

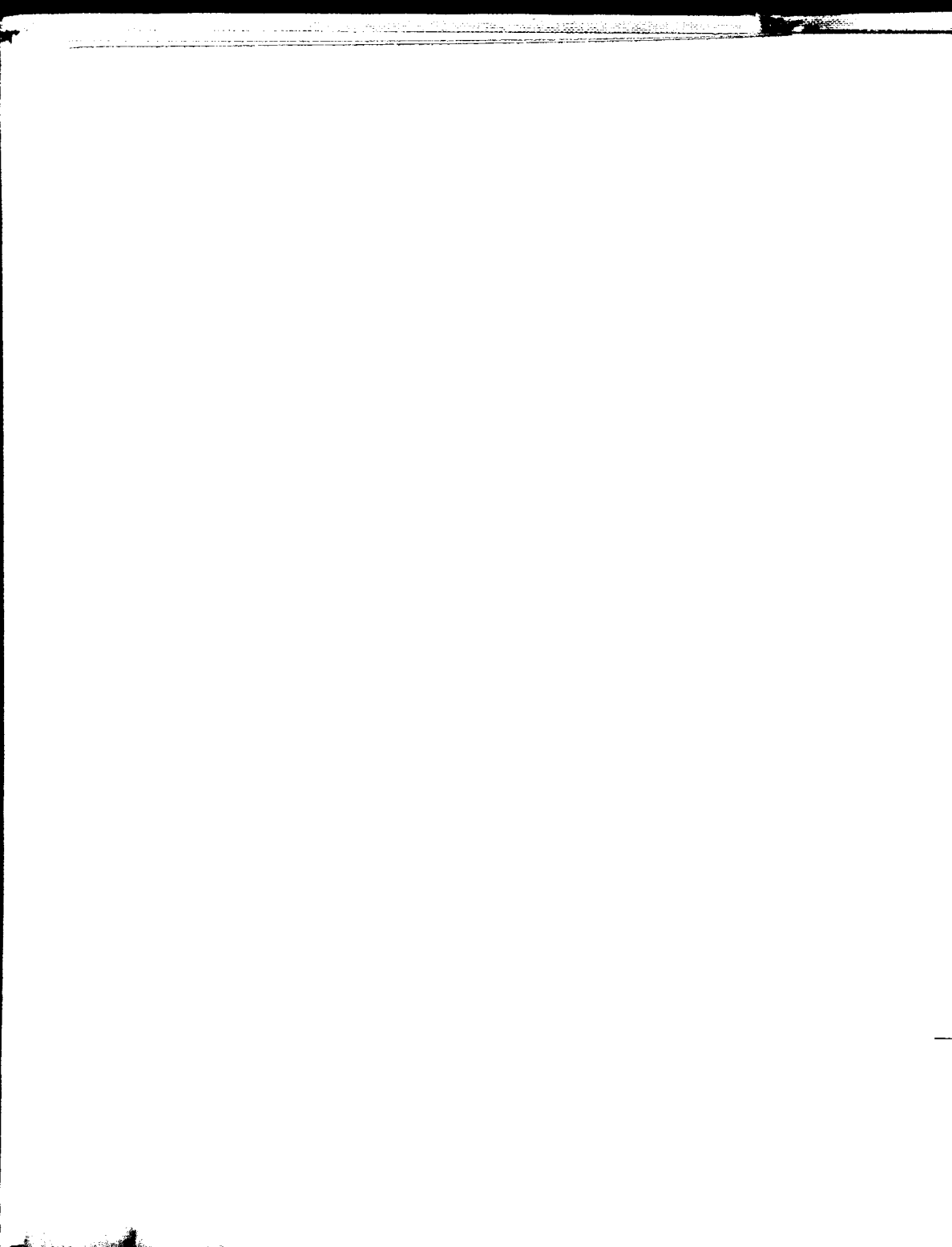


BOLLINGEN SERIES XLV

The Collected Works of Paul Valéry

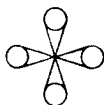
Edited by Jackson Mathews

VOLUME 6



PAUL VALÉRY
MONSIEUR
TESTE

Translated
with an Introduction
by
Jackson Mathews



BOLLINGEN SERIES XLV • 6

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Copyright © 1973 by Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.
All rights reserved

THIS IS VOLUME SIX OF THE
COLLECTED WORKS OF PAUL VALÉRY
CONSTITUTING NUMBER XLV IN BOLLINGEN SERIES
SPONSORED BY BOLLINGEN FOUNDATION.
IT IS THE FOURTEENTH VOLUME OF THE
COLLECTED WORKS TO APPEAR

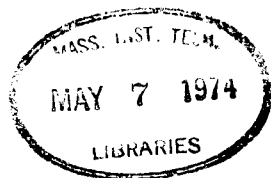
PQ236

A23

11

11

Humanities



ISBN 0-691-09934-0

Library of Congress catalogue card no. 56-9337
Type composed at the University Printing House, Cambridge, England

Printed in the United States of America
by Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.

DESIGNED BY ANDOR BRAUN

CONTENTS

TESTE AND COMPANY, <i>by Jackson Mathews</i>	vii
PREFACE	3
The Evening with Monsieur Teste	8
A Letter from Madame Émilie Teste	22
Extracts from Monsieur Teste's Logbook	35
Letter from a Friend	47
A Walk with Monsieur Teste	60
Dialogue: A New Fragment concerning Monsieur Teste	62
Sketches for a Portrait of Monsieur Teste	66
A Few of Monsieur Teste's Thoughts	72
End of Monsieur Teste	79
SNAPSHOTS OF MONSIEUR TESTE: <i>From the Notebooks</i>	83
APPENDIX	
Publisher's Note	157
Images of Monsieur Teste	158
NOTES	163



Teste and Company

VALÉRY saw everything from the point of view of the intellect. The mind has been said to be his only subject. His preoccupation was the pursuit of consciousness, and no one knew better than he that this pursuit led through man into the world. Valéry's deep concern was always with some possibility, some potential of the mind. He looked at seashells, read mathematical physics, went to the theater, or waked early in the morning, all for the same purpose—to receive the light from these diverse angles, times, and objects upon his obsessive center: the conscious mind.

Consciousness is in itself dramatic, embodied as it is in its opposite, the human flesh. It is that quality which cannot be isolated or known. This elusive humanity is our unknowable Self, unknowable, said Valéry, because it is "that which knows," that generalized awareness which *comprehends* all we know. Like the wind, it may be "seen" only in other things. Consciousness closes around its universe of events, all things being subordinate to "that insurmountable generality which consciousness feels itself to be."

It is this "point of view" of the intelligence that tells us the nature of Valéry's work. It has been said that his *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* was rather an introduction to his own method, for what he did was to imagine the structure and operation of a mind so complete, so universal,

that all the sciences and all the arts were its tools. If such a man ever actually existed, said Valéry, it was certainly Leonardo.

Likewise with Valéry's poem *La Jeune Parque*. Whatever may be the difficulties or obscurities of that major work, whatever its beauties or philosophical import, its subject, as Valéry liked to tease his critics by remarking, was simply "the thoughts of a young girl one night." Even in his essays on contemporary affairs, it was the plight of the mind faced with the facts of modern history that held Valéry's interest. The mind as it knows and suffers in man, as it lives in science, myth, or the arts; consciousness as it ranges from the lower limits of sleep upward through stages of waking and knowing, to the extreme limits of thought; the mind as it rises from the rich muck of the unconscious to the complex structures of the artistic or mathematical imagination; the human and historical condition of consciousness, the drama of consciousness: this may be the central subject of Valéry's work. He called it the Intellectual Comedy.

Monsieur Teste is Valéry's novel. Teste himself may be seen as an ordinary fictional character, the lonely man of modern city life, a problem in everyday human relations. On the other hand, he is a mind behaving as a man, or to put it the other way, "a man regulated by his own powers of thought." *Monsieur Teste* is the story of consciousness and its effort to push being off the stage.

But is it possible for a man to be all mind? Is Monsieur Teste possible? If not, why is he impossible? That question, Valéry says, is the soul of Monsieur Teste: he is impossible because consciousness cannot entirely consume being and continue to exist. Consciousness depends on being. Sensibility

TESTE AND COMPANY

is its home, knowledge is its profession. That is why Valéry had to invent Madame Teste, all soul and sensibility; and Teste's friend, his knowledge of the world.

The pieces that make up the present volume of *Monsieur Teste* are the occasional results of a lifetime of meditation on this question: how would a complete mind behave as an everyday man?

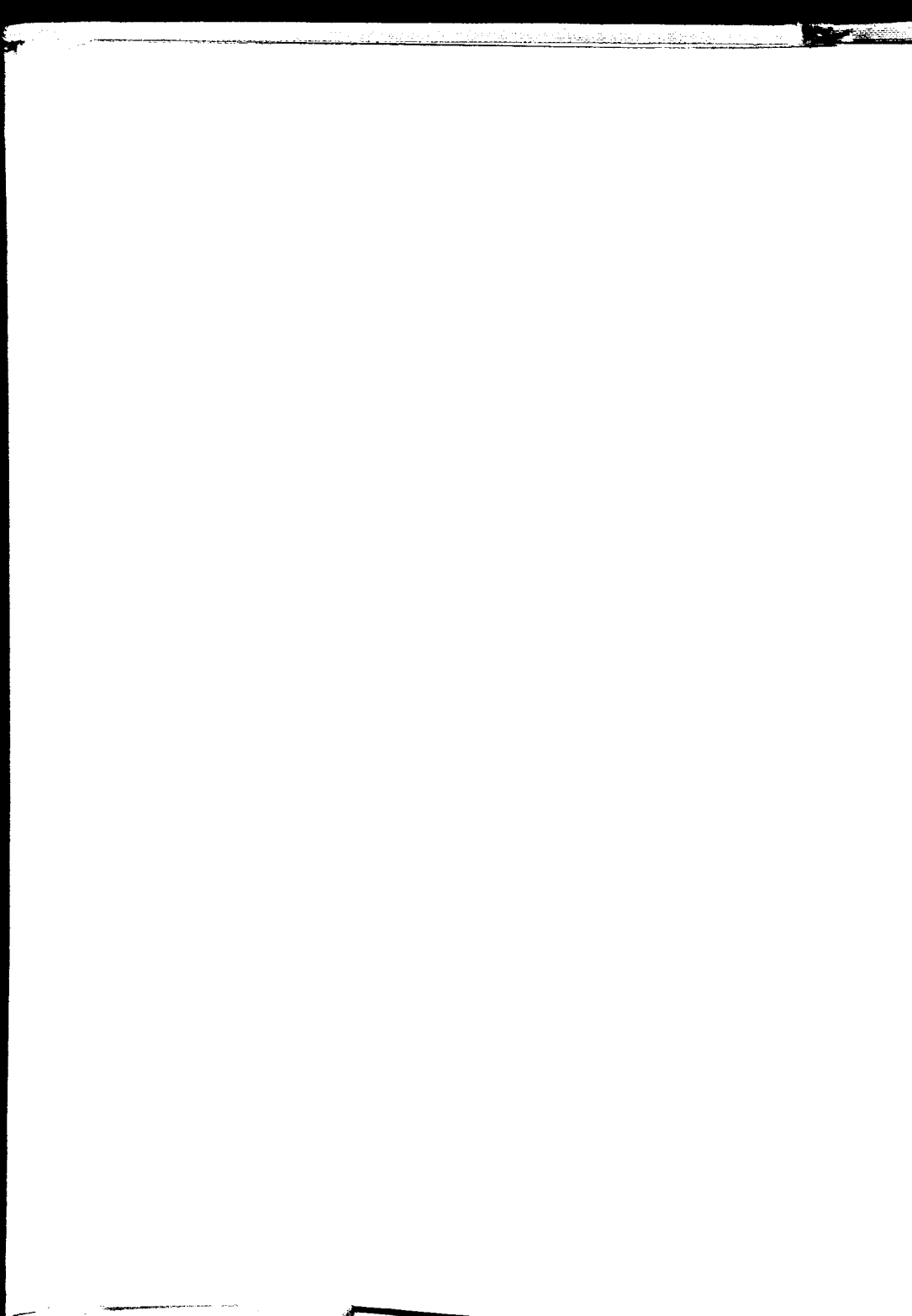
Monsieur Teste's friend Paul Valéry, who himself must seem a figure in the Teste legend, is necessarily central to that "drama of consciousness," instructing us, as he does, in what he calls the triad of man's "possibilities": consciousness, sensibility, and knowledge. In Valéry's thought the components of this group represent man's full range—all he can think, feel, or make. These are his whole potential.

Valéry's first conception of Monsieur Teste was a kind of abstract man without a name—merely "the portrait of a certain Monsieur." It may be that Valéry himself had not yet fully realized the importance of his creation and was hardly prepared to take Monsieur Teste seriously. But that impression was erased when Valéry posed his basic question: *Que peut un homme?* "What is a man's potential?" Here Valéry sounds his fundamental note.

JACKSON MATHEWS



MONSIEUR TESTE



Preface

THIS CHARACTER out of my fantasy, whose author I became in the days of my partly literary, partly solitary or . . . inward youth, has lived, apparently, since that faded time with a certain *life*—which his reticence, more than what he said, has persuaded a few readers to attribute to him.

Teste was conceived—in a room where Auguste Comte spent his early years—at a period when I was drunk on my own will and subject to strange excesses of consciousness of my *self*.

I was suffering from the acute ailment called precision. I tended toward the extreme of the reckless desire to understand, and I searched in myself for the critical points in my powers of attention.

In this way I was doing what I could to extend the duration of certain thoughts. Everything that came easy for me was of no interest, and almost an enemy. The sense of effort seemed to me the thing to be sought, and I saw no value in those lucky finds that are no more than the natural fruits of our native powers. That is, results in general—and consequently, works themselves—were much less important to me than the workman's energy, the substance of things he hopes for. This shows that theology is to be found almost everywhere.

For me literature was suspect, even the fairly precise works of poetry. The act of writing always requires a kind of

"sacrifice of the intellect." We know very well, for instance, that our way of reading literature is incompatible with any excessive precision of language. The intellect would gladly require of the common language a purity and perfection that are not in its power. But rare are the readers who find their pleasure only in stretching the mind. We get their attention by way of a certain amusement; and that sort of attention is passive.

Besides, it seemed to me unworthy to divide my ambition between the desire to produce an effect on others and the passion to know and acknowledge myself as I was, without omission, pretense, or complacency.

I rejected not only literature but almost the whole of philosophy as belonging amongst those Vague and Impure Things which I denied myself with all my heart. The traditional subjects of speculation stirred me so little that I was astonished at philosophers or at myself. I had failed to understand that the loftiest problems scarcely thrust themselves upon us and that they borrow much of their prestige and attraction from certain conventions which we must know and accept if we are to be received among the philosophers. Youth is a time when conventions are, and must be, poorly understood—either blindly opposed, or blindly obeyed. It is inconceivable at the beginning of the reflective life that only arbitrary decisions make it possible for man to found anything whatever: language, society, knowledge, works of art. As for myself, I was so far from understanding this that I made it my rule secretly to consider as void or contemptible all opinions and habits of mind that arise from living together and from our external relations with other men, which vanish when we decide to be alone. And I could think only with disgust of all the ideas and all the feelings developed or

PREFACE

aroused in man simply by his fears and his ills, his hopes and his terrors, and not freely by his direct observation of things and himself.

I was trying, then, to reduce myself to my *real* properties. I had little confidence in my abilities, and with no trouble at all I found within me all that was needed to hate myself; but I was strong in my infinite desire for clarity, in my contempt for beliefs and idols, my disgust for all that was easy, and my awareness of my limitations. I had made for myself an inner island and spent my time reconnoitering and fortifying it.

Monsieur Teste was born one day of a recent memory of those states.

It is in this that he resembles me as closely as a child, conceived by someone at a moment of profound change in his own being, resembles that father out of his mind.

It may happen that now and then we throw off into life the exceptional creature of an exceptional moment. It is not impossible, after all, that the singularity of certain men, the qualities good or bad that set them apart, may be due at times to the momentary condition of their begetters. It may be in this way that instability is transmitted and given a certain career. Besides, in matters of the mind, is this not the function of our works, the act of talent, the very object of our labors, and in short, *the essence of the bizarre instinct to make our rarest finds survive us?*

Coming back to Monsieur Teste, and observing that a character of this kind could not survive in reality for more than a few quarters of an hour, I say that the problem of that existence and its duration is enough to give it a sort of life. The problem itself is a seed. A seed is a living thing, but there are some that could never develop. These make an

effort to live, become monsters, and monsters die. In fact we know them only by this *remarkable property* of being unable to endure. The *abnormal* are those creatures who have a little less future than the *normal*. They are like the many thoughts that contain hidden contradictions. They are formed in the mind, they seem right and promising, but their consequences ruin them, and their presence is very soon fatal to themselves.

Who knows whether most of those prodigious thoughts over which so many great men and an infinity of lesser ones have grown pale for centuries are not, after all, psychological monsters—*Monster Ideas*—born of the naïve exercise of our questioning faculties, which we apply to anything at all, never realizing that we may reasonably question only what can actually give us an answer?

But the monsters of flesh quickly perish. Yet they have had a certain existence. Nothing is more instructive than to meditate on their destiny.

Why is Monsieur Teste impossible? That question is the *soul* of him. *It changes you into Monsieur Teste*. For he is none other than the very demon of possibility. His concern for the whole range of what he can do rules him. He observes himself, he maneuvers, he will not allow himself to be maneuvered. He knows only two values, two categories—those of consciousness reduced to its own acts: the *possible* and the *impossible*. In that strange head, where philosophy has little credit, where language is always under indictment, there is rarely a thought free of the sense that it is provisional; very little remains but expectation and the performance of definite operations. Its brief and intense life is spent in watching over the mechanism which sets up and regulates the relations between the known and the unknown. It even applies its

PREFACE

obscure and transcendent powers obstinately to simulating the properties of an isolated system in which the infinite plays no part.

To give some idea of such a monster, to describe his appearance and his habits, to sketch out at least a Hippogryph, a Chimera of the mind's mythology, requires—and therefore excuses—the use if not the creation of a forced language, at times vigorously abstract. It must also have a certain familiarity and even a few traces of the vulgarity or triviality that we use with ourselves. (We make no show of tact with the man inside us)

A piece of writing subject to these very special conditions is certainly none too easy to read in the original. All the more will it present almost insurmountable difficulties for anyone wishing to carry it over into a foreign language.

The Evening with Monsieur Teste

Vita Cartesii res est simplicissima

STUPIDITY is not my strong point. I have seen many persons; I have visited several countries; I have taken part in various enterprises without liking them; I have eaten nearly every day; I have had women. I can now recall a few hundred faces, two or three great spectacles, and the substance of perhaps twenty books. I have not retained the best nor the worst of these things: what could stay with me did.

Such arithmetic spares me any surprise at growing old. I could also count up the victorious moments of my mind and imagine them joined and blended, composing a *happy* life. . . . But I think I have always been a good judge of myself. I have rarely lost sight of myself; I have detested and adored myself; so, we have grown old together.

Often I have supposed that all was over for me, and I would begin ending with all my strength, anxious to drain and clarify some painful situation. This made me aware that we appraise our own thought too nearly as others *express* theirs! From that moment, the billions of words that have buzzed in my ears have rarely stirred me with what they were meant to mean; and all those I have myself spoken to others, I have always felt them become distinct from my thought—for they were becoming *invariable*.

If I had decided like most men, not only should I have felt superior to them but should have appeared so. I pre-

ferred myself. What they call a superior man is a man who has deceived himself. To be astonished at him, one must see him—and to be seen, he must show himself. And he shows me that he is possessed by an inane infatuation with his own name. So every great man is flawed with an error. Every mind said to be powerful begins with the mistake that makes it known. In exchange for the public's dime, he gives the time required to make himself noticeable, the energy spent in conveying himself, preparing to satisfy someone else. He goes even so far as to compare the crude sport of fame with the joy of feeling unique—the great private pleasure.

At that time I dreamed that the most vigorous minds, the canniest inventors, the most precise connoisseurs of thought, must be unknown men, misers, or those who die without confessing. Their existence was revealed to me precisely by those brilliant individuals a bit less *solid*.

This conclusion was so easy that I could see it taking shape from moment to moment. All that was needed was to imagine the usual sort of great men free of their first error, or even to base oneself on that error in order to conceive a higher degree of consciousness, a less crude sense of the mind's freedom. So simple an operation opened curious perspectives before me, as if I had gone down under sea. Along with the neglected creations produced every day by commerce, fear, boredom, or poverty, I thought I could make out certain *inner* masterpieces, lost amid the brilliance of published discoveries. It amused me to extinguish known history beneath the annals of anonymity.

Invisible in their limpid lives, they were solitaries who knew before all the rest. It seemed to me that in their obscurity they were twice, three times, many times greater than any famous person—they, in their disdain for revealing their

MONSIEUR TESTE

luck and their personal discoveries. They would have refused, I believe, to consider themselves anything more than things.

These ideas came to me during October of '93, at those moments of repose when thought takes pleasure simply in existing.

I was beginning to think no more about them, when I made the acquaintance of Monsieur Teste. (I am thinking now of the traces a man leaves in the little space he moves in every day.) Before I came to know Monsieur Teste, I was attracted by his special ways. I studied his eyes, his clothes, his slightest muffled words to the waiter at the café where I used to see him. I wondered whether he felt observed. I would turn my eyes quickly away from his, so as to catch his following me. I would take up the newspapers he had just been reading, I would rehearse in my mind the sober gestures he made unawares; I noticed that no one paid him any attention.

I had nothing more of this kind to learn when our relations began. I never saw him except at night. Once in a sort of . . . house; often at the theater. I was told that he lived by frugal weekly speculations on the stock market. He took his meals in a small restaurant in the Rue Vivienne. There he would eat as if he were taking a purgative, with the same quick gestures. Occasionally he would allow himself a fine leisurely meal elsewhere.

Monsieur Teste was perhaps forty years old. His speech was extraordinarily rapid, and his voice low. Everything about him was unobtrusive, his eyes, his hands. Yet his shoulders were military and his step had an astonishing regularity. When he spoke he never lifted an arm or a finger; he had *killed his puppet*. He never smiled, nor said good morning or goodnight; he seemed not to hear a "How are you?"

His memory gave me much thought. The signs by which I could judge led me to imagine incomparable intellectual gymnastics. This was not, in him, an excessive trait but rather a trained and transformed faculty. Here are his own words: "I gave up books twenty years ago. I have burned my papers also. I scrape the quick. . . . I keep what I want. But that is not the difficulty. *It is rather to keep what I shall want tomorrow. . . .* I have tried to invent a mechanical sieve. . . ."

After a good deal of thought, I came to believe that Monsieur Teste had managed to discover laws of the mind we know nothing of. Certainly he must have devoted years to this research; even more certainly, other years and many more years had been set aside for maturing his inventions, making them his instincts. Finding is nothing. The difficulty is in acquiring what has been found.

The delicate art of duration, time, its distribution and regulation—using it on well-chosen things to give them special nourishment—this was one of Monsieur Teste's great experiments. He watched for the repetition of certain ideas; he sprinkled them with numbers. This served to make the application of his conscious studies in the end mechanical. He even sought to summarize this labor. He would often say: "Maturare! . . ."

Certainly his singular memory must have retained for him almost solely those impressions which our imagination, by itself, is powerless to construct. If we imagine an ascent in a balloon, we may with shrewdness and force produce many of the probable sensations of an aeronaut; but there will always remain something peculiar to the real ascent, and that difference from what we imagine expresses the value of the methods of an Edmond Teste.

This man had known quite early the importance of what

MONSIEUR TESTE

might be called human *plasticity*. He had investigated its mechanics and its limits. How deeply he must have reflected on his own malleability!

I had a glimpse of feelings in him that made me shudder, a terrible obstinacy in his delirious experiments. He was a man absorbed in his own variations, one who becomes his own system, who commits himself without reservation to the frightening discipline of the free mind, and sets his pleasures to killing his pleasures, the stronger killing the weaker—the mildest, the transitory, the pleasure of the moment and the hour just begun, destroyed by the fundamental—by hope for the fundamental.

And I felt that he was master of his thought: I record this absurdity here. The expression of feeling is always absurd.

Monsieur Teste had no opinions. I believe he stirred his passions when he willed, and to attain a definite end. What had he done with his personality? What was his view of himself? . . . He never laughed, there was never a look of distress on his face. He hated sadness.

