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ART
and
SOCIAL LIFE



by
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Forgotten Books

G. V. Plekhanov 1912

Art and Social Life

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I

The relation of art to social life is a question that has always figured largely in all literatures that have reached a definite stage of development. Most often, the question has been answered in one of two directly opposite senses.

Some say: man is not made for the sabbath, but the sabbath for man; society is not made for the artist, but the artist for society. The function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to improve the social system.

Others emphatically reject this view. In their opinion, art is an *aim* in itself; to, convert it into a *means* of achieving any extraneous aim, even the most noble, is to lower the dignity of a work of art.

The first of these two views was vividly reflected in our progressive literature of the sixties. To say nothing of Pisarev, whose extreme one-sidedness almost turned it into a caricature,^[3] one might mention Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov as the most thorough-going advocates of this view in the critical literature of the time. Chernyshevsky wrote in one of his earliest critical articles:

“The idea of ‘art for art’s sake’ is as strange in our times as ‘wealth for wealth’s sake’, ‘science for science’s sake’, and so forth. All human activities must serve mankind if they are not to remain useless and idle occupations. Wealth exists in order that man may benefit by it; science exists in order to be man’s guide; art, too, must serve some useful purpose and not fruitless pleasure.” In Chernyshevsky’s opinion, the value of the arts, and especially of “the most

serious of them,” poetry, is determined by the sum of knowledge they disseminate in society. He says: “Art, or it would be better to say poetry (only poetry, for the other arts do very little in this respect), spreads among the mass of the reading public an enormous amount of knowledge and, what is still more important, familiarises them with the concepts worked out by science – such is poetry’s great purpose in life.”^[4] The same idea is expressed in his celebrated dissertation, *The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*. According to its 17th thesis, art not only reproduces life but explains it: its productions very often “have the purpose of pronouncing judgement on the phenomena of life.”

In the opinion of Chernyshevsky and his disciple, Dobrolyubov, the function of art was, indeed, to reproduce life and to pass judgement on its phenomena.^[5] And this was not only the opinion of literary critics and theoreticians of art. It was not fortuitous that Nekrasov called his muse the muse of “vengeance and grief.” In one of his poems the Citizen says to the Poet:

Thou poet by the heavens blessed,
Their chosen herald! It is wrong
That the deprived and dispossessed
Are deaf to your inspired song.

Believe, men have not fallen wholly,
God lives yet in the heart of each
And still, though painfully and slowly,
The voice of faith their souls may reach.

Be thou a citizen, serve art.
And for thy fellow-beings live,

To them, to them thy loving heart
And all thy inspiration give. ^[6]

In these words the Citizen Nekrasov sets forth his own understanding of the function of art. It was in exactly the same way that the function of art was understood at that time by the most outstanding representatives of the plastic arts – painting, for example. Perov and Kramskoi, like Nekrasov, strove to be “citizens” in serving art; their works, like his, passed “judgements on the phenomena of life.” ^[7]

The opposite view of the function of creative art had a powerful defender in Pushkin, the Pushkin of the time of Nicholas I. Everybody, of course, is familiar with such of his poems as *The Rabble* and *To the Poet*. The people plead with the poet to compose songs that would improve social morals, but meet with a contemptuous, one might say rude, rebuff:

Begone, ye pharisees! What cares
The peaceful poet for your fate?
Go, boldly steep yourselves in sin:
With you the lyre will bear no weight.

Upon your deeds I turn my back.
The whip, the dungeon and the rack
Till now you suffered as the price
For your stupidity and vice
And, servile madmen, ever shall!

Pushkin set forth his view of the mission of the poet in the much-quoted words:

No, not for worldly agitation,
Nor worldly greed, nor worldly strife,

But for sweet song, for inspiration,
For prayer the poet comes to life. ^[8]

Here the so-called theory of art for art's sake is formulated in the most striking manner. It was not without reason that Pushkin was cited so readily and so often by the opponents of the literary movement of the sixties ^[9].

Which of these two directly opposite views of the function of art is to be considered correct?

In undertaking to answer this question, it must first be observed that it is badly formulated. Like all questions of a similar nature, it cannot be approached from the standpoint of "duty." If the artists of a given country at one period shun "worldly agitation and strife," and, at another, long for strife and the agitation that necessarily goes with it, this is not because somebody prescribes for them different "duties" at different periods, but because in certain social conditions they are dominated by one attitude of mind, and by another attitude of mind in other social conditions. Hence, if we are to approach the subject correctly, we must look at it not from the standpoint of what ought to be, but of what actually is and has been. We shall therefore formulate the question as follows:

What are the most important social conditions in which artists and people keenly interested in art conceive and become possessed by the belief in art for art's sake?

As we approach the answer to this question, it will not be difficult to answer another, one closely connected with it and no less interesting, namely:

What are the most important social conditions in which artists and people keenly interested in art conceive and become possessed by the so-called utilitarian view of art, that is, the tendency to attach to artistic productions the significance of "judgements on the phenomena of life"?

The first of these two questions impels us once again to recall Pushkin.

There was a time when he did not believe in the theory of art for art's sake. There was a time when he did not avoid strife, in fact, was eager for it. This was in the period of Alexander I. At that time he did not think that the "people" should be content with the whip, dungeon and rack. On the contrary, in the ode called *Freedom*, he exclaimed with indignation:

Unhappy nation! Everywhere
Men suffer under whips and chains,
And over all injustice reigns,
And haughty peers abuse their power
And sombre prejudice prevails.

But then his attitude of mind radically changed. In the days of Nicholas I he espoused the theory of art for art's sake. What was the reason for this fundamental change of attitude?

The reign of Nicholas I opened with the catastrophe of December 14^[10], which was to exert an immense influence both on the subsequent development of our "society" and on the fate of Pushkin personally. With the suppression of the "Decembrists," the most educated and advanced representatives of the "society" of that time passed from the scene. This could not but considerably lower its moral and intellectual level. "Young as I was," Herzen says, "I remember how markedly high society declined and

became more sordid and servile with the ascension of Nicholas to the throne. The independence of the aristocracy and the dashing spirit of the Guards characteristic of Alexander's time – all this disappeared in 1826." It was distressing for a sensitive and intelligent person to live in such a society. "Deadness and silence all around," Herzen wrote in another article: "All were submissive, inhuman and hopeless, and moreover extremely shallow, stupid and petty. He who sought for sympathy encountered a look of fright or the forbidding stare of the lackey; he was shunned or insulted." In Pushkin's letters of the time when his poems *The Rabble* and *To the Poet* were written, we find him constantly complaining of the tedium and shallowness of both our capitals.^[11] But it was not only from the shallowness of the society around him that he suffered. His relations with the "ruling spheres" were also a source of grievous vexation.

According to the touching and very widespread legend, in 1826 Nicholas I graciously "forgave" Pushkin the political "errors of his youth," and even became his magnanimous patron. But this is far from the truth. Nicholas and his right-hand man in affairs of this kind, Chief of Police Benkendorf, "forgave" Pushkin nothing, and their "patronage" took the form of a long series of intolerable humiliations. Benkendorf reported to Nicholas in 1827: "After his interview with me, Pushkin spoke enthusiastically of Your Majesty in the English Club, and compelled his fellow diners to drink Your Majesty's health. He is a regular ne'er-do-well, but if we succeed in directing his pen and his tongue, *it will be a good thing.*" The last words in this quotation reveal the secret of the "patronage" accorded to Pushkin. They wanted to make him a minstrel of the existing order of things. Nicholas I and Benkendorf had made it their aim to direct Pushkin's unruly muse into the channels of official morality. When, after Pushkin's death, Field Marshal Paskevich wrote to Nicholas: "I am sorry for Pushkin as a

writer,” the latter replied: “I fully share your opinion, but in all fairness it may be said that in him one mourns the future, not the past.”^[12] This means that the never-to-be-forgotten emperor prized the dead poet not for the great things he had written in his short lifetime, but for what he *might have* written under proper police supervision and guidance. Nicholas had expected him to write “patriotic” works like Kukolnik’s play *The Hand of the All-Highest Saved Our Fatherland*. Even so unworldly a poet as V. A. Zhukovsky, who was withal a very good courtier, tried to make him listen to reason and inspire him with respect for conventional morals. In a letter to him dated April 12, 1826, he wrote: “Our adolescents (that is, all the ripening generation), poorly educated as they are, and therefore with nothing to buttress them in life, have become acquainted with your unruly thoughts clothed in the charm of poetry; you have already done much harm, incurable harm. This should cause you to tremble. Talent is nothing. The chief thing is moral grandeur...”^[13] You will agree that, being in *such* a situation, wearing the chains of *such* tutelage, and having to listen to *such* instruction, it is quite excusable that he conceived a hatred for “moral grandeur,” came to loathe the “benefits” which art might confer, and cried to his counsellors and patrons:

Begone, ye pharisees! What cares
The peaceful poet for your fate?

In other words, being in such a situation, it was quite natural that Pushkin became a believer in art for art’s sake and said to the Poet, in his own person:

You are a king, alone and free to go
Wherever your unfettered mind may lead,
Perfecting, fostering the children of your muse,
Demanding no reward for noble deed.^[14]

Pisarev would have taken issue with me and said that Pushkin the poet addressed these vehement words not to his patrons, but to the “people.” But the real people never came within the purview of the writers of that time. With Pushkin, the word “people” had the same meaning as the word which is often to be found in his poems: “crowd.” And this latter word, of course, does not refer to the labouring masses. In his *Gypsies* Pushkin describes the inhabitants of the stifling cities as follows:

Of love ashamed, of thought afraid,
Foul prejudices rule their brains.
Their liberty they gladly trade
For money to procure them chains.

It is hard to believe that this description refers, say, to the urban artisans.

If all this is true, then the following conclusion suggests itself:

The belief in art for art's sake arises wherever the artist is at odds with his social environment.

It might be said, of course, that the example of Pushkin is not sufficient to justify such a conclusion. I will not controvert or gainsay this. I will give other examples, this time borrowed from the history of French literature, that is, the literature of a country whose intellectual trends – at least down to the middle of the last century – met with the broadest sympathy throughout the European continent.

Pushkin's contemporaries, the French romanticists, were also, with few exceptions, ardent believers in art for art's sake. Perhaps the most consistent of them, Théophile Gautier, abused the defenders of the utilitarian view of art in the following terms:

“No, you fools, no, you goitrous cretins, a book cannot be turned into gelatine soup, nor a novel into a pair of seamless boots... By the intestines of all the Popes, future, past and present: No, and a thousand times no!... I am one of those who consider the superfluous essential; my love of things and people is in inverse proportion to the services they may render.”^[15]

In a biographical note on Baudelaire, this same Gautier highly praised the author of the *Fleurs du mal* for having upheld “the absolute autonomy of art and for not admitting that poetry had any aim but itself, or any mission but to excite in the soul of the reader the sensation of beauty, in the absolute sense of the term” (“*l'autonomie absolue de l'art et qu'il n'admettait pas que la poésie eût d'autre but qu'elle même et d'autre mission à remplir que d'exciter dans l'âme du lecteur la sensation du beau; dans le sens absolu du terme*”).

How little the “idea of beauty” could associate in Gautier’s mind with social and political ideas, may be seen from the following statement of his:

“I would very gladly (*très joyeusement*) renounce my rights as a Frenchman and citizen for the sake of seeing a genuine Raphael or a beautiful woman in the nude.”

That, surely, is the limit. Yet all the Parnassians (*les parnassiens*)^[16] would probably have agreed with Gautier, though some of them may have had certain reservations concerning the too paradoxical form in which he, especially in his youth, expressed the demand for the “absolute autonomy of art.”

What was the reason for this attitude of mind of the French romanticists and Parnassians? Were they also at odds with their social environment?

In an article Théophile Gautier wrote in 1857 on the revival by the Théâtre Français of Alfred de Vigny's play *Chatterton*, he recalled its first performance on February 12, 1835. This is what he said:

“The parterre before which Chatterton declaimed was filled with pallid, long-haired youths, who firmly believed that there was no dignified occupation save writing poems or painting pictures... and who looked on the ‘*bourgeois*’ with a contempt hardly equalled by that which the fuchsés^[17] of Heidelberg and Jena entertain for the philistine.”^[18]

Who were these contemptible “bourgeois”?

“They included,” Gautier says, “nearly everybody – bankers, brokers, lawyers, merchants, shopkeepers, etc. – in a word, everyone who did not belong to the mystical *cénacle* [that is, the romanticist circle. – *G.P.*] and who earned their living by prosaic occupations.”^[19]

And here is further evidence. In a comment to one of his *Odes funambulesques*, Theodore de Banville admits that he too had been afflicted with this hatred of the “bourgeois.” And he too explains who was meant by the term. In the language of the romanticists, the word “bourgeois” meant “a man whose only god was the five-franc piece, who had no ideal but saving his own skin, and who, in poetry, loved sentimental romance, and in the plastic arts, lithography.”^[20]

Recalling this, de Banville begs his reader not to be surprised that his *Odes funambulesques* – which, mark, appeared towards the very end of the romantic period – treated people as unmitigated scoundrels only because they led a bourgeois mode of life and did not worship romantic geniuses.

These illustrations are fairly convincing evidence that the romanticists really were at odds with their bourgeois social environment. True, there was nothing dangerous in this to the bourgeois social relationships. The romanticist circles consisted of young bourgeois who had no objection to these relationships, but were revolted by the sordidness, the tedium and the vulgarity of bourgeois existence. The new art with which they were so strongly infatuated was for them a refuge from this sordidness, tedium and vulgarity. In the latter years of the Restoration^[21] and in the first half of the reign of Louis Philippe, that is, in the best period of romanticism, it was the more difficult for the French youth to accustom themselves to the sordid, prosaic and tedious life of the bourgeoisie, as not long before that France had lived through the terrible storms of the Great Revolution and the Napoleonic era, which had deeply stirred all human passions.^[22] When the bourgeoisie assumed the predominant position in society, and when its life was no longer warmed by the fire of the struggle for liberty, nothing was left for the new art but to *idealise negation of the bourgeois mode of life*. Romantic art was indeed such an idealisation. The romanticists strove to express their negation of bourgeois “moderation and conformity” not only in their artistic works, but even in their own external appearance. We have already heard from Gautier that the young men who filled the parterre at the first performance of *Chatterton* wore long hair. Who has not heard of Gautier’s own red waistcoat, which made “decent people” shiver with horror? For the young romanticists, fantastic costume, like long hair, was a means of drawing a line between themselves and the detested bourgeois. The pale face was a similar means: it was, so to speak, a protest against bourgeois satiety.

Gautier says: “In those days it was the prevailing fashion in the romantic school to have as pallid a complexion as possible, even

greenish, almost cadaverous. This lent a man a fateful, Byronic appearance, testified that he was devoured by passions and remorse. It made him look interesting in the eyes of women.”^[23] Gautier also tells us that the romanticists found it hard to forgive Victor Hugo his respectable appearance, and in private conversation often deplored this weakness of the great poet, “which made him kin with mankind, and even with the bourgeoisie.”^[24] It should be observed, in general, that the effort to assume a definite outward appearance always reflects the social relationships of the given period. An interesting sociological inquiry could be written on this theme.

This being the attitude of the young romanticists to the bourgeoisie, it was only natural that they were revolted by the idea of “useful art.” In their eyes, to make art useful was tantamount to making it serve the bourgeoisie whom they despised so profoundly. This explains Gautier’s vehement sallies against the preachers of useful art, which I have just cited, whom he calls “fools, goitrous cretins” and so on. It also explains the paradox that in his eyes the value of persons and things is in inverse proportion to the service they render. Essentially, all these sallies and paradoxes are a complete counterpart of Pushkin’s:

Begone, ye pharisees! What cares
The peaceful poet for your fate?

The Parnassians, and the early French realists (the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert, etc.) likewise entertained an infinite contempt for the bourgeois society around them. They, too, were untiring in their abuse of the detested “bourgeois.” If they printed their writings, it was not, they averred, for the benefit of the general reading public, but for a chosen few, “pour les amis inconnus”^[25], as Flaubert puts it in one of his letters. They maintained that only a

writer who was devoid of serious talent could find favour with a wide circle of readers. Leconte de Lisle held that the popularity of a writer was proof of his intellectual inferiority (signe d'infériorité intellectuelle). It need scarcely be added that the Parnassians, like the romanticists, were staunch believers in the theory of art for art's sake.

Many similar examples might be given. But it is quite unnecessary. It is already sufficiently clear that the belief in art for art's sake naturally arises among artists wherever they are at odds with the society around them. But it would not be amiss to define this disharmony more precisely.

