

# BANKS OF THE LOIRE



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*Roanne, May 24, 1941*

From now on, may nothing ever cause me to go back on my resolve: never sacrifice the object of my study in order to enhance some verbal turn discovered on the subject, nor piece together any such discoveries in a poem.

Always go back to the object itself, to its raw quality, its *difference*: particularly its difference from what I've (just then) written about it.

May my work be one of continual rectification of expression on behalf of the raw object (with no *a priori* concern about the form of that expression).

Therefore, writing *about* the Loire from a place along the banks of the river, I must constantly immerse my eyes and mind in it. Any time they dry up over an expression, dip them back into the waters of the river.

Recognize the greater right of the object, its inalienable right, in relation to any poem . . . No poem ever being free from absolute judgment *a minima* on the part of the poem's object, nor from accusation of counterfeit.

The object is always more important, more interesting, more capable (full of rights): it has no duty whatsoever toward me, it is I who am obliged to it.

What the preceding lines do not adequately emphasize: *consequently*, never leave off at the *poetic* form – though it must be used at some point in my study because it produces a play of mirrors that can reveal certain persistently obscure aspects of the object. The reciprocal clash of words, the verbal analogies are *one* of the means for studying the object in depth.

Never try to *arrange things*. Objects and poems are irreconcilable.

The point is knowing whether you wish to make a poem or comprehend an object (in the hope that the mind wins out, comes up with something new on the subject). It is the second phase of this alternative that my taste (a violent taste for things, and for advances of the mind) leads me to choose without hesitation.

So my resolve has been reached . . .

After that I hardly care whether someone chooses to call the outcome a poem. As for me, the slightest hint of poetic droning simply reminds me that I'm slipping back onto the old merry-go-round and need to thrust my way off.

# THE WASP

*For Jean-Paul Sartre  
and Simone de Beauvoir*



## THE WASP

A *Hymenopteran* of agile flight, feline – tiger-striped in appearance, actually – with body mass far exceeding that of the mosquito, yet with wings relatively smaller but vibrant and undoubtedly geared way down, the wasp vibrates non-stop at a velocity required of a fly under hypercritical circumstances (to come unstuck from honey or fly-paper, for instance).

She seems to exist in a perpetual state of crisis, which renders her dangerous. A sort of frenzy or folly – that makes for a brilliance as resonant and musical as a very taut cord, fiercely vibrating and therefore burning or stinging, rendering any contact dangerous.

She pumps away with fervor and thrusting hips. Deep into the purple or green plums, it's quite a sight: truly a small extirpating apparatus particularly, pointedly, well-done. Therefore it's not the generating point of the golden ray that is ripening, but rather the generating point of the ray (tinged gold and umber) that carries off results of the ripening.

Honeyed, sun-soaked; transporter of honey, sugar, syrup; hyp-

ocrite and hydromelic. The wasp on the rim of a plate or half-rinsed cup (or jam jar): an irresistible attraction. Such tenacity in this desire! How they are made for one another! A veritable magnetic attraction to sugar.



Analogy between a wasp and an electric streetcar. Something mute in repose and vocal in action. Also something of a short train, with first and second classes, or rather the engine and the observation car. And of a sizzling trolley. Sizzling like a deep fry, like an (effervescent) chemical reaction.

And if she touches down, she stings! Nothing like a mechanical blow: it's an electrical jolt, a venomous vibration.

But her body is more yielding – that's to say more delicately articulated, all in all – her flight more capricious, unforeseen, more dangerous than the rectilinear motion of streetcars determined by the tracks.



A little itinerant siphon, a little distillery on wheels and wings, like the ones that go about from farm to farm through the countryside in certain seasons; a little airborne kitchen, a little public sanitation truck: all in all, the wasp resembles vehicles that are self-fueling and churn out a product along the way, which contributes to

the fact that the mere sight of them assures an element of wonder, for their essential purpose is not simply to move about or to provide transport, but also to carry out an intimate activity that's generally quite mysterious. Quite astute. What we call having an inner life.

... An airborne cauldron for making jam, hermetically sealed but yielding, the ponderous rear axle careening along in flight.



In order to classify the various species, it had obviously been necessary to take hold somewhere, at some part or member and, what's more, at a place attached solidly enough to the whole so it wouldn't come away when grasped, or else in the event that it did come off, would suffice in itself for recognition. Thus, for insects the wing was chosen. Perhaps with good reason: I have no idea, I certainly wouldn't swear by it.

*Hymenoptera*, in any event, for wasps, isn't half bad. Not because a young girl's hymen, to tell the truth, bears much resemblance to the wing of a wasp, but apparently for other reasons. Here we have an abstract word that derives its concrete qualities from a dead language. Well then, to the extent that abstraction is a concrete thing, naturalized and diaphanized, both delicate and taut, pretentious, grandiloquent – this rather suits a wasp wing . . .

... But I won't go on much further in this particular direction.



What is it they say? That the wasp leaves her stinger in the victim, and dies in the process? That would be a pretty good emblem for fruitless warfare.

So she had generally better avoid all contact. And yet, when contact does occur, inherent justice is satisfied: by the punishment of both parties. Still, the punishment seems most severe for the wasp, who inevitably dies. Why? Because she made the mistake of considering the contact hostile and instantly flared up in defensive anger, because she struck. Betraying an exaggerated sensibility (out of fear, of excessive sensitivity, most likely . . . but due to extenuating circumstances, alas! – it’s already too late.) So it’s quite evident, let us repeat, that the wasp has nothing to gain by engaging an adversary, that she should rather avoid all contact, make any detours and zig-zags necessary to that end.

