

DE LA LITTÉRATURE  
A L'HISTOIRE

rue Oberkampf 110. le 24 mai 1903

Monsieur Lucien Descaves

Le livre que vous proposez de faire sur la proscription communaliste sera certes d'un très grand enseignement surtout pour les jeunes gens, qui de très bonne foi se jettent à la suite d'individus qui leur promettent à brève échéance une société renouée chassant la misère, abolissant les abus et ouvrant l'ère de la fraternité des peuples.

Avant la fatale guerre de 70. des hommes influencés par les doctrines des phylarques que vous citez dans votre article du Journal de ce jour, essayaient d'agir et ceux là étaient presque tous de bonne foi pour établir plus de justice dans les droits et les devoirs sociaux.

Alors pour les chefs de ce mouvement il n'y avait à recevoir que coups, amendes et prison. ceux là se le répète étaient des convaincus, l'imminence maladroite de ces tubercules étaient républicains quelques uns par raisonnement beaucoup d'autres par tradition.

EUGENE SCHULKIND

IMAGINATION AND REVOLUTION:  
GUIDELINES FOR A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE  
LITERATURE OF THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871

The purposes of this study are threefold: to consider the possible significance of literary art created by supporters of the Commune of 1871; to assess the contribution made by past studies of this literature; and to suggest an approach to its effective utilization as historical documentation.<sup>1</sup>

Most major revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have generated widespread impulses to communicate intense feelings about the particular revolutionary situation and its perspectives; the drive has tended to extend even to comparatively large numbers of enthusiasts not normally given to expressing themselves publicly, let alone in print. Imaginative literature – that is, such genres as poetry, songs, fiction and drama – is not the least important of the many modes of public expression that give voice to this militant exuberance. Although the actual interconnections between the various ideas or values and their imaginative expression are infinitely complex and many-faceted, this literary art can be said to offer a very distinctive view of the revolutionary consciousness.

Now in the case of the Paris Commune, the argument for devoting rather considerable attention to literary works as important primary sources is particularly strong. The Commune's life was so short and the repression so severe that there is certainly no surplus of documents – in comparison with 1848 or 1917, for example – for tracing with precision the spectrum of attitudes prevailing among partisans of the revolutionary government. Moreover, the sharp debate over the question of socialist consciousness among Communards, considerably increases the importance of any surviving documents in this area. While it is true that works of imaginative literature tend to communicate more *implicitly* than expository and analytical writing, they nevertheless

<sup>1</sup> Aspects of this discussion were raised briefly in a paper presented to the XIth congress of the International Federation for Modern Languages and Literature, 1969.

also reflect recognizable social and political views; those associated with the Commune appear to do so with notable vivacity.

Paradoxically, it is not in spite of, but because of, their more personal, imaginative voice that literary pieces may make a distinctive contribution to portraying facets of Communard mentalities. In any panorama that one would attempt to paint of the experience of the Commune, literary pieces – notwithstanding the mediocre artistic value of the majority – may compose a vital aspect of the revolutionary landscape; they may help us to perceive the more subjective, psychological dimensions of the Communards' vision of their revolution. While conventional documentation may yield an approximate synthesis of the *facts* of the Commune, the body of surviving imaginative literature can yield a view of what it *felt* like to be engagé; what it *felt* like to identify one's private self with collective political aspirations. Undeniably, there is no clear-cut division between imaginative and non-imaginative literature: a journalist's reporting can be quite lyrical (see Jules Vallès' description of the inauguration of the Commune<sup>1</sup>) and a poem can be merely versified argument. The distinctive difference is largely dependent upon whether the underlying principle of construction is predominantly imaginative and affective, as in most poetry, or predominantly analytical or expository, as in most polemic.

If I have begun by calling attention to these generally accepted basic propositions, it is essentially because of the recognition that virtually all historical writing about the Commune of 1871 has failed to attach more than marginal or anecdotal significance to its imaginative literature. The deficiency becomes all the more open to severe criticism when one perceives the substantial number of literary or quasi-literary pieces that have never been subjected to any kind of penetrating historical exegesis even though a cursory examination of a random sampling immediately suggests the likelihood that many may indeed yield significant insights into prevailing Communard attitudes and feelings.

