ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

THE COLLAPSE OF HUMANISM

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I

BY *HUMANISM* we mean that powerful movement which, towards the close of the Middle Ages, seized Italy first, then the whole of Europe, and whose watchword was *man* – the free human personality. Thus the original, essential, distinguishing mark of humanism is *individualism*.

For four hundred years – from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century – this movement dominated the development of educated society in Central Europe. In its broad stream science was not yet severed from art, man was true to the spirit of music. Individual figures of the age, no less than its great scientific discoveries and its currents of political thought, were permeated and informed by this spirit.

The style of the movement was the Renaissance style, which later changed into the baroque – the style which in the nineteenth century it was the fashion to regard as decadent, a sign that modern humanists had forgotten their great past; its value has been reassessed only in our own day, and it is looked upon as the style which is characteristic of that period in the life of an art in which it is declining into old age.

Whose names do we connect in our minds with the conception of 'humanism'? Before all, the names of Petrarch, of Boccaccio, of Pico della Mirandola; after them, those of Erasmus, Reuchlin, Hutten; after these, but much less vividly, the names of French and English humanists come to mind – Montaigne or Thomas More. In France and England the humanist movement was not autonomous.

The names of the great humanists emerge into [90] consciousness to a kind of musical accompaniment. We recognise that all these men are artists and creators, although many of them were not creative artists by profession. Each one of these enormous figures presents itself to us as a symbol, and is perhaps symbolically expressed by an artist. We should not wonder if a painting on which scenes of the Italian Renaissance are represented has Boccaccio written underneath it; it would not surprise us to read on the title page of a poem on the German Reformation one short name – Ulrich von Hutten: so tuneful, so full of the musical spirit are these men's very names.

II

The movement whose starting point and final goal was the human personality could grow and develop only so long as the individual was the main mover of European culture. We know that the first humanists, the creators of independent science, of lay philosophy, literature, art and education, showed open contempt for the gross and unlettered masses; they can be condemned from the point of view of Christian morality, but in this also they were faithful to the spirit of music, since the masses were not at that time the driving force of culture, the orchestra of world history was not dominated by their voices. As soon, however, as there appeared on the stage of Europe a new moving force, not in the individual, but in the masses, this naturally meant that humanism had reached a crisis.

The beginning of this crisis must evidently be sought for in the Reformation. The real outburst, however, did not take place until the eve of the nineteenth century; in the Great Revolution, Europe listened to unfamiliar songs. From that time onwards France [91] became the home of those movements which would receive their true interpretation outside her borders; younger than France, central and eastern Europe seem to have turned the lessons of her revolution to greater account than she herself did.

The German *Sturm und Drang* is marked by two remarkable figures. If I were a sculptor I should never have represented Schiller and Goethe as brothers clasping hands, I should represent Schiller as an eager youth, leaning forward and looking fearlessly into the misty abyss opening before him; the youth is overshadowed by another figure, mysterious and gigantic – Goethe, who starts back into the shadows of the past before the

blinding vision of the future, which his keen eyes discern in the misty depths. Both are equally dear and close to us now; but one is immense – he stands at the meeting of two centuries; Goethe is the end no less than the beginning. In him a movement has reached its consummation; in the frozen stiffness of the arrested flow humanism (individualism, classicism, the ties which join science to art) is dying, pierced and stabbed by the music which rises from the misty abyss of the future – the music of the masses (Part 2 of *Faust*).

Schiller's figure is of a smaller stature, but he means no less to us, because Schiller is the last great European humanist, the last of the company of those who were faithful to the spirit of music. For the last time humanity is sung by Marquis de Posa; one moment and it will all be turned to food for lectures, it will be buried under learned volumes.

Both figures are lit up by a broad dusty beam of sunlight; it is as though a ray of the setting sun entered the round window of an ancient baroque temple; this temple is enlightened Europe; the light of the departing sun fades gradually, and in the shadows [92] gathering about the walls, a bottomless abyss is widening. Both men gaze into it.

