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miniature

I

Psychologists—and more especially philosophers—pay little attention to the play of miniature frequently introduced into fairy tales. In the eyes of the psychologist, the writer is merely amusing himself when he creates houses that can be set on a pea. But this is a basic absurdity that places the tale on a level with the merest fantasy. And fantasy precludes the writer from entering, really, into the domain of the fantastic. Indeed he himself, when he develops his facile inventions, often quite ponderously, would appear not to believe in a psychological reality that corresponds to these miniature features. He lacks that little particle of dream which could be handed on from writer to reader. To make others believe, we must believe ourselves. Is it worthwhile, then, for a philosopher to raise a phenomenological problem with regard to these literary “miniatures,” these objects that are so easily made smaller through literary means? Is it possible for the conscious—of both writer and reader—to play a sincere rôle in the very origin of images of this kind?

Yet we are obliged to grant these images a certain objectivity, from the mere fact that they both attract and interest many dreamers. One might say that these houses in miniature are false objects that possess a true psychological objectivity. Here the process of imagination is typical, and it poses a problem that must be distinguished from the general problem of geometrical similarities. A geometri-*cian* sees *exactly the same thing* in two similar figures, drawn to different scales. The plan of a house drawn on a

reduced scale implies none of the problems that are inherent to a philosophy of the imagination. There is even no need to consider it from the general standpoint of representation, although it would be important, from this standpoint, to study the phenomenology of similarity. Our study should be specified as belonging definitely under the imagination.

Everything will be clear, for instance, if, in order to enter into the domain where we imagine, we are forced to cross the threshold of absurdity, as in the case of *Trésor des fèves* (Bean Treasure), Charles Nodier's¹ hero, who gets into a fairy's coach the size of a bean. In fact, he gets into it with six “litrons”² of beans on his shoulder. There is thus a contradiction in numbers as well as in the size of the space involved. Six thousand beans fit into one. And the same thing is true when Michael—who is oversize—finds himself, to his great surprise, in the house of the *Fée aux Miettes* (Beggar Fairy), which is hidden under a tuft of grass. But he feels at home there, and settles down. Happy at being in a small space, he realizes an experience of topophilia; that is, once inside the miniature house, he sees its vast number of rooms; from the interior he discovers *interior* beauty. Here we have an inversion of perspective, which is either fleeting or captivating, according to the talent of the narrator, or the reader's capacity for dream. Nodier, who was often too eager to be “agreeable,” and too much amused to give full rein to his imagination, allows certain badly camouflaged rationalizations to subsist. In order to explain psychologically this entry into the tiny house, he recalls the little cardboard houses that children play with. In other words, the tiny things we imagine simply take us back to childhood, to familiarity with toys and *the reality of toys*.

But the imagination deserves better than that. In point of fact, imagination in miniature is natural imagination which appears at all ages in the daydreams of born dreamers. Indeed, the element of amusement must be removed, if we are to find its true psychological roots. For instance,

¹ Charles Nodier, 1780-1844. French writer of tales of fantasy.

² Old measure, about 1/16 of a bushel.

one might devote a *serious* reading to this fragment by Hermann Hesse, which appeared in *Fontaine*¹ (N°57, p. 725). A prisoner paints a landscape on the wall of his cell showing a miniature train entering a tunnel. When his jailers come to get him, he asks them "politely to wait a moment, to allow me to verify something in the little train in my picture. As usual, they started to laugh, because they considered me to be weak-minded. I made myself very tiny, entered into my picture and climbed into the little train, which started moving, then disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel. For a few seconds longer, a bit of flaky smoke could be seen coming out of the round hole. Then this smoke blew away, and with it the picture, and with the picture, my person . . ." How many times poet-painters, in their prisons, have broken through walls, by way of a tunnel! How many times, as they painted their dreams, they have escaped through a crack in the wall! And to get out of prison all means are good ones. If need be, mere absurdity can be a source of freedom.

And so, if we follow the poets of miniature sympathetically, if we take the imprisoned painter's little train, geometrical contradiction is redeemed, and Representation is dominated by Imagination. Representation becomes nothing but a body of expressions with which to communicate our own images to others. In line with a philosophy that accepts the imagination as a basic faculty, one could say, in the manner of Schopenhauer: "The world is my imagination." The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it. But in doing this, it must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature. Platonic dialectics of large and small do not suffice for us to become cognizant of the dynamic virtues of miniature thinking. One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small.

By analyzing several examples, I shall show that miniature literature—that is to say, the aggregate of literary

¹ *Fontaine*, French literary review published in Algiers, then in France, during the Second World War.

images that are commentaries on inversions in the perspective of size—stimulates profound values.

II

I shall first take a fragment from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which is quoted in a very fine article by Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, entitled *Le thème de Gulliver et le postulat de Laplace*. Here the author is led to accentuate the intellectualist nature of *Cyrano de Bergerac*'s amused images in order to compare them with this astronomer-mathematician's ideas.¹

The *Cyrano* text is the following: "This apple is a little universe in itself, the seed of which, being hotter than the other parts, gives out the conserving heat of its globe; and this germ, in my opinion, is the little sun of this little world, that warms and feeds the vegetative salt of this little mass."

In this text, nothing stands out, but everything is imagined, and the imaginary miniature is proposed to enclose an imaginary value. At the center is the seed, which is *hotter* than the entire apple. This condensed heat, this warm well-being that men love, takes the image out of the class of images one can see into that of images that are lived. The imagination feels cheered by this germ which is fed by a vegetable salt.² The apple itself, the fruit, is no longer the principal thing, but the seed, which becomes the real dynamic value. Paradoxically, it is the seed that creates the apple, to which it transmits its aromatic saps and conserving strength. The seed is not only born in a tender cradle, protected by the fruit's mass. It is the generator of vital heat.

In such imagination as this, there exists total inversion as regards the spirit of observation. Here the mind that imagines follows the opposite path of the mind that ob-

¹ *Journal de psychologie*, April-June 1947, p. 169.

² How many of us, once we have eaten an apple, attack the seed! In company, we restrain our innocent mania for decorticating the seeds in order to chew them. And what thoughts we have, what day-dreams, when we eat the germs of plants!

serves, the imagination does not want to end in a diagram that summarizes acquired learning. It seeks a pretext to multiply images, and as soon as the imagination is interested by an image, this increases its value. From the moment when Cyrano imagined the Seed-Sun, he had the conviction that the seed was a source of life and heat, in short, that it was a value.

Naturally, this is an exaggerated image. The jesting element in Cyrano, as in many writers, as for instance Nodier, whom we mentioned a few pages back, is prejudicial to imaginary meditation. The images go too fast, and too far. But a psychologist who reads slowly and examines images in slow motion, lingering as long as is needed over each image, will experience a sort of coalescence of unlimited values. Values become engulfed in miniature, and miniature causes men to dream.

