

JACQUES-LOUIS LAFFITTE

*The Madder of Labor*

To William Dunnington  
Northwell-Carson, France

Translated from the French  
by John P. Perry

With an Introduction by Donald Reed

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## Author's Preface

READERS SHOULD NOT LOOK FOR ANY METAPHORS in my title. I am not going to call up the pains of manufacture's slaves, the unhealthiness of working-class slums, or the wretchedness of bodies worn out by untrammelled exploitation. There will be no exposition of all that here, except through the glances and the words, the dreams and the nightmares, of the characters who will occupy our attention.

Who are they? A few dozen or hundred laborers in their twenties around 1830, who decided, each for himself, just about that time that they would no longer tolerate the intolerable. What they found intolerable was not exactly the poverty, the low wages, the uncomfortable housing, or the ever-present specter of hunger. It was something more basic: the anguish of time shot every day working up wood or iron, sewing clothes, or stitching footwear, for no other purpose than to maintain indefinitely the forces of servitude with those of domination; the humiliating absurdity of having to go out begging, day after day, for this labor in which one's life was lost. There was the oppressive weight of other people as well: the work-shop crew with their strut as barroom he-men or their obsequious pose as conscientious workers; the workers waiting outside for a position one would be only too glad to turn over to them; and, finally, the people passing by in carriages and casting disdainful glances at this blighted patch of humanity.

To finish with that, to know why one had not yet finished with it, to change one's life: turning the world upside down begins around the evening hour when normal workers should be tasting the peaceful sleep of people whose work scarcely calls for thinking. This particular evening in October 1839, for example—at 8:00 P.M. to be exact—our characters would be meeting at tailor Martin Rose's place to start a workers' journal.

Vincard, maker of measures, composes songs for the little party (*goguettes*). He has invited Gaunty the joiner, whose taciturn disposition prefers to express itself in vengeful couplets. Pouty the cesspool-cleaner, a poet too, would definitely not be there. That bohemian has deliberately chosen to work at night. But the joiner can inform him of the results in one of those letters of his that he recopies around midnight after several rough drafts—letters in which he wines of their ravaged childhood years and their lost lives, of plebeian fevers and those other forms of existence beyond death, which may be beginning at this very moment in the attempt to put off as long as possible the entry into sleep, which will repair the powers of the servile machine.

The topic of this book is, first of all, the history of those nights snatched from the normal round of work and repose. A harmless and imperceptible interruption of the normal round, one might say, in which our characters prepare and dream and already live the impossible: the suspension of the ancestral hierarchy subordinating those dedicated to manual labor to those who have been given the privilege of thinking. Nights of studying, nights of boozing. Long days of hard labor prolonged to hear the message of the apostles or lessons from the instructors of the people, to learn or dream or debate or write. Sunday mornings anticipated, to head out into the country together and catch the break of day. Such follies some will survive well enough, ending up as entrepreneurs or senators for life, and not necessarily traitors. Others will die of them. They will endure the suicide of impossible aspirations, the languor of assassinated revolutions, the consumptive mists of exile in the north, the plagues of that Egypt where they will seek the "female messiah," or the malaria of that Texas where they will try to build Icaria. Most of them, however, will spend their lives in anonymity, out of which will emerge an occasional name: a worker-poet or a strike leader, the organizer of an ephemeral association or the editor of a journal that quickly disappeared.

What do they represent? asks the historian. What are they by comparison with the anonymous masses of the mills or the innumerable militants of the workers' movement? What weight can be attributed to the verses of their poems or even the prose of their "workers' journals" by comparison with the multiple array of daily practices, oppressions, resistances, murmurings, and clashes of workshop and city? Here we have a method—

*i. Translator's note:* More formally, the *goguettes* were singing societies that met weekly in cabarets, quasi-institutions that served as locales for the circulation of certain political themes and not just for merrymaking. A participant was a *goguetter*.

ological question that would marry guile to its "naïveté" by identifying the statistical exigencies of science with political principles which state that only the masses make history and which enjoin those who would speak in their name to represent them faithfully.

But perhaps those very masses have already given us their answer. Why, in 1833 and 1840, did the striking tailors of Paris want their leader to be André Troncin, a man who divided his free time between the student cafés and his reading of the great thinkers? Why, in 1848, did the working-class painters seek an organizational plan from their bizarre colleague Confais the café-keeper, who ordinarily bored them to death with his Fourierist harmonies and his phrenological experiments? Why did the battling hatmakers seek out the former seminarian Philippe Monnier, whose sister went off to play the "free woman" in Egypt and whose brother-in-law would die in pursuit of his American utopia? Clearly such figures, whose sermons on worker dignity and whose evangelical devotion were studiously shunned, did not represent the ordinary round of their daily labors and angry grievances.

But it is precisely because such figures were "different" that the workers would seek them out when they had something to show the bourgeois classes: proprietors, politicians, or magistrates. It was not simply that such figures knew how to speak better. Something had to be shown, pointed out, to the bourgeoisie, something that went beyond wages, work hours, and the countless little grievances of the wage-earners. It was basically what the foolish nights of their spokesmen already proved: that is, that the proletarian workers should be treated as beings to whom several lives were owed. If the protests of the workshop crew were to find a voice, if the emancipation of the worker was to offer a face to contemplate, if the manual laborers were to exist as subjects of a collective discourse that would give meaning to their manifold meetings and clashes, then their strange spokesmen already had to have made themselves "different": doubly and irremediably excluded for living as workers did and speaking as bourgeois people did.

So we find the history of a solitary word and an impossible identification right at the start of the classic discourses of the revolutionary and labor movement that propose to tell us the word of the laboring collectivity. A history of ghostly doubles and shadow images that the devotees of the masses (Marxist theoreticians, social historians, etc.) have sought to hide again and again behind accepted images of the "worker movement," "popular culture," and the like. Some have fixed in sepia brown the history of the worker movement on the eve of its marriage with proletarian theory,

transforming it into a family photo album. Others have mixed those dark browns with the variegated colors of daily life and popular mentalities. Solemn admiration for the unknown soldiers of the working-class army has come to be mixed with tender curiosity about the lives of anonymous workers and with passionate nostalgia for the accomplished feats of artisans or the vigor of popular songs and celebrations. All these forms of homage are unanimous in assuring us that the closer those laborers stick to their collective identity, the more admirable they are; that they become suspect when they choose to live other than as legions and legionnaires, to claim for themselves the errant ways of individuality reserved for the egotistical "petty bourgeois" gentleman or the fanciful "ideologist."