One wonders if serious historians are sometimes frightened away from some literary works because of their popularity today in sentimental and political writing that draws inspiration from the legend of the Commune. Eugène Pottier's *Internationale*<sup>2</sup> might be taken as an almost symbolic example: composed only days after the fall of the last barricades, its first stanza and chorus had, by 1900, become (and have remained) the principal rallying song of Socialist and Communist

<sup>1</sup> *Cri du Peuple*, 28 mars 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Included in E. Pottier, *Chants révolutionnaires* (Paris, 1887). Set to music by Pierre Degeyter in 1888.

parties throughout the world. Yet its continued absence from any consideration in Commune historical writing suggests the possibility that its subsequent political rôle may have somehow made the poem appear to now be a piece of highly specious evidence. Although the effort to separate the myth from the reality of the Commune is certainly justifiable, it would be most erroneous to conclude that a document which happens to be so much a part of the myth, consequently loses its importance as documentary evidence for study of the reality.

It is not my intention, however, to imply that the common neglect of Commune literature as historical source material is necessarily due to such prejudice; in fact some writing on the Left has, if anything, been guilty of prejudice in an opposing direction. It is undoubtedly far more likely that the reasons for both neglect and misuse lie in the notable inability of most historians – regardless of the degree of sincerity and scruple that may characterize their approach – to grapple effectively with the distinctive nature of communication in literary art. Speaking deliberately to the world of feeling and the imagination, literary works, as I have suggested, do not readily lend themselves to the procedures traditionally employed in documentary analysis. Indeed, they are often elusive even for the experienced literary critic. Interpretation – however historical the purposes of the reading – will necessarily require a methodology appropriate to their more intangible subjective and imaginative character.

It might be argued that if these works are admittedly highly subjective and not amenable to commonly accepted procedures for analysis, what kind of value might they have as documentary evidence? Is not each writer's interweaving of thought, imagination, emotion and poetic voice far too unique to justify inferences concerning general significance? Admittedly, just as a particular literary work may be representative of a climate of attitudes among a given social grouping – here, the Communards – so it may turn out to be *unrepresentative* of that climate and hence of much lesser significance for the historian. It is quite true that there does exist a great danger of making unfounded generalizations in this subject; this is an everpresent problem besetting literary history. In actual fact, as we shall see, all past studies of Commune literature, be they primarily historical or literary, have actually fallen victim to this pitfall. Nevertheless, neither past unfortunate results nor *a priori* theoretical argumentation about the ideological dimensions of literary art can resolve the problem. In the last analysis, only sensitive, perceptive reading of each of many Commune literary pieces can demonstrate convincingly whether they do indeed manifest significant common traits and whether they

can contribute appreciably to our understanding of Communard attitudes. Such a study might very well reveal that what has been called "*The Literature of the Commune*" actually possesses less historical interest than has been suggested. Although close reading of individual texts would seem to be the obvious *sine qua non* of all documentary analysis, we have not found a single study related to Communard literature that appears to have been based upon application of this principle.

Apart from the dedicated pioneering attempts by Lucien Descaves<sup>1</sup> to assemble all literary works that emerged from the Commune or its immediate aftermath, no comprehensive effort of any consequence was undertaken until the formidable enterprise completed by Professor Y. Danilin in 1947.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the impressive research upon which it was based, the entire study is seriously undermined by the dogmatic and arbitrary imposition of a doctrinal schema upon the material assembled. Moreover, indiscriminate use is made of circumstantial details, ill-defined literary categories and political labels, while the complexities of individual works are reduced to simple extraction of selected thematic elements.

With considerable embarrassment, I must confess that my own youthful investigation of the major genres of Communard literature,<sup>3</sup> while evidently based on more extensive reading than the first study, did not escape a tendency to provide oversimplified running commentary for fragments that were once again selected without due regard to their literary contexts.

Although there have to date been no other such comprehensive endeavours, a number of shorter syntheses have appeared, such as those of Jean Fréville<sup>4</sup> and Professor J. Fischer.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately these have merely confined themselves to the utilization of excerpts as evidence for demonstrating the same pre-determined conclusions as guided the studies of Professor Danilin and myself.

Mention should be made of biographical studies that have appeared from time to time ever since it became possible to publish material

<sup>1</sup> Descaves' extensive research into the Commune also served as inspiration for his own novels about it: *La Colonne* (Paris, 1901) and *Philémon, vieux de la vieille* (Paris, 1913).

