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ENGLISH

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PREFACE.

The drama contained in the following pages has nothing to commend it to the attention or the good will of the public. It has not, to attract the interest of political disputants, the advantage of the veto of the official censorship, nor even, to win for it at the outset the literary sympathy of men of taste, the honour of having been formally rejected by an infallible reading committee.

It presents itself, therefore, to the public gaze, naked and friendless, like the infirm man of the Gospel—*solus, pauper, nudus*.

Not without some hesitation, moreover, did the author determine to burden his drama with a preface. Such things are usually of very little interest to the reader. He inquires concerning the talent of a writer rather than concerning his point of view; and in determining whether a work is good or bad, it matters little to him upon what ideas it is based, or in what sort of mind it germinated. One seldom inspects the cellars of a house after visiting its salons, and when one eats the fruit of a tree, one cares but little about its root.

On the other hand, notes and prefaces are sometimes a convenient method of adding to the weight of a book, and of magnifying, in appearance at least, the importance of a work; as a matter of tactics this is not dissimilar to that of the general who, to make his battlefront more imposing, puts everything, even his baggage-trains, in the line. And then, while critics fall foul of the preface and scholars of the notes, it may happen that the work itself will escape

them, passing uninjured between their crossfires, as an army extricates itself from a dangerous position between two skirmishes of outposts and rear-guards.

These reasons, weighty as they may seem, are not those which influenced the author. This volume did not need to be *inflated*, it was already too stout by far. Furthermore, and the author does not know why it is so, his prefaces, frank and ingenuous as they are, have always served rather to compromise him with the critics than to shield him. Far from being staunch and trusty bucklers, they have played him a trick like that played in a battle by an unusual and conspicuous uniform, which, calling attention to the soldier who wears it, attracts all the blows and is proof against none.

Considerations of an altogether different sort acted upon the author. It seemed to him that, although in fact, one seldom inspects the cellars of a building for pleasure, one is not sorry sometimes to examine its foundations. He will, therefore, give himself over once more, with a preface, to the wrath of the *feuilletonists*. *Che sara, sara*. He has never given much though to the fortune of his works, and he is but little appalled by dread of the literary *what will people say*. In the discussion now raging, in which the theatre and the schools, the public and the academies, are at daggers drawn, one will hear, perhaps, not without some interest, the voice of a solitary *apprentice* of nature and truth, who has withdrawn betimes from the literary world, for pure love of letters, and who offers good faith in default of good taste, sincere conviction in default of talent, study in default of learning.

He will confine himself, however, to general considerations concerning the art, without the slightest attempt to smooth the path of his own work, without pretending to write an indictment or a plea, against or for any person whomsoever. An attack upon or defence of his book is of less importance to him than to anybody else. Nor is

personal controversy agreeable to him. It is always a pitiful spectacle to see two hostile self-esteems crossing swords. He protests, therefore, beforehand against every interpretation of his ideas, every personal application of his words, saying with the Spanish fablist:—

Quien haga aplicaciones
Con su pan se lo coma.

In truth, several of the leading champions of "sound literary doctrines" have done him the honour to throw the gauntlet to him, even in his profound obscurity—to him, a simple, imperceptible spectator of this curious contest. He will not have the presumption to pick it up. In the following pages will be found the observations with which he might oppose them—there will be found his sling and his stone; but others, if they choose, may hurl them at the head of the classical Goliaths.

This said, let us pass on.

Let us set out from a fact. The same type of civilization, or to use a more exact, although more extended expression, the same society, has not always inhabited the earth. The human race as a whole has grown, has developed, has matured, like one of ourselves. It was once a child, it was once a man; we are now looking on at its impressive old age. Before the epoch which modern society has dubbed "ancient," there was another epoch which the ancients called "fabulous," but which it would be more accurate to call "primitive." Behold then three great successive orders of things in civilization, from its origin down to our days. Now, as poetry is always superposed upon society, we propose to try to demonstrate, from the form of its society, what the character of the poetry must have been in those three great ages of the world—primitive times, ancient times, modern times.

In primitive times, when man awakes in a world that is newly created, poetry awakes with him. In the face of the marvellous things that dazzle and intoxicate him, his first

speech is a hymn simply. He is still so close to God that all his meditations are ecstatic, all his dreams are visions. His bosom swells, he sings as he breathes. His lyre has but three strings—God, the soul, creation; but this threefold mystery envelopes everything, this threefold idea embraces everything. The earth is still almost deserted. There are families, but no nations; patriarchs, but no kings. Each race exists at its own pleasure; no property, no laws, no contentions, no wars. Everything belongs to each and to all. Society is a community. Man is restrained in nought. He leads that nomadic pastoral life with which all civilizations begin, and which is so well adapted to solitary contemplation, to fanciful reverie. He follows every suggestion, he goes hither and thither, at random. His thought, like his life, resembles a could that changes its shape and its direction according to the wind that drives it. Such is the first man, such is the first poet. He is young, he is cynical. Prayer is his sole religion, the ode is his only form of poetry.

This ode, this poem of primitive times, is Genesis.