My little story of odd proletarian nights would like to question precisely this jealous concern to preserve popular, plebeian, or proletarian purity. Why does scholarly or militant thought always have to find a wicked third party—petty bourgeoisie, ideologist, or master thinker—and blame on it the shadows and opacities that obscure the harmonious fit between its own self-awareness and the self-identity of its object, the "people"? Is it possible that the wicked witch is conveniently fabricated to exorcise an even greater threat: that is, the sight of our nighttime philosophers invading the terrain of serious thinking? Perhaps scholars and militants would have us believe they find something in the old saw that lay behind Plato's denunciation of the sophist, his little fantasy about philosophy being devastated by "a mass of humans not destined for it by nature, their bodies ruined by manual crafts and their souls broken and crushed by their status as laborers."<sup>2</sup> Or is it possible that the question of dignity starts from the other end? Perhaps scholarly thinking must go overboard on the positivity of the lowly people in order to sharpen the contrast with the illusory shadows of the ideologist and thus make it quite clear that its own dignity is very different from that of mere membership in a wage-earning category.

My questions are not the prelude to trial proceedings, but they do explain why I make no excuse for disregarding the majesty of the masses and the positivity of their practices and concentrating on the words and fantasies of a few dozen "non-representative" individuals. In the labyrinth of their real and imaginary wanderings, I have tried to follow the Avicenne's thread of questions: How is it that our deserters, yearning to break away from the constraints of proletarian life, circuitously and paradoxically forged the image and discourse of worker identity? What new forms of misreading will affect this contradiction when the discourse of laborers

2. Plato, *Republic*, VI, 495, d-e.

in love with the night of intellectuals encounters the discourse of intellectuals in love with the toilsome and glorious days of the laboring people? The question is addressed to us, but it has also been lived up to now in the contradictory relations of such nighttime laborers with the prophets of the new world, whether the latter be Saint-Simonians, Icarians, or others.

It is indeed true that the word of the "bourgeois" apostles is what provokes or deepens the fissure in the workaday round through which our laborers are swept into the spiral of another life. The problem begins, however, when the preachers try to turn that spiral into the straight line leading to the mornings of the "new work," when they try to pin down their faithful to their solid identity as soldiers of the great militant army and prototypes of the worker of the future. As they delight in listening to the message of love, won't the Saint-Simonian workers lose a little more of their identity as robust laborers, which is what the apostolate of the new industry calls for? And, on the other hand, how could the Icarian workers find that identity again in any way that would not be prejudicial to the paternal education of their master?

Here we glimpse missed encounters, the impasses of utopian education, about which edifying thought will not be able to flatter itself for long, imagining them as clearing the ground for the self-emancipation of a scientifically informed working class. The twisted reasonings of the first great workers' journal "put out by workers themselves," *L'Atelier*, already give us a glimpse of the truth. It will later be verified by the astonished inspectors who have the task of overseeing the worker associations resulting from this crooked course. It turns out, you see, that the worker, master of the instruments and products of his labor, cannot be persuaded that he is working "for his own thing."

This paradox should not prompt anyone to rejoice too quickly in the recognition of the futility of emancipation's byways. We would do better to go back and see in it the insistent nature of the initial question: What exactly is this "his own thing" about which the worker should be excited but cannot bring himself to be? What exactly is at stake in this strange effort to reconstruct the world around a center that its inhabitants dream only of fleeing? And isn't it "a different thing" that is gained on these byways that lead nowhere, in this tension of maintaining a basic "no" to the way things are amid all the constraints of proletarian existence? No one today will find comforting reasons for his or her own disillusionment and rancor in following the course of our workers from July 1830, when they vowed that nothing would ever be the same as before, and seeing the contradiction in their relations with the intellectual friends of the people.

Indeed, the lesson of this tale would be the opposite of the one that some like to draw from popular wisdom: that is, a certain measure of the impossible, a rejection of the existing order maintained in the very death of utopia.

Leaving the field open, for once, to the thinking of those not "destined" to think, we may come to see that the relationship between the order of things and the desires of those subjugated to it is a bit more complicated than scholarly treatises realize. Perhaps that may help us to acquire a certain *metis* in wielding big words and expressing large sentiments. Who knows?

In any case, those who are venturing into this labyrinth should be honestly forewarned that no answers will be provided them.

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## CHAPTER I

# The Gate of Hell

You ask me what my life is like right now. It's pretty much the same as always. At the moment I look at myself and weep. Forgive me this bout of puerile vanity. It seems to me that I have not found my vocation in hammering iron.<sup>1</sup>

*Forgive me this bout of puerile vanity*

IN THIS MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 1841, *La Ruche populairre* presents its usual face. The article on apprenticeship, bizarrely titled in Gothic letters, offers us another sigh of complaint, rather than a documented study. That approach certainly fits in with the stated aim of a monthly that proposes to be "the mirror of this person's thoughts and that person's feelings, with no literary consistency or coherence; a modest album of the poor and a simple review of the needs and realities of the workshop."<sup>2</sup> It may have succeeded only too well in that effort. The publishers of *L'Atelier*, a rival organ of the "moral and material interests" of workers, saw in this vaunted "hive" of the laborer a noisy Babel of vain murmurings and groans and dreams without substance or consistency.

This time around, however, we might well have had reason to expect something different. The article is signed "Gilland, *worker locksmith*," and we are surprised right away to find such a complaint issuing from a member of the privileged corporation that stretches from the ancient nobility of smiths to the modern aristocracy of metal fitters. Moreover, Jérôme Pierre Gilland is not one of those occasional writers who bequeathed to

1. J.-P. Gilland, "De l'apprentissage: Fragment d'une correspondance intime," *La Ruche populairre*, Sept. 1841, pp. 2-3.

2. E. Vartin, "A tous," *La Ruche populairre*, Nov. 1839, p. 4. *Translator's Note*: This piece is reprinted in Alain Faure and Jacques Rancière (eds.), *La parole ouvrière: 1830/1851* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1976), pp. 219-23. This citation is on p. 220.



posterity only a few pieces of verse or a few summary thoughts, thus testifying to an impotent desire to swap their work tools for the writer's pen. A worker-writer for whom George Sand wrote a preface and a deputy in the Second Republic, Gilland symbolizes the entrance of working-class representatives into the realms of politics and culture and their continuing loyalty to their fellow workers. This son-in-law of a weaver-poet who spent his whole life at his craft will make it a point of personal honor, after Louis Napoleon's coup d'état of December 2, 1851, to pick up his locksmith's tools again and go back to earning his living as a laborer.