At the close of the 18th century, in the period immediately preceding the Great Revolution, the progressive artists of France were likewise at odds with the prevailing "society" of the time. David and his friends were foes of the "old order." And this disharmony was of course hopeless, because reconciliation between them and the old order was quite impossible. More, the disharmony between David and his friends and the old order was incomparably deeper than the disharmony between the romanticists and bourgeois society: whereas David and his friends desired the abolition of the old order, Théophile Gautier and his colleagues, as I have repeatedly said, had no objection to the bourgeois social relationships; all they wanted was that the bourgeois system should cease producing vulgar bourgeois habits. ^[26]

But in revolting against the old order, David and his friends were well aware that behind them marched the serried columns of the third estate, which was soon, in the well-known words of Abbé Sieyès, to become everything. With them, consequently, the feeling of disharmony with the *prevailing order* was supplemented

by a feeling of sympathy with the *new society* which had matured within the womb of the old and was preparing to replace it. But with the romanticists and the Parnassians we find nothing of the kind: they neither expected nor desired a change in the social system of the France of their time. That is why their disharmony with the society around them was quite hopeless.^[27] Nor did our Pushkin expect any change in the Russia of his time. And in the period of Nicholas, moreover, it is probable that he no longer wished for any change. *That is why* his view of social life was similarly tinged with pessimism.

Now, I think, I can amplify my former conclusion and say:

The belief in art for art's sake arises when artists and people keenly interested in art are hopelessly at odds with their social environment.

But this is not the whole matter. The example of our “men of the sixties,” who firmly believed in the early triumph of reason, and that of David and his friends, who held this belief no less firmly, show that *the so-called utilitarian view of art, that is, the tendency to impart to its productions the significance of judgements on the phenomena of life, and the joyful eagerness, which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife, arises and spreads wherever there is mutual sympathy between a considerable section of society and people who have a more or less active interest in creative art.*

How far this is true, is definitely shown by the following fact.

When the refreshing storm of the February Revolution of 1848 broke, many of the French artists who had believed in the theory of art for art's sake emphatically rejected it. Even Baudelaire, who was subsequently cited by Gautier as the model example of an

artist who believed staunchly that art must be absolutely autonomous, began at once to put out a revolutionary journal, *Le salut public*. True, its publication was soon discontinued, but as late as 1852 Baudelaire, in his foreword to Pierre Dupont's *Chansons*, called the theory of art for art's sake infantile (puérile), and declared that art must have a social purpose. Only the triumph of the counter-revolution induced Baudelaire and artists of a similar trend of mind to revert once and for all to the "infantile" theory of art for art's sake. One of the future luminaries of "Parnassus," Leconte de Lisle, brought out the psychological significance of this reversion very distinctly in the preface to his *Poèmes antiques*, the first edition of which appeared in 1852. He said that poetry would no longer stimulate heroic actions or inculcate social virtues, because now, as in all periods of literary decadence, its sacred language could express only petty personal emotions (mesquines impressions personnelles) and was no longer capable of instructing (n'est plus apte à enseigner l'homme).^[28] Addressing the poets, Leconte de Lisle said that the human race, whose teachers they had once been, had now outgrown them.^[29] Now, in the words of the future Parnassian, the task of poetry was "to give an ideal life" to those who had no "real life" (donner la vie idéale a celui qui n'a pas la vie réelle).^[30] These profound words disclose the whole psychological secret of the belief in art for art's sake. We shall have many an occasion to revert to Leconte de Lisle's preface from which I have just quoted.

To conclude with this side of the question, I would say in addition, that political authority always prefers the utilitarian view of art, to the extent, of course, that it pays any attention to art at all. And this is understandable: it is to its interest to harness all ideologies to the service of the cause which it serves itself. And since political authority, although sometimes revolutionary, is most

often conservative and even reactionary, it would clearly be wrong to think that the utilitarian view of art is shared principally by revolutionaries, or by people of advanced mind generally. The history of Russian literature shows very clearly that it has not been shunned even by our “protectors.” Here are some examples. The first three parts of V. T. Narezhny’s novel, *A Russian Gil Blas, or the Adventures of Count Gavril Simonovich Chistyakov*, were published in 1814. The book was at once banned at the instance of the Minister of Public Education, Count Razumovsky, who took the occasion to express the following opinion on the relation of literature to life:

“All too often authors of novels, although apparently campaigning against vice, paint it in such colours or describe it in such detail as to lure young people into vices which it would have been better not to mention at all. Whatever the literary merit of a novel may be, its publication can be sanctioned only when it has a truly moral purpose.”

As we see, Razumovsky believed that art cannot be an aim in itself.

Art was regarded in exactly the same way by those servitors of Nicholas I who, by virtue of their official position, were obliged to have some opinion on the subject. You will remember that Benkendorf tried to direct Pushkin into the path of virtue. Nor was Ostrovsky denied the solicitous attention of authority. When, in March 1850, his comedy *The Bankrupt* was published and certain enlightened lovers of literature – and trade – expressed the fear that it might offend the merchant class, the then Minister of Public Education (Count Shirinsky-Shikhmatov) ordered the guardian of the Moscow Educational Area to invite the young dramatist to

come and see him, and “make him understand that the noble and useful purpose of talent consists not only in the lively depiction of what is ludicrous or evil, but in justly condemning it; not only in caricature, but in inculcating lofty moral sentiments; consequently, in offsetting vice with virtue, the ridiculous and criminal with thoughts and actions that elevate the soul; lastly, in strengthening the faith, which is so important to social and private life, that evil deeds meet with fitting retribution already here on earth.”

Tsar Nicholas I himself looked upon art chiefly from the “moral” standpoint. As we know, he shared Benkendorf’s opinion that it would be a good thing to tame Pushkin. He said of Ostrovsky’s play, *Shouldering Another’s Troubles*, written at the time when Ostrovsky had fallen under the influence of the Slavophiles^[31] and was fond of saying at convivial banquets that, with the help of some of his friends, he would “undo all the work” of Peter^[32] – of this play, which in a certain sense was distinctly didactic, Nicholas I said with praise: “Ce n’est pas une pièce, c’est une leçon.”^[33] Not to multiply examples, I shall confine myself to the two following facts. When N. Polevoi’s *Moskovsky Telegraf*^[34] printed an unfavourable review of Kukolnik’s “patriotic” play, *The Hand of the All-Highest Saved Our Fatherland*, the journal became anathema in the eyes of Nicholas’s ministers and was banned. But when Polevoi himself wrote patriotic plays – *Grandad of the Russian Navy* and *Igolkin the Merchant* – the tsar, Polevoi’s brother relates, was delighted with his dramatic talent. “The author is unusually gifted,” he said. “He should write, write and write. Yes write (he smiled), not publish magazines.”^[35]

And don’t think the Russian rulers were an exception in this respect. No, so typical an exponent of absolutism as Louis XIV of France was no less firmly convinced that art could not be an aim in itself, but must be an instrument of moral education. And all the

literature and all the art of the celebrated era of Louis XIV was permeated through and through with this conviction. Napoleon I would similarly have looked upon the theory of art for art's sake as a pernicious invention of loathsome "ideologists." He, too, wanted literature and art to serve moral purposes. And in this he largely succeeded, as witnessed for example by the fact that most of the pictures in the periodical exhibitions (Salons) of the time were devoted to the warlike feats of the Consulate and the Empire. His little nephew, Napoleon III, followed in his footsteps, though with far less success. He, too, tried to make art and literature serve what he called morality. In November 1852, Professor Laprade of Lyons scathingly ridiculed this Bonapartist penchant for didactic art in a satire called *Les muses d'Etat*. He predicted that the time would soon come when the state muses would place human reason under military discipline; then order would reign and not a single writer would dare to express the slightest dissatisfaction.

Il faut être content, s'il pleut, s'il fait soleil,
S'il fait chaud, s'il fait froid: "Ayez le teint vermeil,
Je déteste les gens maigres, à face pâle;
Celui qui ne rit pas mérite qu'on l'empale," etc. ^[36]

I shall remark in passing that for this witty satire Laprade was deprived of his professorial post. The government of Napoleon III could not tolerate jibes at the "state muses."

II

But let us leave the government “spheres.” Among the French writers of the Second Empire there were some who rejected the theory of art for art’s sake from anything but progressive considerations. Alexandre Dumas fils, for instance, declared categorically that the words “art for art’s sake” were devoid of meaning. His plays, *Le fils naturel* and *Le Père prodigue* were devoted to the furtherance of definite social aims. He considered it necessary to bolster up with his writings the “old society,” which, in his own words, was crumbling on all sides.

Reviewing, in 1857, the literary work of Alfred de Musset who had just died, Lamartine regretted that it had contained no expression of religious, social, political or patriotic beliefs (foi), and he rebuked the contemporary poets for ignoring sense in their infatuation for rhyme and rhythm. Lastly – to cite a literary figure of much smaller calibre – Maxime Ducamp, condemning the passion for form alone, exclaimed:

La forme est belle, soit! quand l’idée est au fond!
Qu’est ce donc qu’on beau front, qui n’a pas de cervelle? ^[37]

He also attacked the head of the romantic school in painting, saying: “Just as some writers have created art for art’s sake, Mr. Delacroix has invented *colour for colour’s sake*. With him, history and mankind are an excuse for combining well-chosen tints.” In the opinion of this same writer, the art-for-art’s sake school had definitely outlived its day. ^[38]

Lamartine and Maxime Ducamp can no more be suspected of destructive tendencies than Alexandre Dumas fils. They rejected the theory of art for art’s sake not because they wanted to replace

the bourgeois order by a new social system, but because they wanted to bolster up the bourgeois relationships, which had been seriously shaken by the liberation movement of the proletariat. In this respect they differed from romanticists – and especially from the Parnassians and the early realists – only in that which disposed them to be far more conciliatory towards the bourgeois mode of life. They were conservative optimists where the others were conservative pessimists.

It follows convincingly from all this that the utilitarian view of art can just as well cohabit with a conservative, as with a revolutionary attitude of mind. The tendency to adopt this view necessarily presupposes only one condition: a lively and active interest in a specific social order or social ideal – no matter which; and it disappears when, for one reason or another, this interest evaporates.

We shall proceed to examine which of these two opposite views of art is more conducive to its progress.

Like all questions of social life and social thought, this question does not permit of an unconditional answer. Everything depends on the conditions of time and place. Remember Nicholas I and his servitors. They wanted to turn Pushkin, Ostrovsky and the other contemporary artists into ministers of morality, as it was understood by the Corps of Gendarmes. Let us assume for a moment that they had succeeded in their firm determination. What would have come of it? This is easily answered. The muses of the artists who had succumbed to their influence, having become state muses, would have betrayed the most evident signs of decadence, and would have diminished exceedingly in truthfulness, forcefulness and attractiveness.

Pushkin's *Slanderers of Russia* cannot be classed among the best of his poetical creations. Ostrovsky's *Shouldering Another's Troubles*, graciously acknowledged by his majesty as a "useful lesson," is not such a wonderful thing either. Yet in this play Ostrovsky made but a step or two towards the ideal which the Benkendorfs, Shirinsky-Shikhmatovs and *similar believers* in useful art were striving to realise.

Let us assume, further, that Théophile Gautier, Théodore de Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert – in a word, the romanticists, the Parnassians and the early French realists – had reconciled themselves to their bourgeois environment and dedicated their muses to the service of the gentry who, in the words of de Banville, prized the five-franc piece above all else. What would have come of it?

This, again, is easily answered. The romanticists, the Parnassians and the early French realists would have sunk very low. Their productions would have become far less forceful, far less truthful and far less attractive.

Which is superior in artistic merit: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Augier's *Gendre de Monsieur Poirier*? Surely, it is superfluous to ask. And the difference is not only in talent. Augier's dramatic vulgarity, which was the very apotheosis of bourgeois moderation and conformity, necessarily called for different creative methods than those employed by Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers and the other realists who contemptuously turned their backs on this moderation and conformity. Lastly, there must have been a reason why one literary trend attracted far more talented men than the other.

What does this prove?

It proves a point which romanticists like Théophile Gautier would never agree with, namely, that the merit of an artistic work is determined in the final analysis by the weightiness of its content. Gautier not only maintained that poetry does not try to prove anything, but that it even does not try to say anything, and that the beauty of a poem is determined by its music, its rhythm. But this is a profound error. On the contrary, poetic and artistic works generally always *say* something, because they always *express* something. Of course, they have their own way of “saying” things. The artist expresses his idea in images; the publicist demonstrates his thought with the help of *logical conclusions*. And if a writer operates with logical conclusions instead of images, or if he invents images in order to demonstrate a definite theme, then he is not an artist but a publicist, even if he does not write essays or articles, but novels, stories or plays. All this is true. But it does not follow that ideas are of no importance in artistic productions. I go further and say that there is no such thing as an artistic production which is devoid of idea. Even productions whose authors lay store only on form and are not concerned for their content, nevertheless express some idea in one way or another. Gautier, who had no concern for the idea content of his poetical works, declared, as we know, that he was prepared to sacrifice his political rights as a French citizen for the pleasure of seeing a genuine Raphael or a beautiful woman in the nude. The one was closely connected with the other: his exclusive concern for form was a product of his social and political indifferentism. Productions whose authors lay store only on form always reflect a definite – and as I have already explained, a *hopelessly negative* – attitude of their authors to their social environment. And in this lies an idea common to all of them in general, and expressed in a different way by each in particular. But while there is no such thing as an artistic work which is entirely devoid of idea, not every idea can be expressed in an artistic work. This is excellently put by

Ruskin when he says that a maiden may sing of her lost love, but a miser cannot sing of his lost money. And he rightly observes that the merit of an artistic work is determined by the loftiness of the sentiments it expresses. “Question with yourselves respecting any feeling that has taken strong possession of your mind. ‘Could this be sung by a master, and sung nobly, with a true melody and art?’ Then it is a right feeling. Could it not be sung at all, or only sung ludicrously? It is a base one.” This is true, and it cannot be otherwise. Art is a means of intellectual communication. And the loftier the sentiment expressed in an artistic work, the more effectively, other conditions being equal, can the work serve as such a means. Why cannot a miser sing of his lost money? Simply because, if he did sing of his loss, his song would not move anybody, that is, could not serve as a means of communication between himself and other people.

What about martial songs, I may be asked; does war, too, serve as a means of communication between man and man? My reply is that while martial poetry expresses hatred of the enemy, it at the same time extols the devoted courage of soldiers, their readiness to die for their country, their nation, etc. In so far as it expresses this readiness, it serves as a means of communication between man and man within confines (tribe, community, nation) whose extent is determined by the level of cultural development attained by mankind, or, more exactly, by the given section of mankind.

Turgenev, who had a strong dislike for preachers of the utilitarian view of art, once said that Venus of Milo is more indubitable than the principles of 1789. He was quite right. But what does it show? Certainly not what Turgenev wanted to show.

There are very many people in the world to whom the principles of 1789 are not only “dubitable,” but entirely unknown. Ask a

Hottentot who has not been to a European school what he thinks of these principles, and you will find that he has never heard of them. But not only are the principles of 1789 unknown to the Hottentot; so is the Venus of Milo. And if he ever happened to see her, he would certainly “have his doubts” about her. He has his own ideal of feminine beauty, depictions of which are often to be met with in anthropological works under the name of the Hottentot Venus. The Venus of Milo is “indubitably” attractive only to a part of the white race. To this part of the race she really is more indubitable than the principles of 1789. But why? Solely because these principles express relationships that correspond only to a certain phase in the development of the white race – the time when the bourgeois order was establishing itself in its struggle against the feudal order^[39] – whereas the Venus of Milo is an ideal of the female form which corresponds to *many* stages in this development. Many, but not all.

