

CRITICISM IN TRANSLATION

The Concept of the New Literature

RAMÓN GÓMEZ DE LA
SERNA

INTRODUCTION AND
TRANSLATION

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Introduction

Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888–1963), arguably Spain's most gifted and renowned avant-gardist, founded the literary journal *Prometeo* in 1908. It was a pioneering journal, not only in featuring the work of young Spanish modernists like Juan Ramón Jiménez, Eugenio Noel, Rafael Cansinos-Assens, and Gabriel Miró, but also in publishing numerous texts in translation by some of Europe's greatest writers of the period, including Rémy de Gourmont, Gabriel D'Annunzio, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Oscar Wilde, among many others. Yet *Prometeo* was significant for another reason. It offered Gómez de la Serna a creative outlet for his nascent avant-gardism. In April 1909—in the same issue in which his Spanish translation of F. T. Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" appeared—he published his own manifesto, "El concepto de la nueva literatura" ("The Concept of the New Literature"). This manifesto is undoubtedly one of the major texts of the early Spanish avant-garde. Indeed, what makes it so remarkable is that it reveals the extent to which Gómez de la Serna not only envisioned with prescient accuracy the aesthetic innovations that would revolutionize European modernisms but also mapped out the avant-gardist agenda that would define much of his experimental work for years to come.

A few months before Gómez de la Serna published "The Concept of the New Literature" in *Prometeo*, he read it to a packed house at the historic Ateneo Científico, Literario y Artístico de Madrid. He had been invited to lecture on his most recent work at the revered institution after being elected secretary of its literature section. No one suspected what was to come when he took the lectern. The reading of the manifesto sparked a great scandal and elicited immediate condemnation and derision from a great many patrons in attendance. There was even talk of blacklisting Gómez de la Serna from the institution and stripping him of his new position. While this never came to pass, he instantly gained a reputation as a brilliant, daring, and

rebellious writer and agent provocateur, the very embodiment of the new spirit of avant-garde modernity that younger writers were so eager to embrace. His polemical manifesto, delivered at the very heart of Spain's intellectual establishment, launched his fame and his status as a subversive avant-gardist.

Gómez de la Serna opens his manifesto by declaring that his objective is to convey the concept—that is, the general framework—of the “new literature,” which is capable of articulating the experience of the modern. Although this new literature remains in its infancy, as he readily acknowledges, it is beginning to manifest itself in the work of young writers who are blazing a path in the all-important task of “irnos reconstruyendo” (“our self-reconstruction”). The new literature demands that writers be unflinchingly truthful in their work and scrupulously examine their intimate and true selves in the experiential here-and-now of daily life. For this reason, the new literature is by necessity (auto)biographical, a type of creative life writing. He adds, “Toda obra ha de ser principalmente biográfica” (“Every work must be primarily biographical”). On the question of literary style, the new literature lacks any defining characteristic. Gómez de la Serna poses the following question: How can we yoke the new literature to any established stylistic norm or formal strategy if it springs from the impulsive dynamism of “la vida misma” (“life itself”)? In other words, “El nuevo estilo ha dejado de ser óptico o corazonado. . . . [C]ompromete la complejidad del ser en un orgasmo” (“The new style is no longer optic or sentimental. . . . [I]t condenses the complexity of being in an orgasm”). The new literature, then, involves not just the realm of the mind, but also the body, the senses, and the self's situatedness in the world. Unsurprisingly, the “old literature,” which, according to Gómez de la Serna, remained straitjacketed by convention and the mind-numbing rituals of academicism and good taste, could never hope to express anything profound, anything *real*, about how the individual actively engages the modern. Unlike the new literature, the old literature lacked “un ESTADO DE CUERPO” (“a BODILY STATE”).

