

from now. No such movement yet seems to be apparent in the sculpture on view this year [...]

XVI 22 December 1824

There is bravura in the genius of Horace Vernet. In this timid, over-cautious century, he takes risks, and the result is a happy one; he works fast, he works well, but he works by approximations [...]

One critic, a great enemy of Romanticism, has used the strange epithet *Shakespearean* in order to describe Vernet's canvas, contrasting them with the *Homeric* tradition of Raphael and David. One might as well say that one will term *Romantic* anything that is not excellent. By this quite simple artifice, in the eyes of the public, slowly the word 'Romantic' would come to be synonymous with the word *bad*.

One thing that is Romantic in painting is the *Battle of Montmirail*, that masterpiece by Horace Vernet, where nothing, not even chiaroscuro, is lacking. A Classical painting, by contrast, is the battle by Salvator Rosa, of approximately the same dimensions, to be seen at the far end of the Grand Gallery on the Seine side. The Romantic, in all the arts, is the man who represents people as they are today, and not as they were in those heroic times so distant from us, and which probably never existed. If one bothers to compare the two battle scenes which I have just indicated, and above all compare the quantity of pleasure that they procure to the spectator, one will be able to form a clear idea of what Romanticism is in painting. Classicism, on the contrary, is exemplified by these completely naked men who fill David's *Intervention of the Sabine Women*. Even if their talent were identical, the Vernet battle scene would be infinitely superior. What sympathy can be felt by a Frenchman of today, who has himself carried a sword, for men who fight *stark naked*? [...]

¹ The scene depicted in this painting is from Racine's play *Britannicus*. Britannicus is the Emperor Nero's half brother. Nero has ordered Locusta to provide Narcissus with poison in order to kill Britannicus. Narcissus tests the efficacy of the poison on a slave.

5 Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de St Simon (1760–1825) 'The Artist, the Savant and the Industrialist'

Few ideas have pervaded the discussion of art in the modern period as thoroughly as that of the 'avant-garde'. The meaning of the term, however, is radically unstable. In some usages it has become aligned with 'Modernism' and even 'art for art's sake'. In others it is identified with the desire to change society. As a term of reference for an advanced force in culture, it first occurs in the late writings of the French utopian socialist, Henri de St Simon. Here it is the second type of meaning which is clearly intended: the artist is given the leading role in the transformation of society, working in cooperation with both the scientist and industrialist against the forces of reaction. St Simon was a product of both the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, and in his earlier writing had given priority to science and technology as the means to improve society. This tendency was fulfilled in the association he made from 1817, with Auguste Comte (cf. II.2). However, at the end of his life he abandoned the mechanistic view of society, breaking with Comte in 1824. He moved instead to a Romantically inclined

view of society as a living organism and began to develop the doctrine known as 'New Christianity'. It was as a consequence of this turn that St Simon came to accord a larger role to art and the imagination in the process of social change. The present text represents an imaginary dialogue between an artist, a savant and an industrialist. St Simon makes it clear that he intends the term 'artist' to refer alike to poet and writer, painter and musician: all 'men of imagination'. The following extract, actually composed by St Simon's disciple, Olinde Rodriguez, is taken from the concluding chapter of *Opinions Littéraires, Philosophiques et Industrielles*, Paris: Galerie de Bossange père, 1825, pp. 332–44. It was translated by Jonathan Murphy for the present volume.

The Artist: None of us, Gentlemen, is content with his situation. But to change it is well within our powers: giving a new direction to our work, and changing the nature of the relations which until now have existed between us would be more than sufficient.

The weak have a right to complain. They have neither the hope nor the means of remedying their situation, and hence a complaint is a natural right and a source of consolation. But the strong have no such right: we, who are capable of curing the physical or moral cause of the source of our complaints, we are merely ridiculous when we start to complain.

Are we not in agreement, Gentlemen, that the strength of society resides in us, that all the energy at the Government's disposal originates in us, and that we, in a word, are the mainstay of the life of society? How could it continue to exist if our work were no more? Who could satisfy the needs of Man, or procure for him those pleasures which are also his needs, if industry, the arts and the sciences were all suddenly to disappear? What could the ruling classes do? They are neither Artists, nor Savants, nor Industrialists, and they consider it well beneath their dignity to be classed among the producers. Would it be to the ruling classes that the father with hungry mouths to feed addressed his demands for bread, clothes and shelter for his children? From them that the labourer demanded the tools for his trade or advice for the success of his harvests? From them that the rich man begged pictures and statues to charm his eye and mind, or sublime songs to please his ear and soul? In the face of such a general crisis, what could the ruling classes grant? In answer to the prayers of the public, what could they possibly give back to society? All they know how to do is to pay: and even this would be impossible if Industry, the Arts and the Sciences, over which they normally have influence, were to refuse to society the fruits of their cooperation, the results of their work and their constant vigilance.