Should we attribute much importance to the youthful disclosure of a man who would soon play the role of a worker Cincinnatus? He is not speaking here in his own name, after all; and in such "fragments of private correspondence," which we come across in *La Roche* and even the austere *Fraternité*, we find a common practice. After the writer has given way to the vagabond thoughts of his double or his demon, the worker-moralist takes over to affirm the virtues of work and the dignity of the worker. Our imaginary correspondent in this case is no different:

It seems to me that I have not found my vocation in hammering iron, although there certainly is nothing ignoble about that calling. Far from it! From the anvil come the warrior's sword that defends the liberty of peoples and the plowshare that feeds them. Great artists have caught the ample, manly poetry of our bronzed faces and our robust limbs, sometimes rendering it with great felicity and energy: our illustrious Charlet, above all, when he sets the leather apron alongside the grenadier's uniform and tells us: "The common people are the army."<sup>3</sup>

As you can see, I know how to appreciate my craft . . .<sup>3</sup>

So everything is put right again. The depicted virtues of forged metal would quickly return the straying fancies of laborers to their assigned furrows as workers or soldiers in the national ideology. But how certain is the value of the image designed to keep the smith at his anvil if it must unsettle the order of the Platonic Republic, which subordinates the skill of the smith to that of the soldier only by excluding the illusionists who paint bridles, bits, and smiths without knowing anything about either of the two crafts?

The risk is not where we might first fear it to be: that is, in the arrogance

3. Gilland, "De l'apprentissage," pp. 2-3.

aroused by such heroic images of the worker's strength. What worker, especially one a bit enamored of engravings, would openly brag of his robust limbs or his bronzed face in an age when delicacy of joint and whiteness of complexion defined the ideal of the beloved maiden or the envied poet? Moreover, the martial image cannot hide from our locksmith the physical misery of workshop people. A few lines later he shows us that these vaunted physical qualities are simply a varnished reflection of the work and its constraints. Parents eager to thrust their children into the hell of the workshop, for example, know exactly what to say: "If the work is rough, they say the kid is very strong. If it is delicate, on the other hand, they say he is artful. They make him a Hercules or an artist as the case requires."<sup>4</sup> And when the vigor of his limbs is not a fake, for the locksmith it is a curse that excludes him from the realm of images in which he acts as model. A few years later, Pierre Vinçard will point up, in his fate, the extreme example of the alienation that causes the worker suffering, less from the loss of his object than from the loss of his image:

The severe pose of the metal worker provides for some admirable studies. The Flemish and Dutch schools have shown us how it might be used to good advantage by a Rembrandt or a Van Ostade. But we cannot forget that the workers who served as models for those admirable paintings lost the use of their eyes at a fairly early age, and that fact ruins some of the pleasure we experience when we contemplate the works of those great masters.<sup>5</sup>

The painter's lie brings us back from the illusory sovereignty of the hand to the real sovereignty of the eyes. The ample, manly poetry depicted on workers' faces by the painters of tempered steel is not simply the mask of worker misery. It is the price paid for the abandonment of a dream: that is, another place in the world of images. Behind the pictures depicting their glory lies the shadow side: the lost glory of pictures that they themselves have not made, that they are doomed never to make, as they well know. "As you can see, I know how to appreciate my craft, and yet I would have liked to have been a painter."<sup>6</sup>

It is the dream of moving to the other side of the canvas. But not to represent the people-army symbolized in the hammer and leather apron

4. *Ibid.*

5. Pierre Vinçard, *Les ouvriers de Paris*, Paris, 1871, p. 122.

6. Gilland, "De l'apprentissage," pp. 2-3.

of the smith. Rather, to paint another image of the army of the people: for example, the gold-studded cavalry officer with tricolor plume whose white steed stands out against the Oriental bodies, the fallen horses, and the Egyptian backdrop of desert, sky, and palm tree. It is Gillard himself, in a letter to George Sand, who rates the painter of the proletarian marshal Murat among the painters who have set him dreaming: "I would have liked to have been a painter. Delivering my messages, I could not help but stop and go into ecstasy before the shops with pictures and engravings. You cannot imagine how many blows Gérard, Gros, Bellangé, and Horace Vernet have cost me."<sup>7</sup>

Over against this imperial dream, however, the moralists of the day set very different images of the painter. The pretensions of the scribbler, the debaucheries of the artist, and the miseries of the genius bring us back to the same model: the man who commits suicide pursuing the chimera of glory, in the realm of those shadows whose existence hangs on the whim of the powerful. This fate, we know, does not spare the most illustrious. A few years earlier, the waters of the Seine had swallowed up the despair of Baron Gros. Strangely enough, however, this curse on the artist now comes to envelop the modest existence of the common worker painter, the painter of buildings or signboards. And the working-class moralists are as zealous as the bourgeois moralists in warning about these dangers. We are surprised to find the old editor of *L'Atelier*, Leneveux the printer, placing the trade of painter way down in the hierarchy of occupations offered to adolescents. He ranks it just above the deadly dangerous jobs of the cesspool-cleaner and the ceruse-maker.<sup>8</sup> Neither the comparative mortality rate nor the wage statistics justify such ostracism of the painter's trade. We get a better picture of the thinking underlying such practical advice when we look at the promotional committee for worker associations and see Corbon, Leneveux's colleague, sharing the concern expressed in the question posed by the reporter about an association of worker painters: "The speaker would like to know if the members of the association are married." The peril of the trade is primarily moral, and one cannot "fail to appreciate the influence of marriage on habits of order and economy."<sup>9</sup> But why are the worker painters the only ones to be scrutinized in terms

7. J.-P. Gillard, *Les peintres ouvriers*, Paris, 1849, p. xii. Gros's painting of Murat at the battle of Aboukir is in the Versailles Museum. Murat was the son of a cooper. He rose to lead Napoleon's cavalry.

8. Henri Leneveux, *Manuel de l'apprentissage*, Paris, 1855.

9. *Procès-verbaux du Conseil d'encouragement pour les associations ouvrières publiées par Octave Féry*, Paris, 1917, p. 52.

of this general norm, given the hundreds of dossiers under scrutiny? Is it, perhaps, that their immorality exceeds the norm in seduced girls and downed glasses? That theirs is the worst sort of perversion, in that it turns a worker's occupation into the means to flee the condition of the man in the leather apron? That is the temptation from which the "people's priest," Father François-Auguste Ledreuille, would like to save the endangered workers through his Sunday sermons. But the hack writer in him cannot help but give way to the charm of it all, as he imagines the words of a shoemaker who has resolved to give up his own trade for that of painter:

I will make you woods that aren't there, letters that you would not know how to read, pictures for which the models have never existed. Always in the air like the birds, intoxicated with the sun, chattering, singing to all the echoes of empty rooms, passing from luxurious mansion to attic garret, from countryside to city, not knowing today where one will be working tomorrow. Always new companions and new figures, welcomes at every streetcorner, tables spread at every town gateway, acquaintances at every stage and level, and a good day's work always.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, there must be a sad end for paradisiac temptations to a vagabond life and an airy trade. Ledreuille's painter would end up a con-sumptive in the town hospital: proof enough that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and that a good trade is better than a bad one.

