CHAPTER XXII

Verbal and Plastic Expression Compared

II

The superiority of painting to literature in point of expressiveness is not, however, absolute and complete. There are regions where it does not exist, and these we must now consider.

The whole domain of the comic is much more open to literature than to plastic art. Unless it stoops to caricature, art can only express the comic in a slight degree. In art the comic tends at once to become serious again; we do not laugh on looking at Breughel, although we admire in him the same force of droll fancy which makes us laugh in reading Rabelais. Only where the comic forms but a slight accessory can pictorial expression rival the written word. We can observe it in what is called genre painting, which may be considered the most attenuated form of the comic.

The disproportionate refinement of details which we noticed above as being characteristic of the paintings of the epoch tends insensibly to change into the pleasure of relating petty curious facts. Whereas in the room of Arnolfini the minutiae do not injure the solemn intimacy of the picture in the least, they have become mere curiosities in the master of Flémalle. His Joseph on the ‘Altar of Merode’ is occupied with making mouse-traps. With him all the details are ‘genre’, with an almost imperceptible flavour of the comic about them. Between his manner of painting an opened window-shutter, a sideboard, a chimney, and that of van Eyck, there is all the difference between purely pictorial vision and ‘genre’ painting.

Now here comes to light a clear advantage of speech over pictorial representation. As soon as something more than mere vision has to be expressed, literature, thanks to its faculty of expressing moods explicitly, takes the lead. Let
us remember again Deschamps' ballads, celebrating the beauty of the castles, which we compared with and found inferior to the perfect miniatures of the brothers of Limburg. These poems of Deschamps lack power and splendour; he has not succeeded in reproducing the vision of these glorious halls. But now compare the ballad in which he paints himself, lying ill in his poor little castle of Fismes, kept awake by the cries of barn-owls, starlings, crows and sparrows, nesting in his tower.

C'est une estrange melodie
Qui ne semble pas grant deduit
A gens qui sont en maladic.
Premiers les corbes font sçavoir
Pour certain si tost qu'il est jour:
De fort crier font leur pouoir,
Le gros, le gresle, sanz sejour;
Mieulx vauldroit le son d'un tabour
Que telz cris de divers oyscaulx,
Puis vient la proie; vaches, veaulx,
Crians, muyans, et tout ce nuit,
Quant on a le cervel trop vuit,
Joint du moustier la sonnerie,
Qui tout l'entendement destruit
A gens qui sont en maladie.¹

At night the owls come with their sinister screeching, evoking thoughts of death:

C'est froit hostel et mal reduit
A gens qui sont en maladic.²

This trick of the mere enumeration of a multitude of details loses its wearisome character, as soon as the faintest trace of

1. It is a strange melody, Which is not felt as a great amusement By people who are ill. First the ravens let us know For certain as soon as it is day: They cry aloud with all their might In deep and shrill tones, without interruption. Even the sound of a drum would be better Than those cries of various birds. Next come the cattle going to pasture, cows, calves, Bellowing, lowing, and all this is noxious When one has an empty brain, With the bells of the church chiming in, And destroying altogether the understanding Of people who are ill.

2. It is a cold hostelry and ill refuge for people who are ill.
humour is mixed up with it. In the middle of a very prolix allegorical poem, *L’Espinette amoureuse*, Froissart diverts us by the enumeration of some sixty games at which he used to play at Valenciennes as a boy. The descriptions of burgher customs or of the female toilet, long though they be, do not fatigue us, because they contain a satirical element which was lacking in the poetical descriptions of the beauty of spring.

From the ‘genre’ to the burlesque is but a step. But here again painting may rival literature in expressive power. Before 1400 art had already attained some mastery of this element of burlesque vision which was to reach its full growth in Pieter Breugel in the sixteenth century. We find it in the figure of Joseph in the ‘Flight into Egypt’ by Broederlam at Dijon and, again, in the three soldiers asleep in the picture of the ‘Three Marys at the Sepulchre’, at one time attributed to Hubert van Eyck. Of the artists of the epoch none took more pleasure in effects of bizarre jocularity than Paul of Limburg. A spectator of the ‘Purification of the Virgin’ wears a kind of bent wizard’s cap, a yard long, and immoderately wide sleeves. The font displays three monstrous masks, shooting out their tongues. In the framework of the ‘Visitation’, we see a soldier in a tower fighting with a snail, and a man wheeling away on a barrow a pig playing the bagpipes.

The literature of the epoch is bizarre in nearly every page, and very fond of burlesque. A vision worthy of Breugel is called up by Deschamps in the ballad of the watchman on the tower of Sluys; he sees the troops for the expedition against England collecting on the beach; they appear to him like an army of rats and mice.

Avant, avant! tirez-vous ça.
Je voy mervelle, ce me semble.
– ‘Lit quoy, guette, que vois-tu là?’
Je voy diz mille rats ensemble
Et mainte souris qui s’assemble
Dessus la rive de la mer. . . .

1. Forward, forward, come here. I see a marvellous thing, it seems to me. – And what, watchman, do you see there? – I see ten thousand rats together And a multitude of mice collecting On the seashore. . . .
On another occasion, sitting at table, absent-minded and gloomy, Deschamps suddenly began to notice the way in which the courtiers were eating: some chewing like pigs; some gnawing like mice, or using their teeth like a saw; others whose beards moved up and down or who made such horrible faces that they looked like devils.

As soon as literature sets to work to depict the life of the masses, it shows this realism full of vitality and good humour, which was to develop abundantly, but not till later, in painting. The peasant receiving in his hovel the duke of Burgundy, who has lost his way, reminds us, by the portrait which Chastellain draws of him, of Breugel’s types. The Pastoral deviates from its central theme, which is sentimental and romantic, to find in the description of shepherds eating, dancing, and courting, matter for a naïve naturalism with a spice of burlesque.

Wherever the eye suffices for communicating the sense of the comic, however airy it may be, art is able to express it as well as, or better than, literature. Apart from this, pictorial art can never render the comic. Line and colour are impotent wherever the comic effect lies in a point of wit. Literature is incontestably sovereign both in the low-comedy genre of the farce and the fabliaux, and in the higher domain of irony.

