The Animal in the Human Being

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(Bourget: *The Disciple.* Maupassant: *Useless Beauty.* Tolstoy: *The Kreutzer Sonata.* Zola: *The Beast in Man.*)

It is striking to what a high degree the literature of recent times, in its most distinguished European representatives, is preoccupied with the idea of a duality in our nature.

In the work of a single French author, Paul Bourget, this duality in human nature appears with a scientific grounding. For Bourget is, even as a creative writer, the soul-probing critic he began by being. In explaining the instinctual and emotional lives of his characters he never proceeds in a purely artistic manner; he always points with the investigator's probe.

If one surveys what he has produced as a writer, from his first novella *L'irréparable* to his latest novel *Le disciple*, there are accordingly certain striking common features. Everything turns, at bottom, on the doubling of the self. His first novella is the story of a peculiar young woman whose life's critical event is a nocturnal assault to which she has been subjected in the loneliness of night by an unscrupulous man with whom she has engaged in an innocent flirtation. The tale begins, very characteristically, with a conversation between the author and a professor of psychology who has written a work on the dissolution of the associations of ideas.

Now, since what we call our self—this idea of something inner and permanent that is united with a body—is an idea that arises through the linking of ideas, it is clear that what the professor has in reality studied are the forms of the self's dissolution, of its duality, as this appears in the numerous diseases of will and mind. In the last novel Bourget has published, we encounter once again the professor of psychology, and once again the same subject. The work that the young criminal

Robert Greslou, accused of murder, has submitted to a celebrated professor in order to learn his opinion, is a study of the duality of the self.

In the novella it is first developed wherein the self's simplest doubling consists. The self is partly conscious, partly unconscious. This explains in general the mistakes and missteps of life. There is hidden within us a creature we do not know, and of which we never know whether it is not the very opposite of the being we believe ourselves to be. On this rest the remarkable reversals of mood and conduct that we experience or observe. One person works toward a goal upon which he imagines his happiness to depend, and when it is reached he discovers that he has misjudged the secret and true demands of his emotional life. Another goes about looking like a calm person, and acts accordingly; suddenly the image of his misery rises up before him—a persistent sorrow or persistent danger that he has sought to forget, but which can overwhelm him and give his life a different direction.

In the novel, the main character furnishes a complete investigation of his own being, tracing every state of his mind back to a scientific schema: heredity, the influence of environment, transplantation of the person, and so on. He determines his dominant characteristic as the capacity and urge for self-doubling: there are always in him, as it were, two clearly distinct personalities, one who comes and goes, acts and feels, and one who, as spectator, observes the other's conduct of life. He is unable to say which of these two persons is his true self. He tries to derive this duality in himself from a mixture of races, from descent from a border people. From childhood he has taken pleasure in pretence and untruth—not in order to boast, but simply in order to be, in his imagination and in the consciousness of his surroundings, someone else. He takes the greatest pleasure in expressing views that are the complete opposite of those he regards as true, and for the same strange reason. His delight is to play a role alongside his true nature. His whole mendacity of bearing, his joy in deceiving, seducing, outwitting, and appropriating a young noble-minded woman for whom he feels no tenderness—all of it is a consequence of the unconquerable duality in the original disposition of his human nature.

As one can see, the bifurcation that preoccupies the scientifically formed Bourget is one that can be fully understood only through philosophical means. It admittedly corresponds, to some degree, to the split in our nature that in former times was found between what was called the corporeal and what was called the spiritual, but it does not coincide with that split in any way. It is conceived in the old-fashioned manner only insofar as Bourget, in his most recent writings, seems to wish to glorify

religious devotion as the only remedy against it.

I

Other significant authors of the age who likewise dwell on the idea of a duality in our nature have given this bifurcation an expression that belongs more properly to the Middle Ages. They speak not infrequently of the animal in the human being and of the human in the human being as of two different worlds coupled together within us. They show themselves occupied with this relationship in much the same way as the theologians were with the relationship between the divine and the human nature in the God-man. For quite a few contemporary authors, the human creature is a kind of centaur—half a higher being, half an animal—which, when it loses itself in soaring thoughts, is awakened from its dream by the sound of its own hooves.