The Christians had their own ideal of the female exterior. It is to be seen on Byzantine icons. Everybody knows that the worshippers of these icons were very “dubious” of the Milo and all other Venuses. They called them she-devils and, wherever they could, destroyed them. Then came a time when the antique she-devils again became pleasing to people of the white race. The way to this was prepared by the liberation movement of the West European burghers – the movement, that is, which was most vividly reflected in the principles of 1789. Turgenev notwithstanding, therefore, we may say that Venus of Milo became the more “indubitable” in the new Europe, the more the European population became ripe for the proclamation of the principles of 1789. This is not a paradox; it is a sheer historical fact. The whole meaning of the history of art in the period of the Renaissance – regarded from the standpoint of the concept of beauty – is that the Christian-monastic ideal of the human exterior

was gradually forced into the background by that mundane ideal which owed its origin to the liberation movement of the towns, and whose elaboration was facilitated by memories of the antique she-devils. Even Belinsky – who toward the end of his literary career quite rightly affirmed that “pure, abstract, unconditional, or as the philosophers say, *absolute*, art never existed anywhere” – was nevertheless prepared to admit that “the productions of the Italian school of painting of the 16th century in some degree approximated to the ideal of absolute art,” since they were the creations of an epoch in which “art was the chief interest exclusively of the most educated part of society.”^[40] He pointed, in illustration, to “Raphael’s ‘Madonna’, that chef-d’oeuvre of 16th-century Italian painting,” that is, the so-called Sistine Madonna which is now in the Dresden Gallery. But the Italian schools of the 16th century were the culmination of a long process of struggle of the mundane ideal against the Christian-monastic. And however exclusive may have been the interest in art of the highly educated section of 16th-century society^[41], it is indisputable that Raphael’s Madonnas are one of the most typical artistic expressions of the victory of the mundane ideal over the Christian-monastic. This may be said without any exaggeration even of those which Raphael painted when he was still under the influence of his teacher Perugino, and whose faces seemingly reflect purely religious sentiments. But behind their religious exterior one discerns such a vitality and such a healthy joy in purely mundane living, that they no longer have anything in common with the pious Virgin Marys of the Byzantine masters.^[42]

The productions of the Italian 16th-century masters were no more creations of “absolute art” than were those of all the earlier masters, beginning with Cimabue and Duccio di Buoninsegna. Indeed, such art had never existed anywhere. And if Turgenev referred to the Venus of Milo as a product of such art, it was

because he, like all idealists, had a mistaken notion of the actual course of man's aesthetic development.

The ideal of beauty prevailing at any time in any society or class of society is rooted partly in the biological conditions of mankind's development – which, incidentally, also produce distinctive racial features – and partly in the historical conditions in which the given society or class arose and exists. It therefore always has a very rich content that is not absolute, not unconditional, but quite specific. He who worships “pure beauty” does not thereby become independent of the biological and historical social conditions which determine his aesthetic taste; he only more or less consciously closes his eyes to these conditions. This, incidentally, was the case with romanticists like Théophile Gautier. I have already said that his exclusive interest in the form of poetical productions stood in close causal relation with his social and political indifferentism.

This indifferentism enhanced the merit of his poetic work to the extent that it saved him from succumbing to bourgeois vulgarity, to bourgeois moderation and conformity. But it detracted from its merit to the extent that it narrowed Gautier's outlook and prevented him from absorbing the progressive ideas of his time. Let us turn again to the already familiar preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, with its almost childishly petulant attacks on the defenders of the utilitarian view of art. In this preface, Gautier exclaims:

“My God, how stupid it is, this supposed faculty of mankind for self-perfection of which our ears are tired of hearing! One might think that the human machine is capable of improvement, and that, by adjusting a wheel or

rearranging a counterpoise, we can make it perform its functions more effectively.”^[43]

To prove that this is not so, Gautier cites Marshal de Bassompierre, who drank the health of his guns in a bootful of wine. He observes that it would be just as difficult to perfect the marshal in the matter of drinking as it would be for the man of today to surpass, in the matter of eating, Milo of Crotona, who devoured a whole bull at one sitting.^[44] These remarks, which are quite true in themselves, are eminently characteristic of the theory of art for art’s sake in the form in which it was professed by the consistent romanticists.

Who was it, one asks, that tired Gautier’s ears with the assertion that mankind is capable of self-perfection? The Socialists – more precisely, the Saint-Simonists, who had been very popular in France not long before *Mademoiselle de Maupin* appeared. It was against the Saint-Simonists that he directed the remarks, quite true in themselves, about the difficulty of excelling Marshal de Bassompierre in winebibbing and Milo of Crotona in gluttony. But these remarks, although quite true in themselves, are entirely inappropriate when directed against the Saint-Simonists. The self-perfection of mankind which they were referring to had nothing to do with enlarging the capacity of the stomach. What the Saint-Simonists had in mind was improvement of the social organisation in the interest of the most numerous section of the population, that is, the working people, the producing section. To call this aim stupid, and to ask whether it would have the effect of increasing man’s capacity to over-indulge in wine and meat, was to betray the very bourgeois narrow-mindedness which was such a thorn in the flesh to the young romanticists. What was the reason for this? How could the bourgeois narrow-mindedness have crept into the

reflections of a writer who saw the whole meaning of his existence in combating it tooth and nail?

I have already answered this question several times, although in passing, and, as the Germans say, in another connection. I answered it by comparing the romanticists' attitude of mind with that of David and his friends. I said that, although the romanticists revolted against bourgeois tastes and habits, they had no objection to the bourgeois social system. We must now examine this point more thoroughly.

Some of the romanticists – George Sand, for example, at the time of her intimacy with Pierre Leroux – were sympathetic to socialism. But they were exceptions. The general rule was that the romanticists, although they revolted against bourgeois vulgarity, had a deep dislike for socialist systems, which called for social reform. The romanticists wanted to change social moeurs without in any way changing the social system. This, needless to say, was quite impossible. Consequently, the romanticists' revolt against the "bourgeois" had just as little practical consequence as the contempt of the Gottingen or Jena fuchsers for the philistines. From the practical aspect, the romanticist revolt against the "bourgeois" was absolutely fruitless. But its practical fruitlessness had literary consequences of no little importance. It imparted to the romantic heroes that stilted and affected character which in the end led to the collapse of the school. Stilted and affected heroes cannot be considered a merit in an artistic work, and we must now therefore accompany the aforesaid good mark with a bad mark: *while the artistic productions of the romanticists gained considerably from their authors' revolt against the "bourgeois," they lost no little from the fact that the revolt had no practical meaning.*

The early French realists strove to eliminate the chief defect of romanticist productions, namely, the affected, stilted character of their heroes. There is not a trace of the romanticist affectedness and stiltedness in the novels of Flaubert (with the exception, perhaps, of *Salambo* and *Les Contes*). The early realists continued to revolt against the “bourgeois,” but did so in a different manner. They did not set up in contrast to the bourgeois vulgarians heroes who had no counterpart in reality, but rather sought to make the vulgarians the object of faithful artistic representation. Flaubert considered it his duty to be as objective in his attitude to the social environment he described as the natural scientist is in his attitude to nature. “One must treat people as one does the mastodon or the crocodile,” he said. “Why be vexed because some have horns and others jaws? Show them as they are, make stuffed models of them, put them into spirit jars. But don’t pass moral judgement on them. And who are you yourselves, you little toads?” And to the extent that Flaubert succeeded in being objective, to that extent the characters he drew in his works acquired the significance of “documents” the study of which is absolutely essential for all who engage in a scientific investigation of social psychology. Objectivity was a powerful feature of his method; but while he was objective in the process of artistic creation, Flaubert never ceased to be deeply subjective in his appraisal of contemporary social movements. With him, as with Théophile Gautier, harsh contempt for the “bourgeois” went hand in hand with a strong dislike for all who in one way or other militated against the bourgeois social relationships. With him, in fact, the dislike was even stronger. He was an inveterate opponent of universal suffrage, which he called a “disgrace to the human mind.” “Under universal suffrage,” he said in a letter to George Sand, “number outweighs mind, education, race, and even money, which is worth more than number (argent... vaut mieux que le nombre).” He says in another letter that universal suffrage is more stupid than the

right of divine mercy. He conceived socialist society as “a great monster which would swallow up all individual action, all personality, all thought, which would direct everything and do everything.” We thus see that in his disapproval of democracy and socialism, this hater of the “bourgeois” was fully at one with the most narrow-minded ideologists of the bourgeoisie. And this same trait is to be observed in all his contemporaries who professed art for art’s sake. Baudelaire, having long forgotten his revolutionary *Salut public*, said in an essay on the life of Edgar Poe: “Among a people which has no aristocracy, the cult of the beautiful can only deteriorate, decline, and disappear.” He says in this same essay that there are only three worthy beings: “the priest, the soldier and the poet.” This is something more than conservatism; it is a definitely reactionary state of mind. Just as much a reactionary is Barbey d’Aurévilly. Speaking, in his book *Les Poètes*, of the poetic works of Laurent-Pichat, he says that he might have been a greater poet “if he had wished to trample upon atheism and democracy, those two dishonours (ces deux déshonneurs) of his thought.”^[45]

Much water has flown under bridges since Théophile Gautier wrote his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. The Saint-Simonists, who supposedly tired his ears with talk about mankind’s faculty for self-perfection, had loudly proclaimed the necessity for social reform. But, like most utopian Socialists, they were resolute believers in peaceful social development, and were therefore no less resolute opponents of class struggle. Moreover, the utopian Socialists addressed themselves chiefly to the rich. They did not believe that the proletariat could act independently. But the events of 1848 showed that its independent action could be very formidable. After 1848, the question was no longer whether the rich would be willing to improve the lot of the poor, but, rather, who would gain the upper

hand in the struggle between the rich and the poor? The relations between the classes of modern society had become greatly simplified. All the ideologists of the bourgeoisie now realised that the point at issue was whether it could succeed in holding the labouring masses in economic subjection. This realisation also penetrated to the minds of the advocates of art for the rich. One of the most remarkable of them in respect to his importance to science, Ernest Renan, demanded, in his *Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, a strong government “which would compel the good rustics to do our share of the work while we devoted ourselves to mental speculation” (“qui force de bons rustiques a faire notre part de travail pendant que nous speculons”).^[46]

The fact that the bourgeois ideologists were now infinitely more cognisant of the import of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat could not but exert a powerful influence on the nature of their “mental speculations.” Ecclesiastes put it excellently: “Surely oppression (of others) maketh a wise man mad.” Having discovered the secret of the struggle between their class and the proletariat, the bourgeois ideologists gradually lost the faculty for calm scientific investigation of social phenomena. And this greatly lowered the inherent value of their more or less scientific works. Whereas, formerly, bourgeois political economy was able to produce scientific giants like David Ricardo, now the tone among its exponents was set by such garrulous dwarfs as Frédéric Bastiat. Philosophy was increasingly invaded by idealist reaction, the essence of which was a conservative urge to reconcile the achievements of modern natural science with the old religious legends, or, to put it more accurately, to reconcile the chapel with the laboratory.^[47] Nor did art escape the general fate. We shall see later to what utter absurdities some of the modern painters have been led under the influence of the present idealist reaction. For the present I shall say the following.

The conservative and, in part, even reactionary mentality of the early realists did not prevent them from making a thorough study of their environment and creating things of great artistic value. But there can be no doubt that it seriously narrowed their field of view. Turning their backs in hostility on the great liberation movement of their time, they excluded the most interesting specimens from the “mastodons” and “crocodiles” they observed, those which possessed the richest internal life. Their objective attitude to the environment they studied implied, in fact, a lack of sympathy with it. And, naturally, they could not sympathise with that which, owing to their conservatism, was alone accessible to their observation, namely, the “petty thoughts” and “petty passions” which bred in the “filthy slime” of commonplace middle-class existence. But this lack of sympathy with the objects they observed or imagined was bound pretty soon to lead, as it did lead, to a decline of interest. Naturalism, the first beginnings of which were laid by their splendid writings, soon landed, as Huysmans put it, “in a blind alley, in a blocked tunnel.” It was able, in Huysmans’ words, to make everything its theme, syphilis included.^[48] But the modern working-class movement was beyond its scope. I have not forgotten, of course, that Zola wrote *Germinal*. But leaving aside the weak points of this novel, it must be remembered that, while Zola himself began, as he said, to incline towards socialism, his so-called experimental method was, and remained, ill-suited for a scientific study and description of great social movements. This method was intimately linked with the standpoint of that materialism which Marx called natural-scientific, and which fails to realise that the actions, inclinations, tastes and habits of mind of social man cannot be adequately explained by *physiology* or *pathology*, since they are determined by *social relationships*. Artists who remained faithful to this method could study and depict their “mastodons” and “crocodiles” as individuals, but not as members of a great whole. This

Huysmans sensed when he said that naturalism had landed in a blind alley and had nothing left but to relate once more the love affair of the first chance wine-merchant with the first chance grocery woman.^[49] Stories of such relationships could be of interest only if they shed light on some aspect of social relationships, as Russian realism did. But social interest was lacking in the French realists. The result was that, in the end, the relation of “the love affair of the first chance wine-merchant with the first chance grocery woman” became uninteresting, boring, even revolting. Huysmans himself in his first productions – in the novel, *Les Soeurs Vatard* for instance – had been a pure naturalist. But growing tired of depicting “the seven mortal sins” (his own words again), he abandoned naturalism, and, as the German saying goes, threw out the baby with the bath water. In *A rebours* – a strange novel, in places extremely tedious, but, because of its very defects, highly instructive – he depicted – or, better, as they used to say of old, *created* – in the person of Des Esseintes a sort of superman (a member of the degenerate aristocracy), whose whole manner of life was intended to represent a complete negation of the life of the “wine-merchant” and the “grocery woman.” The invention of such types was once more confirmation of Leconte de Lisle’s idea that where there is no real life it is the task of poetry to provide an ideal life. But the ideal life of Des Esseintes was so entirely bereft of human content that its *creation* offered no way out of the blind alley. So Huysmans betook himself to mysticism, which served as an “ideal” escape from a situation from which there was no “real” escape. This was perfectly natural in the given circumstances. But see what we get.

An artist who turns mystic does not ignore idea content; he only lends it a peculiar character. Mysticism is itself an idea, but an idea which is as obscure and formless as fog, and which is at mortal enmity with reason. The mystic is quite willing to say

something and even prove something. But he tells of things that are “not of this world,” and he bases his proofs on a negation of common sense. Huysmans’ case again shows that there can be no artistic production without idea content. But when artists become blind to the major social trends of their time, the inherent value of the ideas they express in their works is seriously impaired. And their works inevitably suffer in consequence.

This fact is so important in the history of art and literature that we must thoroughly examine it from various angles. But before doing so, let us sum up the conclusions to which we have been led so far by our inquiry.

The belief in art for art’s sake arises and takes root wherever people engaged in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment. This disharmony reflects favourably on artistic production to the extent that it helps the artists to rise above their environment. Such was the case with Pushkin in the period of Nicholas I. It was also the case with the romanticists, the Parnassians and the early realists in France. By multiplying examples, it might be shown that this has always been the case wherever such a disharmony existed. But while revolting against the vulgarity of their social environment, the romanticists, the Parnassians and the realists had no objection to the social relationships in which this vulgarity was rooted. On the contrary, although they cursed the “bourgeois,” they treasured the bourgeois system – first instinctively, then quite consciously. And the stronger the movement for liberation from the bourgeois system became in modern Europe, the more conscious was the attachment of the French believers in art for art’s sake to this system. And the more conscious their attachment to this system became, the less were they able to remain indifferent to the idea content of their productions. But because of their blindness to the new trend which

aimed at the complete remaking of social life, their views were mistaken, narrow and one-sided, and detracted from the quality of the ideas they expressed in their works. The natural result was that French realism landed in a hopeless quandary, which engendered decadent proclivities and mystical tendencies in writers who had themselves at one time belonged to the realistic (naturalistic) school.

This conclusion will be submitted to detailed verification in the next article. It is now time to close. I shall only, before doing so, say another word or two about Pushkin.

When his poet abuses the “rabble,” we hear much anger in his words but no vulgarity, whatever Pisarev may have said on the point. The poet accuses the aristocratic crowd – precisely the aristocratic crowd, and not the real people who at that time were entirely outside the purview of Russian literature – of setting higher store on a cooking pot than on Apollo Belvedere. This only means that their narrow practical spirit is intolerable to him. Nothing more. His resolute refusal to instruct the crowd only testifies that in his opinion they were entirely beyond redemption. But in this opinion there is not the slightest tinge of reaction. That is where Pushkin is immensely superior to believers in art for art’s sake like Gautier. This superiority is conditional. Pushkin did not jeer at the Saint-Simonists. But he probably never heard of them. He was an honest and generous soul. But this honest and generous soul had absorbed certain class prejudices from childhood. Abolition of the exploitation of one class by another must have seemed to him an impracticable and even ridiculous utopia. If he had heard of any practical plans for its abolition, and especially if these plans had caused such a stir in Russia as the Saint-Simonian plans had in France, he probably would have campaigned against them in violent polemical articles and sarcastic epigrams. Some of

his remarks in the article, 'Thoughts on the Road', concerning the superior position of the Russian peasant serf compared with that of the West European worker lead one to think that in this case Pushkin, who was a man of sagacity, might have argued almost as unintelligently as Gautier, who was infinitely less sagacious. He was saved from this possible weakness by Russia's economic backwardness.