It is especially in erotic poetry that irony developed; by adding its acrid flavour it refined the erotic genre; it purified it at the same time by introducing into it an element of a serious nature. Outside the pale of love-poetry irony was still heavy and clumsy. It is worth remarking that a French writer of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, speaking ironically, often takes care to inform his reader of the fact. Deschamps praises his age; all is well, peace and justice reign everywhere:

L’en me demande chacun jour
Qu’il me semble du temps que voy,
Et je respons: c’est tout honour,
Loyauté, verité et foy
Largesse, prouescê et arroy,
Charité et biens qui s’advance
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Pour le commun; mais, par ma lòy,
Je ne di pas quanque je pence.¹

Another ballad, of the same tenor, has the refrain: ‘Tous ces poins a rebours retien’;² a third ends with the words:

Prince, s’il est par tout generalment
Comme je say, toute vertu habonde;
Mais tel m’oroit qui diroit: ‘Il se ment’ . . .³

A wit of the end of the fifteenth century entitles an epigram: ‘Soubz une meschante paincture faitce de mauvaises couleurs et ud plus meschant peinctre du monde, par maniere d’yronnie par maître Jehan Robertet.’⁴

When dealing with love, on the other hand, irony had already often attained a high degree of refinement. In this region it blended with the gentle despondency and the languishing tenderness which renewed the erotic poetry of the fifteenth century. For the first time we hear the poet voice his melancholy with a smile about his own misfortune, such as Villon giving himself the air of ‘l’amant remis et renié’⁵ or Charles of Orleans singing his little songs of disillusion. Nevertheless the figure ‘Je riz en pleurs’⁶ is not Villon’s invention. Long before him the scripture word, risus dolore miscetur et extrema gaudii luctus occupat,⁷ had given a text for poetical application. Othe de Granson, for example, had said:

Veillier ou lit et jeuner à la table
Rire plourant et en plaignant chanter.⁸

¹. People ask me every day What I think of the present times. And I answer: it is all honour, Loyalty, truth and faith, Liberality, heroism and order, Charity and advancement Of the common weal; but, by my faith, I do not say what I think.

². Take all these points just the other way about.

³. Prince, if it is generally everywhere As I know: every virtue abounds; But many a man hearing me will say: He lies.

⁴. Under a bad picture done in bad colours and by the most paltry painter of the world, in an ironical manner by master Jehan Robertet.

⁵. The shelved and rejected lover.

⁶. I laugh in tears.

⁷. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

⁸. Lying abed awake and fasting at the board, Laughing in tears and lamenting in song.
And again:

Je prins congîé de cc tresdoulz enfant
Les yeulx mouillicz et la bouche riant.  

Alain Chartier made use of the same motif in various ways:

Je n’ay bouche qui puisse rire,
Que les yeulx ne la desmentissent:
Car le cœur l’en vouldroit desider
Par les lèrmes qui des yeulx issent.

He says of a disconsolate lover:

De faire chiere s’efforçoit
Et menoit une joye fainte,
Et à chanter son cœur forçoit
Non pas pour plaisir, mais pour crainte,
Car tousjours ung relaiz de plainte
S’enlassoit au ton de sa voix,
Lit revenoit à son attainte
Comme l’oyssel au chant du bois.

Very near akin to the motif of laughter and tears is that of the poet who at the end of his poem denies his own sorrow, as, for example, Alain Chartier:

Cest livret voult dicter et faire escripre
Pour passer temps sans courage villain
Ung simple clerq que l’en appelle Alain
Qui parle ainsi d’amours pour oyr dire.

Othe de Granson had already pretended to speak of secret love only ‘par devinaille.’ King René treated this motif

1. I took leave of this most sweet child With tearful eyes and a laughing mouth.
2. My mouth cannot laugh, Without my eyes belying it: For the heart would deny it By the tears issuing from the eyes.
3. He constrained himself to be cheerful And showed a feigned joy, And forced his heart to sing Not for pleasure, but for fear, For ever a remainder of complaint Entwined itself with the tone of his voice, And reverted to its purpose Like the ouzel singing in the wood.
4. This booklet meant to dictate and to describe To pass the time without vulgar mood A simple clerk called Alain Who speaks thus of love by hearsay.
5. By guessing.
in a fantastic manner at the end of his *Cuer d’Amours espris.* His valet, with a candle in his hand, tries to find out if the king has really lost his heart, but finds no hole in his side.

Sy me dist tout en soubzriant  
Que je dormisse seulement  
Et que n’avoye nullement  
Pour ce mal garde de morir.\(^1\)

By losing the impeccable gravity characteristic of them in preceding epochs, the ancient conventional forms of erotic poetry became penetrated by a new meaning. Charles d’Orléans makes use of personifications and of allegories like all his predecessors, but, by some slight surplus of stress, he adds an almost imperceptible flavour of raillery, and this gives them an affecting note, which is lacking in the graceful figures of the *Roman de la Rose.* He sees his own heart as a double of himself.

Je suys celluy au cuer vestu de noir. . . .\(^2\)

Occasionally in his extravagant personifications, the comical element has the upper hand:

Un jour à mon cuer devisoye  
Qui en secret à moy parloit,  
Et en parlant lui demandoye  
Se point d’espargne fait avoit  
D’aucuns biens quant Amours servoit:  
Il me dist que très voulentiers  
La verité m’en compteroit,  
Mais qu’eust visité ses papiers.

Quand ce m’eut dit, il print sa voye  
Et d’avecques moy se partoit.  
Après entrer je le véoye  
En ung comptouer qu’il avoit:  
là, de ça et de là quéroit,  
En cherchant plusieurs vieulx caïers

---

\(^1\) So he told me smiling That I should lie down and sleep And that I should not at all Be afraid to die of this evil.  
\(^2\) I am the wight whose heart is draped in black.
Car le vray monstrez me vouloit,
Mais qu’eust visitez ses papiers. . . .

Not always, however; in the following lines the comic is
not dominant:

Ne hurtez plus à l’uis de ma pensée,
Soing et Soucy, sans tant vous travailler;
Car elle dort et ne veult s’esveiller,
Toute la nuit en peine a despensée.

En dangier est, s’elle n’est bien pansée;
Cessez, cessez, laissez la sommeiller;
Ne hurtez plus à l’uis de ma pensée,
Soing et Soucy, sans tant vous travailler. . . .

For the spirit of the epoch nothing heightened so much
the acrid flavour of sad and sensitive love as the addition of
an element of profanation. Religious travesty has created
something better than the obscenities of the Cent Nouvelles
Nouvelles; it furnished the form for the tenderest love-poem
which that age produced: L’Amant rendu Cordelier a l’Observ-
ance d’Amours.

Already the poetical club of Charles d’Orléans had imagined
a literary brotherhood whose members, in analogy to the
reformed Franciscans, called themselves ‘amourex de l’ob-
servance’. The author of L’Amant rendu Cordelier developed
this motif. Who is this author? Is it really Martial d’Au-

1. One day I was talking with my heart Which secretly spoke to me,
And in talking I asked it If it had saved No goods when serving Love: It
said that quite willingly It would tell me the truth about it, As soon as it
had consulted its papers.

Having told me this it went away And from me departed. Next I saw it
enter In an office it had: There it rummaged here and there In looking for
several old writing-books, For it would show me the truth, As soon as it
had consulted its papers.

2. Do not knock at the door of my mind any more, Anxiety and Care;
do not give yourselves so much trouble; For it sleeps and does not want
to wake. It has passed all the night in solictitude.