However, let it not be understood that I regard the ruling classes as having no role to play whatsoever. Properly entrusted with the task of ordering society, they would do it an important and useful service, providing that the highest administration of public affairs be entrusted to those with positive capacities. The ruling classes would then be forced to recognize their function as secondary, and to see that there exists between themselves and the men of Industry, the Arts and the Sciences, a distance similar to the one which separates the teachers and the monitors in schools. Neither should it be understood that I am denying the purity of the intentions of the ruling classes. But they are deluded, and constantly live in a state of perpetual error, for which some blame must be attributed. They do not understand the times in which they live; they do not believe that today, consideration and respect can only be granted to men of talent and to men of value to society. They wish to be given the greatest

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consideration and treated with the utmost respect, when in fact they are but mediocre men who produce no useful work, and therefore have no place amongst Savants, Industrialists and Artists.

European society is no longer composed of children who must, in their own interest, be governed by a firm and active intervention; it is made up of mature men, whose education is complete, and who need naught but instruction. Politics should now be the science of procuring for the greatest number the greatest possible sum of material goods and moral pleasures. The ruling classes, although in the sway of ancient prejudices, and living a life of delusion, do none the less pay homage, through their actions, to public opinion. They are beginning to demonstrate, if not by their actions, then at least by the form in which they present them, that they have begun to realize that they are dealing with reasonable men who do not wish to live in order that they may be governed, but who consent to be governed in order that they may live more comfortably. One may grant that, to the best of their abilities given the present state of affairs, they honour the Arts, the Sciences and Industry with their favours, but what need have these three great powers of such favour, when they are already so capable in themselves, and so indispensable to society? Those of us who oversee them might well ask the ruling classes what, in the final analysis, they have in common with us. How is it that we are at their mercy? To whom does the nation owe its well-being? Who offers the greater service to the throne? Everything which is useful to Society emerges from our minds, from our studies, from our workshops, from our factories and not from their offices or dining-rooms. If we come to conceive of a project of general utility, we are forced to beg them to lend it some consideration. Should we manage to convince them to adopt it, it is we who carry it out in accordance with their whims. But since it is they who are inferior to us in every capacity, since the sole capacity which they possess is that of surveillance (which more rightly should decrease day by day), how is it that their constant desire is to reduce us to the role of merely passive instruments, without which it would be impossible for them to carry out the most rudimentary operation? Their pride is as out of place and as ridiculous as that of the coachman who, proud of the elevation of his seat, believes himself to be above the master who pays him and feeds his horses.

I imagine that if one of us were to put these issues to a member of the ruling class, the reply would be quite simple: 'I have but one thing to say to you', he would answer, 'You are divided but we are united'.

This reply, Gentlemen, would be well-founded. Unity, which is the virtue and safeguard of the weak, is also one of the duties of the strong. Yet, rather than a happy concord reigning amongst us, there is, on the contrary, between Savants, Industrialists and Artists, a state of permanent hostility. I do not pretend that the blame is to be found on one side: we all bear some responsibility.

The Savant, influenced by the nature of his work and his natural talent, respects only rigorous reasoning and positive results, and considers the Artist a somewhat wild spirit. He believes neither in the utility or the power of the arts. But he of course forgets that reasoning merely convinces on an intellectual level, while the arts persuade by touching men's sensibilities.

Neither does the Industrialist, in general, do the Artist the justice that he deserves, but forms instead a false picture of him. He sets little store by the talents of men of

letters, poets, painters and musicians, regarding them as untrustworthy, dangerous outsiders. Normally cold and calculating in matters pertaining to material production, Industrialists look down upon any intellectual work which produces no facts amongst its results. Others seem inspired by some distant feudal associations, and forget all too often both their own plebeian origins, and the hard work which is the honourable source of their riches, and open the doors of their brilliant salons only to people whose great name or large fortune outweighs their usefulness. Doubtless they would be afraid to treat as equals men who regard as obsolete the sort of respect conferred by titles and nobility. In short, all Industrialists regard the superiority of their social position over that of Artists as being quite evident and incontestable.

We Artists – and here I speak with the same frankness – are perhaps even more exclusive and unjust. The ideal sphere which we inhabit often inclines us to cast a glance filled with pity and scorn at this earthly world. The imagination, which provides us with the sweetest pleasures and the purest consolations, seems to us the sole human faculty deserving of respect and praise, and hence we attach no great value to the work of Savants, whose importance we constantly underestimate, and we make almost nothing of their company, which seems to provide so little food for our souls. Their conversation seems too dull, and their work, to our eyes, is too purely material. We feel even more strongly about the men of industry. The low opinion that many of us have of a class of men who are both honourable and necessary is made worse by the conviction that all Industrialists are ruled exclusively by a raging passion for money. Such an eminently earthly passion is hated by poets, painters and musicians, for whom money has neither dignity nor value; since time immemorial, Artists have excelled only at spending it.