It is this (auto)biographical and embodied approach to literary practice spelled out in the manifesto that informs practically everything Gómez de la Serna ever wrote. In his experimental, stream-of-consciousness *El libro mudo (Secretos)* (*The Mute Book (Secrets)*; 1910), his panegyric on his one-person cultural movement *Ramonismo (Ramonism)*; 1923), and his detailed autobiographical chronicle of his living-unto-death *Automoribundia* (1948), he revised and reformulated the aesthetic principles of the new literature that he had championed in his early manifesto. Also noteworthy in this respect are his highly introspective biographies on artists and writers including Carolina Coronado, Salvador Dalí, El Greco, Francisco Goya, José Gutiérrez Solana, and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. He often referred to them as “biografías integrales” (“integral biographies”), because they incorporate such a great deal of his own personal life. And of course there is his signature 1910 invention of the *greguería*, a humorous aphorism that encapsulates his highly subjectivist understanding of the absurdity and fragmentariness of urban life.

Although Gómez de la Serna's manifesto explores various other topics, such as gender, social justice, and decadent aesthetics, it is most memorable for its insights into life writing and its role in redefining literary conventions. It makes clear that experimental autobiographical fiction was in fact constitutive of the new literature of the future. The manifesto champions several literary innovations that would fundamentally influence the course of European modernisms. We need only think ahead to modernists' shifting attitudes toward biography as a genre (the New Biography, to name one salient example, which the Bloomsbury Group developed after 1918), and to the centrality of life writing more generally throughout the early twentieth century. Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Italo Svevo, Robert Musil, Thomas Mann, Miguel de Unamuno, and many others exploited the porosity of autobiographical truth to address the profound crisis of the modern subject who yearned to articulate something authentic about the self. Certainly, this impulse to convey what Gómez de la Serna called “el concepto íntimo y funcional del ser” (“the intimate and

functional concept of being”), played a defining role in shaping modernist aesthetics and its strategies for representing fluid identities. Ultimately, it is what allowed the new literature to place the author’s *I* at the center of the text.

The Concept of the New Literature

Ladies and gentlemen.

Good evening.

I do not understand the fortuitous causes of things, but I do know that they guide me. Obeying them now, I will read a few pages that I wrote during decisive moments in my life.

I was elected secretary of the literary section thanks to the support of my good friends, whose admiration I appreciate. Thus, I was tasked with reading one of my works. I had to justify my new position.

This is the fortuitous cause of our gathering here this evening. Its nexus is a separate issue. I wrote these pages in private, believing they were nothing more than a beginning and an end in themselves, which is how I write most everything. It is a little disconcerting for me to read them aloud now to a live audience. You should know that live audiences have remained a mystery to me, even though I have addressed them on numerous occasions. I have never had the slightest propensity for ceremony. Had I not already been dressed in mourning, I would have violated the liturgy of solemn occasions like this one and appeared before you dressed in a light tan suit, a wool tie, and brightly colored gloves. I would also have worn my indescribable, everyday hat, which I did bring with me.

In the work I will present today, I have endeavored to deduce the concept of the new literature. However, my work is aimed not at the literature that already exists, but rather the literature yet to come, which, although largely formless, is already manifesting itself in daily life. And life—and I will

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state this with utmost conviction—remains unwritten, poignantly and ineffably unwritten.

I will not refer to various eminent figures in my work. I have purposively chosen this approach to avoid any regrettable digressions. Moreover, I have never forgotten the lesson of King Nebuchadnezzar, who threw the brothers Nello into a fiery furnace for refusing to fall prostrate or kneel before his image.

But I suspect that, even though my iconoclasm is conceptual, one of you will surely rise up and defend these deceased eminent figures.

Of course no one is authorized to represent these figures and least of all those who embrace them. Every issue must be tackled with sincerity among individuals. By simply invoking the illustrious names of these historic men, and without further justification, certain conservative and ignorant people feel empowered to oppose all forms of rebellion.

Despite these people, including the flunkies and all the rest of them who cower behind their ideas about eminent figures, I dare you to engage me in a heated debate. It may well be a very challenging debate, for I will certainly be partial. Impartiality is a meaningless principle of inertia. It is nothing but the initial moment of judgment, and, thus, of partiality.