By slow degrees, however, this youth of the world passes away. All the spheres progress; the family becomes a tribe, the tribe becomes a nation. Each of these groups of men camps about a common centre, and kingdoms appear. The social instinct succeeds the nomadic instinct. The camp gives place to the city, the tent to the palace, the ark to the temple. The chiefs of these nascent states are still shepherds, it is true, but shepherds of nations; the pastoral staff has already assumed the shape of a sceptre. Everything tends to become stationary and fixed. Religion takes on a definite shape; prayer is governed by rites; dogma sets bounds to worship. Thus the priest and king share the paternity of the people; thus theocratic society succeeds the patriarchal community.

Meanwhile the nations are beginning to be packed too closely on the earth's surface. They annoy and jostle one

another; hence the clash of empires—war. They overflow upon another; hence, the migrations of nations—voyages. Poetry reflects these momentous events; from ideas it proceeds to things. It sings of ages, of nations, of empires. It becomes epic, it gives birth to Homer.

Homer, in truth, dominates the society of ancient times. In that society, all is simple, all is epic. Poetry is religion, religion is law. The virginity of the earlier age is succeeded by the chastity of the later. A sort of solemn gravity is everywhere noticeable, in private manners no less than in public. The nations have retained nothing of the wandering life of the earlier time, save respect for the stranger and the traveller. The family has a fatherland; everything is connected therewith; it has the cult of the house and the cult of the tomb.

We say again, such a civilization can find its one expression only in the epic. The epic will assume diverse forms, but will never lose its specific character. Pindar is more priestlike than patriarchal, more epic than lyrical. If the chroniclers, the necessary accompaniments of this second age of the world, set about collecting traditions and begin to reckon by centuries, they labour to no purpose—chronology cannot expel poesy; history remains an epic. Herodotus is a Homer.

But it is in the ancient tragedy, above all, that the epic breaks out at every turn. It mounts the Greek stage without losing aught, so to speak, of its immeasurable, gigantic proportions. Its characters are still heroes, demigods, gods; its themes are visions, oracles, fatality; its scenes are battles, funeral rites, catalogues. That which the rhapsodists formerly sang, the actors declaim—that is the whole difference.

There is something more. When the whole plot, the whole spectacle of the epic poem have passed to the stage, the Chorus takes all that remains. The Chorus annotates the tragedy, encourages the heroes, gives descriptions,

summons and expels the daylight, rejoices, laments, sometimes furnishes the scenery, explains the moral bearing of the subject, flatters the listening assemblage. Now, what is the Chorus, this anomalous character standing between the spectacle and the spectator, if it be not the poet completing his epic?

The theatre of the ancients is, like their dramas, huge, pontifical, epic. It is capable of holding thirty thousand spectators; the plays are given in the open air, in bright sunlight; the performances last all day. The actors disguise their voices, wear masks, increase their stature; they make themselves gigantic, like their rôles. The stage is immense. It may represent at the same moment both the interior and the exterior of a temple, a palace, a camp, a city. Upon it, vast spectacles are displayed. There is—we cite only from memory—Prometheus on his mountain; there is Antigone, at the top of a tower, seeking her brother Polynices in the hostile army (*The Phœnicians*); there is Evadne hurling herself from a cliff into the flames where the body of Capaneus is burning (*The Suppliants* of Euripides); there is a ship sailing into port and landing fifty princesses with their retinues (*The Suppliants* of Æschylus). Architecture, poetry, everything assumes a monumental character. In all antiquity there is nothing more solemn, more majestic. Its history and its religion are mingled on its stage. Its first actors are priests; its scenic performances are religious ceremonies, national festivals.

One last observation, which completes our demonstration of the epic character of this epoch: in the subjects which it treats, no less than in the forms it adopts, tragedy simply re-echoes the epic. All the ancient tragic authors derive their plots from Homer. The same fabulous exploits, the same catastrophes, the same heroes. One and all drink from the Homeric stream. The Iliad and Odyssey are always in evidence. Like Achilles dragging Hector at his chariot-wheel, the Greek tragedy circles about Troy.

But the age of the epic draws near its end. Like the society that it represents, this form of poetry wears itself out revolving upon itself. Rome reproduces Greece, Virgil copies Homer, and, as if to make a becoming end, epic poetry expires in the last parturition.

It was time. Another era is about to begin, for the world and for poetry.

A spiritual religion, supplanting the material and external paganism, makes its way to the heart of the ancient society, kills it, and deposits, in that corpse of a decrepit civilization, the germ of modern civilization. This religion is complete, because it is true; between its dogma and its cult, it embraces a deep-rooted moral. And first of all, as a fundamental truth, it teaches man that he has two lives to live, one ephemeral, the other immortal; one on earth, the other in heaven. It shows him that he, like his destiny, is twofold: that there is in him an animal and an intellect, a body and a soul; in a word, that he is the point of intersection, the common link of the two chains of beings which embrace all creation—of the chain of material beings and the chain of incorporeal beings; the first starting from the rock to arrive at man, the second starting from man to end at God.

A portion of these truths had perhaps been suspected by certain wise men of ancient times, but their full, broad, luminous revelation dates from the Gospels. The pagan schools walked in darkness, feeling their way, clinging to falsehoods as well as to truths in their haphazard journeying. Some of their philosophers occasionally cast upon certain subjects feeble gleams which illuminated but one side and made the darkness of the other side more profound. Hence all the phantoms created by ancient philosophy. None but divine wisdom was capable of substituting an even and all-embracing light for all those flickering rays of human wisdom. Pythagoras, Epicurus,

Socrates, Plato, are torches; Christ is the glorious light of day.

