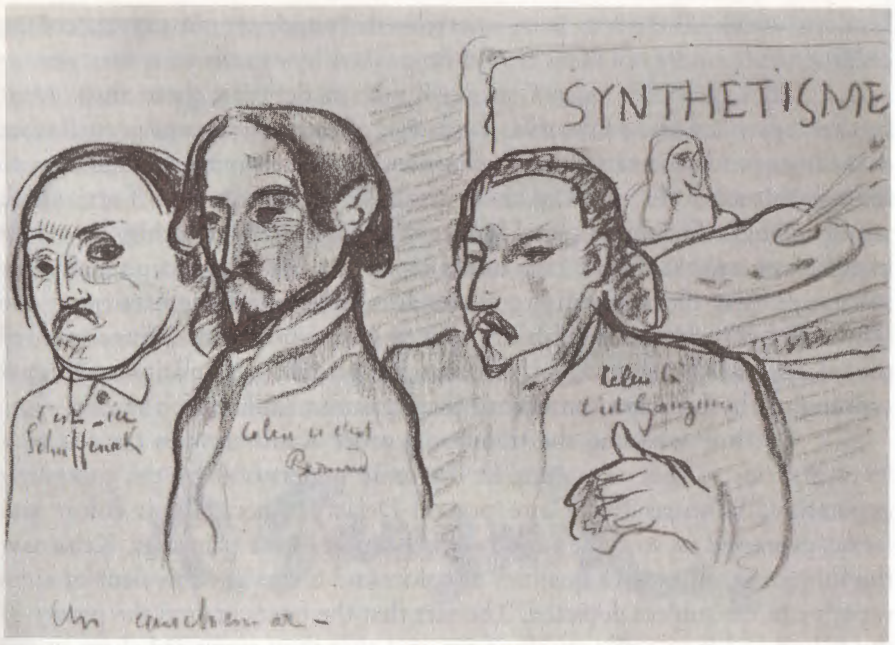
II SYMBOLISM AND OTHER SUBJECTIVIST TENDENCIES: Form and the Evocation of Feeling

INTRODUCTION

The artists participating in the subjectivist movements of about 1885–1900 may be grouped together only because they all rejected the realist conceptions of art that had prevailed for the preceding generation. It is on this basis only that they may be discussed together; stylistically, they varied widely. Following the lead of the advanced poets, they turned away from the exterior world and inward to their own feelings for their subject matter. Although they often employed traditional religious or literary subjects in their painting, they declared that its feeling qualities were derived more from colors and forms than from the subject chosen. The movement, therefore, was a result of new freedoms made possible by throwing off the obligation to "represent" the tangible world, and of new stimuli gained from an exploration of the subjective world. The new freedom and stimuli also allowed the range of ideas on what constituted proper subject matter for painting to be greatly expanded. They stimulated some of the more vigorous painters to create new formal characteristics, or even a new style, to convey better the more intangible qualities of the new subjectivist themes of painting.

The movement was first heralded for the poets in the Symbolist Manifesto (1886) by Jean Moréas (1856–1910). Moréas, rejecting the naturalism of Emile Zola and the writers of the previous generation, proclaimed that "opposed to 'teaching, declamation, false sensibility, objective description,' symbolic poetry seeks to clothe the Idea in a perceptible form . . . ." The Symbolist poets, grouped about Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), developed theories of art which were to provide an ideological background for the thoughts of many of the artists. Their theories centered in a rejection of the world of the commonplace middle-class people meticulously described in Zola's "scientifically" probing novels.



Paul Gauguin or Emile Bernard, A Nightmare (portraits of Emile Schuffenecker, Bernard and Gauguin), ca. 1888, crayon.

They believed that the greatest reality lay in the realm of the imagination and fantasy. These attitudes of the new subjective movement had been expressed a little earlier by Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) in his *Art poétique* (1882) and by J.-K. Huysmans (1848–1907) in *A Rebours* (1884). Taking their inspiration from Romanticism and in particular from the poet Charles Baudelaire, these writers found life tolerable only in the cultivation of their own feelings and sensations. Baudelaire's *Culte de moi* was revived; his concern with individuality of expression was transformed into an obsessive concern with the intimate, private world of the self that led to a rejection of the exterior world. The poets took inspiration in this attitude from Baudelaire's conviction that "the whole of the visible universe is only a storehouse of images and signs to which the imagination assigns a place and a relative value; it is a kind of nourishment that the imagination must digest and transform." Baudelaire's theory of "correspondence," stated in the poem "Correspondence" of 1857, was also deeply influential on the poets and painters. It was, briefly, that a work of art was to be so expressive of basic feelings and so evocative of ideas and emotion that it would rise to a

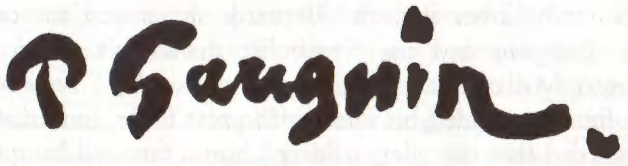
level on which all the arts were interrelated; sounds would suggest colors, colors sounds, and even ideas would be evoked by sounds or colors.

The Symbolist poet Gustave Kahn, in defining their aims, went further, reversing the conventional relation of artist and his subject. Rather than begin with the tangible world and then subjectivize it according to feeling, he took feeling or idea as the starting point of a work of art, which was then objectified in the actual form of the poem of the painting. He wrote in *L'Evénement*, 1886, that "the essential aim of our art is to objectify the subjective (the externalization of the Idea) instead of subjectifying the objective (nature seen through the eyes of a temperament). Thus we carry the analysis of the Self to the extreme, we let the multiplicity and intertwining of rhythm harmonize with the measure of the Idea . . . ."

By thus reversing the traditional order Kahn elevates the self to a level superior to that of nature, in the sense understood by the preceding generation. Whereas Baudelaire praised Delacroix because his colors and forms expressed so well the mood of the subject of his paintings, Kahn saw the subjective, expressive qualities of colors and forms as equivalent or even superior to the subject depicted. The fact that the poets praised the power of the colors and forms of a work of art, and that they expressed them in the terminology of vision, was naturally highly stimulating to the painters. This is but one stage short of the twentieth-century theory that the colors and forms of painting may convey the mood and the idea of a subject without ever actually representing or even suggesting that subject. But while the painters could conceive of the evocative powers of forms and colors existing independent of the subject, they were by no means prepared to carry out in their work the full implications of these theories. It was not until the second decade of the twentieth century, and by artists of quite different convictions, that the first truly abstract paintings could be realized.

The artists of this movement also wrote essays on their art, sometimes with great perception. Even more remarkable is that their theories were not just *a posteriori* contemplations on or explanations of what they had already done, as is frequently the case with artists' statements, but rather their writings often anticipated formal ideas which later appeared in their art. We can assume from this that the theories were probably first stated by the poets and were developed internally by the artists as they struggled with their own problems. The painters were, almost without exception, associated to varying degrees with the principal advanced poets of the time and some of them were also poets or even playwrights, critics, or essayists. Several of them were art critics. Most of them were prolific letter-writers, and they poured out their artistic struggles in the form of lengthy correspondence

with their friends. Seldom since that time and perhaps never before had painter and poet come so close together both in their personal associations and in their struggle with common artistic problems. This kind of association had already been advocated by Richard Wagner in his concept of the "total art," whereby the arts, chiefly music, poetry, and painting would be merged into a sacred union. Wagner, while in Paris, had been drawn into the circle of Mallarmé, where he was highly revered by the French poets. That artists such as Gauguin, Maurice Denis, and Odilon Redon were highly receptive to the literary ideas of the poets is proven by the presence of Symbolist concepts in their writings and also in their paintings. Some of these ideas, such as Synthetism, appeared in the writings of Gauguin before corresponding formal features appeared in his paintings.



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) grew up in a family environment that was dominated by writers; his father was a journalist, and his maternal grandmother had been a feminist lecturer and writer. He carried on a regular correspondence with his friends, especially Van Gogh and Emile Bernard, that contains prolonged discussions of the major ideas and issues confronting both the poets and painters. Gauguin was convinced that what he was attempting in painting was unprecedented and that it, therefore, had to be worked out in ideas as well as in the work itself. The fact that he considered himself to be a "savage" beyond the taint of civilization did not inhibit such sophisticated theorizing, nor did it even restrain him from disputes with critics who had discussed his work. He also wrote, when he first became associated with the poet's group, articles of art criticism for Albert Aurier's *avant-garde* journal *Le Moderniste*, and in Oceania he wrote several long essays concerning his ideas on art and on social and religious problems. He had read the classic authors, and so it is not surprising that even when he "escaped" from European civilization and fled to Polynesia he received regularly and preserved until his death the leading literary journal, *Mercure de France*. And while ill and in a hospital in Tahiti, he read J. A. Moerenhout's extensive study of life and customs in the South Pacific, *Voyages aux iles du Grand Ocean* (1835), from which he took most of the native lore included in his *Noa-Noa* as tales told to him by Tehura. He even

edited and published in mimeographed form his own little newspaper of criticism and comment, chiefly on the local colonial administration.

Gauguin, then, could have been expected to be interested in and even involved in the vital new ideas of the poets. But writing often was difficult for him, and his conversation was so dominated by his own passionate egotism that he usually soon quarrelled with his companions. He found in Emile Bernard (1868–1941) and Paul Sérusier (1863–1927), both much younger than himself, a necessary intellectual stimulus. Both of them were of superior intellect and background. Bernard was especially important for Gauguin, as he had a remarkable talent for discovering, understanding, and transmitting new ideas. Furthermore, he knew and corresponded with many of the major artists, and wrote articles on them, including Van Gogh and Cézanne. He was a friend of Albert Aurier, brilliant Symbolist writer and art critic of about his own age, and Bernard encouraged the critic to write articles on Gauguin and the Symbolist movement. Aurier introduced Gauguin into Mallarmé's circle, where, called the "Symbolist painter," Gauguin often expounded his ideas with great force. Indeed, Gauguin was so well regarded that the poets tendered him a farewell banquet before his first departure for Tahiti in 1891. He had already included both the words "Symbolism" and "Synthetism" in portraits (one of them of Jean Moréas); he had used Symbolist inscriptions on his ceramic sculptures and in his woodcuts; and when in 1896–1897 he wrote the essay, "Diverses Choses," strongly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, he gave it the Symbolist subtitle:

Notes éparses sans suit comme les Rêves
comme la vie tout faite de morceau.