When once the ray has gone out, the temple of enlightened Europe will be plunged in darkness. Schiller will be carried off by an early death, that his eyes may be spared the sight of this dusk, which to him is strange, that he may not hear this music, to him so incoherent, which originates in the darkness. With Schiller the style of humanism, the baroque, will also die. Goethe will remain alone, deserted alike by the youth of Schiller, and by the old age of the baroque. In the darkness he will discern the shadowy outlines of the future, he will watch the tongues of flame which will soon begin to stream into the temple where before the rays of the sun had entered. Rigid and motionless with a mysterious dualism which pervades his attitude to all things, he gives his hand to Richard Wagner, author of the Fire Theme in *The Valkyries*, over the head of the frantic Heinrich Heine, who burns in the same consuming flame of the future.

These men, who are so different, will all be equally lonely and will be equally persecuted, because they alone are the bearers of the culture and the music of the future, though its sound is as yet drowned beneath the chorus of discordant voices raised by those

who are the bearers of a musicless civilisation. This hidden tie which binds them to each other is revealed if only in the twofold relationship which connects Goethe to Heine, and Heine to Goethe.

[*The third section of the essay has been omitted for reasons indicated in the Editorial.*[1] *I. B.*] [93]

IV

When we read and re-read Schiller's *Don Carlos* nowadays, we are amazed by the grandeur of the architecture, by that teeming variety of conceptions, of themes, of ideas which Schiller has with such effortless freedom and ease contained into one tragedy. Elements of historical science, of art, of music, of painting all lie revealed in one tragedy. The modern artist would have created ten dramas out of this material, and each one of them would still be, for our times, unusually big and full throated, would leave far behind it all the brief and spasmodic thought of our age.

And then what creative calm, what creative leisureliness there is in the music-laden atmosphere which surrounded Schiller! Yet ought the artists of the twentieth century to look back to his times as the golden age of art? I think not, because new times bring with them new songs.

Schiller's face is the last sane, tranquil, peaceful face which we can recollect in Europe. We have seen many faces after him, indignant faces, faces twisted and made hideous by inner turmoil; we have seen many more well-fed, contented, self-satisfied faces, but this is not the good, pleasant contentment of old; in these sleek and glossy faces we have always found restless, malicious eyes.

Gone is the equilibrium, the balanced harmony between man and nature, between life and art, between science and music, between civilisation and culture, that balance which was the living breath, the very being of the great humanist movement. Humanism has lost its style: style is rhythm; and with its rhythm humanism lost its integral unity. It was as though a mighty torrent had met with another torrent on its rushing way, and was shivered

[1] 'Editorial II: Alexander Blok', *Oxford Outlook* 11 no. 54 (March 1931), 1–2.

into a thousand little rivulets; in the iridescent spray flying up [94] from the broken stream, the departing spirit of music gently plays; the harmony of the torrent's voice has turned into the discordant murmur of many little brooks, which, divided by each new obstacle they met, and branching off and flowing further and further apart, served as the forces of those formations which we, in our generalising way, call the formations of European civilisation. The 'salt of the earth'[2] has lost its ancient power, and beneath the banner of culture, of rhythmical unity and wholeness, of music, there arose another movement, coming from the opposite direction, the onrush of the masses, Christian only in externals, which until then had had no share in European culture.

Thus the great movement which was the agent of world *culture* was broken up into a multitude of smaller movements which became the agents of European *civilisation*. This civilisation, as it lost the essential traits of culture, and so grew more and more disintegrated, as it lost the spirit of wholeness, of being fused into a unity by music, continued to cling to the memory of its humanist origin; having lost the right to this name, civilisation clung to it more and more stubbornly, much as a degenerate aristocrat clings to his title.

This phenomenon, which, in its way, is curious enough – the anxious guarding of a title the right to which had been forfeited, the preservation of the prerogatives of enlightened Europe – had a tragic significance for European civilisation during the time in which the new culture was being born. The explanation of this also must be sought for in the divorce from the spirit of music: the phenomenon in question only became possible as a result of the spiritual exhaustion of the bearers of humanism.

It was no accident that this was the precise moment at which Immanuel Kant, the wiliest and maddest [95] of mystics, put in the forefront of his teaching his doctrine of time and space. In setting a limit to human understanding, in building up his frightful theory of knowledge, he was the prophet who announced the coming of civilisation, he was himself one of its creators; but in building his system round a leitmotif of time and space, he was a mad artist, a monstrous revolutionary who was dynamiting civilisation from within.

[2] Matthew 5:13.

