

Of being a Writer, sans date

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Les folios

En passant la souris sur une vignette, le titre de l'image apparaît.

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The world and man being given, all the major arts, with the exception of literature, are natural to man. Whatever the type of civilization, the arts of music, dance, and the graphic sign belong as to speak to the biological attributes of man. They represent a form of natural activity, indefinitely self-renewing. Their primitive, essential components: vocalization, rhythm, line, are to be found originally present since the beginning of recorded history. Not so with literature. There is no linear type of civilization had to arise, the passage from instinctive to social behaviour, in order to give birth to a purely artificial discipline: literature.

Whereas all the other major arts deal with concrete, real instruments (tools): voice, human body, colors, etc., the writer deals exclusively with abstract symbols: words. Between him and the world he intends to describe there is the word, which never conveys really the described world. This is the more obvious where the object he deals with is itself abstract: love, liberty, anxiety, etc. It is not in using vile words that he is able to convey meanings, nor does he give us the feeling of beauty in handling sparkling adjectives. Even in the most distanced forms of art (non-objective painting, for instance), there always remains an element of imitation: a line, a dot, the relation of space and color, the reproduction, however unwillingly, geometrical patterns somehow related to really perceived objects. The written word (the spoken word is unerringly carried along, reinforced, rendered meaningful, through mimicry, accent, facial expression, gesture, etc.), the written word, on the other hand, got nothing to carry it but its own symbolism — which is far from being even an approximate equivalent of the thing it is intending to communicate. When I say: sky, table, bread, I merely name, I do not show; I invite the reader to approach intellectually, i.e. abstractly, not the thing in itself, but my own, abstract and abstracted vision of the thing. It is, then, firstly, a pure exercise of the mind, from where it passes into the emotions. Whereas I can listen to music, look at a painting, and get a genuine aesthetic experience without as much as beginning to understand what I look at or listen to, I cannot aesthetically enjoy a novel in the same manner. I must, here, grasp the symbolism beforehand, i.e. I must identify myself intellectually with it, and this could be achieved only when and if the writer has attained the point of perfection where his word and his world have themselves undergone a complete identification: where the words he uses, despite of being pure symbols, no more hinder but carry their object. The highest form of the art of writing calls for the lowest possibility of symbolism, i.e. a form of prose where the symbol appears as if it were unnamed by the writer, and guessed, discovered, built up by the reader.

OF BEING A WRITER.

The world and man being given, all the major arts, with the sole exception of literature, are natural to man. Whatever the type of civilization, the arts of music, dance, and the graphic sign belong so to speak to the biological attributes of man. They represent a form of natural activity, indefinitely self-reproducing. Their primitive, essential components: vocalization, rhythm, line, are to be found originally present since the beginning of recorded history. Not so with literature. There is no linear continuity from the spoken to the written word. A very specific type of civilization had to arise, the passage from instinctive to social behaviour, in order to give birth to a purely artificial discipline: literature.

Whereas all the other major arts deal with concrete, real instruments (tools): voice, human body, colours, etc., the writer deals exclusively with abstract symbols: words. Between him and the world he intends to describe there is the word, which never conveys really the described world. This is the more obvious where the object he deals with is itself abstract: love, liberty, anxiety, etc. It is not in using vile words that he is able to convey goodness, nor does he give us the feeling of beauty in handling sparkling adjectives. Even in the most disembodied forms of art (non-objective painting, for instance), there always remains an element of imitation: a line, a dot, the relation of space and color, do reproduce, however unwillingly, geometrical patterns somehow related to really perceived objects. The written word (the spoken word is invariably carried along, reinforced, rendered meaningful, through mimicry, accent, facial expression, gesticulation, etc.), the written word, on the other hand, got nothing to carry it but its own symbolism — which is far from being even an approximate equivalent of the thing it is intending to communicate. Where I say: sky, table, bread, I merely name, I do not show: I invite the reader to approach intellectually, i.e. abstractly, not the thing in itself, but my own, abstract and abstracted vision of the thing. It is, then, firstly, a pure exercise of the mind, from where it passes into the emotions. Whereas I can listen to music, look at a painting, and get a genuine aesthetic experience without as much as beginning to understand what I look at or listen to, I cannot aesthetically enjoy a novel in the same manner. I must, here, grasp the symbolism beforehand, i.e. I must identify myself intellectually with it, and this could be achieved only when and if the writer has attained the point of perfection where his word and his world have themselves undergone a complete identification: where the words he uses, despite of being pure symbols, no more hinder but carry their object. The highest form of the art of writing calls for the lowest possibility of symbolism, i.e. a form of prose where the symbol appears as if it were unwanted by the writer, and guessed, discovered, built up by the reader.