Evidently, I have spoken frankly here on behalf of all of us, and if I speak as a man who would hide nothing, it is because I desire fervently that these times were behind us. Let us change our attitude and change direction: instead of fixing our attention on the faults of one another, let us instead set about praising our qualities. Let us be filled with one great idea: the well-being of society as a whole depends entirely on the potential of the three groups which we represent. Let us always bear in mind that each of us contributes in equal measure to this good, and that if a single one of the three classes to which we belong were to disappear, society would pass into a time of great hardship and danger. Deprived of Science, Art or Industry, society would topple like a palace in an earthquake.

Let us be conscious of our mutual value, and in this way we will achieve the dignity befitting our position. Let us combine our forces, that the mediocrity of the present, which triumphs over our disarray, will be recognized for what it is, and forever banished to its proper place below. The pacific power of our triple crown will triumph over a world in transformation.

Let us unite. To achieve our one single goal, a separate task will fall to each of us.

We, the artists, will serve as the avant-garde: for amongst all the arms at our disposal, the power of the Arts is the swiftest and most expeditious. When we wish to spread new ideas amongst men, we use, in turn, the lyre, ode or song, story or novel; we inscribe those ideas on marble or canvas, and we popularize them in poetry and in song. We also make use of the stage, and it is there above all that our influence is most electric and triumphant. We aim for the heart and imagination, and hence our effect is

the most vivid and the most important, it is for a success essential to their success.

The peoples of antiquity, unknown, pushed the sciences, and the Arts played a great role in their lives. They were patriotic.

Later, when a new era began to grow and develop, the Arts declined, and the Arts started to rise in a powerful fashion: they were patriotic.

Now that the great work reigns between all men and society is becoming ever more advanced, we have evolved towards for

Such, then, is the character of mankind, in Europe, to maturity and reason. Man has at last attained an advanced stage, and that no one in particular directed in concert towards

Doubtless imagination with its exclusive reign is passing, he none the less determined to persist in following a course for that old-fashioned goal. They would risk losing for ever their civilization, they would meet on the other hand, they should assist the common cause, and give useful sensations for should properly experience with the spirit of the times and success will immediately they will be raised up to be harnessed in the direction simply incalculable. [...]

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Anna Jameson was the celebrated governess between 1810 and 1815. She was aware how fast, how very fast, she was producing a frustration wide, and

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The peoples of antiquity, to whom feelings of universal brotherhood were entirely unknown, pushed the selfishness of individual states to its furthest point. But for them the Arts played a great political role, and exerted an important influence: they were patriotic.

Later, when a new belief spread amongst men the principles of an enlightened, humane and merciful morality, and great political associations were formed, industry began to grow and develop, and slavery, in the face of truly divine beliefs, began to decline, and the Arts still served the general movement of mankind in the most powerful fashion: they were religious.

Now that the great work of Christianity is drawing to a close, and brotherhood reigns between all men and all nations, the great fallacies are slowly being eroded, and society is becoming ever more *positive*. The Arts must now at last take the form they have evolved towards for over a century: they must be filled with *common sense*.

Such, then, is the character of the times in which we live. It has been necessary for mankind, in Europe, to pass through terrible crises, before arriving at a time of maturity and reason. Man must now ensure that all his different faculties, which have at last attained an advanced state of development, are maintained in equilibrium, and that no one in particular dominates at the expense of the rest, so that all may be directed in concert towards a goal of general and complete amelioration.

Doubtless imagination will hold man in its grip for some time to come, but the time of its exclusive reign is past; and if man is as avid as ever for the joys that the Arts bring, he none the less demands that his reason partake of these joys. If the Arts were to persist in following a course where they have nothing left to achieve, and aim still for that old-fashioned goal of merely pleasing and touching the imagination, they would risk losing for ever their importance, and far from directing the march of civilization, they would merely be classed among the base needs of our society. But if, on the other hand, they support the general movement of the human spirit, if they assist the common cause, and contribute to the growth of general well-being, producing useful sensations for mankind such as those which a developed intelligence should properly experience, if they propagate generous ideas which are in keeping with the spirit of the times together with these sensations, an immense future of glory and success will immediately open up before them. Their energies will return, and they will be raised up to the highest point they could possibly attain: for when harnessed in the direction of the public good, the force of the imagination is quite simply incalculable. [...]

6 Anna Jameson (1794–1826) from *Diary of an Ennuyé*

Anna Jameson was the daughter of an Irish painter. She had travelled in Europe as a governess between 1810 and 1825, and then made an uncongenial marriage. 'None seem aware how fast, how very fast the principle of life is burning away within me', she wrote, voicing a frustration widely echoed among the educated women of the nineteenth century.