Pierre-Maxime Schuhl concludes his analysis by underlining in the case of this particularly felicitous example, the dangers of the imagination, which is master of error and falsehood. I think as he does, but I dream differently or, to be more exact, I am willing to react to my reading the way a dreamer does. Here we have the entire problem of the oneiric attitude toward oneiric values. Already, when we describe a daydream *objectively* this diminishes and interrupts it. How many dreams told objectively, have become nothing but oneirism reduced to dust! In the presence of an image that dreams, it must be taken as an invitation to continue the daydream that created it.

The psychologist of the imagination who defines the positivity of the image by the dynamism of daydream, must justify the invention of the image. In the present example, the problem posed: is the seed of an apple its sun? is an absurd one. If we dream enough—and undoubtedly a lot is needed—we end by giving this question oneiric value. Cyrano de Bergerac did not wait for Surrealism to delight in tackling absurd questions. From the standpoint of the imagination, he was not “wrong”; the imagination is never wrong, since it does not have to confront an image with an objective reality. But we must go further: Cyrano did

not mean to deceive his readers. He knew quite well that readers would not mistake it. He had always hoped to find readers worthy of his imagination. Indeed, there is a sort of innate optimism in all works of the imagination. Gérard de Nerval wrote, in *Aurélia* (p. 41): “I believe that the human imagination never invented anything that was not true, in this world or any other.”

When we have experienced an image like the planetary image of Cyrano's apple, we understand that it was not prepared by thought. It has nothing in common with images that illustrate or sustain scientific ideas. On the other hand, the planetary image of Bohr's atom—in scientific thinking, if not in a few indigent, harmful evaluations of popular philosophy—is a pure synthetic construct of mathematical thoughts. In Bohr's planetary atom, the little central sun is *not hot*.

This brief remark is to underline the essential difference between an absolute image that is self-accomplishing, and a post-ideated image that is content to summarize existing thoughts.

III

Our second example of valorized literary miniature will be a botanist's daydream. Botanists delight in the miniature of being exemplified by a flower, and they even ingenuously use words that correspond to things of ordinary size to describe the intimacy of flowers. The following description of the flower of the German stachys may be read under *Herbs* in the *Dictionnaire de botanique chrétienne*, which is a large volume of the *Nouvelle Encyclopédie théologique*, published in 1851:

“These flowers, which are grown in cotton cradles, are pink and white in color, and small and delicate. I take off the little chalice by means of the web of long silk threads that covers it . . . The lower lip of the flower is straight and a bit folded under; it is a deep pink on the inside, and

on the outside is covered with thick fur. The entire plant causes smarting when touched. It wears a typically northern costume with four little stamens that are like little yellow brushes." Thus far, this account may pass for objective. But it soon becomes psychological, and, gradually, the description is accompanied by a daydream: "The four stamens stand erect and on excellent terms with one another in the sort of little niche formed by the lower lip, where they remain snug and warm in little padded case-mates. The little pistil remains respectfully at their feet, but since it is very small, in order to speak to it, they, in turn, must bend their knees. These little women are very important, and those that appear to be the humblest, often assume great authority in their homes. The four seeds remain at the bottom of the chalice, where they are grown, the way, in India, children swing in a hammock. Each stamen recognizes its own handiwork, and there can be no jealousy."

Here our learned botanist has found wedded life in miniature, in a flower; he has felt the gentle warmth preserved by fur, he has seen the hammock that rocks the seed. From the harmony of the forms, he has deduced the well-being of the home. Need one point out that, as in the *Cyrano* text, the gentle warmth of enclosed regions is the first indication of intimacy? This warm intimacy is the root of all images. Here—quite obviously—the images no longer correspond to any sort of reality. Under a magnifying glass we could probably recognize the little yellow brushes of the stamens. But no *observer* could see the slightest real feature that would justify the psychological images accumulated by the narrator in this *Dictionary of Christian Botany*. We are inclined to think that the narrator would have been more cautious had he had to describe an object with ordinary dimensions. But he *entered* into a miniature world and right away images began to abound, then grow, then escape. Large issues from small, not through the logical law of a dialectics of contraries, but thanks to liberation from all obligations of dimensions, a liberation that is

special characteristic of the activity of the imagination. Under *Periwinkle*, in this same dictionary of Christian Botany, we find: "Reader, study the periwinkle in detail, and you will see how detail increases an object's stature."

In two lines, this man with a magnifying glass expresses an important psychological law. He situates us at a sensitive point of objectivity, at the moment when we have to accept unnoticed detail, and dominate it. The magnifying glass in this experience conditions an entry into the world. Here the man with the magnifying glass is not an old man still trying to read his newspaper, in spite of eyes that are weary of looking. The man with the magnifying glass takes the world as though it were quite new to him. If he were to tell us of the discoveries he has made, he would furnish us with documents of pure phenomenology, in which discovery of the world, or entry into the world, would be more than just a worn-out word, more than a word that has become tarnished through over-frequent philosophical use. A philosopher often describes his "entry into the world," his "being in the world," using a familiar object as symbol. He will describe his ink-bottle phenomenologically, and a paltry thing becomes the janitor of the wide world.

The man with the magnifying glass—quite simply—bars the every-day world. He is a fresh eye before a new object. The botanist's magnifying glass is youth recaptured. It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child. With this glass in his hand, he returns to the garden,

*où les enfants regardent grand*¹

(where children see enlarged)

Thus the minuscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness.

Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness.

¹ P. de Boissy, *Main première*, p. 21.

IV

Of course, in describing a phenomenology of the man with the magnifying glass, I was not thinking of the laboratory worker. A scientific worker has a discipline of objectivity that precludes all daydreams of the imagination. He has already seen what he observes in the microscope and, paradoxically, one might say that he never sees anything for the first time. In any case, in the domain of scientific observation that is absolutely objective, the "first time" doesn't count. Observation, then, belongs in the domain of "several times." In scientific work, we have first to digest our surprise psychologically. What scholars observe is well defined in a body of thoughts and experiments. It is not, then, on the level of problems of scientific experiment that I shall make my comments when we study the imagination. When we have forgotten all our habits of scientific objectivity, we look for the *images of the first time*. If we were to consult psychological documents in the history of science—since the objection may well be raised that, in this history, there is quite a store of "first times"—we should find that the first microscopic observations were legends about small objects, and when the object was endowed with life, legends of life. Indeed, one observer, still in the domain of naïveté, saw human forms in "spermatazoic animals!"¹

Here I am again, then, obliged to pose the problems of the Imagination in terms of "first time," which justifies my having chosen examples in realms of the most exaggerated fantasy. And by way of a surprising variation on the theme of the man with the magnifying glass, I shall study a prose-poem by André Pieyre de Mandiargues, entitled *The egg in the landscape*.²

