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July-August, 1942

ON TRANSLATING MONTAIGNE

I lie in deep grass under the shade of a yew tree near my house, enjoying the lovely summer afternoon, and translating Montaigne. What more perfect occupation could one imagine? The slant sun-rays are filling with light the foliage of the oaks, the near ferns and campions, the tall thistles and darting flies. Jackdaws caw, a dove's wings flap unseen among the beech leaves, while another is cooing in the distance. A persistent chaffinch is repeating his silly little phrase again and again, till I am no more aware of it than of the faint hum of flies in the treetops. But the blackcap—I have to listen when *he* starts warbling. And Montaigne—I seem to have forgotten *him*. Yet here he lies on my knees, waiting. I must translate a few more sentences before the sun sets.

Montaigne is the most sympathetic, the most human of all writers. Why then do I now feel a reluctance to return to him? Is it my fault—or the blackcap's—or Montaigne's perhaps? He would be tolerant of my summer-entranced mood; he would be amused by it, but would hardly understand it. Severe old Wordsworth would understand, but not Montaigne. In all his writings there is scarcely a sentence in which he shows the least interest in the beauty of nature. He who has told us everything there was to tell about himself, all his most serious cogitations, all his tastes and habits and wayward thoughts and whimsies, has nothing whatever to say about such sights and sounds as are now giving me such delight. There is indeed this passage in his *Essays*: "When I am taking a solitary walk in a beautiful orchard, if my thoughts are employed upon outside events during part of the time, during another part I call them back to my walk, to

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the orchard, to the sweetness of that solitude, and to myself." So it appears that Montaigne was able to enjoy walking in his orchard, though he could spare it but a small portion of his thoughts. How different from Marvell!—

Annihilating all that's made

To a green thought in a green shade.

For Montaigne was essentially unromantic, and a moralist, though of all moralists the most tolerant and humane. It was Man that he was primarily interested in, and in himself, as the man whom he knew most thoroughly. The "three kinds of intercourse" which had most value for him were, so he tells us, intercourse with friends, with women, and with books. For him these were enough; and to these he devoted all the candour and ingenuity of his mind, and all his genius for literary expression. He loved poetry, but was no poet himself. Yet perhaps he may have been more sensitive to the "Poetry of earth" than would appear from his Essays. At that time no man of letters would ever have conceived the idea of expressing in prose his intimate feelings towards nature, or of describing lovingly and minutely what he saw and heard. That task was left to Ronsard and the Pleiad, to fulfil as best they could within the narrow limits of their poetical conventions. It may well be that sometimes, in the sweet solitude of his orchard, or during those many hours spent by him in the saddle, moods of contemplation would come upon him, and his eyes and mind would open to the beauty and romance of the earth. That we shall never know; for, even if it were so, he would have considered it no fitting theme for his discourses.

And so, much as I love Montaigne, there are times when my sympathy with him must be imperfect. Yet I feel sure that, if he were now to come and seat himself beside me in the grass, I should at once surrender to the charm of his personality and conversation; nay, that the beauty that surrounded us would blend with and enhance the pleasure of our talk, as it did with Socrates and his pupil under the plane tree on the banks of the Ilissus,

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And what would our talk be of? Perhaps he would cast his eye upon the volume of his *Essays* on my knees. What would he say when I confessed to him that I was translating him into the language of our remote and half-civilised island? I think he would be pleased, since, for all his modesty, like most great writers, he enjoyed his fame, and wished that his book should be read and understood. I would then perhaps complain to him of his not infrequent ambiguities and obscurities which, in the absence of any full and helpful commentary, made my task such a difficult one. Here he would laugh and remind me how somewhere in his *Essays* he had declared war upon the whole tribe of commentators, annotators, and manufacturers of glosses and of books about books. As to his obscurities, he would beg me to turn to his *Essay on Vanity*, where he writes: "My intention is that my matter should be distinguishable of itself. It shows clearly enough where it changes, where it concludes, where it begins, where it resumes, without the interweaving of connecting and transitional words, introduced for the benefit of weak or inattentive ears, and without writing commentaries on myself. . . And besides, there are persons whose humour is such that they despise what is intelligible, and they will hold me in higher esteem because they do not understand what I say. They will infer the profundity of my meaning from its obscurity, for which, to tell the truth, I have a strong hatred, and would avoid it if I could avoid myself."