<sup>2</sup> Ju. Danilin, *Poety Parižskoj Kommuny*, tom I (Moscow, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> E. W. Schulkind, *La Littérature de la Commune de 1871*, thesis for "doctorat d'université" (Paris, 1951), typewritten.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Fréville, "La Commune et la littérature", in: *Europe*, avril 1951, pp. 73-111.

<sup>5</sup> Jan O. Fischer, "La poésie de la Commune dans l'évolution littéraire", in: *Philologica Pragensia*, IX (1966), pp. 163-174.

favourable to the Communards. Without denying the considerable light that they have often shed upon the personality and beliefs of the writer standing behind the literary piece, they have not – with the possible exception of Gaston Gille's study of Vallès<sup>1</sup> – distinguished biographical data from analysis of specific literary works. The most notorious example that comes to mind is that of Rimbaud studies: considerable attention has been given to debating the problematic presence of the poet in Paris on certain days during the Commune<sup>2</sup> but there has been no exegesis of the surviving Communard poems he wrote at the time.

Faced with the unsatisfactory character of writing *about* Communard literature, the historian may prefer to turn to one of the anthologies of Communard poetry. He will soon discover that he remains on equally shaky ground. Relatively, the more carefully prepared anthology remains an edition existing only in Russian translation, prepared by Professor Danilin.<sup>3</sup> For the reader who wishes the original French texts, however, there are only the editions presented by Professor Varloot<sup>4</sup> – not as complete or as well annotated – and the recent sentimental, impressionistic, loosely-conceived one prepared by the devoted hand of the late Maurice Choury.<sup>5</sup> The selection of poems for all three anthologies appear to have been made, in varying degrees, on the basis of two criteria: first, the extent to which pieces seem to reflect a highly militant or socialist conception of the Commune for the time; and second, whether an item containing some remote allusion to the Commune was written by either a currently well-known Communard or by a prestigious literary figure such as Verlaine<sup>6</sup> or Victor Hugo.<sup>7</sup> It must surely have required a specious conception of Communard litera-

<sup>1</sup> Gaston Gille, Jules Vallès. 1832-1885. I: Ses révoltes, sa maîtrise, son prestige. II: Sources, Bibliographie. Préface de Lucien Descaves (Paris, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> See Choury (cf. note 5 below) for an up to date summary of the "battle".

<sup>3</sup> Ju. Danilin, Antologija poezii Parižskoj Kommuny 1871 goda (Moscow, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> Les poètes de la Commune. Avec une préface de Jean Varloot pour le quatre-vingtième anniversaire de la Commune de Paris (Paris, 1951).

<sup>5</sup> Les poètes de la Commune. Présentés par Maurice Choury. Préface de Jean-Pierre Chabrol (Paris, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Although there is evidence to demonstrate Verlaine's sympathy for the Commune both before and after its defeat, only one poem, "Les Vaincus", is known to express this attitude (in the sections added in 1872). Elsewhere in his poetry there are only but the remotest references. Yet one finds, in the edition of Choury, for example, "Des Morts", written before 1848, and "Mort!", which not only contains no reference to the Commune but was written in 1895.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Hugo did not support the Commune either publicly or in his poetry; nor did he support Versailles. In various poems that appeared in *l'Année terrible* (Paris, 1872) he expresses his revulsion at the barbarity of the repression, his compassion for the victims and his respect for their idealism.

ture to include in each of these anthologies, the well-known love song, *Le Temps des Cerises*, which Jean-Baptiste Clément composed five years *before* the Commune!<sup>1</sup> When collections are conceived of as tendentiously as these, they ought to be used with the greatest caution and only if supplemented by a considerable number of other pieces genuinely related to the experience of the Commune.

It is paradoxical that although virtually all of the critical, biographical, and textual publications have manifested a very devoted concern with “rescuing” Communard literature from oblivion or distortion, their extremely questionable procedures have performed little more than a disservice to both that literature and to the Marxist method that has supposedly been employed.

By no means can they be said to have considered satisfactorily the historical implications that may be present or even to have provided us with a reliable introduction. If any of these works acquire any measure of permanence it will surely be due to having identified and made accessible a number of hitherto unknown Communard literary pieces. So long as Communard literature continues to lie between the Scylla of neglect and the Charybdis of such crass misuse, we cannot determine with any certainty its possible significance for a more precise appreciation of Communard consciousness. While the roots of the deficiencies to which we have called attention may generally be doctrinal – specifically, a mechanical misapplication of a Marxist approach –, their immediate sources are undeniably both historiographical and literary. It would seem that a new departure must be made if there are ever to be accurate descriptions of the evidence as well as fresh insights or seminal interpretations in this area. First of all, if we wish to erect a sound construction, we had better set our foundations with much greater theoretical clarity: an approach is required that will be simultaneously appropriate, as was suggested earlier, to the artistic character of the evidence and to the historical nature of the enquiry. Although there may be considerable direction in my remarks, I am offering no procedural blueprint; at the risk of being over-ambitious and pretentious, I would only like to suggest some fundamental considerations as guidelines.