Although he was later to deny any influence from the literary men, it is quite evident both in his writings and in the subject matter of some of his paintings, such as *Whence Do We Come?, What Are We?, Where Are We Going?* (1898), that he was deeply immersed in the body of Symbolist ideas which he shared with the poets.

G.-Albert Aurier (1865–1892) was the most knowledgeable and sympathetic of the Symbolist critics; he had studied painting and was a close friend of many of the artists, and he took up the cause of their art with zest. His youthful friendship with Bernard, which began when he was twenty-three, led him to follow Bernard's suggestions and write several highly perceptive articles on the young painters. Chief among these is the first article ever written on Van Gogh (1890), which appeared in the first issue of *Mercure de France*. He had already published articles by Bernard and Gauguin in his own critical review, *Le Moderniste* (1889), and he had pub-

licized as well as reviewed the Café Volpini exhibition of 1889, where Gauguin and his followers showed their work. In his comprehensive article on Gauguin (1891) he praised him as the leader of the Symbolist artists, a term which he preferred to Synthetism, and in a long article on Symbolism (1892) he defined the aesthetics of the movement, distinguishing between it and Synthetism. Since he considered the movement closely akin to Symbolism in literature, he founded an aesthetics of Symbolist art based on the theories already developed for the literary movement. His early death at the age of twenty-seven ended what surely would have been a highly influential career as an art critic, especially in the pages of the *Mercure de France*. The art section of this journal was taken over by Camille Mauclair, the arch-enemy of the Symbolists as well as of Cézanne, Lautrec, and other new artists, and thus much of the impetus created by Aurier was lost.

Gauguin's own ideas, expressed so forcefully but sometimes so awkwardly, were elaborated upon and given widespread dissemination by a group of young painters who revered him as their master. Soon the essential conditions of a "school" were provided: a powerful and colorful personality as the master, several intellectually alert and devoted disciples, an organized group to formulate the theory, and an art school where the ideas and the style were propagated in the instruction.

The chief disciples were Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis (1870–1943). The first group was composed in 1888 of the students at the Académie Julian. Sérusier, the acknowledged leader of the Académie Julian group, had launched the movement when he had brought back from Pont-Aven in 1888 the revered pronouncement of Gauguin that had given the young students the key to the new art:

> How do you see this tree?
> Is it really green? Use green, then, the most beautiful green on your palette. And that shadow, rather blue? Don't be afraid to paint it as blue as possible.

Several of the artists organized in 1891 the group called the Nabis, which also included Paul Ranson, Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard and K.-X. Roussel. The school was the Académie Ranson, founded in 1908, where most of them taught.

It was only many years later that Sérusier developed his own theory, but Maurice Denis, beginning at the age of nineteen with his important essay, "Définition du Néo-traditionisme" (1890), was active in elaborating upon the ideas of Gauguin as transmitted to him by Sérusier. For a few years, until he turned ultraconservative like others of the Nabis and began to apply doctrinaire religious interpretations to the idealist principles of

Residents of the Pension Gloanec, Pont-Aven Brittany, ca. 1888, including Gauguin, Emile Bernard, Charles Laval, Meyer de Haan and Charles Filiger. The man wearing a cap and seated on the curbstone may be Gauguin.

Symbolism, he wrote some of the most perceptive articles on the ideology, history, and formal characteristics of the subjectivist movement. Denis's eminence during his long life as the most influential mural painter since Puvis de Chavannes, and his activity with artists' organizations including his own Studio of Sacred Art, gave him an authority that tended further to propagate among another generation the ideas and theories derived from Gauguin and the poets.

Some of the other painters drew their ideas and imagery directly from the writings of the poets and novelists. Such men as Gustave Moreau and Rodolphe Bresdin in one generation, and Edvard Munch and Odilon Redon in another, painted highly imaginative and unreal scenes which were frequently drawn from literary sources. According to the views of H. R. Rookmaaker, they are the counterpart in the plastic realm of the Symbolist poets in the literary, hence they may be called Symbolist painters.

Even though Redon (1840–1916), in particular, greatly enriched his art far beyond the basic necessity of representing the subject, both he and the other artists of his generation employed formal means that were for the most part conventional. Redon was inclined toward fantastic literature, having

studied especially Baudelaire and Poe, and he had studied botany, all of which became important for his work. He once remarked that he admired human beauty "with the prestige of thought." He had been for a time an art critic in Bordeaux, and soon became a member of the Symbolist poet's group in Paris, where he became friends with Mallarmé, Gide, and Valéry. His many letters and his journal are substantial literary documents, well written, and rich in ideas and imagery.

Although James Ensor, Edvard Munch, and Ferdinand Hodler developed in environments quite different from that of Paris of the *fin-de-siècle*, they were also closely associated with literary men, and each of them had at one time entered into the milieu of French Symbolism in Paris. Ensor (1860–1949) also had studied the writers of fantasy, and was himself a prolific writer of letters, essays, art criticism, and speeches, many of which appeared in the leading *avant-garde* literary magazines. Later critics have praised his colorful and extremely expressive prose, which has the deformation and antisyntactical characteristics of Expressionist writing. Ensor provided himself with material for his often caustic essays by engaging in the bitter artistic battles between the factions of progress and conservatism in Belgium, battles that were kept raging by new statements emanating from the advanced artistic movements of Paris. His articles appeared in the Symbolist journal, *La Plume*, which in 1899 had arranged for his first exhibition in Paris and had at the same time published a special number of the magazine devoted to his painting. Like his painting, Ensor's writing is strongly flavored by his personal situation and tastes: he was a somewhat misanthropic bachelor living with his mother above their curio shop in the small Flemish resort city of Ostende, and he was much interested in peasant folklore, especially as seen in the regional carnivals.

Munch (1863–1944) was obsessed with subjects of emotional crises in his paintings; this was in part the result of childhood tragedies in Norway. He witnessed very early the death of his mother and his sister from tuberculosis and the anxiety and severe nervous attacks suffered by his father. In 1886 at the age of twenty-three he was, along with the novelist Hans Jaeger, one of the literary and artistic bohemians who attacked the conservative and rigid social habits of his countrymen. Shortly thereafter he went to Paris to study, but although he saw the most advanced painting of the time, little influence of it can be seen in his work. He found Berlin to be more congenial; the intellectual climate was more psychologically oriented, and there were more artists and poets from Central Europe and Scandinavia, chiefly Stanislas Przybyszewsky and August Strindberg. Munch's first Berlin exhibition in 1892 was forcibly closed by the authorities; as a result of

this he achieved a sudden fame and was asked to send a traveling exhibition throughout the country. A later stay in Paris, when Munch came into contact with the Symbolist poets, resulted in 1896 in his designing the sets for Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* at the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre*, where other painters and playwrights had often collaborated. The remainder of Munch's life after this time was spent in Northern Europe, partly in Germany, but mostly on the lonely coast of Norway. Significantly, his letters and writings have to do chiefly with his personal life and not with art theory, except for a few brief aphorisms.

Hodler (1853–1918) was by nature inclined toward art theory. He had made a deep study of the writings of Dürer and Leonardo during his youth in Switzerland. He was also a student of religion and of natural science, and later gave lectures of a somewhat mystical and idealistic tone on the subject of "The Mission of the Artist." His theory of parallelism shows the influence of these earlier interests tinged with an individual symbolism based on a metaphysical view of the unity of nature. When Hodler exhibited in Paris in 1892, he was sponsored by the Rose Croix, an artistic group even more idealist and anti-nature in its beliefs than the Symbolists.

Henry van de Velde (1863–1957) was the most influential mind in the formulation of the ideology of *Art Nouveau*, the counterpart in the applied arts of Symbolism in painting. Basing his thought on the idealism of William Morris, he nevertheless, in contrast to Morris, completely accepted the fact of industrialism and machine production and their aesthetic implications. He saw the new movement (although avoiding the term *Art Nouveau*) as a necessary revolution against traditional concepts, and he saw the foundation of the future in its desire totally to design a harmonious environment that would in turn render life also more harmonious. He had been associated with the French Symbolist poets while a student in Paris; he had studied Morris's theories; and he had been a member of *Les XX*, the *avant-garde* artist's group in Brussels.

His activities embraced every avenue for the dissemination of ideas; he was a prolific author and a persuasive lecturer, and in 1901 he formulated a curriculum and a method of teaching at the Dessau Kunstgewerbeschule that became the foundation for the Bauhaus after van de Velde was forced to leave Germany during World War I. The range of his activities as a designer was equally wide: in 1895 he designed his own home in every detail, including the dresses worn by his wife; he designed museums, houses, interiors, furniture, posters, embroidery, decorative drawings, as well as continuing to produce drawings and lithographs.

Paul Gauguin, cover design of Cahier pour Aline, Tahiti, 1893.

Paul Gauguin, Self-Portrait 1891–1892 drawing.

PAUL GAUGUIN: Synthetist Theories

FEELING AND THOUGHT

*From a letter to Emile Schuffenecker, Copenhagen, 14 January 1885**

As for me, it seems to me at times that I'm mad, and yet the more I reflect at night in my bed, the more I think I'm right. For a long time the philosophers have considered the phenomena which seem to us supernatural and yet of which we have the *sensation*. Everything is in that word. Raphael and the others were men in

* From *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, ed. Maurice Malingue (Paris: Grasset, 1949), #11, pp. 44–47.

Schuffenecker (1851–1934) was Gauguin's closest friend and at this time the only person who discussed art with him. He had worked at the same bank until first he and then Gauguin resigned in order to devote themselves to painting, after which time he often assisted Gauguin by offering him lodging or money.

The winter of 1884–1885 was an extremely difficult time for Gauguin. His wife's relatives, with whom he was living, exerted constant pressure on him to abandon his career as an artist and return to business, and he had failed in his several attempts to serve as a representative for Paris business firms. This letter is one of his few contacts with his friends in Paris and with the world of art.

The ideas expressed are in accord with the most advanced ideas of the times. The valuation of the mind as well as of the senses, and the admiration for the ordering effect of science and mathematics had been stated by David Sutter in his essays "Phenomena of Vision" in 1880, although they had been known to earlier painters and to academic theoreticians. Seurat was also in the process of formulating his theories, which were to be developed further three years later on the basis of the scientific aesthetics of Charles Henry, Ogdon N. Rood, and Michel E. Chevreul.

whom the sensation was formulated before thought, which allowed them, when studying, never to destroy the sensation and to remain artists. For me, the great artist is the formulary of the greatest intelligence; he receives the most delicate perceptions, and thus the most invisible translations of the brain.