"That may be all very well for your readers," I would answer. "But I am your translator; and to translate you worthily I must know what you mean." "I fear you take your task too scrupulously and pedantically," he would say. "What should it matter if, having done your best to be faithful to me, you should sometimes wander a little astray from the strict path of my words? In doing so, you may well chance to stumble upon felicities of phrase, and even of thought, which would have done honour to my book, if it had been my good fortune to discover them. You are not translating the Holy Scriptures, nor Plato, nor even the good Plutarch, but the most careless, rambling,

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and ordinary of writers, who has but little learning (despite his brave array of quotations from Seneca and the Latin poets), and no philosophy of his own." "Ah, those quotations!" I would reply. "Dare I confess to you that I have at times had the audacity to omit some of them, when they seemed to contribute little, but rather to interrupt and embarrass the flow of your thoughts?" "Doubtless you are justified in so doing," he would say. "That was indeed a vicious habit which I caught from the authors of my time, who were wont to scatter noble Latin quotations all over their writings, as from a pepper-box, to season their own insipidity. Nay, I go further, and give you free leave to cut away whole sentences and paragraphs of my own uncouth French, whenever it may appear to you that, because of their clumsiness or inconsequence or lack of clarity, they were better away. But one thing I most earnestly beg of you. Not one phrase, not one word, not one slightest stroke of the graving-tool must you omit or alter in that portrait which I have so truthfully and laboriously drawn of my own self. Do not dare to remove any least detail, however trivial, or even unedifying it may seem to you. In this, so far as I was able, I was honest and faithful to myself, and therefore you must now be faithful to me."

Thus we might have talked together, until at length the sunlight would have faded from the ferns and grasses, and from the treetops; the birds would have fallen silent, and he would then rise to his feet, and without a word more would wander away and disappear within the twilight of the woods.

R. C. TREVELYAN

DANTE'S BEATRICE

She never lived but in the poet's mind
 (as sweet a birthplace as all Love can find);
 but there was in her that which all who love
 find still desirable, and still approve.

S.S.

NOCTURNE

Light candles now, for he has gone away.
 Into the blue cathedral of the night.
 My heart streams like music, and the white
 Day's at an end, and dull the coming day.
 See now, the stars in congregation wait;
 Across the sky the legions pace and pass,
 Singing the solemn music of High Mass,
 So with the kneeling hills companionate.

Heart, he is gone : now words redundant are.
 Useless is grief; see now, my spirit streams
 To join the music of a thousand dreams.
 World, you are all too great : oh night, be long,
 That in your sanctuary this heart, more strong,
 Shall hold confessional with hill and star.

M. D. HASTINGS

COMPOSER IN THE NURSERY

"Cannot the Nursery School do without a professional musician?" I thought. "Almost any amateur is able to accompany a hymn tune and "Baa, baa, black sheep" and "I had a little nut tree." But as I did not want to appear unkind, I agreed to play for the babes two or three times a week. Besides, I was to share the honour with a young lady, an excellent concert pianist, who did not at all mind stepping down from the heights of classical music to the musical playground of children under five. So I became a regular visitor at the Nursery School (not very far from Abinger), and what at first seemed to be a sacrifice of my time turned out to be a source of joy and stimulation.

Half-an-hour of music is part of the daily routine. It begins in the early morning with invariably the same hymn tune and ends with a skipping tune. Friendly words of welcome and advice precede the singing of the hymn. The children are seated on the floor round a carpet, feet tucked in. At last all is quiet, and Miss C., the head of the com-

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munity, chooses a child to take a vase of flowers from a table near the window and to put it down in the middle of the carpet. Little Ann is quick and determined in carrying out her task. Billy is by nature more dreamy. He looks at the daisies as if they were a distant goal and slowly sets out on his mission. Slowly coming back, he cautiously puts down the vase just a little to the side of the pattern in the centre of the carpet.

When autumn's last flowers are over, a teddy bear, a doll or some other toy must serve to represent the bright side of life. I strike the chord of D major. Miss C.'s clear and dominating voice intones "All things bright and beautiful. . . The Lord God made them all." I cannot help wondering what unknown powers are responsible for the horrible things we are daily reminded of in these times of total war. The children too are apparently not fully awake to the beauty of the world or of this particular tune. After the second bar we have to stop. "I want to hear everybody singing," and we start again, converted, and shouting with enthusiasm. There are only a few nice singing voices, but these are well drowned in the pious noise.

We now turn to worldly affairs, and the singing improves. "Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool?" The other day I read that this nursery song, like many others, is not as innocent and meaningless as is generally believed. It is said to refer to an old wool tax, which caused dissatisfaction among the poor, "No bag of wool for the naughty boy that lives down the lane." True or not true, the story adds weight and interest to the words. The tune itself is known all over Europe. It can be traced back to the ritual music of the Roman church, and its essential melodic progression is to be found in the folk songs of many nations, as well in some compositions by Beethoven and Schumann. In its German version the tune is used for memorising the A-B-C and, with other words, as a Christmas song. May be it has become popular through Mozart's variations for piano on "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman," which is exactly the same melody, and so much like the English nursery song that even quite small

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children would recognise it. Yet there would be no sense in playing Mozart's delightful variations to my little friends. Music in a Nursery School is no end in itself, but a means of education and a stimulus for games and physical exercise.