To begin with, there is a fundamental necessity for a more precise conceptual and chronological delineation of the subject to replace the nebulous contours that characterize the works criticized above. In

<sup>1</sup> When the song appeared in the 1885 edition of his *Chansons*, it was accompanied by a note that the poem now reminded him of a woman whom he had glimpsed at a barricade fourteen years earlier. However, the song proper was composed in 1866 and expresses no political allusions.

attempting to do this, one must bear in mind that, as is often the case with respect to literature that grows out of and expresses the mentality associated with a given revolution, it is only in retrospect that one can establish the classification of literature of such and such a revolution. This is very much the case for the Commune of 1871 since what we are classifying arbitrarily as Commune literature was, like the entire political experience with which it was associated, thoroughly spontaneous. There is no sign of there having been any organized grouping of writers comparable to that which Gustave Courbet and others achieved among artists.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps not of special significance in view of the brief seventy-two-day life of the Commune and of the absence of any kind of party or political group to organize cultural activity. All that might be surprising is that the beginnings of organized activity that did occur were among artists rather than writers.

There does appear to have been at least the spontaneous conjuncture of individual efforts to propagandize through literary pieces but such efforts were undoubtedly subject to the same loss of some middle class, moderate support as the civil war continued. In any event, although this question of the political action and intentions of writers may be an important one to consider, it is marginal to the study of what was actually expressed in literary pieces. While no aspect of a literary work exists in total autonomy of the environmental forces that moulded the mind, personality, and artistic views of the author, each work – especially when it embodies the unequivocal expression of a political stance – surely speaks for itself. Hence it is clear that any effort to define “*The literature of the Commune*” must be based upon the works themselves and upon perception of significant common features that they might appear to manifest. Need one add that just as the French movement supporting the Commune was far from being limited to Paris (witness both the attempted Communal revolutions in other cities and isolated indications of support elsewhere) so the literary works to be included would certainly not be limited to what was composed within the walls of the capital?

It would probably be most fruitful to divide Commune literature into two categories: the first, and by far the most significant – composed almost entirely in verse forms – would be that of the period of the Commune proper, including as well, works written during the preceding months as expression of a call for the establishment of a revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> La Fédération des Artistes was formerly created at a meeting on the 13th April. An account of the meeting and a statement of the declaration of principles issued by it can be found in the *Journal Officiel* [Commune], 15 avril 1871.

Commune government; the second, the period of the repression, lasting until the general amnesty of 1880. In both periods we will find a common commitment to what the Commune appeared to represent, and conversely, a bitter condemnation of the social and political order symbolized by the Versailles government. However, each period involves a distinctive vantage point from which the revolution is viewed: on the one hand, the optimistic confidence accompanying the perspective of realizable social and political ideals; on the other, that of severe political oppression and indefinite prolongation of social injustice. The literature of the second, the decade of the repression, is stamped indelibly with the effects of years in penal colonies, exile, or clandestinity and is correspondingly variegated in both conception and form. In any event, one's attention will certainly be directed primarily upon the works that communicate Communard mentality during the first period, viz., when defeat was seldom envisaged as a possibility.

Effective analysis of the works that emerged from those momentous days is obviously not a simple matter of assembling and reading the documents. In very general terms, we cannot arrive at a truly perceptive reading without endeavouring to come as close as possible to appreciating the sensibilities and likely response patterns of a sympathetic French contemporary of the Commune in reading or listening to such works; or *mutatis mutandis*, a contemporary of the period of repression. This calls for a much broader conception of what constitutes an adequate framework of historical reference than would normally guide the reading of most other Commune documents. Attention need not be drawn in this article to the most fundamental rôle played by the principal social, political and ideological forces that converge in this civil war; I will suppose agreement that no study – however literary the purpose – would be viable without this. Without entering here into the complex problems involved in the interrelationship between literature and significant moments in social history, I do feel compelled to dissent from the currently fashionable attempt to “explain” phenomena such as the literature of the Commune by means of *a priori* formulas associated with sociologies of literature or of revolution: the Commune of 1871 – or for that matter any revolution – is far too specific; products of the imagination, moreover, are far too complex. Identical social situations and political attitudes certainly do not result in identical literary styles and conceptions: even if we possessed many more literary pieces dating from the Commune than we do, we would be unable from this literature alone to derive an accurate picture of the events and social consciousness that brought it forth, any more than we would, from a knowledge of historical documents alone, be able to infer