There are, as it were, two times, two spaces: one is historical and exists in the calendar, the other is musical and cannot be reckoned. It is only time and space of the first order that is invariably present in the civilised consciousness. We live in the second kind only in those moments in which we feel that we are close to nature, when we surrender ourselves to the musical wave which rises out of the universal orchestra. We have no need of equipoise, of a balance of forces in order to live by days, by months, by years, and it is this absence of necessity ever to spend strength in creative effort that has degraded the greater part of civilised mankind to the level of mere inhabitants of the universe; but we must attain to this equilibrium if we are to approach the musical essence of the universe, to be near to nature, to the elements. We need, before all else, an ordered body and an ordered spirit, for it is only with the whole body and the whole spirit kneaded indissolubly together than one can hear the music of the universe: the loss of equilibrium, bodily or spiritual, inevitably deprives us of the faculty of hearing music, of the capacity of leaving calendar time, of leaving historical years and days, which flicker past and tell us nothing of the real universe, to enter that other time, the time of which there is no measure.

I should like to call the epochs in which this equilibrium is not lost epochs of culture, and to oppose [96] them to the others, during which the conception of the world as one whole can no longer be supported by the failing strength of the bearers of ancient culture, who are overwhelmed by the onrush of new sounds, whose years are drenched and saturated with unfamiliar harmonies. The tide moves slowly if measured by the calendar alone; the appearance of a new force in the history of mankind is gradual. But what arises slowly by the laws of this time takes place suddenly by the laws of the other: so one movement of the baton is sufficient to turn the melody flowing softly in the orchestra into a storm. From this point of view all the customary constructions of the intellect become uncertain and must be re-examined.

It was so once with the Roman Empire; it did not perish finally until the fifth century of our era, but before the start of our era it was periodically convulsed by musical tempests. In the beginning of the era, Tacitus sang of the might and vigour of the new barbarian race destined to enter the world. This meant that the death knell of Roman civilisation had already been sounded; the

enormous empire was plunged into shadow, and had disappeared from the world long before it had reached the end of its earthly, historical path; a new force was active in the world at that time, a new cultural force, which, until its hour came, was hidden underground in the catacombs of the Christians – but when it came, it allied itself to the movement which had come to take the place of classical culture, whose degeneration was Roman civilisation.

One of the fundamental motifs of every revolution is that of a return to nature. This motif is always falsely interpreted. Civilisation tries to utilise its strength, it seeks to harness its waters to turn its own wheels, but its motif is of the night, a wild, delirious tune. For civilisation of any kind it is a funeral march: [97 (*no 96*)] it brings memories of a fealty to a different, a musical, time, of the truth that the life of nature is not reckoned as the life of an individual or of a separate epoch is reckoned, that glaciers and volcanoes are asleep for many thousands of years before they are roused, and with an elemental fury burst forth into torrents of water and of fire.

The fate of those who found themselves heirs to humanist culture, the fatal contradiction in which they became involved, is the result of the weariness of the spirit. The spirit of integral wholeness, the spirit of music had deserted them, and they blindly believed in historic time; they did not feel that something had arisen under the banner of a new movement whose unusual symptoms show it to be different; they continued to believe that the masses would let themselves be carried away by the individualising movement of civilisation, forgetting that these masses were the bearers of a different spirit. Hence the entire history of the nineteenth century, the history of a feverish attempt to build up a humanist civilisation, and side by side with it, the shipwreck of the hope that 'the masses would in the course of time become civilised'.[3]

V

The multiformity which appears to characterise the life of Western Europe in the nineteenth century will not blind the historian of culture – on the contrary, it will draw his particular attention – to

[3] [Untraced.]

the peculiar feature of all European civilisation, its lack of wholeness, its atomicity. Enlightened mankind started off simultaneously on a hundred different paths, political, legal, scientific, artistic, philosophical and ethical. Paths which had once been adjacent to each other now ran further and further away from one another, and each one in its turn branched off into numberless [98] other, smaller, paths; these led in different directions, and parted men, so that when they met again they began to sense enemies in one another.

There is no doubt that this division lay in the very basis of humanism, in its individualist spirit, in the methods by which the antique world was brought to life again; there is no doubt that from the beginning this force was gnawing at the roots of humanism. But it was only at this precise moment – on the eve of the nineteenth century – that it showed its full power and brought about the crisis of humanism.