Those who brood over the animal in the human being will either merely depict it, paint it in its power and repulsiveness, or they will combat it—sometimes even seeking to eradicate it—without ever managing sharply to indicate the dividing line where the animal ends and the human begins. For there are only too many activities and drives that the human being shares with the lower creatures.

Thought-provoking, now, is the fundamental disagreement among our age's most significant authors regarding the question of whether the so-called animal element is an unconquered remnant of the original state of nature, of the savage era and the days of barbarism, or whether it, as we know it, is a product of culture, nurtured by over-civilization, so that we can combat it only by, as the saying goes, returning to nature—that is, to simpler, more rural conditions.

A writer like Maupassant or Zola inclines toward the first view; for them the animal element is the original savagery. A writer like Strindberg or Tolstoy embraces the second perspective; for them the animal element is the unnaturalness of our false civilization.

Tolstoy's new story *The Kreutzer Sonata*—banned in Russia but widely read—is a purely moralizing work, related in this respect to his edifying legends and stories for the Russian common people. Only the book addresses a readership that belongs to the most enlightened in the world.

Here as in *Ghosts* and *A Gauntlet*, sexual purity and impurity is what everything turns on; but there is in the great Russian's perspective a wilder, more passionately consistent thoroughness than in the Norwegians. Ibsen in *Ghosts* had painted

terrifying consequences of male licentiousness for the home and the next generation; Bjørnson had let a young woman make demands for the man's unconditional abstinence before marriage; it seemed impossible to go higher or further in one's demands in this field. But Tolstoy, like a true Russian, runs the line out to its end—this is the distinguishing mark by which, in my book *Impressions of Russia*, I tried to paint Russian distinctiveness. He takes up again the demand for the man's purity before marriage, but augments it with a demand for so-called purity in marriage that is new.

To be sure, Tolstoy does not speak in his own name in the new story. But partly through a conversation in a railway carriage, in which the views that emerge victorious seem likely to lie close to the author's own, and partly through the main character's long account of his life, which takes up the greater part of the work, Tolstoy's sympathy with the outlook on life that finds expression can be traced. It is not probable that he would wish to maintain any essential disagreement between Pozdnyshev's fundamental perspective and his own. In any case he has done nothing to give the reader the impression that such a disagreement obtains. All that can be said is that in his writing *What I Believe* he has admittedly moved along the same paths as his main character, but has not gone quite as far.

Tolstoy passionately upholds the old Christian conception of the virginal state as the genuinely high and valuable one. He has forceful words about the foolishness of a social spirit that throws many a young lovable girl into the arms of an impure and depraved man merely so that she shall not suffer the supposed shame of remaining a virgin— which in Tolstoy's eyes is an honour. This alone is radical enough in feeling, even if the matter has not been thought through.

Marriage or non-marriage, a ceremony or no ceremony, is for Tolstoy a matter of complete indifference; he places no weight on the form. But the first woman a man has bound himself to, the first man a woman has given her trust to—to him and her they are bound for life, indissolubly. They are united in a relation of duty. Whether there is joy in it is not asked; no weight is placed upon it.

The modern view that it is love that grounds marriage and gives it worth strikes Tolstoy as a frivolity—much as it appeared to people of the past, and indeed at bottom still to Hegel with his sober disposition. Tolstoy seems to have arrived at the conviction that, in the opinion of various dark-seeing people, is the correct one: that what was previously called marriage, and is still mostly called that, is only possible where everything is built on authority and obedience, where the parents

choose a husband for their daughter and obtain a wife for their son when the time for it has come, and where the wife trembles before the husband it is her duty to love. For this is of course the classical form of marriage: no choice, no divorce; one master, one will, corporal punishment in cases of insubordination; much domestic discipline. If one is unwilling to accept this, he seems to think, one gradually arrives at making love sovereign, making sexual union a private matter, and limiting social activity to securing, to the best of one's ability, the welfare of children.