Like countless others, our poet is sitting dreaming at the window. But he discovers in the glass itself a slight deformation, which spreads deformation throughout the universe. "Come nearer the window," Mandiargues tells his reader, "while you force yourself not to allow your atten-

tion to be too much attracted by the out-of-doors. Until you have seen one of these kernels that are like cysts in the glass, at times transparent little knucklebones, but more often, befogged or very vaguely translucent, and so long in shape that they make you think of the pupils of a cat's eyes." But what happens to the outside world, when it is seen through this little glazed lune, this pupil of a cat's eye? "Does the nature of the world change (p. 106), or is it real nature that triumphs over appearances? In any event, the experimental fact is that the introduction of the nucleus into the landscape sufficed to make it look limp . . . Walls, rocks, tree-trunks, metal constructions, lost all rigidity in the area surrounding the mobile nucleus." Here the poet makes images surge up on all sides, he presents us with an atom universe in the process of multiplication. Under his guidance, the dreamer can renew his own world, merely by moving his face. From the miniature of the glass cyst, he can call forth an entire world and oblige it to make "the most unwonted contortions" (p. 107). The dreamer sends waves of unreality over what was formerly the real world. "The outside world in its entirety, is transformed into a milieu as malleable as could be desired, by the presence of this single, hard, piercing object, this veritable philosophical ovum which the slightest twitch of my face sets moving all through space."

Here the poet did not look far for his dream instrument. And yet with what art he nucleized the landscape! With what fantasy he conferred multiple curvature on space! This is really a fantasy on Riemann's curved space. Because every universe is enclosed in curves, every universe is concentrated in a nucleus, a spore, a dynamized center. And this center is powerful, because it is an imagined center. One step further into the world of images offered us by Pieyre de Mandiargues, and we see the center that imagines; then we can read the landscape in the glass nucleus. We no longer look at it while looking through it. This nucleizing nucleus is a world in itself. The miniature deploys to the dimensions of a universe. Once more, large is contained in small.

¹ Cf. Bachelard's *La formation de l'esprit scientifique*.

² Edition *Métamorphoses*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 105.

To use a magnifying glass is to pay attention, but isn't paying attention already having a magnifying glass? Attention by itself is an enlarging glass. Elsewhere,¹ Pieyre de Mandiargues meditates upon the flower of the euphorbia: "Like the cross-cut of a flea under the lens of a microscope, the euphorbia had grown mysteriously under his over-attentive scrutiny: it was now a pentagonal fortress, looming stupendously high above him, in a desert of white rocks, and the pink spires of the five towers that studded the castle set in the front line of the flora on the arid country-side, appeared inaccessible."

A reasonable philosopher—and the species is not uncommon—will object, perhaps, that these documents are exaggerated, and that, with words, they make the large, even the immense, issue too gratuitously from the small. For him they are nothing but verbal prestidigitation, which is a poor thing compared to the feat of the real prestidigitator who makes an alarm-clock come out of a thimble. I shall nevertheless defend "literary" prestidigitation. The prestidigitator's action amazes and amuses us, while that of the poet sets us to dreaming. I cannot live and relive what is done by the former. But the poet's creation is mine if only I like to daydream.

This reasonable philosopher would excuse our images if they could be presented as the effect of a drug, such as mescaline. Then they would have physiological reality for him; and he could use them to elucidate his problems of the union of soul and body. I myself consider literary documents as *realities of the imagination*, pure products of the imagination. And why should the actions of the imagination not be as real as those of perception?

Is there any reason, either, why these "extreme" images, which we should be unable to form ourselves, but which readers can receive sincerely from poets, should not be virtual "drugs"—if we must keep to this notion—that procure the seeds of daydreams for us? This virtual drug, moreover, possesses very pure efficacy. For with an "exaggerated"

¹ *Marbre*, p. 63. Laffont, Paris.

image we are sure to be in the direct line of an autonomous imagination.

v

I felt a certain scruple when, a few pages back, I introduced that long description by the botanist in the *Nouvelle Encyclopédie Théologique*. This fragment abandons the seed of daydream too quickly. But because of its gossipy nature, we accept it when we have time for pleasantries. We must dismiss it, however, when we are trying to find the living seed of products of the imagination. If one may say this, it is a miniature made with big pieces and I shall have to look for a better contact with the miniaturizing imagination. Unfortunately, being, as I am, a philosopher who plies his trade at home, I haven't the advantage of actually seeing the works of the miniaturists of the Middle Ages, which was the great age of solitary patience. But I can well imagine this patience, which brings peace to one's fingers. Indeed, we have only to imagine it for our souls to be bathed in peace. All small things must evolve slowly, and certainly a long period of leisure, in a quiet room, was needed to miniaturize the world. Also one must love space to describe it as minutely as though there were world molecules, to enclose an entire spectacle in a molecule of drawing. In this feat there is an important dialectics of the intuition—which always sees big—and work, which is hostile to flights of fancy. Intuitionists, in fact, take in everything at one glance, while details reveal themselves and patiently take their places, one after the other, with the discursive impishness of the clever miniaturist. It is as though the miniaturist challenged the intuitionist philosopher's lazy contemplation, as though he said to him: "You would not have seen that! Take the time needed to see all these little things that cannot be seen all together." In looking at a miniature, unflagging attention is required to integrate all the detail.

Naturally, miniature is easier to tell than to do, and it

is not hard to find literary descriptions that put the world in the diminutive. But because these descriptions tell things in tiny detail, they are automatically verbose. This is true of the following passage by Victor Hugo (I have cut it somewhat), in whose name I shall request the reader's attention for examination of a type of daydream that may seem insignificant.

Although Hugo is generally thought to have had a magnifying vision of things, he also knew how to describe them in miniature, as in this passage from *Le Rhin*¹: "In Freiberg I forgot for a long time the vast landscape spread out before me, in my preoccupation with the plot of grass on which I was seated, atop a wild little knoll on the hill. Here, too, was an entire world. Beetles were advancing slowly under deep fibres of vegetation; parasol-shaped hemlock flowers imitated the pines of Italy . . ., a poor, wet bumble-bee, in black and yellow velvet, was laboriously climbing up a thorny branch, while thick clouds of gnats kept the daylight from him; a blue-bell trembled in the wind, and an entire nation of aphids had taken to shelter under its enormous tent . . . I watched an earthworm that resembled an antediluvian python, come out of the mud and writhe heavenward, breathing in the air. Who knows, perhaps it, too, in this microscopic universe, has its Hercules to kill it and its Cuvier² to describe it. In short, this universe is as large as the other one." The account continues, to the poet's evident amusement. Having mentioned Micromegas, he goes on to pursue a facile theory. But the unhurried reader—I personally hope for no others—undoubtedly enters into this miniaturizing daydream. Indeed, this leisurely reader has often indulged in daydreams of this kind himself, but he would never have dared to write them down. Now the poet has given them literary dignity. It is my ambition to give them philosophical dignity. For in fact, the poet is right, he has just discovered an entire world. "Here, too, was an entire world." Why should a

¹ Victor Hugo, *Le Rhin*, Hetzel edition, Vol. III, p. 98.