This is an old, but eternally new story. When a class lives by exploiting another class which is below it in the economic scale, and when it has attained full mastery in society, from then on its *forward movement* is a *downward movement*. Therein lies the explanation of the fact, which at a first glance seems incomprehensible and even incredible, that the ideology of the ruling classes in economically backward countries is often far superior to that of the ruling classes in advanced countries.

Russia, too, has now reached that level of economic development at which believers in the theory of art for art's sake become conscious defenders of a social order based on the exploitation of one class by another. In our country too, therefore, a great deal of social-reactionary nonsense is now being uttered in support of the "absolute autonomy of art." But this was not yet so in Pushkin's time. And that was his supreme good fortune.

III

I have already said that there is no such thing as a work of art which is entirely devoid of ideas. And I added that not every idea can serve as the foundation of a work of art. An artist can be really inspired only by what is capable of facilitating intercourse among men. The possible limits of such intercourse are not determined by the artist, but by the level of culture attained by the social entity to which he belongs. But in a society divided into classes, they are also determined by the mutual relations of these classes and, moreover, by the phase of development in which each of them happens to be at the time. When the bourgeoisie was still striving to throw off the aegis of the lay and clerical aristocracy, that is, when it was itself a revolutionary class, it was the leader of all the working masses, and together with them constituted a single "third" estate. And at that time the foremost ideologists of the bourgeoisie were also the foremost ideologists of "the whole nation, with the exception of the privileged." In other words, at that time the limits of that intercourse of which artistic production that adhered to the bourgeois standpoint served as the medium, were relatively very wide. But when the interests of the bourgeoisie ceased to be the interests of all the labouring masses, and especially when they came into conflict with the interests of the proletariat, then the limits of this intercourse considerably contracted. If Ruskin said that a miser cannot sing of his lost money, now a time has come when the mental attitude of the bourgeoisie begins to approximate to that of a miser mourning over his treasure. The only difference is that the miser mourns over something already lost, while the bourgeoisie loses its equanimity at the thought of the loss that menaces it in the future. "Oppression (of others) maketh a wise man mad," I would say in the words of Ecclesiastes. And a wise man (even a wise man!)

may be affected in the same pernicious way by the fear that he may lose the possibility of oppressing others. The ideology of a ruling class loses its inherent value as that class ripens for doom. The art engendered by its emotional experience falls into decay. The purpose of this article is to supplement what was said in the previous article with an examination of some of the most vivid symptoms of the present decay of bourgeois art.

We have seen the reason for the mystical trend in contemporary French literature. It is due to the realisation of the impossibility of form without content, that is, without idea, coupled with an inability to rise to an understanding of the great emancipatory ideas of our time. This realisation and this inability have led to many other consequences which, no less than mysticism, lower the inherent value of artistic productions.

Mysticism is implacably hostile to reason. But it is not only he who succumbs to mysticism that is at enmity with reason; so is he who, from one cause or another and in one way or another, defends a false idea. And when a false idea is made the basis of an artistic work, it imparts to it inherent contradictions that inevitably detract from its aesthetic merit.

I have already had occasion to refer to Knut Hamsun's play, *The Gate of the Kingdom*, as an example of an artistic work that suffers from the falsity of its basic idea. ^[50]

The reader will forgive me if I refer to it again.

The hero of this play is Ivar Kareno, a young writer who, if not talented, is at any rate preposterously self-conceited. He calls himself a man "whose thoughts are as free as a bird." And what does this thinker who is as free as a bird write about? About "resistance," and about "hate." And who, in his opinion, must be

resisted, and who hated? It is the proletariat, he advises, that must be resisted, and the proletariat that must be hated. This, surely, is a hero of the very latest type. So far we have met very few – not to say none at all – of his kind in literature. But a man who preaches resistance to the proletariat is a most unquestionable ideologist of the bourgeoisie. The ideologist of the bourgeoisie named Ivar Kareno seems in his own eyes and in those of his creator, Knut Hamsun, a revolutionary of the first order. We have learned from the example of the early French romanticists that there are “revolutionary” attitudes of mind whose chief distinguishing feature is conservatism. Théophile Gautier hated the “bourgeois,” yet he fulminated against people who affirmed that the time had come to abolish the bourgeois social relationships. Ivar Kareno, evidently, is a spiritual descendant of the famous French romanticist. But the descendant goes much further than his ancestor. He is consciously hostile to that for which his ancestor felt only an instinctive dislike.^[51]

If the romanticists were conservatives, Ivar Kareno is a reactionary of the purest water. And, moreover, a utopian of the type of Shchedrin’s wild landlord.^[52] He wants to exterminate the proletariat, just as the latter wanted to exterminate the muzhik. This utopianism is carried to the most comical extremes. And, generally speaking, all Ivar Kareno’s thoughts that are “as free as a bird” go to the height of absurdity. To him, the proletariat is a class which exploits other classes of society. This is the most erroneous of all Kareno’s free-as-a-bird thoughts. And the misfortune is that Knut Hamsun apparently shares this erroneous thought of his hero. His Ivar Kareno suffers so many misadventures precisely because he hates the proletariat and “resists” it. It is because of this that he is unable to obtain a professorial chair, or even publish his book. In brief, he incurs the persecution of the *bourgeois* among whom he lives and acts. But

in what part of the world, in what utopia, is there a bourgeoisie which exacts such inexorable vengeance for “resistance” to the proletariat? There never has been such a bourgeoisie, and never will be. Knut Hamsun based his play on an idea which is in irreconcilable contradiction to reality. And this has vitiated the play to such an extent that it evokes laughter precisely in those places where the author intended the action to be tragic.

Knut Hamsun is highly talented. But no talent can convert into truth that which is its very opposite. The grave defects of his play are a natural consequence of the utter unsoundness of its basic idea. And its unsoundness springs from the author’s inability to understand the struggle of classes in present-day society of which his play is a literary echo.

Knut Hamsun is not a Frenchman. But this makes no difference. The *Communist Manifesto* had pointed out very aptly that in civilised countries, owing to the development of capitalism, “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.”^[53] True, Hamsun was born and brought up in a West European country that is far from being one of the most developed economically. This, of course, explains why his conception of the position of the embattled proletariat in contemporary society is so childishly naive. But the economic backwardness of his country has not prevented him from conceiving that antipathy for the working class and that sympathy for the struggle against it which arise naturally among the bourgeois intellectuals of the more advanced countries. Ivar Kareno is only a variety of the Nietzschean type. And what is Nietzscheanism? It is a new edition, revised and supplemented in response to the demands of modern capitalism, of that already familiar hostility to the “bourgeois” which cohabits in such perfect

harmony with an unshakable sympathy for the bourgeois system. We could easily substitute for the example of Hamsun one borrowed from contemporary French literature.

Undoubtedly, one of the most talented and – what is even more important in this case – one of the most thoughtful dramatists of present-day France is François de Curel. And of his dramas, the one that without the slightest hesitation may be considered the most worthy of note is the five act play, *Le repas du lion*, which as far as I know has received little notice from Russian critics. The chief character of this play is Jean de Sancy. Under the influence of certain exceptional circumstances of his childhood, he is carried away at one time by Christian socialism, but later violently rejects it and becomes an eloquent advocate of large-scale capitalist production. In the third scene of the fourth act, he delivers a long harangue to the workers in which he seeks to persuade them that “egotism which engages in production (l’égotisme qui produit) is for the labouring multitude what charity is for the poor.” And as his auditors voice their disagreement with this view, he gets more and more excited and tries to explain the role of the capitalist and his workers in modern industry with the help of a graphic and picturesque comparison.

“They say,” he thunders, “that a horde of jackals follow the lion in the desert to enjoy the remains of his prey. Too weak to attack a buffalo, too slow to run down a gazelle, all their hope is fastened on the claws of the king of the desert. You hear – on his claws! When twilight falls he leaves his den and runs, roaring with hunger, to seek his prey. Here it is! He makes a mighty bound, a fierce battle ensues, a mortal struggle, and the earth is covered with blood, which is not always the blood of the victim. Then the regal feast, which the jackals watch with attention and respect. When the lion is satiated, it is the turn of the jackals to dine. Do

you think they would have more to eat if the lion divided his prey equally with each of them, leaving only a small portion for himself? Not at all! Such a kind-hearted lion would cease to be a lion; he would hardly be fit for the role of a blind man's dog. At the first groan of his prey, he would refrain from killing it and begin licking its wounds instead. A lion is good only as a savage beast, ravenous for prey, eager only to kill and shed blood. When such a lion roars, the jackals lick their chops in expectation."

Clear as this parable is, the eloquent orator explains its moral in the following, much briefer, but equally expressive words: "The employer opens up the nourishing springs whose spray falls upon the workers."

I know that an artist cannot be held responsible for the statements of his heroes. But very often he in one way or another indicates his own attitude to these statements, and we are thus able to judge what his own views are. The whole subsequent course of *Le repas du lion* shows that Curel himself considers that Jean de Sancy is perfectly right in comparing the employer to a lion, and the workers to jackals. It is quite evident that he might with full conviction repeat the words of his hero: "I believe in the lion. I bow before the rights which his claws give him." He himself is prepared to regard the workers as jackals who feed on the leavings of what the capitalist secures by his labour. To him, as to Jean de Sancy, the struggle of the workers against the capitalist is a struggle of envious jackals against a mighty lion. This comparison is, in fact, the fundamental idea of his play, with which the fate of his principal character is linked. But there is not an atom of truth in this idea. It misrepresents the true character of the social relationships of contemporary society far more than did the economic sophistries of Bastiat and all his numerous followers, up to and including Böhm-Bawerk. The jackals do absolutely nothing

to secure the lion's food, part of which goes to satisfy their own hunger. But who will venture to say that the workers employed in any given factory contribute nothing to the creation of its product? It is by their labour, obviously, that it is created, all economic sophistries notwithstanding. True, the employer participates in the process of production as its organiser. And as an organiser, he is himself a worker. But, again, everybody knows that the salary of a factory manager is one thing, and the entrepreneur profit of the factory-owner quite another. Deducting the salary from the profit, we get a balance which goes to the share of capital as such. The whole question is, why does capital get this balance? And to this question there is not even a hint of an answer in the eloquent disquisitions of Jean de Sancy – who, incidentally, does not even suspect that his own income as a big shareholder in the business would not have been justified even if his absolutely false comparison of the entrepreneur to a lion, and the workers to jackals, had been correct: he himself does absolutely nothing for the business and is content with receiving a big income from it annually. And if anybody resembles a jackal who feeds on what is obtained by the effort of others, it is the shareholder, whose work consists solely in looking after his shares, and also the ideologist of the bourgeois system, who does not participate in production himself, but lives on what is left over from the luxurious: banquet of capital. With all his talent, de Curel, unfortunately, himself belongs to this category of ideologists. In the struggle of the wage-workers against the capitalists, he unreservedly takes the side of the latter and gives an absolutely false picture of their real attitude toward those whom they exploit.

And what is Bourget's play, *La barricade*, but the appeal of a well-known and, undoubtedly, also talented artist to the bourgeoisie, urging all the members of this class to unite against the proletariat? Bourgeois art is becoming belligerent. Its

exponents can no longer say of themselves that they were not born for “agitation and strife.” No, they are eager for strife, and do not shun the agitation that goes with it. But what is it waged for – this strife in which they are anxious to take part? Alas, for the sake of self-interest. Not, it is true, for their own personal self-interest – it would be strange to affirm that men like de Curel or Bourget defend capitalism in the hope of personal enrichment. The self-interest which “agitates” them, and for which they are eager to engage in “strife,” is the self-interest of a whole class. But it is none the less self-interest. And if this is so, just see what we get.

Why did the romanticists despise the “bourgeois” of their time? We already know why: because the “bourgeois,” in the words of Théodore de Banville, prized the five-franc piece above all else. And what do artists like de Curel, Bourget and Hamsun defend in their writings? Those social relationships which are a plentiful source of five-franc pieces for the bourgeoisie. How remote these artists are from the romanticism of the good old days! And what has made them so remote from it? Nothing but the inadvertible march of social development. The acuter the inherent contradictions of the capitalist mode of production became, the harder it was for artists who remained faithful to the bourgeois manner of thought to cling to the theory of art for art’s sake – and to live, as the French term has it, shut up in an ivory tower (*tour d’ivoire*).

There is not, I think, a single country in the modern civilised world where the bourgeois youth is not sympathetic to the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche, perhaps, despised his “sleepy” (*schläfrigen*) contemporaries even more than Théophile Gautier despised the “bourgeois” of his time. But what, in Nietzsche’s eyes, was wrong with his “sleepy” contemporaries? What was their principal defect, the source of all the others? It was that they

could not think, feel and – chiefly – act as befits people who hold the predominant position in society. In the present historical conditions, this is tantamount to the reproach that they did not display sufficient energy and consistency in defending the bourgeois order against the revolutionary attacks of the proletariat. Witness the anger with which Nietzsche spoke of the Socialists. But, again, see what we get.

If Pushkin and the romanticists of his time rebuked the “crowd” for setting too much store on the cooking pot, the inspirers of the present neo-romanticists rebuke the “crowd” for being too sluggish in defending it, that is, in not setting sufficient store on it. Yet the neo-romanticists also proclaim, like the romanticists of the good old days, the absolute autonomy of art. But can one seriously call art autonomous when it consciously sets itself the aim of defending the existing social relationships? Of course not. Such art is undoubtedly utilitarian. And if its exponents despise creative work that is guided by utilitarian considerations, this is simply a misunderstanding. And indeed – leaving aside considerations of personal benefit, which can never be paramount in the eyes of a man who is genuinely devoted to art – to them only such considerations are intolerable as envisage the benefit of the exploited majority. As to the benefit of the exploiting minority, for them it is a supreme law. Thus the attitude, say, of Knut Hamsun or François de Curel to the utilitarian principle in art is actually the very opposite of that of Théophile Gautier or Flaubert, although neither of the latter, as we know, were devoid of conservative prejudices either. But since the time of Gautier and Flaubert, these prejudices, owing to the greater acuteness of the social contradictions, have become so strongly developed in artists who hold to the bourgeois standpoint that it is now incomparably more difficult for them to adhere consistently to the theory of art for art’s sake. Of course, it would be a great mistake to imagine that

none of them nowadays adheres to this theory consistently. But, as we shall soon see, this consistency is now maintained at a very heavy cost.

The neo-romanticists – also under the influence of Nietzsche – fondly imagine that they stand “beyond good and evil.” But what does standing beyond good and evil mean? It means doing a great historical work which cannot be judged within the framework of the existing concepts of good and evil, those springing from the existing social order. The French revolutionaries of 1793, in their struggle against reaction, undoubtedly did stand beyond good and evil, that is, their activities were in contradiction to the concepts of good and evil which had sprung from the old and moribund order. Such a contradiction, in which there is always a great deal of tragedy, can only be justified on the ground that the activities of revolutionaries who are temporarily compelled to stand beyond good and evil have the result that evil retreats before good in social life. In order to take the Bastille, its defenders had to be fought. And whoever wages such a fight must inevitably for the time being take his stand beyond good and evil. And to the extent that the capture of the Bastille curbed the tyranny which could send people to prison “at its good pleasure” (“parce que tel est notre bon plaisir” ^[54] – the well-known expression of the French absolute monarchs), to that extent it compelled evil to retreat before good in the social life of France, thereby justifying the stand beyond good and evil temporarily assumed by those who were fighting tyranny. But such a justification cannot be found for all who take their stand beyond good and evil. Ivar Kareno, for example, would probably not hesitate for a moment to go beyond good and evil for the sake of realising his thoughts that are “as free as a bird.” But, as we know, his thoughts amount, in sum, to waging an implacable struggle against the emancipation movement of the proletariat. For him, therefore, going beyond

good and evil would mean not being deterred in this struggle even by the few rights which the working class has succeeded in winning in bourgeois society. And if his struggle were successful, its effect would be not to diminish, but to increase the evil in social life. In his case, therefore, going beyond good and evil could not be justified, as it generally is when it is done for the furtherance of reactionary aims. It may be argued in objection that although Ivar Kareno could find no justification from the standpoint of the proletariat, he certainly would find justification from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie. I fully agree. But the standpoint of the bourgeoisie is in this case the standpoint of a privileged minority which is anxious to perpetuate its privileges. The standpoint of the proletariat, on the other hand, is that of a majority which demands the abolition of all privileges. Hence, to say that the activity of a particular person is justifiable from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, is to say that it is condemnable from the standpoint of all people who are not inclined to defend the interests of exploiters. And that is all I need, for the inevitable march of economic development is my guarantee that the number of such people will most certainly grow larger and larger.