I will now tackle the subject at hand.

By definition, nothing is what it is. This state of affairs was the malicious aspiration of the Scholastics.

A general term was nothing more than an inconsistent thing. General terms have been replaced over time with an atomistic understanding,

which has become the natural vessel and abode of common sense.

Nevertheless, prescriptivists continue to believe in literature by definition. Every one of them has a pithy formula for it. This is a mistake. Following Lebesgue, we believe that “art reduced to formulas denies itself.” We are incapable—perhaps because of an excess of capability—of conjuring up one of those hermetic and conclusive abstractions about literature that leads nowhere. We are transformists, literarily speaking.

The concept of the new literature resists the simplicity of precepts. It is something far more complicated, intertwined with various other concepts.

By nature, literature is exceptionally conjunctive. Our present moment, requiring as it does a synthesis and a safe harbor, has embraced it.

The historical concept of literature inevitably had to wane. The powerfully vital things of this world refuse with utmost impudence to be defined by prejudices. Everything acquires a presentness over and above any etymological consideration when it does away with atavisms of all kinds.

Thus, the new literature has gained a new meaning that all others have lacked. It unites elements that no other literature has ever encompassed. It has also expanded by correlation. I will not try to justify it. It requires no justification. It is, and that is sufficient, that is its justification. Stirner has said, “Only your might, your power, gives you the right. What you have the power to be you have a right to.”

The primary influence on literature is life, the everyday, tireless, and exposed life that remains as formidable as ever under an unprecedented deluge of light. The expansion of life originates from this entanglement, which has required a primitivism that has taken centuries to come into its own and become truly primitive.

What was needed was a generic mode of expression that was impervious to systematization and could articulate the supreme yearnings of life.

Philosophy was infused with elements of scholasticism, academicism, specialism, and various other *isms*. Thus, there was no choice but to rely on literature.

It stands to reason, therefore, that to study literature we must also study the interventionism of life.

Beginning some years ago, life—that is, the life that only an individual with the least popular temperament can imagine—has attained such a level of serenity that it has managed to cauterize the latest social maladies. Life has endured countless religious epochs, and recently endured a moralistic and ridiculous Comtian phase. From these extensive wounds, it has acquired its present vigor. Thanks to these painful epidemics, it has grown immune to their recurrence. Free from fantasies and rinsed clean, our eyes can finally see for the first time. Indeed, we can see clearly like never before.

Light, landscape, time, and objects in general have become so sociable, so easily comprehensible, that in no other period have they been as expeditiously apprehended as they are now.

Hugo had the world believe that he was a master, but his self-applause was bluster. He did not have it in him to be a master, because he did not believe in man. He was a Christian. He was still confused, and his quip to Napoleon reveals a great deal about his character at the time: “The future belongs to God.”

He was wrong.

It now seems that the future belongs to men.

In principle, it belongs to men.

So many things have reinvigorated life, such promulgation of secularism, such asepsis, countless upheavals, that man has forged a new and surprising truth beyond the reach of clichés, commonplaces, and restrictions.

Emerson, Stirner, Nietzsche, Gorki, and Haeckel bursting forth in our life has changed everything.

Today it is impossible to write a single page ignoring Nietzsche. The crucial question is, Do we ignore everything or not? [. . .]^a

The philosophy of the end of the last century and, especially, of the beginning of this one has shown us how to explore the world generally and without limiting the type of exploration each one of us chooses to undertake. It indoctrinates at the outset, but then offers no definitive conclusions. Its objective ends where its first premise begins.

It liberates us, and then immediately leaves us to our own devices.

Peer Gynt, Ibsen's hero, that creation of a robust and mighty personality, was right when he defined the younger generation much as he defined himself: "I am an autodidact." In truth there are no great teachers left in the world. If there are any of them left for the younger generation—and let me be clear on this point—their role is contingent and dependent, since the student now educates the teacher.