In the field of science this is the time in which two separate spheres become sharply differentiated: that of the natural from that of the historical sciences. Each employs different methods, each is divided into innumerable separate disciplines, which in their turn begin to use different methods of work. The various special sciences gradually grew impenetrable not only to the uninitiated, but to the representatives of neighbouring sciences, an army of specialists came into being, cut off both from the world at large and from their own former fellow workers, each behind the walls of his own little scientific holy of holies:

> Scientific work [says Honegger][4] has taken on such vast proportions that the ordinary intelligence can hardly master even a branch of the mighty whole, and the scholar looks back, almost wistfully on the good old times when he could with one glance embrace every line of thought without losing his way in an overwhelming mass of material. The division of labour developed in science in precisely the same manner, and with precisely the same consequences as in physical labour.

(The division of labour which results from work being done by machines entails, in the words of the same historian, 'a mechanical

[4] For Johann Jakob Honegger see 'Editorial II: Alexander Blok' (4/1). I.B.

atomism of work, which, since it robs it of all [99] significance in the eyes of the worker, turns him into a machine too.')

Scientific workers who are in this way turned en masse into machines for the production of uncoordinated experiments and observations grow hostile to one another; the naturalist goes to war with the philologist, the representatives of one discipline with those of another. All these tiny internal civil wars break the strength of both the opposed factions, each of which continues, nevertheless, to embellish its banners with the old humanist mottoes. The pretext for these quarrels and dissensions is the infinite variety of scientific spheres of activity, which was suddenly revealed to the human view. But the concealed and real cause is, as before, the disappearance of the spirit of music: it alone possessed the power which could weld mankind and its creations into a single unity.

In the meantime, in the midst of their internal dissensions, the neo-humanists forgot more and more completely that the uninitiated are by the will of history becoming the masters both of their own, and of their neo-humanist destinies. They give reminders of their continued existence by an endless series of revolutions. The bearers of civilisation, in their fight against the obsolete forms of the senile state, regard every revolution as so much grist to their mill. The old constitutional forms whose collapsing bureaucratic fabric comes more and more clearly to light are quite justly called by them a dividing wall. This name, however, embodies a misconception which possessed a significance unfortunate for civilisation; these same political forms which are so diligently being subverted by civilisation at one end, and by revolution at the other, are the sole defence of civilisation against revolution. Those who dwell on this side of the wall, lulled into false dreams of security by the optimism of civilisation, do not suspect that the moment the breach in the wall becomes wide [100] enough, they will be overwhelmed by the torrent of elemental forces which will come flooding in, and ultimately threaten their very existence.

Optimism generally is a *Weltanschauung* neither complex nor deep, and one which usually precludes any capacity for looking at the world as a single whole. It usually justifies itself before the world and before itself by the plea that it is opposed to pessimism, but then neither does it ever accord with the *Weltanschauung* of

tragedy, which can alone yield the key to the understanding of the complexity of the world.

Upon those former humanists who are now scattered and lonely optimists there comes from time to time a melancholy yearning after wholeness. One of the embodiments in which such a yearning manifests itself is a phenomenon, which, although it is essentially disgusting, has won itself an absurdly important status: I mean the phenomenon called popular science, that profound compromise, that dilettantism which is fatal both to science itself and to all those who accept in its place this weak, tasteless dilution of it.

It is to popularisation, to the division of the sciences into higher and lower, that we owe that half light, half darkness, infinitely worse than total darkness, which to this day reigns in the heads of the middle classes, in the heads of the European bourgeoisie. Popularisation, which is today making enormous strides forward, as indeed was done by everything second-rate in the last century, has silenced the voices of other movements. In the midst of all this a few solitary artists, members of a class whose voice is as yet heard by no one, make their isolated musical appeals, appeals for knowledge which is single and whole, for synthesis, for a *gaia scienza*. Their meaning has not yet been understood by anyone; the very names of those who make them are removed from the roll of [101] respectable and civilised persons; the compilation of official lists of the proscribed is carried out by an army of humane analytical critics, which is far superior in numbers, and even in learning, to the group, never large, of those who are striving to comprehend the world synthetically.

The same appearance of disintegration accompanied by fruitless efforts to restore the vanished unity meets us in all spheres of activity.