Look at the immense creation of nature and see whether there are not laws to create, with very different aspects which are yet similar in their effect, all the human sentiments. See a huge spider, a tree trunk in a forest; both unaccountably give you a sensation of terror. Why does it disgust you to touch a rat and many other such things: it is not reason behind these feelings. All our five senses arrive *directly at the brain*, conditioned by an infinity of things which no education can destroy. I conclude that there are lines which are noble, false, etc. The straight line indicates the infinite, the curve limits creation, without taking into account the fatality of numbers. Have the numbers 3 and 7 been sufficiently studied? Colors are still more explicative, though less varied, than lines because of their power over the eye. There are noble tones, ordinary ones, tranquil harmonies, consoling ones, others which excite by their vigor. In short, you see in graphology the features of honest men and of liars; why is it that the lines and colors of the amateur also do not give us more or less the grandiose character of the artist. . . .

The further I go the more I am overwhelmed by this sense that the translations of thought are something completely different from literature; we will see who is right. If I am wrong why is it that all your Academy, who know the means employed by the old masters, cannot produce the pictures of a master? Because they don't create one nature, one intelligence, and one heart; because the youthful Raphael had intuition, and in his pictures there are relations of lines which can't be accounted for, since it's the most intimate part of a man that finds itself again completely hidden. Look even in the accessories and in the landscape of a Raphael, you will find the same feeling as in a head. It is pure everywhere. A landscape of Carolus Durand is as vulgar as a portrait. (I can't explain it but I have this feeling.)

Work *freely and passionately*, you will make progress and sooner or later if you have any worth they will recognize it. Above all don't sweat over a canvas; a great emotion can be translated instantly, dream about it and seek for it the simplest form.

The equilateral triangle is the most solid and perfect form of a triangle. An elongated triangle is more elegant. In pure truth, sides don't exist; according to our feelings, lines to the right advance and those to the left recede. The right hand strikes, the left is in defense. A long neck is graceful but heads sunk on the shoulders are more pensive. A duck with its eye turned upward listens; I know, I tell you a bunch of idiotic things; your friend Courtois is more sensible but his painting is so stupid. Why are the willows with hanging branches called "weeping"? Is it because descending lines are sad? Is the sycamore sad because it is put in cemeteries; no, it is the color that is sad.

STRACTION

*n a letter to Emile Schuffenecker, Pont Aven, 14 August 1888**

ne advice: do not paint too much after nature. Art is an abstraction; derive this raction from nature while dreaming before it, and think more of the creation ich will result than of nature. Creating like our Divine Master is the only way rising toward God.

ADOWS

n a letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, November 1888†

u discuss shadows with Laval and ask me if I care about them. . . . In so far as explanation of light, yes! Look at the Japanese, who certainly draw admirably, you will see life in the outdoors and sunlight without shadows, using color y as a combination of tones . . . giving the impression of warmth, etc. Besides I sider Impressionism as a completely new quest which must necessarily separate lf from everything mechanical like photography, etc. That is why I will get as away as possible from that which gives the illusion of a thing, and since shadows the *trompe l'œil* of the sun, I am inclined to do away with them.

If in your composition, shadow enters as a necessary form, it's a completely erent thing. Thus if instead of a figure you put the shadow only of a person, have found an original starting point, the strangeness of which you have ulated. Such is the raven on the head of Pallas, who is there rather than a parrot ugh the choice of the artist, a calculated choice. And so, therefore, my dear ard, put in shadows if you consider them useful, or don't put them in. It's ne same thing, if you consider yourself not a slave to shadow; it is, as it were, shadow which is at your service. I am expressing my thought to you very *o modo*, it is up to you to read between the lines.

OTES SYNTHETIQUES"

the manuscript, ca. 1888‡

* Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #67, p. 134.

† Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #75, pp. 149–150.

Gauguin had met Bernard in Pont-Aven in 1886. Although Bernard was only en years of age at the time and twenty years younger than Gauguin, a lively exchange of oon developed. The two had been together during the summer of 1888, preceding Gau- visit to Van Gogh in Arles, and this letter represents Gauguin's need for the rational ctual discussion that was becoming increasingly difficult between himself and Van Gogh. ubject of the letter—avoidance of shadows—is one in which both Gauguin and Bernard a deep interest, as it was becoming the basis of their "cloisonnist" styles, and later was to of the points on which they quarrelled.

‡ Originally published in *Vers et Prose* (Paris), XXII (July–August–September, 1910) This English translation from *Paul Gauguin, A Sketchbook*, text by Raymond Cogniat

Paul Gauguin, 1888.

Painting is the most beautiful of all arts. In it, all sensations are condensed; contemplating it, everyone can create a story at the will of his imagination and—with a single glance—have his soul invaded by the most profound recollections; no effort of memory, everything is summed up in one instant. —A complete art which sums up all the others and completes them. —Like music, it acts on the soul through the intermediary of the senses: harmonious colors correspond to the harmonies of sounds. But in painting a unity is obtained which is not possible in music, where the accords follow one another, so that the judgment experiences a continuous fatigue if it wants to reunite the end with the beginning. The ear is actually a sense inferior to the eye. The hearing can only grasp a single sound at a time, whereas the sight takes in everything and simultaneously simplifies it at will.

foreword by John Rewald, 3 vols. (New York: Hammer Galleries, 1962), I, 57–64. Rewald dates this manuscript at about 1888, in which case it most probably was written in Pont-Aven. It reflects Symbolist ideas, such as the relations between painting, music, and literature, although Gauguin seems especially hostile toward the literary art critic.

Like literature, the art of painting tells whatever it wishes, with the advantage that the reader immediately knows the prelude, the setting, and the ending. Literature and music require an effort of memory for the appreciation of the whole; the last named is the most incomplete and the least powerful of arts.

You can dream freely when you listen to music as well as when looking at a painting. When you read a book, you are a slave of the author's thought. The author is obliged to address himself to the mind before he can impress the heart, and God knows how little power a reasoned sensation has. Sight alone produced an instantaneous impulse. But then, the men of letters alone are art-critics; they alone defend themselves before the public. Their introductions are always a justification of their work, as if really good work does not defend itself on its own.

These gentlemen flutter about the world like bats which flap their wings in the twilight and whose dark mass appears to you in every direction; animals disquieted by their fate, their too heavy bodies preventing them from rising. Throw them a handkerchief full of sand and they will stupidly make a rush at it.

One must listen to them judging all human works. God has created man after his own image which, obviously, is flattering for man. "This work pleases me and is done exactly the way I should have conceived it." All art criticism is like that: to agree with the public, to seek a work after one's own image. Yes, gentlemen of letters, you are incapable of criticizing a work of art, be it even a book. Because you are already corrupt judges; you have beforehand a ready-made idea—that of the man of letters—and have too high an opinion of your own thoughts to examine those of others. You do not like blue, therefore you condemn all blue paintings. If you are a sensitive and melancholy poet, you want all compositions to be in a minor key. —Such a one likes graciousness and must have everything that way. Another one likes gaiety and does not understand a sonata.

It takes intelligence and knowledge in order to judge a book. To judge painting and music requires special sensations of nature besides intelligence and artistic science; in a word, one has to be a born artist, and few are chosen among all those who are called. Any idea can be formulated, but not so the sensation of the heart. What efforts are not needed to master fear or a moment of enthusiasm! Is not love often instantaneous and nearly always blind? And to say that thought is called spirit, whereas the instincts, the nerves, and the heart are part of matter. What irony!

The vaguest, the most undefinable, the most varied is precisely matter. Thought is a slave of sensations. I have always wondered why one speaks of "noble instincts." . . .

Above man is nature.

Literature is human thought described by words.

Whatever talent you may have in telling me how Othello appears, his heart devoured by jealousy, to kill Desdemona, my soul will never be as much

impressed as when I have seen Othello with my own eyes entering the room, his forehead presaging the storm. That is why you need the stage to complement your work.

You may describe a tempest with talent—you will never succeed in conveying to me the sensation of it.

Instrumental music as well as numbers are based on a unit. The entire musical system derives from this principle, and the ear has become used to all these divisions. The unit is established through the means of an instrument, yet you may choose some other basis and the tones, half-tones, and quarter-tones will follow each other. Outside of these you will have dissonance. The eye is used less than the ear to perceive these dissonances, but then divisions [of color] are more numerous, and for further complication there are several units.

On an instrument, you start from one tone. In painting you start from several. Thus, you begin with black and divide up to white—the first unit, the easiest and the most frequently used one, hence the best understood. But take as many units as there are colors in the rainbow, add those made up by composite colors, and you will reach a rather respectable number of units. What an accumulation of numbers, truly a Chinese puzzle! No wonder then that the colorist's science has been so little investigated by the painters and is so little understood by the public. Yet what richness of means to attain an intimate relationship with nature!

They reprove our colors which we put [unmixed] side by side. In this domain we are perforce victorious, since we are powerfully helped by nature which does not proceed otherwise. A green next to a red does not produce a reddish brown, like the mixture [of pigments], but two vibrating tones. If you put chrome yellow next to this red, you have three tones complementing each other and augmenting the intensity of the first tone: the green. Replace the yellow by a blue, you will find three different tones, though still vibrating through one another. If instead of the blue you apply a violet, the result will be a single tone, but a composite one, belonging to the reds.

The combinations are unlimited. The mixture of colors produces a dirty tone. Any color alone is a crudity and does not exist in nature. Colors exist only in an apparent rainbow, but how well rich nature took care to show them to you side by side in an established and unalterable order, as if each color was born out of another!

Yet you have fewer means than nature, and you condemn yourself to renounce all those which it puts at your disposal. Will you ever have as much light as nature, as much heat as the sun? And you speak of exaggeration—but how can you exaggerate since you remain below nature?

Ah! If you mean by exaggerated any badly balanced work, then you are right in that respect. But I must draw your attention to the fact that, although your work may be timid and pale, it will be considered exaggerated if there is a mistake of harmony in it. Is there then a science of harmony? Yes.

