through. Dig up his carvings in the center of the Sahara Desert, where there was once a lake and forests, his effectiveness remains intact.

He differs from the philosopher in point of action. He is the whole man, not the breaker up but the compactor. He does not translate the sensuality of his materials into symbols but deals with them directly. By this he belongs to his world and time, sensually, realistically. His work might and finally must be expanded—holds the power of expansion at any time—into new conceptions of government. It is not the passive "to be" but the active "I am."

Being an artist I can produce, if I am able, universals of general applicability. If I succeed in keeping myself objective enough, sensual enough, I can produce the factors, the concretions of materials by which others shall understand and so be led to use—that they may the better see, touch, taste,

enjoy—their own world *differing as it may* from mine. By mine, they, different, can be discovered to be the same as I, and, thrown into contrast, will see the implications of a general enjoyment through me.

That—all my life I have striven to emphasize it—is what is meant by the universality of the local. From me where I stand to them where they stand in their here and now—where I cannot be—I do in spite of that arrive! through their work which complements my own, each sensually local.

This is the generosity also of art. It closes up the ranks of understanding. It shows the world at one with itself. And it solves, it is the solvent—or it can be—of old antagonisms. It is theoretical, as opposed to philosophy, most theoretical when it is most down on the ground, most sensual, most real. Picking out a flower or a bird in detail that becomes an abstract term of enlightenment.

This paper is full of electricity, I can hardly pick it up or lay it down.

Another characteristic of all art is its compactness. It is not, at its best, the mirror—which is far too ready a symbol. It is the life—but transmuted to another tighter form.

The compactness implies restriction but does not mean loss of parts; it means compact, restricted to essentials. Neither does it mean the extraction of a philosophic essence. The essence remains in the parts proper to life, in all their sensual reality.

The grossly active agent of the moment, possessing the government, less whole than the artist, usually a party—that is to say partial or a part—tries to break the artist from his complete position to make him serve an incomplete function. And the *way* they attack him in order to make him serve their purpose is to accuse him of being inactive or reserved to the aesthetic. To which he can have only one answer which is to be active, to practice his unnicked art. For this they will kill him proving his point—and if they have not been successful in destroying all he has done, which is unlikely, he will end by destroying them.

The extreme example of the principle of sabotage as practiced by parties upon the arts was the destruction of the library at Alexandria. So valuable was the work of the artist there that to this day we unglue the backs of old books and even pick apart the lids of sarcophagi in order to find perhaps one line of Sappho.

What does the artist do? And what has the world of varying events to do with what he does? He attacks, constantly toward a full possession of life by himself as a man. Those who possess the world will have it their way but in the conceit of the artist, generous enough, the actual and necessary government occupies only an incomplete segment of that which is just, in the full sense, and possible.

The artist is, by that, called very often a revolutionist and is threatened, as it may be Shakespeare was threatened by the Protestant power, which he had to please being himself a Papist. At the same time *he wrote plays*. And if, in *The Tempest*, he approached the ideology of his bringing up, during his full intervening years *he still wrote plays*. That is the artist, the man of action, as laid against the man of ideas.

Imagine a world without the effects of art. Take it ten years before Shakespeare wrote a play or Dante placed on paper his *Divina Commedia*. Such a world might well be and was in either case governed by laws, but what should be the general applicability of them if it had not been for works of art existing earlier? Without conceptions of art the world might well be and has usually been a shambles of groups lawful enough but bent upon nothing else than mutual destruction. This comes of their partiality. They lack that which must draw them together—without destruction of their particular characteristics; the thing that will draw them together because in their disparateness it discovers an identity. Nowhere will this be found save in the sensual, the real, world of the arts.

Every masterwork liberates while it draws the world closer in mutual understanding and tolerance. This is its aroma of the whole. For these are the pure characteristics, in tremen-

dous concentration, of the work itself, made, demonstrated, as imitated in the laboratory, in which we believe so much today, by the trivial artist. It is the cement of the sensual world. Or even less destructible, it is more the cementless joining itself of the parts, as in the examples of Inca masonry.