In politics there is an endless flickering succession of changing constitutional forms, there is a fitful kaleidoscopic shifting of frontiers. The post-Napoleonic era is full of strivings for unity. The result of them is united Germany, united Italy. The quest of national and other political unities is answered with revolutions; attempts are made, and are partly successful, to divert them into new channels, they are defined as national movements or movements of liberation. What is either forgotten or glossed over in this process is the most important factor of all, which every

revolution contains within itself, that urgent, musical, synthetic impulse which is always uncontrollable, which cannot be conducted into artificial channels.

The same disintegration prevails in art. It is broken up into tendencies and schools, into tendencies within tendencies. All the arts part ways and leave one another: the choir of the Muses becomes unthinkable since the sculptor is no longer understood by the painter, or the painter by the musician, or the writer by any of the three – the writer who is now treated as a purveyor of something heavy and nourishing, of something intellectual and humane as opposed to the frivolous artist – and in the end, both individually and collectively, they cease to understand the artisan, with the result that there is created in every branch of art a kind of fecklessness, a namy-pambiness [102] which the genuine humanists of an earlier day would never have accepted, nor indeed have even understood, and which can have been known only in Alexandrian periods.

In response to this came the synthetic trumpet-calls of Wagner; these, and many others, which must be looked for not so much in the treatises devoted to this question (such as, for instance, Wagner's essay *Oper und Drama*) as in the musical sounds with which individual works of the age are filled. Civilisation either does not listen to these sounds at all, or it attempts to interpret away their meaning; this meaning, which is fatal to civilisation, seems inarticulate to it; to the optimist, the tragic is unattainable.

And we shall find the same multiplicity of scattered and disconnected lines of approach and mutually exclusive methods in jurisprudence, in education, in ethics, in philosophy, in applied science. In its efforts to enrich the world, civilisation has merely cluttered it up. Its building activities are often compared with the building of the Tower of Babel; creative work gives way to joyless labour, discoveries to inventions, everything is found in disconnected heaps, nothing is joined together; the cement which alone could have joined it has disappeared, the spirit of music has flown away. 'The feelings of dissatisfaction with ourselves and our surrounds', declares the historian, 'robs us of all our *strength*. We are in that state, when in the words of Pascal "man flees from himself".[5] Such is the malady of our age, and the symptoms of it

[5] [Untraced: a paraphrase rather than a quotation?]

are as evident to him who reflects as the physical sensation caused by the approach of a thunderstorm.'

VI

The ominous character of the century, the atmosphere charged with thunder, communicates itself to [103] the artists of Europe: those bearers of music, who, in their own time, were cruelly persecuted, and whose genius has been recognised only in ours – recognised, but only tentatively, with caution. They may be called living catacombs of culture, since throughout the whole length of the nineteenth century we observe a series of persecutions with which civilisation oppresses the bearers of culture, and a corresponding series of attempts on the part of the same civilisation to adapt itself to this spirit which is hostile to it. It is now no longer possible to speak of civilisation as one with culture; we can speak only of the unceasing fight of civilisation against music, of its unsuccessful efforts to make use of material which it has not learnt to handle, in its attempt to create unity within itself. Nevertheless, civilisation collapses like a house of cards before the first breath of life, while the musical rhythms which it attacked grow in vastness and power, for in this rhythm, and not in rationalist generalisations, the real life of the age is reflected.

European civilisation used the subtlest methods in its war against music. There is hardly anyone who can deny that the critics and the public opinion of Europe avenged themselves cruelly upon their artists for their 'betrayal' of the fundamental principles of humanist civilisation. Heine suffered from this malicious vindictiveness all his life. They could not forgive Wagner the works of his genius until they discovered a method of interpreting them after their own fashion. Strindberg himself speaks of the persecution to which he was subjected; he underwent the most refined of tortures – pursuit in the occult sphere. The lives of all the greatest artists of the age, all without exception, were made difficult beyond endurance, for they were either defenceless and hence oppressed, or forced to spend their creative powers on [104] developing antidotes, in resisting the massed forces of civilisation which encompassed them, and which employed agents and spies to watch their every movement.