Nothing could be more material, indeed, than the ancient theogony. Far from proposing, as Christianity does, to separate the spirit from the body, it ascribes form and features to everything, even to impalpable essences, even to the intelligence. In it everything is visible, tangible, fleshly. Its gods need a cloud to conceal themselves from men's eyes. They eat, drink, and sleep. They are wounded and their blood flows; they are maimed, and lo! they limp forever after. That religion has gods and halves of gods. Its thunderbolts are forged on an anvil, and among other things three rays of twisted rain (*tres imbris torti radios*) enter into their composition. Its Jupiter suspends the world by a golden chain; its sun rides in a four-horse chariot; its hell is a precipice the brink of which is marked on the globe; its heaven is a mountain.

Thus paganism, which moulded all creations from the same clay, minimizes divinity and magnifies man. Homer's heroes are of almost the same stature as his gods. Ajax defies Jupiter, Achilles is the peer of Mars. Christianity on the contrary, as we have seen, draws a broad line of division between spirit and matter. It places an abyss between the soul and the body, an abyss between man and God.

At this point—to omit nothing from the sketch upon which we have ventured—we will call attention to the fact that, with Christianity, and by its means, there entered into the mind of the nations a new sentiment, unknown to the ancients and marvellously developed among moderns, a sentiment which is more than gravity and less than sadness —melancholy. In truth, might not the heart of man, hitherto deadened by religions purely hierarchical and sacerdotal, awake and feel springing to life within it some unexpected faculty, under the breath of a religion that is human because it is divine, a religion which makes of the poor man's prayer, the rich man's wealth, religion of equality,

liberty and charity? Might it not see all things in a new light, since the Gospel had shown it the soul through the senses, eternity behind life?

Moreover, at that very moment the world was undergoing so complete a revolution that it was impossible that there should not be a revolution in men's minds. Hitherto the catastrophes of empires had rarely reached the hearts of the people; it was kings who fell, majesties that vanished, nothing more. The lightning struck only in the upper regions, and, as we have already pointed out, events seemed to succeed one another with all the solemnity of the epic. In the ancient society, the individual occupied so lowly a place that, to strike him, adversity must needs descend to his family. So that he knew little of misfortune outside of domestic sorrows. It was an almost unheard-of thing that the general disasters of the state should disarrange his life. But the instant that Christian society became firmly established, the ancient continent was thrown into confusion. Everything was pulled up by the roots. Events, destined to destroy ancient Europe and to construct a new Europe, trod upon one another's heels in their ceaseless rush, and drove the nations pell-mell, some into the light, others into darkness. So much uproar ensued that it was impossible that some echoes of it should not reach the hearts of the people. It was more than an echo, it was a reflex blow. Man, withdrawing within himself in presence of these imposing vicissitudes, began to take pity upon mankind, to reflect upon the bitter disillusionments of life. Of this sentiment, which to Cato the heathen was despair, Christianity fashioned melancholy.

At the same time was born the spirit of scrutiny and curiosity. These great catastrophes were also great spectacles, impressive cataclysms. It was the North hurling itself upon the South; the Roman world changing shape; the last convulsive throes of a whole universe in the death agony. As soon as that world was dead, lo! clouds of

rhetoricians, grammarians, sophists, swooped down like insects on its immense body. People saw them swarming and heard them buzzing in that seat of putrefaction. They vied with one another in scrutinizing, commenting, disputing. Each limb, each muscle, each fibre of the huge prostrate body was twisted and turned in every direction. Surely it must have been a keen satisfaction to those anatomists of the mind, to be able, at their début, to make experiments on a large scale; to have a dead society to dissect, for their first "subject."

Thus we see melancholy and meditation, the demons of analysis and controversy, appear at the same moment, and, as it were, hand-in-hand. At one extremity of this era of transition is Longinus, at the other St. Augustine. We must beware of casting a disdainful eye upon that epoch wherein all that has since borne fruit was contained in germs; upon that epoch whose least eminent writers, if we may be pardoned a vulgar but expressive phrase, made fertilizer for the harvest that was to follow. The Middle Ages were grafted on the Lower Empire.

Behold, then, a new religion, a new society; upon this twofold foundation there must inevitably spring up a new poetry. Previously—we beg pardon for setting forth a result which the reader has probably already foreseen from what has been said above—previously, following therein the course pursued by the ancient polytheism and philosophy, the purely epic muse of the ancients had studied nature in only a single aspect, casting aside without pity almost everything in art which, in the world subjected to its imitation, had not relation to a certain type of beauty. A type which was magnificent at first, but, as always happens with everything systematic, became in later times false, trivial and conventional. Christianity leads poetry to the truth. Like it, the modern muse will see things in a higher and broader light. It will realize that everything in creation is not humanly *beautiful*, that the ugly exists beside the

beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light. It will ask itself if the narrow and relative sense of the artist should prevail over the infinite, absolute sense of the Creator; if it is for man to correct God; if a mutilated nature will be the more beautiful for the mutilation; if art has the right to duplicate, so to speak, man, life, creation; if things will progress better when their muscles and their vigour have been taken from them; if, in short, to be incomplete is the best way to be harmonious. Then it is that, with its eyes fixed upon events that are both laughable and redoubtable, and under the influence of that spirit of Christian melancholy and philosophical criticism which we described a moment ago, poetry will take a great step, a decisive step, a step which, like the upheaval of an earthquake, will change the whole face of the intellectual world. It will set about doing as nature does, mingling in its creations—but without confounding them—darkness and light, the grotesque and the sublime; in other words, the body and the soul, the beast and the intellect; for the starting-point of religion is always the starting-point of poetry. All things are connected.