“I know my own self,” she muses. “If I simply let go, the slightest argument will turn tragic: I’ll no longer know myself. I’ll break into a frenzy: you disgust me, I don’t recognize you anymore.”

“Pointed arguments are the only kind I know, insults, blows – the fatal thrust of the sword.”

“I’d rather not argue at all.”

“We’re poles apart.”

“If I were ever to accept the slightest contact with people, if one

day I were constrained by sincerity, if I had to say what I think! . . . I'd take leave of my life along with my response – my sting.”

“So just leave me alone; I implore you: let's not argue. Leave me to my daily grind, and you to yours. To my sleepwalker's business, my inner life. Let's put off as long as possible any discussion . . .”

Whereupon she gets one slight tap – and falls instantly: nothing left to do but squash her.



Susceptible as well perhaps because of the very precious, all too precious, character of the cargo she bears: which *merits* her frenzy.

. . . Her awareness of its value.



But this stupor that can be her undoing (one tap of the hand and she falls to the ground) is also capable, if not of saving, then at least of curiously prolonging her life.

A wasp is so stupid – I mean no offense – that if cut in two, she goes on living. It takes her two days to realize that she's dead. She keeps on flailing about. Even more than before.

There you have the height of *preventive* stupefaction. Also the height of defiance.



*Essaim*. Swarm: *exagmen*, from *ex agire* – to expel.



Frenetic perhaps because of the exiguity of her diaphragm.

(It is a known fact that for the Greeks thought resided in the diaphragm . . . and that the same word stood for both: φρην, to be precise.)



Why, of all insects, is the most active the sun-hued one?

Why, as well, are yellow-striped animals the most vicious?



*The Wasp and Fruit*

Transport of bruised pulp, ravaged, contaminated, mortified by the excessively brilliant golden-black, gypsy, Doña Juana.

Integrity lost through contact with an overly brilliant visitor. And not integrity alone – but the very quality of what remains.

Between birds and fruit there is none of this love-hatred, this passion. The flesh of fruit retains a lovely indifference when broached by a bird. There's indifference between them. The bird is but a physical agent.

Yet between insects and fruit, what profound effects, what chem-

istry, what reactions! The wasp is a physio-chemical agent. She precipitates the post-maturation and decomposition of the vegetal flesh, which had imprisoned the seed.

→←

The plum says, “If the sun jabs me with its rays, they gild my skin. If the wasp jabs me with its sting, it wounds my flesh.”

→←

Forever burrowing into the nectarotheca – head pulsating, pumping away with fervor and thrusting hips.

A sort of syringe for ingurgitating nectar.

→←

*First the Blaze*

That the wasp rises out of the earth – and so tremulous, so dangerous – is of no small significance to man, because he recognizes in this the perfection of what he attempts elsewhere, with his vast hangars, his airfields.

In those there’s something like a blaze whose sparks spurt far with unforeseen trajectories.

They take off from their subterranean airports . . . Offensive, offending . . .

The word *dynamo*.

They spring up at times as though unable to control their motor.

. . . First the crackling blaze, sputtering, then the flights are carried out, long distance flights, with precipitate attacks from time to time, silent plunges into the fruit, whereby the wasp accomplishes her mission – that’s to say her crime.



*The Swarm of Exact Words, or Wasp Nest*

Whoa! . . . This bothersome spurt out of the furrow, isn’t this a seditious sect of the seed roused against the sower? Yes, their outrage first lands them back in his overalls.

No! Stand back! There’s something here very like a blaze, whose sparks spray far and wide, with unforeseen trajectories . . . I see in this the perfection of what’s attempted elsewhere by these vast hangars, these airfields. But let’s take a closer look.

*Ouch!* Oh natural winged fervor! It’s the assembly of your people sputtering about there, in preparation for a rebellious attack. Go ahead, jab me . . . But already we can see their animosity dissipates in furious excursions . . .



A barbarous swarm is sweeping the countryside. The garden is overrun.

*Stray Bullet*

It's also like a stray bullet, but loose, languid, dreamy. Seemingly nonchalant, at moments she regains her virtue, her sense of purpose – and pounces on her target from close range.

It is as though on leaving the gun barrel projectiles experience a sudden rapture that induces them to forget their original intention, their motivation, their rancor.

Like some army that had been ordered to rapidly occupy the strategic points of a city, yet immediately on entering the gates became engrossed in the shop windows, visited the museums, sipped from the straws of customers enjoying drinks at all the sidewalk cafés.



Like buckshot too, with pensive little taps she riddles the vertical panels of worm-eaten wood.

*The Musical Form of Honey*

The wasp can be called the musical form of honey. That's to say a major note, sharpened, insistent, beginning faintly but not easy to release, clinging, bright, with alternating force and frailty, etc.



*Et cetera . . .*

And finally, for the rest of it, for a certain number of fine attributes that I might have neglected to draw out, well, dear reader, be patient! Some fine day a critic will surely happen along, perceptive enough to REPROACH ME for this *eruption* into literature by my wasp in a manner that's *importunate, annoying, impetuous, and trifling* all at once, to DENOUNCE the *halting* pace of these notes, their *disorderly, zigzag* presentation, to FRET over the taste for *brilliant discontinuity*, for a *sting* without depth though not without danger, not without the *venomous tail* which they disclose – in short, with great arrogance, to CALL DOWN UPON my work ALL THE EPITHETS it merits.

*Paris, August 1939 – Fronville, August 1943*