The most conservative but not the most adequate interpretation of *The Kreutzer Sonata* is that Tolstoy wanted to say: "As men are now, they are made unfit for married life by their conduct in youth." It is undeniable that he, quite like Bjørnson, is very much preoccupied with the wretchedness and degradation of the life that men are said generally to lead before entering into marriage. Tolstoy has even in his own confessional writings given accounts of a rather disturbing nature which, even if they exaggerate, show that he knows from his own experience what he judges most harshly:

> "It is impossible for me to recall those years without being overcome by a feeling of horror, disgust, and pain. There is no vice to which I could not have abandoned myself at that time, no crime I would not have been capable of committing. Lying, theft, debaucheries of every kind, violence, and murder—these are things I have made myself guilty of in all their forms... On the estate where I lived I squandered in revelry and card-playing everything my serfs had earned for me by their labour—and in addition I tormented and punished them on every occasion, sacrificed them to my excesses, deceived them, sold them, and so on."

Compare with this, in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Pozdnyshev's description of how he "wallowed in the filth of debauchery." The kernel here is the same as in Bjørnson's accounts of a related kind: men—all men of the better-off classes at least—live in their youth a downright swinish life, crude, loveless, with women indiscriminately.

The certain thing about the matter is that accounts and statements of this kind can in truth have a lively interest only for those whose development has not run ahead of these authors'. A not inconsiderable number of male readers' impression will be this: we do not feel addressed. Many a person who is not suspected of being a hypocrite will say to himself quietly: I am tired of this talk. It is talk for the spiritual common people. However excellently such books may be written, in this

respect they are books for the common people, which merely impress upon one anew that all genuine art addresses itself to the most developed of the age.

We see in different countries related literary phenomena of this kind. There arises the younger Dumas who, by his own account, by no means lived like a saint in his youth "unless one were to think of Saint Augustine in the first phase of his life"; he sets his life in order and, on the threshold of old age, preaches the strictest sexual morality—spicing it, from old habit, with bold figures of speech and risqué allusions. There arises Bjørnson who, without having Dumas's Parisian experiences of youth, has developed into an equally stubborn teacher of duty and who has it from a genuine Norwegian that he is more fresh and sincere than actually refined. He proclaims to us the sexual decline of men. He seems, it appears, to have seen very much crudeness around him, and if he can diminish it, that is meritorious. Whether it is diminished by a touring moral agitation of the kind he embarked upon in his time is an open question. What is certain is that he has diminished the artistic value of his great didactic novels by the pastoral care that dominates them.

Now comes Tolstoy. He has behind him a Russian "junker's" civil and military experiences, and draws conclusions from these for men who have never been "junkers", never led a junker's life, and perhaps never displayed crudeness in relation to the other sex. But upon such readers he, like the other preachers of morality in their struggle against social morals, necessarily makes the impression of Puritans attacking Papists. The developed reader has no interest in internal theological feuds. Monkish squabbling!—as Ulrich von Hutten wrote about Luther's first attack on the Pope.

There surely exist even in our day (or already in our day) men who feel, on decisive points, like Greeks from the best period of ancient Hellas—men for whom the division between the animal and the human does not exist, men who have never wallowed in the mire, have no bad conscience, and are in need of no conversion. These authors now come to them and treat them like professional drunkards: For heaven's sake, they call out to their readers, not a drop of wine to your lips! Look around you! You live in a world of drunkards and deliriants. See, there lies one in the gutter, dead drunk to the point of inhumanity; there lies one trembling with twitching muscle-fibres, mortally ill in a padded cell. For heaven's sake, empty no glass of wine! And meanwhile grapes ripen under the sun's rays; they hang there, dark and pale, and Dionysus—the god of wine and tragedy—stands with green leaves around his brow and holds out to the thirsty and weary the drink that is humanity's consolation. These moralists make Bacchus himself into a candidate for

delirium tremens. And they forget that their words not infrequently turn to men who feel like Greeks, who worship the wine-god, drink the wine mixed with water, enjoy the mild intoxication, and shun drunkenness as a disgust and a plague.

Yet Tolstoy is not satisfied with the Bjørnsonesque standpoint. He proceeds much more thoroughly. Out of his book beats a mighty passionate fervour of feeling like flames; and his consequential thinking goes so much deeper than Bjørnson's preaching as early Christianity is deeper than the seminary wisdom of the doctrine of development.