² Baron Georges Cuvier, eighteenth-century zoologist and founder of the science of paleontology.

metaphysician not confront this world? It would permit him to renew, at little cost, his experiences of "an opening onto the world," of "entrance into the world." Too often the world designated by philosophy is merely a non-I, its vastness an accumulation of negativities. But the philosopher proceeds too quickly to what is positive, and appropriates for himself the World, a World that is unique of its kind. Such formulas as: being-in-the-world and world-being are too majestic for me and I do not succeed in experiencing them. In fact, I feel more at home in miniature worlds, which, for me, are dominated worlds. And when I live them I feel waves that generate world-consciousness emanating from my dreaming self. For me, the vastness of the world has become merely the jamming of these waves. To have experienced miniature sincerely detaches me from the surrounding world, and helps me to resist dissolution of the surrounding atmosphere.

Miniature is an exercise that has metaphysical freshness; it allows us to be world conscious at slight risk. And how restful this exercise on a dominated world can be! For miniature rests us without ever putting us to sleep. Here the imagination is both vigilant and content.

But in order to devote myself to this miniaturized metaphysics with a clear conscience, I should need the increased support of additional texts. Otherwise, by confessing my love of miniature, I should be afraid of confirming the diagnosis suggested, some twenty-five years ago, by my old friend Mme. Favez-Boutonier, who told me that my Lilliputian hallucinations were characteristic of alcoholism.

There exist numerous texts in which a meadow is a forest, and a tuft of grass a thicket. In one of Thomas Hardy's novels, a handful of moss is a pine wood; and in *Niels Lyne*,¹ J. P. Jacobsen's novel of subtle passions, the author, describing the Forest of Happiness, with its autumn leaves and the shadbush "weighted down with red berries," completes his picture with "vigorous, thick moss that looked like pine trees, or like palms." Also, "there was in addition, a thin moss that covered the tree-trunks and reminded one

¹ *Niels Lyne* was a work that Rilke read and reread.

of the wheat-fields of elves" (p. 255 of the French translation). For a writer whose task it is to follow a highly intense human drama—as was the case with Jacobsen—to interrupt his passionate story, in order to "write this miniature," presents a paradox that would need elucidating if we wanted to take an exact measure of literary interests. By following the text closely, it is as though something human gained in delicacy in this effort to see this delicate forest set in the forest of big trees. From one forest to the other, from the forest in diastole to the forest in systole, there is the breathing of a cosmicity. And paradoxically, it seems that by living in the world of miniature, one relaxes in a small space.

This is one of the many daydreams that take us out of this world into another, and the novelist needed it to transport us into the region beyond the world that is the world of new love. People who are hurried by the affairs of men will not enter there. Indeed the reader of a book that follows the undulations of a great love may be surprised at this interruption through cosmicity. But he only gives the book a linear reading that follows the thread of the human events. For this reader, events do not need a picture. And linear reading deprives us of countless daydreams.

Daydreams of this sort are invitations to verticality, pauses in the narrative during which the reader is invited to dream. They are very pure, since they have no use. They must also be distinguished from the fairy-tale convention in which a dwarf hides behind a head of lettuce to lay traps for the hero, as in *Le nain jaune* (The Yellow Dwarf) by Countess d'Aulnoy.¹ Cosmic poetry is independent of the plots that characterize stories for children. In the examples given, it demands participation in a really intimate vegetism that has none of the torpor to which Bergsonian philosophy condemned it. Indeed, through its attachment to miniaturized forces, the vegetal world is great in smallness, sharp in gentleness, vividly alive in its greenness.

¹ Seventeenth-century French author of many fairy tales that have become classics.

At times, a poet seizes upon some tiny dramatic incident, as for instance, Jacques Audiberti who, in his amazing *Abraxas*, makes us sense the dramatic moment at which "the climbing nettle raises the gray scale" in its struggle with a stone wall. What a vegetal Atlas! In *Abraxas* Audiberti weaves a closely-knit fabric of dream and reality. He knows the daydreams that put intuition at the *punctum maximum*. One would like to help the nettle root make one more blister on the old wall.

But we haven't time, in this world of ours, to love things and see them at close range, in the plentitude of their smallness. Only once in my life I saw a young lichen come into being and spread out on a wall. What youth and vigor to honor the surface!

Of course, we should lose all sense of real values if we interpreted miniatures from the standpoint of the simple relativism of large and small. A bit of moss may well be a pine, but a pine will never be a bit of moss. The imagination does not function with the same conviction in both directions.

Poets learn to know the primal germ of flowers in the gardens of tininess. And I should like to be able to say with André Breton:

*J'ai des mains pour te cueillir,
thym minuscule de mes rêves,
romarin de mon extrême pâleur.*¹

(I have hands to pluck you,
wee thyme of my dreams,
rosemary of my excessive palor.)

VI

A fairy tale is a reasoning image. It tends to associate extraordinary images as though they could be coherent images, imparting the conviction of a primal image to an entire

¹ André Breton, *Le revolver aux cheveux blancs*, p. 122. Cahiers Libres, Paris.

ensemble of derivative images. But the tie is so facile, and the reasoning so fluid that soon we no longer know where the germ of the tale lies.

In the case of a story told in miniature such as *Petit Poucet* (Tom Thumb), we seem to have no difficulty in finding the principle of the primal image: mere tininess paves the way for everything that happens. But when we examine it more closely, the phenomenological situation of this narrated miniature is precarious. And the fact is that it is subject to the dialectics of wonder and jest. A single overdrawn feature suffices sometimes to interrupt participation in wonderment. In a drawing, we might continue to admire it, but the commentary exceeds the limits: in one version, quoted by Gaston Paris,¹ Poucet is so small "that he splits a grain of dust with his head, and passes through it with his entire body." In another, he is killed by a kick from an ant. But in this last, there is no oneiric value. Our animalized oneirism, which is so powerful as regards large animals, has not recorded the doings and gestures of tiny animals. In fact, in the domain of tininess, animalized oneirism is less developed than vegetal oneirism.²

Gaston Paris notes that this direction, in which Poucet is killed by a kick from an ant, leads inevitably to the epigram, and a sort of insult through the image that expresses contempt for lowly creatures. Here we are faced with counter participation. "These witty games may be found among the Romans," he writes, "who, at the period of the decadence, addressed a dwarf with the following epigram: 'A flea's skin would be too big for you'." "Today still," adds Gaston Paris, "the same jokes are to be found in the song about *Le Petit Mari*"³ (The Little Husband). Gaston Paris describes this song, moreover, as a "children's song," which will no doubt astonish our psychoanalysts. Fortunately, in

¹ Gaston Paris, *Le Petit Poucet et la Grande Ourse*, p. 22. Paris, 1875.

² It should be noted, however, that certain neurotics insist that they can see the microbes that are consuming their organs.

³ *Mon père m'a donné un mari, mon Dieu, quel petit homme!* Popular French folk song.

the last seventy-five years, we have acquired new means of psychological explanation.