For Ledreuille's listeners and for those who refuse to listen to him, however, the problem is knowing what exactly is a good trade. Where do you find one that is not subject to accidents, illness, unemployment, salary cuts, off-seasons, and boredom? Ledreuille assures them that such jobs abound in the countryside. Whether he is being ingenuous or cynical, we do not know; but he urges all those driven by poverty to the city to head right back and look for the treasure buried in their father's field.

Less scatterbrained than our preacher and his painter, the former shepherd Gillard knows from experience that the relationship between the nurturing countryside and the illusionary city is a bit more complex. In one of his stories he might well attribute the apprenticeship trials of his double, "little William," to the illusions propagated by a worker boasting about the charms of Parisian life. But he also knows very well that the

10. F.-A. Ledreuille, *Discours prononcés aux réunions des ouvriers de la Société de Saint-François-Xavier à Paris et en province par M. l'abbé François-Auguste Ledreuille, recueillis et publiés par M. l'abbé Faucher*, Paris, 1861, p. 277.

heavenly contemplations of the little shepherd were not feeding his five brothers, that his fall was steep to the bottom of the stone quarry, and that the boy would have to reascend the muddy pathways with his back bent under the weight of his basket.<sup>11</sup> Besides, Gilland himself refused to go back to the pastoral serenity to whose charms he returns his hero. He knows also that the good workers end up in the hospital just as the others do and that, of his first two loves, it was not the woman of ill repute but the respectable seamstress who died of consumption. Poverty is not defined in the relationship of idleness to work but in the impossibility of choosing one's fatigue: "I would have liked to have been a painter. But poverty enjoys no privileges, not even that of choosing this or that fatigue for a living."

What is at stake here is not the right to idleness but the dream of another kind of work: that is, a gentle movement of the hand, slowly following the eyes, on a polished surface. It is also a matter of producing something other than the wrought objects in which the philosophy of the future sees the essence of man-the-producer being realized, at the price of losing some time in the ownership of capital. Our "friend of the workers," Ledreuil, was on target: "woods that aren't there, letters you would not know how to read, pictures for which the models have never existed." They would be so many hieroglyphs of the anticommodity, products of a worker know-how that retains the creative and destructive dream of those proletarian children who seek to exorcise their inexorable future as useful workers. Writes the biographer of a tailor-poet: "In his long breaks he took special delight in executing little products of fantasy that were good for nothing. . . . Thousands of pieces of wood endured the whims of his childlike imagination and were turned into essentially hieroglyphic shapes by his hatchet or his plane."<sup>12</sup>

For these laborers secretly in love with useless things, the image of the worker-soldier could be more dangerous than the evil it sought to cure. For it reconciles the worker to his state only at the cost of giving prime place to the party excluded from the city of workers and soldiers. Behind the depicted glory of the worker lay the falsehood of the image. Behind the falsehood of the image lay the power of the painter, heir to the dream produced by the epic of those proletarian cavaliers whose image he fixed while retaining sovereignty for himself. The reconciling image gets

11. J.-P. Gilland, "Les aventures du petit Guillaume du Mont-Cel," in *Les contes ouvriers*.

12. Alphonse Vollet, *Les poètes du peuple au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1846, p. 2.

its virtues from the very sources producing the separation between the worker's vocation and his state.

To keep the worker in his place, the real-life hierarchy must have its double in an imaginary hierarchy, the latter undermining the former not so much by offering emblems of popular power as by introducing duplicity into the very core of the worker's activity in his place. If the counter-image proposed to the pious workers of the Saint Francis Xavier Society is the image of the sign painter, the reason is that the latter image best manifests the lie in the self-satisfaction of the worker who is happy with his work, the flight of production toward the principle of antiproduction and disorder in the city: not only imitation, but imitation without a model. As it decomposes, the "useful" representation of the happy smith reveals the logic of desertion that will be expressed by the poet to come, the one who will be the first to decipher the "letters that you would not know how to read," the new hieroglyphics of the duplicity of the illiterate: idiotic paintings, doortop decorations, ornamental paintings, tumbler canvases, billboards, popular prints, voyages of discovery of which one has no accounts, republics without histories, the invented color of vowels, a mosque to finish instead of a factory. . . . (Rimbaud's "alcémie du verbe" in *Une saison en enfer*).

Are these sophisticated subtleties played on a little confidence that per-sonalizes a great and modest claim of labor? Looking at the mosaic of "fragments of private correspondence," "letters of a nephew to his uncle in the countryside," "indiscretions," "opinions," and invocations that make up *La Ruche populaire*, we may realize, perhaps, that there is more sophis-tication here than is ordinarily admitted. Behind the lithography of the illustrious Charlet, as under those paintings several times overlaid, we may find traces of many sketchy or corrected images, many landscapes glimpsed or dreamed of.

It is an age, remember, when the growth of court accounts offers an endless harvest of images of the common people to the imagery of the melodrama, as well as to right-minded people and their rhetoric, an age when the revolutionary technique of stereotyping is being enlisted in the educational aims of the *Magasins pittoresques* and the social typing of "physiologies." In such an age there is no worker's claim that does not set the true portrait of the worker over against the commonplace scenes in-voked against him by his enemies. But neither is there any true portrait of the worker that does not immediately disappear, by virtue of the power conferred on the identifying image, into the spiral ranging from the mean-

ingleness of children's hieroglyphics to adult dreams of another life. A question of identity, of image, of the relationship of Self and Other, both involving and concealing the question of maintaining or transgressing the barrier that separates those who think from those who work with their hands.

Here one would like to produce a simple effect: to bridge this image of the worker-soldier. One would like first to show off the Parisian sketches, the country watercolors, the Oriental charcoals, and the historical tableaux that lie concealed in the portrait of the man in the leather apron: news items gleaned in the daily round of domination, poverty, and crime; trees or birds glimpsed in the patch of sky that slices the high window of the workshop; vast horizons embraced in laying floors, painting walls, or molding the cornices of an affluent home; blossoming girls and vine branches laden with the fruits of their romancing; souvenirs of the era when Napoleon, the "Man-People," paraded the triumphant coturnoner through "all the capitals of the civilized world";<sup>13</sup> calvalcades of conquered Algeria, sands of deserts dreamed of, prairies of promised America; harmonies in the June night coming from the Saint-Simonian choirs on the lawn of Ménilmontant. One would like to measure the gap between these hidden images or broken dreams and adherence to the emblems of anvil, plowshare, and sword, to grasp the logic of the identification process wherein those scenes can be covered over, effaced, and recombined, even into the hagiographic and threatened image of the man in the leather apron.

I am not talking exactly about scratching the images in the accustomed ways. I am not talking about the old political approach that unmasks the painful reality underneath the flattering surface. Nor am I talking about the modesty of the historian and the new-look politics that invites us to look under the varnish of heroic paintings and see the circulating blood of a life that is simultaneously more savage and more tranquil. We are not going to scratch images to bring truth to the surface; we are going to shove them aside so that other figures may come together and decompose there. We do not hold for the affectation of those who denounce the tyranny of truth. Rather, insofar as we scrape and clean and take off the varnish, we are surprised to find again and always the pattern of our illustrious Charlet.