The philosophical and expansive influence of which I speak owes a great deal to the fact that philosophy has become more literary—that is to say, worldlier—as literature has turned more philosophical. These transformations are not surprising, since, as Taine rightly argued, literature has always offered the author a pretext to philosophize.

The new and unprecedented literature emerges from this conjunction. While Racine defined it from the perspective of the metaphysical trinity—the subtle art of creating something out of nothing—Boschort has recently advanced the contrary and impassioned argument that its objective is to gain knowledge of our human condition.

Everything favors it.

A detached urban consciousness, the lessons of the modern street, years of daily press, the rise of the machine—everything has taught us lessons on imperialism and human value that have increased our will to power.

Zola refused to listen to Nietzsche. Born during a period when contrary ideologies collided, Zola's literature shed light on numerous social perils, outrages, and cruelties that we would do well to keep in mind, for this consciousness has begun to alleviate much suffering in life. We can better understand Zola's hyperbolic literature if we consider that it sprang from upheavals, injustices, and a fierce discontent that has now subsided. During this turbulent age, even good old Rousseau was prosecuted, though deep down he was nothing more than a respectable village priest.

Liberated from this intemperance, the new literature affirms a syncretic and even-keeled judgment the likes of which has never been seen before. It incorporates various influences to magnify and renew its fundamental purpose.

Paul Adam has expressed its impetus thus: "We consecrate ourselves to an *idealist* literature just like

our predecessors consecrated themselves to an essentially sentimental literature."

The impervious judgment of the new literature exalts intuition. The new literature is the unification of every methodology and ideology.

It is truer than science, too, according to Amiel, because it is synthetic and reveals from the outset what all the sciences combined can only hope to discover one day.

Taine has stated that, "instead of defining ideas, it generates them."

As with every diapositive, the negative cliché has contributed to the concept of the new literature.

In the light of a certain literature of the past—and even of the present—the new literature detests what is commonplace, trite, and hackneyed. It detests everything in this literature that should have faded into obscurity long ago.

Thus, the wisdom of the new literature—because it still finds itself somewhat in transition—consists primarily in knowing *what it must not do*, which is valuable knowledge gleaned from the vulgar nonsense one finds in practically every book. In engaging with these books, the new literature has become deeply apprehensive of a great many things.

The literature of the past, much like the literature of the anachronists, is exceedingly technical, condensed, and simplistic. Preoccupied with form and crafted following predetermined rules, it reads like the writings of presbyters: it is inert, dull, and oppressive, for it lacks humanity and, above all else, worldliness.

Its meager, gaunt, hermetic, primitive, dense, and overwrought pages are filled with deadening platitudes and a stifling prose devoid of any airiness, poise, or light. These pages reek of dusty rooms and humid cloisters, and they suffocate the reader with their rarefied schemes, abstractions, and terminology.

Yet the most deplorable thing about this literature, and what most powerfully incites rebellion against it, is that it lacks passion. It is impassive. Yes, impassive. It is merely entertainment, a pastime—and is it not a kind of suicide to pass the time so carelessly? It is a pastime for people whose blood has not pulsed with the exalted rhythms of Rodin, Meunier, Zuloaga, Carrière, Beethoven,

Walt Whitman, Mallarmé, Anatole, the great Oscar Wilde, and so many others.

We conceive each minute as formidable and apothecic.

This is why we care little about filling time with entertainment. We need more than discretion—much more. We demand indiscretion.

Everything about these anachronists is too dialectical. Their work lacks the drive and carnal imperative with which the new literature bares itself to us. Everything about them is insulated, theatrical, and fatuous. Forged from vile and rigid convictions, these authors uphold the same imperturbable views and spread a literary, fanatic, and hostile lie rife with moralization.

