

## SPORT AND LITERATURE

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At first glance nothing looks more unreconciliable, and even more perfectly opposed than Literature and Sport. The former is a dream, a poetic and fictional transposition, whereas the latter is direct action, it is a purely physical effort, at least in its appearance. But if we come to envisage that sport is also spirit, the barrier falls immediately and we can see the possibility, that will become a necessity, of a reconciliation which could end in a harmonic fusion.

But we are not yet there.

Considering sport and just sport we can hardly see how we possibly could mix it with literature. It is true that the epic side of the contest, the exaltation of the moments that place man above himself, the need of singing these moments, are calling upon literature. But immediately, as they compare the words with acts, the man who accomplishes the act and the one who watches him as a spectator smile with scepticism. These great moments of man, though, and others too, which outside public competition, championship, performance, records, allow him to face himself, to win his inner self, to surpass himself, we all feel that they should not be forgotten just after the accomplishment. On the contrary we feel the need and sometimes the intense desire, to see these moments last, continue in a way, not to be lost or completely forgotten and with them their beauty and their lesson. It is then that by instinct we have recourse to literature, which we feel contains a longevity, a greater duration than the perishable film or the record.

Man has always by instinct sung and magnified deeds. Literature has prolonged what has been and what without literature would not be anymore. It has been the intense and exalting support of strong feelings, of sparkling virtues : courage,

abnegation, sacrifice. When considering sport we naturally reach the conclusion that literature should serve it as Sport is serving man, and that it may become not only what reminds of deeds, but what can and should explain them, what shall not only prevent them from dying, but what shall give sense to and express the quintessence of deeds.

All those who have attended an important event have always wished to tell about it. Being particularly sensitive, the writer will not only "see better" but he will "feel the event better". What is more, he will be able to "express it better" and even if his sense of poetry leads him to transpose it outside life, he will, by painting it and commenting on it, reach a truth more true than raw truth, the naked truth, which will be "the inner truth" of this event.

We can in sport consider two sorts of events : the deed and the other event which is produced inside the man. As far as the latter is concerned it is up to the writer to guess and understand and then to write about what he has guessed and understood. The former he will sing, and in his song there will be the exaltation of the moment when the event was achieved, the deed which will be fixed by him forever.

I should like right now to determine — I think it is indispensable — where what we call "literature" starts and where it ends.

The word "literature" is often a pejorative word. It joins "eloquence" about which one of our French writers has said "Take eloquence and twist its neck". Eloquence, in fact, is often "grandiloquence". An event, a deed, may be ridiculed by the way it is reported. This ridicule, sometimes, is called literature and that is the reason why Art, real art, made of measure, of tact, of talent in a word, of a talent that becomes more difficult because the act or the deed are above common levels, yes, that is why art should come in, and while giving new dimensions to the described act, keep it its truth and real significance. Literature must not "betray" nor distort if it is to exalt and magnify. It starts and ends in honesty. And this is why the "pieces" that one finds in certain sports magazines, in certain reports of bicycle races or soccer matches, these inflated statements, these ridiculous accounts in the form of "false literature", that we are reading too often, cannot possibly be called "literature" because they are nothing but a grotesque caricature.

In the field of sport, therefore, the writer must endeavour to "interpret" by words what the sportsman feels. By "writer" I chiefly mean the novelist or the essayist, who wishes to experience the feelings of the character he depicts,

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*To express the exaltation of a moment.*

and to analyse these feelings, through either action (in the case of the novelist) or study (in the case of the essayist). He must penetrate deeply into the heart and comprehension of all who practice sport if he wishes to be a real sports writer.

It has been said that good literature and good feelings do not match. This seems absurd when we consider sport literature. A book should certainly not be a sermon, but its feelings are good and it is good when it relates the efforts of an alpinist or the crossing of a lone sailor for example, and how many young hearts are vibrating then in the bodies of boys who "would like to do the same". And true literature, literature of action and soul at action level, asserts itself at that moment by the force which is in it, by the example it contains, by the enthusiasm it instigates when the author is a writer who knows how to tell things and express what youth is eager to feel.

Hence by the will of the writers themselves a true sport literature was born and, in the twenties, an Association of sports writers was founded in France.

There were then many of us among the writers who had met elsewhere than in "salons" and literary inns. We had begun to prove that we could talk of literature not only in smoke-filled and mundane places but in the open air, as well, within the limits of stadiums after having run and jumped like people well alive. Our research was not limited anymore to literature only, that is to say to literature for the sake of literature, but was extended in a way to "literature in action". And under our pens, quite naturally, action became literature. This was a major evolution for,

in times past, it was bloody fights and battles leading to men's death that gave man the feeling of outdoing himself through risk and courage. Things were different now and, while competing in the 800 or 1500 m. and struggling with valour, the only valour that was real, not that of champions, but valour made of our sole means, will and faith, we would acquire the certitude that we could talk, and write about this valour and that it would not be just vain talk or useless literature.

So, sport literature was born and, with ups and downs due to the difficulty for the public to get accustomed to subjects which, up to that time, had not seemed literary subjects, it got steady and little by little triumphed.

This literature has since become what it is today. It is composed, essentially, of books which go, according to a varied and extended scale, from the narration to the essay. These narrations, these studies are the account of deeds such as the climbing of Anapurna, the crossing on the Kon-Tiki, or the crossing of the Atlantic by Tabarly. They are also books about the joys of swimming or under-water fishing, and the discoveries they lead to. Other books are dedicated to team games, to athleticism, taken as a test and not as a record, to the technique through a philosophical study of sport and which show how the means are useful, indispensable, to success, to amelioration not only of the performance but of a race, the race of sportsmen.

I don't know whether my voice will be strong enough to go beyond the wonderful limits of Olympia and to cross the hills dominating the Alphens but I should like that some of those present here gather some of my words and

think about them back home, because they love sport and wish to serve it. In fact sport literature is still limited. But it blooms brilliantly already in France. It even crosses the borders of our country through the translations of our books. Already we see books of the same order appearing in Europe, in America and even in Asia. It is a large orchestra and we should like to see more

instruments joining in. We should like to see a World Sport Literature originating right now. Thus would gather throughout the planet all those who are animated by the same spirit and want it to spread.

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