As the world is unimaginable without the effects of art—that is to say without art there would be no Chartres, no Parthenon, no *Oedipus Rex*, no pyramids, *Matthew's Passion*, *Divina Commedia*, *Quixote* or *Lear*—which make it one, so a man walks the streets but he is none without the agency of the artist. He may be a "soul" or a "citizen," a "member of the party," an example of certain philosophic concepts in operation or one of the genus *Homo sapiens* but a MAN—lacking art—never! Only that preserves him in his full sensuality, the man himself.

And today, after the same fashion, he is everything imaginable. There are a hundred names and might just as well be five hundred or a thousand—and the reasons one way or the other are often logical (Why not?), cogent, inevitable and overwhelming. But it has an effect, this positivity. It blinds! It deafens, confuses and destroys. Catholic or Protestant can never be more than half a man in the eyes of the artist—each in himself "perfect." A man, to be, emerges through them into a region common to both. He knows them by what they *do*—in relation to each other—to make up the whole.

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These are some conditions an artist must face and react to: There are two great Spanish epics that illustrate this life of man preserved in the arts. They will serve as examples. Both the *Poema del Cid* and the *Book of Love* are distinguished and live by what is called the "ethical detachment" of the poet exhibited there. He, the poet, saw a specific action, he experienced and he recorded, as a man of sense, directly after the deed without preconception.

The poet saw a sword flash! It lit the field. He did not see

a CASTILIAN sword flash or a MOORISH sword flash. He saw a SWORD flash. The effect of that flashing did not immediately concern either Spain or Arabia, it concerned a man. The sword rose or it fell and the work was done or missed. The poet recorded it with a power that took it out of the partial, a power which derived from his passion as an artist to know, in full. This is good.

With the author of the *Libro de Buen Amor*, the fat archpriest of Hita the same. His work was not war but love, love of God and love of women—almost indistinguishable to the poet though he made ample gestures both ways. But the *poem* was the thing—this was his good—as he confesses very clearly. He came, this amorous archpriest, of a time when Moslem, Christian and Jew mingled, as it has been said, in one great fraternity of mirth and pleasure, whatever ends each otherwise was also seeking. They mingled without prejudice, a resemblance to the conditions of art. They mingled and *El Libro de Buen Amor* took it up and lives.

A more complex example than the *Book of Love*, Dante's *Divina Commedia* throws into even greater relief this compelling force which takes possession of a man and causes him to act in a certain manner producing works of art—its conditions and significances. In the *Book of Love*, untouched by morals, the artist's impulse carries the day unopposed. But the *Divina Commedia* presents three facts, the moral, that of formal religion and that other whose character, in itself, I wish to define. The comment of the artist illuminates the other two—a good place to witness it at work. Dante upon Dante.

Full stop.

Nothing is under consideration but the artist's concern in these things, enlightenment upon the artist's significance. And the reason for going into such seemingly remote matters (as the poetry of Dante) in the search for present-day solutions is the question of origins. As writers we shall find in writing our most telling answers and as writers it is we who should

uncover them. That is our business. If, as writers, we are stuck somewhere, along with others, we must go back to the place, if we can, where a blockage may have occurred. We must go back in established writing, as far as necessary, searching out the elements that occur there. We must go to the bottom.

If we suspect that, in past writing, archaic forms give the significance a false cast we are under an obligation to go back to that place where the falsity clings and whence it works. We must unravel it to the last shred; nothing is more important, nothing must stand in the way and no time that is taken to it could be better spent. We have to dig. For by repeating an early misconception it gains acceptance and may be found running through many, or even all, later work. It has to be rooted out at the site of its first occurrence.

We know that what we are seeking, as writing, lies in the form or in the substance or both, of what is before us. It lies there undeciphered but active, malevolent it may be, and from it steam up the forces which are obstructing the light. Furthermore it is quite likely to be defended under the title of "beauty."

It is distinctly important that in the face of "beauty" we go in and expose the lesion. Nothing could be more timely. If we do not take the time for it but think to press on to more advanced matters we leave a basis for destruction in our rear. While we are using the old forms we unwittingly do ourselves a damage if they carry over within them that which undermines our own enlightened effectiveness.