In any case, Gaston Paris clearly designated the weak point of the legend (*loc. cit.* p. 23): the passages that jeer at tininess deform the original story, the pure miniature. In the original tale, which the phenomenologist must always reinstate, "smallness is not ridiculous, but wonderful. In fact, the most interesting features of the story are the extraordinary things that Poucet accomplishes, thanks to his smallness; he is witty and clever on all occasions, and always extricates himself triumphantly from the awkward situations in which he happens to be."

But then, in order to participate in the story really, this subtlety of wit should be accompanied by material subtlety. The tale invites us to "slip" between the difficulties. In other words, in addition to the design, we must seize the dynamism of the miniature, this being a supplementary phenomenological instance. And what a thrill we get from the story if we trace the source of this smallness, the nascent movement of this tiny creature, exerting influence upon the large one. As an example, the dynamism of miniature is often evidenced by the stories in which, seated in the horse's ear, Poucet is master of the forces that pull the plough. "This, in my opinion," writes Paris (p. 23), "is the original basis of his story; for this is a feature that is found among the legends of all peoples, whereas the other stories that are attributed to him, and which are creations of the imagination, once it has been stirred by this amusing little creature, usually differ among different peoples."

Naturally, when he is in the horse's ear, Poucet orders it to turn right or left. He is the *center of decision*, that the daydreams of our will advise us to set up in any small space. I said earlier that tininess is the habitat of greatness. But if we sympathize dynamically with this lively little Poucet, tininess soon appears to be the habitat of primitive strength. A Cartesian philosopher—if a Cartesian could indulge in pleasantry—would say that, in this story, Petit Poucet is the pineal gland of the plough. In any

case, the infinitesimal is master of energies, small commands large. When Poucet has spoken, horse, ploughshare and man have only to follow. The better these three subordinates obey, the greater the certainty that the furrow will be straight.

Petit Poucet is at home in the space of an ear, at the entrance of the natural sound cavity. He is an ear within an ear. Thus the tale figured by visual representations is duplicated by what, in the next paragraph, I shall call a miniature of sound. As a matter of fact, as we follow the tale, we are invited to go beyond the auditory threshold, to hear with our imagination. Poucet climbed into the horse's ear in order to speak softly, that is to say, to command loudly, with a voice that none could hear except he who should "listen." Here the word "listen" takes on the double meaning of to hear and to obey. It is moreover in the minimum of sound, in a sound miniature like the one that illustrates this legend, that the play of this double meaning is most delicate.

This Poucet who guides the farmer's team with his intelligence and will, seems rather remote from the Poucet of my youth. And yet it is in line with the fables that will lead us to primitive legend, in the footsteps of Gaston Paris, who was the great dispenser of primitivity.

For Paris, the key to the legend of Petit Poucet—as in so many legends!—is in the sky; in other words, it is Poucet who drives the constellation of the Grand Chariot.¹ And as a matter of fact, in many lands, according to this author, a little star just above the chariot is designated by the name of Poucet.

We need not follow all the convergent proofs that the reader can find in this work by Gaston Paris. However, I should like to insist upon a Swiss legend which will give us our full of an ear that knows how to dream. In this legend, also recounted by Paris (p. 11), the chariot turns over at midnight with a frightful noise. Such a legend teaches us to listen to the night. The time of night? The time of the starry

¹ Alas, in English, the "Grand Chariot" is the "Great Bear," so this "key" will not fit the legend of our Tom Thumb. (Translator's note).

sky? I once read somewhere that a hermit who was watching his hour-glass without praying, heard noises that split his eardrums. He suddenly heard the catastrophe of time, in the hour-glass. The tick tock of our watches is so mechanically jerky that we no longer have ears subtle enough to hear the passage of time.

VII

The tale of Petit Poucet, transposed into 'the sky, shows that images move easily from small to large and from large to small. The Gulliver type of daydream is natural, and a great dreamer sees his images doubly, on earth and in the sky. But in this poetic life of images there is more than a mere game of dimensions. Daydream is not geometrical. The dreamer commits himself absolutely. In an *Appendix* to C. A. Hackett's thesis on *Le Lyrisme de Rimbaud*, under the title, *Rimbaud et Gulliver*, there is an excellent passage in which Rimbaud is represented as small beside his mother, and great in the dominated world. Whereas in the presence of his mother he is nothing but "a little man in Brobdingnag's country," at school, little "Arthur imagines that he is Gulliver among the Lilliputians." And C. A. Hackett quotes Victor Hugo who, in *Les contemplations (Souvenirs paternels)*, shows children who laugh

*De voir d'affreux géants très bêtes
Vaincus par des nains d'esprit.*

(When they see frightful, very stupid giants
Overpowered by witty dwarfs.)

Here Hackett has given an indication of all the elements of a psychoanalysis of Rimbaud. But although psychoanalysis, as I have often observed, can furnish us valuable information with regard to the deeper nature of a writer, occasionally it can divert us from the study of the direct virtue of an image. There are images that are so immense, their power of communication lures us so far from life,

from our own life, that psychoanalytical commentary can only develop on the margin of values. There is immense daydreaming in these two lines by Rimbaud:

*Petit Poucet rêveur, j'égrenais dans ma course
Des rimes. Mon auberge était à la Grande Ourse.*

(Dreamy Petit Poucet, on my way, as though in prayer,
I said rhymes, my inn was under the sign of the Great Bear.)

It is of course possible to admit that, for Rimbaud, the Great Bear was an "image of Mme. Rimbaud" (Hackett, p. 69). But additional psychological insight does not give us the dynamism of this outburst of image that led the poet to recapture the legend of the Walloon Poucet. In fact I shall have to leave aside my psychoanalytical knowledge if I want to be touched by the phenomenological grace of the dreamer's image, of the image of this fifteen-year-old prophet. If the Great Bear Inn is merely the harsh home of an ill-handled adolescent, it awakens no positive memory in me, no active daydream. Here I can only dream in Rimbaud's sky. The particular origin that psychoanalysis finds in the writer's life, even though it may be psychologically correct, has little chance of recapturing an influence over any one. And yet I receive the message of this extraordinary image, and for a brief instant, by detaching me from my life, it transforms me into an imagining being. It is in such moments of reading as this that, little by little, I have come to doubt not only the psychoanalytical origin of the image, but all psychological causality of the poetic image as well. Poetry, in its paradoxes, may be counter-causal, which is yet another way of being of the world, of being engaged in the dialectics of the passions. But when poetry attains its autonomy, we can say that it is a-causal. In order to receive *directly* the virtue of an isolated image—and an image in isolation has all its virtue—phenomenology now seems to me to be more favorable than psychoanalysis, for the precise reason that phenomenology requires us to assume this image ourselves, uncritically and with enthusiasm.

