

diary (1953)

translated by Lillian Vallee

Friday

I write this diary reluctantly. Its dishonest honesty wearies me. For whom am I writing? If I am writing for myself, then why is it being published? If for the reader, why do I pretend that I am talking to myself? Are you talking to yourself so that others will hear you?

How far I am from the certitude and vigor that hum in me when I am, pardon me, "creating." Here, on these pages, I feel as if I were emerging from a blessed night into the hard light of dawn, which fills me with yawning and drags my shortcomings out into the open. The duplicity inherent in keeping a diary makes me timid, so forgive me, oh, forgive me (perhaps these last words are dispensable, perhaps they are already pretentious?).

Yet I realize that one must be oneself at all levels of writing, which is to say, that I ought to be able to express myself not only in a poem or drama, but also in everyday prose—in an article or in a diary—and the flight of art has to find its counterpart in the domain of regular life, just as the shadow of the condor is cast onto the ground. What's more, this passage into an everyday world from an area that is backed into the most remote depths, practically in the underground, is a matter of great importance to me. I want to be a balloon, but one with ballast; an antenna, but one that is grounded. I want to be capable of translating myself into everyday speech, but—*traduttore, traditore*. Here I betray myself, I am beneath myself.

The difficulty consists in the fact that I write about myself not at night, not in isolation, but right in a newspaper in front of people.

In these circumstances, I cannot treat myself with the appropriate gravity, I have to be "modest" and then again, I am tormented by that which has tormented me throughout my entire life and which has so greatly influenced my way of being with other people. The necessity of slighting myself in order to be in tune with those who slight me, or who don't know the least little thing about me. I will not submit myself to that "modesty" at any price and I consider it my mortal enemy. Happy Frenchmen who write their diaries with tact, except that I don't believe in the value of their tact, I know that theirs is only a tactful circumvention of the problem, which by its very nature is unsociable.

But I should grab the bull by the horns. From childhood I have been very much initiated into this matter; it grew right along with me so that today I should be pretty comfortable with it. I know and I have said this on many occasions, that every artist has to be pompous because he aspires to be on a pedestal. Yet I have also said that concealing these pretensions is a stylistic flaw, and a sign of a faulty "inner resolution." Openness. One must play with uncovered cards. Writing is nothing more than a battle that the artist wages with others for his own prominence.

Yet if I am incapable of making this thought real here in the diary, what is it worth? Yet somehow I cannot, and something bothers me because there is no artistic form between me and people and our contact becomes too embarrassing. I ought to treat this diary as an instrument of my becoming before you. I ought to strive to have you understand me in some way, in a way that would enable me to have (and let this dangerous word appear) talent. Let this diary be more modern and more conscious and let it be permeated by the idea that my talent can arise only in connection with you, that is, that only you can excite me to talent or, what's more, that only you can create it in me.

I would like people to see in me that which I suggest to them. I would like to impose myself on people as a personality in order to be its subject forever after that. Other diaries should be to this one what the words "I am like this" are to "I want to be like this." We are used to lifeless words that merely ascertain. A better word is one that brings to life. *Spiritus movens*. If I could only succeed in

summoning the spirit that moves to the first pages of this diary, I could do a great deal. I could, first of all (and I need this even more because I am a Polish author), shatter this narrow cage of concepts in which you would like to imprison me. Far too many people, worthy of a better fate, have been shackled. I alone should designate the role I am to play.

Furthermore, by suggesting, somewhat in the way of a proposition, certain problems, more or less linked to me, I pull myself into them and they lead me to other secrets still unknown to me. To travel as far as possible into the virgin territory of culture, into its still half-wild, and so indecent, places, while exciting you to extremes, to excite even myself . . . I want to meet you in that jungle, bind myself to you in a way that is the most difficult and uncomfortable, for you and for me. Don't I have to distinguish myself from current European thought? Aren't my enemies the currents and doctrines to which I am similar? I have to attack them in order to force myself into contradistinction and I have to force you to confirm it. I want to uncover my present moment and tie myself to you in our todayness.

In this little diary I would like to set out to openly construct a talent for myself, as openly as Henry fabricates a marriage for himself in the third act. Why openly? Because I desire to reveal myself, to stop being too easy a riddle for you to solve. By taking you to the backstage of my being, I force myself to retreat to an even more remote depth.

That is all. If only I could summon the spirit. But I don't feel equal to the task. Three years ago, unfortunately, I broke with pure art, as my kind of art was not the kind that could be cultivated casually, on Sundays or holidays. I began to write this diary for the simple reason of saving myself, in fear of degradation and an ultimate inundation by the waves of a trivial life, which are already up to my neck. Yet it turns out that even here I am incapable of total effort. One cannot be nothingness all week and then suddenly expect to exist on Sunday. Journalists and you, honorable counselors and spectators, have no need to fear. You no longer need to feel threatened by any conceit and incomprehension on my part. I am tumbling into publicism along with you and the rest of the world.