For a pianist, though I do not pretend to be one, there is not much of a chance to show off. My most fascinating number was "Dickory, Dickory, Dock. . . The clock struck one, the mouse ran down"—and down the white keys I would rush, and by this easy trick earn a big clap. Once, in a paradoxical mood, I ventured to do the glissando upwards. The children did not fail to notice my shameful behaviour on the piano, and duly disapproved of it. But I achieved my greatest success in a sphere a little outside my habitual activities. I actually mounted the cock-horse that rides to Banbury Cross, and there was no end of laughter. Even without performing difficult feats like this I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Songs and games and watching the children were fun enough.

If one does not want to get bored by too many repetitions of the same tune, one has to give one's whole attention to whatever the moment may demand, playing from the book, from memory, by ear, and, above all, improvising variations on a given tune. There must be a striking contrast, "If I were a fish, a-swimming I would go" and "If I were a cow, a-munching I would go," and no less between the warbling lark and the roaring lion. In no circumstances must the man at the piano allow his thoughts to wander. I am afraid he sometimes did, and so it happened one morning that he was completely at sea. Having played from memory "Here sits the Lord Mayor" on many a day and on this disastrous morning already five times, at the sixth time he could not remember the music.

Hardly anything can be said about the musical talents of the children. One is simply happy to hear a child singing perfectly in tune, but it does not indicate much for his future. As a grown-up he may be interested merely in entertainment music of the lowest kind, while another child with neither voice nor sense of pitch may become an ardent lover of good music. At their present stage the piano exerts

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a rather mysterious attraction, and they all like to flock round it. Before I became accustomed to the rules of the Nursery School I sometimes made a child sit on my knees and allowed him to strum a bit. I was gently reminded that discipline had to be kept. Of course it has.

ROBERT MULLER-HARTMANN

REFLECTION

When the pool is still
The image seen there, is
In calm reverse.
So the heart will
In quietness regard itself
And so converse.

When the raging storm
Tears overhead until
It weaves its chaos, round
Turbulent currents form
And looking in the deep
Is nothing found.

JOHN GRIFFIN

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE TEACHING
OF ART

After several years of carving in stone and wood, experimenting along certain lines, some fundamental ideas have emerged for me which, as far as I am aware, have not been formulated by any school of thought—certainly not by most art schools.

When children's drawings are examined with care, not necessarily from an artistic, but from a psychological point of view, it is observed and is generally admitted that the children draw absolutely spontaneously and that purely symbolic or primitive pictures repeat themselves again and again, so much so that one can recognise likeness between

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these drawings and certain crude prehistoric modellings in clay or negro cave paintings found in Africa. When a small child plays with a ball of clay his one thought is to make an image of a man or of a particular animal, but he has no desire to reproduce exactly what he sees before him. A child is more imaginative than an adult. He wants to create a certain symbol or image subjectively, and pays no attention to the objective suggestion of a grown-up person. But the time comes when a youth enters a craft school to be trained as a stonemason or a church carver. He is taught to master, on strict lines, the highly complicated technique, and to keep to stereotyped designs, with the result that all creative impulse is repressed. It is too late then for him to express creative ideas.

I have often noticed when talking to people the complete inhibition they show in their power of self-expression owing, I believe, to lack of imagination in their education. The repetition of stereotyped sophisticated designs corrupts direct visions of what pupils have before them. They are unable to follow their own emotional and creative desires. They become afraid of their own ideas and of producing something too "different" from what others have produced before them. Again and again I have seen students, timid but with something to say, paralysed by teachers who, dominated by a convention, try to impose it, and thereby frustrate the pupil's creative impulse.

One cannot teach a pupil what Art expresses. The pupil has to find out for himself, but the teacher can show the way on purely practical lines and encourage him to develop his creative impulses. Criticism should be very sparingly used, certainly hardly ever with a beginner. One must give him confidence in himself.

I believe that, when teaching people, it is possible to allow them to develop their natural artistic impulses on purely primitive lines. They should be encouraged to mould in clay, for instance, the figure of a man, bearing in mind the fact that the model is a symbol and not a reproduction. The pupil will thus feel encouraged to express his own ideas, possibly along simple lines and with a rather crude

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result; whereas, if a more orthodox way is imposed on him, his creative impulse is inhibited, in part, if not altogether.

Pupils should be shown photographs of masterpieces from all over the world, not only Greek carvings and the mural paintings of the Italian Renaissance, but also primitive sculpture and cave paintings. It has been demonstrated that looking at artistic achievements made by different people throughout the ages stimulates the creative faculty and leads to fresh creativeness.

It is long practise which enables the pupil to pass through the cruder stages into something that could not possibly have been given expression, if those primitive ideas had been repressed and drawn into sophisticated channels of which we see everywhere the hideous results.

A. B. S. SPRIGGE

NOSTALGIA

The rain sweeps curtain-like across the moors,
furtive, noiseless, irresistible.

The streams are swollen,
mourning curlew silenced,
and the heather drenched and cowed.

The farmhouse stands foursquare,
grey and slumbering.

Not buttressed against the wild
but one with all the sulky strength
of rain soaked moors
and grim primeval forms of earth and stone.

Why should I think of this
among the lights of Piccadilly
and in the shadowland of Leicester Square?

H. B. ALDRICH



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