Consequently, in its *direct reverie* aspect, "The Great Bear Inn" is not a maternal prison any more than it is a village sign. It is a "house in the sky." If we dream intensely at the sight of a square, we sense its stability, we know that it is a very safe refuge. Between the four stars of the Great Bear, a great dreamer can go and live. Perhaps he is fleeing the earth, and a psychoanalyst can enumerate the reasons for his flight. But the dreamer is sure to find a resting place proportionate to his dreams. And this house in the sky keeps turning round and round! The other stars, lost in the heavenly tides, turn ineptly. But the Grand Chariot does not lose its way. To watch it turning so smoothly is already to be master of the voyage. And, while dreaming, the poet undoubtedly experiences a coalescence of legends, all of which are given new life through the image. They are not an ancient wisdom. The poet does not repeat old-wives' tales. He has no past, but lives in a world that is new. As regards the past and the affairs of this world, he has realized absolute sublimation. The phenomenologist must follow the poet. The psychoanalyst is only interested in the negativity of sublimation.

VIII

On the theme of Petit Poucet, in folklore as well as among poets, we have just seen transpositions of size that give a double life to poetic space. Two lines suffice sometimes for this transposition, as, for instance these lines by Noël Bureau:¹

*Il se couchait derrière le brin d'herbe
Pour agrandir le ciel.*

(He lay down behind the blade of grass
To enlarge the sky.)

But sometimes the transactions between small and large multiply, have repercussions. Then, when a familiar image grows to the dimensions of the sky, one is suddenly struck

¹ Noël Bureau, *Les mains tendues*, p. 25.

by the impression that, correlatively, familiar objects become the miniatures of a world. Macrocosm and microcosm are correlated.

This correlation, which can become operative in both directions, has served as basis for certain poems by Jules Supervielle, especially those collected under the revealing title, *Gravitations*. Here every poetic center of interest, whether in the sky or on the earth, is a center of active gravity. For the poet, this center of gravity is soon, if one can say this, both in heaven and on earth. For instance, with what freedom of movement in the images, the family table becomes an aerial table, with the sun for its lamp.¹

*L'homme, la femme, les enfants
A la table aérienne
Appuyée sur un miracle
Qui cherche à se définir.*

(The man, the woman, the children
At the aerial table
Resting on a miracle
That seeks its definition.)

Then, after this "explosion of unreality," the poet comes down to earth again:

*Je me retrouve à ma table habituelle
Sur la terre cultivée
Celle qui donne le maïs et les troupeaux
.....
Je retrouvais les visages autour de moi
Avec les pleins et les creux de la vérité.*

(I am back again at my usual table
On the cultivated earth
The one that yields corn and flocks
.....
I recognized the faces about me
With their lights and shades of truth.)

¹ Jules Supervielle, *Gravitations*, pp. 183-185.

The image that serves as pivot for this transforming daydream, which is by turns earthly and aerial, familiar and cosmic, is the image of the lamp-sun or the sun-lamp. One could find innumerable literary documents on the subject of this very ancient image. But Jules Supervielle contributes an important variation by making it active in both directions. Thus he restores its entire suppleness to the imagination, a suppleness so miraculous that the image can be said to represent the sum of the direction that enlarges and the direction that concentrates. The poet keeps the image from becoming motionless.

If we are alive to Supervielle's cosmic allusions, under this title *Gravitations*, which is filled with scientific significance for the modern mind, may be found ideas that have a distinguished past. When the history of science is not over-modernized, and Copernicus, for instance, is taken as he was, with all his dreams and ideas, it becomes evident that the stars gravitate about light, and that the sun is, primarily, the great Light of the World. Later, mathematicians decided that it was a magnetic mass. Upper light, being the principle of centrality, is a very important value in the hierarchy of images. For the imagination, therefore, the world gravitates about a *value*.

The evening lamp on the family table is also the center of a world. In fact, the lamp-lighted table is a little world in itself, and a dreamer-philosopher may well fear lest our indirect lighting cause us to lose the center of the evening room. If this happens, will memory retain the faces of other days,

With their lights and shades of truth?

When we have followed Supervielle's entire poem, both in its astral ascensions and its return to the world of human beings, we perceive that the familiar world assumes the new relief of a dazzling cosmic miniature. We did not know that the familiar world was so large. The poet has shown us that large is not incompatible with small. And we are reminded of Baudelaire's comments on certain Goya litho-

graphs, which he called "vast pictures in miniature."¹ He also said of Marc Baud,² an enamelist, "he knows how to create large in small."

In reality, as we shall see later, especially when we examine images of immenseness, tiny and immense are compatible. A poet is always ready to see large and small. For instance, thanks to the image, a man like Paul Claudel, in his cosmogony was quick to assimilate the vocabulary—if not the thinking—of contemporary science. The following lines are from his *Cinq grandes odes* (p.180): "Just as we see little spiders or certain insect larvae hidden like precious stones in their cotton and satin pouches,

"In the same way, I was shown an entire nestful of still embarrassed suns in the cold folds of the nebula."

If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing.

ix

Distance, too, creates miniatures at all points on the horizon, and the dreamer, faced with these spectacles of distant nature, picks out these miniatures as so many nests of solitude in which he dreams of living.

In this connection, Joë Bousquet³ writes: "I plunge into the tiny dimensions that distance confers, for I am anxious to measure the immobility in which I am confined with this reduction." A permanent invalid, this great dreamer bestrode the intervening space in order to "plunge" into tininess. The isolated villages on the horizon become homelands for the eyes. Distance disperses nothing but, on the contrary, composes a miniature of a country in which we should like to live. In distant miniatures, disparate things become reconciled. They then offer themselves for our "possession," while denying the distance that created them. We possess from afar, and how peacefully!

These miniature pictures on the horizon may be compared with the sights that characterize belfry daydreams,

¹ Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques*, p. 429.

² Baudelaire, *loc. cit.* p. 316.

³ Joë Bousquet, *Le meneur de lune*, p. 162.

and which are so numerous that they are considered commonplace. Writers note them in passing but vary them hardly at all. And yet what a lesson in solitude! From the solitude of a belfry-tower, a man watches other men "running about" on the distant square bleached white by the summer sun. The men look "the size of flies," and move about irrationally "like ants." These comparisons, which are so hackneyed that one no longer dares to use them, appear as though inadvertently in numerous passages that recount a belfry daydream. It remains true, nevertheless, that a phenomenologist of images must take note of the extreme simplicity of these reflections which so successfully separate the daydreamer from the restless world, and give him an impression of domination at little cost. But once its commonplace nature has been pointed out, we realize that this is specifically the dream of high solitude. Enclosed solitude would think other thoughts. It would deny the world otherwise, and would not have a concrete image with which to dominate it. From the top of his tower, a philosopher of domination sees the universe in miniature. Everything is small because he is so high. And since he is high, he is great, the height of his station is proof of his own greatness.