Thus, then, we see a principle unknown to the ancients, a new type, introduced in poetry; and as an additional element in anything modifies the whole of the thing, a new form of the art is developed. This type is the grotesque; its new form is comedy.

And we beg leave to dwell upon this point; for we have now indicated the significant feature, the fundamental difference which, in our opinion, separates modern from ancient art, the present form from the defunct form; or, to use less definite but more popular terms, *romantic* literature from *classical* literature.

"At last!" exclaim the people who for some time past *have seen what we were coming at*, "at last we have you—you are caught in the act. So then you put forward the ugly as a

type for imitation, you make the *grotesque* an element of art. But the graces; but good taste! Don't you know that art should correct nature? that we must *ennoble* art? that we must *select?* Did the ancients ever exhibit the ugly or the grotesque? Did they ever mingle comedy and tragedy? The example of the ancients, gentlemen! and Aristotle, too; and Boileau; and La Harpe. Upon my word!"

These arguments are sound, doubtless, and, above all, of extraordinary novelty. But it is not our place to reply to them. We are constructing no system here—God protect us from systems! We are stating a fact. We are a historian, not a critic. Whether the fact is agreeable or not matters little; it is a fact. Let us resume, therefore, and try to prove that it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born—so complex, so diverse in its forms, so inexhaustible in its creations; and therein directly opposed to the uniform simplicity of the genius of the ancients; let us show that that is the point from which we must set out to establish the real and radical difference between the two forms of literature.

Not that it is strictly true that comedy and the grotesque were entirely unknown to the ancients. In fact, such a thing would be impossible. Nothing grows without a root; the germ of the second epoch always exists in the first. In the Iliad Thersites and Vulcan furnish comedy, one to the mortals, the other to the gods. There is too much nature and originality in the Greek tragedy for there not to be an occasional touch of comedy in it. For example, to cite only what we happen to recall, the scene between Menelaus and the portress of the palace (*Helen*, Act I), and the scene of the Phrygian (*Orestes*, Act IV). The Tritons, the Satyrs, the Cyclops are grotesque; Polyphemus is a terrifying, Silenus a farcical grotesque.

But one feels that this part of the art is still in its infancy. The epic, which at this period imposes its form on everything, the epic weighs heavily upon it and stifles it.

The ancient grotesque is timid and forever trying to keep out of sight. It is plain that it is not on familiar ground, because it is not in its natural surroundings. It conceals itself as much as it can. The Satyrs, the Tritons, and the Sirens are hardly abnormal in form. The Fates and the Harpies are hideous in their attributes rather than in feature; the Furies are beautiful, and are called *Eumenides*, that is to say, *gentle, beneficent*. There is a veil of grandeur or of divinity over other grotesques. Polyphemus is a giant, Midas a king, Silenus a god.

Thus comedy is almost imperceptible in the great epic *ensemble* of ancient times. What is the barrow of Thespis beside the Olympian chariots? What are Aristophanes and Plautus, beside the Homeric colossi, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides? Homer bears them along with him, as Hercules bore the pygmies, hidden in his lion's skin?

In the idea of men of modern times, however, the grotesque plays an enormous part. It is found everywhere; on the one hand it creates the abnormal and the horrible, on the other the comic and the burlesque. It fastens upon religion a thousand original superstitions, upon poetry a thousand picturesque fancies. It is the grotesque which scatters lavishly, in air, water, earth, fire, those myriads of intermediary creatures which we find all alive in the popular traditions of the Middle Ages; it is the grotesque which impels the ghastly antics of the witches' revels, which gives Satan his horns, his cloven foot and his bat's wings. It is the grotesque, still the grotesque, which now casts into the Christian hell the frightful faces which the severe genius of Dante and Milton will evoke, and again peoples it with those laughter-moving figures amid which Callot, the burlesque Michelangelo, will disport himself. If it passes from the world of imagination to the real world, it unfolds an inexhaustible supply of parodies of mankind. Creations of its fantasy are the Scaramouches, Crispins and Harlequins, grinning silhouettes of man, types altogether

unknown to serious-minded antiquity, although they originated in classic Italy. It is the grotesque, lastly, which, colouring the same drama with the fancies of the North and of the South in turn, exhibits Sganarelle capering about Don Juan and Mephistopheles crawling about Faust.