He would talk and one felt included among things in his mind: one felt remote, mingled with the houses, the magnitudes of space, the shifting colors of the street, the street corners. . . . And the most artfully touching words—the very ones that bring their author closer to us than any other man, those that make us believe the eternal wall between minds is falling—would occur to him. . . . He was wonderfully aware that they would have moved *anyone else*. He would talk and one realized, though unable to discern the motives or the extent of the taboo, that a large number of words had been banished from his discourse. Those he used were at times so curiously sustained by his voice or lighted by his phrasing that their weight was altered and their meaning renewed.

At times they would lose all sense, seeming merely to fill a blank for which the appropriate term was still in doubt, or not provided by the language. I have heard him designate a concrete object by a group of abstract words and proper names.

To what he said there was no reply. He killed polite assent. Conversations were kept going by leaps that were no surprise to him.

If this man had changed the object of his inner meditations, if he had turned upon the world the controlled power of his mind, nothing could have resisted him. I am sorry to speak of him as we speak of those of whom statues are made. I am sure that between "genius" and him there is a quantity of weakness. He, so real! So new! So free of all deception, of all wonders! So hard! My own enthusiasm spoils him for me. . . .

How can one not feel enthusiasm for the man who never said anything *vague*? For the man who calmly remarked: "In all things I am interested only in the *ease* or the *difficulty* of knowing them and doing them. I take extreme care in measuring the degree of each, and in remaining detached. . . . And what do I care for what I know all too well?"

How can one not be won over by a man whose mind seemed to transform for itself alone every existing thing, a mind that *performed* everything that occurred to it? I imagined it handling, combining, transforming, connecting, and, within the field of its knowledge, able to cut off and deviate, illuminate, freeze this or heat that, suppress, heighten, name the unnamed, forget at will, subdue or brighten this or that. . . .

I am grossly simplifying his impenetrable powers. I don't dare say all that my subject suggests. Logic stops me. But in myself, every time the problem of Teste arises, curious formations appear.

MONSIEUR TESTE

On certain days I recover him quite clearly. He reappears in my memory, sitting beside me. I breathe the smoke of our cigars, I listen to him, I am *wary*. At times, reading a newspaper brings me up against some thought of his now justified by an event. And again I try a few of those experiments in illusion that used to delight me when we spent our evenings together. That is, I imagine him doing something I never saw him do. What is Monsieur Teste like when he is sick? In love, how does he reason? Is he ever sad? What would frighten him? What could make him tremble? . . . I wondered. I held the complete image of this rigorous man before me, trying to make it answer my questions. . . . It kept on fading.

He loves, he suffers, he is bored—like everyone else. But when he sighs, or heaves an elemental groan, I want him to bring into play the rules and forms of his whole mind.

Exactly two years and three months ago this evening I was with him at the theater, in a box lent to him. I have been thinking about this all day.

I can still see him standing beside the golden column at the Opéra; together.

He looked only at the audience. He was breathing the great burst of brilliance at the edge of the pit. He was red.

An immense copper girl separated us from a group murmuring beyond the dazzlement. Deep in the vapor glittered a naked bit of woman, smooth as a pebble. Numerous ladies' fans were independently alive over the audience, dark and bright, foaming up to the top lamps. My glance picked out dozens of small faces, alighted on a sad head, rippled over bare arms, over people, and finally flickered out.

Everyone was in his seat, free to make a slight movement.

I liked the system of classification, the almost theoretical simplicity of the audience, the social order. I had the delightful sensation that all who breathed in that cube would follow its laws, flare up in great circles of laughter, grow excited in sections; feel in *groups* things *intimate—unique—secret* stirrings, rising to the unavowable! I strayed over those layers of people row by row, in orbits, fancying that I could bring together ideally all those having the same illness or the same theory or the same vice... One music touched us all; it swelled to abundance, then became quite small.

It vanished. Monsieur Teste was murmuring: "One is handsome or extraordinary only to others. *They* are eaten by others!"

The last word arose from the silence created by the orchestra. Teste drew his breath.

His face, flushed with heat and color, his broad shoulders, his dark figure splashed with light, the shape of the whole clothed block of him propped against the heavy column, struck me again. Not an atom escaped him of all that was becoming perceptible, momentarily, in that grandeur of red and gold.

I watched his skull making acquaintance with the angles of the capital, the right hand cooling itself among the gilt cornices; and in the purple shadow his large feet. From the far reaches of the theater, his eyes turned toward me; his mouth said: "Discipline is not bad... It's at least a beginning..."

I found nothing to reply. He said in his low quick voice: "Let them enjoy and obey!"

His eyes were fixed for a long moment on a young man seated facing us, then on a woman, then on a whole group in the upper galleries—overflowing the balcony in five or six

MONSIEUR TESTE

glowing faces—then on the whole audience, the whole theater filled like the heavens, tense, fascinated by the stage we could not see. The stupor that held all the others told us that something or other sublime was going on. We watched the dying light reflected from all the faces in the audience. And when it was quite faint, when the light no longer shone, all that was left was the vast phosphorescence of those thousand faces. I saw that the twilight was making all these souls passive. Their attention and the darkness, both increasing, formed a continuous equilibrium. I was myself attentive *inevitably*—to all that attention.

Monsieur Teste said: "The supreme simplifies *them*. I wager they are all thinking, more and more, *toward* the same thing. They will be equal at the climax or common limit. Yet the law is not so simple. . . since it does not include me; and—here I am."

He added: "The lights hold them."

I said, laughing: "You too?"

He replied: "You too."

"What a dramatist you would make!" I said. "You seem to be watching some experiment on the frontiers of all the sciences! I would like to see a theater inspired by your meditations. . . ."

He said: "No one meditates."

The applause and the house-lights drove us out. We circled and went down. The people passing seemed free. Monsieur Teste complained mildly of the midnight chill. He alluded to old pains.

As we walked along, he was muttering almost incoherent phrases. Although I tried, I could barely follow his words, and in the end merely recalled them. The incoherence of speech depends on the one listening to it. The mind seems

to me so made that it cannot be incoherent to itself. That is why I was careful not to classify Teste among the mad. Besides, I could vaguely make out the thread of his ideas, and I noticed no contradiction in them; also, I should have feared too simple a solution.

We were going through streets made quiet by the darkness, turning corners in the void, finding our way by instinct—wider, narrower, wider. His military step dominated mine.

“And yet,” I replied, “how can we escape music of such power! And why should we? I find a special excitement in it; must I reject it? I find in it the illusion of a tremendous work that might suddenly become possible for me. . . an illusion that gives me *abstract sensations*, delightful images of everything I love—change, movement, mixture, flow, transformation. . . Will you deny that certain things are anaesthetic? Trees that make us drunk, men who give us strength, girls who paralyze us, skies that strike us dumb?”

Monsieur Teste raised his voice in reply:

“But, Monsieur! What does the ‘talent’ of your trees—or anybody’s—matter to me? I am at home in MYSELF, I speak my own language, I hate extraordinary things. Only weak minds need them. Believe me literally: genius is *easy*, divinity is *easy*. . . I mean simply. . . that I know how it is to be conceived. It is *easy*.”

“In the past—some twenty years ago—anything above the ordinary achieved by another man was for me a personal defeat. At that time, I could see nothing but ideas stolen from me! How stupid! . . . To say that our own image is not a matter of indifference to us! In our imaginary battles, we treat it either *too well* or *too badly*! . . .”

He coughed. He said to himself: "*Que peut un homme?* . . . What is a man's potential?" He said to me: "You know a man who knows that he doesn't know what he is saying!"

We were at his door. He invited me to come in and smoke a cigar with him.

At the top floor of the house, we went into a very small "furnished" apartment. There was not a book in sight. Nothing indicated the usual sort of work at a table, beneath a lamp, amongst pens and papers. In the greenish room smelling of mint, there around the candle was nothing but the dull abstract furniture—a bed, a clock, a wardrobe with a mirror, two armchairs—like creations of the mind. On the mantelpiece a few newspapers, a dozen calling cards covered with numbers, and a medicine bottle. I have never had a stronger impression of the *ordinary*. This was any room, like "any point" in geometry—and perhaps as useful. My host existed in lodgings of the most usual sort. I thought of the hours he would spend in that armchair. I was terrified by the infinite dreariness possible in that abstract and banal place. I have lived in such rooms—I could never believe, without a shudder, that they were my final destination.

Monsieur Teste talked about money. I cannot reproduce his special eloquence: it seemed to me less precise than usual. Fatigue, the silence deeper by the hour, the bitter cigars, the relaxation of night, seemed to overtake him. I still hear his voice, softer and slower, fluttering the flame of the single candle burning between us, while he cited very large numbers, wearily. Eight hundred ten million seventy-five thousand five hundred fifty. . . . I listened to that extraordinary music without following the calculation. He was reciting for me the fluctuations of the stock market, and the long sequences of the names of numbers held me like a poem. He

would compare events of the day, industrial phenomena, public taste and the passions, and still more numbers, one with another. He would say: "Gold is somehow the mind of society."

Suddenly, he was silent. He was in pain.

Again I looked around the chill room at the nullity of the furniture, not to look at him. He took his flask and drank. I stood up to leave.

"Stay on," he said, "you don't mind. I'm going to bed. In a few moments I'll be asleep. You'll take the candle to go down."

He undressed quietly. His gaunt body slid beneath the covers and lay still. Later he turned over and sank deeper into the bed—it was too short.

He said with a smile. "I'm a plank...floating!...I feel an imperceptible rolling under me—a vast movement? I sleep for an hour or two at most...I'm fond of navigating the night. Often I can't distinguish my thought from sleep. I don't know whether I have been asleep. In the past, whenever I drowsed I would think of all that had given me pleasure—faces, things, moments. I would bring them to mind so that thinking would be as pleasant as possible, smooth as the bed...I'm old. I can show you that I feel old... Remember! When we are children we *discover* ourselves, we learn little by little the extent of our body, we express our body's particularity by a series of movements, I suppose? We twist and discover or rediscover ourselves, and are amazed! We touch our heel, or hold the right foot in the left hand, we take a cold foot into a warm palm!... Now, I know myself by heart. My heart included. Bah! The whole earth is staked off, all the flags are flying over all territories. ... My bed remains. I'm fond of this flow of sleep and linen;

the sheet stretched and folded, or crumpled—falling over me like sand when I lie ‘dead’ still, it curdles around me in sleep. . . . A very complex bit of mechanics. Along the warp or the woof, the slightest deviation. . . . Ah-h-h!”

He was in pain.

“What’s the matter?” I said. “I can. . . .”

“It’s nothing. . . much,” he said. “It’s. . . a tenth of a second appearing. . . . Wait. . . . At certain moments my body lights up. . . . This is very odd. Suddenly, I can see into myself. . . . I can make out the depths of the layers of my flesh; I feel zones of pain. . . rings, poles, plumes of pain. Do you see these living forms, this geometry of my suffering? There are certain flashes that are exactly like ideas. They make me understand—from here, to there. . . . Yet they leave me uncertain. ‘Uncertain’ is not the word. . . . When *it* is coming on, I find something confused or diffused in me. Inside my *self*. . . foggy places arise, there are open expanses that come into view. Then I pick out a question from my memory, some problem or other. . . and plunge into it. I count grains of sand. . . and so long as I can see them. . . . My increasing pain forces me to notice it. I think about it! Waiting only to hear my cry. . . and the moment I hear it, the *object*, the terrible *object*, smaller and still smaller, vanishes from my inner sight. . . .

“What is a man’s potential? I fight against everything—except the suffering of my body, beyond a certain intensity. Yet, it is there I should begin. Because. . . to suffer is to give supreme attention to something, and I am somewhat a man of attention. . . . Let me tell you that I foresaw my future illness. I had thought with precision about something everyone else knows. I believe that such a look at an obvious portion of the future should be a part of one’s education. Yes, I

had foreseen what is now beginning. At the time, it was an idea like any other. So I was able to pursue it."

He was calm now.

He turned on his side, closed his eyes; and a moment later was talking again. He was beginning to lose himself. His voice was no more than a murmur in the pillow. His reddening hand was already asleep.

He was still talking: "I am thinking, and that hinders nothing. I am alone. How comfortable solitude is! Nothing soft is weighing on me. . . . The same reverie here as in the ship's cabin, or at the Café Lambert. . . . If a Bertha's arms become important, I am robbed—as by pain. . . . Any man who talks to me, if he has no proof, is an enemy. I prefer the brilliance of the least fact that happens. I am being and seeing myself; seeing me see myself, and so forth. Let's think very closely. Rubbish! Any subject at all will put you to sleep. . . . Sleep will prolong any idea at all. . . ."

He was snoring softly. A little more softly, I took the candle and went out on tiptoe.

A Letter from Madame Émilie Teste

Kind Sir,

I send you thanks for your gift and for your letter to Monsieur Teste. I feel sure that the pineapple and the jam were not unwelcome, and I know that the cigarettes pleased him. As for the letter, anything I might say about it would be deceiving. I read it to my husband, but scarcely understood it. Yet I confess that it gave me a certain delight. Listening to things that are abstract or beyond my understanding does not bore me; I find an almost musical enchantment in them. A good part of the soul can enjoy without understanding, and in me it is a large part.

So I read your letter aloud to Monsieur Teste. He listened without showing what he thought of it, nor even that he was thinking about it. You know that he reads almost nothing with his eyes, but uses them in a strange and somehow *inner* way. I am mistaken—I mean a *particular* way. But that is not it at all. I don't know how to put it; let's say *inner, particular . . .*, and *universal!* !! His eyes are beautiful; I admire them for being somewhat larger than all that is visible. One never knows if anything at all escapes them, or, on the other hand, whether the world itself is not simply a detail in all that they see, a floating speck that can besiege you but does not exist. Sir, in all the time I have been married to your friend I have never been sure of what he sees. The object his eyes fix upon may be the very object that his mind means to reduce to nothing.

Our life is still just as you know it: mine, dull and useful; his, all habit and abstraction. Not that he doesn't wake and come back, when he wishes, terribly alive. I like him this way. He is fierce and tall suddenly. The mechanism of his monotonous acts explodes; his face sparkles; he says things that, often, I can barely make out, yet they remain undiminished in my memory. But I don't wish to hide anything from you, or very little: *at times he is impenetrable*. I don't believe anyone can be so adamant as he is. He breaks your spirit with a word, and I feel like a flawed vase rejected by the potter. He is stern as an angel, Sir. He does not know his strength: he utters unexpected words that carry too much truth; they destroy people, waken them in the midst of their stupidity, face to face with themselves, trapped in what they are, and living so naturally on nonsense. We live at ease, each in his own absurdity like fish in water, and are never aware but by accident of all the folly contained in the life of a reasonable person. We never think that what we think conceals from us what we are. I do hope, Sir, that we are worth more than all our thoughts, and that our greatest merit before God will be in having tried to stand on something more durable than our mind babbling to itself, however beautifully.

Moreover, Monsieur Teste need not speak to reduce those around him to humility and an almost animal stupidity. His very existence seems to disqualify all others, and even his manias make one think.

But you must not imagine that he is always difficult or overwhelming. If you knew, Sir, how otherwise he can be! . . . Certainly he is stern on occasion; but at other times he takes on an exquisite and surprising gentleness that seems to come down from the heavens. His smile is a mysterious

and irresistible gift, and his rare tenderness is a winter's rose. Yet neither his mildness nor his violence can be foreseen. It is vain to predict either his harshness or his kindness; all the ordinary calculations that people make about the character of their fellows are thrown off by his profound abstraction and the impenetrable order of his thoughts. My kindnesses, my willingness, my silly notions, my little feelings—I never know how they will affect Monsieur Teste. But I confess that nothing binds me to him more than the uncertainty of his moods. After all, I am quite happy not to understand him too well, not to foresee every day, every night, every next moment of my passage on earth. My soul longs to be surprised more than anything else. Expectation, risk, a bit of doubt, these exalt and vivify my spirit far more than certainty. I believe this is not good; but it is how I am, though I reproach myself for it. I have more than once made confession for thinking that I would rather believe in God than see Him in all His glory, and I was blamed for it. My confessor told me that it was nonsense rather than a sin.

Forgive me for writing to you about my poor self when you want only to have news of the man who interests you so much. But I am somewhat more than the witness of his life; I am a part, almost an organ of it, though nonessential. Husband and wife as we are, our actions are harmonized in marriage and our temporal necessities are well enough adjusted, despite the immense and indefinable difference of our minds. So I am obliged to tell you incidentally about her, who is now telling you about him. Perhaps you find it difficult to conceive my situation with Monsieur Teste, and how I manage to spend my days in the intimacy of such an original man, finding myself so near and so far from him?

The ladies of my age, my true or apparent friends, are

greatly surprised that I, who seem so well suited to a life like theirs, being an agreeable enough woman, not undeserving of a simple comprehensible life, should accept a role they cannot in the least imagine for themselves in the life of such a man, whose reputation for eccentricities must shock and scandalize them. They are unaware that the slightest show of affection from my dear husband is a thousand times more precious than all the caresses of theirs. What is their love, always repeating itself, always the same—love that long since lost all surprise, the unknown, the impossible, everything that charges the slightest touch with meaning, risk, and power, knowing that the substance of one voice is the only sustenance of the soul, and that in the end all things are more beautiful, more meaningful—more luminous or sinister, more remarkable or empty—according to a mere guess at what is going on inside a changing person who has become mysteriously essential to us?

You see then, Sir, one must not be a connoisseur of the pleasures if he wants them free of anxiety. However sheltered I may be, I can well imagine how much the voluptuous delights lose in being tamed and suited to domestic habits. Mutual abandon and possession gain infinitely, I believe, by beginning in ignorance of their approach. That supreme certainty must arise out of a supreme uncertainty, and show itself to be the climax of a kind of drama whose pace and development we should find it difficult to trace, from calm up to the extreme threat of the event. . . .

Fortunately—or not—I am never sure of Monsieur Teste's feelings toward me; and this matters less to me than you would believe. Though mine is a very strange marriage, I am fully aware that it is so. I knew very well that great souls set up a household only by accident; or perhaps to provide a

warm room where, insofar as a woman can enter into the system of their lives, she will always be at hand and shut in. The soft glow of a rather smooth shoulder is not to be despised, seen dawning between two thoughts! . . . Men are like that, even the deep ones.

I do not say this about Monsieur Teste. He is so strange! In fact, nothing can be said about him that is not mistaken at the moment! . . . I believe he has too much sequence in his ideas. He misleads you at every step in a web that he alone knows how to weave, break off, take up again. He spins out in himself such fragile threads that they survive their delicacy only with the concerted help of all his vital powers. He stretches them over the unknown depths within him, and ventures no doubt far beyond ordinary time, into some abyss of the difficult. I wonder what becomes of him there? It is clear that one is no longer himself under those constraints. Our humanity cannot follow us toward such distant lights. His soul, no doubt, changes into some peculiar plant whose root, and not the foliage, would thrust against nature toward the light!

Is that not aiming beyond the world? Will he find life or death, at the extremity of his attentive will? Will it be God, or some frightful sense of encountering, at the deepest point of thought, nothing but the pale ray of his own miserable substance?

One would have to have seen him in those excesses of abstraction! At such times, his whole countenance is altered—obscured! . . . A bit more of such absorption, and I am sure that he would be invisible! . . .

But Sir, when he comes back to me from the depths! He seems to discover me like a new land! To him I seem unknown, new, necessary. He seizes me blindly in his arms, as

if I were a living rock of real presence, on which his great and incommunicable genius might stumble, clutch, and suddenly take hold, after so much monstrous and inhuman silence! He falls back upon me as if I were the earth itself. He awakes in me, comes back to himself in me, what joy!

His head lies heavy on my face, and I am prey to all his nervous strength. He has a force and frightening presence in his hands. I feel myself in the grip of a stonemason, a surgeon, a murderer, under their brutal and precise handling; and I imagine, in terror, that I have fallen under the claws of an intellectual eagle. Shall I give you the whole of my thought? I imagine that he is not fully aware of what he is doing, what he is molding.

His whole being, concentrated in a certain *place* on the frontiers of consciousness, has just lost its ideal object, that object which does and does not exist, since it is only a matter of slightly more or less tension. It required the whole energy of the whole of a great body to sustain in the mind that diamond instant, at once idea and Thing, both entrance and end. You see, Sir, when this extraordinary husband takes hold and masters me, as it were, putting the imprint of his strength upon me, I feel that I am a substitute for some object of his will that just then escaped him. I am like the plaything of a muscular thought—I express it as best I can. The truth he was awaiting took on my strength and my living resistance; and by a quite ineffable transposition, his inner urges subside, discharged through his hard and determined hands. These are very difficult moments. What can I do then! I take refuge in my heart, where I love him as I wish.

As to his feeling for me, what opinion of myself he may have, these are things I do not know, just as I know nothing more about him than is to be seen and heard. I told you a

moment ago what I assume, but I do not really know what thoughts or plans occupy him for so many hours. As for myself, I keep to the surface of life; I drift with the passing days. I tell myself that I am the servant of that incomprehensible moment when my marriage was decided, as of itself. A wonderful moment, perhaps supernatural?

I cannot say that I am loved. You may be sure that the word love, so vague in its ordinary use and suggesting many different images, is entirely meaningless when it describes the relations between my husband's heart and my person. His head is a locked treasury, and I am not sure that he has a heart. Am I ever sure that he recognizes me; that he loves or observes me? Or does he observe through me? You will understand that I do not mean to make much of this. In short, I feel that I am in his hands and among his thoughts, like an object, at times the most familiar and again the strangest thing in the world to him, according to the nature of his sight, varying as it focuses.

If I dared tell you about a frequent impression of mine, just as I am aware of it myself, and as I have often confided it to Abbé Mosson, I would say, figuratively, that I feel as if I live and move in a cage, where a superior mind holds me captive—*by its very existence*. His mind contains my own, as a man's mind contains a child's or a dog's. Don't mistake me, Sir. At times I move about in our house, going and coming; the notion of singing comes over me, and rises as I skip and dance from room to room with improvised gaiety and a remainder of youth. But however sprightly my dance, I never cease to feel the sway of that powerful absent figure, somewhere in an armchair, musing, smoking, looking at his hand, slowly flexing all its joints. Never do I feel my spirit without its bounds. But surrounded, enclosed. Heavens!

How difficult it is to explain! I don't at all mean *captive*. I am free, but classified.

What we have that is most ours, most precious, is obscure to ourselves, as you well know. It seems to me that I should lose my being, if I knew myself completely. Well, for one man I am transparent, seen and foreseen just as I am, without mystery, or darkness, or any possible recourse to my unknown self—to my own ignorance of myself!

I am a fly, flitting through its meager life in the universe of an unflinching eye; seen at times, then unseen, but never out of sight. I know at every moment that I exist within a consciousness always vaster and more general than all my vigilance, always quicker than my promptest and quickest thoughts. The highest impulses of my soul are for him small and insignificant events. And yet I have an infinity of my own. . . . I feel it. I cannot but recognize that it is contained in his, and I cannot consent that it should be so. It is something inexpressible, Sir, that I should be capable of thinking and acting absolutely as I will, and yet can never, *never*, think nor will anything that is unforeseen, or important, or new to Monsieur Teste! . . . I can assure you that such a strange and constant feeling gives me ideas that go very deep. . . . I may say that my life seems to me at every moment a living model of man's existence in the divine mind. I have the personal experience of being within the sphere of a being, just as all souls are in Being.

But alas! This very sense of a presence one cannot escape, and of such deep insight, does not fail to lead me at times into vile thoughts. I am tempted. I tell myself that this man is perhaps damned, that in his company I am in great danger, and that I am living in the shade of an evil tree. . . . But then almost immediately I am aware that these specious reflec-

tions themselves conceal the peril which they warn me to beware of. I sense in their implications a very clever temptation to dream of another and more delightful life, of other men . . . and I am appalled at myself. I think back over my own life; I feel that it is as it must be; I tell myself that I *will* my lot, that I choose it anew at every instant; I hear within me the clear deep voice of Monsieur Teste calling me . . . But if you knew by what names!