To be sure, the characters have changed since his day; and in the accelerated rotation of picture books, we have more than once seen the chosen

13. "Napoléon ou l'Homme-Peuple," Saint-Simonian flysheet, Paris, 1832.

assume the role of the damned and the devils assume the halo of saints. So we have watched the parade of images depicting the grandeur and decadence of the worker myth: nostalgic artisans, proud of their fine work and defending a culture of worker's brain and brawn against the big industry that enslaves and frees; militants brought up in the school of the factory, conscious of their rights and obligations as workers; savage breakers of machines or deserters from the industrial order, later planed by the new disciplines into waxy figures on whose natural wrinkles are inscribed the thoughts of their masters about labor, hygiene, and family; "sublime" workers turning their very adroitness into the instrument of their resistance to factory discipline; and ordinary workers caught in the daily round of their labors, conflicts, and domestic lives.

True enough, this course of changes has some grounds for presenting itself as the path of progress. A shift from the great frescoes of labor misery and struggle to the fruitful austerity of the historian's rule: not words, deeds; not heroism, the daily round; not impressions, numbers; not images, the real thing. The method seems to be recommended by a heartfelt love for science and for the common people. And isn't that what first motivated the present work: to look at craft activities, workshop rumors, work displacements, and factory forms and regulations and grasp therein the interplay of subjugation and resistance that explains both the materiality of class relations and the ideality of a culture of resistance? It was apparently justifiable to seek out the autonomy of worker word and practice above and beyond the interpretations of intellectuals and the lies of politicians. And it was not surprising to find at the outset that this quest for the muffled truth had to wade through so much babbling: the many professions of faith mimicking politicians, verses in the style of the great poets, moral declamations based on bourgeois norms, and screen representations that had to be scratched off.

But when one does proceed to scrape the varnish off those too civilized savages and those too bourgeois proletarian laborers, there comes a moment when one asks oneself: Is it possible that the quest for the true word compels us to shush so many people? What exactly is the meaning of this evasion that tends to disqualify the verbiage of every proffered message in favor of the mute eloquence of one who is not heard? Isn't there some sort of dodge in this fascination with the mute truth of the popular body, in these evocations of a different culture that the workers—the masses, the people, the plebs—practice with enough contentment to leave to others the lacerations of conscience and the mirages of representation? Hasn't the historian's modesty shared in the benefits of the curious exchange

that has occurred since the existence of the worker was proffered as the living refutation of hinterworlds, since the path of descent into hell was presented as the royal road for correcting the vision problems caused by looking too much at the heaven of ideas, since the class once judged by the philosopher's *Republic* to be too ignoble to raise its eyes to heaven has come to be endowed with the supreme nobility of truth incarnate?

Both Marxist science and its denouncers say that here we find the gate of hell and true science, where all the reverie of the ideologist and all the vanity of the master thinker are to be wiped out. It lies in the den of Capital, where the labor of theory must equal the suffering that inscribes on proletarian bodies the truth concealed by the daily religion of commodity exchange and word exchange. It lies in the hell of the damned, where honest, undecieved thinking must recognize the plebeian truth and its denunciation of the science of the masters in the bruises on the people's flesh and their tattoos of revolt. In the modern thinker, then, we find this strange fascination for the truth of the popular body; a long-declared war on all those "unclassed intellectuals," "petty bourgeois ideologists," "master thinkers," who pervert the native truth of it with their rationalizing certitudes; tears of compassion; accusing fingers; and even contrite confessions of having taken part in the work of perversion. But isn't all that just another way of ensuring a share in the division, giving the thinker his dignity by virtue of the bias of his fault-finding?

The modern "reversal" of truth, you see, is really a matter of dividing in two. It has not done away with the old scholarly discourse that excludes the artisan locked in the circle of material needs and labors. It has simply doubled it with a discourse of truth, incarnating the latter in the very same subject who can know neither it nor himself but who cannot help but manifest it in his words and his actions. Thus, mastery ensures a replacement for itself. Sometimes it affirms the inability of the worker to recognize and transform his state without the help of its scholarly science. Sometimes it pays homage to the suffering truth of the popular body and pours shame on the false science that adulterates it: the better to reserve for itself, at the cost of asking forgiveness, the share of semblance that doubles as the lining for science even as ignorance does for the truth. Once upon a time it said: ours is the "lightning flash of thought" that will fructify the "naive popular terrain." Later it said: theirs is the touchstone of palpable truth, the look of undecieved eyes, the naked cry of anger, the rough discipline that will change the world, the true culture, the sense of festivity, or the smile of plebeian derision; ours, alas, are the pangs of petty bourgeois conscience, the sophistications of empty thinking, and complicity with the science of the masters.

It suffices that the division of shares leaves each in his place, you see, and there are two ways to make sure of that. There is the age-old authoritative franchise. Its conservative version says that if the shoemakers meddle in lawmaking, the city will only end up with bad laws and no more shoes. Its revolutionary version says that if the workers choose to elaborate their own philosophy of worker emancipation, they will simply reproduce the thinking that was expressly designed to blind them and block their road to emancipation. The second approach is the tack of modern flattery, which also has two ways of assuring us that the place of the worker is the royal place; that the actions, murmurs, and struggles of the workshop, the cries and festivities of the common people, enact culture and bear witness to the truth far more than does the vain science of ideologists.

So we have two ways of repeating the same injunction to the suspect population of deserters who are enticed by the semblances of knowledge and imitations of poetry; artisans seduced by the higher profits of philosophy, Plato would say; worker-poets who, in the 1840s, addressed the fruits of their sleepless nights to well-established poets. The gifts were an embarrassment, to judge from the responses of their recipients. Victor Hugo, for example, offers this encouragement to the poetic beginnings of that child given to hieroglyphics who has become a worker tailor: "In your fine verse there is something more than fine verse. There is a strong soul, a lofty heart, a noble and robust spirit. Carry on. Always be what you are: poet and worker. That is to say, thinker and worker."<sup>14</sup>

A great poet does not mince words. It is not too much to say that the fine verses are more than fine verses and to bestow a great future on this "robust" worker poetry in order to pass along the advice that the worker stay in his present place, on the pretense that his place can be divided in two. Unfortunately, experience clearly teaches those who have not read the *Republic* that it simply is not possible to be both poet and worker, thinker and common laborer, at the same time:

M. Victor Hugo knows very well that a person who performs his task as worker, which is already the work of two since half of the world lives in idleness, cannot carry out his apostolate as poet.<sup>15</sup>