Tolstoy is offended by the animal in the human being, by the beast in man. He is offended by the marital life of spouses. The passionate cohabitation of the newly married destroys, in his conception, all deeper goodwill and all genuine respect between man and woman. It is to blame for all the evil that later surfaces between them. It produces self-contempt and contempt for the other party. It awakens, in the intervals between the periods of physical attraction, the deep hatred that in his view generally breaks out between spouses in every quarrel about even the most trifling matter, and it is moreover to blame for the half-mad jealousy that, on the book's presupposition, always consumes one or both parties and makes their domestic life an eternal hell.

It is amusing in our day to encounter such an early-Christian manner of feeling. Not a trace of the healthy, antique and modern outlook on life, which in the cohabitation of two lovers—however passionate it may be—sees something pure and beautiful. Not a trace of the nature worship that in antiquity ennobled sensual life; not a trace either of the infinite tenderness that in modern people ennobles it and transforms crude pleasure into joy or happiness.

The starting point is the biblical word that whoever looks at a woman with desire has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And what is new is that for Tolstoy this word holds also within marriage. Marriage is broken by the spouses' desire for each other. In the perfect relationship, the woman is for the man a sister, nothing more. The clear and consistent consequence would be the one drawn by the religious sectarians the Skoptsy in Russia, namely self-mutilation. Tolstoy evidently shrinks from this. But in compensation he wishes, as far as one can understand, the sensual element either entirely mortified or at least suppressed to the least possible degree. Not only every exposure of the body's forms by low-cut or tight-fitting garments, not merely dancing, is to him a horror as sensual stimulation; he also fears art altogether, and music in particular, less as an appeal to the senses than

as an arouser of feeling. And it is indeed after a piece of music that the book is named. The line of thought is that every significant composition powerfully sweeps the listener—as if by possession—into the agitated mood in which the composer found himself when he created it; the souls of listener and composer flow together. And thus music also merges listeners, sometimes two by two, into this same mood, separates them from their surroundings, and unites them. It can, in this respect, perform the work of a procurer.

II

The feeling of the sexual relation itself as a degradation is, after Europe's long education in a Christian-spiritual direction, no rare occurrence. One encounters it in our day, however, as fully developed in personalities of a wholly pagan type as in spiritualists and Christians. Modern development has led refined people of the most varied convictions equally far from the Greek unity of feeling in its freedom and health. I recall from my early youth a long philosophical conversation with a young French friend that revolved around this very point—sexual union—which revolted him. He was indignant that the world's architect had not devised a more refined and noble form for the merging of the sexes. An exclamation of his still rings in my ear: *Pourquoi cette insulte!* Why this affront, this slap in the face!

It is this same thought that is varied in several places in Maupassant's latest book *L'inutile beauté*. In *Un cas de divorce* the hero comes, in relation to his young wife, finally to the point where he cannot touch her with his hand or lips without feeling an unconquerable disgust—not exactly at her, but a more comprehensive and more contemptuous disgust at the erotic embrace itself, which for all refined beings stands as a thing one must be ashamed of and conceal, yes, which one mentions only in a low voice, with a blush.

And when, in the story after which the collection is named, the conversation turns to a beautiful, refined lady whose beauty has suffered from numerous childbirths, and the remark is made, "What can one say—it is nature's way!"—the young man whom the author uses as his mouthpiece exclaims: "Nature! I tell you that nature is our enemy, that we must always fight against nature; it perpetually leads us back to the animal." And he now develops the argument that everything clean, beautiful, choice, and ideal on earth is not God's but humanity's work:

> "It is we who, by singing creation, interpreting it, admiring it as poets,

> ennobling it as artists, explaining it as scientists, have introduced a little grace and beauty, something attractive and mysterious into it. Think of reproduction! What can be imagined more ignoble and repellent than this filthy and ridiculous act, over which all finer souls will feel revolted to the end of days. If the organs had necessarily to serve a double purpose, why could the Creator not have chosen, for reproduction—the noblest and most important of all human activities—organs that were less unclean, less soiled? It is as if, in a kind of malicious cynicism, he wished to place insurmountable obstacles in man's way, preventing him from ever being able to beautify or ennoble his relationship with woman. Man has nevertheless invented love, which is not a bad reply to a cunning and teasing deity."