The old literature is devoid of ideas. Do you understand? Reading it is like suffering a trepanation. Everything about it is descriptive and visual, because its defective style is grammatical and paralytic. It has not assimilated change like the new writers, whose style stems from their cells, semen, retinas, dermis, epidermis, etc., etc.

There is not a single passion, blasphemy, ambiguity, effrontery, or excess in this literature. It lacks a BODILY STATE. Crafted entirely from a condition of ethical, logical, canonical, and insufferable repose, it is as if the author simply disappeared from its pages.

The people portrayed in these works are observed without truly being seen. Is this even possible? Can the individuals we observe appear to us as something other than an intimate concept, an epilogue, a *flavor*, or a remark?

No.

The renunciation in these literary creations is harmful and antagonistic, and it aggressively evokes the idea of a surgical procedure. We feel as if we are being torn apart—the spirit of these works is bound up in such distant and lofty matters. They decenter us. We feel as if we are being wrung out and had our innermost parts plundered by the outermost parts of the world.

What applies to living beings and things also applies to the landscape. There is no landscape beyond our eyeballs. It is the most subjective thing. Imagine a landscape reflected in a mirror without a pair of eyes to observe it, or a subjectivity to

particularize it. It does not exist. It simply does not exist. It cannot exist. A landscape is inconceivable if it is not refracted through a bodily perception at a given moment in time. And yet, absurd individuals have attempted to portray it from an impersonal perspective.

Everything that lies beyond our personal consideration is invisible, irrelevant, prophetic without being enigmatic, abstruse without being difficult, and neither familiar nor foreign to our way of thinking—the impersonal, the unthinkable.

To seek life itself in the intellectual meaning of life is a mistake.

To do so only renders life meaningless. To search for life within ourselves is to solve the great mystery using our one and only clue.

Scherer, the great paraphraser of the Bible, uttered a single truth, which is this: “Truth does not reside on earth. It is *created*.” Of course, he said these words with the wicked aim of forging a neo-Christian truth.

According to the concept of the new literature, we must acknowledge a wealth of exotic sensations and their many influences when it comes to the question of truth. Unbridled inspiration is not enough.

Every work must be primarily biographical, for, if it is not, it ends up being something teratological. Works created according to other concepts are often disjointed and tend to spiritually strip away our inner world to embody bizarre things.

Men have devised ways to speak outside themselves. I cannot explain how this came about because it happened gradually. I cannot say exactly how they do it, but they have accomplished it somehow. They have devised ways to scatter their identities so that, when they are and cannot but be a single idea, they manage to divide it into two. The maneuver is undoubtedly odd, yet it is nonetheless true. Men who exhibit this penchant for exteriority have produced a stagnant and aimless literature that is agonizing to read.

Yet today, after we have made supreme the concept of man, thus categorically upholding the affirmation of living, we have rightly sought to conserve our energy. We must conserve our energy and not squander it, for we run the risk of suffering

fatigue and sterility—a macabre sterility, since it *lacks* any idea of eternity in which to find solace. This is what is so infuriating about the old literature: it is a literature of discontinuities and uprootedness.

For this reason, the task of the new literature must be our self-reconstruction, pilfering things, stripping them of the conceptual shards of ourselves that others have left there. Nothing can be considered objectively, yet the old literature is objective through and through. It is one big distraction. It has done nothing but alienate our spirit.

But its negative influence on life has ended. (We are entitled to invoke the definitiveness of this word, *ended*, for it really has come to an end for us).

We realize that to attend to ourselves or not, or to confirm or deny ourselves, bears upon a formidable and desperate question—to be or not to be.

“You lie like an epitaph,” says one of Gautier’s characters.

It is true: the epitaphs of the prominent authors of the old literature lie a great deal.

But I did not come here this evening to quibble about epitaphs. I came to present something more than simply the negative side of a concept.

There are many more important things to worry about.

For one, the question of style.