The first and obvious contrast between the *Book of Love* and the *Commedia* is the scrupulous order maintained throughout the latter both in content and structure as against the carefree disorder of the Spanish work. One is closely clipt within ascertained bounds while the other runs away, going along from point to point, like a child picking flowers under a hedge.

This is very bad, this looseness, according to one of the major tenets of art, conscious restriction to prescribed form, and very good according to another—unconfined acceptance of experience. Close order makes for penetration. Looseness is likely to prove weakness, having little impact upon the mind. But it is wise, always, to beware of that sort of order which cuts away too much.

The *Divina Commedia* has since the twelfth century exerted a lasting influence on Western poetry. What sort of influence? Good or bad? Which of the characters it presents has been the most influential? What of it relates to the art and how much masks under the colors of art and to other effect?

This begins to give an inkling of what, to the artist, is meant, as Rembrandt might conceivably have used the term, by "the great tradition"—an inkling of what is good and what is evil relating to his world by which he lives and acts beyond the aesthetic in his person as an artist.

Good and evil are the conjoint theme of the *Divina Commedia*, full of prejudice as between the blessed and the damned and structurally full of the mystical forms of religious ritual—in which it closely resembles Gothic architecture. But it is also a great work of art in that the same lack of ethical prejudice prevails as in the *Book of Love*. The blessed and the damned are treated by Dante, the artist, with scrupulous impartiality. The drawing is the same, the intense application toward veracity, the same meticulous care for "the good" whether in heaven or hell, the same address toward the truth—throughout its gamut.

I am comparing two poetical works of diverse character to discover wherein the practices of the artist are significant. These works are not arbitrarily chosen but represent two casts of thought stemming from them which stand confronting each other also today.

But my purpose in contrasting these works is the opposite

of an attempt to weigh one against the other. Rather I want to draw out the same metal from both to see what its influence there is and has been.

Both the *Commedia* and the *Libro de Buen Amor* have love as their theme, earthly and heavenly. But earthly love, in its own right (Paolo and Francesca) is condemned in the *Commedia* and celebrated to the full in the *Book*—free to the winds.

Dante restricts, the archpriest expands. Dante fastened upon his passion a whole hierarchy of formal beliefs. The fat priest slighted the formality of his beliefs in favor of the sensual thing itself to its full length and breadth.

In the structure of their works will stand revealed that they, as artists, conceived of their material. In the structure the artist speaks as an artist purely. There he cannot lie. The artist as a man of action perpetuates his deed and records himself as a reality in the structure of his work—for which the content is merely useful.

The artist addresses himself to life as a whole. By reason of this he is constantly questioned and attacked. He is attacked by the closed lobbies of thought, those who have special solutions. Those who wish to halt the mutations of truth under a single aegis fixing it to a complexion of their private manufacture in search of a way through to order as against the modern lostness and distress.

But the general reason for our distress seems to be that we are stopped in our tracks by the dead masquerading as life. We are stopped by the archaic lingering in our laboring forms of procedure—which interested parties, parts, having or getting the power will defend with explosives—seeking to prevent the new life from generating in the decay of the old.

Those who see it one way call it the defense of tradition. Others see tradition belied in that tradition once was new—now only a wall.

In Dante and the fat archpriest of Hita, two artists look at good and evil; as artist they agree, unbiased. Dante condemned not only usurers and murderers to hell but lovers also unless formally blest. Yet as an artist he seems to pity Paolo and Francesca by the grace with which he has portrayed them.

To the other there are no barriers, only a glowing at the center which extends in all directions equally, resembling in that the grace of Paradise. To Dante the passion was restricted by the narrow corset of the times, the *Commedia* by its constriction to a set of special symbols standing to lose much of its availability as time passes and knowledge increases. Their harsh, restrictive and archaic nature approaches the malevolent today—in face of the great tradition.

There is likely to prove as time passes more good in the *Book of Love* than could ever be contained in Dante's *Paradiso*. That is why the *Paradiso* is so much weaker than the *Inferno*. The artist is belied there. There Dante set himself to limit virtue by a set of narrow symbols.