No woman in the world is called by such names as I am. You know what ridiculous epithets lovers use with each other: pet names of dogs and parrots are the natural fruits of carnal intimacy. The voices of the heart are childish. The voices of the flesh are elemental. In fact, Monsieur Teste thinks that love consists in the privilege of *being silly beasts together*—the complete licence of nonsense and bestiality. So he calls me whatever he will. He nearly always names me according to what he wants of me. The name alone that he gives me tells me in one word what I am to expect or what I must do. When he wants nothing in particular, he calls me "Being" or "Thing." And sometimes he calls me "Oasis," which pleases me.

But he never tells me that I am stupid—and this touches me very deeply.

Our priest, who has a great and charitable curiosity about my husband and a sort of compassionate sympathy for a mind so isolated, tells me frankly that Monsieur Teste inspires feelings in him very difficult to reconcile. He said to me the other day: *Your husband's faces are innumerable!*

He considers him "a monster of isolation and peculiar knowledge," and he explains him, though with regret, by his pride, one of those prides that cut us off from the living, and not only the now living but the eternally living; a pride

that would be wholly abominable and almost Satanic, if, in a soul already too much exercised, such pride were not so bitterly turned against itself, and with so precise a knowledge of itself that the evil is somehow impaired at its source.

“He is frightfully cut off from the good,” my confessor told me, “but fortunately he is also cut off from evil. . . . He has in him a sort of frightening purity, a detachment, an undeniable strength and clarity. I have never observed such an absence of uncertainty and doubt in a mind so profoundly tormented. He is terribly tranquil! No uneasiness of spirit can be attributed to him, no inner darkness—and nothing, moreover, derived from the instincts of fear or desire. . . . Yet nothing that tends toward Charity.

“His heart is a desert island. . . . The whole scope, the whole energy of his mind surround and protect him; his depths isolate him and guard him against the truth. He flatters himself that he is entirely alone there. . . . Patience, dear lady. Perhaps, one day, he will discover some footprint on the sand. . . . What holy and happy terror, what salutary fright, once he recognizes in that pure sign of grace that his island is mysteriously inhabited! . . .”

So I said to our priest that my husband often reminded me of a mystic without God. . . .

“What an insight!” he said, “what insights women sometimes derive from the simplicity of their impressions and the vagueness of their language! . . .”

But immediately and to himself, he replied: “A mystic without God! . . . Brilliant nonsense! . . . It’s too easy! . . . Spurious light. . . . A Godless mystic, dear lady! But no movement is conceivable without direction and aim, with-

MONSIEUR TESTE

out going somewhere in the end! . . . A Godless mystic! . . . Why not a Hippogryph, a Centaur!"

"Why not a Sphinx, Father?"

As a Christian, he is even grateful to Monsieur Teste for the freedom allowed me to follow my faith and give myself to my devotions. I am entirely free to love God and serve Him, and I find it possible to share myself very happily between Our Lord and my dear husband. Monsieur Teste sometimes asks me to tell him about my prayers and explain to him as exactly as I can how I go about them, how I concentrate and sustain myself in them; and he wants to know if I lose myself in them as truly as I believe I do. But I have hardly begun searching my memory for the words, when he is already ahead of me, interrogating himself; then putting himself miraculously in my place he tells me such things about my own prayers, and in such precise detail that they are clarified, penetrated somehow in their secret depths—and so he reveals to me their tendency and desire! . . . His language has some strange power to make us see and understand what is most hidden in us. . . . And yet his remarks are human, no more than human; they are simply the deeper forms of faith recovered by artifice and marvelously articulated by a mind of incomparable audacity and depth! He would seem to have coolly explored the fervent soul. . . . But what I find frightfully lacking in this restoration of my burning heart and its faith, is its essence which is *hope*. . . . There is not a grain of hope in the whole substance of Monsieur Teste; and that is why I feel a certain uneasiness in this exercise of his power.

I have very little more to tell you today. I shall not excuse myself for writing at such length, since you asked me to do

A LETTER FROM MADAME ÉMILIE TESTE

so and since you say that you have an insatiable appetite for your friend's every act and gesture. But I must stop. It is time now for our daily walk. I am going to put on my hat. We shall walk slowly through the stony and tortuous little streets of this old city which you know somewhat. In the end, we go down where you would like to go if you were here, to that ancient garden where all those who think, or worry, or talk to themselves, go down towards evening as water goes to the river, and gather necessarily together. They are scholars, lovers, old men, priests, and the disillusioned; all *dreamers*, of every possible kind. They seem to be seeking their distances from each other. They must like to see but not know one another, and their separate sorts of bitterness are accustomed to encountering each other. One drags his illness, another is driven by his anguish; they are shadows fleeing from each other; but there is no other place to escape the others but this, where the same idea of solitude invincibly draws each of all those absorbed souls. In a few minutes we shall be in that place worthy of the dead. It is a botanical ruin. We shall be there a little before sunset. Imagine us walking slowly, exposed to the sun, the cypresses, the cries of birds. The wind is cool in the sun; the sky, too beautiful at times, grips my heart. The unseen cathedral tolls. Here and there are round basins, banked and standing waist-high. They are filled to the brim with dark impenetrable water, on which the enormous leaves of the *Nymphaea Nelumbo* lie flat; and the drops that venture upon those leaves roll and glitter like mercury. Monsieur Teste absently gazes at those large living drops, or walks slowly among the rectangular flower beds with their green labels, where specimens of the vegetable kingdom are more or less cultivated. He is amused at this rather ridiculous order and takes delight in spelling out the baroque names

MONSIEUR TESTE

Antirrhinum Siculum
Solanum Warscewiczii!!!

And that *Sisymbriifolium*, what jargon!... And the *Vulgare*, and the *Asper*, and the *Palustris*, and the *Sinuata*, and the *Flexuosum*, and the *Praealtum!!!*

"This is a garden of epithets," he said the other day, "a dictionary and cemetery garden..."

And after a moment he said, "Learnedly to die... *Transiit classificando.*"

Accept, Sir and Friend, all our thanks and our pleasant memories.

ÉMILIE TESTE

Extracts from Monsieur Teste's Logbook

ONE OF MONSIEUR TESTE'S PRAYERS

Lord, I was in the Void, endlessly nothing and quiet. I was aroused from that condition to be thrust into this strange carnival. . . and in your care I was endowed with all that is needed to suffer, enjoy, understand, and be wrong; but these gifts are unequal.

I consider you the master of that darkness I look into when I think, and on which the last thought will be inscribed.

Grant, O Darkness—grant the supreme thought. . . .

But any generally ordinary thought may be the "supreme thought."

If it were otherwise, if there were one thought *supreme in itself* and *of itself*, we could discover it by reflection or by chance; and once it was found, we should have to die. That would mean being able to die of a particular thought, merely because there was none to follow.

I confess that I have made an idol of my mind, but I have found no other. I have served it with offerings and curses. Not as a thing of mine. But. . . .

*

An analogy to De Maistre's remark on a gentleman's conscience! I don't know what a fool's conscience is, but a wit's is full of foolishness.

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

I don't know a certain thing; I can't grasp a certain thing, but I *know* Portius who understands it. I understand my Portius, I manipulate him as a man and one who contains what I don't know.

*

There are individuals who feel that their senses separate them from the real, from being. That sense in them infects their other senses.

What I see blinds me. What I hear deafens me. That by which I know makes me ignorant. I am ignorant inasmuch, and insofar, as I know. This light before me is a blindfold and hides either a darkness or a light more. . . . More what? Here the circle of that strange reversal closes: knowledge as a cloud over being; the bright world as an opaque growth on the eye.

Away with everything, so that I may see.

*

Dear Sir, you are perfectly "devoid of interest." But your skeleton is not, nor your liver, nor in itself your brain. Not even your stupid look, nor those belated eyes of yours—and all your ideas. If I could only know the mechanism of a fool!

*

I am not made for novels or plays. Their great scenes, rages, passions, tragic moments, far from exciting me, strike me as shabby outbursts, rudimentary states in which every sort of

EXTRACTS FROM MONSIEUR TESTE'S LOGBOOK

nonsense is let loose, in which the human being is simplified to the point of stupidity, and drowns instead of swimming in the surrounding water.

*

Reading the newspaper, I skip over the resounding drama, the incident that sets every heart palpitating. Where would they lead me if not to the very threshold of those abstract problems with which I am already quite at home.

*

I am quick or nothing—restless, a headlong explorer. At times I recognize myself in a particularly personal view capable of generalization.

These views blot out other views that cannot be lifted into generality—either for want of power in the seer, or for some other reason?

The result is an individual, regulated by his own powers of thought.

*

Man always standing on Cape Thought, stretching his eyes beyond the limits either of things, or of sight. . . .

It is impossible to receive the "truth" from oneself. When one feels it forming (this is an impression), one forms at the same moment *another self, an unaccustomed self*. . . and is proud of it—jealous of it. . . . (This is one limit of internal policy.)

Between a clear Self and a cloudy Self, a just Self and a guilty Self, there are old hatreds and old compromises, old disavowals and old entreaties.

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

A SORT OF PRIVATE PRAYER

I am thankful for this injustice, this insult that roused me, the sting of which flung me far beyond its ridiculous cause, giving me also the strength and the appetite for my own thought, to the point that my work in the end benefited from my rage; the search for my own laws profited from the incident.

*

Why I love what I love? Why I hate what I hate?

Who would not desire to upset the table of his desires and distastes? To change the direction of his instinctive responses?

How can it be that, at one and the same time, I am like a compass needle and a senseless body? . . .

I contain a lesser being which I must obey under an unknown penalty, which is death.

Love, hate are below.

Love, hate—*seem* to me accidents.

*

It is what I contain of the unknown to me that makes me myself.

It is my clumsiness, my uncertainty that is really myself.

My weakness, my frailty. . . .

Gaps are my starting point. My impotence is my origin.

My strength comes from you. My impulse goes from my weakness to my strength.

My real poverty generates an imaginary wealth; and I am that symmetry; I am the act that annuls my desires.

EXTRACTS FROM MONSIEUR TESTE'S LOGBOOK

There is in me some faculty, more or less active, to consider—and it even *must* consider—my tastes and distastes as purely accidental.

If I knew more about them, perhaps I should see a necessity—instead of this accident. But to see that necessity is still different. . . . What compels me is not myself.

*

Give yourself whole to your best moment, to your greatest memory. It is this you must recognize as king of time,

Your greatest memory,

The condition to which all discipline must bring you back.

That which allows you to despise yourself, as well as rightly to approve yourself.

Everything measured by that, which establishes a measure, degrees, in your development.

And if it is due to some other than yourself—deny it and know it.

Center of strength, of contempt, of purity.

I sacrifice myself inwardly to what I would be!

*

The idea, the beginning, the flash, the first moment of the first attempt, the jump, the leap beyond sequence. . . . Preparation, execution are for others. Cast your net here. This is the place in the sea where you will make your find. Good-bye.

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

... Old desire (here you are again, periodic prompter) to rebuild everything out of pure materials: nothing but designed parts, planned contacts and contours, nothing but controlled forms, and nothing vague.

*

MEDITATIONS ON HIS ANCESTORS, AND DESCENDANTS

The strangeness of those echoes of the ONE.

What! This solid block, ME! discovers parts outside itself!...

... This way of seeing, which contains the whole of me, which predicts, prepares in a certain smile all my explicit thought—the location of this *Thing* between the crease at the left corner of my mouth and the pressure of the eyelids and the torsion of the eye-muscles—this act essential to myself, this definition, this peculiar condition—exists on that other face, on the face of some dead man, on this man now, on that one again—in various epochs and ages. Of course! I know very well—these specimens have not experienced the same things; their experiments and their sciences were very different... But no matter! *They make no mistake about one another*; they sense each other.

Marvelous, the mathematical kinship among men. What is to be said about this forest of relations and resemblances? (We haven't half the words the Romans had, to talk about such things.) What mixtures and what diffusions!

*

I am endlessly aware of ability and will, because I am endlessly aware of the shapeless, and of the accidental that sur-

EXTRACTS FROM MONSIEUR TESTE'S LOGBOOK

rounds all these, tolerates them, and tends to recover its own fatal freedom, its indifferent face, its level of equal chance.

TOGETHER

Others: my caricature, my model, both.

Others: I rightly sacrifice them in silence; I burn them under the nose of my . . . soul!

And ME! I tear him apart, and feed him on his own substance—he chews it over and over, the only food to make him grow!

*

Others: I like him weak; strong, I worship and drink to him; I prefer you intelligent and passive . . . unless (a rare thing) and until, perhaps, another SAME appears—a precise response . . .

Meanwhile, what does the rest matter!

*

In what does this afternoon, this false light, this today, these known events, these papers, this ordinary everything, differ from any other everything; from any *day-before-yesterday*? The senses are not keen enough to see that changes have taken place. I know very well that it is not the same day, but I only know it.

Not keen enough, my senses, to undo this work, so subtle or so profound, which is the past; not keen enough for me to perceive that this room and that wall are not, perhaps, identical with what they were the other day.

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

IF THE SELF COULD TALK

A compliment—what an insult! He dares praise me! Am I not beyond all qualification? That is what a Self would say, if it *dared!*

And if the Self could speak (refrain).

*

POEM

(translated from the Self language)

O my Mind!

But I realize

That I loved you already so much!

Perhaps I was about to love you,

O my Mind!

But it occurs to me, O my Mind,

That I loved you already in quite another way!

You make yourself remember, not others but yourself,

And you are always becoming more like no one else.

More differently the same, and more same than me.

O Mine—but you are not yet entirely Me!

THE RICH IN SPIRIT

This man had in himself such possessions, such perspectives; he was made of so many years of reading, refutation, meditation, inner combinations, observations; of such ramifications that it was difficult to foresee his responses. He did not himself know what would come out, what aspect would finally impress him, what feeling would prevail in him, what

twist or unexpected simplification would occur, what desire would emerge, what retort, what insights! . . .

Perhaps he had arrived at that strange state of being unable to regard his own decision or inner response as more than an expedient, knowing very well that his thought would go on endlessly and that the idea of *ending* no longer has any meaning in a mind that knows itself well enough. He had come to that point of *inner civilization* where consciousness will no longer tolerate opinions without surrounding them with their retinue of qualifications, and finds its repose (if this be repose) only in the sense of its own miracles, its own exercise, its own substitutions, and its innumerable distinctions.

. . . In his head, where behind his closed eyes curious forms of rotation occurred—developments so various, so free, and yet so controlled—lights, like those of a lamp carried by someone walking through a house whose windows could be seen in the darkness, like far-off festivities, or fairs at night; but which might change into railway stations and savagery, if one could approach—or into frightful calamities—or truths and revelations. . . .

It was both sanctuary and brothel, as it were, of possibilities.

The habit of meditation brought this mind to live in—and by means of—rare states; in a perpetual assumption of purely ideal experiments; in the continual practice of extreme conditions and critical phases of thought. . . .

As if the extremes of rarefaction, unknown degrees of vacuum, hypothetical temperatures, monstrous pressures and weights had been his natural resources—and that no thought could exist in him except he expose it, for that very reason, to the most rigorous treatment, researching the whole domain of his existence.

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

The taste, and at times the talent for *transcendence*—by this I mean a real discontinuity, more real than any planned continuity, with the sense of being that which passes *immediately* from one thing into another, somehow traversing the most diverse orders—orders of magnitude... points of view, foreign adaptations... And those sudden recoveries, coming back to oneself, breaking off from whatever; and those bifid views, those tripod forms of attention, those contacts in another world between things separated in *their own*. That is me.

*

Despite your thoughts, as of themselves they go. And come again!

THE PERSONAL GAME

Rules of the game.

The game is won if you feel worthy of your own approval.

If you have won by calculation, conscious will, persistence, and a clear head, the gain is the greatest possible.

THE MAN OF GLASS

“So direct is my vision, so pure my sensation, so clumsily complete my knowledge, and so quick, so clear my reflection, and my understanding so perfect, that I see through myself from the farthest end of the world down to my unspoken word; and from the shapeless *thing* desired on waking, along the known nerve fibers and organized centers, I

EXTRACTS FROM MONSIEUR TESTE'S LOGBOOK

follow and *am* myself, I answer myself, reflect and reverberate myself, I quiver to the infinity of mirrors—I am glass.”

*

My solitude—which is nothing more than being for many years without *friends* long and deeply seen; without intense conversations, dialogues with no preamble, no subtleties but the rarest—costs me dear. It is not living to live without a living resistance, without objections, without that prey, that other person, the adversary, that undifferentiated remainder of the world, both obstacle and shadow of the self—another self—a rival, irrepressible intelligence—an enemy as best friend, that divine, that fatal and . . . intimate . . . hostility.

Divine! So, imagine a god who impregnates you, permeates you, infinitely dominates and infinitely understands—his joy at being challenged by his creature who is trying imperceptibly to be, to be separate. . . . Devour him and let him be reborn; a mutual joy, and increase.

If we knew, we would not speak—would not think, would not talk together.

Knowledge is somehow foreign, even to being. . . . Being knows nothing about itself, questions itself, demands answers. . . .

*

From what have I suffered most? Perhaps from the habit of working out my whole thought—of going to the very end in me.

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

I scorn your ideas so as to consider them in all clarity and almost as the futile ornament of my own ideas; and I see them as one sees, through clear water in a glass vase, three or four goldfish swimming about, making discoveries that are always naïve and always the same.

*

I am not stupid because every time I think I am stupid, I deny myself—kill myself.

*

Disgusted with being right, with doing what succeeds, with the effectiveness of methods, try something else.

Letter from a Friend*

MY FRIEND, here I am, far from you. We were just talking, and I am writing to you. This, *if you will*, is a very strange thing.

You will see that I am in a mood to marvel.

Merely coming back to Paris, after a rather long absence, has assumed for me a sort of metaphysical guise. I do not mean the actual journey only, the dark sacrifice of a night to noise and jolts. The inert but living body gives itself up to the moving deadweight that transports it. The express has a fixed idea which is the City. You are the captive of its ideal, the plaything of its monotonous rage. You are subjected to millions of blows struck offstage, and those rhythms and broken rhythms, the mechanical clanking and groaning—all the furious clatter of some factory making speed. You are drunk on whirling phantoms, on visions spilled into the void, and lights snatched away. The metal forged by this progress through the darkness makes you dream that a personal and brutal form of Time is attacking and disintegrating the deep, hard distance. The overstimulated brain, overcome by cruel treatment, necessarily produces, of itself and without knowing it, a whole modern literature. . . .

* A few indulgent minds having agreed, though without material proof, that this letter was sent to Monsieur Teste by a friend of his, a writer, it seemed appropriate to add it to this collection, which could do without it just as it could do without the collection. [p.v.]

At times, sensation comes to a stop. All those jolts taken together lead to nothing. The total movement is composed of an infinite number of repetitions; each moment convinces the next that we shall never arrive. . . .

Can it be that eternity and hell are the naïve expressions of some inevitable journey?

Nevertheless, by dint of an endless jostling of our bones and ideas in the dark, the sun and Paris finally turn up.

But the being of the mind—*the little man who is in man* (and who is always assumed in the crude image we make of knowledge)—performs his own change of presence. He does not circulate, like consciousness, through a phantasmagoria of visions and a tumult of phenomena. He travels according to his own nature, *and inside his nature*. I should have a great opinion of myself if I knew how to conceive his operation. If I could describe it for you, my self-esteem would grow infinitely. But there is no question of that. . . .

I imagine then, as best I can, that the sense of change of residence is accompanied, in some substance unknown and yet essential to us, by a process of subtle detachment and renewal. This is some deep arrangement being transformed. While departure is still scarcely decided, and long before the body begins to move, the mere idea that everything around us will change notifies our inner system of some mysterious alteration. From feeling that one is going away, everything still within reach very quickly loses its proximity. Things are, as it were, stricken in their powers of presence, and a few of them actually vanish. Only yesterday you were with me, yet there was a secret person in me already quite disposed not to see you again for a long time. I could no longer find you nearby in time, and yet I was holding your hand. For me, you had the color of absence and were somehow condemned

LETTER FROM A FRIEND

to have no imminent future. I was looking at you close on, but seeing you far off. Even the look in your eyes no longer held duration. It seemed that between you and me there were *two distances*, one still imperceptibly short, the other already enormous; and I did not know which should be taken for the more real of the two. . . .

During the journey, I observed my heart's expectations changing. Certain springs relaxed, others tightened. Our unconscious anticipations and our eventual surprises exchanged their deep locations. If I should meet you tomorrow, it would be a great surprise. . . .

Suddenly I felt in Paris, several hours before I was there. I was clearly recovering my Parisian spirits, which had been somewhat dispersed during my travels. They had been reduced to memories; now they were becoming living values again, resources to be used at every moment.

What a demon is the demon of abstract analogy! (You know how he torments me at times!) He whispered that I should compare this indefinable alteration going on in me to a rather sudden change of certain mental *probabilities*. Some response, some gesture, some expression on the face, which in Paris are the immediate effects of our impressions, are no longer so natural to us when we are away in the country, or taken into a milieu sufficiently foreign. Spontaneity is no longer the same. We are prepared to respond only to what is *probably present*.

Certain strange consequences could be drawn from this. A bold physicist, who would bring the living and even their feelings into his plans, might dare to define a postponement as a certain inner distribution. . . .

I greatly fear, old friend, that we are made of many things that know nothing about us. And this is how we fail to

know ourselves. If there is an infinite number of such things, all meditation is useless. . . .

It seemed to me that we were approaching a cloud of gossip. A thousand reputations were evolving, a thousand book titles *per second* were appearing and perishing indistinctly in that thickening fog. I did not know whether I was seeing or hearing that senseless agitation. There was writing that screamed, words that were men, and men that were names. . . . There is no place on earth, I thought, where language has greater frequency, more resonance, less reserve than in this very Paris where the literature, the sciences, the arts and politics of a great country are jealously concentrated. The French have stored all their ideas in one enclosure. Here we live in our own fire.

Talking, repeating, contradicting, predicting, slandering . . . all these verbs together summed up for me the buzzing of paradise and words.

What is more tiring than to conceive the chaos of a multitude of minds? Every thought in that tumult finds its like, its opposite, its antecedent and its successor. It is discouraged by so much sameness and so much of the unexpected.

Can you imagine the indescribable disorder kept up by ten thousand absolute individuals? Just think of the temperature that may be reached in a place where so great a number of *prides* are comparing themselves one to another. Paris contains and combines, and consummates or consumes, most of the brilliant failures summoned by their destinies to the *delirious professions*. . . . By this I mean all those occupations in which the principal instrument is one's opinion of oneself, and the raw material is the opinion of you held by others. The persons who practice them, and so are committed to being perennial candidates, are necessarily always afflicted

LETTER FROM A FRIEND

with certain delusions of grandeur, endlessly crossed and tormented by delusions of persecution. This tribe of *uniques* is ruled by the law of doing what no one has ever done and no one will ever do. This at least is the law of the *best*—that is, of those who have the pluck to will something obviously absurd. . . . They live for nothing else but to achieve the lasting illusion of being alone—for superiority is merely a solitude situated at the present limits of a species. Each of them finds his own existence on the nonexistence of others, who must be forced however to agree that they do not exist. . . . Please notice that I am only deducing what is contained in what is seen. If you doubt this, just try to discover the aim of work which must be absolutely impossible to perform for all but one particular individual, and which depends on the particularity of men? Think of the true meaning of a hierarchy founded on rarity. I sometimes amuse myself with an idea of our hearts borrowed from *physics*: they are made of an enormous injustice and a very small justice, intimately combined. I imagine that in each one of us there is one atom more important than all the others; it is composed of *two particles of energy* which would gladly be separated. They are contradictory energies, but indivisible. Nature has joined them forever, though they are furious enemies. One is the perpetual motion of a large *positive electron*, and this movement engenders a series of low-pitched sounds in which the inner ear can easily distinguish the deep monotonous phrase: *There's only me. There's only me. There's only me, me, me. . . .* As for the small, radically *negative electron*, it screams at the extremest pitch, piercing again and again in the cruelest way the egotistical theme of the other: *Yes, but there's so-and-so, and so-and-so*: And someone else! . . . For the name changes frequently. . . .

A bizarre kingdom in which all the beautiful things produced there are bitter food for all souls but one. And the more beautiful they are, the more bitterly they are resented.

But wait. It seems to me that every mortal contains, very near the center of his machine and in a favored place among the instruments for navigating his life, a little mechanism of incredible sensitivity, which indicates the state of his self-love. It tells whether one admires oneself, adores, hates, or puts oneself out of existence; and some living *indicator*, quivering over the hidden dial, hesitates terribly quickly between the zero of being a beast and the maximum of being a god.