Hating the “sleepers” from the bottom of their hearts, the neo-romanticists want movement. But the movement they desire is a *protective* movement, the very opposite of the *emancipation* movement of our time. This is the whole secret of their psychology. It is also the secret of the fact that even the most talented of them cannot produce the significant works they would have produced if their social sympathies ran in a different direction, and if their attitude of mind were different. We have already seen how erroneous is the idea on which de Curel based his play, *Le repas du lion*. And a false idea is bound to injure an artistic work, since it gives a false twist to the psychology of its characters. It would not be difficult to demonstrate how much

falsity there is in the psychology of the principal hero of this play, Jean de Sancy. But this would compel me to make a much longer digression than the plan of my article warrants. I shall take another example which will permit me to be more brief.

The basic idea of the play *La barricade* is that everyone must participate in the modern class struggle on the side of his own class. But whom does Bourget consider the “most likeable figure” in his play? An old worker named Gaucherond^[55], who sides not with the workers, but with the employer. The behaviour of this worker fundamentally contradicts the basic idea of the play, and he may seem likeable only to those who are absolutely blinded by sympathy for the bourgeoisie. The sentiment which guides Gaucherond is that of a slave who reveres his chains. And we already know from the time of Count Alexei Tolstoi that it is hard to evoke sympathy for the devotion of a slave in anyone who has not been educated in the spirit of slavery. Remember Vasily Shibanov, who so wonderfully preserved his “slavish fidelity.”^[56] Despite terrible torture, he died a hero:

Tsar, forever the same is his word:
He does naught but sing the praise of his lord.

But this slavish heroism has but little appeal for the modern reader, who probably cannot even conceive how it is possible for a “vocal tool”^[57] to display such devoted loyalty to his owner. Yet old Gaucherond in Bourget’s play is a sort of Vasily Shibanov transformed from a serf into a modern proletarian. One must be purblind indeed to call him the “most likeable figure” in the play. And one thing is certain at any rate: if Gaucherond really is likeable, then it shows that, despite Bourget, each of us must side not with the class to which he belongs, but with that whose cause he considers more just.

Bourget's creation contradicts his own idea. And this is for the same reason that a wise man who oppresses others becomes mad. When a talented artist is inspired by a wrong idea, he spoils his own production. And the modern artist cannot be inspired by a right idea if he is anxious to defend the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the proletariat.

I have said that it is incomparably harder than formerly for an artist who holds to the bourgeois standpoint to adhere consistently to the theory of art for art's sake. This, incidentally, is admitted by Bourget himself. He even puts it far more emphatically. "The role of an indifferent chronicler," he says, "is impossible for a thinking mind and a sensitive heart when it is a case of those terrible internecine wars on which, it sometimes seems, the whole future of one's country and of civilisation depends."^[58] But here it is appropriate to make a reservation. It is indeed true that a man with a thinking mind and a responsive heart cannot remain an indifferent observer of the civil war going on in modern society. If his field of vision is narrowed by bourgeois prejudices, he will be on one side of the "barricade"; if he is not infected with these prejudices, he will be on the other. That is true. But not all the children of the bourgeoisie – or of any other class, of course – possess thinking minds. And those who do think, do not always have responsive hearts. For them, it is easy even now to remain consistent believers in the theory of art for art's sake. It eminently accords with indifference to social – and even narrow class – interests. And the bourgeois social system is perhaps more capable than any other of engendering such indifference. When whole generations are educated in the celebrated principle of each for himself and the devil take the hindmost, the appearance of egotists who think only of themselves and are interested only in themselves, is very natural. And we do, in fact, find that such egotists are more frequently to be met with among the present-day

bourgeoisie than perhaps at any other time. On this point we have the very valuable testimony of one of its most prominent ideologists: Maurice Barrès.

“Our morality, our religion, our national sentiment have all gone to pieces,” he says. “No rules of life can be borrowed from them. And until such time as our teachers establish authentic truths, there is naught we can do but cling to the only reality, our ego.”^[59]

When in the eyes of a man all has “fallen to pieces” save his own ego, then there is nothing to prevent him from acting as a calm chronicler of the great war raging in the bosom of modern society. But, no! Even then there is something to prevent him doing so. This something will be precisely that lack of all social interest which is vividly described in the lines of Barrès I have quoted. Why should a man act as a chronicler of the social struggle when he has not the slightest interest either in the struggle, or in society? He will be irresistibly bored by everything connected with the struggle. And if he is an artist, he will not even hint at it in his works. In them, too, he will be concerned with the “only reality” – his ego. And as his ego may nevertheless be bored when it has no company but itself, he will invent for it a fantastic, transcendental world, a world standing high above the earth and all earthly “questions.” And that is what many present-day artists do. I am not labelling them. They say so themselves. Here, for example, is what our countrywoman, Mrs. Zinaida Hippus, says:

“I consider that a natural and most essential need of human nature is prayer. Everyone most certainly prays or strives to pray – whether he is conscious of it or not, whatever the form his praying may take, and to whatever god it may be addressed. The form depends on the abilities and inclinations of each. Poesy in general, and versifying –

verbal music – in particular, is only one of the forms prayer takes in our hearts.”^[60]

This identification of “verbal music” with prayer is of course utterly untenable. There have been very long periods in the history of poetry when it bore no relation whatever to prayer. But there is no necessity to argue this point. It is only important for me here to acquaint the reader with Mrs. Hippius’s terminology, for unless he is acquainted with it, he might be rather perplexed on reading the following passages, which are important for us in substance.

Mrs. Hippius continues: “Are we to blame that every ego has now become separate, lonely and isolated from every other ego, and therefore incomprehensible and unnecessary to it? We all of us passionately need, understand and prize our prayer, our verse – the reflection of an instantaneous fullness of the heart. But to another, whose cherished ego is different, my prayer is incomprehensible and alien. The consciousness of loneliness isolates people from one another still more, makes them separate, compels them to lock their hearts. We are ashamed of our prayers, and knowing that all the same we shall not merge in them with anyone, we say them, compose them, in a whisper, to ourselves, in hints that are clear only to ourselves.”^[61]

When individualism is carried to such an extreme, then, indeed, as Mrs. Hippius quite rightly says, there is no longer any “possibility of communication through prayer [that is, poetry – *G. P.*], of community in prayerful [that is, poetical – *G. P.*] impulse.” But this cannot but reflect detrimentally on poetry and art in general, which is one of the media through which people communicate with one another. It was aptly observed by the biblical Jehovah that it is not good that man should be alone. And this is eminently

corroborated by the example of Mrs. Hippius herself. In one of her poems, we read:

'Tis a merciless road I must plod.
On and on unto death it will roll.
But I love myself as my God,
And that love, it will save my soul.

We may well doubt that. Who "loves himself as God"? A boundless egotist. And a boundless egotist is scarcely capable of saving anyone's soul.

But the point is not whether the souls of Mrs. Hippius and of all who, like her, "love themselves as God" will be saved or not. The point is that poets who love themselves as God can have no interest in what is going on in the society around them. Their ambitions must of necessity be extremely vague. In her poem, *A Song*, Mrs. Hippius "sings":

Alas, in the madness of sorrow I perish,
I perish,

'Tis a dream of I know not what that I cherish,
I cherish,

This desire has arisen I know not where from,
Where from,

Yet my heart still yearns for a miracle to come,
To come.

Oh that there might befall which never can be,
Never can be!

The cold, pallid skies promise wonders to me,
To me,

Yet I mourn without tears for the broken word,
The broken word.

Give me that which in this world is not,
Is not, O Lord!

This puts it quite neatly. A person who “loves himself as God,” and has lost all capacity of communication with other people, has nothing left but to “yearn for a miracle” and to long for that “which in this world is not” – for what is in this world cannot interest him. Sergeyev-Tsensky’s Lieutenant Babayev^[62] says that “art is a product of anaemia.” This philosophising son of Mars is seriously mistaken if he believes that *all* art is a product of anaemia. But it cannot be denied that it is anaemia that produces the art which yearns for what “in this world is not.” This art is characteristic of the decay of a whole system of social relationships, and is therefore quite aptly called decadent art.

True, the system of social relationships of whose decay this art is characteristic, that is, the system of capitalist relations of production, is still far from having decayed in our own country.^[63] In Russia, capitalism has not yet completely gained the upper hand over the old order. But since the time of Peter I Russian literature has been very strongly influenced by West European literatures. Not infrequently, therefore, it is invaded by trends which fully correspond to the West European social relationships and much less to the relatively backward relationships of Russia. There was a time when some of our aristocrats had an infatuation for the doctrines of the Encyclopaedists,^[64] which corresponded to one of the last phases in the struggle of the third estate against the aristocracy in France.

Now a time has come when many of our “intellectuals” conceive an infatuation for social, philosophical and aesthetic doctrines which correspond to the era of decay of the West European bourgeoisie. This infatuation anticipates the course of our own social development in the same way as it was anticipated by the infatuation of 18th-century people for the theory of the Encyclopaedists. ^[65]

But if the appearance of Russian decadence cannot be adequately explained, so to speak, by domestic causes, this fact in no way alters its nature. Introduced into our country from the West, it does not cease to be what it was at home, namely, a product of the “anaemia” that accompanies the decay of the class now predominant in Western Europe.

Mrs. Hippus will probably say that I quite arbitrarily ascribe to her a complete indifference to social questions. But, in the first place, I ascribe nothing to her; I cite her own lyrical effusions, and only define their significance. Whether I have understood these effusions rightly or not, I leave it to the reader to judge. In the second place, I am aware of course that nowadays Mrs. Hippus is not averse to discoursing even on the social movement. The book, for instance, which she wrote in collaboration with Mr. Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Mr. Dmitry Filosofov and published in Germany in 1908, might serve as convincing evidence of her interest in the Russian social movement. But one has only to read the introduction to the book to see how extreme is the yearning of its authors for “they know not what.” It says that Europe is familiar with the deeds of the Russian revolution, but not with its soul. And in order, presumably, to acquaint Europe with the soul of the Russian revolution, the authors tell the Europeans the following: “We resemble you as the left hand resembles the right... We are equal with you, but only in the reverse sense... Kant would

have said that our soul lies in the transcendental, and yours in the phenomenal. Nietzsche would have said that you are ruled by Apollo, and we by Dionysus; your genius consists in moderation, ours in impulsiveness. You are able to check yourselves in time; if you come up against a wall, you stop or go round it; we, however, dash our heads against it (*wir rennen uns aber die Köpfe ein*). It is not easy for us to get going, but once we have, we cannot stop. We do not walk, we run. We do not run, we fly. We do not fly, we plunge downwards. You are fond of the golden mean; we are fond of extremes. You are just; for us there are no laws. You are able to retain your equanimity; we are always striving to lose it. You possess the kingdom of the present; we seek the kingdom of the future. You, in the final analysis, always place government authority higher than the liberties you may secure. We, on the other hand, remain rebels and anarchists even when fettered in the chains of slavery. Reason and emotion lead us to the extreme limit of negation, yet, despite this, deep down at the bottom of our being and will, we remain mystics.”^[66]

The Europeans further learn that the Russian revolution is as absolute as the form of government against which it is directed, and that if its conscious empirical aim is socialism, its unconscious mystical aim is anarchy.^[67] In conclusion, the authors declare that they are addressing themselves not to the European bourgeoisie, but – to whom, reader? To the proletariat, you think? You are mistaken. “Only to individual minds of the universal culture, to people who share Nietzsche’s view that the state is the coldest of cold monsters,” etc.^[68]

I have not cited these passages for polemical reasons. Generally, I am not here indulging in polemics, but only trying to characterise and explain certain mental attitudes of certain social strata. The quotations I have just given are, I hope, sufficient to show that

Mrs. Hippius, now that she has (at last!) become interested in social questions, still remains exactly as she appeared to us in the poems cited above, namely, an extreme individualist of the decadent type who yearns for a “miracle” only because she has no serious attitude to real social life. The reader has not forgotten Leconte de Lisle’s idea that poetry now provides an ideal life for those who no longer have a real life. And when a man ceases to have any spiritual intercourse with the people around him, his ideal life loses all connection with the earth. His imagination then carries him to heaven, he becomes a mystic. Thoroughly permeated with mysticism, Mrs. Hippius’s interest in social questions is absolutely fruitless.^[69] But she and her collaborators are quite mistaken in thinking that the yearning for a “miracle” and the “mystical” negation of “politics” “as a science” are a feature peculiar to the Russian decadents.^[70] The “sober” West, before “inebriate” Russia, produced people who revolt against reason in the name of an irrational aspirations. Przybyszewski’s Eric Falk abuses the Social-Democrats and “drawing-room anarchists like John Henry Mackay” solely because, as he claims, they put too much faith in reason.

“They all,” declares this non-Russian decadent, “preach peaceful revolution, the changing of the broken wheel while the cart is in motion. Their whole dogmatic structure is idiotically stupid just because it is so logical, for it is based on almighty reason. But up to now everything has taken place not by virtue of reason, but of foolishness, of meaningless chance.”

Falk’s reference to “foolishness” and “meaningless chance” is exactly of the same nature as the yearning for a “miracle” which permeates the German book of Mrs. Hippius and Messrs. Merezhkovsky and Filosofov. It is one and the same thought

posing under different names. It owes its origin to the extreme subjectivity of a large section of the present-day bourgeois intellectuals. When a man believes that his own ego is the “only reality,” he cannot admit the existence of an objective, “rational,” that is, logical connection between his ego and the outer world around him. To him the outer world must be either entirely unreal, or only partly real, only to the extent that its existence rests upon the only true reality, that is, his ego. If such a man is fond of philosophical cogitation, he will say that, in creating the outer world, our ego imparts to it at least some modicum of its own rationality; a philosopher cannot completely revolt against reason even when he restricts its rights from one or other motive—in the interest of religion, for example. ^[71] If a man who believes that the only reality is his own ego is not given to philosophical cogitation, he does not bother his head as to how his ego creates the outer world. In that case he will not be inclined to presume even a modicum of reason – that is, of law – in the outer world. On the contrary, the world will seem to him a realm of “meaningless chance.” And if it should occur to him to sympathise with any great social movement, he, like Falk, will certainly say that its success can be ensured not by the natural march of social development, but only by human “foolishness,” or – which is one and the same thing – by “meaningless” historical “chance.” But as I have already said, the mystical view of the Russian emancipation movement held by Hippius and her two like-thinkers in no way differs, essentially, from Falk’s view that the causes of great historical events are “meaningless.” Although anxious to stagger Europe with the unparalleled immensity of the freedom-loving ambitions of the Russians, the authors of the German book I have referred to are decadents of the purest water, who are capable of feeling sympathy only with that “which never can be, never can be” – in other words, are incapable of feeling sympathy with anything which occurs in reality. Their mystical anarchism,

therefore, does not weaken the validity of the conclusions I drew from Mrs. Hippus's lyrical effusions.

Since I have touched upon this point, I shall express my thought without reservation. The events of 1905 – 06 produced just as strong an impression on the Russian decadents as the events of 1848 – 49 did on the French romanticists. They awoke in them an interest in social life. But this interest was even less suited to the temperament of the decadents than it had been to the temperament of the romanticists. It therefore proved still less durable. And there are no grounds for taking it seriously.

Let us return to modern art. When a man is disposed to regard his ego as the only reality, he, like Mrs. Hippus, "loves himself as God." This is fully understandable and quite inevitable. And when a man "loves himself as God," he will be concerned in his artistic productions solely with himself. The outer world will interest him only to the extent that it in one way or another affects this "sole reality," this precious ego of his. In Scene I Act II of Sudermann's most interesting play, *Das Blumenboot*, Baroness Erfflingen says to her daughter Thea: "People of our category exist in order to make the things of this world into a sort of merry panorama which passes before us – or, rather, which *seems* to pass before us. Because, actually, it is we that are moving. That's certain. And what is more, we don't need any ballast." These words perfectly describe the life-aim of people of Baroness Erfflingen's category; they could with complete conviction reiterate the words of Barrès: "The only reality is our ego." But people who pursue this life aim must look upon art solely as a means of embellishing the panorama which "*seems*" to be passing before them. And here, too, they will try not to be burdened with any ballast. They will either completely scorn idea content in artistic works, or will

subordinate it to the caprices and fickle demands of their extreme subjectiveness.