Just what is wrong with the *Paradiso* becomes clearer when the whole place of the sensual artist in sacred works is better understood. Pan is the artist's patron. How have morality and the Church compromised to bring him in and be saved? It is an unnatural alliance. The structure of the work must reveal it. The structure shows this struggle between the artist and his material, to wrestle his content out of the narrow into the greater meaning.

Dante was the agent of art facing a time and place and enforcement which were his "weather." Taking this weather as his starting point, as an artist, he had to deal with it to affirm that which to him was greater than it. By his structure he shows this struggle.

All I say is that the artist's is the great master pattern which all others approach and that in this Dante and the archpriest are the same. The moral good and bad approach the good and bad of the arts. Formal patterns of all sorts represent arrests of the truth in some particular phase of its mutations, and

immediately thereafter, unless they change, become mutilations.

The great pattern is difficult to approach: This is the principal objective of a work of art—to maintain this against the weather of the other conditions—so that though they warp and bend it the effect will be still the supersedure of that above these effects.

And so when a life approaches the conditions of art we have clement weather, when it recedes from them the weather is vile and tormented.

The absolute is art with its sharp distinction of good and bad, the great tradition; nothing is wholly good which has no place for every part.

Dante was a craftsman of supreme skill, his emphasis upon a triple unity is an emphasis upon structure. All his elements are in threes. In the solid structure of the Spaniard, far less skilfully made, it is important to note the flat-footed quadruple rhyme scheme as opposed to the unfinished three of the Italian dogmatist. The emphasis is upon structure, the sensual structure of the verse.

Without such sensuality the dogmatism of the *Commedia* would have killed all attempts at a work of art—as it limits it and, except for the skill of the artist (had the faintest prejudice intervened), would have submerged it. It is only as the artist has clung fast to his greatness in sensual portrayal, without influence from the content of his work, that he is able to give the content whatever secondary value it posseses. The real significance of the *Commedia* today is that it is a work of art—its meaning shifting steadily with time more and more away from the smallness, the narrowness of special pressures of its dogmatic significance. Just as the whole Renaissance has a flavor of fading dogmatism about it, perversion—which the artist leaning upon Hellenic originals—rescued sacrilegiously while painting Christian models.

This must show somewhere in the structure. There is an undercurrent, a hidden—mystical!—quality about the whole

Renaissance. This is the missing part that is not named. In the *Commedia*, Dante, like the painters, fused the two, the Hellenic and the mystic, but in doing so had to seem to sacrifice the wholeness which made pagan art universal, the charge of Pan whom the Church hates.

To realize these two in Dante, as typifying what the artist has to do, to sense the point of fusion and how it tortures the handling (as in El Greco), is to realize the inevitable direction art took following the Renaissance. The archpriest, freed by geography from the dominance of Christian dogma, was closer to the artist of today than the abler Florentine.

Today is the day in question. Does the work of Dante instruct or maim today? He must be split and the artist rescued from the dogmatist first. When this is done he gives life, when we fail to do so he inspires death. The sunnier scatterings of the amorous archpriest at least manure the entire poetic field.

Look at the structure if you will truly grasp the significance of a poem. The dogmatist in Dante chose a triple multiple for his poem, the craftsman skilfully followed orders—but the artist?

Note that beginning with the first line of the *terza rima* at any given onset, every four lines following contain a dissonance. In the *Book of Love* four rhymes are continuous, one piled upon the next four in the manner of masonry. Throughout the *Commedia* this fourth unrhymed factor, unobserved, is the entrance of Pan to the Trinity which restores it to the candid embrace of love underlying the peculiar, faulty love of the great poem which makes remote, by virtue, that which possessed, illuminates the Spanish epic.

This fault, this celebration of denial, that enters into the archaic structure of the Renaissance as against the broader Hellenic which it copies, the necessities of art correct.

It is not until today that we see the full bearing of this, the elemental significance of the work of the supreme artist shouldering through the impediments of his time. For if the poem set out to punish the wicked and reward the virtuous,

it had better have been on the basis of fulfilled love than unfulfilled.