And how free and open it is in its bearing! how boldly it brings into relief all the strange forms which the preceding age had timidly wrapped in swaddling-clothes! Ancient poetry, compelled to provide the lame Vulcan with companions, tried to disguise their deformity by distributing it, so to speak, upon gigantic proportions. Modern genius retains this myth of the supernatural smiths, but gives it an entirely different character and one which makes it even more striking; it changes the giants to dwarfs and makes gnomes of the Cyclops. With like originality, it substitutes for the somewhat commonplace Lernæan hydra all the local dragons of our national legends —the gargoyle of Rouen, the *gra-ouilli* of Metz, the *chair sallée* of Troyes, the *drée* of Montlhéry, the *tarasque* of Tarascon—monsters of forms so diverse, whose outlandish names are an additional attribute. All these creations draw from their own nature that energetic and significant expression before which antiquity seems sometimes to have recoiled. Certain it is that the Greek Eumenides are much less horrible, and consequently less *true*, than the witches in *Macbeth*. Pluto is not the devil.

In our opinion a most novel book might be written upon the employment of the grotesque in the arts. One might point out the powerful effects the moderns have obtained from that fruitful type, upon which narrow-minded criticism continues to wage war even in our own day. It may be that we shall be led by our subject to call attention in passing to some features of this vast picture. We will simply say here that, as a means of contrast with the sublime, the grotesque is, in our view, the richest source that nature can offer art. Rubens so understood it, doubtless, when it

pleased him to introduce the hideous features of a court dwarf amid his exhibitions of royal magnificence, coronations and splendid ceremonial. The universal beauty which the ancients solemnly laid upon everything, is not without monotony; the same impression repeated again and again may prove fatiguing at last. Sublime upon sublime scarcely presents a contrast, and we need a little rest from everything, even the beautiful. On the other hand, the grotesque seems to be a halting-place, a mean term, a starting-point whence one rises toward the beautiful with a fresher and keener perception. The salamander gives relief to the water-sprite; the gnome heightens the charm of the sylph.

And it would be true also to say that contact with the abnormal has imparted to the modern sublime a something purer, grander, more sublime, in short, than the beautiful of the ancients; and that is as it should be. When art is consistent with itself, it guides everything more surely to its goal. If the Homeric Elysium is a long, long way from the ethereal charm, the angelic pleasureableness of Milton's Paradise, it is because under Eden there is a hell far more terrible than the heathen Tartarus. Do you think that Francesca da Rimini and Beatrice would be so enchanting in a poet who should not confine us in the tower of Hunger and compel us to share Ugolino's revolting repast? Dante would have less charm, if he had less power. Have the fleshly naiads, the muscular Tritons, the wanton Zephyrs, the diaphanous transparency of our water-sprites and sylphs? Is it not because the modern imagination does not fear to picture the ghastly forms of vampires, ogres, ghouls, snake-charmers and jinns prowling about graveyards, that it can give to its fairies that incorporeal shape, that purity of essence, of which the heathen nymphs fall so far short? The antique Venus is beautiful, admirable, no doubt; but what has imparted to Jean Goujon's faces that weird, tender, ethereal delicacy? What has given them

that unfamiliar suggestion of life and grandeur, if not the proximity of the rough and powerful sculptures of the Middle Ages?

If the thread of our argument has not been broken in the reader's mind by these necessary digressions—which in truth, might be developed much further—he has realized, doubtless, how powerfully the grotesque—that germ of comedy, fostered by the modern muse—grew in extent and importance as soon as it was transplanted to a soil more propitious than paganism and the Epic. In truth, in the new poetry, while the sublime represents the soul as it is, purified by Christian morality, the grotesque plays the part of the human beast. The former type, delivered of all impure alloy, has as its attributes all the charms, all the graces, all the beauties; it must be able some day to create Juliet, Desdemona, Ophelia. The latter assumes all the absurdities, all the infirmities, all the blemishes. In this partition of mankind and of creation, to it fall the passions, vices, crimes; it is sensuous, fawning, greedy, miserly, false, incoherent, hypocritical; it is, in turn, Iago, Tartuffe, Basile, Polonius, Harpagon, Bartholo, Falstaff, Scapin, Figaro. The beautiful has but one type, the ugly has a thousand. The fact is that the beautiful, humanly speaking, is merely form considered in its simplest aspect, in its most perfect symmetry, in its most entire harmony with our make-up. Thus the *ensemble* that it offers us is always complete, but restricted like ourselves. What we call the ugly, on the contrary, is a detail of a great whole which eludes us, and which is in harmony, not with man but with all creation. That is why it constantly presents itself to us in new but incomplete aspects.

It is interesting to study the first appearance and the progress of the grotesque in modern times. At first, it is an invasion, an irruption, an overflow, as of a torrent that has burst its banks. It rushes through the expiring Latin literature, imparts some coloring to Persius, Petronius and

Juvenal, and leaves behind it the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius. Thence it diffuses itself through the imaginations of the new nations that are remodelling Europe. It abounds in the work of the fabulists, the chroniclers, the romancists. We see it make its way from the South to the North. It disports itself in the dreams of the Teutonic nations, and at the same time vivifies with its breath the admirable Spanish *romanceros*, a veritable Iliad of the age of chivalry. For example, it is the grotesque which describes thus, in the *Roman de la Rose*, an august ceremonial, the election of a king:—

"A long-shanked knave they chose, I wis,
Of all their men the boniest."