Let us turn to painting.

Complete indifference to the idea content of their works was already displayed by the impressionists. One of them very aptly expressed the conviction of them all when he said: “The chief dramatis persona in a picture is light.” But the sensation of light is only a sensation – that is, it is not *yet* emotion, and not *yet* thought. An artist who confines his attention to the realm of sensations is indifferent to emotion and thought. He may paint a good landscape. And the impressionists did, in fact, paint many excellent landscapes. But landscape is not the whole of painting. ^[72] Let us recall Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* and ask, is light the chief dramatis persona in this famous fresco? We know that its subject is that highly dramatic moment in the relationship of Jesus to his disciples when he says: “One of you shall betray me.” Leonardo da Vinci’s task was to portray the state of mind of Jesus himself, who was deeply grieved by his dreadful discovery, and of his disciples, who could not believe there could be a traitor in their small company. If the artist had believed that the chief dramatis persona in a picture is light, he would not have thought of depicting this drama. And if he had painted the fresco nevertheless, its chief artistic interest would have been centred not on what was going on in the hearts of Jesus and his disciples, but on what was happening on the walls of the chamber in which they were assembled, on the table at which they were seated, and on their own skins – that is, on the various light effects. We should then have had not a terrific spiritual drama, but a series of excellently painted patches of light: one, say, on a wall of the chamber, another on the table-cloth, a third on Judas’ hooked nose, a fourth on Jesus’ cheek, and so on and so forth. But because

of this the impression caused by the fresco would be infinitely weaker, and the specific importance of Leonardo da Vinci's production would be infinitely less. Some French critics have compared impressionism with realism in literature. And there is some basis for the comparison. But if the impressionists were realists, it must be admitted that their realism was quite superficial, that it did not go deeper than the "husk of appearances." And when this realism acquired a firm position in modern art – as it undoubtedly did – artists trained under its influence had only one of two alternatives: either to exercise their ingenuity over the "husk of appearances" and devise ever more astonishing and ever more artificial light effects; or to attempt to penetrate beneath the "husk of appearances," having realised the mistake of the impressionists and grasped that the chief dramatis persona in a picture is not light, but man and his highly diversified emotional experiences. And we do indeed find both these trends in modern art. Concentration of interest on the "husk of appearances" accounts for those paradoxical canvases before which even the most indulgent critic shrugs his shoulders in perplexity and confesses that modern painting is passing through a "crisis of ugliness."^[73] Recognition, on the other hand, that it is impossible to stop at the "husk of appearances" impels artists to seek for idea content, that is, to worship what they had only recently burned. But to impart idea content to a production is not so easy as it may seem. Idea is not something that exists independently of the real world. A man's stock of ideas is determined and enriched by his relations with that world. And he whose relations with that world are such that he considers his ego the "only reality," inevitably becomes an out-and-out pauper in the matter of ideas. Not only is he bereft of ideas, but – and this is the chief point – he is not in a position to conceive any. And just as people, when they have no bread, eat dockweed, so when they have no clear ideas they content themselves with vague hints at ideas, with surrogates

borrowed from mysticism, symbolism and the similar “isms” characteristic of the period of decadence. In brief, we find in painting a repetition of what we have seen in literature: realism decays because of its inherent vacuity and idealistic reaction triumphs.

Subjective idealism was always anchored in the idea that there is no reality save our ego. But it required the boundless individualism of the era of bourgeois decadence to make this idea not only an egotistical rule defining the relations between people each of whom “loves himself as God” – the bourgeoisie was never distinguished by excessive altruism – but also the theoretical foundation of a new aesthetics.

The reader has of course heard of the so-called cubists. And if he has had occasion to see some of their productions, I do not run much risk of being mistaken if I assume that he was not at all delighted with them. In me, at any rate, they do not evoke anything resembling aesthetic enjoyment. “Nonsense cubed!” are the words that suggest themselves at the sight of these ostensibly artistic exercises. But cubism, after all, has its cause. Calling it nonsense raised to the third degree is not explaining its origin. This, of course, is not the place to attempt such an explanation. But even here one may indicate the direction in which it is to be sought. Before me lies an interesting book: *Du cubisme*, by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. Both authors are painters, and both belong to the cubist school. Let us obey the rule *audiatur et altera pars*,^[74] and let us hear what they have to say. How do they justify their bewildering creative methods?

“There is nothing real outside of us,” they say. – “...It does not occur to us to doubt the existence of the objects which act upon our senses: but reasonable certainty is possible

only in respect to the images which they evoke in our mind.”^[75]

From this the authors conclude that we do not know what forms objects have in themselves. And since these forms are unknown, they consider they are entitled to portray them at their own will and pleasure. They make the noteworthy reservation that they do not find it desirable to confine themselves, as the impressionists do, to the realm of sensation. “We seek the essential,” they assure us, “but we seek it in our personality not in an eternity laboriously fashioned by mathematicians and philosophers.”^[76]

In these arguments, as the reader will see, we meet, first of all, the already well-known idea that our ego is the “only reality.” True, we meet it here in less rigid guise. Gleizes and Metzinger affirm that nothing is farther from their thought than to doubt the existence of external objects. But having granted the existence of the external world, our authors right there and then declare it to be unknowable. And this means that, for them too, there is nothing real except their ego.

If images of objects arise in us because the latter act upon our external senses, then it surely cannot be said that the outer world is unknowable: we obtain knowledge of it precisely because of this action. Gleizes and Metzinger are mistaken. Their argument about forms-in-themselves is also very lame. They cannot seriously be blamed for their mistakes: similar mistakes have been made by men infinitely more adept in philosophy than they. But one thing cannot be passed over, namely, that from the supposed unknowableness of the outer world, our authors infer that the essential must be sought in “our personality.” This inference may be understood in two ways: first, by “personality” may be meant the whole human race in general; secondly, it may mean each

personality separately. In the first case, we arrive at the transcendental idealism of Kant; in the second, at the sophistical recognition that each separate person is the measure of all things. Our authors incline towards the sophistical interpretation of their inference.

And once its sophistical interpretation is accepted,^[77] one may permit oneself anything one likes in painting and in everything else. If instead of the “Woman in Blue” (*La femme en bleu* – a painting exhibited by Fernand Léger at last autumn’s Salon), I depict several stereometric figures, who has the right to say I have painted a bad picture? Women are part of the outer world around me. The outer world is unknowable. To portray a woman, I have to appeal to my own “personality,” and my “personality” lends the woman the form of several haphazardly arranged cubes, or, rather, parallelepipeds. These cubes cause a smile in everybody who visits the Salon. But that’s all right. The “crowd” laughs only because it does not understand the language of the artist. The artist must under no circumstances give way to the crowd. “Making no concessions, explaining nothing and telling nothing, the artist accumulates internal energy which illuminates everything around him.”^[78] And until such energy is accumulated, there is nothing for it but to draw stereometric figures.

We thus get an amusing parody on Pushkin’s “To The Poet”:

Exacting artist, are you pleased with your creation?
You are? Then let the mob abuse your name
And on the altar spit where burns your flame.
And shake your tripod in its childlike animation.

The amusing thing about the parody is that in this case the “exacting artist” is content with the most obvious nonsense. Incidentally, the appearance of such parodies shows that the

inherent dialectics of social life have now led the theory of art for art's sake to the point of utter absurdity.

It is not good that man should be alone. The present "innovators" in art are not satisfied with what their predecessors created. There is nothing wrong in this. On the contrary, the urge for something new is very often a source of progress. But not everybody who searches for something new, really finds it. One must know how to look for it. He who is blind to the new teachings of social life, he to whom there is no reality save his own ego, will find in his search for something "new" nothing but a new absurdity. It is not good that man should be alone.

It appears, then, that in present-day social conditions the fruits of art for art's sake are far from delectable. The extreme individualism of the era of bourgeois decay cuts off artists from all sources of true inspiration. It makes them completely blind to what is going on in social life, and condemns them to sterile preoccupation with personal emotional experiences that are entirely without significance and with the phantasies of a morbid imagination. The end product of their preoccupation is something that not only has no relation to beauty of any kind, but which moreover represents an obvious absurdity that can only be defended with the help of sophisticated distortions of the idealist theory of knowledge.

Pushkin's "cold and haughty people" listen to the singing poet with "empty minds."^[79] I have already said that, coming from Pushkin's pen, this juxtaposition had historical meaning. In order to understand it, we must only bear in mind that the epithets "cold and haughty" were not applicable to the Russian peasant serf of the time. But they were fully applicable to the high society "rabble" whose obtuseness led to the ultimate doom of our great

poet. The people who composed this “rabble” might without any exaggeration say of themselves what the rabble say in Pushkin’s poem:

We all are treacherous and vicious,
Ungrateful, shameless, meretricious,
Our hearts no feeling ever warms.
Slaves, slanderers and fools, black swarms
Of vices breed in each and all.

Pushkin saw that it would be ridiculous to give “bold” lessons to the heartless aristocratic crowd: they would not have understood them. He did right in proudly turning away from them. More, he did wrong – to the great misfortune of Russian literature – in not turning away from them resolutely enough. But nowadays in the more advanced capitalist countries the attitude which the poet – and artist generally – who is unable to throw off the old bourgeois Adam maintains toward the people is the very opposite of what we see in the case of Pushkin: now it is no longer the “people” – the real people, whose advanced section is becoming more and more conscious – that can be accused of obtuseness, but the artists who listen with “empty minds” to the noble calls emanating from the people. At best, the fault of these artists is that their clocks are some eighty years behind the time. Repudiating the finest aspirations of their era, they naively imagine themselves to be continuers of the struggle waged by the romanticists against philistinism. The West European aesthetes, and the Russian aesthetes who follow them, are very fond of dilating on the philistinism of the present-day proletarian movement.

This is comical. How baseless the charge of philistinism is which these gentlemen level at the emancipation movement of the working class, was shown long ago by Richard Wagner. In his

well-founded opinion, the emancipation movement of the working class, when carefully considered (“genau betrachtet”), proves to be a movement not toward, but away from philistinism and toward a free life, toward an “artistic humanity” (“zum künstlerischen Menschentum”). It is a movement “for dignified enjoyment of life, the material means for which man will no longer have to procure at the expense of all his vital energies.” It is this necessity of expending all one’s vital energies to procure the means of subsistence that is nowadays the source of “philistine” sentiments. Constant concern for his means of subsistence “has made man weak, servile, stupid and mean, has turned him into a creature that is incapable either of love or hate, into a citizen who is prepared at any moment to sacrifice the last vestige of free will only that this concern might be eased.” The emancipation movement of the working class aims at doing away with this humiliating and corrupting concern. Wagner maintained that only when it is done away with, only when the proletariat’s urge for emancipation is realised, will the words of Jesus – take no thought for what ye shall eat, etc. – become true.^[80] He would have been right in adding that *only* when this is realised will there be no serious grounds for juxtaposing aesthetics to morality, as the believers in art for art’s sake do – Flaubert, for example.^[81] Flaubert held that “virtuous books are tedious and false” (“*les livres vertueux sont ennuyeux et faux*”). He was right – but *only* because the virtue of present-day society – bourgeois virtue – is tedious and false. Flaubert himself saw nothing tedious or false in antique “virtue.” Yet it only differed from bourgeois virtue in not being tainted with bourgeois individualism. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, as Minister of Education to Nicholas I, considered that the duty of art was to “strengthen the faith, so important to social and private life, that evil deeds meet with fitting retribution already here on earth,” that is, in the society so zealously guarded by the Shirinsky-Shikhmatovs. That opinion, of course, was eminently false and

tediously vulgar. Artists do right in turning away from such falsities and vulgarities. And when we read in Flaubert that in a *certain sense* “nothing is more poetic than vice,”^[82] we understand that, in its *real sense*, this is a juxtaposition of vice to the vulgar, tedious and false virtue of the bourgeois moralists and the Shirinsky-Shikhmatovs. But when the social order which breeds this vulgar, tedious and false virtue is done away with, the *moral* compulsion to idealise vice will also disappear. Flaubert, I repeat, saw nothing vulgar, tedious or false in antique virtue, although, while respecting it, he could at the same time, owing to the very rudimentary character of his social and political concepts, admire such a monstrous negation of this virtue as the behaviour of Nero. In a socialist society the pursuit of art for art’s sake will be a sheer logical impossibility to the extent that there will no longer be that vulgarisation of social morals which is now an inevitable consequence of the determination of the ruling class to retain its privileges. Flaubert says: “*L’art est la recherche de l’inutile*” (“art is a search for the useless”). It is not difficult to detect in these words the basic idea of Pushkin’s *The Rabble*. But his insistence on this idea only signifies that the artist is revolting against the narrow utilitarianism of the given ruling class, or caste... With the disappearance of classes, this narrow utilitarianism, which is closely akin to *egotism*, will also disappear. Egotism has nothing in common with aesthetics: a judgement of taste always carries the presumption that the person who pronounces it is not actuated by considerations of personal advantage. But *personal* advantage is one thing, and *social* advantage another. The desire to be useful to society, which was the basis of antique virtue, is a fountain-head of self-sacrifice, and an act of self-sacrificing may easily be – and very often has been, as the history of art shows – an object of aesthetic portrayal. We have only to remember the songs of the primitive

peoples or, not to go so far afield, the monument to Harmodius and Aristogeiton in Athens.

The ancient thinkers – Plato and Aristotle, for example – were fully aware how a man is degraded when all his vital energies are absorbed by concern for his material subsistence. The present-day ideologists of the bourgeoisie are also aware of it. They likewise consider it necessary to relieve people of the degrading burden of constant economic cares. But the people they have in mind are the members of the highest social class, which lives by exploiting labour. They see the solution of the problem where the ancient thinkers saw it, namely, in the enslavement of the producers by a fortunate chosen few who more or less approach the ideal of the “superman.” But if this solution was conservative even in the days of Plato and Aristotle, now it is arch-reactionary. And if the conservative Greek slaveowners of Aristotle’s time could hope to retain their predominant position by dint of their own “valour,” the present-day preachers of the enslavement of the masses are very sceptical of the valour of the bourgeois exploiters. That is why they are so given to dreaming of the appearance at the head of the state of a superhuman genius who will bolster up, by his iron will, the already tottering pillars of class rule. Decadents who are not devoid of political interests are often ardent admirers of Napoleon I.

If Renan called for a strong government capable of compelling the “good rustics” to work for him while he dedicated himself to mental reflection, the present-day aesthetes need a social system that would force the proletariat to work while they dedicate themselves to lofty pleasures – such as drawing and painting cubes and other stereometric figures. Being organically incapable of any serious work, they are sincerely outraged at the idea of a social system in which idlers will be entirely unknown.

If you live with the wolves, you must howl with the wolves. The modern bourgeois aesthetes profess to be warring against philistinism, but they themselves worship the golden calf no less than the common or garden philistine. “What they think is a movement in art,” Mauclair says, “is actually a movement in the picture mart, where there is also speculation in unlaunched geniuses.”^[83] I would add, in passing, that this speculation in unlaunched geniuses is due, among other things, to the feverish hunt for something “new” to which the majority of the present-day artists are addicted. People always strive for something “new” when they are not satisfied with the old. But the question is, *why* are they not satisfied? Very many contemporary artists are not satisfied with the old for the sole reason that, so long as the general public cling to it, their own genius will remain “unlaunched.” They are driven to revolt against the old by a love not for some new idea, but for the “only reality,” their own dear ego. But such a love does not inspire an artist; it only disposes him to regard even the “idol of Belvedere” from the standpoint of self-advantage. “The money question is so strongly intertwined with the question of art,” Mauclair says, “that art criticism is squeezed in a vice. The best critics cannot say what they think, and the rest say only what they think is opportune, for, after all, they have to live by their writing. I do not say this is something to be indignant about, but it is well to realise the complexity of the problem.”^[84]

Thus we find that *art for art's sake* has turned into *art for money's sake*. And the whole problem Mauclair is concerned with boils down to determining the reasons why this has happened. And it is not very difficult to determine them. “There was a time, as in the Middle Ages, when only the superfluous, the excess of production over consumption, was exchanged.

“There was again a time, when not only the superfluous, but all products, all industrial existence, had passed into commerce, when the whole of production depended on exchange...

“Finally, there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought – virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc. – when everything, in short, passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.” [85]

Is it surprising that at a time of universal venality, art also becomes venal?