All these things, all things relating to the world of art are to be unraveled, not to be swallowed whole with amazed eyes.

Both materials and structure have a meaning that is to be discovered, one in relation to the other, not in an esoteric, special sense but in a general sense hidden by the other, a full sense which the partial, selective sense seeks to hide and is put there to hide.

The natural corrective is the salutary mutation in the expression of all truths, the continual change without which no symbol remains permanent. It must change, it must reappear in another form, to remain permanent. It is the image of the Phoenix. To stop the flames that destroy the old nest prevents the rebirth of the bird itself. All things rot and stink, nothing stinks more than an old nest, if not recreated.

This is the essence of what art is expected to do and cannot live without doing. These are some conditions which an artist must face and react to.

3

How does this apply here, today?

Take America. When America became the escape for the restless and confined of Europe the significance, as a historic moment, was not guessed. It has never been clarified. The commonly accepted symbol for it, naturally enough, was "freedom," in which the sense of an escape from a tyrannical restriction was emphasized. This was inevitable and in the first flush of release seemed thoroughly justified, but it left a great deal to be desired.

Liberty is the better word. It was liberty they needed, not so much liberty for freedom's sake but liberty to partake of, to be included in and to conserve. Liberty, in this sense, has the significance of inclusion rather than a breaking away. It is the correct sense for the understanding of America, a

sense which the word has had difficulty to convey and which few properly interpret.

But to have liberty one must be first a man, cultured by circumstances to maintain oneself under adverse weather conditions as still part of the whole. Discipline is implied.

But freedom remained the commonly accepted and much copied cliché, implying lack of discipline, dispersion.

As a matter of fact, men and women isolated in Europe found each other here and banded together to resist official restrictions of the people to join on points of common agreement. The impulse was toward joint action. It was a drawing together.

The real character of the people became their joint and skilful resistance to the weather. Some broke away, but their leaders usually hanged those. They had banded together to resist it in Europe and, in a transmuted form, the same applied here. The real character of the people is not toward dispersion except as a temporary phase for the gathering of power, but to unite. To form a union. To work toward a common purpose—to resist the weather.

For what? On the principle that only in this way can that which is common, commonly possessed—be preserved among differences. Commonwealth Avenue was the center of Boston. The common persists among New England towns.

Man has only one enemy: the weather. It came to America, this philosophy, largely from the northern countries where the weather is bad. Being able to resist individually *taught them* to work toward a stronger union so that they could better resist as a whole. It comes from boats and the sea, from the north, through England to us. It is interesting that the Icelanders who lived in perishable ships should have been among the first to be governed by common councils. It came also from Norway.

There were certain effects.

Braddock in Pennsylvania was advancing down a narrow, wooded road with his men in close formation. They were

among the finest troops in the world. Suddenly being picked off panic-stricken from behind trees, they stampeded to the rear until Washington—whose advice had been earlier put to scorn—sick as he was, grabbed a horse, rode up and got his Americans out among the trees to fight the enemy at its own game. He gave each man his liberty, under orders, to look out for himself in open formation. The result was to save the day—to whatever extent it could be saved.

Later when Von Steuben, trained in the army of Frederick the Great, came to drill the American troops at Valley Forge he was not blind to the advantages of certain native tactics. It was he who wrote the first American Manual at Arms, the *Army Blue Book*. When he did so he adopted from America the open formation, theretofore unheard of, now the common usage of all armies of the world and likely to become more and more important as warfare progresses and trees get wings.

The weather changes and man adapts his methods that he may survive, one by one, in order to be there for agreements later. In this sense only is the artist an individualist. The whole material has shrunk back before attack into him. It is with him as with the Chinese today: the front has to be broken up and guerrilla tactics adopted. Let them hunt us out individually and kill us one by one because we carry the destiny of united action within us, action on the plane of a whole man. Not to be alone for individual reasons but only in that it is sheer suicide to advance in phalanx and be destroyed. Disperse and survive.

The artist is the servant of need.