the specific character that this literature would manifest. On the other hand, it would seem germane to call attention to the need for largely sociological compass points that relate specifically to Communard literature: for example, the desirability of acquiring data about the social background of those who wrote Communard pieces in each of the two periods, the public for whom they were conceived, what sort of material failed to appear in print, and what kind of material failed to survive even when printed. Such information is likely to be quite scanty for obvious reasons but it is not impossible to glean a number of indications that might suggest possible points of correlation.

The other important direction of enquiry into the contextual framework – that which is most likely to be oversimplified when not neglected altogether by most historians – concerns the linguistic and literary *Geist* of Communard Paris. It is self-evident that the highly topical imaginative literature of the Commune is unlikely to evoke quite the same resonances a century later. This is particularly true for pieces written in the prevailing popular idiom, in which, for example, specific expressions have since lost their distinctive associations and occasionally even their meaning. In addition, one cannot, without being grossly anachronistic, readily read into the variegated Communard political and social vocabulary, the significations that certain terms would have in modern Left discussions: expressions like *le socialisme*, *la révolution sociale*, or even *Commune* itself, represented a broad range of meanings, often vague or even contradictory. There is much to be said for investigation of the relative importance and genesis of commonly used linguistic and imagistic clusters of symbolic associations: one thinks immediately of the whole anti-clerical syndrome, of barricade fighting, of the red flag and of the symbol of Paris itself – for these certainly mark virtually all forms of popular expression at the time, including literary pieces.<sup>1</sup>

It is not an easy matter for today's reader to reduce the distance that separates his sensibilities from those of the Communards: he tends to be rather amused if not annoyed by many of the mannerisms and postures to which French democrats and socialists of 1871 were most responsive in largely didactic literary forms. One must remember that Communard literature did not express any conscious rejection of predominant tastes in this area; it did not entail a revolt against the styles of what today might be called "Establishment" literature. Rather than follow some of the more esoteric trends that did indeed stand in opposition to academic styles, Communard pieces tended to exhibit the same grandi-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jean Dubois, *Le vocabulaire politique et social en France de 1869 à 1872* (Paris, 1962).

loquent declamation, sonorous clichés and vitriolic verve that were so admired at the time in Victor Hugo's *Châtiments*. With the very notable exceptions, such as some of Rimbaud's Communard poems, writers who admired the Commune were as much at home with this kind of artistic expression as were their readers – and, moreover, as were most writers and readers who supported Versailles! On the other hand, it is quite true that Communard literary works manifest a comparatively greater use of colloquial language and of imagery drawn from everyday life. Moreover, there is a noticeable increase in the tendency to place working class figures in the center of the stage and to conceive of them less as the sentimental idealizations of the 1840's than as ordinary spirited Parisian working people.

Would these developments warrant the assertion that there was a distinctive Communard theory of literature – part of a germinating “socialist” aesthetics? This does not appear to be the case, for at most, as one would expect, literary works associated with defence of the Commune merely reflect a common preoccupation to let the fervour of political commitment guide artistic sensibilities, as occurs in most radical literature of any period. Parenthetically, it might be of marginal interest to consider conversely, the extent to which the defeat of the Commune and the intensity of the repression subsequently contributed to the growth of more esoteric, “ivory-tower” aesthetics among French writers. While a relationship may well have existed, it would be quite difficult, however, to adduce evidence of a causal connection.

The most important component of the literature produced during the existence of the Commune is without doubt the extensive, varied and influential popular literature – that which is strictly speaking outside the realm of what is generally understood as “literary” literature. While it is related to and often interacts with the development of more sophisticated literary forms in the nineteenth century, this popular literature nevertheless possesses its own independent genealogy in France; one whose sources are deep in the eighteenth century. The period of the Commune of 1871 is merely the latest chapter in this evolution; distinctive only for its particular topical references and themes.