Here in Maupassant, then, nature is conceived in this relation as the enemy. In Tolstoy it is the nearest goal—though a goal beyond which he in turn strives; an ideal lying behind us, to which one should return, except that he knows a still higher ideal than it, namely its renunciation. In him the struggle against sexual life is only an application of his general perspective, according to which culture is of the evil: money, magnificent buildings, refinement, abundance, all life other than peasant and artisan life is of the evil. He had long since disdained and condemned science. Now it is art's turn. He had never been willing to see in money condensed labour, only condensed force. Now he sees in sexual cohabitation only an animal and degrading condition. He has brooded over this tragic and comic fact that the human being is by its nature a more highly developed animal, so that it can only partially consign its origin to oblivion and can never entirely efface its traces. And he sees our culture as the power that gives everything animal the upper hand. One feels in him, with the years, a mounting revulsion for the merely natural, the universally human—both Russian religiosity and the old man's gaze at these mysteries, which has made itself felt in the North as well. The disgust at licentiousness, at the heightened life of instinct, at passion and vice, has in him taken the final form of loathing for the animal in the human being.

If one passes through the book to its author and from him to the great public that loses itself in admiration for him, the following remark seems to me to suggest itself. It is astonishing how humanity even today is struck with reverence for teachers of duty. It lies so deeply in the blood of most of us, from biblical upbringing, that we involuntarily think: here, where morality is preached, something especially serious

and solemn is occurring.

The Russians had a refined, amiable, warm-hearted author in Turgenev, a man of the world who unpretentiously wrote one poetic masterpiece after another. He did not imagine that he was thereby transforming the human race. He was a quiet artist with certain weaknesses and great virtues—a gentleman.

Then there comes after him a writer like Tolstoy. In his youth he is a rather dissolute landowner and officer; in his more mature years he becomes a great admonishing poet; with the years, an ever more passionate teacher of duty; in the end, a John the Baptist. He fashions his own religion, he preaches, he calls and rebukes, he goes about in a camel-hair shirt—or rather in a peasant smock. He lets his beard grow and parts his hair in the middle of his forehead like a Russian peasant; he lives on his country estate, immersed in contemplation and manual work; at times he resembles a peasant prophet; and when the seriousness of his daily occupations has at last left its deep impress on his features, he allows a visiting photographer to fix this expression on the prepared plate. He walks behind the plough with his white nag before the old-fashioned wooden plough, dreams himself back into the state of nature, far from civilization, from his manor house that lies right in the vicinity, and allows Repin to paint him thus set back into the state of nature.

The difference is plain enough between him and the original John the Baptist. The latter, as is well known, had no manor house, so he had considerably less difficulty in feeling himself entirely detached from civilization. And when he had put on the camel-hair shirt, he did not allow himself to be photographed in it.

III

At his highest point Tolstoy now attacks his contemporaries by virtue of conditions whose ground lies in the human being being an animal developed toward humanity. Could he, he would gladly eradicate the animal in the human being entirely.

It is remarkable, this designation: the Animal. It is of course an ancient Christian expression. One does not easily forget the vivid depiction of the Beast in the thirteenth chapter of the Revelation of John: “I stood on the shore of the sea and saw a beast rise up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads; on its horns were ten diadems and on its heads blasphemous names, and the beast I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its maw like a lion’s maw, and the

dragon gave it its power, and they worshipped the Beast and said: who is like the Beast and who can fight against it?"

The Beast was, for the Christians of that time, primarily the Roman world power—we know this with complete precision; the symbol is transparent to us right down to the mysterious number 666 in verse 18, which is Nero's name, Nero Caesar, written in Hebrew letters and added up according to the numerical value of those letters. But more deeply conceived, the Beast was of course for the first Christians paganism as essence and power—everything unbaptized, everything insofar animal in the human being, that was to be overcome. To use the modern term: the Beast was no actual animal; it was the beast in man.