The picture which I have drawn is singularly hideous and repulsive. If a total stranger were suddenly projected into the midst

of the nineteenth century, he would quite probably go mad. One would think that nothing so cruel and improbable could ever have existed: what possible motive could there be behind this consistent, systematic persecution of the representatives of culture, by the representatives of civilisation? The cause, however, was as I have described it. I assert that the picture I have drawn is a true one, because I feel in the great art of the nineteenth century a real menace to civilisation. These cosy novels of Dickens are in reality a fearful explosive; I have, in reading Dickens, sometimes been conscious of terror the like of which Poe himself never inspired. In Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* ancient memories lie embodied by the side of which the humane foundations of our communal existence begin to seem mere empty baubles. Wagner was an enchanter who called up 'spirits from the vasty deep',[6] who conjured up primordial chaos. Ibsen's path leads towards sharp and perilous rocks. It generally became evident in the nineteenth century that art can make 'the prudent age of man somehow so boring', can 'from life ravish the unravishable', as Gogol used to say. Words like these make it plain what art is, what it is akin to, what it is capable of: it is the voice of nature's elements, the elemental force. In this lies its function, and its meaning, and its sole purpose; everything else is a superstructure built over it, the work of civilisation's fussy hands.

The works or the artists themselves must recede [105] to second place in the light of this new conception, since all of them are still imperfect creations, fragments of much vaster conceptions, reservoirs of sound which have had time to absorb only a small part of that which rocked and tossed in the delirium of the creative consciousness. The Venus of Milo herself is but some sound-drawing discovered in marble, and she has being quite independently of whether her statue will or will not, one day, be broken to pieces.

Everything in art over which civilisation watched so jealously – all the Rheims Cathedrals, all the Messinas, all the old country houses – it may be that not one of these will survive. What will indubitably remain is only that which civilisation used to hunt and persecute with such zeal – the spirit of music.

In Western Europe, where the memory of culture, of the great musical past of humanism, was still alive, all this was, of course,

[6] Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, 3.1.50.

felt very acutely. Consequently civilisation, even while it organised its heresy-hunts, did at the same time make every effort to enter into friendly relations with the new force on whose side breathed the spirit of music. Its adherents madly clapped their hands over their ears in a desperate effort to shut out the strange and threatening sounds; they dug channels into which the sounds might harmlessly pour themselves, they found subtle interpretations for them and adjusted them to their own educational programmes, harnessing the current to turn their own wheels; finally they looked among them for melodies pleasing to humane ears. War was definitely declared only after all methods of discovering such melodies had signally failed, when music began to cast its light over gloomy regions which civilisation shunned. Sometimes the exact opposite would happen: music would begin to sound within the bowels of civilisation itself. History also has whims, and [106] occasionally plays tricks; music really did turn wheels of some sort, would sometimes grow ravishingly sweet, would consent, as often as not, to stay within its banks and not rise in flood – this is the minor music of the age. But major music existed too, and it communicated to the century that hidden *greatness* which outwardly it had lost. Many a wheel was broken, many a critical eardrum torn by it during that time.

All these fine ties and connections, this delicate interplay and flirtation of civilisation with culture, will become the subject of research. It is often not at all easy to distinguish within one tendency, or within one personality, where civilisation ends and culture begins. The chief task, however, which the historian of nineteenth-century culture will have to carry out will be to trace these interconnections in all their subtle involutions, and to condense the result into some brief formula, to act as a beacon-fire to future generations, not volumes upon volumes of an endless thesis.

It was not so, of course, in poor young Russia, which possessed no historical memory. What, therefore, will be observed here are much cruder and simpler, and consequently more sincere, manifestations of the schism. Here the question which a European simply could not with decency ask used to be raised: 'What is higher, Shakespeare or a pair of boots?'[7] Here disputes frequently

[7] [An allusion to the remark, often mistakenly attributed to Pisarev, that a pair of boots is better than Shakespeare. This derives from a

arose the like of which Europe had long ago forgotten, disputes as to the usefulness of art, controversies which I would call truly cultural. These, in their primitive simplicity and wholeness, are far too hostile to the spirit of civilisation. We were generally occupied with subjects whose bare idea would dumbfound and bewilder any civilisation which had not previously diverted them into channels prepared for the purpose, along which they could for a time at any rate flow unimpeded (such artificial channels were commonly known as belles-lettres). [107]