But the inconsistency of the great poet may well have a logic of its own:

14. Constant Hilbey, *Vénalité des journaux*, Paris, 1845, p. 33.

15. Constant Hilbey, *Réponse à tous mes critiques*, Paris, 1846, p. 44.



Jesus Christ said to the fishermen: Leave your nets and I will make you fishers of men. You others, you tell them: Don't leave your nets, continue to catch fish for our table, for we are the apostles of glutony and our kingdom is a cooking pot. And our only cry on earth is: What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we clothe ourselves with?<sup>16</sup>

Here the causticity of the tailor undoubtedly exaggerates the materialism of the writer. Our writer is more concerned about the rarity of his verse than about the opulence of his table. Another writer, shoemaker-poet Savinien Lapointe, is a member of a guild that has an old score to settle with the philosophers and the artists, so he is more sensitive to the way the discourse on classes slides in and out. His response to the poet-peer of France, who now invests himself with the title "worker of thought," gives a better indication of the give-and-take and the polite exchanges that are the price of maintaining the hierarchy of thinkers and workers. It is not enough for thinkers to ensure their wardrobe by forbidding shoemakers to judge the work of a painter above the shoes. To keep their place and keep the shoemaker in his, they must pay a cautionary visit to the workshop, even if it means giving up a little of their usual comfort: "Certain folks go down into workshops in wooden clogs, for fear of seeing the common people go up to their homes, even in pumps."<sup>17</sup>

The disguise is surely a bit too worn to revitalize the old representation of the body and the soul. To make more convincing use of the fable that assigns everyone his proper place, one will have to redistribute the scenes of order and subversion as well as the qualities of the characters. It will then be possible to link it in good faith with the honest concern to preserve the autonomy of working-class struggle, popular culture, and plebeian wisdom from our own uncertainties and illusions. Our desire that everyone stay in his place will be more subtle and less riddled with anxiety. And we will voice it more discreetly, insisting, as occasion warrants, that the actions of workers are so much more cultivated than their speeches, their discipline more revolutionary than their outbursts, their smiles more rebellious than their demands, and their festivities more subversive than their riots. In short, the more taciturn their speech, the more eloquent we shall find it; and their subversion will be all the more radical insofar as

16. Hilbey, *Vénalité des journaux*, p. 38.

17. Savinien Lapointe, "Lettre à M. Victor Hugo, pair de France," *L'Union*, May-June 1846. Reprinted in Faure and Rancière (eds.), *La parole ouvrière*, pp. 259-67. This citation is on p. 266.

it barely makes a ripple on the surface of the day-to-day order. At that price the gods are in the kitchen, the workers are our masters, and truth inhabits the spirit of simple people: "The common people are the army."

Seeing these placards show up on the road that was said to lead to the hidden truth of the workshop, I had the urge to make an about-face and go back in the company of those whom I had come across first: those who were traveling the road in the opposite direction, deserting what was said to be their culture and their truth to go toward our shadows. I mean those worker dreamers, prattlers, versifiers, reasoners, and indulgers in sophistry whose notebooks serve as a replacement screen in the mirror of reality granted and appearance withheld and whose falsetto voice creates dissonance in the duet of mute truth and contrite illusion. Perverted proletarians whose discourse is made up of borrowed words. And one knows that these people, so highly praised for keeping an exact account of their dues and debts, almost always give back the borrowed words in a strangely made-up way, with a droll pronunciation of their own. Vinçard notices it in a young Saint-Simonian engraver, "a small young man talking all the time, pretensions to devotion, but far more knowing than all that. He has a surprising daintiness in his pronunciation, so that he is quite boring."<sup>18</sup> The slight young man, too delicate to wear the illustrious Charlet's apron, will die soon after. But not the hardy race of those contraband intellectuals, like the cumbersome German tailor recruited by an illiterate Saint-Simonian missionary: "A hazy, argumentative talker losing himself in a host of hypotheses seasoned with old philosophical citations. There's a guy who is really boring. . . . I like him all the same; but more when he listens, which he does not do very often."<sup>19</sup>

One certainly does hear them with more pleasure when they keep silent. The proletarian pastor Vinçard, who indulges in these reactions against two sheep of the Saint-Simonian flock, will learn this at his own expense when he writes his *Histoire du travail et des travailleurs en France*. It will be his turn to hear that workers contribute much better to the cultural riches of humanity with their work during the day than with the fruit of their sleepless nights, that they have everything to gain by abandoning their "lucubrations," the word used by professional writers and thinkers to write off the work of those who write in the short space of time intervening between the constraint of work and the constraint of sleep.

But their solicitude is in vain when they try to warn these workers

18. Vinçard to Enfantin, April 22, 1837, Fonds Enfantin, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Ms. 7627.

19. Ibid.

against those who would like to wrest from them the well-earned quietude of their night. If they speak, it is to say that they don't have any night of their own because night belongs to those who order the labors of the day. They speak to win the night of their desires: not *their* night, the "brutalizing night of sleep" that joiner Gauny sees approaching,<sup>20</sup> but *our* night, the kingdom of shadows and appearances reserved for those who can stay awake instead of sleeping. The good critic of the *Revue des deux mondes* watches at the end of the day as "the worker with strong arms and broad shoulders, his gait slowed by fatigue, returns to the lodgings where he will again find his evening repast and sleep," and he vainly praises "the distributive equity of Providence, which has decreed that for him all upsets and vexations should end with the work of the day."<sup>21</sup> In vain will others try to teach them that their true culture is in the workshop, the street, or the cabaret. The gods may be in the kitchen, but they don't want to go there, any more than does the seamstress who desires to ply her talent in the house of the fine Saint-Simonian ladies. Her directress in Saint-Simonism, Eugénie Niboyet, states: "Mme. Guindorff would like to devote one day a week to the needlework being done on Rue Monsigny. I think it would not do for Mme. Guindorff to dine in the kitchen."<sup>22</sup> We do not know where Madame Guindorff finally took her meal. But we do know what happened to her daughter, Reine (was it proper for a republican mechanic to give a name like "Queen" to a daughter destined for the trade of seamstress?). Reine was to die of that vanity, victim of her sinful love for a man of letters. The man drew enough profit from the lesson, at least, to join Father Ledreulle's battle against the "doctors of the day" who were perverting the true joys and simple sorrows of working-class life.<sup>23</sup>

Certainly a foolish vanity: wanting to exchange the true toil and fatigue of the common laborer for the illusory languors of the bourgeoisie. But what if the most painful of those fatigues was precisely the fact that they

20. Gauny to Ponty, Jan. 23, 1838, Fonds Gauny, Bibliothèque municipale de Saint-Denis, Ms. 168. *Translator's Note:* A useful selection of Gauny's writings and letters is now available in the anthology compiled by the author. See Jacques Rancière (ed.), *Louis Gabriel Gauny: Le philosophe plébésien* (Paris: La Découverte/Maspéro, 1983), hereafter cited as *Le philosophe plébésien*. The present letter can be found on pp. 167-69. This citation is on p. 168.