Mauclair is reluctant to say whether this is something to be indignant about. Nor have I any desire to assess this phenomenon from the moral standpoint. I try, as the saying goes, not to weep or to laugh, but to understand. I do not say that modern artists “*must*” take inspiration from the emancipatory aspirations of the proletariat. No, if the apple-tree *must* bear apples, and the pear-tree *must* produce pears, artists who adhere to the standpoint of the bourgeoisie *must* revolt against the foresaid aspirations. *In decadent times art “must” be decadent.* This is inevitable. And there is no point in being “indignant” about it. But, as the *Communist Manifesto* rightly says, “in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going

on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.”^[86]

Among the bourgeois ideologists who go over to the proletariat, we find very few artists. The reason probably is that it is only people who think that can “raise themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole,” and modern artists, in contradiction to the great masters of the Renaissance, do extremely little thinking.^[87] But however that may be, it can be said with certainty that every more or less gifted artist will increase his power substantially if he absorbs the great emancipatory ideas of our time. Only these ideas must become part of his flesh and blood, and he must express them precisely as an artist.^[88] He must be able, moreover, to form a correct opinion of the artistic modernism of the present-day ideologists of the bourgeoisie. The ruling class has now reached a position where, for it, going forward means sinking downward. And this sad fate is shared by all its ideologists. The most advanced of them are precisely those who have sunk lower than all their predecessors.

When I expressed the views expounded here, Mr. Lunacharsky challenged me on several points, the chief of which I shall now examine.

First, he was surprised, he said, that I seemed to recognise the existence of an absolute criterion of beauty. There was no such criterion. Everything flowed and changed. Men's notions of beauty also changed. There was no possibility, therefore, of proving that modern art really was passing through a crisis of ugliness.

To this I objected, and now object, that I do not think there is, or can be, an absolute criterion of beauty.^[89] People's notions of beauty do undoubtedly change in the course of the historical process. But while there is no *absolute* criterion of beauty, while all its criteria are *relative*, this does not mean that there is no *objective* possibility of judging whether a given artistic design has been well executed or not. Let us suppose that an artist wants to paint a "woman in blue." If what he portrays in his picture really does resemble such a woman, we shall say that he has succeeded in painting a good picture. But if, instead of a woman wearing a blue dress, we see on his canvas several stereometric figures more or less thickly and more or less crudely tinted here and there with blue colour, we shall say that whatever he has painted, it certainly is not a good picture. The more the execution corresponds to the design, or – to use a more general expression – the more the form of an artistic production corresponds to its idea, the more successful it is. There you have an objective criterion. And precisely because there is such a criterion, we are entitled to say that the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, for example, are better than the drawings of some little Themistocles^[90] who spoils good paper for his own distraction. When Leonardo da Vinci, say, drew an old man with a beard, the result really was an old man with a beard – so much so that at the sight of him we say: "Why, he's alive!" But when Themistocles draws an old man, we would do well to write underneath: "This is an old man with a beard" – so that there might be no misunderstanding. In asserting that there

can be no objective criterion of beauty, Mr. Lunacharsky committed the sin of which so many bourgeois ideologists, up to and including the cubists, are guilty: the sin of extreme subjectivism. How a man who calls himself a Marxist can be guilty of this sin, I simply cannot understand.

It must be added, however, that I here use the term “beautiful” in a very wide, if you like, in too wide a sense: drawing a bearded old man *beautifully* does not mean drawing a *beautiful* old man. The realm of art is much wider than the realm of the “beautiful.” But throughout its broad realm, the criterion I refer to – correspondence of form to idea – may be applied with equal convenience. Mr. Lunacharsky maintained (if I understood him correctly) that form may quite well correspond to a false idea. But I cannot agree. Remember de Curel’s play *Le repas du lion*. It is based, as we know, on the false idea that the employer stands in the same relation to his workers as the lion stands to the jackals who feed on the crumbs that fall from his royal table. The question is, could de Curel have faithfully expressed in his play this erroneous idea? No. The idea is erroneous because it is in contradiction to the real relation of the employer to his workers. To present it in an artistic production is to distort reality. And when an artistic production distorts reality it is unsuccessful as a work of art. That is why *Le repas du lion* is far below de Curel’s talent. *The Gate of the Kingdom* is far below Hamsun’s talent for the same reason.

Secondly, Mr. Lunacharsky accused me of excessive objectivism. He apparently agreed that an apple-tree *must* bear apples, and a pear-tree must produce pears. But he observed that among the artists who adhere to the bourgeois standpoint there are waverers, whom it is our duty to convince and not leave to the elemental action of bourgeois influences.

I must confess that to me this accusation is even more incomprehensible than the first. In my lecture, I said – and I should like to hope, proved – that modern art is decaying.^[91] I stated that the reason for this phenomenon – to which nobody who sincerely loves art can remain indifferent – is that the majority of our present-day artists adhere to the bourgeois standpoint and are quite impervious to the great emancipatory ideas of our time. In what way can this statement influence the waverers? If it is convincing, it should induce the waverers to adopt the standpoint of the proletariat. And this is all that can be demanded of a lecture whose purpose was to examine the question of art, not to expound or defend the principles of socialism.

Last but not least, Mr. Lunacharsky, having maintained that it is impossible to prove that bourgeois art is decaying, considered that I would have done wiser to juxtapose to the bourgeois ideals a harmonious system – that was his expression, if I remember rightly – of opposite concepts. And he assured the audience that such a system would in time be elaborated. Now this objection completely passes my understanding. If this system is still *to be* elaborated, then, clearly, it has not yet been elaborated. And if it has not yet been elaborated, how could I have juxtaposed it to the bourgeois views? And what can this harmonious system of concepts possibly be? Modern scientific socialism is unquestionably a fully harmonious system. And it has the advantage that it *already* exists. But as I have already said, it would have been very strange if, having undertaken to deliver a lecture on the subject of Art and Social Life, I had begun to expound the doctrines of modern scientific socialism – the theory of surplus-value, for example. Everything is good at the proper time and in the proper place.

It is possible however that when Mr. Lunacharsky spoke of a harmonious system of concepts he was referring to the views on proletarian culture recently put forward in the press by his close colleague in thought, Mr. Bogdanov. If that is so, then his last objection amounted to this, that I yet greater praise would earn, if to Mr. Bogdanov I went to learn.^[92] I thank him for the advice, but I don't intend to take it. And if anyone should, from inexperience, think of interesting himself in Mr. Bogdanov's pamphlet, *Proletarian Culture*, I would remind him that it was very effectively laughed to scorn in *Sovremenny Mir*^[93] by another of Mr. Lunacharsky's close colleagues in thought – Mr. Alexinsky.

Notes

[Footnotes are Plekhanov's own, except additions by subsequent editor marked "Note by editor"]

1. The work here presented to the reader is a recast of a lecture which I delivered, in Russian, in Liège and Paris in November of this year (1912). It has therefore to some degree retained the form of an oral delivery. Towards the end of the second part I shall examine certain objections addressed to me publicly in Paris by Mr. Lunacharsky concerning the criterion of beauty. I replied to them verbally at the time, but I consider it useful to discuss them in the press.
2. The article *Art and Social Life* was originally published in parts in the journal *Sovremennik*, November and December 1912, and January 1913. It is included in Vol. XIV of Plekhanov's *Collected Works*, published after his death. [Note by editor.]
3. Plekhanov's assessment of Pisarev's views on art is not quite correct. Pisarev was a strong opponent of the theory of art for art's sake, and held that art should be deeply imbued with thought content and reflect the progressive ideas of its time. But he did not deny the aesthetic value of art and literature. [Note by editor.]
4. N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Collected Works*, 1906 ed., Vol. I, pp. 33-34.

5. This opinion was partly a reiteration and partly a further development of the views formulated by Belinsky towards the end of his life. In his article, "A View of Russian Literature of 1847," Belinsky wrote: "The highest and most sacred interest of society is its own welfare, equally extended to each of its members. The road to this welfare is consciousness, and art can promote consciousness no less than science. Here science and art are equally indispensable, and neither science can replace art, nor art replace science." But art can develop man's knowledge only by "passing judgement on the phenomena of life." Chernyshevsky's dissertation is thus linked with Belinsky's final view of Russian literature.

6. Nekrasov, *The Poet and the Citizen*. [Note by editor.]

7. Kramskoi's letter to V. V. Stasov from Mentone, April 30, 1884, shows that he was strongly influenced by the views of Belinsky, Gogol, Fedotov, Ivanov, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Perov (*Ivan Nikolayevich Kramskoi, His Life, Correspondence and Critical Articles*, St. Petersburg, 1888, p. 487). It should be observed, however, that the judgements on the phenomena of life to be met with in Kramskoi's critical articles are far inferior in lucidity to those which we find, for example, in G. I. Uspensky, to say nothing of Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov.

8. This and the previous fragment are from Pushkin's *The Poet and the Crowd*, originally published under the title *The Rabble*. [Note by editor.]

9. In the 1860s, Russian critics who held that art should be independent of social life, appealed to the authority of Pushkin against the revolutionary democrats. They falsely construed these poems and maintained that Pushkin was a believer in "pure art." Similar views were held by the Russian decadents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. [Note by editor.]

10. Reference is to the armed uprising of the troops of the St. Petersburg garrison led by revolutionary officers, members of the Russian nobility, on December 14, 1825 (hence their name – the Decembrists). The basic demands in the programmes of their secret societies were abolition of serfdom and limitation of the tsarist autocracy. The uprising was brutally suppressed; its leaders were executed and many of the participants exiled to Siberia. [Note by editor.]

11. Reference is to St. Petersburg and Moscow. [Note by editor.]

12. P. Y. Shchogolev, *Pushkin, Essays*, St. Petersburg, 1912, p. 357.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

14. From Pushkin's *To the Poet*. [Note by editor.]

15. Preface to *Mlle de Maupin*.

16. A group of French poets (Théophile Gautier, Charles Leconte de Lisle, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and others), which took shape in the latter half of the 19th century. The name Parnassians was derived from *Parnasse Contemporain*, the title of collections of poems they published in 1866, 1871 and 1876, where they preached the cult of art for art's sake. [Note by editor.]

17. The name applied in German student corps to first-year students; here the reference is to students in Heidelberg and Jena. [Note by editor.]

18. *Histoire du romantisme*, Paris, 1895, pp. 153-54.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

20. *Les odes funambulesques*, Paris, 1858, pp. 294-95.

21. *Restoration* in France – the period (1814-30) of Bourbon rule after the restoration of the dynasty in 1814. [Note by editor.]

22. Alfred de Musset describes this disharmony in the following words: “Dès lors se formèrent comme deux camps: d’une part les esprits exaltés, souffrants; toutes les âmes expansives, qui ont besoin de l’infini, plièrent la tête en pleurant, ils s’enveloppèrent de rêves maladifs, et l’on ne vit plus que de frêles roseaux sur un océan d’amertume. D’une autre part, les hommes de chair restèrent debout, inflexibles, au milieu des jouissances positives, et il ne leur prit d’autre souci que de compter l’argent qu’ils avaient. Ce ne fut qu’un sanglot et un éclat de rire, l’un venant de l’âme, l’autre du corps.” (“Two camps, as it were, formed: on one side, exalted and suffering minds, expansive souls who yearn for the infinite bowed their heads and wept, wrapped themselves in morbid dreams, and one saw nothing but frail reeds in an ocean of bitterness. On the other, men of the flesh remained erect, inflexible, giving themselves over to positive pleasures and knowing no care but the counting of their money. Nothing but sobs and bursts of laughter – the former coming from the soul, the latter from the body.”) *La confession d’un enfant du siècle*, p. 10.

23. *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

25. “For unknown friends.” – *Ed.*

26. Théodore de Banville says explicitly that the romanticists’ attacks on the “bourgeois” were not directed against the bourgeoisie as a social class (*Les odes funambulesques*, Paris, 1858, p.294). This conservative revolt of the romanticists against the “bourgeois,” but not against the foundations of the bourgeois system, has been understood by some of our present-day

Russian... theoreticians (Mr. Ivanov-Razumnik, for instance) as a struggle against the bourgeois spirit, a struggle which was far superior in scope to the social and political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. I leave it to the reader to judge the profundity of this conception. In reality, it points to the regrettable fact that people who undertake to expound the history of Russian social thought do not always go to the trouble of acquainting themselves preliminarily with the history of thought in Western Europe.

27. The attitude of mind of the German romanticists was marked by an equally hopeless disharmony with their social environment, as is excellently shown by Brandes in his *Die romantische Schule in Deutschland*, which is the second volume of his work, *Die Hauptströmungen der Literatur des 19-ten Jahrhunderts*.

28. *Poèmes antiques*, Paris, 1852, Preface, p. vii.

29. *Ibid.*, p. ix.

30. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

31. *Slavophiles* – a trend of social thought in Russia which arose in the forties and fifties of the 19th century. They advanced a “theory” that Russia should follow its own, distinctive path of development based on the communal system (which was supposedly peculiar to the Slav nations) and Orthodox Christianity. The Slavophiles believed that Russian historical development precluded any possibility of revolutionary upheavals, strongly disapproved of the revolutionary movement and thought that the tsarist autocracy should be preserved in Russia. [*Note by editor.*]

32. By the “work” of Peter Ostrovsky meant the reforms of Peter I, designed to Europeanise Russia and end her backwardness. [*Note by editor.*]

33. “It is not a play, it’s a lesson.” – *Ed.*

34. *Moskovsky Telegraf* (Moscow Telegraph) – a scientific and literary journal published by N. A. Polevoi from 1825 to 1834. It came out in favour of enlightenment and criticised the system of feudal serfdom in Russia. [*Note by editor.*]

35. *Memoirs of Ksenofont Polevoi*, Suvorin Publishing House, St. Petersburg, 1888, p. 445.

36. One must be content in sunshine and rain, in heat or cold: “Be of ruddy countenance; I detest lean and pallid men. He who does not laugh deserves to be impaled.” – *Ed.*

37. Form is beautiful, true, when there is thought beneath it! What is the use of a beautiful forehead, if there is no brain behind it? – *Ed.*
38. See A. Cassagne's excellent book, *La théorie de l'art pour l'art en France chez les derniers romantiques et les premiers réalistes*, Paris, 1906, pp. 96-105.
39. Article 2 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, adopted by the French Constituent Assembly at its sittings of August 20-26, 1789, reads: "Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l'homme. Ces droits sont: la liberté, la propriété, la sûreté et la résistance a l'oppression." ("The object of every civic association is the protection of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are: liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.") The concern for *property* testifies to the bourgeois character of the revolution, while the recognition of the right to "resist oppression" indicates that the revolution had only just taken place but had not yet been completed, having met with strong resistance from the lay and clerical aristocracy. In June 1848 the French bourgeoisie no longer recognised the right of the citizen to resist oppression.
40. Belinsky expressed this opinion in his article "A View of Russian Literature in 1847." [*Note by editor.*]
41. Its exclusiveness, which cannot be denied, only signified that in the 16th century the people who prized art were hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment. Then, too, this disharmony induced a gravitation towards pure art, that is, towards art for art's sake. Previously, in the time of Giotto, say, there had been no such disharmony and no such gravitation.
42. It is noteworthy that Perugino himself was suspected by his contemporaries of being an atheist.
43. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Préface, p. 23.
44. *Milo of Crotona* – a famous Greek athlete (6th century B.C.). [*Note by editor.*]
45. *Les Poètes*, MDCCCLXXXIX, p. 260. – *Ed.*
46. Quoted by Cassagne in his *La théorie de l'art pour l'art chez les derniers romantiques et les premiers réalistes*, pp. 194-95.
47. "On peut, sans contradiction, aller successivement à son laboratoire et à son oratoire" ("one can, without contradiction, go successively to one's laboratory and one's chapel"), Grasset, professor of clinical

medicine at Montpellier, said ten years or so ago. This dictum is reiterated with delight by such theorists as Jules Soury, author of *Bréviaire de l'histoire du matérialisme*, a book written in the spirit of Lange's well-known work on the same theme. See the article "Oratoire et laboratoire," in Soury's *Campagnes nationalistes*, Paris, 1902, pp. 233-66, 267. See also, in the same book, the article "Science et Religion," the chief idea of which is expressed in the words of Du Bois-Reymond: *ignoramus et ignorabimus* (we do not know and never will know).