That was also how Alexandre Dumas understood it when in 1870, with a witty application of the old biblical passage, he told of his attempts to examine the human being in the great crucible Paris. He maintained that the human being, even the Parisian, always contained however small a fraction of soul—roughly as the sixtieth homeopathic dilution still contains an atom of the original fluid. And he told how he saw male and female bovine heads being formed and shaped by the cauldron's vapours, when he suddenly heard a boiling sound, and up from the cauldron there rose—not formed from its foam or steam but fashioned from the substances themselves within it—an enormous beast with seven heads and ten horns, and on these horns ten diadems, and on these heads hair with a metallic lustre and the colour of alcohol. The beast resembled a leopard, its feet were powerful as a bear's, its maw was like a lion's maw, and the dragon gave it its strength. And the beast was clothed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold, with precious stones and pearls, and in its white hands it held, as one carries a bowl of milk, a golden vase full of all the abominations and impurities of Babylon, Sodom, and Lesbos. From its body issued an intoxicating vapour, through which it shone like the most beautiful of God's angels, and through which a thousand small human beings moved, writhing with voluptuousness and howling with pain, and disappeared with a small pop or crack—that is, they burst, and nothing remained of them but a drop of something liquid, a tear or a drop of blood. But the beast was not sated. It crushed them with its feet, tore them with its claws, chewed them with its teeth, suffocated them against its breast, and those whom it thus suffocated were the most envied. Its seven heads formed a garland reaching to heaven; its seven mouths were perpetually smiling and the lips flame-red, and above its ten diadems there blazed in a blaze of light the single word: Prostitution.

This beast, he says, was the newest bodily form of woman. The Beast here is the smiling and roaring sex that, after a thousand years of bondage and impotence, takes revenge on the man, armed with her beauty and her beauty's resources, and bestows on him the love that breaks down and destroys him. And it is this Beast that Dumas threw onto the boards of the stage when he erected the great, coarse symbol Césarine in *La femme de Claude*. For Dumas it is then, roughly as for Tolstoy, culture—more precisely, over-culture—that makes the human being animal in the biblical sense, that is, vicious; and the human being was not that, on the presupposition, so long as it was not a modern human being but subject to the unconditional discipline of unearthly authorities.

IV

At the same time that Tolstoy in Russia was composing *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Zola in France was writing his latest novel *La Bête humaine—The Beast in Man*. Here the relationship is seen from an entirely different side. For Zola the animal element is not something that civilization develops in us, but something that has been left behind in us as a slumbering remnant from primordial times and that can, under certain circumstances, awaken to our horror.

Zola's standpoint is not the moral but the natural-historical. He presents the relationship as it appears to him, without accusation, but with a grand-scale seriousness.

At bottom it is always the beast in man that has preoccupied Zola. Certain younger writers like Bourget and Rod interest themselves only in the human being in its latest and highest unfolding under a refined civilization; Zola always reaches back to the original instincts and sensations of which primordial humanity consists. One might think, for example, of his depiction of the peasant's love of the land, of property, of gain in *La Terre*, or of the drive of self-preservation in its most naive form in *Le ventre de Paris*.

Here he has reached back to one of the most sinister of original impulses: the drive to annihilation, the cruel instinct that leads to destruction and murder, and has conceived of this impulse in its mysterious connection with the erotic drive. Whereas Tolstoy in his story studies principally the sexual inclination in its over-development and shows how the murderous madness germinates from it—the drive to annihilation arising as a mere expression of jealousy—Zola immerses himself principally in the

murder instinct and depicts a whole series of murders and murder attempts, but shows in all of them, as a secondary thread, the connection with a low-born but vital eroticism.

We see the original inclination to kill alive in all the human beings he presents. A husband who learns that an old libertine took possession of his wife when she was a young girl avenges himself, after a fit of retrospective jealousy, by a murder committed in a railway carriage, and forces his wife to assist in the murder. The bloody deed lies oppressively on the couple and soon drives them entirely apart.

The young wife takes a lover and demands that he kill her husband. He consents knowingly, but at the very moment he lies in wait for the husband's arrival in order to murder him, he kills, driven by an irresistible impulse and against his will, his mistress.

This young man, the involuntary murderer, is the main character of the book. Zola has, as he has expressly stated, sought in contrast to the Russians Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to show that one murders not with deliberation and clear consciousness but from instinct. He wanted to furnish a kind of counterpart to Raskolnikov, and comes remarkably close to Tolstoy in doing so.