Well, my good friend, if you would understand something about many things, just imagine that so vital and so delicate an apparatus is the plaything of the firstcomer.

And doubtless there are strange men in whom that hidden needle always stands at the point opposite the one you would swear it should indicate. They despise themselves at the very moment when they are universally admired, and to the contrary in the opposite case. But we know that no laws any longer are strictly obeyed. Now, there is only the more or less. . . .

And the train was still rushing on, violently flinging back poplars, cows, barns, and all earthly things, as if it were thirsty, or dashing toward pure thought or to catch up with some star. What supreme goal can require such a brutal ravishment, and so sudden a tossing away of landscape to all the devils?

We are approaching the fog. Certain names were becoming luminous. The sky was crowded with meteors, political and literary. Surprises were sputtering. The gentle were

bleating, the bitter were caterwauling, the fat were bellowing, the thin were screaming.

Schools, factions, salons, cafés, all were making themselves heard. When the air no longer sufficed, the ether crackled with messages. There was the deafening rattle of a duel in which the swords were lightning flashes of wit, and endless commonplaces were transmitted to the end of the world at the speed of light.

I beg your pardon for this abuse of the imperfect indicative; but that is the tense of incoherence, and I realize that I have been painting for you, if it may be called painting, the greatest conceivable incoherence. I shall add a few touches by way of a few more *imperfects*.

I could see in my mind the market, the stock exchange, the occidental bazaar for the exchange of illusions. I was fascinated with the wonders of instability, its astonishing duration, the power of paradoxes, the resistance of worn-out things. You could expect anything. Abstract wrestling took the form of sorcery. Fashion and eternity were locked in an embrace. The backward and the advanced were arguing the point that separates them. Novelty, even the new ones, were giving birth to very ancient consequences. What silence had wrought was being cried for sale. . . . In short, all possible mental events were being rapidly produced before my mind still half asleep. It was seized with terror, disgust, despair, and a shocking curiosity, while contemplating, tired and confused as it was, the ideal spectacle of that prodigious activity called intellectual. . . .

—INTELLECTUAL?...

That extraordinary word, coming vaguely into my mind, *stopped* dead the whole train of my visionary notions. The shock of a word in a head is an odd thing! The whole

mass of the *false*, at top speed, suddenly jumps out of line with the *true*...

Intellectual?... No answer. No idea. Trees, signal discs, endless harps on the horizontal strings of which there were plains, châteaux, and plumes of smoke flying past... I was looking into myself with the eyes of some stranger. I was stumbling into what I had just created. Bewildered amongst the debris of the intelligible, I rediscovered that big word lying inert and overturned, the word that had caused the catastrophe. It was doubtless a bit too long for the curves of my thought...

Intellectual... Anyone in my place would have understood. Anyone but me!...

You know, dear You, that my mind is of the obscurest sort. You know it by experience, you know it all the better for having heard it said a thousand times. There is no lack of persons, learned and benign and well-disposed, who are waiting until I am translated into French to read me. They complain against me to the public, they expose to it certain citations of my verse, in reading which I confess that they are right to be bewildered. They even acquire a deserved reputation for not understanding something; a fact that others might conceal. "*Modeste tamen et circumspetto judicio pronuntandum est,*" said Quintilian, in a passage which Racine took the trouble to translate, "*ne quod plerisque accidit, damnent quae non intelligunt.*" But, as for me, I am desperately sorry to distress these lovers of light. Nothing appeals to me but clarity. Alas, my friend! I assure you that I find it almost nowhere. I whisper this close to your ear. Don't spread it about. Guard my secret excessively. Yes, clarity for me is so uncommon that throughout the world—and particularly the thinking and writing world—I find it only in the proportion of dia-

LETTER FROM A FRIEND

mond to the planet. The darkness attributed to me is empty and transparent compared to what I find nearly everywhere. Happy are the others who agree among themselves that they understand each other perfectly! They write, and talk, without a qualm. You surmise how much I envy all those lucid persons whose works make us dream of the sweet ease of the sun in a crystal universe. . . . My bad conscience suggests at times that I should blame them in self-defense. It murmurs to me that only those who are looking for nothing never encounter the dark, and that people must be told only what they know already. But when I look into myself to the bottom, I must agree with what is said by so many distinguished persons. It is true, my friend, I am composed of an unfortunate mind which is never quite sure that it has understood what it has understood without realizing it. I find it very hard to distinguish what is clear without reflection from what is positively obscure. . . . This weakness is no doubt the source of my darkness. I am suspicious of all words, for even the slightest reflection shows the absurdity of trusting them. I have come to the point, alas, of comparing those words by which we traverse so lightly the space of a thought to thin planks thrown across an abyss, which allow crossing but no stopping. A man in swift movement uses them safely; but let him pause for the slightest moment, and that bit of time breaks them down and all together fall into the abyss. The man who goes quickly *has learned* he must not dwell; it would soon be found that the clearest text is a tissue of obscure terms.

All this could lead me into large and delightful digressions which I shall spare you. A letter is literature. And one of the strict laws of literature is that we must not go to the bottom of anything. This is also the general wish. Just look about you.

So there I was in my own abyss—which, for all of being my own, was none the less an abyss—so there I was in my own abyss, unable to explain to a child, or a savage, or an archangel, or to myself, that word *Intellectual*, which offers no difficulty to anyone at all.

It was not images that were lacking. But to the contrary, every time that terrible word looked into my mind, the oracle responded with a different image. All of them were naïve. Not one of them precisely blotted out my sense of not understanding.

Scraps of dream kept coming to me.

I was forming faces that I called “Intellectuals,” men almost motionless who caused great movements in the world. Or very animated men, in whom the quick actions of their hands and their mouths revealed imperceptible powers and objects that were by their nature invisible. . . . I beg your pardon for telling you the truth. I saw what I saw.

Men of thought, Men of letters, Men of science, Artists—Causes, living causes, individuate causes, minimal causes, causes within causes and inexplicable to themselves—and causes whose effects were as futile but at the same time as prodigiously important *as I wished*. . . . The universe of these causes and their effects existed and yet did not exist. This system of strange acts, of products and prodigies, had the all-powerful and empty reality of a game of cards. Inspiration, meditation, works, fame, talents—it depended on a certain look whether those things would be almost everything, and a certain other look whether they would be reduced to almost nothing.

Then, in an apocalyptic flash, I seemed to glimpse the disorder and fermentation of a whole society of demons. In a supernatural space, there appeared a sort of burlesque of

LETTER FROM A FRIEND

what happens in history. Fights, factions, triumphs, solemn execrations, executions, uprisings, tragedies of power! . . . In that Republic there were rumors of nothing but scandal, fortunes overwhelming or overwhelmed, conspiracies and attempted murder. There were closet plebiscites, meaningless coronations, frequent assassinations by *word of mouth*—not to speak of pilfering. This whole “intellectual” population was like the other. There were puritans, speculators, prostitutes, believers who seemed to be infidels and infidels pretending to be believers; there were the deceptively simple and the really stupid, the authorities and the anarchists, and even the executioners whose blades dripped ink. Some thought themselves priests and pontiffs, others prophets, others either Caesars or martyrs, or a bit of each. A few even in their actions took themselves to be children or women. The most ridiculous were those who, on their own authority, made themselves the judges and justices of the tribe. They seemed never to suspect that our judgments judge us, and that nothing exposes our weaknesses and reveals ourselves more naïvely than the attitude of pronouncing upon our neighbors. That art is dangerous in which the slightest errors can always be attributed to character.

Each of those demons looked at himself quite often in a paper mirror; what he saw there was the greatest or the lowest of human beings. . . .

I was vaguely searching out the laws of that empire. The obligation to be amusing; the need to make a living; the desire to survive; the pleasure of surprising, shocking, rebuking, teaching, despising: the goad of jealousy drove, stung, heated, and explained that Hell.

I saw myself there; and in a guise unknown to me, created perhaps by my writings. You are not unaware, dear

MONSIEUR TESTE

dreamer, that in dreams a *peculiar* accord arises between what one sees and what one knows; but it is not an accord that could withstand waking. I *see* Peter and I *know* that he is James. So I have had glimpses of myself, though rarely, and wearing another face; I could recognize myself only by an exquisite grief that pierced my heart. Either the ghost or myself, it seemed to me that one of us must *vanish*...

Goodbye. I should never have done if I tried to record for you all that took shape to confound me in the final moments of my journey. Goodbye. I almost forgot to tell you that I was snatched out of all this by the foot of a crusty Englishman, which crushed mine with no trouble at all, just as the black sweating train was coming to a stop. Goodbye.

NOTE

PAUL VALÉRY, not long before his death, had brought together a collection of notes and sketches with the intention of using them for a new edition of *Monsieur Teste*. The following fragments, belonging to very different periods of his life, have been chosen from that collection.

A Walk with Monsieur Teste

I COME to myself on summer mornings, about eleven o'clock, on a sidewalk filled with idlers, near the Madeleine where I have taken the habit of going for a stroll, to smoke and reflect on what the day's newspaper says—that is, to remind myself of all that it does not say. Very soon I encounter Monsieur Teste meditating in the opposite direction along the same easy line.

We both give up our ideas and come together to watch the quiet and incomprehensible movement in the street sweeping along shadows, circles, fluid structures, inconsequential acts, bringing at times someone pure and exquisite: a person, an eye, or a handsome animal creating endless golden forms and playing over the ground.

We drink the delicious flow. We watch the flecks of brilliance making everyone haphazardly smile, flickering across the forehead of a hurrying woman as she glides and weaves her way among the slender carriages and the other events. A pale street, a precipice of soft shade with velvet balconies, hangs abrupt there against a sky softly veiled in light; and in front of us, drowned in the pure and immense ground reflecting the daylight, strollers have come, looking like us, and soon to scatter into the sunlight.

We listen with delicately tuned ear to the mixture of noises in the ample street, our heads filled with the innumerable nuances of the stepping clusters of horses and the endless

flow of man, vaguely animating the background, making it rumble as in a dream with a sort of confused rhythm whose measure quavers and brings together the sound of steps, the abundant slough of the world, the transformations of the average each into the other, the general press of the crowd.

We are silent, and look fixedly at one another, anxious not to be a fragment of the crowd. But in me the enormous *other* presses from all sides. It breathes for me in its own impenetrable substance. If I smile, a bit of its magic pulp, very close to my thought, wrinkles; and by this change in my lips, I feel suddenly shrewd.

I no longer know what is mine: not even that smile, nor its effect, half thought.

What makes me unique mixes with the vast crowd and the passing wealth of this place; over there, political seed, the people flow among a few individuals, and across my reflections a flame of air and men endlessly replacing itself blows out or baffles, overtakes or at times precisely constitutes my thought.

A continual ability to begin and end consumes people, pieces of people, doubts, walking phrases, prostitutes, an endless gallop of colors bearing away the whole scene and even certain moments obliterated in a peculiar void. . . .

Dialogue: A New
Fragment concerning Monsieur Teste

MAN is different from me and you. What thinks is never what it thinks about; and since the first is a form with a voice, the latter takes on all forms and all voices. So, no one is man, Monsieur Teste least of all.

Neither was he a philosopher, nor anything of that kind, nor even a writer; and for that reason he thought a great deal—for the more one writes, the less one thinks.

He was continually adding to something I knew nothing about: perhaps he was making his method of conceiving faster and faster, perhaps he was devoting himself to the abundance of solitary invention. In either case, he remains the most satisfactory being I have met—that is, the only individual who endures in my mind.

Consequently, he was neither good nor bad nor stupid nor cynical nor otherwise; he did nothing but choose: this is the ability to make of a moment and oneself a pleasing group.

He had given himself an advantage over everyone else: that of having a useful idea of himself; and another Monsieur Teste went into each of his thoughts—a well-known figure, simplified, compatible with the real at every point. . . . In short, he had replaced the vague notion of the self that falsifies all our reckonings and slyly involves us in our own speculations—who are trapped in them—by a definite imaginary being, a well-defined or trained Self, precise as an

DIALOGUE

instrument, sensitive as an animal, and adaptable to everything—like man.

So Teste, in the armor of his own image, knew at every moment his weakness and his strength. For him the world was composed, first, of everything he knew, and of what was his—and this no longer counted; then, in another self, of all the rest; and this remainder either could or could not be acquired, constructed, transformed. He wasted no time with the impossible or the easy.

One evening he replied to me: "My friend, the infinite no longer amounts to much—it's a matter of writing. *The universe exists only on paper.*

"No idea can express it. None of the senses can show it. It can be said and that's all."

"But science," I said, "tries...."

"Science! There are only scientists, my friend, and they're scientists only at certain moments. They are men... groping... with their bad nights, their upset stomachs, or an excellent lucid afternoon. Do you know the first hypothesis of all science, the idea indispensable to every scientist? It's this: *the world is almost unknown.* This is a fact. Yet we often think the contrary: there are moments when everything seems clear, when all is fulfilled and there are no problems. At such times, there is no more science—or if you prefer, science is complete. But at other times, nothing is clear, there are only gaps, acts of faith, uncertainties; nothing to be seen but scraps and irreducible objects, on every hand.

"Since all this has become more or less clear—we are looking for the means of passing, with assurance, from the second stage back to the first, and of transforming at will the anxious mind of the moment into the calm possessor of the

moment before. But there is a bit of madness in such an ambition."

"All right," I replied. "Yet in every possible case, being, you will agree, is still strange. To be in some particular way is stranger still. It's even embarrassing."

And I added, repeating what all rather simple-minded people think: "So, what am I doing here?"

"Well . . .," said Monsieur Teste, "you are wondering what you are doing here. . . ."

"And yet, why? The really odd thing is precisely that we do wonder why. Why do we wonder?"

"Because it occurred to you."

"You are making fun of me, you are pulling my leg."

"No doubt," said Monsieur Teste.

"Let's come back," I said, "to the human plight." (And I had hardly spoken when I felt stupid.)

"I wonder," Monsieur Teste thought aloud, "just how man's 'plight,' as you say, interests me? About as much as . . . the goddess Barbara, whom no one ever heard of, and whose name I just coined. It's the same thing. At bottom, can we be passionately interested only in the absurd? That's not for me."

"It's not for really superior men," I said, to clear myself.

"Numskull!" shouted Monsieur Teste, "don't compare me to others: first of all, you don't know me, and second, you don't know others."

"As for enthusiasm, that stupid flash, you'd better learn to bottle it, and set it running on live wires. *Isolate it* from the silly objects for which most people feel it or imagine they do. Silly, because they are this or that, and not what you want. Burn brilliantly, but only at your will—and, despising every particular thing, draw power from everything. Yet many

DIALOGUE

things remain nonexistent, if you wish. Their nonexistence depends on you. . . . For instance, all stupid asses boast about their humanity, the weak about their justice; both kinds profit from confusion. Let us avoid the herd and the scales of the Just—the Just are great bores; let us strike down all who want us to be like them. Simply remember that between men there are two relations only: logic or war. Always demand proof, proof is the elementary courtesy that is anyone's due. If that is withheld, remember that you are being attacked and that every means will be employed to make you obey. You will be trapped by the pleasure or the charm of no matter what, you will be impassioned by someone else's passion; you will be made to think what you have neither thought about nor understood; you will be touched, delighted, dazzled; you will draw conclusions from premises that someone else has fabricated for you, and you will discover, with a certain genius, . . . all that you know by heart."

"The most difficult thing is to see what is," I sighed.

"Yes," said Monsieur Teste, "that is, not to be confused by words. You must feel that you can arrange them as you will, and for every combination that can be put together there is not necessarily some corresponding thing. There are two hundred words that must be forgotten, and when heard they must be translated. For example, the word "Law" should be blotted out everywhere, from every mind, so that no one may be deceived."

"This hurts," I replied. "This is hard. No more mistakes, and I like mistakes."

And so we went on and on. . . .

Sketches for a Portrait of Monsieur Teste

Gentlemen:

The term *aberration* is taken often enough in a bad sense. Its usual meaning is "a departure from the normal toward the worse," a symptom of deterioration and disintegration of the mental faculties, whether in the form of perverted taste, extravagant speech, or strange, even malicious practices. But in certain branches of science this same word, while retaining a shade of pathological meaning, may point to some excess of vitality, an overflow of internal energy, resulting in an abnormal development of certain organs or of physical or psychic activity. It is in this sense that botany speaks of aberrant vegetation, and that, in a certain sense, most of the vegetable species that man uses for his needs, such as grain, grapes, roses, etc., are products of immemorial methods of cultivation which have resulted in varieties that may be called aberrant despite their usefulness or their beauty. We have found that we must set down these preliminary remarks before proceeding to examine the singular case, well known among psychologists as "the case of Monsieur Teste."

*

Monsieur Teste was born of chance. Like everybody else. All the mind he has, or had, comes from this fact.

SKETCHES FOR A PORTRAIT

*

There is no known likeness of Monsieur Teste.

All the portraits differ.

The man with no reflection:

This phantom which is our self (which it *feels itself to be*) and which is clothed in *our* weight.

Just imagine the meaning of the phrase: "My weight!"

What a possessive! . . .

How is that weight to be distinguished from the energy that makes it what it is—heavy, light, etc. . . .

*

Monsieur Teste is the witness.

That in us which causes *everything* and therefore nothing—] reaction itself, pure recoil.

The eye, for example—seeing opposed to the seen—everything seen being exchanged for what destroys it to preserve the faculty of sight—and able to exist only by *consuming the possible* and reloading.

Imagine an individual who would be, as it were, the allegory and hero of this.

*

Conscious—Teste, Testis.

Given an "eternal" observer whose role is limited to repeating and rehearsing the system of which the *Self* is that instantaneous part which believes it is the Whole.

The *Self* could never engage itself if it did not believe—it is all.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Suddenly the *suavis mamilla* that he touches becomes nothing more than what it is.

The sun itself. . . .

The "stupidity" of everything makes itself felt. Stupidity—that is, particularity opposed to generality. "Smaller than" becomes the terrible sign of the mind. The Demon of arranged possibilities.

*

A man observed, watched, spied on, by his "ideas," by memory.

*

The most complete psychic transformer, no doubt, that ever was.

The opposite of a madman (but *aberration*—so important in nature—is here conscious) since he always recovered from it the richer, no doubt, carrying dissociation, substitution, and similitude to the extreme, but sure of recovery, an infallible reverse operation.

Everything seemed to him a special case of his mental functioning, and the functioning itself now conscious, identical with the idea or sense he had of it.

At the end of the mind, the body. But at the end of the body, the mind.

Pain was searching for the mechanism that might have converted pain into knowledge—something the mystics glimpsed and disapproved. But the reverse was the beginning of that experiment.

God is not far. He is what is nearest.

*

SKETCHES FOR A PORTRAIT

In him psychic activity occurs when internal exchanges are at the furthest point from *values*.

Thought is equally free (when he is HIMSELF) of its similarities and confusions with the *World*, and, on the other hand, of its affective values. He considers it as pure chance.

Or rather, he is that one who is a reaction to a certain spectacle that requires at least Someone.

The notion of external things is a restriction on combinations.

Meaningful imagination is trickery in feeling.

How come back from such a distance?

*

Jealous of his best ideas, of those he considers his best—at times so personal, so much his own, that to express them in ordinary impersonal language can give others only the faintest and falsest notion. And who knows whether those ideas most important for the conduct of the mind are not as peculiar to it, as strictly personal, as a coat or an article made to fit the body? Who knows whether anyone's true "philosophy" is... communicable?

Jealous, then, of his individual insights, Teste thought: What is an idea that is not given the value of a state secret or a secret of art?... and about which, also, one is not reserved, as if it were a sin or an offense. Hide your god. Hide your demon.

*

In plays, we give ourself a special value—whether we figure in person or as a hidden presence.

MONSIEUR TESTE

And yet, how does one choose a character to be oneself?
How is that center formed?

Why, in the theater of the mind, are you You? *You* and not *me*?

This device, then, is not the most inclusive possible. If it were, there would be no more *absolute me*.

But isn't that precisely Monsieur Teste's experiment: to withdraw from the me, the ordinary me, by trying constantly to diminish, resist, compensate the irregularity, the anisotropy of consciousness?

*

Monsieur Teste enters and all those present are struck by his "simplicity."

He looks *absolute*: his face, his gestures, have an indefinable *simplicity*.

Etc. . . .

He is the man who thinks (by consummate discipline and habit become nature) continuously and on every occasion according to studied data and definitions.

Everything is referred to himself and in himself to rigorous thought. Man of precision . . . and vivid distinctions.

*

To this strange man, the keenest and clearest recollection appeared simply as an *immediate* formation of his mind, and the very sensation of the *past* of a certain image was accompanied by the notion that the *past* is a fact of the *present*—a sort of . . . *color* of some image—or perhaps the immediacy of precise and accurate response.

SKETCHES FOR A PORTRAIT

*

Up to a rather mature age, Monsieur Teste was not in the least aware of the *singularity* of his mind. He thought that everybody was like himself. But he thought he was weaker and more stupid than most. This observation led him to note his weaknesses, and occasionally his accomplishments. He noticed that frequently enough he was better than the best and duller than the dullest—a dangerous observation, which might lead to a policy of abuse and oddly distributed concessions.

*

Recollections of Monsieur Teste: from the *diary of Teste's Friend*.

One of Teste's pet notions, and not his least fanciful, was his wish to keep art itself—*Ars*—and yet do away with the illusions of artists and writers. He could not stomach the stupid pretensions of poets—nor the vulgar pretensions of novelists. He insisted that clear ideas about what one is doing lead to far more surprising and widely valid results than all the humbug about inspiration, the "reality" of the characters, etc. . . . If Bach had believed that the spheres were dictating his music, he would never have had the powers of clarity and the command of lucid harmonies which he achieved. The staccato.

November 34

A Few of Monsieur Teste's Thoughts

ONE must go into himself armed to the teeth.

*

Take the "owner's" tour of inspection in oneself.
The state of mind of someone who has had enough of abstract words—who has broken with them.

*

Create a kind of anguish with the idea of resolving it.

*

The game played with oneself.
The effect on others, never forgetting their mechanics—quantities, intensities, potentials—and not only treating them as *selves* but as machines, animals—whence an *art*.

*

"It is one of my earliest observations, one that I have the weakness to admire, that men are more alike as they are observed at shorter intervals—so that they are indistinguishable *in an instant*: and another, no less dear to my mind, is

MONSIEUR TESTE'S THOUGHTS

that this very similarity, increasing to the point of identity, comes from the intensity of their emotions."

(Cf. Monsieur Teste.) *It is natural* to try to discover whether these two limiting aspects of (neuropsychic) identity may not be related.

Haste would suffice, actually—or surprise, etc. . . .

So, the limits are conditional.

*

—The bottom of thought is paved with crossroads.

—I am the unstable.

—The mind is maximum possibility—and maximum capacity for incoherence.

—The SELF is the immediate response to each partial incoherence . . . which is a *stimulus*.

*

My aim is to borrow from the (visible) world nothing but forces—not forms, but the means of making forms.

Not history. Not *décor*. But the feeling of matter itself, rock, air, water, vegetable matter—and their elementary properties.

And acts and phases—not persons and their memory. |

*

The first thing is to look over one's domain.

Then, put a fence around it; for although it may be limited by other external circumstances, one wants to have a hand in setting this unwanted limit.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Man makes an effort to will what he has not willed.
He is given a prison and says: I am locking myself up.
He can no more get out than a man gets out of a dungeon
by counting the stones in the wall—nor any more than the
words he may write on the walls can make the walls fall
down.

*

No one would think of *explaining movement* by considerations of *color*, whereas the opposite has been tried. So the two are not reversible. Perhaps, then, we are sources of movement and not of color, and this ability is the basis of the explanation.

I say *sources*. But just as we are sources of pain or pleasure. We feel ourselves "producing" certain... (how shall I say?) certain changes... values... quantities, "sensations" ... or "accelerations" that are at once completely *ours* and completely foreign to us, our guides, our *selves* of the moment, and of the coming moment.

How describe this background so changeable and without reference, having the most important but most unstable relations with "thought." Music alone can do it. A sort of *field* controlling these phenomena of consciousness—images, ideas, which without that field would be simply *combinations*, a symmetrical group of all the combinations.

Cf. Monsieur Teste—the epic opposition between this combinatory *objectivity* and the *field* in question.