The need is to resist the cracking weather on all fronts. There is more destruction in a pleasant day than in a stormy one because the storm carries a greater emphasis of its intent. We live under attack by various parties against the whole. And all in the name of order! But never an order discovered in its living character of today, always an order imposed in the senseless image of yesterday—for a purpose of denial.

Parties exist to impose such governments. The result is inevitably to cut off and discard that part of the whole which does not come within the order they affect.

By this it is to be observed that even the ordinary political mind finds important what the composition of a work of art may be. It must be measured to the same measure that the political situation calls for or suffer—by which its dangerous interest is made clear.

Then let those who would force the artist to conform to their party—in the broadest sense—but especially let such poets realize, such pretty orderists as seek to impose a fixed order from without, that the acts of today, the brutalities and bigotries of the various segmentary regimes are a direct moral consequence upon their own faithless acts of a generation previous. Of course their affectation is a faith! Faith! Since they are the betrayers of the great tradition nothing but to affect a faith (in *something*) will excuse them.

England has lopped off that Spain where loyalty to the dangerous present is assertive—a Spain that does not fit that "order" which conveniences her, just as Russia periodically lops off those men who do not convenience the party.

Chamberlain had to make a choice, black or white, to defend the best of English tradition fighting for its life in Spain or to defend the British Empire under Tory rule. He chose the latter. This is a choice no artist could make without sacrificing his status as an artist.

There is a sharp cleavage between the true and the false in art; that illustrates it.

The responsibility of the artist in face of the world is toward inclusion when others sell out to a party. Nations may be said to have to take what is and to be convenient liars for a purpose, because they have to do something and only by so doing can they exist. But the artist, for that very reason and all the more so because of it, can never be a liar. He has to perpetuate his trust on an unlying scale. If he fails, the character of his failure lies precisely there, his crime, for

which I condemn him to the eighth circle of hell, dry rot. Of all moral hells that of the faithless artist is the worst since his responsibility is the greatest: as England murders Spanish babies, dextrously, behind the back of opinion, and censors the terrors of Disney's *Snow White* from its children.

This is the sort of thing an artist is incapable of performing.

The poet must see before and behind—if he will know what he sees in front of him or comprehend its significance—for the art forms of today open the way to the intelligence of tomorrow.

The understanding of Walt Whitman is after the same nature. Verse is measure, there is no free verse. *But* the measure must be one of more trust, greater liberty, than has been permitted in the past. It must be an open formation. Whitman was never able fully to realize the significance of his structural innovations. As a result he fell back to the overstuffed catalogues of his later poems and a sort of looseness that was not freedom but lack of measure. Selection, structural selection was lacking.

And so about a generation ago, when under the influence of Whitman the prevalent verse forms had gone to the free-verse pole, the countering cry of Order! Order! reawakened. That was the time of the new Anglo-Catholicism.

The result was predictable. Slash down the best life of the day to bring it into the lines of control.

It comes to this: Murder can't be murder—it has to be some special sort of murder—with a quasi-secret, cabalistic significance—not understood by everyone. It has to be murder *in the cathedral*—whose momentum is lost, at the full, except to the instructed few. And instructed poetry is all secondary in the exact sense that Dante's *Commedia* is secondary where it is archaic and fettered against a broad application of the great tradition. Nothing can be simply beautiful, it must be so beautiful that no one can understand it *except* by the assistance of the cult. It must be a "mystery."

Man is mysterious in his own right and does not submit to

more than his common sensual relationships to "explain" him. Anything else approaches the trivial.

He is a man to be judged, to live or die, like other men by what he does. No symbolism is acceptable. No symbolism can be permitted to obscure the real purpose, to lift the world of the senses to the level of the imagination and so give it new currency. If the time can possess itself of such a man, such an actor, to make it aware of its own values to which through lack of imagination it remains blind, amorphous, it can gain such a momentum toward life that its dominance will be invincible.

The imagination is the transmuter. It is the changer. Without imagination life cannot go on, for we are left staring at the empty casings where truth lived yesterday while the creature itself has escaped behind us. It is the power of mutation which the mind possesses to rediscover the truth.