In that respect the feeling of the colorist is exactly the natural harmony. ke singers, painters sometimes are out of tune, their eye has no harmony. Later ere will be, through study, an entire method of harmony, unless people neglect it, is done in the academies and most of the time also in studios. Indeed, the study painting has been divided into two categories. One learns to draw first and then to int, which means that one applies color within a pre-established contour, not like a statue that is painted after it is finished. I must admit that until now I have derstood only one thing about this practice, namely that color is nothing but an cessory. "Sir, you must draw properly before painting"—this is said in a dantic manner; but then, all great stupidities are said that way.

Does one wear shoes instead of gloves? Can you really make me believe at drawing does not derive from color, and vice-versa? To prove this, I commit yself to reduce or enlarge one and the same drawing, according to the color with hich I fill it up. Try to draw a head by Rembrandt in his exact proportions and en put on the colors of Rubens—you will see what misshapen product you erive, while at the same time the colors will have become unharmonious.

During the last hundred years large amounts have been spent for the opagation of drawing and the number of painters is increasing, yet no real ogress has been made. Who are the painters we admire at the present? All ose who reproved the schools, all those who drew their science from the ersonal observation of nature. Not one . . . [manuscript not completed].

ECORATION

*om a letter to Daniel de Monfried, Tahiti, August 1892**

can only do you good to be forced to decorate. But beware of *modeling*. The nple stained-glass window, attracting the eye by its divisions of colors and forms, it is still the best. A kind of music. To think that I was born to do decorative and that I have not been able to achieve it. Neither windows, nor furniture, ceramics, nor whatever. . . . There lie my real aptitudes much more than in nting strictly speaking.[1]

* Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #132, p. 232.

De Monfried (1856–1929) was the closest friend and best correspondent of Gauguin ng the last twelve years of his life in Tahiti and the Marquesas. He was a painter of modest ats who was constant in his admiration for Gauguin. He was in comfortable financial umstances, and so was able to lend Gauguin his studio in Paris and to buy several of his tings at the auction that was to make possible the first trip to Tahiti. He also looked after guin's affairs, both business and personal, during his long absence. Thus, many of the letters e Monfried are concerned with both theoretical and personal problems.

[1] Only a few months earlier Albert Aurier had called Gauguin the only great rator of the century, adding the name of Puvis de Chavannes as a possible second (*Révue clopédique*, April 1892. See the quotation in Maurice Denis' essay of 1903 in hommage to guin, "The Influence of Paul Gauguin" reprinted below). Since Gauguin had worked extensively in ceramics before leaving for Tahiti and had already realized a "decorative" style in such paintings as *The Vision After the Sermon* (1888), the despair expressed in his letter probably is the result of poverty. He complains to De Montfried that not only have his paintings not found buyers in Paris, but friends and dealers who owe him money have not paid him. Finally, his hope that he would receive commissions to paint the portraits of officials in Tahiti had not been realized, and not being able to purchase canvas, he had turned to wood sculpture.

THE IMPRESSIONISTS

*Three selections from the manuscript "Diverses Choses, 1896–1897," Tahiti**

The Impressionists study color exclusively insofar as the decorative effect, but without freedom, retaining the shackles of verisimilitude. For them the dream landscape, created from many different entities, does not exist. They look and perceive harmoniously, but without any aim. Their edifice rests upon no solid base which is founded upon the nature of the sensation perceived by means of color.

They heed only the eye and neglect the mysterious centers of thought, so falling into merely scientific reasoning. . . . They are the officials of tomorrow, as bad as the officials of yesterday. . . . The art of yesterday has plumbed the depths, it has produced masterpieces and will continue to do so. Meanwhile, the officials of today are aboard a boat that is vacillating, badly constructed and incomplete. . . . When they speak of their art, what is it? A purely superficial art, full of affectations and purely material. There is no thought there.

. . . "But you have a technique?" they will demand.

No, I have not. Or rather I do have one, but it is very fugitive, very flexible, according to my disposition when I arise in the morning; a technique which I apply in my own manner to express my own thought without any concern for the truth of the common, exterior aspects of Nature.

MEMORY

From "Diverses Choses"

The task of whoever paints is not at all like that of a mason's who, compass in hand, builds a house after a plan furnished by an architect. It is well for young people to have a model so long as they draw a curtain over it while they paint.

It is better to paint from memory. Thus your work will be your own; your sensation, your intelligence and your soul will then survive the scrutiny of the amateur. He goes to his stable if he wishes to count the hairs of his donkey and to determine the place of each of them.

* From "Diverses Choses, 1896–1897," an unpublished manuscript, part of which appears in Jean de Rotonchamp, *Paul Gauguin, 1848–1903* (Paris: Crès, 1925); these selections from pp. 210, 216, 211.

COLOR

From "Diverses Choses"

Color, being itself enigmatic in the sensations which it gives us, can logically be employed only enigmatically. One does not use color to draw but always to give the musical sensations which flow from itself, from its own nature, from its mysterious and enigmatic interior force.

PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

*From a letter to Charles Morice, Tahiti, July 1901**

Puvis explains his idea, yes, but he does not paint it. He is a Greek while I am a savage, a wolf in the woods without a collar. Puvis would call a painting "Purity," and to explain it he would paint a young virgin holding a lily in her hand—a familiar symbol; consequently one understands it. Gauguin, for the title "Purity," would paint a landscape with limpid waters; no stain of the civilized human being, perhaps a figure.

Without entering into details there is a wide world between Puvis and myself. As a painter Puvis is a lettered man but he is not a man of letters, while I am not a lettered man but perhaps a man of letters.

Why is it that before a work the critic wants to make points of comparison with former ideas and with other authors. And not finding what he believes should be there, he comprehends no more and he is not moved. Emotion first! understanding later.

* Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #174, pp. 300–301.

Charles Morice was an important Symbolist poet, critic, and editor of literary ournals who had become a friend of Gauguin's during the time that the painter frequented the neetings of the poets and writers. He wrote several sympathetic articles on Gauguin, beginning ibout the time of his departure for Tahiti in 1891, and later he wrote articles for *Mercure de France* and an important biography. Gauguin's remarks in this letter seem to be a reply to Morice's statement in his first article on Gauguin in 1891 that "Puvis de Chavannes, Carrière, Renoir, Redon, Degas, Gustave Moreau, and Gauguin are, in painting, guiding the young rtists."

GAUGUIN: On His Paintings

SELF-PORTRAIT, LES MISERABLES, 1888[1]

*From a letter to Emile Schuffenecker, Quimperlé, 8 October 1888**

I have this year sacrificed everything—execution, color—for style, wishing to impose upon myself nothing except what I can do. It is, I think, a transformation which has not yet borne fruit but which will. I have done the self-portrait which Vincent asked for. I believe it is one of my best things: absolutely incomprehensible (for example) it is so abstract. Head of a bandit in the foreground, a Jean Valjean (*Les Misérables*) personifying also a disreputable Impressionist painter, shackled always to this world. The design is absolutely special, a complete abstraction. The eyes, mouth, and nose are like the flowers of a Persian carpet, thus personifying the symbolic aspect. The color is far from nature; imagine a vague suggestion of pottery contorted by a great fire! All the reds, violets, striped by flashes of fire like a furnace radiating from the eyes, seat of the struggles of the painter's thought. The whole on a chrome background strewn with childish bouquets. Chamber of a pure young girl. The Impressionist is pure, still unsullied by the putrid kiss of the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

MANAO TUPAPAU (THE SPIRIT OF THE DEAD WATCHING) 1892[2]

From the manuscript "Cahier pour Aline," Tahiti, 1893†

A young Tahitian girl is lying on her stomach, showing part of her frightened face. She rests on a bed covered by a blue *pareu* and a light chrome yellow sheet. A violet purple background, sown with flowers glowing like electric sparks; a strange figure sits beside the bed.

Captured by a form, a movement, I paint them with no other preoccupation than to execute a nude figure. As it is, it is a slightly indecent study of a

[1] Collection V. W. van Gogh, Laren, The Netherlands.

* Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #71, pp. 140–141.

This painting was the result of a request from Van Gogh that both Gauguin and Bernard, who were at Pont-Aven, should paint the other's portrait and send both portraits to Arles. Neither painter being able, for different reasons, to paint the other's face, they resolved to make self-portraits which would include a sketch of the other in the background. Gauguin made an additional observation in a letter to Van Gogh that "by painting him [Jean Valjean] in my own likeness, you have an image of myself as well as a portrait of all of us, poor victims of society, who retaliate only by doing good." (From an unpublished letter in the possession of Ir. V. W. van Gogh.)

[2] Collection A. Conger Goodyear, New York.

† From Gauguin's manuscript, "Cahier pour Aline" (his daughter), Tahiti, 1893. This selection appears in De Rotonchamp, *Paul Gauguin*, pp. 218–220. Excerpts of it appear in

Paul Gauguin, page from Cahier pour Aline, Tahiti, 1893, with a sketch of The Spirit of the Dead Watching (Manao Tupapau).

ude, and yet I wish to make of it a chaste picture and imbue it with the spirit of ne native, its character and tradition.

The *pareu* being intimately connected with the life of a Tahitian, I use it s a bedspread. The bark cloth sheet must be yellow, because in this color it arouses omething unexpected for the spectator, and because it suggests lamplight. This, owever, prevents me from making an actual effect of a lamp. I need a back-round of terror; purple is clearly indicated. And now the musical part of the cture is laid out.

What can a young native girl be doing completely nude on a bed, and in is somewhat difficult position? Preparing herself for making love? That is

glish translation in Robert J. Goldwater, *Paul Gauguin* (New York: Abrams, 1957), p. 140. alingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, includes the letter to his wife of 8 December 1892 (#134, pp. 5–238), in which the explanation in slightly different language first appeared. It was written nkly with the hope of stimulating interest and sales in his work—for instance, he priced *nao Tupapau* at 1500 francs, or double the price of any of his other paintings, and he told his fe that he wanted the price of these paintings to be much higher than those he had made in nce. He prefaces the explanation with: "So that you can understand [the meaning of the ntings] and can as they say be malicious, I will give you the strictest explanation and, besides, re is one that I hope to keep or else to sell high. The *Manao pupapau* [*sic*]." This comment ows the explanation: "This is a little text that will prepare you for the critics when they nbard you with their malicious questions. . . . What I have just written is very boring, but I k it is necessary for back there."

certainly in character, but it is indecent, and I do not wish it to be so. Sleeping? The amorous activity would then be over, and that is still indecent. I see here only fear. What kind of fear? Certainly not the fear of Susanna surprised by the elders. That kind of fear does not exist in Oceania.