48. In saying this, Huysmans was hinting at the novel of the Belgian author Tabarant: *Les virus d'amour*.

49. See Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, conversation with Huysmans, pp. 176-77.

50. See the article "Dr. Stockmann's Son" in my collection *From Defence to Attack*.

51. I am speaking of the time when Gautier had not yet worn out his celebrated red waistcoat. Later – at the time of the Paris Commune, for instance – he was already a conscious – and very bitter – enemy of the emancipatory aspirations of the working class. It should be observed, however, that Flaubert might likewise be called an ideological forerunner of Knut Hamsun, and even, perhaps, with greater right. In one of his notebooks we find the following significant lines: "Ce n'est pas contre Dieu que Prométhée aujourd'hui, devrait se révolter, mais contre le Peuple, dieu nouveau. Aux vieilles tyrannies sacerdotales, féodales et monarchiques on a succédé une autre, plus subtile, inextricable, impérieuse et qui, dans quelque temps, ne laissera pas un seul coin de la terre qui soit libre." ("It is not against God that Prometheus would have to revolt today, but against the People, the new god. The old sacerdotal, feudal and monarchical tyrannies have been succeeded by another, more subtle, enigmatic and imperious, and one that soon will not leave a single free corner on the earth.") See the chapter, "Les carnets de Gustave Flaubert" in Louis Bertrand's *Gustave Flaubert*, Paris, 1912, p. 255.

This is just the sort of free-as-a-bird thinking that inspires Ivar Kareno. In a letter to George Sand dated September 8, 1871, Flaubert says: "Je crois que la foule, le troupeau sera toujours haïssable. Il n'y a d'important qu'un petit groupe d'esprits toujours les mêmes et qui se repassent le flambeau." ("I believe that the crowd, the herd, will always be detestable. Nothing is important but a small group of always the same minds who pass on, the torch to one another.") This letter also contains the lines I have already quoted to the effect that universal suffrage is a disgrace to the human mind, since because of it number dominates even over money!" (See Flaubert, *Correspondance, quatrième série (1869-1880), huitième mille*,

Paris, 1910.) Ivar Kareno would probably recognise in these views his own free-as-a-bird thoughts. But these views were not yet reflected in Flaubert's novels *directly*. The class struggle in modern society had to advance much further before the ideologists of the ruling class felt the need to give outright expression in literature to their hatred for the emancipatory ambitions of the "people." But those who eventually conceived this need could no longer advocate the "absolute autonomy" of ideologies. On the contrary, they demanded that ideologies should consciously serve as intellectual weapons in the struggle against the proletariat. But of this later.

52. The feudal landlord in Saltykov-Shchedrin's satirical tale, *The Wild Landlord*, who wanted "to solve" the peasant problem by murdering off the peasants. [Note by editor.]

53. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1969, p. 112. [Note by editor.]

54. "For such is our good pleasure." – *Ed.*

55. He says so himself. See *La barricade*, Paris, 1910, Preface, p. xix.

56. *Vasily Shibanov* – hero of an historical ballad of the same name by Count Alexei Tolstoy. [Note by editor.]

57. "Vocal tool" – *instrumentum vocale*, the name given to slaves in Ancient Rome. [Note by editor.]

58. *La barricade*, Preface, p. xxiv.

59. *Sous l'oeil des barbares*, 1901 ed., p. 18.

60. *Collected Verse*, Preface, p. ii.

61. *Collected Verse*, Preface, p. iii.

62. *Babayev* – a character in Sergeyev-Tsensky's play of the same name. [Note by editor.]

63. According to Plekhanov's opportunist conception, there were no objective conditions for a socialist revolution in Russia since she had embarked on the road of industrial development later than other countries and a conflict between the productive forces and capitalist production relations was not yet in sight. [Note by editor.]

64. We know, for instance, that the work of Helvetius, *De l'homme*, was published in The Hague, in 1772, by a Prince Golitsyn.

65. The infatuation of Russian aristocrats for the French Encyclopaedists had no practical consequences of any moment. It was however *useful*, in the sense that it did clear certain aristocratic minds of some aristocratic prejudices. On the other hand, the present infatuation of a section of our

intelligentsia for the philosophical views and aesthetic tastes of the declining bourgeoisie is *harmful*, in the sense that it fills their “intellectual” minds with bourgeois prejudices, for the independent production of which our Russian soil has not yet been sufficiently prepared by the course of social development. These prejudices even invade the minds of many Russians who sympathise with the proletarian movement. The result is that they are filled with an astonishing mixture of socialism and that modernism which is bred by the decline of the bourgeoisie. This confusion is even the cause of no little practical harm.

66. Dmitri Mereschkowsky, Zinaida Hippus, Dmitri Philosophoff, *Der Zar and die Revolution*, Munich, K. Piper and Co., 1908, pp. 1-2.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

69. In their German book, Merezhkovsky, Hippus and Filosofov do not at all repudiate the name “decadents” as applied to themselves. They only confine themselves to modestly informing Europe that the Russian decadents have “attained the highest peaks of world culture” (“haben die höchsten Gipfel der Weltkultur erreicht”). *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

70. Her mystical anarchism will of course not frighten anyone. Anarchism, generally, is only an extreme deduction from the basic premises of bourgeois individualism. That is why we find so many bourgeois ideologists in the period of decadence who are sympathetic to anarchism. Maurice Barrès likewise sympathised with anarchism in that period of his development when he affirmed that there is no reality save our ego. Now, probably, he has no *conscious* sympathy for anarchism, for the ostensibly stormy outbursts of his particular brand of individualism ceased long ago. For him, the “authentic truths” which, he maintained, were “destroyed” have now been restored, the process of restoration being that Barrès has adopted the reactionary standpoint of the most vulgar nationalism. And this is not surprising: it is but a step from extreme bourgeois individualism to the most reactionary “truths.” This should be noted by Mrs. Hippus, as well as by Messrs. Merezhkovsky and Filosofov.

71. As an example of a thinker who restricts the rights of reason in the interest of religion, one might instance Kant: “Ich musste also das *Wissen* aufheben; um zum *Glauben* Platz zu bekommen.” (“I must, therefore, abolish *knowledge*, to make room for *belief*.”) *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Preface to the second edition, p. 26, Leipzig, Philipp Reclam, second and improved edition.

72. Many of the early impressionists were men of great talent. But it is noteworthy that among these very talented men there were no first-rate

portrait painters. This is understandable, for in portrait painting light cannot be the chief dramatis persona. Furthermore, the landscapes of the distinguished impressionist masters are good for the very reason that they affectively convey the capricious and diversified effects of light; but there is very little “mood” in them. Feuerbach put it extremely well when he said: “Die Evangelien der Sinne im Zusammenhang lesen, heisst denken.” (“Reading the gospel of the senses coherently is thinking.”) Remembering that by “senses,” or sensibility, Feuerbach meant everything that relates to the realm of sensation, it may be said that the impressionists could not, and would not, read the “gospel of the senses.” This was the principal shortcoming of their school, and it very soon led to its degeneration. If the landscapes of the early and outstanding impressionist masters are good, very many of those of their very numerous followers resemble caricatures.

73. See Camille Mauclair’s “La crise de la laideur en peinture,” in his interesting collection of articles, *Trois crises de l’art actuel*, Paris, 1906.

74. Let the other side be heard. – *Ed.*

75. *Du cubisme*, p. 30.

76. *Du cubisme*, p. 31.

77. See the book in question, especially pp. 43-44.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

79. The words in quotation marks and the verses in the same paragraph are from Pushkin’s *The Poet and the Crowd*. [*Note by editor.*]

80. *Die Kunst and die Revolution* (R. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III, Leipzig, 1872, pp. 40-41.)

81. “Les carnets de Gustave Flaubert” (L. Bertrand, *Gustave Flaubert*, p. 260).

82. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

83. *Op. cit.*, pp. 314-20.

84. *Op. cit.*, p. 321.

85. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Moscow, 1962, pp. 31-32.

86. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1969, p. 117. [*Note by editor.*]

87. Nous touchons ici au défaut de culture générale qui caractérise la plupart des artistes jeunes. Une fréquentation assidue vous démontrera vite qu’ils sont en général très ignorants... incapables ou indifférents devant les antagonismes d’idées et les situations dramatiques actuelles, ils oeuvrent

péniblement a l'écart de toute l'agitation intellectuelle et sociale, confinés dans les conflits de technique, absorbés par l'apparence matérielle de la peinture plus que par sa signification générale et son influence intellectuelle." ("We refer here to the general lack of culture that characterises most young artists. Frequent contacts with them will soon show you that they are in general very ignorant... being incapable of understanding, or indifferent to, the conflicts of ideas and dramatic situations of the present day, they work drudgingly secluded from all intellectual and social movements, confining themselves to problems of technique and absorbed more with the material appearance of painting than with its general significance and intellectual influence.") Holl, *La jeune peinture contemporaine*, pp. 14-15, Paris, 1912.

88. Here I have the satisfaction of citing Flaubert. He wrote to George Sand, "Je crois la forme et le fond... deux entités qui n'existent jamais l'une sans l'autre." ("I believe form and substance to be two entities which never exist apart.") *Correspondance*, quatrième série, p. 225. He who considers it possible to sacrifice form "for idea" ceases to be an artist, if he ever was one.

89. "It is not the irresponsible whim of capricious taste that suggests the desire to find unique aesthetic values that are not subject to the vanity of fashion or the imitation of the herd. The creative dream of a single incorruptible beauty, the living image that will save the world and enlighten and regenerate the erring and fallen, is nourished by the ineradicable urge of the human spirit to penetrate the fundamental mysteries of the Absolute." (V. N. Speransky, *The Social Role of Philosophy*, Introduction, p. xi, Part I, Shipovnik Publishing House, St. Petersburg, 1913.) People who argue in this manner are compelled by logic to recognise an absolute criterion of beauty. But people who argue thus are pure-blooded idealists, and I, for my part, consider myself a no less pure-blooded materialist. Not only do I not recognise the existence of a "single incorruptible beauty"; I do not even know what the words "single incorruptible beauty" can possibly mean. More, I am certain that the idealists do not know either. All the talk about such beauty is "just words."

90. *Themistocles* – a boy, son of the landowner Manilov in Gogol's *Dead Souls*. [Note by editor.]

91. I am afraid that this too may give rise to misunderstanding. By the word "decay" I mean, *comme de raison*, a whole process, not an isolated phenomenon. This process has not yet ended, just as the social process of decay of the bourgeois order has not yet ended. It would therefore be strange to think that present-day bourgeois ideologists are definitely incapable of producing works of distinction. Such works, of

course, are possible even now. But the chances of any such appearing have drastically diminished. Furthermore, even works of distinction now bear the impress of the era of decadence. Take, for example, the Russian trio mentioned above: if Mr. Filosofov is devoid of all talent in any field, Mrs. Hippus possesses a certain artistic talent and Mr. Merezhkovsky is even a very talented artist. But it is easy to see that his latest novel *Alexander I*, for example, is irretrievably vitiated by religious mania, which, in its turn, is characteristic of an era of decadence. In such eras even men of very great talent do not produce what they might have produced under more favourable social conditions. [

92. A play on lines from Krylov's fable, *The Ass and the Nightingale*. After hearing the nightingale sing, the ass commended her, but thought she "yet greater praise would earn, if to the farmyard cock she went to learn." [Note by editor.]

93. *Sovremenny Mir* (Contemporary World) – a monthly journal published in St. Petersburg from 1906 to 1918. [Note by editor.]

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Aristotle (384-322 B. C.) Great thinker of Ancient Greece

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Barrès, Auguste Maurice (1862-1923) French writer and publicist, ideologist of Catholicism

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Bertrand, Louis Marie Emile (1866-1941) French writer and literary critic

Bogdanov A. (Malinovsky, Alexander Alexandrovich) (1873-1928) Russian philosopher, sociologist and economist; Social-Democrat; in philosophy displayed revisionist views

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Harmodius (6th century B. C.) Athenian who was executed for conspiring against the tyrants Hipparchus and Hippias

Helvetius, Claude Adrien (1715-1771) French materialist philosopher

Herzen, Alexander Ivanovich (1812-1870) Russian revolutionary democrat, writer, materialist philosopher

Hippius, Zinaida Nikolayevna (1869-1945) Russian reactionary poetess, representative of symbolism

Hugo, Victor (1802-1885) French novelist and poet, an outstanding representative of romanticism

Huret, Jules (1864-1915) French journalist, published several collections of quotations of noted personalities on literature, public life, etc.

Huysmans, Joris Karl (1848-1907) French symbolist writer; decadent

Ivanov, Alexander Andreyevich (1806-1858) Russian painter

Ivanov-Razumnik (Razumnik Vasilyevich Ivanov) (1878-1945) Russian Narodnik, literary critic and sociologist

Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804) German philosopher, founder of German classical idealism

Kramskoi, Ivan Nikolayevich (1837-1887) Russian painter and public figure

Kukolnik, Nestor Vasilyevich (1809-1868) Russian reactionary novelist and playwright

Lamartine, Alphonse de (1790-1869) French poet, historian and politician

Lange, Friedrich Albert (1828-1875) German Neo-Kantian philosopher, economist

Laprade, Pierre Martin Victor (1812-1883) French poet

Laurent-Pichat, Léon (1823-1886) French poet and publicist

Leconte de Lisle, Charles (1818-1894) French poet

Léger, Fernand (1881-1955) French painter

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) Italian painter, scientist and engineer, one of the greatest men of the Renaissance

Leroux, Pierre (1797-1871) French utopian socialist

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Louis Philippe (1713-1850) King of France (1830-1848)

Lunacharsky, Anatoly Vasilyevich (1875-1933) Prominent Russian Bolshevik; subsequently Soviet statesman and public figure, publicist and literary critic; during the years of reaction (1907-10), member of the anti-Party *Vperyod* group

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Ostrovsky, Alexander Nikolayevich (1823-1886) Russian playwright

Paskevich, Ivan Fyodorovich (1782-1856) Russian general, reactionary statesman

Perov, Vasily Grigoryevich (1833 [34]-1882) Russian painter and graphic artist

Perugino (Pietro di Christophoro Vannucci) (c. 1445-1523) Italian painter of the Renaissance

Peter I (1672-1725) Russian tsar (1682-1721) and Emperor of Russia (1721-1725)

Pisarev, Dmitry Ivanovich (1840-1869) Russian literary critic and publicist, revolutionary democrat

Plato (427-347 B.C.) Idealist philosopher of ancient Greece

Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-1849) American writer

Polevoi, Ksenofont Alexeyevich (1801-1867) Russian writer and critic, brother of N.A. Polevoi

Polevoi, Nikolai Alexeyevich (1796-1846) Russian journalist, writer and historian

Przybyszewski, Stanislaw (1868-1927) Polish writer, decadent and mystic

Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyevich (1799-1837) Great Russian poet

Raphael, Sanzio (1483-1520) Great Italian painter

Razumovsky, Alexei Kirillovich (1748-1822) Minister of Education under Alexander I

Renan, Joseph Ernest (1823-1892) French historian of religion, idealist philosopher

Ricardo, David (1772-1823) English economist, an outstanding representative of bourgeois classical political economy

Ruskin, John (1819-1900) English theoretician of art, critic and publicist

Sand, George (pseudonym of *Aurore Dudevant*) (1804-1876) French novelist

Sergeyev-Tsensky, Sergei Nikolayevich (1875-1958) Russian Soviet writer

Shchedrin (Saltykov-Shchedrin), Mikhail Yevgrafovich (1826-1889) Russian satirist

Shchogolev, Pavel Yeliseyevich (1877-1931) Russian Soviet literary critic

Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, Platon Alexandrovich (1790-1853)
Minister of Education in Russia from 1850 to 1853

Sieyès, Abbé Emanuel Joseph (1748-1836) Leader in the French
bourgeois revolution of the end of the 18th century

Soury, Jules-Auguste (1842-1915) French philosopher, Neo-
Kantian

Speransky, Valentin Nikolayevich – historian of philosophy,
privat-dozent of St. Petersburg University

Stasov, Vladimir Vasilyevich (1824-1906) Russian musical and art
critic

Sudermann, Hermann (1857-1928) German playwright and
novelist

Tabarant, Adolf (b. 1863) Belgian writer

Tolstoy, Alexei Konstantinovich (1817-1875) Russian poet and
playwright

Turgenev, Ivan Sergeyeovich (1818-1883) Russian writer

Uspensky, Gleb Ivanovich (1843-1902) Russian writer

Vigny, Alfred de (1797-1863) French romantic poet and novelist

Wagner, Richard (1813-1883) German composer

Zola, Emile (1840-1902) French writer

Zhukovsky, Vasily Andreyevich (1783-1852) Russian poet