It will be in danger, if not well nursed; Stop, stop, let it sleep; Do not
knock at the door of my mind any more, Anxiety and Care; do not give
yourselves so much trouble.
vergne? It is hard to believe it, so much does this poem rise above the level of his work.

The poor disillusioned lover comes to renounce the world in the strange convent, where only 'the martyrs of love' are received. He tells the Prior the touching story of his despised love; the latter exhorts him to forget it. Under a medieval guise we seem to perceive already the genre of Watteau. Only the moonlight is wanting to remind us of Pierrot. 'Was she not in the habit,' asks the Prior, 'of giving you a sweet look or saying "God save you" in passing?' - 'I had not got so far in her good graces,' replies the lover; 'but at night I stood about the door of her house, and looked up at the eaves.'

Et puis, quant je estoye les verrière
De la maison qui cliquetoient,
Lors me semblloit que mes prières
Exaussées d'elle sy estoient.¹

'Were you quite sure that she noticed you?' asks the Prior.

Se m'aist Dieu, j'estoye tant ravis,
Que ne savoye mon sens ne estre,
Car, sans parler, m'estoit advis
Que le vent ventoit sa fenestre
Et que m'avoir bien peu cognoistre,
En disant bas: 'Doint bonne nuyt,'
Et Dieu scet se j'estoye grant maistre
Après cela toute la nuyt.'²

Then he slept in glory.

Tellement estoie restauré
Que, sans tourner ne travailler,
Je faisoie un somme doré,
Sans point la nuyt me resveiller,
Et puis, avant que m'abiller,

¹. And then, when I heard the window Of the house which clattered, Then it seemed to me that my prayers Had been heard by her.

². So help me God, I was so ravished That I was scarcely conscious, For, without being told, it seemed to me That the wind moved her window and she could well have recognized me, Perhaps saying softly: 'Good night, then,' and God knows I felt like a prince After this all night.
Pour en rendre à Amours louanges,
Baisoic troys fois mon orillier,
En riant à par moy aux anges.¹

When he is solemnly received into the order, the lady who had despised him faints and a little gold heart enamelled with tears, which he had given her, falls from her dress.

Les aultres, pour leur mal couvrir
A force leurs cueurs retenoient,
Passans temps a clorre et rouvrir
Les heures qu’en leurs mains tenoient,
Dont souvent les feuillès tounoient
En signe de devocioun;
Mais les deulz et pleurs que meneoient
Monstroient bien leur affection.²

The Prior enumerates his new duties to him, warning him never to listen to the nightingale’s song, never to sleep under ‘eglantine and mayflower’, and, above all, never to look a woman in the eyes. The exhortation ends in a long string of eight-lined stanzas, being variations to the theme ‘Sweet eyes.’

Doux yeulx qui tousjours vont et viennent;
Doux yeulx eschauffans le plisson,
De ceulx qui amoureux deviennent. . . .

Doux yeulx a cler esperlissans,
Qui dient: C’est fait quant tu vouldras,
A ceulx qu’ils sentent bien puissans. . . .³

Towards the middle of the fifteenth century all the conventional genres of erotic poetry are of a languishing tenor,

¹. I felt so refreshed That without turning about or tossing, I enjoyed golden slumber, Without waking up all night, And then, before dressing To praise Love for it, I kissed my pillow thrice, While laughing silently at the angels.

². The others, to hide their affliction Controlled their hearts by force, Passing the time in closing and opening again The breviaries they held in their hands, Of which they often turned the leaves As a sign of devotion; But their sorrow and tears Clearly showed their emotion.

³. Sweet eyes that always come and go; Sweet eyes heating the fur coat Of those who fall in love. . . .

Sweet eyes of pearly clearness, That say: I am ready when you please, To those whom they feel to be powerful.
and bear the stamp of resigned melancholy. Even cynical contempt of woman grows refined. In the Quinzé Joyes de Mariage the mischievous and gross purpose is tempered by wistful sentimentality. By its sober realism, by the elegance of its form and the subtlety of its psychology, this work is a precursor of the ‘novel of manners’ of modern times.

In all that concerns the expression of love, literature profited by the models and the experience of a long series of past centuries. Masters of such diversity of spirit as Plato and Ovid, the troubadours and the wandering students. Dante and Jean de Meun, had bequeathed to it a perfected instrument. Pictorial art, on the contrary, having neither models nor tradition, was primitive in the strict sense of the word, in respect of erotic expression. Not till the eighteenth century was painting to overtake literature in point of delicate expression of love. The artist of the fifteenth century had not yet learned to be frivolous or sentimental. In the miniatures of that time the posture of lovers embracing remains hieratic and solemn. A portrait of a Dutch gentlewoman, Lysbet of Duvenvoorde, by an unknown master before 1430, shows a figure of such severe dignity that a modern scholar has taken the picture for a donor’s portrait, omitting to read the words on the scroll she bears in her hand: ‘Mi verdiert lange te hopen, Wie is hi die syn hert hout open?’ i.e.: ‘I am weary of hoping so long. Who is he who holds his heart open?’ Pictorial expression knew no middle term between the chaste and the obscene. The rendering of erotic subjects was rare, and what there is of it is naïve and innocent. Once more, however, we must bear in mind that the greater number of profane works have disappeared. It would be most interesting to be able to compare the nude of van Eyck in his ‘Bath of Women’, which Fazio saw, with that of his ‘Adam and Eve’. As to the latter picture, it must not be imagined that the erotic element is lacking. Following the rules of the code of feminine beauty of his time, the artist made the breasts small and placed them too high; the arms are long and thin, the belly prominent. But he did so quite ingenuously and with
no intention of giving sensual pleasure. A small picture in the Leipzig Gallery, occasionally designated as belonging to the 'school of Jan van Eyck', represents a girl in a room; she is nude, as magical practices require, and is employing witchcraft to force her lover to show himself. Here the intention is present, and the artist has succeeded in expressing the erotic sentiment: the nude figure has the demure lasciviousness which reappears in those of Cranach.

It is most improbable that the restraint thus displayed in fifteenth-century art, in respect of erotic expression, was due to a sense of modesty, for in general an extreme licence was tolerated. Though pictorial art cultivated it very little as yet, the nude occupied a large place in the tableau vivant. The 'personnages' of nude goddesses or nymphs played by real women were rarely wanting at the entries of princes. These exhibitions took place on platforms and occasionally even in the water, like that of the sirens who swam in the Lys 'quite naked and dishevelled as they paint them', near the bridge over which Duke Philip had to pass, on his entry into Ghent in 1457. The Judgement of Paris was the favourite subject. These representations should be taken neither as proofs of high aesthetic taste nor gross licentiousness, but rather as naïve and popular sensuousness. Jean de Roye, speaking of sirens that were seen, not very far from a Calvary, on the occasion of Louis XI's entry into Paris in 1461, says: 'And there were also three very handsome girls, representing quite naked sirens, and one saw their beautiful turgid, separate, round and hard breasts, which was a very pleasant sight, and they recited little motets and bernerettes; and near them several deep-toned instruments were playing fine melodies.' Molinet tells us of the pleasure which the people of Antwerp felt at the entry of Philip le Beau in 1494, when they saw the Judgement of Paris: 'But the stand at which the people looked with the greatest pleasure was the history of the three goddesses represented nude by living women.'