*

The mind must not be occupied with persons; *de personis non curandum*.

MONSIEUR TESTE'S THOUGHTS

*

What really matters to someone (I mean the kind of someone who in his essence is unique and alone) is precisely that which makes him feel that he is alone.

It is this that comes to him when he is *truly alone* (even when in fact he is with others).

*

To consider one's emotions as nonsense, debility, imbecility, a waste, a defect—like seasickness and fear of heights, humiliating.

... Something in us, or in me, rebels against the soul's creative power over the mind.

*

At times, it is *SOMEONE* entirely independent of the body and the sensibility (the interests of *SELF*) who speaks.

He observes and coldly describes life, death, danger, passion, all that is human in our being—as if he were someone else, a witness who is all intellect....

Is he the soul?

Not at all. This thing is somehow beyond all "affectivity." It is pure knowledge, with a kind of peculiar contempt and detachment toward the rest—like an eye that sees what it sees, attributing no value but the chromatic.... This thing would count the buttons on the hangman's coat....

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

I despise what I know—what I can do.

What I can do has the same weakness or strength as my body. My "soul" begins at the very point where I can no longer see, where I can do nothing more—where my mind closes its own road ahead—and coming back from the profoundest depths, looks with contempt at the mark on the sounding line and what the net has brought up—the wretched "catch" from the middling depths. . . . What labor, what joy for such a take! And which is the more ridiculous: to be ashamed or elated at the response we get from ourselves?

*

Man's only hope is to discover the means of action which diminish the bad and increase the good in himself, that is, which directly or indirectly furnish his sensibility with the means of acting upon itself, according to its own nature.

Here, an account of what has been done in this direction. Sensibility is everything, sustains everything, judges everything.

*

For me, "ideas" are means of transformation—and consequently, parts or moments of some change.

An "idea" of man "is a means of transforming a question."

*

You are full of secrets which you call ME.

You are the voice of your unknown.

MONSIEUR TESTE'S THOUGHTS

*

I feel no need whatever of others' feelings, and it gives me no pleasure to borrow them. My own are enough. As for love affairs, they may divert me if I fail to notice that I can easily alter them.

*

I need nothing. And even the word "need" has no meaning for me. So, I shall do something. I shall give myself an *aim*; and yet there is nothing outside myself. I shall even make beings who are somewhat like me, and I shall give them eyes and a mind. I shall also give them a very vague hint of my existence, so they may be brought to deny it to me by the very mind I have conferred on them; and their eyes will be made in such a way that they see an infinite number of things, but not me.

This done, I shall make it their law to predict me, to see me in spite of their eyes, and to define me against their reason.

And I shall be the prize of this riddle. I shall make myself known to those who solve the puzzle of the universe and who have sufficient contempt for the organs and other means I have invented to conclude against the evidence and against their own clear thought.

*

I am not turned toward the world. My face is to the WALL. There is not an atom of the wall's surface that is not known to me. }

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

For me, he said, the most violent feelings seem to have something in them—a sign—that tells me to despise them. I simply *feel* them coming from beyond my kingdom, once I have wept and laughed.

*

Pain is due to consciousness and its resistance to some local condition in the body. A pain we could clearly conceive and somehow circumscribe would become a sensation without suffering—and we should perhaps manage in that way to know something directly about our deeper body—a knowledge on the order of that we find in music. Pain is something very like music, one can almost talk about it in musical terms. There are flat and sharp pains, some are andante and others furioso, sustained notes, rests, arpeggios, progressions, and sudden silences, etc. . . .

*

All right (said Monsieur Teste). The essential is against life.

*

Freedom—Generality.

All that I do and think is merely a Sample of my possibility.

Man is more general than his life and his acts. He is *designed*, as it were, for more eventualities than he can experience.

Monsieur Teste says: My possibility never leaves me.

*

And the Demon said to him: Give me the proof. Show me that you are *still* the one you thought you were.

End of Monsieur Teste

IT IS A matter of going from zero to zero. And this is life. From unconsciousness and insensibility to unconsciousness and insensibility.

The passage impossible to see, since it goes from seeing to nonseeing, after going from nonseeing to seeing.

Seeing is not being, seeing implies being. Seeing is not exactly being. One can *be* without seeing, which means that seeing has gaps. We become aware of the gaps by the changes that have come about. . . revealed by a kind of seeing called memory. The difference between "actual" seeing and "memory" seeing, if the difference is discontinuous and not contained in the actual seeing, must be attributed to a "time" interval. This hypothesis has never been proved wrong.

The stranger's way of looking at things, the eye of a man who *does not recognize*, who is beyond this world, the eye as frontier between being and nonbeing—belongs to the *thinker*. It is also the eye of a dying man, a man losing recognition. In this, the thinker is a dying man, or a Lazarus, as he chooses. Not much choice.

Monsieur Teste tells me:

Goodbye. Soon a certain way of seeing will . . . end. . . . Perhaps suddenly, now! Maybe tonight in a gradual decline, little by little unaware of itself. . . . Yet I've worked all my life toward this minute.

MONSIEUR TESTE

After a while, perhaps, before the end, I shall have that important instant—and perhaps grasp the whole of myself in one terrible look. Not possible.

Syllogisms falsified by suffering, a stream of joyous images bathed in pain, fear mingled with happy moments of the past.

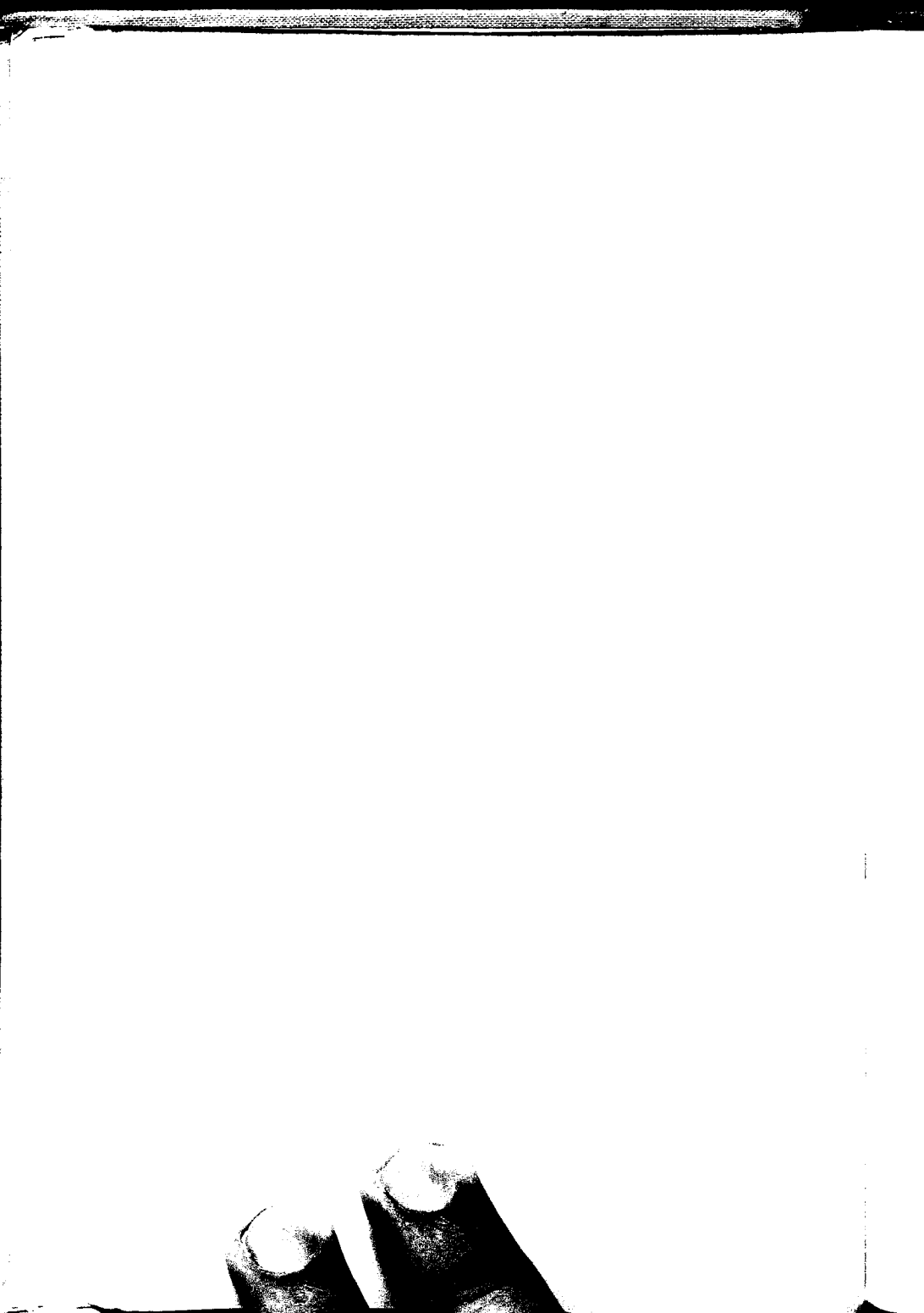
And yet, what a temptation death is.

Something unimaginable enters the mind in forms of desire and horror in turn.

Intellect's end. Funeral march of thought.

SNAPSHOTS
OF MONSIEUR TESTE

From the Notebooks



Snapshots of Monsieur Teste

Portrait of a Certain Monsieur

a) All that he seems. All that he tells by what he seems, and all that he seems to himself, physically and morally.

His walk, his features, complexion, flexibility, his way of gesturing, variations in his characteristics.

b) Establishing his identity. Maximum length and motility of radius p of the Sphere of Knowledge.

The probable quantity of the countless number of his discriminations.

What has he thought about? What has he thought most about? His dominant vision.

Construction of the model of his symmetry.

Does he think about others? Does he compare himself?

Classify himself?

Frequencies in the use of words, of manners.

c) Applications. Variations.

Imagine him eating, copulating, suffering.

Interpretation—behind-the-scenes principle.

His Budget.

I : 19

*

Maximum Divergences.

Literarily, it is better if the portrait is made at a given moment, as painters do from a definite pose of the subject.

This is absolutely different from the plan above.

I : 20

MONSIEUR TESTE

Monsieur Teste is my bogey. When I misbehave, I think of him. I:248

Death is terrible when one is not feeble enough to bear it. I:252

What is a man's potential? . . . or each cell of time. I:281

*

Teste 2.

The idea of dying: ordinary people talk about it, forget it, come back to it, think of it while talking about something else, talk about it without thinking; they weep over it, laugh at it, argue about it, sing it—and what in hell more do you expect? That's all they can do.

Once you have laughed a bit, raved, wept, reasoned a bit about something, you have to let it go for a while. It's had its turn. I:295

*

Monsieur Teste began to laugh and thought out loud: "To tell the truth" always requires a certain amount of fabrication! Lying is natural, comes of itself. I:315

*

Teste 2. A great philosopher (or whatever), but a man (*vir*) at the same time. One evening when in the joy of his mind he triumphed over something, he suddenly touched himself and said: "Why! I am a great philosopher! . . . But then, that's *all* I am: a great philosopher." And he saw his circle closing. I:316

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

*

Teste 2. When the mind has put a thing through a certain number of transformations, it can only let go of it.

"A thing" is that which can undergo such treatment without becoming unrecognizable. *invariant!*

"I regret this, but within certain limits, since for certain changes greater than E, I have no reason for regret." I:330

*

Teste II. I was a shallow man . . . but when anyone told me so, I felt deep as the sea (or a tower). I:337

*

Teste 2. The man who cannot sleep because when he sleeps he dreams and when he dreams he realizes that he is dreaming and yells in a horrible voice "Stop joking," and his yell wakes him. I:338

*

Teste. He considers his own thought as coldly and contemptuously as he does the world: but since this also is a thought, it is in the world of the mind, as the body is in the world of bodies. It cannot be treated as harshly as the rest. I:339

*

Teste 2. I was not sleeping alone. And when she drowned I held her, cool as a plant, and thought absorbedly about ME. I:346

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

Teste 2. We can do something to what does not exist: we can name it. 1:349

*

Teste 2. Fools fall in love with what they *imitate*. 1:352

*

“But, they will make fun of it,” I said.

“That’s possible,” said Monsieur Teste. But I am only in . . . *me*, and inside here, my contempt occupies more space than Paris. 1:572

*

Teste 2. “Here is a delicate, delightful, new and enduring difficulty.” 1:605

*

Teste 2. “That’s a profound, sublime, etc., idea, and I didn’t discover it. *Therefore*, I must find a flaw in it, and punish it for delighting me. This is vital. So let’s look at its consequences, and a stern-faced logic will avenge us.” 1:712

*

Teste 2. If the world is a riddle, so be it. I believe only in what I can guess. 1:885

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Mr. T. *Catechism*. Contempt for every kind of mass. Endless exploration. Discrimination. Consciousness. Love of extreme concision. Personal language. Impossible to be taken for anyone else's. Theory of imitation in practical matters, pure originality in ideas. Constant foresight. Simple operations. Be ignorant of nothing that can be known. Precise subtlety. Flexibility.

Everything seen from the point of view that compares all categories. 2: 156

*

Teste 2. And in the final analysis, a good swim in the sea, the twisting body and the undulation of water around it, and a purely idle meditation—this shows the whole of man, pure activity. 2: 167

*

T. 2. Now... I shall sit down here... How deep the distances, what space, and how many expanding hours I feel and wait for, here in this empire of words and meditation, all mine. In my horror of the common, and of this age, I shall sit down... and behind a ridge of contempt, shall allow myself a single lake where my hidden will can wander.

I shall relearn idleness. Their excitement is so inane—their need to pinch themselves to be alive. 2: 332

*

T. 2. The mind is the place of vague things. 2: 349

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

Mr. T., as I have conceived him at various times, would be a model of policy in thinking, with respect to itself and even against itself. The aim of this policy is the maintenance and development of one's idea of oneself. Constant preparation for the lucky moment, setting aside every premature definition of oneself, to win by every means a legitimate contempt for others, acquire the ability to despise, no less, every phase of oneself, use one's ideas, and not be used by them. . . . that is the picture. (Compare what Voltaire says about Pascal—strength.)

2:401

*

To a friend trying to describe a third person, Monsieur Teste retorts: "Would you drink out of his glass—would you sleep in the same bed? . . ."

2:458

*

His eyes—slightly larger than all that is visible—as quick as thought.

2:813

*

Teste. The teeth slightly clinched and showing, the masseter muscles taut, the nostrils flared and expectant, the head slightly turned and tilted back, one eye fixed, the look in the other glancing off the middle of his nose and seeing it vaguely. Then come thoughts, and a way of entertaining them which I know well.

Never had that skull imagined being a plaything for an anthropologist, nor that book. . . . for a psychologist.

3:66

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Teste 2. The admiration conferred on genius is due, at bottom—the *very bottom*—to our attributing to it the power of working miracles without fatigue—or very little. Yes, it's the ease, the spontaneity, the all-powerful child's play, the creative *far niente*, that rouse admiration and envy. 3:142

*

Socrates: "The question is this—Synthesis, Analysis, etc. Bring together, put underneath (*sustain*), join, separate: all these roots of philosophical terms—are they to be taken *literally* or *figuratively*?"

Teste: "Figuratively, O Socrates."

Socrates: "But then, if they are figurative. . . figurative of what? Of what figures are they the figures?" 3:649

*

Teste. That body moves faster than my eyes.

This weight becomes heavier without changing.
That noise is always beyond my inner effort to suppress it. 3:736

*

Monsieur Teste.

I once tried to describe a man *camped* in his life, a sort of intellectual animal, a Mongol, sparing of nonsense and mistakes, quick and ugly, with no roots, a traveler with no regrets, a lone man without remorse—wholly given to his inner practices, his profound prey. Lodged in a hotel with his suitcase, no books, no need to write, despising both of these weaknesses—a pitiless reducer, a cold calculator,

MONSIEUR TESTE

ready for anything, contemptuous of everything—my Ideal.

“All I want is ability,” he said—“I despise both dream and action. But I have a mad wish to feel all the clarity I am capable of. My delight is in precision—I feel myself putting on my chains to free myself—taking my own form. I count as nothing love, history, nature. 4:378

*

Teste in chains.

I know so many things, surmise so many connections, that I no longer talk. Nor even think, knowing already as the idea dawns that a whole system is coming into play, that enormous labor is required, that I shall not go as far as I know I *ought* to go. This tires me at the start. I won't have the courage to look into this flash, in detail—it illuminates many years in a second. 4:400

*

Tête (Teste, Head).

The organ of potentiality is nature's masterpiece. 4:586

*

T.

The man who assumes the prophet's tone is always a kind of crook. He wants to persuade me by his tone, of what he cannot persuade me by his meaning. 4:636

*

T. Nonexistence of certain problems.

These (metaphorical) problems are based on logical paradoxes for their terms.

They are put forward as a rule *by feelings*, but the translation into words does not correspond. There is no perfect correspondence between the verbal-conceptual system and these feelings. There could be several translations. The feelings are music and the statements are like someone's description of the effects of music.

We may look for constants.

The feelings in question use as functions whatever they find—for example, the type *why?* the type *what?* analogy, etc.

In short, this personality must in the end become that curious way of seeing which is superobjective, in which the living man himself is transformed *regularly, constantly* into definite vision and limited operations—therefore, tending to climb onto his own shoulders...or trying to do so. 4:904

*

T. I could never endure the thought of being understood, myself, as a concept. I have rejected those acts which confer on *essence* the idea of defining itself.

I have rejected the poet, the philosopher, the professional man, who were *possible* in me.

I have rejected the good man and the evil man.

I like myself when he seems not to be this man or that. I hate myself when I recognize *me*, when I am aware of my man, my property; I want to be nobody. 5:134

*

T.

The job is twofold: (1) to refine, redesign, resignify things, to redissolve relations and let them recrystallize. Prepare pure bodies. Scale.

And (2) to transfer these new elements into the available, spontaneous future, the immediate—into automatism *and* sensibility.

... My ideal has not been to offer an explanation of the world, but to augment the powers, the training of the human system. Particularly to prepare it against its feelings and its thoughts, its emotions, by trying to attach to these fluctuations the notion of the relativity of their value and the vagueness of what they *signify*.

All forms of "internal" knowledge are made possible by forms of external knowledge serving their turn as feelers, reagents for internal observation.

And hence the *expression* of internal knowledge is always a *dislocation* of external knowledge. The latter kinds disintegrate, as it were, and become elements of knowledge in the inverse sense. If, then, we substitute for the crude, naïve forms of external knowledge, those forms acquired by non-naïve experience, we get, in addition, a new instrument of inward notions....

s: 169

*

T. The time may come when the love-idol and other things of that sort will disappear, along with bugaboos, ghosts, everything that haunts us, all those mysteries and naïve profundities so little worthy of consideration in the eyes of mature people.

s: 186

*

T. Why I love what I love? Why I hate what I hate? Who would not wish to upset the table of his desires and distastes? Change the direction of his instinctive urges?

How can it be, at one and the same time, that I am like a magnetized needle and an inert body?

I contain a lesser being, which I must obey under an unknown penalty, which is death.

Love, hate are beneath. . . . Love, hate—to me *seem* accidents. There is in me some more or less active faculty for considering—and being bound to consider—my taste and my distaste as purely accidental.

If I knew more about them, perhaps I should see a necessity instead of this accident. But to see that necessity is already something different from myself—what compels me is not me. 5:213

*

Teste.

My "mind" is partly a "scientific" mind and partly instinctive. I find no pleasure in my memories. Whatever is finished and can teach me nothing—that is, about the future—is forgotten, disagreeable. All memories annoy me, the pleasing ones because they no longer exist, the bitter ones because they revive.

Same reaction to events of the present. I feel them as useful potentially, or useless, or a hindrance. I know very well that something can be made of any fact, but this is true theoretically. It requires strength, and appetite for the fact; and if the fact depresses, wearies, irritates me, the best of facts is a loss. I live instead of seeing.

An indifferent fact, and me with all my faculties, my mind clear, means infinitely more to me than a gripping

fact that grips too hard. Deep impressions are bad for the future. Scars on the glorious body.

My ideal is reversible potential. The quickness of my thought is in accord with my abstention from activity. I run to the far-off, the worst, the limit, the unforeseen. *What act could follow me?*

The true fact, then, is something I feel in its reach. If it has none, if it escapes me, *I endure it*. So, I endure the immense majority of facts.

What impatience in general! What patience in particular, inexplicable to my other selves.

And yet the act must follow me, or I am condemned to dream. I must digest my thought into will, or it becomes a ghost. I must transmute seeing into living—if not, something precious fades in me and diminishes. Something—but what? To recover what: perhaps reach a first limit.

To find by no law the Self, as if it were a model of vegetal growth of another kind, must perpetually change seeing into action—taking O, giving back CO₂—or else suffering the strangest deformations.

5:236-237

*

Teste.

The point is to change certain ways of thinking—ways of feeling that have been practiced for millions of years and are now imposed on us by language, manners, whatever most influences a man. A change that compromises thought itself, even the self. . . .

By ways of thinking I mean not only ideas. It is not a matter of changing one's opinions.

But rather a far more profound *education*, a real wrenching—operations of an unknown delicacy, like retaining the

powers due to illusion without the illusion itself! Splitting, like that in physics, or like reducing to reflexes those acts we now perform only after endless practice.

The ideas that take hold most deeply are those which carry with them, either in their form or their meaning, the production or release of a kind of energy.

This energy always tends to set up (complex) functions, and each function set going tends of itself to become property—that is, memory.

5:465

*

T. Insights. Natural lights.
 “By the light of envy, the light of loathing, the light of pride”—what insights! But every strong passion brings its own; its sensitizes all that may disturb or reinforce it, in the uniform group of presences. These are beings who live by their needs. Passion makes everything that is our prey shine out in the most ordinary acts of someone else; it traces the most delicate arborescences of his heart and his plans. We understand him better than ourselves, and better than he understands himself. He forgets himself, we forget ourselves; but this wound cannot sleep long. It takes the exaggerated form of the man, the event, the act that localizes it. It wakes us in the morning; we feel something wrong, a faceless suffering, and at once it assumes the familiar detested face.

Who does not have his sensitive points? His natural wounds, his wise, subtle, and fundamental sufferings, his true flesh all the more sensitive for being deep. *This must be mine. Why not me? What does it matter to me, all that self and all that world?*

The gray, raw, clear light of disgust. Light gilded with

MONSIEUR TESTE

envy. The white light of pure pride. (The above to be combined with *mechanics*.)

(Pride, envy, and everything of that kind are the peculiar properties of certain images. Local congestion, hypernutrition, overdevelopment at one point, *exaggerated vigilance*, and the inordinate reactivity of certain ideas; near-spontaneity and functioning at every turn.)

5:491-492

*

T. 2.

The "perfect" man as I imagine him cannot be called intelligent. He is "intelligent" as the tiger is supple and strong. As the pigeon flies. This is simply his nature, and in no way exceptional. It is his breed that requires him to be shrewd, searching, inventive, his mind as impossible to overtake as the foil of a fencing master.

Nothing could be farther from the notion of the genius with his hump and his brows, or the notion of inspiration.

6:225

*

Teste. Intelligence, mind, those inevitable myths—everyone defines them for himself, decides that he has them or not on a certain occasion.

My notion of them this morning I shall express in this way: intelligence is the *power of substitution* (as being the *more adapted*). Its problem would be: for any proposed group of things, or circumstances, to substitute another, such that. . . etc., *and in this way, what was not possible becomes so*. The role of language in intelligence then seems quite clear. It is a typical, fundamental substitution.

Substitutions of words and of things. To understand it
to perform a substitution—a translation. 6:274

*

History and Teste II.

What is important for x (a man, or humanity, or whatever) is *that* whose nature is to transform x as x (also whatever preserves him or it) where the reaction of x is no longer a simple functional act but an initial variation of the functions themselves, involving in a more or less brief time the possibility, or the suppression, of certain kinds of acts.

It is in this that the wars of Napoleon, as wars and events, are perhaps less important than Napoleon himself (as ideas and a model).

Here is a new way of understanding and therefore of writing history. For the latter is merely the record of certain facts, excluding the infinite number of other similar facts. If, then, someone undertook to retain only those facts I have called important, great bringers of change, we should have an entirely different history.

Same observation for the Novel.