The *tupapau* (Spirit of the Dead) is clearly indicated. For the natives it is a constant dread. A lamp is always lighted at night. No one ever goes out on the paths on a moonless night without a lantern, and even then they travel in groups.

Once I have found my *tupapau* I devote my attention completely to it and make it the motif of my picture. The nude sinks to a secondary level.

What can a spirit mean to a Tahitian? She knows neither the theatre nor the reading of novels, and when she thinks of a dead person she thinks necessarily of someone she has already seen. My spirit can only be an ordinary little woman. Her hand is outstretched as if to seize a prey.

My decorative sense leads me to strew the background with flowers. These flowers are the phosphorescent flowers of the *tupapau*; they are the sign that the spirit nears you. Tahitian beliefs.

The title *Manao tupapau* has two meanings, either the girl thinks of the spirit, or the spirit thinks of her.

To sum up: The musical part: undulating horizontal lines; harmonies of orange and blue, united by the yellows and purples (their derivatives) lit by greenish sparks. The literary part: the spirit of a living person linked to the spirit of the dead. Night and Day.

This genesis is written for those who must always know the *why* and the *wherefore*.

Otherwise it is simply a study of an Oceanian nude.

WHENCE DO WE COME? WHAT ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE GOING? 1898[1]

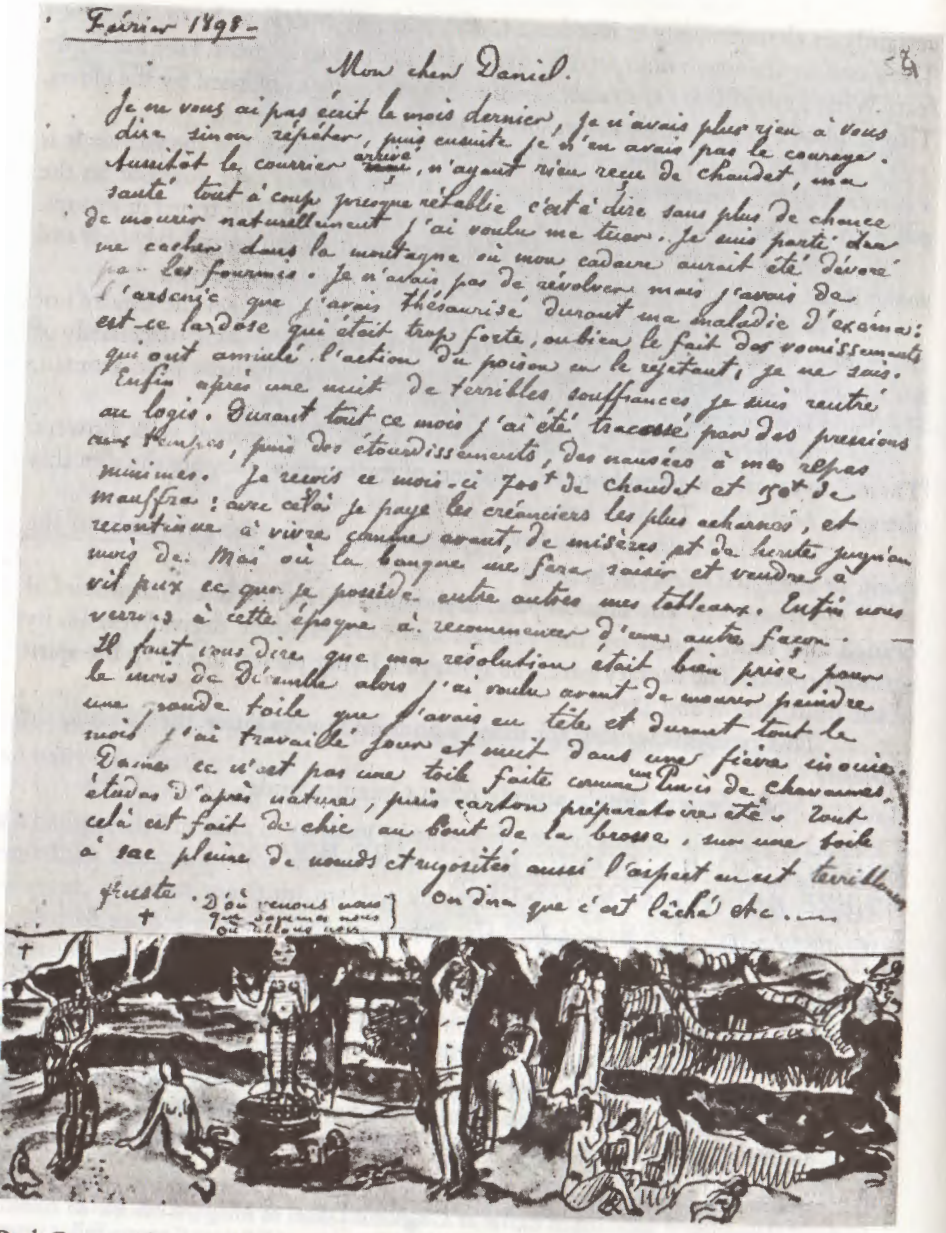
*From a letter to Daniel de Monfried, Tahiti, February 1898**

I did not write to you last month; I had nothing more to say to you except to repeat that I no longer had any courage. Having received nothing from Chaudet by the last post, and suddenly almost recovering my health, so that there was no longer any chance of dying naturally, I wanted to kill myself. I left to conceal myself in the mountains where my dead body would have been devoured by the ants. I did not have a revolver, but I had some arsenic which I had saved during my eczema.

[1] Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

* The letter is included in *Lettres de Gauguin à Daniel de Monfried*, ed. Mme. Annie Joly-Ségalen (Paris: Falaize, 1950), #40, pp. 118–119. Courtesy of Editions Georges Fall, 15 rue de Montsouris, Paris. The English translation of the first part is from John Rewald, *Gauguin* (London, Paris, New York: Heinemann, with Hyperion, 1949), p. 29.

The meaning of this, the major Symbolist painting by Gauguin, has been the subject of considerable speculation. His attempt at suicide following its completion suggests that it was meant as a kind of last testament for himself as well as a summarization of his ideas. H. R.



Février 1898 -

Mon cher Daniel.

Je ne vous ai pas écrit le mois dernier, je n'avais plus rien à vous dire sinon répéter, puis ensuite je n'en avais pas le courage. Aussitôt le courrier arrivé, n'ayant rien reçu de Chaudet, ma santé tout à coup presque rétablie c'est à dire sans plus de chance de mourir naturellement j'ai voulu me tuer. Je suis parti dans la montagne où mon cadavre aurait été dévoré par les fourmis. Je n'avais pas de révolver mais j'avais de l'arsenic que j'avais thésaurisé durant ma maladie d'eczéma: est-ce la dose qui était trop forte, oubliai-je le fait des vomissements qui ont annulé l'action du poison en le rejetant; je ne sais. Enfin après une nuit de terribles souffrances je suis rentré au logis. Durant tout ce mois j'ai été tracassé par des pressions aux tempes, puis des étourdissements, des nausées à mes repas minimes. Je reçois ce mois-ci 700 fcs de Chaudet et 150 fcs de Maufra: avec cela je paye les créanciers les plus acharnés, et recommence à vivre comme avant, de misères et de hontes jusqu'au mois de Mai où la banque me fera saisir et vendre à vil prix ce que je possède entre autres mes tableaux. Enfin nous verrons à cette époque à recommencer d'une autre façon. —

Il faut vous dire que ma résolution était bien prise pour le mois de Décembre alors j'ai voulu avant de mourir peindre une grande toile que j'avais en tête et durant tout le mois j'ai travaillé jour et nuit dans une fièvre incroyable. Dame ce n'est pas une toile faite comme un Puvis de Chavannes, études d'après nature, puis cartons préparatoires etc. Tout cela est fait de chic au bout de la brosse, sur une toile à sac pleine de nœuds et rugosités aussi l'aspect en est terrible, on dira que c'est lâché etc. . . .

finesse

+ D'où venons nous
Que sommes nous
Où allons nous

Paul Gauguin, letter to Daniel de Monfried describing Whence Do We Come? What Are We? Where Are We Going?, February 1898.

Paul Gauguin, Whence Do We Come? What Are We? Where Are We Going? 1898, oil on canvas.

I do not know whether the dose was too strong or whether the vomitings nullified the action of the poison by rejecting it. Finally, after a night of terrible suffering, I went back home. During this whole month, I have been afflicted with pressures at the temples and spells of dizziness and nausea when I was having my meager meals. This month I receive 700 francs from Chaudet and 150 francs from Maufra: with that I pay the most furious creditors. Then I begin again to live as before, in misery and shame. In May the bank will seize and sell at a miserable price all I possess; among other things my paintings. Then we shall see how to start again in another way. I must tell you that in December my mind was indeed made up. So, before dying, I wanted to paint a big canvas which I had in mind, and during that whole month I worked day and night in an incredible fever. By God, it is not made like a Puvis de Chavannes, studies from nature, preparatory cartoon, etc. It is all done in a bold style, directly with the brush, on sackcloth full of knots and wrinkles, so it looks terribly rough.

They will say that it is careless . . . not finished. It is true that one is not a good judge of one's own work; however, I believe that this canvas not only surpasses all the preceding ones, but also that I will never do anything better or even similar to it. Before dying I put into it all my energy, such a painful passion under terrible circumstances, and a vision so clear without corrections, that the haste

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Rookmaaker, *Synthetist Art Theories*, (Amsterdam: Svets and Zeitlinger, 1959), pp. 230–237, thinks that the concept was derived from Balzac's *Séraphita*, who speculates on the destiny of humanity: "Whence does it come, where is it going?" He cites also Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, a copy of which was included by Gauguin in his portrait of Meyer de Haan of 1889. In writing of himself Carlyle asks the question "Whence? How? Whereto?" Rookmaaker cites also a similar question which Hippolyte Taine asked in a study of Carlyle: "Mais d'où venons-nous? O Dieu, où allons-nous?"