21. Lermintier, "De la littérature des ouvriers," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Dec. 15, 1841.

22. Report of Oct. 1, 1831, Fonds Enfantin, Ms. 7815.

23. Raymond Brucker, *Les docteurs du jour devant la famille*, Paris, 1844.

left no time for such languors; what if the truest sorrow lay in not being able to enjoy the false ones? At the gate of hell, the apportionment of true and false, the calculus of pleasures and pains, may well be a bit more subtle than we generally imagine it to be in the case of simple souls:

There are misfortunes so noble and so well sung that they glitter in the sky of the imagination like apocalyptic stars, their glow causing us to forget our mean sorrows, which, lost in the gullies of this world, seem to be no more than deceptive specks. Childe Harold, Obermann, René, confess to us the fragrance of your agonies. Answer. Were you not happy in your glorious fits of melancholy? For we know that they crown your souls like haloes with the genius of your lamentations and the amplitude of their radiation. Your celebrated pains have their own mysterious recompense, which again corroborates the facility of complaints. Sublime unfortunates! You did not know the sorrow of sorrows, the vulgar sorrow of the lion caught in a trap, of the centenarian subjected to horrible sessions in the workshop, the penitentiary expedient gnawing away at spirit and body with boredom and the folly of long labor. Ah, Dante, you old devil, you never traveled to the real hell, the hell without poetry! Adieu!<sup>24</sup>

Is that the farewell of a laborer aware of the real sufferings of the work-day to poets who know hell only in their imagination, and to sons of good family who suffer only in their heads? But then again, aren't the worst of true sufferings precisely those of thought? Gauny the joiner goes on to say: "Now our chagrin has reached its peak because it is a reasoned and considered thing."<sup>25</sup> The supreme sorrow of the laborer is to know in truth the misfortune of René, whose parents left him unprotected in life; of Obermann, who could not come to a decision about a career; of Childe Harold, whose passions were too large for the place assigned him by the world. The laborer's hell is not the suffering of the true that leaves all vanity at the door. It is the most radical vanity, of which the other is only the shadow. Those who know only the shadow of hell are actually those who live the true life, and the days of the workshop laborers are merely a dream by comparison. The joiner who bids farewell to old Dante is the

24. Louis Gabriel Gauny, "Opinions," *La Revue populaire*, April 1841; in Rancière (ed.), *Le philosophe plébésien*, p. 37.

25. *Ibid.*



same fellow who had been urged not long ago, by a floor-tiler friend, to bid farewell to the old world and join him in sharing the true life of the Saint-Simonian community:

Soon you will leave this world, where I say no more than what you also say with Victor Hugo: "My days vanish from dream to dream." Who better than we can understand all the sorrow in that line of verse: we who have so often tried to step out into the day without wherewithal or success; we who know of all the pleasures God has lavished on the earth but have tasted them only in imagination; we who have some feel for our dignity but have always seen it go unappreciated; we, in short, who have hoped and despaired time and again?<sup>26</sup>

The untruth of the poet does not lie in being unaware of the laborer's sorrows but in voicing them without realizing it. So it has nothing to do with the dialectical lacerations of thinking and being, of certitude and truth, which are to be reconciled in a thought process aware of plebeian sufferings or in proletarian action equipped with the weapons of theory. If the laborer alone experiences the truth of what the poet says, he recognizes only his own nothingness in that truth. Neither one, in his knowledge or his life, holds the truth of which the other produces the semblance, or the knowledge of what the other suffers. Far from the man in the leather apron, the laborer cannot, in the poet's image, recognize any self-identity.

In this exchange of vanities uttered in the manner of Epimenides, which steals away the subject who could attest to the truth about the untruth, the result is not skepticism but a certain kind of knowledge. It is an empty knowledge, if you will, promising no mastery. Something, however, akin to the transgression that prompted a tasting of the fruits of the tree of knowledge: an unknown relish, a bite from which there can be no recovery, an unsettling in which sensible reality itself seems to vacillate and reel. Such was the fever that seized Gauny and his friends one Sunday morning in the country, in May, while they were engaged in their metaphysical chats: "The earth was sinking down and out or we were ascending into empty space, because we saw creations unfolding that are not of here."<sup>27</sup>

26. Bergier to Gauny, May 1832, Fonds Gauny, Ms. 166; in Rancière (ed.), *Le philosophe plebeien*, pp. 156-57.

27. Gauny to Bergier, May 14, 1832, *ibid.*; in Rancière (ed.), *Le philosophe plebeien*, p. 152.

What relationship is there between the Sunday extravagances of these "artisans" and "petty bourgeois" men on the one hand, and the solid realities of exploitation and class struggle on the other? As with every vertigo and every Sunday, it is one of everything and nothing. Monday they will begin again the monotony of work or the vagrancy of unemployment. The world remains unchanged when the young seamstress leaves the Saint-Simonian preaching session, to which she had gone "to find a bit of droll amusement" and from which she returned "filled with admiration and astonishment for the grandeur of the ideas and the unselfishness of the apostles."<sup>28</sup> Nothing has changed, but nothing will ever be the same as before, either. Fifty years later, when many of the apostles will have forgotten or disavowed it, our seamstress and our joiner will still proudly bear the marks of the bite. For it is in the moments when the real world wavers and seems to reel into mere appearance, more than in the slow accumulation of day-to-day experiences, that it becomes possible to form a judgment about the world.

That is why those other worlds, which supposedly anesthetize the sufferings of the workers, can actually be the thing that sharpens their awareness of such sufferings. That is why those metaphysical problems, said to be good for bishops who find their supper ready and waiting for them, are even more essential for those who set out every morning to find the work on which their evening meal will depend. Who is better suited than those who hire out their bodies day after day to give meaning to dissertations on the distinction between body and soul, time and eternity, or on the origin of humanity and its destiny? Asks *L'Atelier*: "Can one explore any issue whatever without going back to first causes?"<sup>29</sup> Like the sham passions of poetry, the hinterworlds of metaphysics are simultaneously the supreme luxury and the supreme necessity for the common laborers. Despite his farewell to Dante, Gauny the joiner explains to a ragpicker friend of his the necessity of another world, be it the chimera of believers or that of poets, for the struggle here:

Plunge into terrible readings. That will awaken passions in your wretched existence, and the laborer needs them to stand tall in the face of that which is ready to devour him. So, from the *Imitation* to *L'Élie*, explore the enigma of the mysterious and formidable chagrin at work in those with sublime concepts.<sup>30</sup>

28. Désirée Véret to Enfantin, Sept. 11, 1831, Fonds Enfantin, Ms. 7608.

29. "La revue synchrétique contre L'Atelier," *L'Atelier*, June 1843, p. 88.