History solves the following problem (which is of no interest in itself): what happened in the year n ? But since we have nothing more to do with the year n , the problem is in reality undecided: we shall never know whether it has been solved. And besides, this has no meaning other than literary —and that, incomplete. Teste II. 6:435-436

*

Teste II. My effort has always been to prove my strength or explain my weakness. 6:463

VMT

*

Teste. New dances. . . . But you must have a supple body, tireless, flexible, quick to grasp all the rules and relations it is capable of describing—then that new dance will always be simply one more dance, one example in a thousand of your *substantial* agility.

But among those exercises there are several better fitted precisely to overcome your inertia, to clarify you through and through. They are not new, they are simply eternal; all the others, however odd or new they may be, will never be more than a diminution of these.

To discover the essential exercises is the capital act or event of an intelligent life.

It is not the new that is desirable in itself, but something that is *in* the new, or that we think will be there.

Otherwise, one would adore a god who devours one's father: this is natural, of course, and widespread; but not in the least *new*.

What we require of the new is its own former strength, the opposite of lassitude. 7:233

*

The Operator.

Teste II. City. Everything we see is made by human hands. Everything has been thought out, *willed*, prepared for the eyes, for a walker, for a certain height, for a span of time. An angel would find that these materials are ephemeral; and these domes soap bubbles!

Looked at in the opposite way, it is a pretty view of nature—these accidental perspectives, these beautiful mistakes, this forest *luck*. 7:424

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

*

Death of Monsieur Teste.

It is said that there are two kinds of death, the *natural* (complete) and the *ordinary*—*giving back* to the world nothing but a corpse *empty of its possible consciousness*.

The *ordinary* is the ordinary dead man (and on his features, the expression of a man surprised and slightly shocked, impolitely interrupted by some trifle in an interesting conversation).

The *natural* or true death would be the total exhaustion of the possibilities of the system of an individual man. All the inner combinations of his capacities, incomplete in themselves, would be exhausted. He has told himself everything he knew.*

*This to be related by a well chosen Phaedo. 7:690

*

The man who was about to die said: Wait a bit longer. I am about to become horrible, dreadful. You will be frightened.

You will think I am somewhere, in a room, and everywhere, and that I shall see you without eyes, that I shall do you harm or good, etc., etc.

You will bow to me as you pass. I am becoming something important and nothing, absent from each place and present everywhere. 7:836

*

The mind moves by images. Images and change are inseparable. 9:45

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

Monsieur Teste had taken the strange habit of thinking of himself as a chessman in his own game. He could see himself. He would push himself across the table. At times he lost interest in the game.

—The systematic use of Me as He.

9:139

*

Mr. T. Erudition and collecting, signs of impotence. They don't understand that works are waste products, excrement.

9:199

*

T. Concerning things that don't exist in a moment.

We can explain only by way of things that seem to exist entirely in the moment.

And that is the great difficulty. Knowledge despises what cannot be circumscribed (in an instant), that is, what cannot be reduced to exchange and act.

9:437

*

Teste.

Pain is due to consciousness and its resistance to some local disposition of the body. A pain we could clearly conceive and almost circumscribe would become a sensation without pain; and we might, in that way, come to know something directly about our deeper body, a knowledge on the order of that we find in music. Pain is something very musical, we can almost talk about it in musical terms. Certain pains are grave and acute, some andante and furioso, held notes, organ stops, arpeggios, progressions, sudden silences, etc.

9:511

*

Teste speaks: It is of the first necessity to create for oneself the means of considering others, *legitimately* and clearly, as stupid (that is, useless, personally zero, for a certain purpose) and the stupidity of everyone else [sic]. It's a question of life or death.

But this education leads necessarily to including oneself with the others. 9:688

*

Teste's Prayer.

Lord,

Do us the kindness to set against us only those for whom we have no esteem. Let them declare themselves against us, that we may not have against us those to whom we owe something, those with whom we have communed inwardly.

Let us not be loved by those, and may we be unable to love those, whose love cannot develop into the truest knowledge of *us* and of *them*.

God Himself cannot love someone just as he is—He asks him to reform. 9:745

But deliver us from the immiscible.

*

T. Some women are *skinny* and *tough*; others are *soft*; others, *firm* and *bouncy*—and it takes them all.

Nearly all are *calculating*, even in the most stupid and dim-witted way. 9:856

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

Teste: Theta.

I do good and evil. The same mind, the same hands, the same goads, do both. And the man I am when I do good is not absent in the man I am when I do evil. For I have but two hands and one mind; and it is not I who defined the two attributes of human conduct, good and evil.

It is some stranger to me, and to us. . . . 9:863

*

Psychology according to Monsieur Teste.

There is always a *point* such that others see what you see and something else. (But this point is an instant.) 10:26

*

Teste.

The strange and the imperceptible (the rare) are interchangeable in me, equally. But in most men the exchange is not equal, and more of the strange is changed into the imperceptible than of the imperceptible and familiar into the strange.

Developing a theory of these inverse variations one to the other, we find among other things that in the mind there is an *irregular* property of *spontaneous return* to the state of *original perception*. We may say habit equals degeneration of sensibility. In this case, the *probable* would be habit, or insensitivity. Compensated by what? 10:62

*

Teste. It was centuries ago that I ceased to understand vague language. I pay no attention to a man's words once I guess

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

that he is obeying the elementary laws of his speech function, and that he is not adjusting them against themselves. 10:64

*

Teste. The analysis of human lives and destinies.

The probabilities. . . .

Determining what is favorable. Criticism.

10:65

Man, system.

*

The chemist, Monsieur Détard, a friend of Monsieur Teste, says: All atoms are different. 10:90

*

Monsieur Teste.

Superiority and solitude. Teste can *no longer talk*, being vastly superior to everyone. This is a great subject. 10:94

*

T. In the very midst of love, Teste is pierced by his demon—knowledge.

He perceives ideas through sensations of "pleasure." He feels another's orgasm, and that other, by a demonstration difficult to reproduce, *equates* Him and Self. Self = Him. 10:100

Antagonism—of the. . . .

*

Teste 2. . . . He was *walking*, enjoying the humanized—or channeled—disorder of associations between his steps, his ideas, and *things*.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Kaleidoscope. All the brilliant haphazard in the street and the mind.

10:154

*

Teste 2. Expressions such as "great poet," "genius," etc.: I use them only when my words are of no importance, when they are for talk—for the merely *adequate*, not for thought . . . or the *necessary*.

They have no meaning at all when I am alone. I am no sooner reduced to myself—or rather enlarged to myself—than they collapse like marionettes, forgotten.

Our words are puppets.

10:187

*

Monsieur Teste's last day.

My dream will have been to be capable, one day, of thinking with the help of principles, definitions, and judgments of thought, which I would have remade in keeping with my reflections, and not inherited with the language, its forms, and the temporary habits it brings with it and imposes upon us. My precision substituted for my vagueness.

10:225

*

Teste: or the Life of a man who watches himself live.

10:254

*

The worst if not the most agonizing punishment that can be inflicted on anyone is to treat him with rigorous objectivity.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

That look, that kind of philosophical scrutiny turned on someone alive—judgments that calculate, measure, frame, depersonalize, reduce the Whole to a part, and make the Unique indistinguishable from others—and even generally, the very intention, or act, of *transforming* (in the geometer's sense of the word) some object, shows *freedom*—which is greater space, superiority, pride.

For example, if we conceive a rage, an offense, a passion, or suffering, manifested by someone as a pure phenomenon—that is, as elements in a group of substitutions which is the group of *things*—we deny this person the pretense and quality of being a person, of being therefore a point of origin, a source, a likeness to the world's soul.

The past and the future of a *person* are different from the past and future of a *thing*.

To say "two men" is to diminish both. 10:274

*

Monsieur Teste's mottoes:

Others destroy me

As Me.

Make without believing

10:310

All or Me.

*

Monsieur Teste says: My possibility never leaves me.

10:357

*

A note on the theory of love (by M. Teste).

10:373

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

Teste. A terrific scene of *rage*.

This profound analyst could distinguish in a man's actions and thoughts and reactions what came from the right side and what came from the left side of the body.

10:518

*

Mnemosyne or Monsieur Teste.

The game played with oneself.

The effect on others, never forgetting their mechanics (their quantities, intensities, potentials) and not only treating them as *selves* but as machines and animals—whence an *art*.

10:527

*

Love and Monsieur Teste.

He talks theory and then. . . .

10:538

*

Teste. Cancel all effects of a theatrical kind—all the effects of shock, or surprise, all that is possible only in view of the assembled number, and assuming polarization of the eyes, lack of time for looking around, "enthusiasm" (delightful in itself, suspect in its effects: confusion between what one feels, what one does, and what one wants to make others feel—the illusion of immediate creation by desire).

10:546

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Teste. The brain, too much occupied internally, deals brutally with external things—rejects them violently, etc.

The mind's aim is the mind.

10:554

*

Abbé Mosson's letter to X?

Everything in brief. Notes from his exercise book. Journal.

Teste's words on truth: Technique of conscious *thinking*. Countermetaphysics. Tactics of assimilation and disassimilation. Curiosity saturated with doctrine. Invention, metaphysical or other, is only a response, an image of what would satisfy a naïve need.

Dr. Ch—— or A—— and Madam B——, Doctor of Sciences: someone said "their sessions of love-making are experiments."

In short, to give an impression of the location of thoughts, opinions, doctrines, etc., in the living man and in a group of living men—their signals to each other. *Et memento musicae*.

10:594

*

Teste as precursor: "No books more" [Valéry's English], since books give such-and-such particular results—useless if the general aim is research.

10:600

*

Dialogue: Valéry and Teste.

Valéry has written a poem in twelve-syllable lines. Teste asks him to put it into ten-syllable lines.

This amounts to making a similar, homothetic figure. Bold considerations in homogeneity and poetry. The possibility of similitude.

This problem is conceivable only in regular verse.

But what becomes of "genius"?

But genius is one of the consequences of the effects which the work must produce on the reader (a necessary condition since 1800).

The reader must be carried to the point where he should conclude that the work is an accident, and the author a peculiarity.

And the result is this new problem: to find the general system in which the observed exception becomes a probable case, where the act of *genius* is a frequent, assured, *normal* act—in short, the rule. What is the transformation that must be conceived, to include genius?

II:134

*

Teste. Relativity = God and the Devil. How can we know who made this or that? Who helped him?

How tell them apart?

II:218

*

In Monsieur Teste's study.

Monsieur Teste is writing. He is seen across three *vacant* rooms. The friend approaches and looks at him, startles him.

Tableau of the *Alone*. Acts, gestures. Then closer: sheets of paper with drawings—theory of connections.

Tries to describe a circle greater than the region in which a certain mystic moves—that is, to have and keep what the mystic perceives, plus x .

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

To enclose, embody, relativize.
A high-pitched voice.

II:234

*

The Key of Mr. Teste [Valéry's English].

In any performance, we give ourselves a special value, whether we figure in person or in spirit.

And yet, how does one choose a character to be oneself? How does that center take shape? Why, in the theater of the mind, are you You? *You* and not *me*?

So, this device is not the most general possible. If it were—no more *absolute self*.

But is that not precisely Monsieur Teste's research: to withdraw from the self, the ordinary self, by trying constantly to diminish, combat, compensate the irregularity, the anisotropy of consciousness.

Opinions were to him like hearing a foreign language—he disregarded them completely. Descartes in Holland would never listen.

II:261

*

Teste's Logbook.

Old Stuff: Death and life. God.

Antiques: Museums.

II:298

*

Monsieur Teste's Paternity.

Letter. . . .

Teste as father: birth, crisis, etc., taking that brain away from its preoccupations—change of scale, point of view. Violence, doctors, etc.

"I don't want it to be instinct," he grumbled. II:339

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

Teste and Narcissus.

On the Consequences of Self-seeing.

(a) Study of duplication. Possibility.

(b) Unbearable diminution:

Surrounded by images of one's self.

II:531

*

Teste and literature.

I don't understand writing in which there is nothing to understand. Isn't this a *truism*? Which does not suggest that there is anything to be understood.

Teste, the inner apostle of consciousness—to which *faith* he eternally exhorts himself.

II:601

*

Monsieur Teste is a mystic and a physicist of self-awareness, pure and applied. (I made this the policy of my solitude.)

And above all, one who seeks to "apply" self-awareness;

And to make it functional. . . automatic!!—like elimination, or the regular *resolution* of physical states.

II:643

*

Teste-Mnemosyne.

"The latter is a dark body, my mind."

Inner activity cannot compose a "world" as the activity of the external senses can. The effort of many men to endow this inner chaos with a structure, laws, a geography, an astronomy, a physics or mechanics, or even a simple average stability. . . was in vain.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

If it had been possible, the world so constructed would be action on images, images of images, images of action, images by action: transformations, reciprocal or not, of images into acts and acts into images.

II:715

*

Perhaps do a "Teste," bringing into the literary act the idea of transformations—of covariant analogies: attention, dream.

The developments in psychology are remarkable for their number and variety. It is not "Ideas" alone that compose them, but fields—the selectors, catalysers, which cause the same individual to be mentally so different from himself, following such different routes in himself.

The mind would not know which route to follow to prolong itself, if the possibilities were equal. One association is as good as another: *a* gives *b* or *c* or *p*...

And this is what happens to the mind when it is suddenly assaulted—it loses its way....

II:755

*

Teste's papers:

Log Book

MSS found....

Hours (Books of)

Psalms

II:755

*

Is Mr. Teste anything more than the possible, the incarnation of the possible in as much as we use it and dispose of it?

And that version of the possible, is it not what we mean by intellectual?

II:768

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

(Teste). The Optimum.

A chapter on intelligential Euphoria.

Cf. conversations with Franel, etc., etc.

When the mind sparkles and shocks the mind—energy,
return the ball. . . .

II:800

*

Teste was wary of his mind, as of a stranger about whom almost nothing is known.

And is there any stranger who is not less unknown to us than this mind of ours. . . constantly bringing us surprises, insights, resistances, lapses, all of them unexpected?

He knew that the mind makes *analytical extensions* for itself, and of its own kind, planes on which it thinks it sees to infinity.

II:847

*

La Gioventù del Signor Teste.

The sense of verbal indecency: "soul," "genius," "God," "cause." Never say *I love you*. Impossible!

Patriotic sentiments. Say nothing that cannot be proved.

Retain nothing that is merely words.

Reductio ad vivum, praesentem (reduction to the living man, the present).

Everything in terms that seemed to him to *exceed a man's verifiable powers*, all words and propositions not connected by a chain of personal experiences possible in the actual present, were banished; and whoever uses them is *damned, an infidel, an enemy, unclean*. The pure race.

II:863

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

*

Teste's policy.

Consider words, spoken and written, as nothing.

Imponderables exist, but they are unstable compounds—
violent, undependable. 11:890

*

Teste: his policy.

Septation.

Science, Politics, Consciousness.

If consciousness were developed in everything, and if the whole domain were *equalized*, judgment and action being abandoned in *p* as if what we know in *q* did not exist, then: Praise, Curses, Epithets, etc.

Radius of the reflexes in conventional expression. Brain No. 47003. They correspond to a minimum of mental effort. That is how we should judge, and how we shall do so if men continue to advance in wisdom.

On the internal and external irregularities of the modern mind. In short, the disparity (to be depicted) of the principles of judgment in the same man, at the same period: the differences in mental level in the same man. Coexistent Superstitions. Differences increased by scientific development.

The new man and the old: the consequences for *religion*; skepticism and practice; the relativity of skepticism; states of mind made impossible, museum pieces, etc. 12:59

*

Teste: All feeling is an "inferior" product, a monovariant reflex. 12:94

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

Reflecting on the first idea of my old system (Teste!), that is, on "knowledge as a closed system, and a system of transformations and constants," I come back to the problems that occupied me in '98 and 1905.

12:378

*

T.

Great men are strong in certainties of the second class. That is, they have a *reality* of their own, and that reality *connects* with the average, common reality. The connection is essential although generally undefined, unexplained.

12:416

*

Teste.

I assume that, from the functional point of view, we may compare the various sense organs quite closely (including those which coordinate the scales of value of the various sensitivities) with apparatus similar to what we may construct.

Then our notions of the world and of things ("world" and "things") will discover effects corresponding to a part of themselves, since the organs and apparatuses and their conditions are likewise perceived as their own functioning.

It will be possible, at will, to consider a given body or an event as primitive—or as the result of a complex combination of functions.

All our "judgments" will be results or products which more or less conform to an *expectation* (our expectation, the self here being reduced to an expectation).

Suppose that finally we have a fairly clear notion of our own functioning, our responses, our combinative range, our

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

problems, knowledge, solutions, our mental formations, etc.
... What then becomes of man—what remains...? 12:729

*

The Rosencavalier at the Opera. But Vienna, with Schelk.
Still the beautiful Second Empire theater, in barbarous taste,
"garnet red"—beautiful, red-hot barbarous theater.

During the play, very Rococo—Vienna—Wagner, and
perfectly staged and performed, from a folding seat on the
far right of the orchestra I looked over the garnet pit. The
darkness is not total—there are lamps at the back of the loges.
All is a dark powerful glimmer like the inside of a furnace
heated from the outside. I recall my impressions of long ago
—the Teste period. Gatherings of humanity (here well
mounted and arranged in rows) still give me that strange
effect. 12:888

*

Monsieur Teste *dixit*: "Never has the word Love (nor many
another) polluted my inner voice. It has never been spoken
between me and me."

He admitted into his monodialogue only terms of im-
mediate value—that is, instantly negotiable at the present
rate. 13:147

*

For Teste: Violent emotion, *intellectual* in origin:

a) Attach no importance to "human things"—they are
undifferentiated sensibility. If it were differentiated, there
would be no suffering—that is, nothing *uncompensated*, but

precise reactions, acts of recovery. Also, images, fears, etc., would be classified as such, and treated as information without overtones. (But it is impossible to produce acts to rectify every change in the plane of exact consciousness.)

b) Recover in the intellect the passions and emotions without *men*. At first, jealousy—but afterwards there is no individualized *other*. Everything is expressed as Absolute, etc.

13:166

*

The Teste Principle.

Teste is the negation of *all* that cannot coexist with clear consciousness—or rather, the systematic, almost *automatic* reduction of the content of that *all* to an amount equal to the clarity it can tolerate.

Nothing that is present to the mind or to perception can have more *value* than the condition surrounding it. No *beyond*.

Consequence. All that comes unconsciously, by way of unconsciousness, has the same value. But if a certain contribution takes on value, it does so from elsewhere, *after the fact*, in consciousness. This is not because of its “profound” origin, but despite that origin, because it is miraculously worthy of being *willed*.

13:410

*

Anarchy and Mysticism.

Teste: The words “state” and “laws” make no *sense* inside, in the middle of *Me*. (Socrates or the Daimon would add: just as *man* no longer makes sense on the space-time scale of a cell. That imbecile the mind, said Eryximachus, made Socrates talk about Diké, etc., when it was simply a difference in scale.)

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

But that difference was generally productive. False problems were the fathers and mothers of knowledge.

(They are known by the impossibility of stating them without absurdity.) 13:481

*

Teste. O Dark Star!

This typical Personage could be described by analogy with the dark star. Exactly, by properties. 13:524

*

Contribution to a knowledge of Monsieur Teste.

What is a man's possibility?

Inequality of "can" and "will" in the two directions *intus et extra*—(inner will).

Supposition: inner power, greater than the true.

Power not to think—power to prolong, *finish* one's thought. 13:560

*

(Teste) Barrenness of the angels.

What caused the fall of the angels is the contrary of what caused and still causes the fall of man.

They fell because they had no heart—and man, for love. 13:610

*

Teste.

Logic, etc., combinative, general, symmetrical, is like mental functioning at combinative temperature. Clarification, consciousness. Cf. dreams.

MONSIEUR TESTE

To have cold consciousness—no diapsychic transformations.

14:12

*

Teste.

Man observed, watched, spied on by his "ideas," his memory.

14:12

*

Teste.

Few men or none possess, as a constant condition or ever-ready reflex, the (feeling-memory-response-pseudo act) which at each moment of internal or external perception *assumes* immediately various kinds of *freedom* or *variability* of that moment—that moment becoming immediately a group element, and the subject emitting the *field* of that group.

"New observations of Monsieur Teste"

a) Observation of Teste as a distant star. Forecasts made.

Then treat the question of someone's observations.

b) *The three laws* on stage.

14:186

*

Monsieur Teste.

Everything depends on the degree of precision chosen (or determined by your nature) as the limit of judgments.

If every opinion and every act that cannot reach this degree is rejected (every act whose result cannot be precisely related to the maneuver and entirely dependent on it) and in particular one that mixes sentimental values with conventions, and confuses all phases and all categories... then....

14:282

*

Combat: cobra and mongoose. Teste's combat with himself, or with another mind.

Describe this as a brute struggle between intellects.

14:324

*

"Amiel" and Monsieur Teste.

But the enormous difference between the Stendhals, the Amiels, and me—or Monsieur Teste—is that they are interested in their own states of mind and in themselves in terms of the content of those states, whereas I am interested, on the other hand, only in what is *not yet* personal in those states, since their contents, the *person*, seem to me subordinate to those conditions (1) of impersonal consciousness and (2) of mechanics and statistics. One of my illusions was that I could manage to bring together so many conditions or conditional equations of thought, that each moment's thought or judgment would be almost entirely defined as a response and a product.

14:351

*

Teste.

The Severed Head looks at things just as they are, the pure Present, without meaning, without high or low, without symmetry or features. But a diversity. And when the reaction times of the retinas are slow....

No responses. Judgment eternally suspended. For *all judgment is hasty*, speaks too soon, finishes what is not nor ever will be finished.

No *transit*. Neither past nor future. No numbers. 14:391

*

Philosophy according to Monsieur Teste.

What he calls: *The Central Problem*. To be a center.

This problem is one of agreements—coincidences, stabilities, *time intervals of various kinds* in combination or contrast.

These “intervals”

The contrasts between specific times, various functions—that is to say, what *keeps us from merging with change itself*, and makes us aware of the divergence, the potential, and gives the *Capacity* of the moment. . . . This is the Present in conscious life—that is, its instability (self-variance). 14:431

*

Monsieur Teste. The sea-cucumber, the glove finger.

The internal becomes external (objective). The external becomes internal, and the *visible* or perceptible or external world becomes *rarefied*.

But the difference is that engendered by the existence of organs of sense and movement, connected and differentiated, in which no internal sense is provided. Illusions about the inner life.

If we could close the eyes of the mind, withdraw from the *inside*, the so-called inner world would be external, like the other.

Both are fabrications.

That which comes to my mind, *that* which *wishes* to come, that which *wishes* that *this* would come (or does not wish). The conditions, models, etc.

The intervals, the alternations, the condition of the screen on which they appear, the evolutionary phase of this

activity, its characteristics slow or quick, dominant or weak. . . . 14:854

*

Monsieur Teste?

If reflection on one point could be prolonged, it is likely that the content of thought would allow its substance to appear, and that whatever it might represent, one would see the *canvas*, the panel, the texture—the true elements of time. There would be an *expansion of time* during which a sort of pure sensation would arise in its place, as the substance of the meaningful illusion. But such an extension is impossible. Attention ends in the perception of attention itself, which is fatigue, and that perception is a change in the mind's *ligne d'univers*. 14:855

*

Teste. That others than you can *think* is an hypothesis and an acquired notion; it is not obvious. Nature is against it. Language, creativity, invention, all prove the assumption—but *up to a certain point*. 15:48

*

Monsieur Teste's question, *What is a man's potential?* destroys all philosophy.

Philosophy ordinarily uses *words* that cannot be expressed in terms of true power.

And science as well. A million *parsecs*, a thousand millionths of a millimeter are transitional terms. If we take as the *meaning* of word *a*, the *photograph* of what we think when we use or hear that word, seeing it without isolating it from an individual condition, we find that the laws of transforma-

MONSIEUR TESTE

tion which govern dreams and regulate what it preserves and what it alters are perhaps not impossible to discover.

We recognize ourselves, it seems, and we recognize other beings, things, etc.—the Self, etc. But I believe that in this case the recognition is furnished—contributed by things, names, etc. “I” furnishes something to recognize.

To recognize means: a part produces the whole. So there are Wholes. The Whole is the complete realization of Self with regard to the given—to such a degree that my response may be unique. I can go further. The *incomplete* leaves a freedom; and here *freedom is resistance, duration.* 15:221

*

Monsieur Teste proves to the priest that his system is “purer” than any religion. 15:305

*

Teste or Gladiator—Memoirs of a mind.