See the excellent interpretation of the meaning of the painting by Robert T. Goldwater, "The Genesis of a Picture: Theme and Form in Modern Painting," *Critique* (New York), October 1946. Also Georges Wildenstein, "L'idéologie et l'esthétique dans deux tableaux-clés de Gauguin," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (Paris) 6th Period, XLVII (January–April, 1956), 127–159.

disappears and the life surges up. It does not smell of the model, of professional techniques and of so-called rules—from all of which I always did free myself, although sometimes with trepidation.

It is a canvas about five feet [high] by twelve [wide].* The two upper corners are chrome yellow, with an inscription on the left, and my name on the right, like a fresco on a golden wall with its corners damaged.

To the right, below, a sleeping baby and three seated women. Two figures dressed in purple confide their thoughts to each other. An enormous crouching figure which intentionally violates the perspective, raises its arm in the air and looks in astonishment at these two people who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the center is picking fruit. Two cats near a child. A white goat. An idol, both arms mysteriously and rhythmically raised, seems to indicate the Beyond. A crouching girl seems to listen to the idol. Lastly, an old woman approaching death appears reconciled and resigned to her thoughts. She completes the story. At her feet a strange white bird, holding a lizard in its claw, represents a futility of words.

The setting is the bank of a stream in the woods. In the background the ocean, and beyond the mountains of a neighboring island. In spite of changes of tone, the landscape is blue and Veronese green from one end to another. The naked figures stand out against it in bold orange.

If anyone said to the students competing for the Rome Prize [*Prix de Rome*] at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, the picture you must paint is to represent *Whence Do We Come? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* what would they do? I have finished a philosophical work on this theme, comparable to the Gospels.[1] I think it is good; [if I have the strength to copy it I will send it to you].

André Fontainas, Review of Gauguin's Exhibition and Whence Do We Come . . . ?†

Everyone is at liberty to choose either a commonplace or an unusual setting, as he pleases. That in itself is of no importance. The essential—since I cannot see in these pictures an exact representation of scenes in Tahiti or in the Marquesas—is that the art of the painter must convey to us an image, true or false (that does not matter), of a tropic land, luxuriant and primitive, covered with gigantic dense jungle growth, a land of deep waters and violent contrasts of light and air, peopled by a dignified race, modest and unspoiled. That M. Gauguin should have abandoned the too artificial simplicity of Brittany for his Oceanic mirages is yet another proof of

* The English translation from this point on is from Goldwater, *Paul Gauguin*, p. 140. The material in brackets is in the original text and has been added by myself.

[1] Probably the manuscript, "L'esprit modern et la catholisme," *ca.* 1897–1898, unpublished except in fragments by H. S. Leonard in *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis*, Summer 1949.

† Originally published in *Mercure de France*, XXIX, 109 (January–March 1899), 235–238. This English translation from Paul Gauguin, *Letters to Ambroise Vollard and André Fontainas*, ed. John Rewald (San Francisco: Grabhorn, 1943), pp. 19–21.

his complete sincerity. Out there on his enchanted island he is no longer concerned with the absurd mania for playing at the restoration of the great archaic romance of Brittany, so tedious after all. He no longer needs to worry about his reputation among the literary aesthetes; he is alive in the midst of distant seas, and the pictures he sends to his friends from time to time continue to prove to us that he is working.

What impresses the beholder at once is the careful study of arrangement in his canvases, which are primarily decorative. The landscapes that compose their profound, subdued harmony are organized not so much for crude picturesque effect as for the purpose, almost always achieved, of creating warm, brooding wellsprings for the surging emotions. If the violent oppositions of such full and vibrant tones, which do not blend and never merge into one another through intermediate values, first distract and then rivet the attention, it must also be admitted that while they are often glowing, bold, and exultant they sometimes lose their effect by monotonous repetition; by the juxtaposition, irritating in the long run, of a startling red and a vibrant green, identical in value and intensity. And yet it is undoubtedly the landscape that satisfies and ever exalts one in M. Gauguin's painting. He has invented a new and broad method of painting landscapes by synthesis and, in the words that he himself wrote in *Mercure de France* [XIII, February 1895, p. 223], by "seeking to express the harmony between human life and that of animals and plants in compositions in which I allowed the deep voice of the earth to play an important part."

At Vollard's, hanging not far from an extremely delicate landscape painted some years ago, in which figures at the water's edge are watching the reflection of the sun sparkling on the waves, there is a purely decorative picture conceived in this manner and, I believe, very characteristic of the artist's personality. In the midst of the sombre blues and greens, noble animal and vegetable forms intermingle, composing a pure pattern. Nothing more; a perfect harmony of form and color.

There is also a landscape of varied yellows spread out like a delicate curtain of thin golden rain. Here and there the green of some strange leaf, the repeated detail of bright red berries. A man in a sarong reaches towards the low branches of a tree. All this—the light, the graceful effort of the gesture, the grouping of objects and colors—compose a simple and exquisite picture.

If only M. Gauguin were always like that! Or if he would paint as he does when he shows us ceremonial dancers lingering under the trees amidst thick undergrowth, or nude women bathing surrounded by gorgeous, strangely illuminated vegetation. But too often the people of his dreams, dry, colorless, and rigid, vaguely represent forms poorly conceived by an imagination untrained in metaphysics, of which the meaning is doubtful and the expression is arbitrary. Such canvases leave no impression but that of deplorable error, for abstractions are not communicated through concrete images unless, in the artist's own mind, they have already taken shape in some natural allegory which gives them life.

That is the lesson taught by the noble example Puvis de Chavannes gives us through his art. To represent a philosophical ideal he creates harmonious groups of figures whose attitudes convey to us a dream analogous to his own. In the large picture exhibited by M. Gauguin, nothing—not even the two graceful and pensive figures standing so tranquilly and beautifully, or the masterful evocation of a mysterious idol—would reveal to us the meaning of the allegory, if he had not taken the trouble to write high up in a corner of the canvas: "Whence do we come? What are we? Where are we going?"

However, in spite of the outlandishness of these near-savages, to which one becomes accustomed, the interest is diverted from the naked woman crouched in the foreground and again becomes fixed wholly upon the charm of the setting in which the action takes place.

But if I point out the grace of a woman half-reclining on a sort of couch, magnificent and curious, in the open air, I prefer not to dwell on other paintings which show the persistent efforts of an obstinate innovator in all the willfulness, slightly brutal, of his struggle.

In other respects M. Gauguin is without doubt an unusually gifted painter from whom the opportunity of displaying the vigorous energy of his temperament by the execution of an important decorative composition on the walls of a public edifice has been too long withheld. There we could see exactly what he is capable of doing, and if he would guard against a tendency towards abstraction, I am sure we should see powerful and truly harmonious creations produced by his hand.

*Gauguin's letter in response to Fontainas's article, Tahiti, March 1899**

Un grand sommeil noir
Tombe sur ma vie
Dormez, tout espoir
Dormez, toute envie.

Verlaine

Monsieur Fontainas,

In the January number of the *Mercure de France*, you have two interesting articles, "Rembrandt" and "The Vollard Gallery." In the latter you mention me. In spite of your dislike you have tried to make an honest study of the art or rather the work of a painter who has no emotional effect upon you. A rare phenomenon among critics.

I have always [thought] that it was the duty of a painter never to answer criticisms, even hostile ones—especially hostile ones; nor flattering ones, either, because those are often dictated by friendship.

This time, without departing from my habitual reserve, I have an irresistible desire to write to you, a caprice if you will, and—like all emotional

* The letter is included in Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #170, pp. 286–290. This English translation from Rewald, *Paul Gauguin*, pp. 21–24.

people—I am not good at resisting. Since this is merely a personal letter it is not a real answer but simply a chat on art; your article prompts and evokes it.

We painters, we who are condemned to penury, accept the material difficulties of life without complaining, but we suffer from them insofar as they constitute a hindrance to work. How much time we lose in seeking our daily bread! The most menial tasks, dilapidated studios, and a thousand other obstacles. All these create despondency, followed by impotence, rage, violence. Such things do not concern you at all, I mention them only to convince both of us that you have good reason to point out numerous defects, violence, monotony of tone, clashing colors, etc. Yes, all these probably exist, do exist. Sometimes however they are intentional. Are not these repetitions of tones, these monotonous color harmonies (in the musical sense) analogous to oriental chants sung in a shrill voice, to the accompaniment of pulsating notes which intensify them by contrast? Beethoven uses them frequently (as I understand it) in the "Sonata Pathétique," for example. Delacroix too with his repeated harmonies of brown and dull violet, a sombre cloak suggesting tragedy. You often go to the Louvre; with what I have said in mind, look closely at Cimabue.

Think also of the musical role color will henceforth play in modern painting. Color, which is vibration just as music is, is able to attain what is most universal yet at the same time most elusive in nature: its inner force.

Here near my cabin, in complete silence, amid the intoxicating perfumes of nature, I dream of violent harmonies. A delight enhanced by I know not what sacred horror I divine in the infinite. An aroma of long-vanished joy that I breathe in the present. Animal figures rigid as statues, with something indescribably solemn and religious in the rhythm of their pose, in their strange immobility. In eyes that dream, the troubled surface of an unfathomable enigma.

Night is here. All is at rest. My eyes close in order to see without actually understanding the dream that flees before me in infinite space; and I experience the languorous sensation produced by the mournful procession of my hopes.

In praise of certain pictures that I considered unimportant you exclaim: "If only Gauguin were always like that!" But I don't want to be always like that.

"In the large panel that Gauguin exhibits there is nothing that explains the meaning of the allegory." Yes, there is: my dream is intangible, it comprises no allegory; as Mallarmé said, "It is a musical poem, it needs no libretto." Consequently the essence of a work, unsubstantial and out of reach, consists precisely of "that which is not expressed; it flows by implication from the lines without color or words; it is not a material structure."

Standing before one of my pictures of Tahiti, Mallarmé also remarked: "It is amazing that one can put so much mystery in so much brilliance."

To go back to the panel: the idol is there not as a literary symbol but as a statue, yet perhaps less of a statue than the animal figures, less animal also, combining my dream before my cabin with all nature, dominating our primitive soul,

the unearthly consolation of our sufferings to the extent that they are vague and incomprehensible before the mystery of our origin and of our future.

And all this sings with sadness in my soul and in my design while I paint and dream at the same time with no tangible allegory within my reach—due perhaps to a lack of literary education.