Jacques Lantier suffers from a morbid drive, a mysterious and irresistible impulse that is found in nature, is well known to physicians, and has frequently been described in learned handbooks. But what Zola has added out of his own as a personal peculiarity, as an improbable explanation, is this: what comes over Lantier is not simply a sudden seizure of blind rage but a continually recurring thirst to avenge very old wrongs of which he has lost all precise memory. It came from so far back, the text has it—from all the evil women had done to his forebears, from the grievance that had accumulated from one male to another, ever since a woman betrayed one of them for the first time, when they still inhabited caves. The fits are thus regarded entirely as a haunting; they stem from prehistoric times, quite opposite to Pozdnyshev's fits in Tolstoy, which are derived from the over-civilization of modern times. When Lantier has his fits, he feels it as a necessity to struggle to conquer a woman and possess her entirely. This is, for Zola's imagination, the degenerate impulse to throw her over his back as prey—the impulse the male has always wrested for himself from community with the others.

In Zola, then, imperfectly digested Darwinism—as in Tolstoy, irrationally revived early Christianity.

Grouped around Lantier are other characters with similar potential for murder:

a young woman, a railway gatekeeper, who out of jealousy causes an entire railway train to be wrecked because she is in love with Lantier and wants to revenge herself on him and his mistress, who are both in the train; an old man, a moral monster, who slowly poisons his wife in order to get hold of her savings; and finally a fireman who out of jealousy at last murders Jacques.

This, then, is a great poem about prehistoric murder-lust in its connection with the erotic drive—in that respect a kind of prehistoric epic. It is instructive to compare it with a genuinely prehistoric epic of our own day, such as the German Heinrich Hart's *Tul und Nahila*, the first volume of a work entitled *Lied der Menschheit*, which after its naive plan is to consist of no fewer than twenty-four cantos.

Hart's poem takes place in Ceylon in the grey antiquity of thousands of years before all civilization. The main characters are a human couple living among beings from the transitional time between humanity's ancestors and humans themselves. Ape-like dwarfs and giants still carry on their eerie game alongside the humans. Only a few concepts have developed: fire is the fire-serpent; how to master it is still unknown. Expressions are used like "the fire-serpent has gnawed at the flesh." Few tools: club, stone axe, stone-tipped spear, bone fish-hook, bast sling for hunting. Among the humans, natural dependence and herd-instinct hold sway. We follow the life-history of the human couple. Nahila loves Tul for life because this man, for her sake, was expelled from his tribe when he refused to yield her to the community. A sense of shame, of modesty, develops in her from a peculiar and not improbable motive: because her own sex seems ugly to her—therefore she makes herself a skirt of leaves. We see how the birth of a child makes the taming of domestic animals necessary under certain conditions. A goat is caught that nourishes the child with its milk. Despite all the difficulties the subject presents, the poem is not stupid. The human beings seem here genuinely original and wild. And yet everything in Zola is, in its kind, wilder and greater, even though it takes place in our own day—in 1870—and appears as a novel about railway operations and railway accidents and about crimes committed with railway tracks or in railway carriages.

Jules Lemaître has pointed out the weakness in this book: that the setting has no inherent connection with the core. Whereas in *L'Assommoir* there is a necessary connection between the dram-shop and the working-class population, or in *Germinal* between the mine and the miners, here there is no necessary connection between the lust for annihilation and railway operations. To that extent this book is inferior to several preceding ones, more arbitrary in its composition. But it is great through the

author's eye for the simple and terrible basic drives of humanity, and great through its rich symbolism.

Besides the beast in man, there is in this novel, as in Zola's others, an impersonal being that appropriates a major share of the author's interest. In earlier books there appeared the cemetery, the market halls, the dram-shop, the department store, the farmland, the church. We have seen above that while Zola consistently traces the human back to the animal, he attributes to impersonal creatures all the more-than- animal force of which he deprives the individual beings—indeed, attributes to them independence and will. Such an impersonal creature in the railway novel is a locomotive. It has a name; it is called Lison; it leads a life and arouses feelings like a woman. The engine driver loves his machine, loves it as the rider loves his horse. A kind of marriage takes place between them.