More especially it imposes its characteristic qualities upon that wonderful architecture which, in the Middle Ages, takes the place of all the arts. It affixes its mark on the façades of cathedrals, frames its hells and purgatories in the ogive arches of great doorways, portrays them in brilliant hues on window-glass, exhibits its monsters, its bull-dogs, its imps about capitals, along friezes, on the edges of roofs. It flaunts itself in numberless shapes on the wooden façades of houses, on the stone façades of châteaux, on the marble façades of palaces. From the arts it makes its way into the national manners, and while it stirs applause from the people for the *graciosos* of comedy, it gives to the kings court-jesters. Later, in the age of etiquette, it will show us Scarron on the very edge of Louis the Fourteenth's bed. Meanwhile, it decorates coats-of-arms, and draws upon knights' shields the symbolic hieroglyphs of feudalism. From the manners, it makes its way into the laws; numberless strange customs attest its passage through the institutions of the Middle Ages. Just as it represented Thespis, smeared with wine-lees, leaping in her tomb, it dances with the *Basoche* on the famous marble table which served at the same time as a stage for the popular farces and for the royal banquets. Finally, having

made its way into the arts, the manners, and the laws, it enters even the Church. In every Catholic city we see it organizing some one of those curious ceremonies, those strange processions, wherein religion is attended by all varieties of superstition—the sublime attended by all the forms of the grotesque. To paint it in one stroke, so great is its vigour, its energy, its creative sap, at the dawn of letters, that it casts, at the outset, upon the threshold of modern poetry, three burlesque Homers: Ariosto in Italy, Cervantes in Spain, Rabelais in France.

It would be mere surplusage to dwell further upon the influence of the grotesque in the third civilization. Everything tends to show its close creative alliance with the beautiful in the so-called "romantic" period. Even among the simplest popular legends there are none which do not somewhere, with an admirable instinct, solve this mystery of modern art. Antiquity could not have produced *Beauty and the Beast.*

It is true that at the period at which we have arrived the predominance of the grotesque over the sublime in literature is clearly indicated. But it is a spasm of reaction, an eager thirst for novelty, which is but temporary; it is an initial wave which gradually recedes. The type of the beautiful will soon resume its rights and its rôle, which is not to exclude the other principle, but to prevail over it. It is time that the grotesque should be content with a corner of the picture in Murillo's royal frescoes, in the sacred pages of Veronese; content to be introduced in two marvellous *Last Judgments*, in which art will take a just pride, in the scene of fascination and horror with which Michelangelo will embellish the Vatican, in those awe-inspiring representations of the fall of man which Rubens will throw upon the arches of the Cathedral of Antwerp. The time has come when the balance between the two principles is to be established. A man, a poet-king, *poeta soverano*, as Dante calls Homer, is about to adjust

everything. The two rival genii combine their flames, and thence issues Shakespeare.

We have now reached the poetic culmination of modern times. Shakespeare is the drama; and the drama, which with the same breath moulds the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the absurd, tragedy and comedy—the drama is the distinguishing characteristic of the third epoch of poetry, of the literature of the present day.

Thus, to sum up hurriedly the facts that we have noted thus far, poetry has three periods, each of which corresponds to an epoch of civilization: the ode, the epic, and the drama. Primitive times are lyrical, ancient times epical, modern times dramatic. The ode sings of eternity, the epic imparts solemnity to history, the drama depicts life. The characteristic of the first poetry is ingenuousness, of the second, simplicity, of the third, truth. The rhapsodists mark the transition from the lyric to the epic poets, as do the romancists that from the lyric to the dramatic poets. Historians appear in the second period, chroniclers and critics in the third. The characters of the ode are colossi—Adam, Cain, Noah; those of the epic are giants—Achilles, Atreus, Orestes; those of the drama are men—Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello. The ode lives upon the ideal, the epic upon the grandiose, the drama upon the real. Lastly, this threefold poetry flows from three great sources—The Bible, Homer, Shakespeare.

Such then—and we confine ourselves herein to noting a single result—such are the diverse aspects of thought in the different epochs of mankind and of civilization. Such are its three faces, in youth, in manhood, in old age. Whether one examines one literature by itself or all literatures *en masse*, one will always reach the same result: the lyric poets before the epic poets, the epic poets before the dramatic poets. In France, Malherbe before Chapelain, Chapelain before Corneille; in ancient Greece, Orpheus before Homer, Homer before Æschylus; in the first of all

books, *Genesis* before *Kings*, *Kings* before *Job;* or to come back to that monumental scale of all ages of poetry, which we ran over a moment since, The Bible before the *Iliad*, the *Iliad* before Shakespeare.

In a word, civilization begins by singing of its dreams, then narrates its doings, and lastly, sets about describing what it thinks. It is, let us say in passing, because of this last, that the drama, combining the most opposed qualities, may be at the same time full of profundity and full of relief, philosophical and picturesque.

It would be logical to add here that everything in nature and in life passes through these three phases, the lyric, the epic, and the dramatic, because everything is born, acts, and dies. If it were not absurd to confound the fantastic conceits of the imagination with the stern deductions of the reasoning faculty, a poet might say that the rising of the sun, for example, is a hymn, noon-day a brilliant epic, and sunset a gloomy drama wherein day and night, life and death, contend for mastery. But that would be poetry—folly, perhaps—and *what does it prove?*

Let us hold to the facts marshalled above; let us supplement them, too, by an important observation, namely that we have in no wise pretended to assign exclusive limits to the three epochs of poetry, but simply to set forth their predominant characteristics. The Bible, that divine lyric monument, contains in germ, as we suggested a moment ago, an epic and a drama—*Kings* and *Job*. In the Homeric poems one is conscious of a clinging reminiscence of lyric poetry and of a beginning of dramatic poetry. Ode and drama meet in the epic. There is a touch of all in each; but in each there exists a generative element to which all the other elements give place, and which imposes its own character upon the whole.