Many a theorem of topo-analysis would have to be elucidated to determine the action of space upon us. For images cannot be measured. And even when they speak of space, they change in size. The slightest value extends, heightens, or multiplies them. Either the dreamer becomes the being of his image, absorbing all its space or he confines himself in a miniature version of his images. What metaphysicians call our being-in-the-world (*être-là*) should be determined as regards each image, lest, occasionally, we find nothing but a miniature of being. I shall return to these aspects of this problem in a later chapter.

x

Since I have centered all my considerations on the problems of experienced space, miniature, for me, is solely a

visual image. But the *causality of smallness* stirs all our senses, and an interesting study could be undertaken of the "miniatures" that appeal to each sense. For the sense of taste or smell, the problem might be even more interesting than for the sense of vision, since sight curtails the dramas it witnesses. But a whiff of perfume, or even the slightest odor can create an entire environment in the world of the imagination.

Naturally, the problems of causality of smallness have been analyzed by sensory psychology. In a perfectly positive way, the psychologist carefully determines the different *thresholds* at which the various sense organs go into action. These thresholds may differ with different persons, but there is no contesting their reality. In fact, the idea of threshold is one of the most clearly objective ideas in modern psychology.

In this paragraph I should like to see if the imagination does not attract us to an area beyond these thresholds; if a poet who is hyper-alert to the inner word, by making form and color speak, doesn't hear in a region beyond perception. There exist too many paradoxical metaphors in this connection, for us not to examine them systematically, since they must conceal a certain reality, a certain truth of the imagination. I shall give some examples of what, for the sake of brevity, I shall call sound miniatures.

First of all, we must dismiss the usual references to problems of hallucination. For they refer to objective phenomena detectable in actual behavior that can be recorded thanks to photographs of faces in anguish at hearing imaginary voices. They would therefore not allow us to really enter into the domains of pure imagination. Nor do I believe that we can apprehend the autonomous activity of the creative imagination through a mixture of true sensations and hallucinations that may be either true or false. The problem for me, I repeat, is not to examine men, but images. And the only images that can be examined phenomenologically are transmissible ones; they are those we receive in a successful transmission. And even if the creator of an image were the victim of an hallucination, the

image can very well fulfill our desire to imagine as readers, who are not hallucinated.

It must be recognized that a veritable ontological change took place when what psychiatrists designate as auditory hallucinations were given literary dignity by a great writer like Edgar Allan Poe. In such a case, psychological or psychoanalytical explanations concerning the author of the work of art can lead to a situation where problems of the creative imagination would be posed wrongly, or not at all. In general, too, *facts* do not explain *values*. And in works of the poetic imagination, values bear the mark of such novelty that everything related to the past, is lifeless beside them. All memory has to be reimagined. For we have in our memories micro-films that can only be read if they are lighted by the bright light of the imagination.

Naturally, it can still be affirmed that Poe wrote "The Fall of the House of Usher" because he *suffered* from auditory hallucinations. But "suffer" runs counter to "create," and we may be sure that it was not while he was "suffering" that he wrote this tale, in which the images are brilliantly associated and the shades and silences have very delicately corresponding features. "Terrestrial objects were glowing" in the darkness, words were "murmurs." A sensitive ear knows that this is a poet writing in prose, and that, at a certain point, poetry dominates meaning. In short, in the auditory category, we have here an immense sound miniature, the miniature of an entire cosmos that speaks softly.

Faced with such a miniature of world sounds as this, a phenomenologist must systematically point out all that goes beyond perception, organically as well as objectively. This is not a matter of ears burning or of wall lizards growing bigger. There's a dead woman in a vault, who doesn't want to die. On a shelf in the library are very old books that tell of another past than the one the dreamer has known. Dreams, thoughts and memories weave a single fabric. The soul dreams and thinks, then it imagines. The poet has brought us to an extreme situation beyond which we are afraid to venture, a situation that lies between

mental disorder and reason, between the living and a woman who is dead. The slightest sound prepares a catastrophe, while mad winds prepare general chaos. Murmur and clangor go hand in hand. We are taught the ontology of presentiment. In this tense state of fore-hearing, we are asked to become aware of the slightest indications, and in this cosmos of extremes, things are indications before they are phenomena; the weaker the indication, the greater the significance, since it indicates an origin. Taken as origins, it seems as though all these indications occur and reoccur without the tale coming to an end. Here genius teaches us some quite simple things. The tale ends by taking root in our consciousness and, for this reason, becomes the possession of the phenomenologist.

Meanwhile, consciousness increases; not, however, in relations between human beings, upon which psychoanalysis generally bases its observations. For it is not possible to concentrate on human problems in the face of a cosmos in danger. Everything lives in a sort of pre-quake, in a house about to collapse beneath the weight of walls which, when they too collapse, will have achieved definitive burial for a dead woman.

But this cosmos is not real. As Poe himself said, it is a *sulphurous* ideality, created by the dreamer with each new wave of his images. Man and the World, man and *his* world, are at their closest, it being in the power of the poet to designate them to us in their moments of greatest proximity. Man and the world are in a community of dangers. They are dangerous for each other. All this can be heard and pre-heard in the sub-rumbling murmur of the poem.

But my demonstration of the reality of poetic sound miniatures will be simpler, no doubt, if I take miniatures that are less composed. I shall therefore choose examples that may be contained in a few lines.

Poets often introduce us into a world of *impossible* sounds, so impossible, in fact, that their authors may be charged with creating fantasy that has no interest. One smiles and goes one's way. And yet, most often, the poet

did not take his poem lightly, and a certain tenderness presided over these images.

René-Guy Cadou, who lived in the Village of Happy Homes, was moved to write:¹

On entend gazouiller les fleurs du paravent

(You can hear the prattle of the flowers on the screen.)

Because all flowers speak and sing, even those we draw, and it is impossible to remain unsociable when we draw a flower or a bird.

Another poet writes:

Son secret c'était

.....

D'écouter la fleur

*User sa couleur.*²

(Her secret was
Listening to flowers

.....

Wear out their color.)

Like so many poets, Claude Vigée hears the grass grow:³

J'écoute

Un jeune noisetier

Verdir.

(I hear

A young nut-tree
grow green.)

Such images as these must be taken, at the least, in their existence as a *reality of expression*. For they owe their entire being to poetic expression, and this being would be diminished if we tried to refer them to a reality, even to a psycho-

¹ René-Guy Cadou, *Hélène ou le règne végétal*, p. 13, Séghers, Paris.

² Noël Bureau, *Les mains tendues*, p. 29.

³ Claude Vigée, *loc. cit.* p. 68.

logical reality. Indeed, they dominate psychology and correspond to no psychological impulse, save the simple need for self-expression, in one of those leisurely moments when we listen to everything in nature that is unable to speak.

It would be quite superfluous for such images to be true. They exist. They possess the absoluteness of the image, and they have passed beyond the limit that separates conditioned from absolute sublimation.