30. Gauny to Ponry, May 12, 1842, Fonds Gauny, Ms. 168.

So the initial relationship must be reversed. It is the secret of others that the worker needs to define the meaning of his own life and struggle. Not the "secret of the commodity"—isn't every bit of that as clear as day? It is not day but night that is involved here, not the property of others but their "chagrin," their invented sorrow that contains all real sorrows. It is not knowledge of exploitation that the worker needs in order "to stand tall in the face of that which is ready to devour him." What he lacks and needs is a knowledge of self that reveals to him a being dedicated to something else besides exploitation, a revelation of self that comes circuitously by way of the secret of others: that is, those intellectuals and bourgeois people with whom they will later say, and we in turn will repeat, they want to have nothing to do—and especially not with any distinction between the good ones and the bad ones.

But how can we not be struck by the gratitude shown for the love offered by the Saint-Simonian preachers, by the interest shown in the plans of all those who assured them that they had found the remedy for the ills of society in general and the poor classes in particular, by the love lavished on the great poets and popular novelists? The world of the bourgeoisie, like that of the worker, divides in two. There are those who live a vegetative existence, the rich people so persistently depicted as stretched out indolently on their sofas or feather beds, responding only to the fragrance of their own interests and incapable of experiencing the passions of those whose lives entail love, suffering, risk, and dedication. The image may not embody anger over their laziness so much as contempt for such an animal existence. But there are also those others who desert the domestic cult of Baal to set out in search of the unknown: the inventors, the poets, the lovers of the people and the Republic, the organizers of the cities of the future, and the apostles of new religions. The worker needs all of these people, not to gain scientific or scholarly knowledge of his condition, but to entertain and maintain his passions and desires for another world. Otherwise the constraints of labor will level them down to the mere instinct for survival and subsistence, turning the worker brutalized by work and sleep into the servant and accomplice of the rich people bloated with egotism and idleness.

Thus, between the smith and his image, between the image that recalls him to his place and the image that invites him to revolt, we get a slight twist: unexpected meetings and fleeting conversations between our marginal workers who want to learn the secret of noble passions and the marginal intellectuals who want to minister to the sorrows of labor. They

are difficult meetings resembling the ones granted by our somber joiner Gauny to the blond preacher who calls himself Moses and dreams of new labors in Egypt: "I am not master of my time, so I cannot go to your place tomorrow. But if you happen to be at Exchange Square between 2:00 and 2:30, we shall see each other as do the wretched shades on the margins of hell."<sup>31</sup>

It is a difficult meeting. Not of poor man and rich man: the "bourgeois" Retouret would even have to borrow money from the "proletarian" Gauny against possible income from his writings. The meeting is difficult because it is a meeting of two worlds that do not run on the same time. Their relationship will be reversed soon enough, to be sure. The frail "pilgrim of eternity" will go off to die under the Algerian sun, leaving the somber joiner half a century to draw profit from the new message. Proclaiming the new order ("classification according to capabilities" and "retribution according to works") but positing love as its origin and basis, this message revives the semblances and contradictions of the old myth in the *Republic*, which said that the mixture of gold, silver, or iron in their souls determined the place allotted to philosopher-kings, warriors, and artisans.<sup>32</sup> The important thing, in any case, is not the content of the doctrines about the new hierarchy of the industrial city but the initial disorder of the picture that marks their enunciation: the meeting of the margins of hell, the mingling of base and precious metals, the visionary alliance or alloy of gold and iron against the dominations and servitudes of the kingdom of silver, the flight established at the heart of the worker's recognition of his image.

Is it really worthwhile to tarry over those encounters? Haven't some been long denouncing the delusions of those who want to straddle two worlds? Haven't they dismissed the false images for the inescapable realities of class struggle that rule out deception at a glance? Haven't others followed suit and described the movement of images as the work of a puppeteer (philanthropist, state, or master thinker), transforming the rigors of the new disciplinary order into a beguiling dream? The poor joiner, the former will say, is going to let himself be taken in by talk about love that seeks to make him forget the struggle. Look, say the latter, at the price in mirages he pays for his entry into the disciplinary universe of the pioneers of the modern industrial order.

But where did they get the idea that workers cannot simultaneously

31. Gauny to Retouret, Oct. 12, 1833, Fonds Gauny, Ms. 165.

32. Plato, *Republic*, III, 415.

who has the right to speak for others by trying their hand at words and theories from on high. Perhaps it is through a few singular passions, a few chance encounters, and a few discussions of the sex of God and the origin of the world that we may see the image of the great labor community take visible shape and hear its voice sound out.

love bourgeois people and do battle with them, indulge in Saint-Simonian love for the Father, the East, or the Woman, and flee its railroad empire? Writes one of the faithful: "I marveled at their teachings and preachings. But I was a bit disturbed by the outcome of their efforts and what they hoped and expected to see in the way of lofiness and grandeur in the governmental state."<sup>33</sup> What justifies our claim to see the realm of representation neatly divided between manipulators and manipulated, to see the laboring class as necessarily duped by what it believes? What makes this strange domain an "illusion," by very definition excusing one from trying to say something about it that is at least likely, even if not necessarily true? Isn't it a fact that all talk about illusion—at the cost of some redistributing of knowledge and truth—is designed to suppress the prior question expressed in the myth of the three souls and the three metals, a myth that it is "impossible to make people believe"?

That prior question has to do with the unjustifiable and inescapable frontier separating those whom the deity destines for thinking from those whom he destines for shoemaking. Not the partition that fixes the boundary of the reason by separating it from its other—that is, its margins or its un-thought-out version—but rather the inner frontier dignifying this thinking that makes the weaver its model and, at the same time, the one excluded from it. Perhaps, then, there is something at stake in our effort to mark the digression that intervenes between the old partitions of knowledge and the new apportionments that range thoughts, discourses, and images in the twofold registers of class struggle, science and ideology, power and resistance, mastery and dissidence. Perhaps there is a real point in letting the scene unfold as weavers and shoemakers, joiners or smiths, ask themselves about their identity and their right to speak, carried along by the very logic of the disjunction that prompts recognition of one only at the expense of the other. Such is their venture as they seek to appropriate for themselves the night of those who can stay awake, the language of those who do not have to beg, and the image of those who do not need to be flattered. We must take this detour on the supposedly direct road from exploitation to class message, from worker identity to its collective expression. We must examine the mixed scene in which some workers, with the complicity of intellectuals who have gone out to meet them and perhaps wish to expropriate their role, replay and shift the old myth about

33. Pierre Vinograd, *Mémoires épiscopales d'un vieux chansonnier saint-simonien*, Paris, 1879, pp. 57-58.