The drama is complete poetry. The ode and the epic contain it only in germ; it contains both of them in a state of high development, and epitomizes both. Surely, he who said:

"The French have not the epic brain," said a true and clever thing; if he had said, "The moderns," the clever remark would have been profound. It is beyond question, however, that there is epic genius in that marvellous *Athalie*, so exalted and so simple in its sublimity that the royal century was unable to comprehend it. It is certain, too, that the series of Shakespeare's chronicle dramas presents a grand epic aspect. But it is lyric poetry above all that befits the drama; it never embarrasses it, adapts itself to all its caprices, disports itself in all forms, sometimes sublime as in Ariel, sometimes grotesque as in Caliban. Our era being above all else dramatic, is for that very reason eminently lyric. There is more than one connection between the beginning and the end; the sunset has some features of the sunrise; the old man becomes a child once more. But this second childhood is not like the first; it is as melancholy as the other is joyous. It is the same with lyric poetry. Dazzling, dreamy, at the dawn of civilization, it reappears, solemn and pensive, at its decline. The Bible opens joyously with *Genesis* and comes to a close with the threatening *Apocalypse*. The modern ode is still inspired, but is no longer ignorant. It meditates more than it scrutinizes; its musing is melancholy. We see, by its painful labour, that the muse has taken the drama for her mate.

To make clear by a metaphor the ideas that we have ventured to put forth, we will compare early lyric poetry to a placid lake which reflects the clouds and stars; the epic is the stream which flows from the lake, and rushes on, reflecting its banks, forests, fields and cities, until it throws itself into the ocean of the drama. Like the lake, the drama reflects the sky; like the stream, it reflects its banks; but it alone has tempests and measureless depths.

The drama, then, is the goal to which everything in modern poetry leads. *Paradise Lost* is a drama before it is an epic. As we know, it first presented itself to the poet's imagination in the first of these forms, and as a drama it

always remains in the reader's memory, so prominent is the old dramatic framework still beneath Milton's epic structure! When Dante had finished his terrible *Inferno*, when he had closed its doors and nought remained save to give his work a name, the unerring instinct of his genius showed him that that multiform poem was an emanation of the drama, not of the epic; and on the front of that gigantic monument, he wrote with his pen of bronze: *Divina Commedia*.

Thus we see that the only two poets of modern times who are of Shakespeare's stature follow him in unity of design. They coincide with him in imparting a dramatic tinge to all our poetry; like him, they blend the grotesque with the sublime; and, far from standing by themselves in the great literary *ensemble* that rests upon Shakespeare, Dante and Milton are, in some sort, the two supporting abutments of the edifice of which he is the central pillar, the buttresses of the arch of which he is the keystone.

Permit us, at this point, to recur to certain ideas already suggested, which, however, it is necessary to emphasize. We have arrived, and now we must set out again.

On the day when Christianity said to man: "Thou art twofold, thou art made up of two beings, one perishable, the other immortal, one carnal, the other ethereal, one enslaved by appetites, cravings and passions, the other borne aloft on the wings of enthusiasm and reverie—in a word, the one always stooping toward the earth, its mother, the other always darting up toward heaven, its fatherland"—on that day the drama was created. Is it, in truth, anything other than that contrast of every day, that struggle of every moment, between two opposing principles which are ever face to face in life, and which dispute possession of man from the cradle to the tomb?

The poetry born of Christianity, the poetry of our time, is, therefore, the drama; the real results from the wholly natural combination of two types, the sublime and the

grotesque, which meet in the drama, as they meet in life and in creation. For true poetry, complete poetry, consists in the harmony of contraries. Hence, it is time to say aloud —and it is here above all that exceptions prove the rule— that everything that exists in nature exists in art.

On taking one's stand at this point of view, to pass judgment on our petty conventional rules, to disentangle all those scholastic labyrinths, to solve all those trivial problems which the critics of the last two centuries have laboriously built up about the art, one is struck by the promptitude with which the question of the modern stage is made clear and distinct. The drama has but to take a step to break all the spider's webs with which the militia of Lilliput have attempted to fetter its sleep.

And so, let addle-pated pedants (one does not exclude the other) claim that the deformed, the ugly, the grotesque should never be imitated in art; one replies that the grotesque is comedy, and that comedy apparently makes a part of art. Tartuffe is not handsome, Pourceaugnac is not noble, but Pourceaugnac and Tartuffe are admirable flashes of art.

If, driven back from this entrenchment to their second line of custom-houses, they renew their prohibition of the grotesque coupled with the sublime, of comedy melted into tragedy, we prove to them that, in the poetry of Christian nations, the first of these two types represents the human beast, the second the soul. These two stalks of art, if we prevent their branches from mingling, if we persistently separate them, will produce by way of fruit, on the one hand abstract vices and absurdities, on the other, abstract crime, heroism and virtue. The two types, thus isolated and left to themselves, will go each its own way, leaving the real between them, at the left hand of one, at the right hand of the other. Whence it follows that after all these abstractions there will remain something to represent—man; after these tragedies and comedies, something to create—the drama.