Unlike the feeble, inhibited, carceral, and oppressive style the others have bequeathed to us, unlike their knotted, harsh, and opaque prose, the style of the new literature has no deficiencies to speak of. Unlike the old style, it is not defined by grammar or mnemotechnics but sheds its distinct personality, its *style*, along with all its idiosyncrasies and pretentious individuality, to become life itself.

The new style is no longer optic or sentimental. Since it lacks any religious residue whatsoever, it condenses the complexity of being in an orgasm.

As opposed to the Byzantinism that has always inspired our sense of style—and as opposed to Buffon’s spurious and pretentious ideas about it—Bernard Shaw has said, thoroughly confounding the logicians who are ignorant of the new methods of literary definition, that “style is having something to say.”

Thus, style loses the lofty status it had created for itself. How things are said is no longer important. What matters is what is said.

Shaw’s genius and the reactive spirit animating it is pitted against the vacuous ideal of life that is starved of ideas.

Words, words, words!

Hamlet’s tragic cry captures the burden of life. Everywhere words, nothing but words. . . . Words that resemble ideas, but that are so hollow that when they are thrown about, they rattle with the emptiest of sounds. . . . Lifeless words, bits of plasterboard that contaminate ideas and supplant them. . . . [. . .]

Style is no longer a mere adornment. It no longer exudes a distinctive decorative quality. It is becoming transparent like never before, and it aspires to be more so every day. It is shedding its ostentatiousness. Yet, the question of style has never been more complicated than it is today—it is disconcerting and complicated for those who are incapable of interpreting it and overcoming it (you overcome it by assimilating it whole). Style should fade from view and reveal the concept of a piece. It is a kind of nakedness, whereas before it was an extravagant disguise.

This is how the expressive style has come to be. In every style, there ought to be a play of physiognomy filled with intimate revelations. The ideal of style is to achieve the expression of a Zacconi, a Novelli, or any other great actor.

Style has lost its old hue and acquired a new light. It has attained an ideal luminescence.

With luminescent prose, we avoid the maddening distractions of the old style, a style which, I admit, while in no way endorsing it, required skill to perfect. In the prologue to *L’Archipel en fleurs*, Retté commanded us to loathe everything that is “well said.” And Amiel, the Saint, has professed his “repugnance for good taste.”

Style should go unnoticed.

Classic good style is so overwrought that it smothers and supplants the concept. In this style, phrases stand in for ideas. One of the advantages of the new literature is its stylistic disarray and asymmetry.

Thus, concept is style, and style is concept.

In discussing style, I must speak about language and its philosophical underpinnings, as well as other vexing deceptions. Without going into detail, and to be perfectly blunt about it, I believe that language, especially if we keep in mind Lebesgue's remark that I referenced earlier, is an accidental phenomenon. Helen Keller's book proves as much. Although she is blind and deaf, her book is more truthful than those of Humboldt, or any other linguist for that matter.

Literary formulas have been rebelliously conquered, and literary genres have become genres of *thought*. Every literary mold, once it has been infused with life, has proven to be too restrictive because it has derived patronymically from the descendants of a great philosophical lie. Literary molds are inadequate for the same reason that in one of Paul de Kock's works, which happens to be a magnificent retort to Rousseau's neo-Christianity, the girdles and bodices of the young women living in the town of the fearless Alfonso are too tight. Yet Alfonso, with nature as his only teacher, grew handsome and strong from his life in the forest, free from all historical learning.

A transformation of style is also necessary to differentiate it from the conventional. Conventionality is one of the great tyrannies of life, and it drains our spirit. Conventionality has dulled life and distorted it. It has entombed the philosopher's stone. In our fealty to the conventional, we have forgotten nature's contrasting unity.

It is true that we would have happily dwelt inside convention forever. Since necessity can create an organ or render it superfluous, we would have lost our eyes and our rear ends would have ballooned in size had skepticism not placed us outside the grasp of the conventional and sown the seeds of reform.