How far removed from the Greek sense of beauty was the parody of this theme got up for the entry of Charles the Bold at Lille in 1468, where were seen a corpulent Venus, a thin
Juno and a hunchbacked Minerva, each wearing a gold crown.

These nude spectacles remained customary during the sixteenth century. Dürer, in the diary of his journey in the Netherlands, described the one he saw at Antwerp at the entry of Charles V in 1521, and as late as 1578 William of Orange, at his entry in Brussels, saw among other items a chained and nude Andromeda, 'which one would have taken for a marble statue.'

The inferiority of pictorial as compared with literary expression is not confined to the domain of the comic, the sentimental and the erotic. The expressive faculty of the art of this period fails as soon as it is no longer supported by that extraordinary turn for visualizing, which explains the marvels of its pictures. When more is required than the direct and accurate vision of reality, the superiority of pictorial expression at once vanishes, and then is felt the justice of Michelangelo's criticism: that this art aims at achieving several things at the same time, of which a single one would be important enough to demand the devotion of all its powers.

Let us once more consider a picture by Jan van Eyck. In so far as accurate observation suffices, his art is perfect, especially in facial expression, the material of the dresses, and the jewellery. As soon as it becomes necessary to reduce reality in some sort to a scheme, as is the case when buildings and landscapes have to be painted, certain weaknesses appear. In spite of the charming intimacy of his perspectives, there is a certain incoherence, a defective grouping. The more the subject demands free composition and the creation of a new form, the more his powers fall short.

It cannot be denied that in the illuminated breviaries the calendar pages surpass in beauty those representing sacred subjects. To picture a month, it suffices to observe and reproduce accurately. On the other hand, to compose an important scene, full of movement, with many personages, needed the sense of rhythm and of unity which Giotto possessed and which Michelangelo recaptured. Now, multiplicity was a characteristic of fifteenth-century art. It rarely
succeeds in finding harmony and unity. The central part of the altar-piece of the Lamb does indeed show this harmony, in the severe rhythm in which the different processions of adorers are advancing towards the Lamb; but this effect has been obtained, so to say, by a purely arithmetical co-ordination. van Eyck evaded the difficulties of the composition by grouping his personages in a very simple figure; the harmony is static, not dynamic.

The great distance separating van Eyck from Rogier van der Weyden lies in the fact that the latter is aware of a problem of rhythmical composition. He limits himself in the use of detail, in order to find unity; it is true, without always succeeding.

There was a venerable and severe tradition regulating the representation of the most important sacred subjects. The artist had not to invent the composition of his picture; for some of these subjects rhythmical composition came, so to speak, of itself. It was impossible to paint a Descent from the Cross, a pieta, an Adoration of the Shepherds, without the composition assuming a certain rhythmical structure. It suffices to remember the Descent from the Cross by Rogier van der Weyden in the Escorial, his pieta at Madrid, or those of the Avignon school at the Louvre and at Brussels, those by Petrus Cristus, by Geertgen of Sint Jan, the ‘Belles heures d’Ailly.’ The very nature of the subject implied a simple and severe composition.

As soon as the scene to be represented required more movement, as in the case of Christ being mocked or bearing the cross, or in the Adoration of the Magi, the difficulties of the composition increase and a certain unrest and lack of harmony is the result. Here, however, iconographic tradition still supplies a model of a kind, but where it fails him altogether the artist of the fifteenth century is almost helpless. We need but notice the feebleness of composition in the scenes in courts of justice by Dirk Bouts and by Gerard David, though the solemnity of the subject itself called for an element of severity. The composition reaches an irritating pitch of clumsiness in scenes like the Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus at
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Louvain, and that of Saint Hippolytus, torn to pieces by horses, at Bruges.

And yet here we are still dealing with the representation of scenes borrowed from reality. When the whole has to be created by the unaided imagination, the art of the period cannot avoid the ridiculous. Pictures on the grand scale were saved by the solemnity of their subjects, but the illuminators could not evade the task of giving a shape to all the mythological and allegorical fancies of which literature was full. The illustrations by Jean Miélot for the Epitre d'Othéa à Hector, a mythological fancy of Christine de Pisan's, may serve as a sample. It is impossible to imagine anything more awkward. The Greek gods have large wings outside their ermine mantles and 'houppelandes' of brocade. Saturn devouring his children, Midas awarding the prize, are simply ridiculous and devoid of all charm. Yet, whenever the illuminator sees a chance of enlivening the prospect by a little scene, such as a shepherd with his sheep, he shows the ability common to the period: within his province his hand is sure. The reason is that here we have come to the limit of the creative faculties of these artists. Easily masters of their craft, so long as observation of reality is their guide, their mastery fails at once when imaginative creation of new motifs is called for.

Imagination, both literary and artistic, had been led into a blind alley by allegory. The mind had grown accustomed simply to turn into pictorial presentments the allegorical ideas presenting themselves to the mind. Allegory linked the presentment to the thought and the thought to the presentment. The desire to describe accurately the allegorical vision caused all demands of artistic style to be lost sight of. The cardinal virtue of Temperance has to carry a clock to represent rule and measure. We see her with this attribute on a tomb, the work of Michel Colombe, in Nantes Cathedral, and on that of the cardinals of Amboise at Rouen. The illuminator of the Epitre d'Othéa, to conform to this rule, simply puts on her head a timepiece resembling the one with which he ornaments the room of Philip the Good.
The allegorical figure can only be justified by a tradition which has become venerable. Invented all of a piece, it is rarely satisfactory. The more realistic the mind which creates it, the more bizarre and factitious its form will be. Chastellain, in his *Exposition sur Vérité mal prise*, sees four ladies coming to accuse him. They call themselves ‘Indignation, Reprobation, Accusation, Vindication.’ This is how he describes the second. ‘This dame here appeared to have acrid conditions and very tart and biting reasons; she ground her teeth and bit her lips; often nodded her head; and showing signs of being argumentative, jumped on her feet and turned to this side and to that; she proved to be impatient and inclined to contradict; the right eye was closed and the other open; she had a bag full of books before her, of which she put some into her girdle, as if they were dear to her, the others she threw away spitefully; she tore up papers and leaves; she threw writing-books into the fire furiously; she smiled on some and kissed them; she spat on others out of meanness and trod them underfoot; she had a pen in her hand, full of ink, with which she crossed out many important writings ...; also with a sponge she blackened some pictures, she scratched out others with her nails, and others again she erased wholly and smoothed them as if to have them forgotten; and showed herself a hard and fell enemy to many respectable people, more arbitrarily than reasonably.’ Elsewhere he sees Dame Peace spread out her mantle and break up into four new ladies: Peace of Heart, Peace of Mouth, Seeming Peace, Peace of True Effect. Or he invents female figures which he calls ‘Importance of your lands, Various conditions and qualities of your several peoples, The envy and hatred of Frenchmen and of neighbouring nations’, as if politics lent themselves to allegory. It is no living fancy, of course, which prompts him to imagine these quaint figures, but only reflection. All wear their names written on scrolls: he evidently imagines them as figures on tapestry, or in a picture or a show.