Here there occurs a magnificent description of the locomotive's struggle to push through accumulated snow in a storm, and when the train later collides with a cart loaded with heavy stones and the locomotive is wrecked, it dies just like a living being. There is in this an art that has become artfulness. The locomotive, this monster with glowing eyes and iron flanks, puts the human beings to shame, so to speak, by its docility, its masculine discipline, its whole good behaviour, and by the unmixed love it inspires in its driver.

And at the end of the book there is no lack of another, greater symbol. When the fireman has murdered Jacques, pushed him down from his locomotive, and when this—without a driver, without a guiding spirit—races like a mad creature past station after station, carrying French conscript soldiers to the border in the July of that remarkable year 1870, it stands written:

> "It rolled, rolled on through the black night; nobody knew where. What did it matter how many victims the machine crushed on the way? Did it not roll on, in spite of all, toward the future, heedless of the blood spilled? Without a driver, in the darkness, a blind and deaf animal, it rolled and rolled on, laden with this cannon-fodder, these already exhausted soldiers who sang in their drunkenness."

This locomotive that is guided by no one is, as one feels, the symbol of that France that goes to war without a will at its head. The novel about the drive to annihilation, about the murder instinct, reaches its culmination in this dragging of thousands upon thousands toward this enormous mass murder. The endless bloodshed of the great war is the triumph and defeat of the beast in man in one.

V

What is admirable about these great foreign authors and writers is that they unfold the human being before our eyes completely, like a fan. There is nothing that, out of fear of readers or reviewers, needs to be concealed or falsified. We look out over a wide field of spiritual life, from the vicious and low, from crime, through the animally human, the merely natural, the universally human, to the purely human and its human nobility. And everything that is communicated is communicated in the admirable freedom of expression of great literatures, without prudishness and without sentimentality.

All of them need, in order to give an impression of life's richness and misery, the idea of a split in our nature into two worlds—the unconscious and the conscious—which in the poetic language of most recent times have been made synonymous with the worlds of the animal and the human within us, the domains of necessity and freedom, as it was said in former times.

Modern science no longer believes in a freedom of will of the kind previously clung to. Some of the writers see a danger precisely in this. Thus Bourget, who seems frightened by the impression that the philosophical doctrine of necessity has sometimes made on a younger generation, in whose eyes it provides a licence for ruthless egotism. He fears that science itself, civilization itself, will unleash the animal in coming generations, and in his last books (*Mensonges*, *Le Disciple*) has, with a certain pietistic flaccidity, referred to the Catholic abbé, to religion, to prayer, as the only power capable of holding the animal down and giving modern minds unity anew.

Dumas, who is enough of a genuine Frenchman to harbour no doubt about the freedom of the will, sees the animal develop in the swamp of over- civilization and cries "guard!" against it. The moralist Tolstoy and the child of the world Maupassant regard with the same loathing the fundamental relation between the two sexes, which for them both stands as a violation of human dignity—but which for Maupassant is degrading as a piece of unconquered and unconquerable primordial nature, and for Tolstoy degrading as a product of culture's over-stimulated unnaturalness. Zola, finally, is the thoroughly convinced believer in necessity, for whom the human plant, the beast in man, human thought, human will, obey unshakeable laws, and who finds in compensation a kind of fantastic satisfaction in equipping lifeless objects with independent life and autonomous will.

Human, truly human, is only the machine, Zola seems to say in his latest novel.

Human, truly human, is only civilization, Maupassant seems to say in his latest collection of stories, which passes judgment against everything that is nature in us, as animal. Human, nobly human —in the language of former times, divine—is only the soul's recollection in devout feeling and prayer, says Bourget in his two latest books. Human is not culture, not civilization, says Tolstoy in his latest works, but only the way of life that never meets evil with self-defence, never wards off injustice, never troubles itself about property and money, and that brings man and woman always to see in each other only a sister and brother.

Such, then, is the language spoken by the wise of our day, by the men who in our time address the greatest and most distinguished readership on earth.

If one could imagine that an ancient Hellene from the classical period of Greece were to rise from his ashes and hear these pronouncements, he would surely clap his hands together in astonishment at such talk.