Awakening with my work finished, I ask myself: "Whence do we come? What are we? Where are we going?" A thought which has no longer anything to do with the canvas, expressed in words quite apart on the wall which surrounds it. Not a title but a signature.

You see, although I understand very well the value of words—abstract and concrete—in the dictionary, I no longer grasp them in painting. I have tried to interpret my vision in an appropriate décor without recourse to literary means and with all the simplicity the medium permits: a difficult job. You may say that I have failed, but do not reproach me for having tried, nor should you advise me to change my goal, to dally with other ideas already accepted, consecrated. Puvis de Chavannes is the perfect example. Of course Puvis overwhelms me with his talent and experience, which I lack; I admire him as much as you do and more, but for entirely different reasons (and—don't be annoyed—with more understanding). Each of us belongs to his own period.

The government is right not to give me an order for a decoration for a public building which might clash with the ideas of the majority, and it would be even more reprehensible for me to accept it, since I should have no alternative but to cheat or lie to myself.

At my exhibition at Durand Ruel's [1893] a young man who didn't understand my pictures asked Degas to explain them to him. Smiling, he recited a fable by La Fontaine. "You see," he said, "Gauguin is the thin wolf without the collar." [that is, he prefers liberty with starvation to servitude with abundance—John Rewald].

After fifteen years of struggle we are beginning to free ourselves from the influence of the Academy, from all this confusion of formulas apart from which there has been no hope of salvation, honor, or money: drawing, color composition, sincerity in the presence of nature, and so on. Only yesterday some mathematician [Charles Henry] tried to prove to us that we should use unchangeable light and color.

Now the danger is past. Yes, we are free, and yet I still see another danger flickering on the horizon; I want to discuss it with you. This long and boring letter has been written with only that in view. Criticism of today, when it is serious, intelligent, full of good intentions, tends to impose on us a method of thinking and dreaming which might become another bondage. Preoccupied with what concerns it particularly, its own field, literature, it will lose sight of what concerns us, painting. If that is true, I shall be impertinent enough to quote Mallarmé: "A critic is someone who meddles with something that is none of his business."

In his memory will you permit me to offer you this sketch of him, hastily dashed off, a vague recollection of a beautiful and beloved face, radiant, even in the shadows. Not a gift but an appeal for the indulgence I need for my foolishness and violence.

Paul Gauguin, sketch of a Marquesan sculpture, 1891–93.

GAUGUIN: On Primitivism

BUFFALO BILL AT THE WORLD'S FAIR

*From a letter to Emile Bernard, Paris, n.d. [February 1889]**

I have been to Buffalo's. You must make all efforts to come to see it. It is of enormous interest.

JAVANESE VILLAGE AT THE WORLD'S FAIR

From a letter to Emile Bernard, Paris, n.d. [March 1889]†

You were wrong not to come the other day. There are Hindu dancers in the Javanese village. All the art of India is there, and my photographs of Cambodia literally are found there, too. I will go there again Tuesday, as I have a rendezvous with a mulatto girl.

* Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #80, p. 157.

† Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #81, p. 157.

Entire native villages were built on the fairgrounds and inhabited by native families brought to represent the various French colonies throughout the world. Accompanied by restaurants serving native food and vendors selling curios and photographs, these displays were among the most popular of the fair.

The "Cambodian photographs" referred to by Gauguin are probably those of the temple of Boro-Budur, a replica of which was built on the fairgrounds. Gauguin's own photographs are illustrated and their influence on his painting discussed in Bernard Dorival, "Sources of the Art of Gauguin from Java, Egypt and Ancient Greece," *Burlington Magazine* (London) XCIII, (April 1951) 118–122.

LONGING FOR THE TROPICS

*From a letter to his wife Mette, Paris, n.d. [February 1890]**

May the day come, perhaps very soon, when I'll bury myself in the woods of an ocean island to live on ecstasy, calmness and art. With a new family, and far from that European struggle for money. There in the silence of the beautiful tropical nights of Tahiti, I shall be able to listen to the sweet murmuring music of my heart's beating, in amorous harmony with the mysterious beings of my environment. Free at last, without money trouble, I'll be able to love, to sing and to die.

From a letter to Emile Bernard, Le Pouldu, n.d. [June 1890]†

What I am going to make is a studio of the tropics. With the money I have I can buy a house in the country like those we have seen at the International Exposition.

From a letter to J. F. Willumsen, Pont-Aven, autumn, 1890‡

As for me, my mind is made up. I am going soon to Tahiti, a small island in Oceania, where the material necessities of life can be had without money. I want to forget all the misfortunes of the past, I want to be free to paint without any glory whatsoever in the eyes of the others and I want to die there and to be forgotten here. And if my children are able and wish to come and join me, I would feel completely isolated. A terrible epoch is brewing in Europe for the coming generation: the kingdom of gold. Everything is putrefied, even men, even the arts. There, at least, under an eternally summer sky, on a marvellously fertile soil, the Tahitian has only to lift his hands to gather his food; and in addition he never works. When in Europe men and women survive only after unceasing labor during which they struggle in convulsions of cold and hunger, a prey to misery, the Tahitians, on the contrary, happy inhabitants of the unknown paradise of Oceania, know only sweetness of life. To live, for them, is to sing and to love—(a lecture on Tahiti, Van der Veere)—. Once my material life is well organized, I can there devote myself to great works of art, freed from all artistic jealousies and with no need whatsoever of lowly trade.

In art one is concerned with the condition of the spirit for three quarters of the time; one must therefore care for oneself if he wishes to make something great and lasting.

* Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #100, p. 184.

† Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #105, p. 191.

‡ Originally published in *Les Marges* (Paris), 15 March 1918. The letter also appears in French in Sven Lövgren, *The Genesis of Modernism* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1959), pp. 164–165. Willumsen (1863–1958) was a Danish painter who for a time was a member of the Pont-Aven group.

An exchange of letters between August Strindberg and Gauguin

*Strindberg's reply to a request from Gauguin, Paris n.d. [1 February, 1895]**

You have set your heart on having the preface to your catalogue written by me, in memory of the winter of 1894–95 when we lived here behind the Institute, not far from the Pantheon and quite close to the cemetery of Montparnasse.

I should gladly have given you this souvenir to take away with you to that island in Oceania, where you are going to seek for space and a scenery in harmony with your powerful stature, but from the very beginning I feel myself in an equivocal position and I am replying at once to your request with an "I cannot" or, more brutally still, with an "I do not wish to."

At the same time I owe you an explanation of my refusal, which does not spring from a lack of friendly feeling, or from a lazy pen, although it would have been easy for me to place the blame on the trouble in my hands which, as a matter of fact, has not given the skin time to grow in the palms.

Here it is: I cannot understand your art and I cannot like it. I have no grasp of your art, which is now exclusively Tahitian. But I know that this confession will neither astonish nor wound you, for you always seem to me fortified especially by the hatred of others: your personality delights in the antipathy it arouses, anxious as it is to keep its own integrity. And perhaps this is a good thing, for the moment you were approved and admired and had supporters, they would classify you, put you in your place and give your art a name which, five years later, the younger generation would be using as a tag for designating a superannuated art, an art they would do everything to render still more out of date.

I myself have made many serious attempts to classify you, to introduce you like a link into the chain, so that I might understand the history of your development, but in vain.

I remember my first stay in Paris, in 1876. The city was a sad one, for the nation was mourning over the events that had occurred and was anxious about the future; something was fermenting.

In the circle of Swedish artists we had not yet heard the name of Zola, for *L'Assommoir* was still to be published. I was present at a performance at the Théâtre Français of *Rome Vaincue*, in which Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, the new star,

* This English translation fron *Paul Gauguin's Intimate Journals*, trans. Van Wyck Brooks (Bloomfield: Indiana University Press, 1958), pp. 42–49. Originally published by Liveright, New York.

Strindberg (1845–1912), the Swedish dramatist and novelist, was at that time an influential figure in the circles of *Mercure de France*, the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre*, and the *Nabis*. He was also a painter of considerable talent, and worked steadily during these years. His subjects were limited to almost a single theme, seascapes with dramatically tempestuous skies, akin in spirit to the highly charged emotionality of his plays. His brushstrokes are more activated than those of any of the contemporary movements, anticipating the expressionism of the *Brücke* group of about ten years later.

was crowned as a second Rachel, and my young artists had dragged me over to Durand-Ruel's to see something quite new in painting. A young painter who was then unknown was my guide and we saw some marvelous canvases, most of them signed Monet and Manet. But as I had other things to do in Paris than to look at pictures (as the secretary of the Library of Stockholm it was my task to hunt up an old Swedish missal in the library of Sainte-Geneviève), I looked at this new painting with calm indifference. But the next day I returned, I did not know just why, and I discovered that there was "something" in these bizarre manifestations. I saw the swarming of a crowd over a pier, but I did not see the crowd itself; I saw the rapid passage of a train across a Normandy landscape, the movement of wheels in the street, frightful portraits of excessively ugly persons who had not known how to pose calmly. Very much struck by these canvases, I sent to a paper in my own country a letter in which I tried to explain the sensation I thought the Impressionists had tried to render, and my article had a certain success as a piece of incomprehensibility.

When, in 1883, I returned to Paris a second time, Manet was dead, but his spirit lived in a whole school that struggled for hegemony with Bastien-Lepage.[1] During my third stay in Paris, in 1885, I saw the Manet exhibition. This movement had now forced itself to the front; it had produced its effect and it was now classified. At the triennial exposition, which occurred that very year, there was an utter anarchy—all styles, all colors, all subjects, historical, mythological and naturalistic. People no longer wished to hear of schools or tendencies. Liberty was now the rallying-cry. Taine had said that the beautiful was not the pretty, and Zola that art was a fragment of nature seen through a temperament.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the last spasms of naturalism, one name was pronounced by all with admiration, that of Puvis de Chavannes. He stood quite alone, like a contradiction, painting with a believing soul, even while he took a passing notice of the taste of his contemporaries for allusion. (We did not yet possess the term symbolism, a very unfortunate name for so old a thing as allegory.)

It was toward Puvis de Chavannes that my thoughts turned yesterday evening when, to the tropical sounds of the mandolin and the guitar, I saw on the walls of your studio that confused mass of pictures, flooded with sunshine, which pursued me last night in my dreams. I saw trees such as no botanist could ever discover, animals the existence of which had never been suspected by Cuvier, and men whom you alone could have created, a sea that might have flowed out of a volcano, a sky which no God could inhabit.