There is not a trace of true inspiration here. It is the pastime of an exhausted mind. Though the authors always
place their action in the setting of a dream, their phantasmagorias never resemble real dreams, such as we find in Dante and Shakespeare. They do not even keep up the illusion of real vision: Chastellain naively calls himself in one of his poems ‘the inventor or the imaginer of this vision.’

Only the note of raillery can still make the arid field of allegory flower again, as in these lines of Deschamps:

Phisicen, comment fait Droit?
– Sur m’ame, il est en petit point . . .
– Que fait Raison? . . .
Perdu a son entendement,
Elle parle mais faiblement,
Et Justice est toute ydiote. . . .

The different spheres of literary fancy are mixed up regardless of all homogeneity of style. The author of the Pastoralet dresses his political shepherds in a tabard ornamented with fleurs-de-lis and lions rampant; ‘shepherds in long cassocks’ represent the clergy. Molinet muddles up religious, military, heraldic and amorous terms in a proclamation of the Lord to all true lovers:

Nous Dieu d’amours, créateur, roy de gloire,
Salut à tous vrays amans d’humble affaire!
Comme il soit vrays que depuis la victoire
De nostre filz sur le mont de Calvaire
Plusieurs soulars par peu de cognoissance
De noz armes, font au dyable allyance. . . .

Therefore the true blazon is described to them: escutcheon argent, chief or with five wounds – and the Church militant is given full liberty to take all into her service who want to return to that blazon.

The feats which procured Molinet the reputation of an

1. Physician, what about Law? – By my soul, he is poorly. . . . How does Reason? . . . She is out of her mind, She speaks but feebly, And Justice is quite crazy.

2. We God of love, creator, king of glory All hail to all true lovers of humble mind! As it is true that since the victory Of our son on Mount Calvary Several soldiers through lack of knowledge Of our arms, make an alliance with the devil. . . .
excellent 'rhétoriqueur' and poet appear to us rather as the extreme degeneration of a literary form nearing its end. He takes pleasure in the most insipid puns: 'Et ainsi demoura l'Escluse en paix qui lui fut incluse, car la guerre fut d'elle excluse plus solitaire que recluse.'¹ In the introduction to his prose version of the Roman de la Rose he plays upon his name, Molinet. 'Et affin que je ne perde le froment de ma labur, et que la farine que en sera molue puisse avoir fleur salutaire, j'ay intencion, se Dieu m'en donne la grace, de tourner et convertir soubz mes rudes meulles le vicieux au vertueux, le corporel en l'espirituel, la mondanité en divinité, et souverainement de la moraliser. Et par ainsi nous tirerons le miel hors de la dure pierre, et la rose vermeille hors de poignans espines, ou nous trouverons grain et graine, fruit, fleur et feuille, tres souesve odeur, odorant verdurc, verdoyant floriture, florissant nourriture, nourrissant fruit et fructifiant pasture.'²

When they do not play upon words, they play upon ideas. Meschinot makes Prudence and Justice the glasses of his Lunettes des Princes, Force the frame and Temperance the nail which keeps the whole together. The poet receives the aforesaid spectacles from Reason with directions how to use them. Sent by Heaven, Reason enters his mind and wants to feast there; but finds nothing 'off which to dine well,' for Despair has spoilt all.

Products like these would seem to betray mere decadence and senile decay. Thinking of Italian literature of the same period, the fresh and lovely poetry of the quattrocento, we may

1. And so Sluys remained in peace that was included with her, for war was excluded from her, lonelier than a recluse.

2. And lest I lose the wheat of my labour, and that the meal into which it will be ground may have wholesome flour, I intend, if God gives me grace for it, to turn and convert under my rough mill-stones the vicious into the virtuous, the corporal into the spiritual, the worldly into the divine, and, above all, to moralize it. And in this way we shall gather honey from the hard stone and the vermeil rose from sharp thorns, where we shall find grains and seed, fruit, flower and leaf, very sweet odour, odiferous verdurc, verdant florescence, flourishing nurture, nourishing fruit and fruitful pasture.
perhaps wonder how the form and spirit of the Renaissance can still seem so remote from the regions on this side of the Alps.

It requires some effort and some reflection to realize that exactly in these artifices of style and wit, we witness the coming of the Renaissance, in the shape it took outside Italy. To contemporaries this far-fetched form meant the renewal of art.
CHAPTER XXIII

The Advent of the New Form

The transition from the spirit of the declining Middle Ages to humanism was far less simple than we are inclined to imagine it. Accustomed to oppose humanism to the Middle Ages, we would gladly believe that it was necessary to give up the one in order to embrace the other. We find it difficult to fancy the mind cultivating the ancient forms of medieval thought and expression while aspiring at the same time to antique wisdom and beauty. Yet this is just what we have to picture to ourselves. Classicism did not come as a sudden revelation, it grew up among the luxuriant vegetation of medieval thought. Humanism was a form before it was an inspiration. On the other hand, the characteristic modes of thought of the Middle Ages did not die out till long after the Renaissance.

In Italy the problem of humanism presents itself in a most simple form, because there men’s minds had ever been predisposed to the reception of antique culture. The Italian spirit had never lost touch with classic harmony and simplicity. It could expand freely and naturally in the restored forms of classic expression. The quattrocento with its serenity makes the impression of a renewed culture, which has shaken off the fetters of medieval thought, until Savonarola reminds us that below the surface the Middle Ages still subsist.

The history of French civilization of the fifteenth century, on the contrary, does not permit us to forget the Middle Ages. France had been the mother-land of all that was strongest and most beautiful in the products of the medieval spirit. All medieval forms—feudalism, the ideas of chivalry and courtesy, scholasticism, Gothic architecture—were rooted here much more firmly than ever they had been in Italy. In the fifteenth century they were dominating still. Instead of the full rich style, the blitheness and the harmony characteristic
of Italy and the Renaissance, here it is bizarre pomp, cumbersome forms of expression, a worn-out fancy and an atmosphere of melancholy gravity which prevail. It is not the Middle Ages, it is the new coming culture, which might easily be forgotten.