So that the artist is dealing with actualities not with dreams. But do not be deceived, there is no intention to depict the artist, the poet, as a popular leader in the Rousseauian sense. Rather he builds a structure of government using for this the materials of his verse. His objective is an order. It is through this structure that the artist's permanence and effectiveness are proven.

Judged equitably by the great tradition, of which the processes of art are the active front—obviously it is the artist's business to call attention to the imbecilities, the imperfections, the partialities as well as the excellence of his time.

Obviously—all defects are officially neglected by those in power; never studied or even mentioned—for clear reasons!

The trick is delay; to involve the mind in discussions likely to last a lifetime and so withdraw the active agent from performance. The answer is, an eye to judge.—When the deer is running between the birches one doesn't get out a sextant but a gun—a flash of insight with proof by performance—and let discussion follow. If the result is a work of art the effect is permanent.

Meanwhile twenty or thirty generations have died stupefied by it. The genius of the colored would have started singing it off before any one of them was twelve.

Obviously the trick of postponement needs to knock one leg from under the table so that it will wobble—to keep everyone scurrying about for a prop instead of sitting down at the table and eating. Finally they put a living caryatid in the form of a Mexican-Spanish-Russian-Chinese peasant under the loose corner to take the brunt of it on his shoulders while SOMEBODY gorges.

Why are we dull other than that the best minds are inoperative, blocked by the half minds.

Obviously—"It's *his* money and a man can do what he pleases with his own money." "He doesn't really *own* the money, my dear. After all, you must know *that*. It's really in all our pockets . . ." and "$500,000 may seem impressive to you but we are in the habit of dealing with a weekly balance of $35,000,000, or more, so that to me $500,000 might be something easily overlooked."

Obviously—a man of quite ordinary intelligence sees at once what is at stake. Somebody ought to offer a prize.

Obviously—the economic imbecilities of the age are reflected in everything save the artist's judgments:

The political, the social. Fascism is helpless without compromise with capital-credit just as Russia is the same. Both come out of the same pot. The revolution that will be a revolution is still to be made. It will have a complexion of the great tradition, cannot have any other, which capital-credit traduces in the name of "masterpieces," to them no more than conspicuous waste.

"What heavenly blue on those Gutenberg Bibles! We haven't anything like that nowadays."

Obviously—the Church sold out in 325 A.D. at the council of Nicaea. The writing shows it—the secrecy and all the rest of it when compared with the directness and clarity of the

first century. Leo shows his good heart—or showed his good heart in the encyclical *Rerum Organum* addressed to Spain forty years ago, in which he warned of what was to happen, and has since happened! if the peasants were to be continually robbed as they were being robbed at that time under the Church's dominion. Splendid! But it does not for a moment wipe out the systematic economic policy upon which the institution of which A. Vetti is the official head was founded.

Invest in the N. Y. market and count on inside information to get your funds out before the crash without comment on the character of the market. These things are obviously marked with their origin.

Obviously every little cleric who happens to bleat and consider himself an artist because of his association with the Church has no title whatever to consider himself so for that reason. Rather the Church is likely to be a insuperable barrier today if the major function of the artist—to lift to the imagination and give new currency to the sensual world at our feet —is envisaged.

Obviously the artist cannot ignore the economic dominance in his time. He is all but suppressed by it—which should mean something—but never converted. On the contrary he attacks and his attack is basic, the only basic one.

It was not I or even my day that brought the Church into the discussion touching poetry but by their adoption of its authority, those seeking order from it, do not by that remove the question of its revelance there.

Modern painting and the State have divorced themselves from clerical alliances to good effect—good being the inclusive sweep of the great tradition. If poetry is to be tied into it anew it should show in the structural breadth of its receptors—not a narrowing lilt and a content of "mysteries."

All formal religions, in spite of their varieties, embrace one final and damning evil; founded on the immanence of a religious experience, they tend rather to be monopolies using

religion to bring a man under an economic yoke of one sort or another for the perpetuation of a priesthood—largely predatory in character.

The simple teaching, "Give all thy goods to feed the poor" was in spite of great examples, such as that of St. Francis, turned into—the draining of every cent from the Russian serfs, the Mexican peon and the Spanish peasantry to their everlasting misery and impoverishment—murders, wars. No wonder they hate the Church.