In those days, *every work seemed to me a particular case . . . of what? Of maneuver.*

A masterpiece seemed to me a *restriction, a demonstration, an exercise*, in which the residue, the product was for *Someone else.*

This was to upset the established order, and especially the Mallarmé method, which made the Work the universal aim. For me, it was the man. 16:698

*

The god of the *Impasse Frochot* (Monsieur Teste).

The same problem today as at the end of the eighteenth

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

century: the fabrication of a *religion* and a *constitution*, a priori. But the times have changed—myths, magic, etc.

On the antitraditionalism in these matters—which would put *la nouvelle Sophie* in opposition to the precedents.

17:675

*

Teste-Epimenides: If I am not much interested in "opinions" as such, this is one, so it is nothing, therefore it is worth....

If the Cretans are not liars, they are liars.

18:387

*

Theta. Philosophy. Role or situation of the Witness (Teste), whose function is to "relativize."

The philosopher who first plays this role finds that he is a witness in his turn—a philosopher of the second order, who draws conclusions from the first order. So he must determine whether there is an *infinity* in this direction.

No. But it can be made a literary supposition, and this would allow feigning an *ad hoc God* as a limit.

No. Exponentiation stops at the second term. 20:219

*

Teste-Leonardo.

"Leonardo"—or the symbol of *What is a man's potential?* A self-sufficient sense of potentiality. This was what I felt in '93.... At the expense of "works." Buonarotti's reproaches.

Argument from misunderstanding—and from external "creation" by accident. The Other.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Lack of rigor in the search for "effects."

Consequences: Acrobatics, Anarchy, formidable Simplicity. 21:363

*

(Teste) "What is a man's potential?" is decidedly the greatest question.

But *potential* has two meanings, one passive and one active:

I can understand, feel, experience, be changed, suffer, etc. Here the meaning is "properties" and the reference is to *sensibility*.

I can make, act, modify. Here the meaning is ability and the reference is to *action*.

Between the two, the possibilities are mixed: *I can* remember—and here we must add all those actions which are sometimes reflex, sometimes voluntary. 21:521

*

Jeune Parque: I would say to myself in the 1890's (and I put it in the first *Leonardo*) that physics (theoretical) was only images, and hence a study had to be made of the imagery in *me*, and what it could do, *the image's potential*. But this kind of physics is being liquidated. I had been brought to it by my peculiar exercises, literary in origin, beginning with anxieties and naïve questions about poetry, and these led me to a true system of self-awareness, which has served well and is still with me.

The expression of this state is found also in *Monsieur Teste*, the imaginary portrait of a fantastic individual whose only

spur to existence was no more than this: *Que peut un homme?*

What is a man's potential?

This led me to search for a kind of *writing* or *language* for my own observations, since ordinary language and still more the language of philosophers is referenceless, and in each use, it is more important than it should be—or less. Now this is the case whenever reflection and a halt come over language representing things. . . .

21:695

*

Fatto in casa, "home-made."

Monsieur Teste would not tolerate entities he had not made for himself.

21:750

*

Ego.

There are things that I could "clarify" and don't wish to. . . .

I keep them in condition. The social keeps the spiritual in condition.

Social life does not want Mr Teste to discharge his duties. We must admit that the *spirit* kills and the *letter* gives life. . . .

21:886

Monsieur Teste's Prayer.

Reading (by chance) Pascal's *Prière pour le bon usage*, etc., I am shocked by the rhetoric and falsity of this text—as in most writings of the kind. They don't say what they really feel, but say they are offering, or giving, what can be offered only by mouth; and this offering is very long and closely reasoned! This is not the way a human being speaks to God,

who (by definition) knows very well what He is dealing with, what is wanted of Him, and what can be "given" Him.

They assume a tone and use expressions that are indecent if they truly believe; and they debase their God, for they make Him someone who can be seduced, moved to pity, deceived about the root of the matter. This is not the true monologue, known to God, so long as we tell Him only what we wish.

This mystical literature must be compared to what can really be produced by the sensibility and things of the mind which it awakens in what we know. The inner convulsions, the sudden starts, the collapses, the emotions and tender or harsh feelings; the words and imaginings, etc. At times an extraordinary peace may prevail.

God appears when we don't know to what we should attribute a change in things or a change of feeling which astonishes, answers, releases, brings us to accept. 22:60I

*

Write a novel in which all the characters would be *puppets*, whose mechanics are revealed to a certain look. Actually it is enough to display their physiological and social time-tables—their daily or secular growth.

(Whence this paradoxical formula: The novel gives the impression of "life," by the absence of reality.)

Monsieur Teste in such a setting would feel himself surrounded by automatons, and all the more manifestly as they were men of thought and feeling. 22:716

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Testis. Teste is painfully present, a pain entirely contrary to his essence, in the important effort of his will to be a witness against the infernal power of the body *b*, and the world *w*, and, above all, of the inner reaction of the mind *m*.

It is true that, if this were not so, how many things the witness would never know!

Reduce the fact to the fact, and the idea to the idea, that is the generally impossible aim. *It can be reached only for moderate values of a certain variable*, itself a highly complex function and the least "analytical" of all.

To be in the audience *and* on the stage, that is the odd fate. 23:302

*

Teste. The isolated eye amuses itself.

Its isolation is made possible by the suppression or inhibition of all meanings, since sight *acquires* an aim, a meaning: that is, objects (it ignores spots). Pure ornament, which is variation itself—and closed.

So I am myself made for fundamental solitude, admitting others *at will*, as we allow ourselves water or light—as *planned*: that is, the necessary amount of opposition, communion, exchange, sympathy, agreement, control, etc., to balance the *self*, to increase the resources and output of the sole *one*—that center of the ANTI-ALL. 23:309

*

Teste. Above the times, one's age, sex, place, and the limits of one's own language. With no memory of the days and events lived through. No opinions but the resented and denied—like fireflies and bothersome bugs.

A modern man has or may have "opinions" on everything. 23:313

*

Teste. History is food for vulgar, credulous minds, in which imagination simply unfolds.

Events annoy me, bore me, whether they are public or private. The "greater" they are, the more stupid. 23:756

*

A fragment of Monsieur Teste—"Treatise on the divine strangeness," by Father John X——. Monsieur Teste and "Rachel."

Distinguished persons treated as insects. Customs as tropisms, or entirely incomprehensible. A "philosopher," a Napoleon treated according to instincts—"fame." 24:613

*

"What is a man's potential?" (Teste.)

The variation of the *possibility-implex* is a capital notion for the analysis of the living man.

"What is possible for me" is a group of variables. *What is possible for me, at this moment*, in a certain condition, and during a certain event *phi* or *psi*. What is *probably* possible for me in general (this is the person himself). What I know or feel or imagine about this possibility, and the other.

And these possibilities combine with the external possibilities (of which physics is a partial study). 24:765

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Tale: Someone founds a "religion." It could be Monsieur Teste. The idea comes to him "by chance." Comes again. Develops. He studies the conditions of the moment. Examines existing religions. Need? Explanation of the times. The state of minds and sensibilities. Analysis of "Religion" as a product. View of "Science" as... undeclared religion. View of *real* "Morals."

A statistical study of the matter—a peculiar study. Search for the first disciples. Women. Intellectuals. Various. Ordinary. Deviations from the initial idea. Certain types of people as means of penetration, least resistance; and others as points of diffusion. 24:781

*

Gladiator. Pi. Teste.

If a man were capable, *after deep study*, of doing as well as an expert in poetry or something else, would he or not be superior to him? Meaning a kind of imitation that would assume not a copy but a knowledge of "causes." And for this man, a certain "great man" would be a particular case, an "application"—a Possibility. 25:235

*

Teste. Gladiator. Ego.

To expend on an object of useless, even futile, activity an extraordinary amount of energy, of willed profundity—that is, possession of the *self implex* (hidden self), as *complete* as possible—and as improbable and as unusual. This seems to me the worthiest of intentions. *Worthy of this enormous fact: that we live only once*, and that *this is*... not to know what we do. What are you doing, breathing, and eating? What do these instincts protect? What is propagated by the exertions of

MONSIEUR TESTE

love? What is destroyed by all these minutes and debasing circumstances?

We have too much mind for this mechanism. 25:254

*

Teste.

He worked constantly (but finally without being aware of it) to substitute *his* depth for all things (all of which may be regarded as superficial) and to make all depth superficial.

... The substance of all things is essential, but no more than the canvas to the painting. In itself it has no value at all.

God is perhaps necessary—but nothing more! If you must have a Cause, an End, a bit of order, and a certain intervention of the least *probable* of factors, among others, *so be it!* That your mind should produce for you all this spiritual material, so be it! But this is merely a necessity you are satisfying at small expense. You pay yourself with your own money. You give the question and the answer. 25:351

*

Teste's Law.

Analogy? Kirchhoff's law. In a *dark body* transmission (frequency ν) depends on temperature, independent of the *kind* of atoms; depends on the stimulus, independent of individuals. This is Teste's law: the sublime simplifies them and the *theater* is the *Dark Body*... *The physicist would suddenly suppress the scene.* But how is the transmission to be called x , regardless of the personality of each of the spectators, now *passive*?

A number of persons brought together is simplification, identification. There is a *simultaneous* law of large numbers.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Bringing individuals together creates a state of energy, similarities. Music is here the source of external energy. 25:385

*

(Teste?)

The felt concentration of the forces of inner *will* is not a poetic state. The self is then like a strong hand *taking a powerful hold on itself*—as if a *hand of forces* should grasp a *hand of forms* and articulated solids, and so create and thus induce a powerful sense of *possibility*.

On one hand, that sense of concentrated force and means, ready to act; on the other, a number of quite separate aims and applications.

This is not a "poetic" attitude. The MAKING (quite different from the PRODUCING) is all strength and construction. 25:438

*

P.V.

Preface or coda to the Course in Poetics.

"There is a *poetry* of things of the mind." That is what struck me as early as 189—. Or rather I felt interested in these abstract things about 1892-93—in my own way, and as stimulants. 25:460

*

Teste. Man, or rather *every man*, in his normal state and in the diametrically opposite state of extreme consciousness, is *non-man*—he resembles no one, has no personality that is unique and his own, no inseparable attributes.

He is *beside* his body and his fate, as he is of his milieu.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Before any reflection, he is a particular sensation: need, pain, caution. And at the furthest point of reflection, he rejects *everything* (or, there is total rejection). *Pure Self*.

This *Everything* and this *Self* are merely properties, as it were *polar* properties, of an attitude or disposition which in the end turns *the maximum consciousness of self into automatism*, by . . . animalizing the fact of being sensitive to the cyclois and the mechanics of the normal regime of life—*animal life* being typical.

25:507

*

“What do you do all day?”

“I invent myself.”

25:579

*

Faust III. Teste?

I despise what I know—what I can do.

What I can do has the same weakness or strength as my body. My “soul” begins at the very point where I can no longer see, can do nothing. Where my mind closes its own road ahead, and, coming back from its greatest depth, looks with pity at the mark on the sounding line and the catch hauled in by the net where it finds the wretched prey brought up from the middling depths. . . . What labor and what joy for such a sorry catch! And which is the more ridiculous: to gnaw our liver or exult at our own response?

25:584

*

Teste.

China—Population. River of Men. Yellow River. My ideas were right, 1895! Quantitative considerations.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Value of the individual. *What is a man's potential? But...*
what is a man's value? 25:675

*

Teste and Faust.

Mind against life (and death, since *life implies death*).
These two serpents swallow each other.

The mind rejects everything as either possibilities or
particular cases, and would consume everything. 25:688

Life tends to preserve *itself*.

*

Teste.

The importance of what we cannot manage to think
(that is, *express*) infinitely exceeds (for Teste) the importance
of all that we *can* manage to think, when the impossibility is
not one resulting simply from too great a number of factors
to be combined, of which not one is impossible to think, or
simply from a tension of too long duration—that is, from
both circumstances which may be reduced in some measure
by material means: writing, symbols, difficulties comparable
to the impossibility of moving too heavy a weight. But im-
possibilities like that of separating molecules in a solution—
or of getting outside a closed surface—are of another kind. 25:749

*

Limoges, 20 May, '42.

(Teste)
He is trying to conceive the perfect mind (as we say a *per-
fect gas*). From perfect Disorder to perfect Order. "Analytical
mystic." 26:23

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

Teste. At the moment of intensive work, of the greatest instability in the mind, *EVERYTHING has its importance*. And there is nothing that may not either arouse or quash (perhaps forever) the *KEY* combination, the decisive move. This is the thread that leads to the point Omega. To be compared with ascension—a profound reflex. 26:259

*

Teste. The “intelligent” man detests feeling that he is a person, a Gentleman, well defined, and yet he insists on being *himself!* He does and does not wish to be Somebody.

He wants *to be somebody* in his passion to be distinguished from others. *And not to be so* in his horror of being like others, that is, in not being necessary, irreplaceable, and yet he wants to make them *all* useless, except himself, since he “understands” them, includes or summarizes them—surpasses and nullifies them!—and feels, believes, he is *capable* of them all. 26:288

*

Teste.

How can we not think that *what is is stupid?* That is the problem, Reverend Father. And if one must humble himself, take upon himself that stupidity, the impression of which is like created things—that is to disparage the question itself, and deny that we can be concerned with a creator. 26:351

*

Teste.

Nothing is more humiliating than to feel suddenly that

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

one is of one's own time, one's own country, that one has an origin, a name, a past, a bit of future; and above all, what a disgrace to feel regret, hope—that muck, that excrement befouling the best moment, the equidistant instant. . . . 26:355

*

Ego. Teste.

The aim of a thinking man seemed to me the effort to become conscious of his own structure—what it can do or can produce. Whence, reflection on the self, finally to dominate it, *once for all*, and despise it, with its world and its feelings, before giving up *all* to the . . . All—which is nothing.

26:389

*

“Mind” derived by exhaustion or reduction and development of the Teste. Cf. Soul.

Recipe for the idea of mind.

Imagine a character who acts, alters, displaces bodies, etc., then notice the change his action has produced in that initial state. Then imagine this transformation being produced “by itself”—cancel the personality and reduce *ad libitum* the time required for the observed change. So, the spectator tends to produce the invisible character, *who has become a need.*

26:450

*

Monsieur Teste. *What is a man's potential?*

His “ideal” would have been to produce, or know how and *be able* to produce, as well as anyone, in one genre or another; but, in addition, *not to give a damn.*

To have done with importance, idols, and personality.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Here, a certain resemblance to the "mystics"—with one vast difference, no more idols.

This came about from reducing ideas and "states" to the act of observing them—a sort of equation between what is produced in the mind or the sensibility and the functional conditions—the *possibility*—which is a function subject to quite other conditions: substitution, time, etc.

And this capital remark on the general independence of *form* and *value*, which are associated only in particular cases: by the fact, *per accidens*, or from habit. Principle of duality.

26:464

*

(Teste.)

The quite sublime misfortune of man is that strange power of thinking—sensibility, which at almost every instant produces *what is not, no longer is, may yet be, and the possible or the impossible*, mightier than *what is*.

One may imagine, as pure fiction, a person on whom the ideas he produces would have no effect. Only momentary needs would act, and the minimum of useful notions which they introduce. The remainder would be as cold in him as the map of the Moon. This person is an . . . ideal!

26:552

*

Teste *dixit*:

"Without the nerves," he said, "everything could be denied.

"Denied? More exactly—everything could be *erased*, like chalk on a blackboard."

26:930

*

Memoirs of my Head.

In that truly flourishing period of my mind (1895) when I wrote Leonardo, Teste, The Conquest, etc., and many an idea for myself, I dreamed (by way of my metapolitics) of doing for nations what had been tried for naval combat vessels: a *value* formula, a bold combination of their characteristics (speed, protection, armament, etc.). A very arbitrary fabrication, of course, whose products are to be used only lightly. But exciting, and defying the vague notions used in politics to make themselves precise.

What I called the *fundamental theorem* (in the "Crisis of the Mind," twenty-four years later) derives from that kind of formal remark. I am generalizing. . . . This same problem of *Similitude* must be posed in *every matter of competition*—comparable Works, etc. (Competition and the problems of *Similitude*.)

And *men* also, considered as values of production and execution.

This is absurd in itself. But *absurdity depends on the usage value to be attached to this way of judging*. (For me, not "truth value" but "excitement value.")

But if we consider it an excitation to analysis, and to awareness of the problems we pose and solve in the vague, since the entire mental occupation that consists in *choosing* assumes or makes a decision about similarities, then this exercise is not so vain.

To *compare* two complex systems is a continual operation (a way of *imposing order*).

Two species, two works, two persons. The mind tries to interpret and justify the sensibility's reactions of preference, and at times to refresh its decisions.

Notice that the result of comparing complex systems

must be *one number* which allows them to be arranged in a line (1 2 3 . . .) in view of a definite end, and that every judgment such as *a* is larger or smaller, greater or less than *b*, may be translated as $\varphi(a) > \varphi(b)$. 27:81-82

*

Teste the Apocalypt.

Monsieur Teste is writing a Sacred Book,

περι τῶν τῶν θεῶν (καὶ ἀνθρώπων!).

How can one bear to read any *Sacred Book* whatever?

The Avesta, the Vedas, the Bible, the Koran, and even *Thus Spake Zarathustra!*—not the least boring of them.

Hyperboles, Parables, Symbols—Nonsense. The Yahweh of the Bible—isn't he perhaps the devil? The one who hardens hearts, to punish them afterwards "for good reason"! (N.B. To *explain* this remarkable trick would be worthwhile. Cf. *Ne inducas nos in temptationem*—"tempt"?—in short, *God as Tempter* . . .).

Where can this idea have come from, so incompatible with *the idea of God* derived from Christianity?

Principal themes:

God as the Universe

God as a distinct *Person*—derived by various operations on the notion of man.

The first leads to the Fate-Necessity cycle, etc.

The second . . . to character, will, action, caprices (of the Monarch type), etc.

As more abstract, he becomes *Cause*, pure Spirit—Relations with Man.

A God has to answer a regular questionnaire—asking for explanations and help. So, the first thing to do in a study of

Theognosis is to state the needs or requests to which the god must respond.

But the case unheard of before will be mentioned separately: of the god with least resemblance to men, absolutely unintelligible to them, a god for whom the "creation" and individuals are indistinguishable, as *Good* and *Evil* are also, and who can be deduced from a *modified scientific version of the universe*.

What is more unlike Me than what appears to me as conditions of this Me, conditions recognized on the other hand, as "physical nature," the structure of the body at various levels, its functioning, its organic life, reproduction, and death?

And also the recognition of the pure or absolute Me, the Me = Zero which is identical in us all, rejects all, is opposed to all.

And yet is the *nexus* of sensibility and "consciousness."
27: 121-122

*

Teste.

What one *can do* with words. That is everything.
27: 365

*

Teste.

Isn't it the goal, to be able to think of oneself as a puppet
—or an *automaton*?

But wait a moment! Try to find which are the different ways of thinking about oneself after all, and how many of these can be found? Here, then, is one way: the *automaton*, or the puppet. And then?
27: 491

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

Teste would say: "Gold is perhaps the mind of society."

27:505

*

Teste: Negations.

I give no credit. Miser that I am. But I am no usurer from the old repertory, like all those philosophers who turn loose upon you their stuffed crocodiles: Being and Company. I make no system. You reproach me for not building a house of cards, all the while imagining that it's a house of marble.

Look at all those collapsed cards. One should build houses of cards, and not one only—and knowing that they are houses of cards.

27:799

*

Mnss [Mnemosyne?] or Teste... Marvelous transformer! And that extreme and extraordinary clarity of the orders or phases of transformations, with no confusion.

Order imposed on various kinds of disorders of the mind!

When *that* gives freedom to images, or gives itself to those substitutions pure and meaningless in themselves which are called Logic; or is determined, in fact, to "realize" (i.e., to burden and enchain oneself to conditions representing those for observing the real) and when that diversity produces surprising combinations, as in a chemical laboratory, and produces them *in series*, keeping back this or that *which may serve*, as the chemist—as the eternal man produced conic sections two thousand years before Kepler's need. 27:909

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

Apocalypt Teste.

That the Man-God never existed.

Against the Man-God there is this serious objection, that a twofold experience and a twofold example are missing in his history. No sex life, no intellectual life: two problems not even stated.

On the other hand, the most feeble of temptations, so feeble that the Devil is forever in disgrace. Hence the idea that a "New Testament" could be written.

What we should have had was *all the temptations*, and in all their power: *the heart as flesh*, and the supreme pride of the *mind*—and the "divine" solutions for those notorious punishments....

That's what is missing in the Gospels, what astonishes—not to be found in them! Man is not the whole man there.
Neither is the devil....

28: 57

*

Teste, or Rachel.

De Deo

"Father, don't offer me a god stupider than I am!" (Or some such remark.)

God is what is said about him multiplied by Himself.

Who made all this—this World, etc., etc.?

But what do you mean by *Make*?

Just think for a moment, first, about your *Word*, before tying that tin can, the *World*, to its tail. You would be quite embarrassed already if you held up that old word for a moment, wishing to substitute something clear instead. The analysis of the idea of *Making* destroys generalized causality.

28: 123

*

MONSIEUR TESTE

I am quite astonished at the inventive powers of anyone who finds *subjects* for stories or plays, and very effective ones, it seems to me—just as good or better than those so successful today on the screen or in print.

But I notice that the characters in all these productions have no existence beyond the affair or the anecdote or the action in which they figure. They are created by these, as necessary parts of a mechanism.

This is general in our time. Not one (literary) *being* is distinct from its local function, or becomes known as a type or a possible living man outside the story of the moment.

On the contrary, in the few instances where I have personified—as in Monsieur and Madame Teste and the Parque—I have tried to invent synthetic human beings—and it is true that this meant, on the other hand, sacrificing “the interest” of action and adventure; but *that is my way*, very much mine. The accidental interests me hardly at all—far from it. And besides, it’s a necessity—to make the implications apparent. But. . . .

28:159

*

Teste, Apocalypt.

All philosophical terms are evasions, ambiguities, a great number of which are taken from the ordinary decent vocabulary (reality, liberty) and lose themselves in formal combinations like this: *thought thinks itself*—which means nothing and allows one to persuade himself that he has thus found the formula for God.

Definition: God is Being, with respect to which the formula *to think the thought of thought*, etc. *in exponential form* has a *meaning*; but this meaning is only for Him and is identical with Him.

Do you understand?

This leads to the question of the "Infinite, Transfinite," etc., that is, of *repetition*, continuity, etc.

Observation: These two "notions" require that *one do something*. Prolong, repeat, divide, *these are acts*. These acts are either *applied* or *free*. *Free*, which is to say, without substance or consequence—*this is pure "possibility."* 28:180

*

Teste. Ego.

Misereor super mentem: Psalm, Apoclypt.

Contempt, scorn: *for the mind*.

Everything that is mental, thought itself makes me think of a witch's stew in a pot. It simmers, it bubbles, it foams and sings—making combinations, dissociations, precipitates. There's a bit of *everything*. That's it—everything!

I have tried (as if I were not in one after another of these soups) to conceive that *all* is in this pot, which we never think of. *All* is simply one *property of a pot*, a vessel, a receptacle, a container. To say *all* is to form an enclosure, an envelope; and then to locate something outside it—which is to say that *All is not all!* . . . Shall I put *God* in this pot, or is He *all* that is outside it? Isn't He what we call Mind, *Consciousness*, Self?—which are obscure names for what is itself one condition of the magic brew? . . .

"Consciousness of self" seems to be the sensation of the mixture's reaction in striking against the wall of the pot. 28:226

*

Teste: Notebook.

To surmount:

Undo all the traps which *all* acquired ideas are. . . .

Words remain. . . forms remain. . . Learn to take them for what they are—i.e., *one's potential, drawn out of oneself by unknowns*. This is the essence of language. Nothing more. But nothing less. Language is good, it does its job when it's used and forgotten by circumstance and need, like a tool—pliers or a drill—or a kind of currency—sometimes a weapon.

But never as an oracle, as if it knew more than *we*, good for philosophers who believe in knowledge, who question the questioner, and make him answer. . . .

Undo all the snares of the mind's sensibility: the idols of originality and envy. 28:233

*

Teste.