"Monsieur," I said in my dream, "you have created a new heaven and a

[1] Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884) was an academic painter of realistic subjects from the lives of the common people. He was enormously popular at the official salons and hence he and those like him seemed to stand in the way of the younger artists of Manet's circle. The Manet memorial exhibition of 1884 was held at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; the setting signified his victory over his academic detractors.

new earth, but I do not enjoy myself in the midst of your creation. It is too sun-drenched for me, who enjoy the play of light and shade. And in your paradise there dwells an Eve who is not my ideal—for I, myself, really have an ideal of a woman or two!" This morning I went to the Luxembourg to have a look at Chavannes, who kept coming to my mind. I contemplated with profound sympathy the poor fisherman, so attentively occupied with watching for the catch that will bring him the faithful love of his wife, who is gathering flowers, and his idle child. That is beautiful! But now I am striking against the crown of thorns, Monsieur, which I hate, as you must know! I will have none of this pitiful God who accepts blows. My God is rather that *Vitsliputsli*[1] who in the sun devours the hearts of men.

No, Gauguin is not formed from the side of Chavannes, any more than from Manet's or Bastien-Lepage's!

What is he then? He is Gauguin, the savage, who hates a whimpering civilization, a sort of Titan who, jealous of the Creator, makes in his leisure hours his own little creation, the child who takes his toys to pieces so as to make others from them, who abjures and defies, preferring to see the heavens red rather than blue with the crowd.

Really, it seems to me that since I have warmed up as I write I am beginning to have a certain understanding of the art of Gauguin.

A modern author has been reproached for not depicting real beings, but for quite simply creating his personages himself. Quite simply!

Bon voyage, Master; but come back to us and come and see me. By then, perhaps, I shall have learned to understand your art better, which will enable me to write a real preface for a new catalogue in the Hôtel Drouot. For I, too, am beginning to feel an immense need to become a savage and create a new world.

*Reply to Strindberg from Gauguin, Paris, n.d. [5 February 1895]**

Dear Strindberg,

I received your letter today; your letter which is a preface for my catalogue. I had the idea to ask you for this preface the other day when I saw you in my studio playing the guitar and singing; your blue northern eye attentively studying the paintings on the walls. I had then the premonition of a revolt: the conflict between your civilization and my barbarism.

Civilization from which you suffer; barbarism which is for me a rejuvenation.

Compared with the Eve of my choice, whom I have painted in the forms

[1] Aztec war god. Human sacrifice was part of the ritual, and the priest donned the flayed skin of the victim in order to impersonate and placate the god.

* Although Strindberg had refused Gauguin's request that he write a preface to the exhibition catalogue, Gauguin actually published both letters in it (Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 18 February 1895). This letter is included in Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #154, pp. 262–264.

and harmonies of another world, your chosen memories have perhaps evoked a painful past. The Eve of your civilized conception makes misogynists of you and almost all of us; but the ancient Eve, which frightened you in my studio, might well some day smile upon you less bitterly. This world, to which a Cuvier or a botanist would be unknown, would be a paradise which I alone would have portrayed. And from the portrayal to the realization of the dream is a long way. But no matter! Is not a glimpse of happiness a foretaste of *Nirvana*?

The Eve which I have painted (she alone) can logically remain nude before our gaze. In such a simple state yours could not move without being indecent, and, being too pretty (perhaps), would be the evocation of evil and pain.

To make you understand my thought completely, I will no longer directly compare the two women, but the Maori or Turkestanian language, which my Eve speaks, and language spoken by your chosen woman, the European language of inflections.

In the languages of Oceania, composed of essential elements preserving their ruggedness, with no taste for polish whether isolated or joined, everything is naked and primordial.

While the roots of the languages of inflections, with which, as with all languages, they have commenced, disappear in the daily commerce which has worn threadbare their projections and their contours. It is a perfected mosaic, where one ceases to see the rough joinings of the stones in order to admire only a pretty painting like jewelry. An expert eye alone is able to detect the process of construction.

Excuse this long philological digression; I believe it necessary to explain the savage pattern which I had to use in order to decorate an exotic country and people.

It remains for me to thank you, dear Strindberg.

When will we see you again?

Then, as today, all my best to you.

PRIMITIVISM

*From the manuscript "Diverses Choses, 1896–1897," Tahiti**

I think that man has certain moments of playfulness, and infantile things, far from being injurious to his serious work, endow it with grace, gaiety and naïveté. . . . When machines have come, art has fled, and I could never believe that photography has been beneficial to us. A fancier of horses claims that "since the instantaneous photograph,[1] the painter has come to understand this animal, and Meissonier, the

* De Rotonchamp, *Paul Gauguin*, p. 212.

[1] Gauguin is probably referring to the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), photographer and student of animal locomotion who captured the motion of animals

glory of France, has been enabled to render all the attitudes of this noble animal." But as for me, I go back very far, even farther than the horses of the Parthenon, . . . as far as the toys of my infancy, the good wooden hobby-horse.

MARQUESAN ART

*From the manuscript "Avant et Après," Marquesas Islands, 1903**

We do not seem to suspect in Europe that there exists, both among the Maoris of New Zealand and the Marquesans, a very advanced decorative art. Our fine critics are mistaken when they take all this for Papuan art!

In the Marquesan especially there is an unparalleled sense of decoration. Give him a subject even of the most ungainly geometrical forms and he will succeed in keeping the whole harmonious and in leaving no displeasing or incongruous empty spaces. The basis is the human body or the face, especially the face. One is astonished to find the face where one thought there was nothing but a strange geometric figure. Always the same thing, and yet never the same thing.

Today, even for gold, you can no longer find any of those beautiful objects in bone, shell, iron-wood which they used to make. The police have *stolen* it all and sold it to amateur collectors; yet the Administration has never for an instant dreamed of establishing a museum in Tahiti, as it could so easily do, for all this Oceanic art.

None of these people who consider themselves learned have ever for an instant suspected the value of the Marquesan artists. There is not the pettiest official's wife who would not exclaim at the sight of it, "It's horrible! It's savagery!" Savagery! Their mouths are full of it.

LIFE OF A SAVAGE

Last letter to Charles Morice, Atuana, Marquesas Islands, April 1903†

I am striken to the ground, but not yet vanquished. Is the Indian who smiles during his torture vanquished? The savage is decidedly better than us. You were mistaken once in saying that I was wrong to say I am a savage. It is true, nevertheless; I am a savage. And the civilized foresee it, for there is nothing surprising or confusing in

nd human beings by means of a series of rapid-sequence photographs. His first book of hotographs of horses, *The Horse in Motion*, appeared in 1878, and in 1881 he invented a oo-proxiscope which projected animated pictures on a screen.

* Published in facsimile (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1918); text only (Paris: Crès, 1923). nglish translation from Brooks, *Paul Gauguin's Intimate Journals*, pp. 92–95.

† Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin*, #181, pp. 318–319.

Gauguin wrote what was to be his last letter to De Monfried about the same time as is one, and then devoted many days to writing letters to the court of appeals in Papeete otesting his conviction to three months imprisonment by a local court for libellous remarks out the police. Although exhausted and ill, he undertook a lengthy letter to the chief of the

Paul Gauguin, cover design *Avant et Après*, 1903
Marquesas.

my work except this savage-in-spite-of-myself. For that reason it is inimitable. The work of a man is the explanation of that man. Hence two kinds of beauty: one that results from instinct and another which would come from studying. The combination of the two, with its necessary modifications, produces certainly a great and very complicated richness, which the art critic must devote himself to discover . . . . Art has just gone through a long period of aberration caused by physics, chemistry, mechanics, and the study of nature. Artists, having lost all of their savagery, having no more instincts, one could even say imagination, went astray on every path, looking for productive elements which they did not have enough strength to create. Consequently, they act only as a disorderly crowd, they feel frightened like lost ones when they are alone. That is why solitude must not be advised for everyone, since one must have strength to be able to bear it and to act alone.

gendarmerie in Papeete in which he most eloquently defended his own actions and at the same time continued his attacks upon the local police. (For quotations from the letter, as well as much additional new documentary material, see Bengt Danielsson, *Gauguin in the South Seas* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965], Ch. X.) After several days during which he would see no one he was found dead on May 8, 1903.

SYMBOLIST THEORIES

*G.-Albert Aurier, from "Essay on a New Method of Criticism," 1890–1893**

Apart from the criticism in the newspapers, which is in fact not so much criticism as reporting, the criticism of this century has had the pretension to be scientific.

It has been peculiar to the nineteenth century to try to introduce science everywhere, even where it is least concerned;—and when I say science, one must not think of mathematics, the only real science, but of those obtuse bastards of science, the natural sciences.

But these natural sciences, being inexact, in contradistinction to the rational or exact sciences, are by definition not able to come to absolute solutions, and lead therefore inevitably to skepticism and to the *fear to think*.

They must, therefore, be accused of having made this society lose faith, become earthbound, incapable of thousands of those intellectual or emotional human utterances which can be characterized by the term devotion.

They are therefore responsible—as Schiller has already said—for the poorness of our art, which they have assigned exclusively to the domain of imitation, the only quality that can be established by experimental methods. In giving art this end, which is contradictory to art itself, have they not simply suppressed it completely? This is what has happened, with the exception of those rare artists who have had the strength to isolate themselves far from this environment with its destructive ideas.

If we have understood this, is it not time to react, to chase away science, as Verlaine said, "the intruder of the house," the "murderer of oratory," and to enclose, if that is still possible, the invading scientists in their laboratories?

A work of art is a new being that not only has a soul but it has a double soul (soul of the artist and soul of nature, father and mother).

To love is the only way to penetrate into a thing. To understand God, one must love Him; to understand a woman, one must love her; understanding is in proportion to love. The only means, thus, to understand a work of art is to become the lover of it. This is possible, as the work is a being that has a soul and manifests this by a language that one can learn.

It is even easier to have true love for a work of art than for a woman, as

* "Essai sur une nouvelle méthode de critique," incomplete first draft of a manuscript published posthumously in G.-Albert Aurier, *Oeuvres posthumes de G.-Albert Aurier*, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1893), pp. 175–176. This English translation is by H. R. Rookmaaker and myself. (The initials H.R.R. in footnotes in the next two sections indicate notes by H. R. Rookmaaker.)