But even when they start from psychology, the turning away from psychological impressions to poetic expression is sometimes so subtle that one is tempted to attribute a basis of psychological reality to what is pure expression. The Touraine writer, J. Moreau, could "not resist the pleasure of quoting Théophile Gautier, when he gives poetic form to the impressions he had while smoking hashish."¹ "My hearing," Gautier wrote, "became enormously keen; I heard the noises of colors; green, red, blue, yellow sounds came to me in perfectly distinct waves." But Moreau was not taken in, and he notes that he quoted the poet's words "in spite of the poetic exaggeration that marks them, and which it is useless to point out." But then, for whom is this document intended? For the psychologist, or for the philosopher, who is interested in the poetic human being? In other words, is it the hashish or the poet that exaggerates? Alone, the hashish would not have succeeded in exaggerating so well. And we quiet readers, whose knowledge of hashish impressions has been acquired through literary proxy, would not hear colors shudder if a poet had not known how to make us listen, not to say, super-listen.

Then how shall we see without hearing? There exist complicated forms which, even when they are at rest, make a noise. Twisted things continue to make creaking contortions. And Rimbaud knew this when

Il écoutait grouiller les galeux espaliers
(*Les poètes de sept ans*)

(He listened to mangy trellises crawling)

¹ J. Moreau, *Du haschisch et de l'aliénation mentale, Etudes Psychologiques*, 1845, p. 71.

The form of the mandrake maintains its legend. Indeed, this root in human form must cry out when it is pulled up from the ground. And for ears that dream, what a noise of syllables there is in its name!¹ Words are clamor-filled shells. There's many a story in the miniature of a single word!

There are also great waves of silence that vibrate in poems, as in the little selection of poems by Pericle Patocchi, prefaced by Marcel Raymond. Here we have the silence of the distant world concentrated in one line:

Au loin j'entendais prier les sources de la terre
(*Vingt Poèmes*)

(Far off I heard the springs of earth praying.)

Some poems move toward silence the way we descend in memory. As, for instance, in this great poem by Milosz:

Tandis que le grand vent glapit des noms de mortes
Ou bruit de vieille pluie aigre sur quelque route
.....
Ecoute—plus rien—seul le grand silence—écoute.
(O. W. DE L. MIŁOZ)²

(While the high wind yelps the names of women long dead
Or the sound of bitter old rain on a road

.....
Listen—now there's nothing—but complete silence—listen.)

Here there is nothing that would require the kind of poetic imitation to be found in Victor Hugo's great play, *Les Djinnns*. It is the silence, rather, that obliges the poet to listen, and gives the dream greater intimacy. We hardly know where to situate this silence, whether in the vast world or in the immense past. But we do know that it comes from beyond a wind that dies down or a rain that grows gentle. In another poem, (*loc. cit.*, p. 372) we find this unforgettable line by Milosz:

¹ In French, *mandragore*.

² Published in *Les Lettres*, No. 8, 2nd year.

L'odeur du silence est si vieille

(The odor of silence is so old . . .)

As life grows older, we are besieged by many a silence!

XI

How hard it is to situate the values of being and non-being! And where is the root of silence? Is it a distinction of non-being, or a domination of being? It is "deep." But where is the root of its depth? In the universe where sources about to be born are praying, or in the heart of a man who has suffered? And at what height of being should listening ears become aware?

Being myself a philosopher of adjectives, I am caught up in the perplexing dialectics of deep and large; of the infinitely diminished that deepens, or the large that extends beyond all limits. In Claudel's *L'annonce faite à Marie*, the dialogue between Violaine and Mara reaches down to unplumbed depths, establishing in a few words the ontological link between invisible and inaudible.

VIOLAINE (*who is blind*)—I hear . . .

MARA—What do you hear?

VIOLAINE—Things existing with me.

Here the touch goes so deep that one would have to meditate at length upon a world that exists in depth by virtue of its sonority, a world the entire existence of which would be the existence of voices. This frail, ephemeral thing, a voice, can bear witness to the most forceful realities. In Claudel's dialogues—abundant proof of this would be easy to find—the voice assumes the certainties of a reality that unites man and the world. But before speaking, one must listen. Claudel was a great listener.

XII

We have just seen united in grandeur of being, the transcendency of what is seen and what is heard. The follow-

ing bit of daring, however, will serve as a simpler indication of this dual transcendency:¹

Je m'entendais fermer les yeux, les rouvrir.

(I heard myself close my eyes, then open them.)

All solitary dreamers know that they hear differently when they close their eyes. And when we want to think hard, to listen to the inner voice, or compose the tightly constructed key sentence that will express the very core of our thinking, is there one of us who hasn't his thumb and forefinger pressed firmly against his lids? The ear knows then that the eyes are closed, it knows that it is responsible for the being who is thinking and writing. Relaxation will come when the eyes are reopened.

But who will tell us the daydreams of closed, half-closed, or even wide-open eyes? How much of the world must one retain in order to be accessible to transcendency? On page 247 of the above-mentioned book written over a century ago, by J. J. Moreau, we read: "With certain patients, merely to lower their eye-lids, while still awake, suffices to produce visual hallucinations." Moreau quotes Baillarger, adding: "Lowering the eyelids does not produce visual hallucinations only, but auditory hallucinations as well."

By associating the observations of these doctors of the old school, with a gentle poet like Loys Masson, I provide myself with countless daydreams. What a fine ear this poet has! And what mastery in directing the play of the dream devices known to us as seeing and hearing, ultra-seeing and ultra-hearing, hearing oneself seeing.

Another poet teaches us, if one may say this, to hear ourselves listen:

*Ecoute bien pourtant. Non pas
mes paroles, mais le tumulte qui
s'élève en ton corps lorsque tu t'écoutes.*²

¹ Loys Masson, *Icare ou le voyageur*, p. 15. Séghers, Paris.

² René Daumal, *Poésie noire, poésie blanche*, p. 42. Gallimard, Paris.

(Yet listen well. Not to my words,
but to the tumult that rages in
your body when you listen to yourself.)

Here René Daumal has seized upon a point of departure for a phenomenology of the verb to listen.

The fact that I have made use of all the documents of fantasy and daydreams that like to play with words and the most ephemeral sort of impressions, is another admission on my part of my intention of remaining in the domain of the superficial. I have only explored the thin layer of nascent images. No doubt, the frailest, most inconsistent image can reveal profound vibrations. But to determine the metaphysics of all that transcends our perceptive life would require a different type of research. Particularly, if we were to describe how silence affects not only man's time and speech, but also his very being, it would fill a large volume. Fortunately, this volume exists. I recommend Max Picard's *The World of Silence*.¹

¹ Max Picard, *Die Welt des Schweigens*, Rentsch Verlag, 1948, English translation, Harvill Press, London, 1952.

8

intimate immensity

*Le monde est grand, mais en nous
il est profond comme la mer.*

R. M. RILKE

(The world is large, but in us
it is deep as the sea.)

L'espace m'a toujours rendu silencieux

(JULES VALLÈS, *L'enfant*, p. 238)

(Space has always reduced me to silence.)

I

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity.

Far from the immensities of sea and land, merely through memory, we can recapture, by means of meditation, the resonances of this contemplation of grandeur. But is this really memory? Isn't imagination alone able to enlarge indefinitely the images of immensity? In point of fact, daydreaming, from the very first second, is an entirely constituted state. We do not see it start, and yet it always starts