When Chamberlain in England—while the poor man, poor in ways not to be more than half-guessed, starves—plays for the dominance of the banking class before the obvious dread that were Italy and Germany and Franco, *not*-triumphant England must, of necessity, reform her internal economy. To which the Church supported by the Bishop Mannings of America in pay of those who have to build his heap of stone—sends out a large mouthed, Aye!

A curious anomaly is the suppression of the Jew for practical reasons—on borrowed ethical grounds—today in Germany as throughout past history. But a Jew as a Jew does not exist. He is a man, an oriental somewhat characterized by certain manners and physiologic peculiarities perhaps, but no different from any others in that. But a Jew as party to a tribal-religious cult is something else again. Judaism in *that* sense, he must not forget, is precisely the equivalent of *that* aspect of Fascism today.

Communism is the obverse of that facet. And in spite of the poetic and theoretical solidity of Marxist teaching the effects, so far, do not warrant unthinking obedience to it.

How will the artist show the side he has taken? as a man? By subjecting himself, like Lorca, to attack—to be dragged gutless through Granada and burned with his books on the public square? Or to be an exile like Thomas Mann?

All I say is that, unless all this is already in his writing—in the materials and structure of it—he might better have been a cowhand. The effect of the aristocratic revolution that the

artist knows is necessary and intended—must be in his work, in the structure of his work. Everything else is secondary, but for the artist *that*, which has made all the greatest art one and permanent, that continual reassertion of structure, is first.

The mutability of the truth, Ibsen said it. Jefferson said it. We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in a new mode. There has to be new poetry. But the thing is that the change, the greater material, the altered structure of the inevitable revolution must be *in* the poem, in it. Made of it. It must shine in the structural body of it.

There is a bookish quality too patent in Communism today, taken from a book that appears not to have been properly related to its object—man. Raw. And I'll back, as I regret, the faces of some of my young compatriots, with scars on their backs and faces, from policeman's fists and clubs, showing the part they have taken in strikes. They've seen the froth at the mouths of the men who club women in the belly with night sticks and seen how they bare their upper teeth as they attack. But—when I look at their poems, I wonder. The structure is weak.

The poet is a special sort of fool. He only has the one talent in most cases which can't be spent to effect but once.

Think of a work of art—a poem—as a structure. A form is a structure consciously adopted for an effect. How then can a man seriously speak of order when the most that he is doing is to impose a structural character taken over from the habits of the past upon his content? This is sheer bastardy. Where in that is the work, the creation which gives the artist his status as a man? And what is a man saying of moment as an artist when he neglects his major opportunity, to build his living, complex day into the body of his poem?

Unless he discovers and builds anew he is betraying his contemporaries in all other fields of intellectual realization and achievement and must bring their contempt upon himself and his fellow artists.

Who cares anything about propaganda, about alliances with the broad front of a life that seeks to assert itself in any age when lived to the hilt—unless the best thought is built newly, in a comprehensive form of the day, into the structure of the work? And if such a basis is accepted then, indeed, propaganda can be thoroughly welcomed. Built into the structure of a work, propaganda is always acceptable for by that it has been transmuted into the materials of art. It has no life unless to live or die judged by an artist's standards.

But if, imposing an exposed, a depleted, restrictive and unrealized form, the propagandist thinks he can make what he has to say convincing by merely filling in that wooden structure with some ideas he wants to put over—he turns up not only as no artist but a weak fool.

Whitman, a key man to whom I keep returning, was tremendously important in the history of modern poetry. But who has seen through his structure to a clear reason for his values and his limitations? No one that I have encountered. They begin to speak of his derivations, of his personal habits, of his putative children. For God's sake! He broke through the deadness of copied forms which keep shouting above everything that wants to get said today drowning out one man with the accumulated weight of a thousand voices in the past—re-establishing the tyrannies of the past, the very tyrannies that we are seeking to diminish. The structure of the old is active, it says no! to everything in propaganda and poetry that wants to say yes. Whitman broke through that. That was basic and good.