If we are to look upon the history of nineteenth-century culture as the history of the battle of humane civilisation with the spirit of music, we shall have to reconsider many values, and extract out of the vast heritage that which is really as essential to us as our daily bread. We really do need that which is connected with culture; and we do not particularly need what is connected with civilisation. The problem of selection is vital. In the catastrophe which has engulfed our generation, every cultural source must be conceived of as the kind of catacomb in which the early Christians guarded their spiritual heritage. The difference is that nowadays nothing can any longer be concealed beneath the surface: the path to salvation lies elsewhere. The heritage of the spirit must not be concealed, it must be revealed to the world, and revealed in such a manner as will make the world recognise that it is sacrosanct and inviolable, to make life itself protect it. I believe that life will not protect, but, on the contrary will ruthlessly destroy everything which is not welded together, which is not irradiated by the spirit of real culture. Not many products of civilisation are likely to survive; chance alone could save them, and that will not save them for long.

satirical 'extract' from a 'novel' ('Otryvok iz romana *Shchedrodarov*'), contributed by Dostoevsky in 1864 to his journal *Epokha*: see 'Gospodin Shchedrin ili raskol v nigilistakh', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo v XVIII tomakh* (Moscow, 2003–6) v 266–81, at 267–78. At 271 the eponymous character Shchedrodarov (sc. Saltykov-Shchedrin), who has recently joined the editorial board of the journal *Svoevremennyi* – a board whose members include Skribov (sc. Pisarev) – encounters the board's editorial principle that 'a pair of boots is, in every sense, better than Pushkin, because […] Pushkin is mere luxury and nonsense'; and, a little later, 'Shakespeare too is mere nonsense and luxury'.]

VII

Every movement is generated by the spirit of music, its whole activity is permeated by it, but after a time the movement suffers degeneration, it loses the musical moisture of which it was born, and is from that moment doomed to destruction. It ceases being culture and turns into civilisation; this occurred in the classical world just as it happened in our own. The spirit of music finds its preserver and guardian in the same element into which it ultimately re-enters (*revertitur* [108] *in terram suam unde erat*),[8] that very same people, the same barbarian masses.

Hence it is no paradox to say that the barbarian masses turned out to be the preservers of culture, possessing as they do nothing but the spirit of music during those periods in which civilisation, its wings clipped and its fires extinct, becomes the foe of culture in spite of having at its disposal all the factors of progress – science with all its technical machinery, the law, and so forth. Civilisation dies, and a new movement is conceived and quickens in the same musical element, and this movement has new and distinct features of its own, it does not resemble its predecessor.

The culture of the future gathered strength not in the scattered attempts of civilisation to mend what is past mending, to raise the dead, to reunify humanism, but in the synthetic efforts of revolution, in the taut, resilient rhythms, in the musical strainings and strivings, in the onrushes of volitional force, in the ebb and flow whose highest expression is found in Wagner. That growing complexity of rhythms in poetry and in music (especially towards the close of the century), to which the epigoni of humanism with such stubborn, grim hostility refused to listen, is nothing other than the musical preparation for a new cultural movement, a reflection of those rhythms of nature's elements which compose the overture of the era now opening before us.

The music filtered through the surface by secret paths known to it alone. Rainbowlike, it cast its light upon the fine spray which marked the last of the humanists, Schiller, then rose in vapours and in clouds, which burst in showers and descended in dense mists upon the men of the nineteenth century (these mists and

[8] Ecclesiastes 12:7 reads 'et revertatur pulvis in terram suam unde erat et spiritus redeat ad Deum qui dedit illum' ('Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.')

showers are often heard in the best lyrical voices of the time) – showers and mists in which some lost [109] their way, while others kept calling to each other in the darkness. The earth drank its fill of mist and rain; there, underneath the sodden surface, distant musical murmurs were born and grew and swelled, till they began to be heard in the voices of the elements, in the voices of the barbarian masses and of the great artists of the age; wider and wider grew the river which for centuries had flowed beneath the ground, breaking through the crust of civilisation in this place and in that, and which in our days with irresistible force burst out from underneath it, intoxicated with the spirit of music.

To the civilised ear this music is a wild chorus, a discordant shriek: some of us can hardly suffer it at all; when I declare that for many of us it is even deadly, no one can now afford to smile. It spreads havoc among those conquests of civilisation which seemed eternal; it is opposed to our familiar tunes of 'the true, the good and the beautiful'.[9] It is openly hostile to all that which has been implanted in us by the education and upbringing of humane Europe of the last century.