In literature classical forms could appear without the spirit having changed. An interest in the refinement of Latin style was enough, it seems, to give birth to humanism. The proof of this is furnished by a group of French scholars about the year 1400. It was composed of ecclesiastics and magistrates, Jean de Montreuil, canon of Lille and secretary to the king, Nicolas de Cleanges, the famous denouncer of abuses in the Church, Pierre et Gontier Col, the Milanese Ambrose de Miliis, also royal secretaries. The elegant and grave epistles they exchange are inferior in no respect – neither in the vagueness of thought, nor in the consequential air, nor in the tortured sentences, nor even in learned trifling – to the epistolary genre of later humanists. Jean de Montreuil spins long dissertations on the subject of Latin spelling. He defends Cicero and Virgil against the criticism of his friend Ambrose de Miliis, who had accused the former of contradictions and preferred Ovid to the latter. On another occasion he writes to Cleanges: ‘If you do not come to my aid, dear master and brother, I shall have lost my reputation and be as one sentenced to death. I have just noticed that in my last letter to my lord and father, the bishop of Cambrai, I wrote proximior instead of the comparative propior; so rash and careless is the pen. Kindly correct this, otherwise our detractors will write libels about it.’

There are more charming passages in this correspondence than this: for example, his description of the monastery of Charlieu, near Senlis, where he speaks of the sparrows coming to share the monks’ repast, the wren which behaves as if it were the abbot, and lastly, the gardener’s donkey, which begs the author not to forget it in his letter. We may hesitate whether to call this medieval naïvety or humanistic elegance.

It suffices to recall that we met Jean de Montreuil and the brothers Col among the zealots of the Roman de la Rose and among the members of the Court of Love of 1401, to be con-
vinced that this primitive French humanism was but a secondary element of their culture, the fruit of scholarly erudition, analogous to the so-called renaissances of classic latinity of earlier ages, notably the ninth and the twelfth century. The circle of Jean de Montreuil had no immediate successors, and this early French humanism seems to disappear with the men who cultivated it. Still, in its origins it was to some extent connected with the great international movement of literary renovation. Petrarch was, in the eyes of Jean de Montreuil and his friends, the illustrious initiator, and Coluccio Salutati, the Florentine chancellor who introduced classicism into official style, was not unknown to them either. Their zeal for classic refinement had evidently been roused not a little by Petrarch's taunt that there were no orators nor poets outside Italy. In France Petrarch's work had, so to say, been accepted in a medieval spirit and incorporated into medieval thought. He himself had personally known the leading spirits of the second half of the fourteenth century; the poet Philippe de Vitri, Nicolas Oresme, philosopher and politician, who had been a preceptor to the dauphin, probably also Philippe de Mézières. These men, in spite of the ideas which make Oresme one of the forerunners of modern science, were not humanists. As to Petrarch himself, we are always inclined to exaggerate the modern element in his mind and work, because we are accustomed to see him exclusively as the first of renovators. It is easy to imagine him emancipated from the ideas of his century. Nothing is further from the truth. He is most emphatically a man of his time. The themes of which he treated were those of the Middle Ages: *De contemptu mundi, De otio religiosorum, De vita solitaria.* It is only the form and the tone of his work which differ and are more highly finished. His glorification of antique virtue in his *De viris illustribus* and his *Rerum memorandarum libri* corresponds more or less with the chivalrous cult of the Nine Worthies. There is nothing surprising in his being found in touch with the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life, or cited as an authority on a dogmatic point by the fanatic Jean de Varennes. Denis the Carthusian borrowed laments
from him about the loss of the Holy Sepulchre, a typically medieval subject. What contemporaries outside Italy saw in Petrarch was not at all the poet of the Sonnets or the Triainfli, but a moral philosopher, a Christian Cicero.

In a more limited field Boccaccio exercised an influence resembling that of Petrarch. His fame too was that of a moral philosopher, and by no means rested on the Decamerone. He was honoured as the ‘doctor of patience in adversity’, as the author of De casibus virorum illustrium and of De claris mulieribus. Because of these queer writings treating of the inconstancy of human fate ‘messire Jehan Bocace’ had made himself a sort of impresario of Fortune. As such he appears to Chastellain, who gave the name of Le Temple de Bocace to the bizarre treatise in which he endeavoured to console Queen Margaret, after her flight from England, by relating to her a series of the tragic destinies of his time. In recognizing in Boccaccio the strongly medieval spirit which was their own, these Burgundian spirits of a century later were not at all off the mark.

What distinguishes nascent Humanism in France from that of Italy, is a difference of erudition, skill and taste, rather than of tone or aspiration. To transplant antique form and sentiment into national literature the French had to overcome far more obstacles than the people born under the Tuscan sky or in the shadow of the Coliseum. France too, had her learned clerks, writing in Latin, who were capable at an early date of rising to the height of the epistolary style. But a blending of classicism and medievalism in the vernacular, such as was achieved by Boccaccio, was for a long time impossible in France. The old forms were too strong, and the general culture still lacked the proficiency in mythology and ancient history which was current in Italy. Machaut, although a clerk, pitifully disfigures the names of the seven sages. Chastellain confounds Peleus with Pelias, La Marche Proteus with Pirithous. The author of the Pastoralet speaks of the ‘good king Scipio of Africa’. But at the same time his subject inspires him with a description of the god Silvanus and a prayer to Pan, in which the poetical imagination of the Renaissance
seems on the point of breaking forth. The chroniclers were already trying their hand at military speeches in Livy’s manner, and adorning their narrative of important events by mentioning portents, in close imitation of Livy. Their attempts at classicism did not always succeed. Jean Germain’s description of the Arras congress of 1435 is a veritable caricature of antique prose. The vision of Antiquity was still very bizarre. At the funeral service of Charles the Bold at Nancy, his conqueror, the young duke of Lorraine, came to honour the corpse of his enemy, dressed ‘in antique style’, that is to say, wearing a long golden beard which reached to his girdle. Thus got up to represent one of the Nine Worthies, he prayed for a quarter of an hour.

The word ‘antique’ as conceived in France about 1400 belonged to the same group of ideas as ‘rhétorique, orateur, poésie.’ No one would have thought of applying the word ‘poésie’ to a ballad or a song in the old French form. This classical word, which evoked the idea of the admired perfection of the Ancients, meant above all an artificial form. The poets of this time are perfectly capable of expressing heartfelt emotions in a simple form, but when they wish to attain superior beauty, they hunt up mythology, employ pedantic latinized terms and then consider themselves ‘rhetoricians.’ Christine de Pisan expressly singles out a mythologic piece, which she calls ‘balade pouétique’, from her ordinary work. Eustache Deschamps, wishing to air his talent, in sending his works to Chaucer, his fellow-poet and admirer, adds the following lines:

O Socrates plains de philosophie,
Seneque en meurs et Anglux en pratique,
Ovides granz en ta poeterie,
Bries en parler, saiges en rethorique
Aigles tres haulz, qui par ta théorique
Enlumines le regne d’Eneas,
L’Isle aux Geans, ceuls de Bruth, et qui as
Semé les fleurs et planté le rosier,
Aux ignorans de la langue pandras,
Grant translateur, noble Geoffroy Chaucier!
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A toy pour ce de la fontaine Helye,
Requier avoir un buvraige autentique,
Dont la doys est du tout en ta baillie,
Pour rafrener d'elle ma soif ethique,
Qui en Gaule seray paralitique
Jusques a ce que tu m'abuveras.¹

This is the beginning, modest as yet, of the ridiculous latinism which Villon and Rabelais satirized. This insufferable manner reappears whenever authors exert themselves to be exceptionally brilliant, in dedications, discourses, or literary correspondence. In this vein Chastellain will write ‘vostre tres humble et obeissante serve et ancelle, la ville de Gand’, ‘la viscerale intime douleur et tribulation’,² La Marche ‘nostre francigene locution et langue vernacule’,³ Molinet ‘abreuvé de la doulce et mellifie liqueur procédant de la fontaine caballine’, ‘ce vertueux duc scipionique’, ‘gens de mulièbre courage’.⁴

This far-fetched rhetoric testifies both to an ideal of literary conversation and to an ideal of style. Like the troubadours of yore, the rhetoricians and the humanists cultivated literature in the form of an all-round game. Literary correspondence of a rather strange kind springs up. A fervent admirer of Georges Chastellain, Jean Robertet, secretary to three dukes of Bourbon and to three kings of France, tried to enter

¹. O Socrates full of philosophy, Seneca in morals and Englishman in practice, Great Ovid in your poetry, Brief of speech, well-versed in rhetoric, Exalted eagle, who by your erudition Have illumined the reign of Eneas, The Island of the Giants, and that of Brut, and who have Sown flowers and planted the egantine, For the ignorant of the language, you will pour yourself forth, Great translator, noble Geoffroy Chaucer!
From you therefore out of the fountain of Helye I ask to have an authentic draught, Of which the conduit is wholly in your power To slake my hectic thirst, I who in Gaul shall be paralysed Till you shall give me to drink.

². Your very humble and obedient slave and servant, the city of Ghent;
The intestinal inward sorrow and tribulation.

³. Our French-born locution and vernacular tongue.

⁴. Having drunk from the sweet and mellifluous liquor proceeding from the equine fountain. This virtuous scipionic duke. People of muliebral courage.
into correspondence with the poet-historiographer of the Burgundian court, by the good offices of a certain Montferrat who lived at Bruges. The latter, to soften the old author, who was at first rather reserved, had recourse to the time-honoured device of allegory. He evoked the 'twelve dames of rhetoric', Science, Eloquence, Gravity of Meaning, Profundity, etc., who appeared to him in a vision and told him to exert himself in behalf of the correspondence desired by Robertet. In the exchange of poetical and rhetorical compliments which followed, Chastellain's verses are sober, when compared with the hyperbolic effusions of Robertet.

Frappé en l'oeil d'une clarté terrible
Attaint au coeur d'éloquence incroyable,
A humain sens difficile à produire,
Tout osfusqué de lumière incroyable
Outre perçant de ray presqu'impossible
Sur obscur corps qui jamais ne peut luire,
Ravi, abstrait me trouve en mon déduire,
Fin extase corps gisant à la terre,
Foule esprit perplex à voye enquerro
Pour trouver lieu et opportune yssue
Du pas estroit où je suis mis en serre,
Pris à la rets qu'amour vraye a tissuc.¹

In these terms he describes the sensations which the arrival of a letter by Chastellain caused in him. And, continuing in prose, he asks his friend Montferrat (whom he calls 'friend of the immortal gods, beloved of men, high Ulyssean breast, full of mellifluent eloquence'), 'N'est-ce resplendeur équale au curre Phoebus?'² Does he not surpass Orpheus' lyre? and 'la tube d'Amphion, in Mercuriale flute qui endormit Argus?

¹. Struck in the eye by a terrible brightness, Touched in the heart by incredible eloquence, Difficult for the human mind to produce, Quite obscured by incendiary light Penetrating with almost unbearable rays, To a dark body that can never shine, Ravished, distraught, I find myself, in my delight, My body in ecstasy lying on the ground, My feeble spirit is at a loss to go in quest of a path In order to find a place and opportune exit From the narrow pass where I am hemmed in Caught in the toils which true love has netted.

². Is this not splendour equal to the car of Phoebus?
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‘Où est l’œil capable de tel objet visible, l’oreille pour ouyr le haut son argentin et tintinabule d’or?’

Chastellain showed some scepticism as to this raving enthusiasm. Soon he had enough of it and wanted to bar the gate which had so long and widely been open to ‘Dame Vanity.’ ‘Robertet has quite soaked me by his cloud, of which the drops, congealing like hail, make my garments brilliant as with pearls; but what good is it to the dark body underneath, when my robe deceives the onlookers?’ Therefore let him cease writing in this way, otherwise Chastellain will throw his letters into the fire without reading them. If he is willing to speak as beseems among friends, he may rest assured of George’s affection.

Lucubrations of this sort by no means give us the feeling of the measure and harmony of the Renaissance. It all seems to us antiquated in sentiment and style. There is no doubt, however, that these wits considered themselves supremely modern. This Robertet had been in Italy, ‘a country greedy for renovation ... on which the meteoric conditions operate to facilitate ornate speech, and towards which all elemental sweetness is drawn, there to resolve into harmony.’ He evidently believed that the secret of this harmony was in the ‘ornate speech’ and that to rival the Italians it sufficed to bedeck the French style with the ornaments of classicism. Now, in Italy, where language and thought had never been entirely estranged from the pure Latin style, the social environment and the turn of mind were far more congenial to the humanistic tendencies than in France. Italian civilization had naturally developed the type of the humanist. The Italian language was not, like the French, corrupted by an influx of latinism; it absorbed it without difficulty. In France, on the contrary, the medieval foundations of social life were still solid; the language, much farther removed from Latin than Italian was, refused to be latinized. If, in English, erudite latinisms were to find an easy access, it was because

1. The reed of Amphion, the Mercurial flute, which caused Argus to sleep? Where is the eye capable of seeing such a visible object, the ear to hear the high silver sound and golden tintinnabulation?
of the very fact that here the language was not of Latin stock at all, so that no incongruity of expression made itself felt.

In so far as the French humanists of the fifteenth century wrote in Latin, the medieval subsoil of their culture is little in evidence. The more completely the classical style is imitated, the more the true spirit is concealed. The letters and the discourses of Robert Gaguin are not distinguishable from the works of other humanists. But Gaguin is, at the same time, a French poet of altogether medieval inspiration and of altogether national style. Whereas those who did not, and perhaps could not, write in Latin, spoiled their French by latinized forms, he, the accomplished latinist, when writing in French, disdained rhetorical effects. His *Débat du Laboureur, du Prestre et du Gendarme*, medieval in its subject, is also medieval in style. It is simple and vigorous, like Villon’s poetry and Deschamps’ best work.