To destroy the power of mental images—this is not striving to cancel them. Can we do without them? No. On the contrary, it is by taking them for what they are, inflicting on them a systematic treatment for precision, bringing out their symmetrical properties, their groups of possibilities.

For the harm they do is due to whatever deprives them of their inherent "harmonic" character, and offers them as having no substitute—"like reality." *There are no two realities that are equivalent*, whereas every production that is entirely mental is one element in a group analogous to a scale in music, which, when sounded, reveals a profound structure. . . .

When the real appears, a resonator is excited and generally shuts out the other components of the group. 28:242

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

*

The expression *I think that I think* . . . stops, or is lost in itself, immediately after the second occurrence of the sign *I think that* . . .

(Only Monsieur Teste could arise at times, for a moment, to the third degree . . . , etc.). 28:248

*

Teste: Faust—Luste.

A complete being would have eliminated ideals. God has His ideal. The *Just* man is His ideal of man. God, then, is . . . incomplete. 28:275

*

Faust or Teste: "I am tired of being Me! But that's saying very little—I'll say more! I am tired of being a Me—because that is to submit.

(This could be in *Hermit III*: Faust speaking, rising up like Lazarus, would make a frightful scene, *furioso*, against the Angel, the Devil, the Hermit—finally making off with Luste.)

The Angel would have revived him to get the better of the devil. Faust yells to him: *You were wrong. You are three fools!* 28:289

*

A description or an exact representation of what one thinks—as a phenomenon—is enough to destroy all metaphysics. It makes these pretensions all the more empty, the more precisely they are observed.

MONSIEUR TESTE

Hence the importance of my question in Monsieur Teste:
What is a man's potential? 28:540

*

Testis.

The words *I* and *Me* point to our *central ignorance* . . . and evoke it.

It is impossible to think "of oneself" otherwise than in one particular and particularly *sensitive* way.

Observation: It happens that *the knowing-knowledge moment* (which is a kind of act) may be *remarkably meaningless*, and that the *Self-function* brings in *the pure Self*, purely *functional* (of indefinite duration) with no mixture of "qualities." The objective world, or the *Phenomenon* (which "science" says is better "known" the more *foreign* it is, and even the more *strange*) is therefore a system of properties which remain through all the variations in *values*. 28:709

*

Teste. Man.

A far more precise and searching knowledge of the system of Self (and therefore of "man") . . . of what consequence can it be? 28:743

*

Teste. Sadisms of the mind.

There are those who exercise the abstract faculties and seek enjoyment of the intellect—in nonnatural ways. Thus, certain mathematicians, and the syntactical sadism in Mallarmé.

Likewise, the hardened scholastic. It is becoming not to take seriously conclusions that are meaningless or mere

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

sounds. But these are the methods that excite minds of this type.

Formal elaborations carried to the extreme, as among sadists: such combinations as imagination—voluntary movement—overexcitement—sensory strength, etc.

For man is excess, abuse—this is his very essence. Wise men give him the choice between “depraved animal” and “fallen angel.” . . .

28:76r

*

Teste.

All the difficulties or impossibilities we find in conceiving certain phenomena are elements of a general form that would define the limits of our domain of organic action. (Example: attraction.)

Rediscover the vertebrate and the biped that you are, *in your mind*, O man! Until you do, you are superficial.

Man, a machine for *making*. Role of the sensory sensibility and its derivatives. Exchanges among the senses: eye and hand, hearing and hand, or hearing and breathing, and mouth-throat. Reciprocal expectations.

28:779-80

*

Teste.

Could any man bear to look at himself at every moment of his life, and rethink, as a witness, all he has thought, all that has come into his head, into his whole being? Who would not hate himself, not wish to blot out what he was, not so much from want of success, or the effect of certain acts he has committed, but simply because of the *particular person* whom these have little by little *defined*, and who

shocks his full sense of possibility. Our history makes of us Mr *So-and-So*—and this is an offense.

What is more ridiculous than *SOMEONE*? And what “great Man” can resist the details of his status, attitudes, gestures, words, and the whole series of his acts, omitting nothing?

God Himself, simply by listing what He does according to the Bible, gives such a poor account of Himself that theology, exegesis, and apologetics have exhausted themselves in explaining, altering, covering up, excusing, etc., the numerous sallies and witticisms of that sacred text.

No one could accept himself as he is if some miraculous circumstance offered him a full knowledge of what he was and what he is. Man recognizes *HIMSELF* only...in *AN-OTHER*!

28:823

*

Teste.

The home of the Selves

The island of the Selves

Whatever is not “in space” is in the mind. (So “time” would be...mind!)

But mind is located *in the head*, whether you will or not.

“Time,” in particular, is not in space. It is *in the head*—a kind of *present*.

So there is a privileged region in “space.” The Island of the Selves.

28:876

*

Teste.

Dials

The dial of values—emotions—feelings—sensitivities.

Field: the needle of this dial is always oscillating—between ideas and visceral sensations. 28:888

*

Apocalypt T...!

Topochronology

Homogenesis, hetero....

A Head: a formidable, closed Implex....

A Head furnished with the means and modes of development and transformation, the most various and most precise, playing among the sources of sensibility-energy, to be applied in every "initial situation," or one taken to be so, stimulating a quite special reflex, the *Crossroads reflex*, of which the center is the *pure Self*, the No. 1.

No philosopher has dared to display the evidence for this fundamental localization.

The cephalic, or cephalopsychic, sensations are in immediate relation with psychic reactions, on the one hand, and with those of *My-Body*, on the other, and its reactions. These are, for the most part, *motor* sensations. Facial expressions and the activities of "inner" speech are in intimate relation with the psychic products (and the notion itself of interiority). It is *afterwards* that the effects become apparently distinct and independent. But, in reality, they themselves exist only by the restoration of their mechanics in someone else. It is in this motivity that *intellectual will* exists. 28:890

*

Teste Illustrious.

Conscious of chance.

Consciousness can transform *everything* into chance. In

MONSIEUR TESTE

fact, its characteristic withdrawal tends to make everything *strange*, a *Phenomenon*. . . to the point of destroying the notion or effect of *Chance*. To depreciate sensibility by *being aware of its mechanism*, what I call *consciousness* being precisely its elementary law!

29:25

*

Teste.

What can you tell me that is not, for me, more than anything else a product of your mind's mechanism? This perhaps has a "value" independent of that mechanism, of those sparks that are its *Words*, and of those atomic combinations of *time-ideas* which occur in a "field" and under a tension of *sensibility*, and which excite the availability of *language*, and discharge their energies at times explosively, at times somehow reversibly. . . ? And if I *see* in this way, what becomes of your "thought"? It is reduced to what it is, and if it is reduced to what it is, it has no more than the virtue of an instantaneous effect. . . .

And if I see in what you say, what *you can* truly say, and your real resources, and your range and your limits, the conditions of what you say—do you imagine that everything this is *worth* is not affected by it, and does not become what *you are worth*, and that I do not see, on the one hand, its local mechanics, and on the other, a great deal of chance in all this—and finally, that I do not clearly see and exclude from the effect of your discourse all that I must contribute to it of my own, to make of it and feel in it what you believe is true, strong, and powerful in its effect on Me?

29:66

*

Ego Scriptor.

Just as in the *Evening with Teste* I purposely introduced the word "brothel" ("b...") to compensate, by way of a single letter, the abstract coloring of the text and to give as economically as possible a fairly vulgar tone of debauchery to my "hero" of the intellect; likewise, *twenty-five years* later I introduced into the *Cimetière marin* the Zeno stanza, to give this ode the particular character of the meditation-song of an intellectual man, a *culture addict*.

Proceeding exactly, in both cases, as would a painter who, stepping back to view his work as a whole and noticing a certain need of contrast or balance in the relation between his picture and his eye, inflicts on what is finished the required alteration of adding some object as a detail that brings in here or there the desired tone—as an additional weight, a balance, etc.

This reveals in my technique at these different periods a similar care to consider what I was making as units of composition in which the successive parts should modify each other reciprocally in a simultaneous resolution. This is an unexpected way of interpreting the *Ut pictura poesis*.

If in this way of composing I can see the influence of painting, I see even more clearly in various things that I have done the influence of music. . . . The vague idea (vague to me, knowing nothing about this art) and the magic of the word "Modulation" played an important role. . . in my poems. *La Jeune Parque* was obsessed by the desire for the continuum doubly required: first, in the musical sequence of syllables and lines, and then in the fading and substitution of ideas and images, themselves following the states of consciousness and sensibility of the speaker in the poem.

29:91-92

MONSIEUR TESTE

*

Apocalypt T.

Here is a problem in the Teste manner:

How to reduce a memory to an existing product?

Isn't a memory a way of producing, and then of qualifying, some mental event that could do without this qualifier? Doesn't that "way" make itself felt when a "memory" which *ought* to appear does not?

I remember that I must remember a certain thing.

29:224

*

Teste Apocalypt.

The "mind," having understood a law, seen the trick, the system, or the mechanism, tends to reject it and all that it produces.

Spiritus abhorret ob reiterando—it would like to erase all that, as when a demonstration is over we erase the chalk from the blackboard. A thing understood is finished.

In me, this feeling came very early. (Rothomago.) No repetition. *Vidi—Vixi*.

There is antagonism between a sort of inertia of conservation and an instinct for exhaustion by knowledge—which is acquisition of foresight. *Non bis in idem*. 29:250

*

To the Romantic, Teste *dixit*:

"The extremes are poor."

29:347

*

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

The Teste Problem par excellence.

It is a matter of trying to destroy all the *psi-phi*:*psi-phi* values you wish.

Values, in this case, are the *c* or somatic sensations of Category *b*. (I write *cb*.)

The *ca* values are physiological, that is, they are part of the normal functions. For example, the sensation of appetite coming at the sight of food is in accord and connected with the whole mechanism of nutrition.

But the mere idea of food affects us also and is no longer purely physiological, especially if it is provoked by a description (for example).

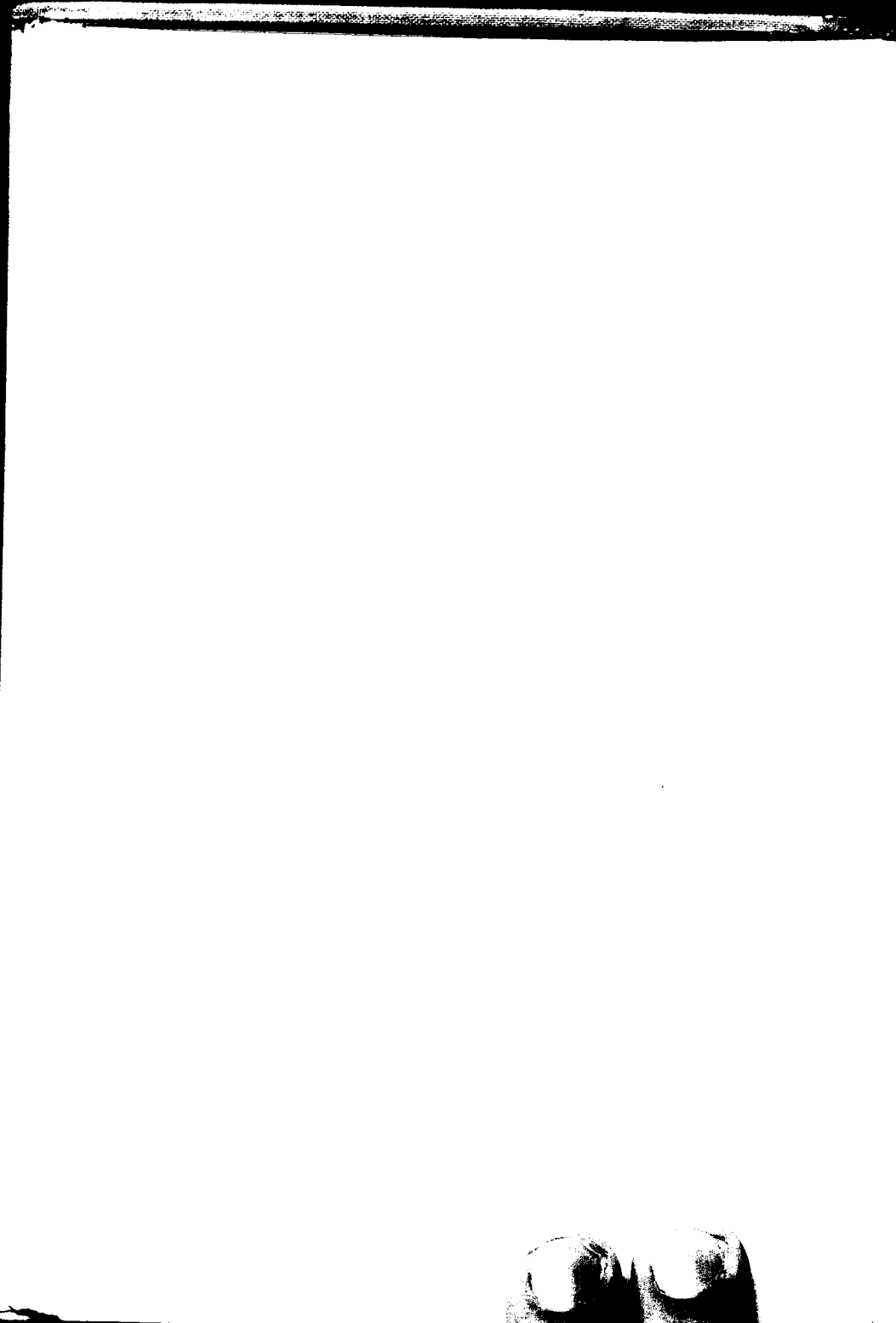
But this is a matter of *b* values—the irrationals.

ALL VALUES ARE IRRATIONAL.

29:797



APPENDIX



Publisher's Note

[1924]

ONE of us happened, more than thirty years ago, to make the acquaintance of a singular personality of whom he drew a portrait, published in 1896 in *Le Centaure* under the title, *The Evening with Monsieur Teste*. He had lost sight of the original in question and hardly expected to be further concerned with him, when a few days ago he received a rather surprising letter about him.

That letter (of which he was given only a typed copy) was due apparently to the wife of M. Teste. It implies that the recluse of yesteryear is now married, and it informs us that he is living in the country.

After some hesitation, we decided to publish it despite the many doubts inspired by the text. All is suspect both in the substance and the source of the document. It is scarcely a woman's language we find there, less for its uneven and peculiar style than for a certain absence of restraint and modesty in the expression. We strongly suspect this missive of being a barefaced fabrication, and our sense of it does not favor the real existence of Madame Teste. In fact, we have asked ourselves whether this letter may not have been forged by Monsieur Teste in person, for some unexplained purpose.

However that may be, we hand over to the public for purely documentary use these few pages, several of which have seemed to us interesting, despite their improbability.

Images of Monsieur Teste

[1945]

MONSIEUR TESTE, an essentially *inner* man, willingly dispenses with any particular resemblance. He is so little distinct from "common mortals" that he may be thought of as *invisible*. He offers the contrast of being as *like* as possible to anyone whatever in his external aspect, but as different as possible from everybody in the exercise of his thought and the use of his inner powers.

Moreover, there is a peculiar reason which would have it that he has no face, and no more-or-less picturesque representation of his person.

I wrote "The Evening with Monsieur Teste" in 1895, pressed by my friends of the *Centaure* to offer to that review several pages of prose. . . . After rejections, hesitations, and various projects, I decided on the idea of making the portrait of a mind as much occupied with itself as a virtuoso may be with the debates between his instrument and his talent. I intended that this literary portrait should be of the greatest precision, in an order of things where expression is generally vitiated by a dreary philosophical jargon, the vaguest of the known languages. So I invented my Teste and gave him, by way of substance, a selection of my direct and personal observations; to which I added some scenery, a room, a theater, and other places as well, only lightly indicated, in which the imagination's eye could place the *inhuman* and believe that it saw its reaction.

IMAGES OF MONSIEUR TESTE

But does anyone know what *ideal*, during my work, proposed and imposed itself on my mind? For the abstract portrait I wanted to make, it was my ambition to give it the qualities which seemed to belong to Degas' drawing. . . . Nothing but that. I dreamed of transposing that drawing, by analogy, into the severity of a prose that finds and at last fixes the "form" in the clarity of ultimate expression, without blurs, etc.

This pretension excluded from my work the representation of my hero's features. I saw only the mass of his body, his broad build, and his gestures, those of a well-tempered automaton.

Yet the several texts brought together in the present volume might well tempt a draftsman.

As for the etchings which I have been asked to add to these pages, they are what they are: the work of an amateur who for his amusement engraves as best he can what he can in the midst of his papers, which vie with his engravings for the space of a small table and the time left for freedom of the mind and the hand and their acts—by people, days, and the gods.

P.V.



NOTES



NOTES

AN EARLIER translation of *Monsieur Teste* by Jackson Mathews, omitting the extracts from the *Cahiers*, was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1947 in a limited edition.

3. PREFACE: Written for the second English translation of *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste*. *The Evening with Mr. Teste* is a translation by Ronald Davis, with a preface in French by Paul Valéry (Paris: Ronald Davis, 1925). This preface appeared at the same time in the review *Commerce IV*, Paris, Spring 1925. The first English translation was made by Natalie Clifford Barney and published in *The Dial*, New York, LXXII, No. 2, February 1922. See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), p. II.

... in a room where *Auguste Comte* . . . : in the former Hôtel de l'Intendance du Languedoc, at Montpellier.

... the substance of things he hopes for: a reference to Hebrews II:1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

8. THE EVENING WITH MONSIEUR TESTE: "La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste," one of Valéry's most famous texts, first appeared in the second and final volume of the quarterly review *Le Centaure*, Paris, 1896. Paul Fort republished it unchanged in the review *Vers et Prose*, December 1905-January 1906. The publishing house La Nouvelle Revue Française published *La Soirée* . . . as a plaquette in 1919, and again in 1922, with a portrait of M. Teste by Bernard Naudin in the collection "Une œuvre Un portrait." In 1926, Ronald Davis

published *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste, avec préface et suivie d'extraits de son log-book*, the first of the editions to bring together some of the pieces known as the "Teste Cycle." This edition carried the superscription, *Vita Cartesii res simplicissima est*. In 1931, Les Éditions du Sagittaire, Paris, published the *Préface, La Soirée. . ., Lettre de Madame Émilie Teste, Le Log-book de M. Teste*, and *Lettre d'un Ami*. Gallimard had published these same five texts in 1927, and in 1946 augmented this edition with five unpublished texts. See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), pp. 15 ff.

Vita Cartesii res est simplicissima: The superscription has this form in *Œuvres de Paul Valéry*, Tome B, 1931. The Pléiade edition of Valéry's work has dropped "res."

As first published (in *Le Centaure*, 1896), instead of a superscription, *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste* carried a dedication to Eugène Kolbassine, a professor of philosophy and admired friend of Valéry. But this dedication was made only after Degas had refused it for himself. (See *André Gide-Paul Valéry Correspondance* [Paris: Gallimard, 1955], p. 261.)

22. A LETTER FROM MADAME ÉMILIE TESTE: first published with the title *Émilie Teste: Lettre* in Marguerite Caetani's review *Commerce II*, Autumn 1924, with a "publisher's note" questioning its authenticity. (See Appendix, herein, p. 157.) It was reprinted by Ronald Davis in 1925, with the title *Madame Émilie Teste: Lettre à un ami*, and became a part of the "Teste Cycle" in later editions of *Monsieur Teste*.

33. . . . *this old city. . . that ancient garden*: Montpellier and its Botanical Garden.

35. EXTRACTS FROM MONSIEUR TESTE'S LOGBOOK: published first with the title *Edmond Teste: Extraits de son Log-*

NOTES

book, in *Commerce VI*, Winter 1925; and by Ronald Davis in 1926. Valéry had used his own "Log-book" of 1896 (see *Cahier I*: 123-140). His first *Cahiers* were given the titles *Journal du bord* (1894), "Docks" (1895), *Self-book* (1895). On the cover of the *Journal du bord*, Valéry wrote: "1894. Pré-Teste. Bath." See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), p. 37.

47. LETTER FROM A FRIEND: first published with the title *Lettre*, in *Commerce I*, Summer 1924; printed at Brussels in 1925, with the title *Lettre de Paul Valéry*, for friends of the author by the Imprimerie Goosens; and with the title *Lettre à un ami*, with five woodcuts by Carlègle, by Les Éditions du Capitole (Paris, 1926). See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), p. 48.

54. . . . *who are waiting until I am translated into French* . . . : Valéry was often accused of writing obscure verse and prose. For the flurry caused by his "Inscriptions for the Palais de Chaillot," see *Collected Works*, Vol. II, p. 219.

Modeste tamen et circumspetto iudicio pronuntiaudum est; ne quod plerisque accidit, damnent quae non intelligunt: "Yet judgment was pronounced with restraint and caution; nor, as it happens in most cases, did they condemn what they did not understand."

60-79. A WALK WITH MONSIEUR TESTE: "Promenade avec Monsieur Teste"; DIALOGUE; SKETCHES FOR A PORTRAIT OF MONSIEUR TESTE: "Pour un Portrait de Monsieur Teste"; A FEW OF MONSIEUR TESTE'S THOUGHTS: "Quelques Pensées de Monsieur Teste"; END OF MONSIEUR TESTE: "Fin de Monsieur Teste": all were first published by Gallimard in 1946, along with the other pieces in the "Teste Cycle," and were accompanied by this note: "Paul Valéry avait, avant sa mort, réuni un ensemble de notes et d'esquisses avec l'intention de

les utiliser pour une nouvelle édition de M. Teste. Les fragments qui suivent et qui appartiennent à des époques très différentes, ont été choisies parmi cet ensemble." See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), p. 56.

60. A WALK WITH MONSIEUR TESTE: In a letter to André Gide, written July 21, 1912, Valéry mentions putting together a new Monsieur Teste. "Je pourrai, alors, s'il plaît au temps, tripatouiller *Monsieur Teste* ainsi: 1° *La Soirée*, 2° l'excommencement d'*Agathe* qui ferait l'intérieur de la nuit de M. Teste; 3° un petit tour avec Monsieur, dont j'ai le début . . ." (*Gide-Valéry Correspondance*, pp. 426-27). For "Agathe ou le Sommeil," see *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 205, and *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), p. 1388.

83. SNAPSHOTS OF MONSIEUR TESTE: Selections from Valéry's Notebooks. These *Cahiers* were published in facsimile, in twenty-nine volumes, by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1957-1961.

99. *Death of Monsieur Teste*: This passage, written as the conclusion to "Fin de Monsieur Teste" in *Cahier 7*, p. 836, was omitted from the Pléiade edition, *Œuvres II*, p. 74.

123. Reference to Titus I: 12-13: "It was a Cretan prophet, one of their own countrymen, who said 'Cretans were always liars, viscious brutes, lazy gluttons'—and he told the truth!"

Buonarotti's reproaches. . . : "Walking with a friend near S. Trinità, where a company of honest folk were gathered and talk was going on about some passage from Dante, they called to Lionardo and begged him to explain its meaning. It so happened that just at this moment Michelangelo went by, and being hailed by one of them, Lionardo

NOTES

answered: 'There goes Michelangelo; he will interpret the verses you require.' Whereupon Michelangelo, who thought he spoke in this way to make fun of him, replied in anger: 'Explain them yourself, you who made the model of a horse to be cast in bronze, and could not cast it, and to your shame left it in the lurch.' With these words, he turned his back to the group, and went his way. Lionardo remained standing there, red in the face for the reproach cast at him; and Michelangelo, not satisfied, but wanting to sting him to the quick, added: 'And those Milanese capons believed in your ability to do it!'" John Addington Symonds, *The Life of Michelangelo Buonarotti*, New York: The Modern Library, 1926, pp. 110-11. The anecdote is taken from *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarotti, Narrata con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti da Aurelio Gotti*, 2 vols. Florence: Tip. della Gazzetta d'Italia, 1875, I, 48.

Appendix

157. PUBLISHER'S NOTE: This "Note de la Direction," written by Valéry, accompanied the first publication of "A Letter from Madame Émilie Teste," in *Commerce II*, Autumn 1924.

158. IMAGES OF MONSIEUR TESTE: "Monsieur Teste en Images," Valéry's preface to *Album de Monsieur Teste, avec gravures de l'auteur*, published by Les Éditions de la Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1945.



This colophon was chosen from a number of drawings by Paul Valéry of his favorite device.

s by Paul Valéry of