In the drama, as it may be conceived at least, if not executed, all things are connected and follow one another as in real life. The body plays its part no less than the mind; and men and events, set in motion by this twofold agent, pass across the stage, burlesque and terrible in turn, and sometimes both at once. Thus the judge will say: "Off with his head and let us go to dinner!" Thus the Roman Senate will deliberate over Domitian's turbot. Thus Socrates, drinking the hemlock and discoursing on the immortal soul and the only God, will interrupt himself to suggest that a cock be sacrificed to Æsculapius. Thus Elizabeth will swear and talk Latin. Thus Richelieu will submit to Joseph the Capuchin, and Louis XI to his barber, Maître Olivier le Diable. Thus Cromwell will say: "I have Parliament in my bag and the King in my pocket"; or, with the hand that signed the death sentence of Charles the First, smear with ink the face of a regicide who smilingly returns the compliment. Thus Cæsar, in his triumphal car, will be afraid of overturning. For men of genius, however great they be, have always within them a touch of the beast which mocks at their intelligence. Therein they are akin to mankind in general, for therein they are dramatic. "It is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous," said Napoleon, when he was convinced that he was mere man; and that outburst of a soul on fire illumines art and history at once; that cry of anguish is the résumé of the drama and of life.

It is a striking fact that all these contrasts are met with in the poets themselves, taken as men. By dint of meditating upon existence, of laying stress upon its bitter irony, of pouring floods of sarcasm and raillery upon our infirmities, the very men who make us laugh so heartily become profoundly sad. These Democrituses are Heraclituses as well. Beaumarchais was surly, Molière gloomy, Shakespeare melancholy.

The fact is, then, that the grotesque is one of the supreme beauties of the drama. It is not simply an appropriate

element of it, but is oftentimes a necessity. Sometimes it appears in homogeneous masses, in entire characters, as Daudin, Prusias, Trissotin, Brid'oison, Juliet's nurse; sometimes impregnated with terror, as Richard III, Bégears, Tartuffe, Mephistopheles; sometimes, too, with a veil of grace and refinement, as Figaro, Osric, Mercutio, Don Juan. It finds its way in everywhere; for just as the most commonplace have their occasional moments of sublimity, so the most exalted frequently pay tribute to the trivial and ridiculous. Thus, often impalpable, often imperceptible, it is always present on the stage, even when it says nothing, even when it keeps out of sight. Thanks to it, there is no thought of monotony. Sometimes it injects laughter, sometimes horror, into tragedy. It will bring Romeo face to face with the apothecary, Macbeth with the witches, Hamlet with the grave-diggers. Sometimes it may, without discord, as in the scene between King Lear and his jester, mingle its shrill voice with the most sublime, the most dismal, the dreamiest music of the soul.

That is what Shakespeare alone among all has succeeded in doing, in a fashion of his own, which it would be no less fruitless than impossible to imitate—Shakespeare, the god of the stage, in whom, as in a trinity, the three characteristic geniuses of our stage, Corneille, Molière, Beaumarchais, seem united.

We see how quickly the arbitrary distinction between the species of poetry vanishes before common sense and taste. No less easily one might demolish the alleged rule of the two unities. We say *two* and not *three* unities, because unity of plot or of *ensemble,* the only true and well-founded one, was long ago removed from the sphere of discussion.

Distinguished contemporaries, foreigners and Frenchmen, have already attacked, both in theory and in practice, that fundamental law of the pseudo-Aristotelian code. Indeed, the combat was not likely to be a long one. At the first blow

it cracked, so worm-eaten was that timber of the old scholastic hovel!

The strange thing is that the slaves of routine pretend to rest their rule of the two unities on probability, whereas reality is the very thing that destroys it. Indeed, what could be more improbable and absurd than this porch or peristyle or ante-chamber—vulgar places where our tragedies are obliging enough to develop themselves; whither conspirators come, no one knows whence, to declaim against the tyrant, and the tyrant to declaim against the conspirators, each in turn, as if they had said to one another in bucolic phrase:—

Alternis cantemus; amant alterna Camenæ.

Where did anyone ever see a porch or peristyle of that sort? What could be more opposed—we will not say to the truth, for the scholastics hold it very cheap, but to probability? The result is that everything that is too characteristic, too intimate, too local, to happen in the ante-chamber or on the street-corner—that is to say, the whole drama—takes place in the wings. We see on the stage only the elbows of the plot, so to speak; its hands are somewhere else. Instead of scenes we have narrative; instead of tableaux, descriptions. Solemn-faced characters, placed, as in the old chorus, between the drama and ourselves, tell us what is going on in the temple, in the palace, on the public square, until we are tempted many a time to call out to them: "Indeed! then take us there! It must be very entertaining—a fine sight!" To which they would reply no doubt: "It is quite possible that it might entertain or interest you, but that isn't the question; we are the guardians of the dignity of the French Melpomene." And there you are!

"But," someone will say, "this rule that you discard is borrowed from the Greek drama." Wherein, pray, do the Greek stage and drama resemble our stage and drama? Moreover, we have already shown that the vast extent of