The new literature rejects convention. It disinters the true concept of life by revitalizing our anemic curiosity and transgressing the prohibitions in which convention primarily consists—prohibitions that echo the warning etched on the Pillars of Hercules, which declare that there is nothing further beyond. The truth is that there are countless worlds still to be discovered. [. . .]

Everybody forgot about the everydayness of life. How is this possible? The everyday is supreme and what most affects us in our depths. The old literature ignored it, evoking instead a precarious, monotonous, and desolate feeling of vacuity—a vacuity that is as vacuous as its themes are ostentatious.

This is how a collection of *pathological* and *infarcted* works were born covered in *abscesses* and *boils* and filled with sentimentality and all sorts of honorable ideas—of which we retain only the barely visible *coccyges*. These works are invariably hypertrophic and portray a *life of exception*.

Bernard Shaw, who believes himself superior to Shakespeare, has said: "Shakespeare's characters appear to be frozen before an inscrutable Sphinx: with no answer to give, some laugh, some cry, some die, and *the rest is silence*."

The new literature tends to dissect this hermetic and still silence—everything that was essential and went unnoticed among the background actors or played *no role whatsoever* on the stage. Shaw has shown how it can be taken seriously.

"The rest is silence."

Indeed, we must ignore the external conflicts that have always inspired literature. We must change our habit of respiring concepts for one of perspiring them instead.

The new man—the only man if we are to speak with any good sense—has done well to put away his giant peplums and abandon the old pastime of walking on stilts. In rejecting the strident and stubborn epic, which was the product of a solemn and absurd wind instrument lodged in our belly, the other, intimate epic of instinctive provocations and cravings has regained its footing after lying buried for years beneath fraudulent and anodyne splendors. [. . .]

The new literature favors city avenues and boulevards, and park benches in public squares;¹ it favors a life of personal connections over the isolated armchair existence of the ivory tower. It does not turn a blind eye to social questions.

For the first time, it speaks decisive words of change and forces calm and conservative men—even the most subversive among them—to remain silent. [. . .]

By rejecting the excesses and irrational fears of other literatures, the new literature dares to be arbitrary, and therefore consequential and human. Within its pages, man strives for his own betterment. He has filled the void of God's absence in his own ineffable way. He has learned the value of mud.

For this reason, to be completely organic in the circumstantial—and thus, absolute—sense of the word, the new literature cannot ignore the now, nor can it ignore questions of space and place.

Oh! The now!

The last century inflicted great harm on the concept of time. Life was confusing. The self-affirmation apparent today has established a new temporality. It has become clear that we must live every moment with supreme ambition and without squandering anything, as if life itself were the *only* thing that remained intact, uninterrupted.

The now contributes to the affirmation of our lives and our finitude. This is all we need.

The now allows us to belong to a specific moment. We wish to belong to all moments, yet we do not see that, within this chimerical *all*, there is nothing to sustain us, nothing that *originates* us in terms of the intimate, organic, and carnal experience that molds our self-affirmation. [. . .]

Thus, we are discovering the new literature like neophytes. The concept of the new literature unifies and harmonizes everything monistically, and it explains the world straightforwardly without

requiring the lucubrations and expertise of others. Indeed, it is paradoxical that, from man's perspective, nature still finds itself under construction.

The new literature is no longer an expiation. It has been appeased.

This brings me to my penultimate point, the coda to my profession of faith. I expect everything from the new literature. It rejects idleness in all its forms, even the idleness of libertines who falter in their insurrection. It knows Gourmont's apothegm well: "Civilization is nothing but a succession of insurrections."

LET US UNLEASH OUR OWN.

That is all.

Tableau

AUTHOR'S NOTE

1. The reference to park benches does not imply that the new literature adopts a static approach to life. It believes the words Rousseau put in Monsieur de Wolmar's mouth when he declared, "It pains me that one sees nothing when one is intent on looking, or that it is necessary to rebel to appreciate why people rebel. I became an actor in life to thereby become a spectator."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

a. Bracketed ellipses indicate elided text; all other ellipses appear in the original.