We can now no longer deny that a definite movement is spreading which is new and hostile to the civilised world, that civilisation is no longer a continent but a group of islands which the destroying torrent may soon smother beneath its waves; that all those ethical, aesthetic, legal products of civilisation which from the humanitarian point of view are so valuable – Rheims cathedral, for instance, or private property, or international law – have either already been, or are in danger of being, swept off by the storm. If we are genuinely civilised humanists, we shall never be reconciled to this; but if we refuse to accept it, if we continue to cling to whatever it is that humane civilisation has declared to be of eternal value, shall we not soon find ourselves cut off from the world and from culture, that [110] culture which the wave of destruction bears upon its crest?

The main and undeniable fact is this: the movement which is at the present time active in the world cannot be measured by any human standards, cannot be interpreted by any civilised methods. Civilisation has in recent years been making desperate attempts to adapt itself to this movement; the most impressive instance of this is the manner in which it contrived to adapt itself to the meanest

[9] [The highest Platonic ideals.]

and most colossal of all the wars which the world has ever seen. By its deliberately anti-musical assent to this war, civilisation signed its own death warrant.

In our own day civilisation tries to adapt itself to movement. The extremely dubious and partial success of these attempts, such as it is, can be explained only by the temporary decline of music in Europe; but it has by now become more than obvious that nothing will be gained by lulling oneself to sleep with calendar time; it is no less obvious that the restoration of humanism would be followed by such an orgy of bloodshed as has never yet taken place. If Europe will not open its gates to the new movement somebody else will do it for her; for music does not dwindle in the world.

In any case the struggle which has been going on for over a century and a half is virtually over: the vanquished is human civilisation, the victor – the spirit of music.

The great bell of anti-humanism peals over the earth; the world purifies itself, casting off its old garments; man grows closer to the elemental in nature – he grows more musical.

Man is an animal; man is a plant, a flower; an extraordinary cruelty sometimes stares out of his features, the cruelty of an animal, not of a human being; this, and a primitive tenderness which also is not human, but the tenderness of a plant; [111] all these are but brief masks and disguises, an endless procession of flitting, unsubstantial shapes. This flickering signifies that a transformation of the breed is going on; the whole being of man is being stirred into motion, it has woken from the age-long sleep of civilisation. Spirit, soul, body are caught up into the whirling, rushing movement; in the whirlwind of political and social revolutions between which there exist cosmic correspondences a new natural selection is at work, a new man is being shaped, man, the human, the social, the moral animal, is being transformed into the *artist*, to speak Wagner's language.

I have tried to single out that moment in the past in which the crisis of humanism arose; I have indicated the witnesses and the actors in that crisis – the artists of the nineteenth century who remained faithful to the spirit of music. And now it looks to me as though the time had come to draw connections between them, to pronounce judgements upon their value; and the one sign which alone can be used as the criterion in such judgements is that of their sensibility, their artistry, the degree of perfection with which

the life of the world was reflected in their rhythms. I hold that all other signs including those of nationality are either of inferior importance or else altogether unreal.

I have singled out yet another aspect of the struggle of which the nineteenth century is full: the visible domination exercised by the work of the German, and, to some extent, of the Slavonic races, and in contrast with it the silence kept by the Romance and Anglo-Saxon races. This is quite natural, since musical memory is weaker in the English and French, and consequently in the great battle against humanism, against a musicless civilisation, they tended to be more economical of their blood than the Germans.

We have no historical memory, but our natural [112] memory is vast. A great destiny lies in store for our enormous distances. We have been listening not to Petrarch, not to Hutten, but to the wind which sweeps our plains, to nature herself, whose merciless refrain was always sounding in the ears of Gogol, of Tolstoy, of Dostoevsky.

Finally I affirm that the issue of the battle is decided, and that the movement of humane civilisation has given place to another movement which also is born of the spirit of music. Now it manifests itself as the raging torrent which carries in its stream the debris of civilisation; yet it is in this very movement that the new part which the human personality will play is already shadowed forth. Its goal is not the ethical man, not the political man, not the humane man, but *man the artist*; he and he alone will be able *to act and to live greedily* in the new epoch of whirlwinds and storms into which mankind is irresistibly rushing.

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