Who are the true moderns in the French literature of the fifteenth century? Those, no doubt, whose works approach nearest to what the following century produced of beauty. Assuredly it is not, whatever their merits may have been, the grave and pompous representatives of the Burgundian style: not Chastellain, La Marche, Molinet. The novelties of form which they affected were too superficial, the foundation of their thought too essentially medieval, their classical whimsies too naïve. Should one look for the modern element in the refinement of form? Sometimes this form, though most artificial, has so much grace that the sweet melody makes us forget the emptiness of meaning.

Plusiers bergiers sont en lacz mortelz telz
Heurtez, Boutez, que pou leur déduit duyt.
Et leurs moutons en maux fortunez nez,
Venez, vanez, de fers mal parez rez,
Leurs bledz emblez, ayans sauf conduit vuyd,
La nuit leur nuit, la mort qui desruit ruit,
Leur fruit s’en fuit venant aperte perte:
Mais Pan nous tient en asserance experte.1

1. Several shepherds are in such mortal snares So much knocked and pushed that it little tends to their delight. And their sheep, born in an evil
This was written by Jean Lemaire de Belges. Much more might be said on this elaboration of a purely formal beauty in poetry. But, taking all in all, it is not here that the future of literature lies. If by moderns we understand those who have most affinity with the later development of French literature, the moderns are Villon, Charles of Orleans and the poet of L’Amant rendu Cordelier, just those who kept most aloof from classicism and who did not strain after over-nice forms. The medieval character of their motifs robs them not in the least of their aspect of youth and of promise. It is the spontaneity of their expression which makes them moderns.

Classicism then was not the controlling factor in the advent of the new spirit in literature. Neither was paganism. The frequent use of pagan expressions or tropes has often been considered the chief characteristic of the Renaissance. This practice, however, is far older. As early as the twelfth century mythological terms were employed to express concepts of the Christian faith, and this was not considered at all irreverent or impious. Deschamps speaking of ‘Jupiter come from paradise’, Villon calling the Holy Virgin ‘high goddess’, the humanists referring to God in terms like ‘princeps superum’ and to Mary as ‘genetrix tonantis’, are by no means pagans. Pastorals required some admixture of innocent paganism, by which no reader was duped. The author of the Pastoralet who calls the Celestine church at Paris ‘the temple in the high woods, where people pray to the gods’, declares, to dispel all ambiguity, ‘If, to lend my Muse some strangeness, I speak of the pagan gods, the shepherds and myself are Christians all the same.’ In the same way Molinet excuses himself for having introduced Mars and Minerva, by quoting ‘Reason and Understanding’, who said to him: ‘You should do it, not to instil faith in gods and goddesses, but because Our Lord alone inspires people as it pleases Him and frequently by various inspirations.’

hour, Are hunted, exhausted, shorn by ill-sharpened shears, Their corn is stolen, having a fruitless safe-conduct, The night is noxious to them; destructive death rushes in, Their fruit flies, as open run comes, But Pan holds us in his expert protection.
The purity of Faith was more seriously threatened when, as in the following lines, a certain respect for pagan cults, and notably of sacrifices, is manifested.

Des dieux jadis les nations gentiles
Quirent l'amour par humbles sacrifices,
Lesquels, posé que ne fussent utiles,
Furent nientmoins rendables et fertiles,
De maint grant fruit et de haulx bénéfices,
Monstrans par fait que d'amour les offices
Et d'honneur humble, impartis où qu'ils soient
Pour percer ciel et enfer suffisoient.¹

This is a stanza of the *Dit de Vérité*, the best poem of Chastellain, which was inspired by his fidelity to the duke of Burgundy, and in which, forgetting his ordinary grandiloquence a little, he gives free rein to his political indignation.

To find paganism, there was no need for the spirit of the waning Middle Ages to revert to classic literature. The pagan spirit displayed itself, as amply as possible, in the *Roman de la Rose*. Not in the guise of some mythological phrases; it was not there that the danger lay, but in the whole erotic conception and inspiration of this most popular work of all. From the early Middle Ages onward Venus and Cupid had found a refuge in this domain. But the great pagan who called them to vigorous life and enthroned them was Jean de Meun. By blending with Christian conceptions of eternal bliss the boldest praise of voluptuousness, he had taught numerous generations a very ambiguous attitude towards Faith. He had dared to distort Genesis for his impious purposes by making Nature complain of men because they neglect her commandment of procreation, in the words:

Si m'aist Diex li crucesis,
Moult me repens dont homme fîs.²

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¹ Formerly the gentile nations of the gods craved love by humble sacrifices, which, taken for granted that they were useless, were nevertheless profitable and prolific. Of much important fruit and of high benefits, which shows by facts that offices of love and of humble homage, rendered wherever they were, were sufficient to pierce heaven and hell.

² So help me God who was crucified, I much repent that I made man.
It is astonishing that the Church, which so rigorously repressed the slightest deviations from dogma of a speculative character, suffered the teaching of this breviary of the aristocracy (for the Roman de la Rose was nothing less) to be disseminated with impunity.

But the essence of the great renewal lies even less in paganism than in pure Latinity. Classic expression and imagery, and even sentiments borrowed from heathen Antiquity, might be a potent stimulus or an indispensable support in the process of cultural renovation, they never were its moving power. The soul of Western Christendom itself was out-growing medieval forms and modes of thought that had become shackles. The Middle Ages had always lived in the shadow of Antiquity, always handled its treasures, or what they had of them, interpreting it according to truly medieval principles: scholastic theology and chivalry, asceticism and courtesy. Now, by an inward ripening, the mind, after having been so long conversant with the forms of Antiquity, began to grasp its spirit. The incomparable simpleness and purity of the ancient culture, its exactitude of conception and of expression, its easy and natural thought and strong interest in men and in life, – all this began to dawn upon men’s minds. Europe, after having lived in the shadow of Antiquity, lived in its sunshine once more.

This process of assimilation of the classic spirit, however, was intricate and full of incongruities. The new form and the new spirit do not yet coincide. The classical form may serve to express the old conceptions: more than one humanist chooses the sapphic strophe for a pious poem of purely medieval inspiration. Traditional forms, on the other hand, may contain the spirit of the coming age. Nothing is more erroneous than to identify classicism and modern culture.

The fifteenth century in France and the Netherlands is still medieval at heart. The diapason of life had not yet changed. Scholastic thought, with symbolism and strong formalism, the thoroughly dualistic conception of life and the world still dominated. The two poles of the mind continued
to be chivalry and hierarchy. Profound pessimism spread a general gloom over life. The gothic principle prevailed in art. But all these forms and modes were on the wane. A high and strong culture is declining, but at the same time and in the same sphere new things are being born. The tide is turning, the tone of life is about to change.