

THE FUTURE PHENOMENON

(From the French of Stéphane Mallarmé)



THE pale sky that lies above a world ending in decrepitude will perhaps pass away with the clouds: the tattered purple of the sunset is fading in a river sleeping on the horizon submerged in sunlight and in water. The trees are tired; and, beneath their whitened leaves (whitened by the dust of time rather than by that of the roads,) rises the canvas house of the Interpreter of Past Things: many a lamp awaits the twilight and lightens the faces of an unhappy crowd, conquered by the immortal malady and the sin of the centuries, of men standing by their wretched accomplices quick with the miserable fruit with which the world shall perish. In the unquiet silence of every eye supplicating yonder sun, which, beneath the water, sinks with the despair of a cry, listen to the simple patter of the showman: "No sign regales you of the spectacle within, for there is not now a painter capable of presenting any sad shadow of it. I bring alive (and preserved through the years by sovereign science) a woman of old time. Some folly, original and simple, an ecstasy of gold, I know not what! which she names her hair, falls with the grace of rich stuffs about her face, which contrasts with the bloodlike nudity of her lips. In place of the vain gown, she has a body; and the eyes, though like rare stones, are not worth the look that leaps from the happy flesh: the breasts, raised as if filled with an eternal milk, are pointed to the sky, and the smooth limbs still keep the salt of the primal sea." Remembering their poor wives, bald, morbid, and full of horror, the husbands press forward: and the wives, too, impelled by melancholy curiosity, wish to see.

When all have looked upon the noble creature, vestige of an epoch already accursed, some, indifferent, not having the power to comprehend, but others,

whelmed in grief and their eyelids wet with tears of resignation, gaze at each other ; whilst the poets of these times, feeling their dead eyes brighten, drag themselves to their lamps, their brains drunk for a moment with a vague glory, haunted with Rhythm, and forgetful that they live in an age that has outlived beauty.

GEORGE MOORE.