In one sense it could be said that Communard popular literature is the child of the militant democratic and egalitarian traditions of 1789 and of the social romanticism associated with 1848. It is very evident that this is a literature associated with yet a third major working-class insurrection to occur in the space of forty years; that it expresses social and political ideals with comparatively more militancy; with greater confidence that they are at last realizable. Many song and verse patterns

that had originated in analogous revolutionary situations were utilized but with new texts appropriate to the new situation. Interestingly, the verses – whether the *Chant du Départ* or the songs of Pierre Dupont – are occasionally circulated with the original texts. Generally simple, vivid and full of infectious lyrical qualities, the revived forms were particularly apt for oral transmission: in the street, at café-concerts and in music halls. The shapes assumed by the myriad works of popular literature are as often drawn from the broad gamut of folklore as from the revolutionary heritage – one often merged with the other. Parody, gallic wit, sentimentality, and farce become the tools for defence of the Commune and for virulent indictment of Versailles and what it signifies. Thematically, it is the latter that predominates; this is rendered with imaginative vivacity and concreteness, with symbols drawn copiously from everyday life. On the other hand, the vision of the Commune ideal tends to be conveyed in a romantic manner that has only just begun to evolve appreciably from that which we associate with Delacroix' 1830 painting, *La Liberté sur les Barricades*. Still, there are pieces that make us conscious that this literature has, in many aspects, moved from the vision of *La Marseillaise* to that of the *Internationale*.

Unfortunately, although there are many items of distinctly popular literature which survived and have been located, they seem to comprise a disproportionately small fragment of what was actually produced and circulated. Appearing in small quantities in whatever printing media chanced to be available; subject to frequent publication difficulties, this literature was particularly vulnerable to subsequent destruction; in addition it soon became too late to undo the effects of the disdain of librarians and historians in the years following the Commune's defeat. Nevertheless, it appears that a sufficient number of wall posters, circulars, and newspapers containing this kind of ephemeral piece are available to permit some viable inferences.<sup>1</sup>

Mention should be made of one source of Commune literary art whose rôle appears to have been considerable: namely, the many partisans drawn from the world of the cultural bohemia that had fermented actively under Louis-Philippe and during the Second Empire. Their own feelings of social alienation and their relative poverty undoubtedly contributed appreciably to a feeling of identification with working people as co-victims of the commonly despised

<sup>1</sup> A recent study, Georges Coulonges, *La Commune en chantant* (Paris, 1970) deals with the image of the Commune in popular songs, but once again the contribution is vitiated by the same impressionistic and loose conception of earlier works.

bourgeois Establishment; equally, to a strong desire to join and to sometimes lead working class political struggles. It is very likely that this radical political orientation had much to do with the urge among writers to integrate their own intellectual background, social idealism, and dynamic use of popular language and imagery. The importance of these *déclassés* is evident in their presence, or rather omnipresence, in Communard newspapers; their style might be illustrated by the prose of Jules Vallès or by *Les Vaincus* of Verlaine.<sup>1</sup>

Assuming that he has managed to establish an adequate contextual framework and has also assembled a considerable sampling of texts, the historian now faces the central problem of reading the literary pieces with heightened perceptivity. This was the locus of the criticism made of all studies of Communard literature to date. As already emphasized above, literature of the Commune cannot viably be approached as historical documentation without recognition that literary art communicates through the total artistic form that has given each work imaginative presence. In other words, there is little in the physiognomy of most literary pieces that is without relevance to their over-all signification. To overlook, for example, the effects of imagery, sound, rhythm, and overall tone in Rimbaud's *Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie*, or *Orgie parisienne*,<sup>2</sup> is to etiolate their very essence, for in each it is the artistic synthesis that makes the full communication and makes it so effectively. In essence, my point is that to achieve an accurate reading of most Communard literary works the historian must utilize a different wave-length of perception and interpretation than he is normally accustomed to; he cannot without risking a mis-reading, separate out a supposed "content" from a supposed ornamental dressing, just as he cannot select little gobbets out of their particular context. Even though his objectives are not ultimately aesthetic, he must seek out the inner dynamic that ties together *all* the elements of a work. This includes the suggestive, just as much as the explicit statements that have unfortunately tended to serve as the terminal points of historians' reading of imaginative literature. What I am suggesting is not at all a disregard for fundamental principles of documentary analysis in historical research. My main point is only that these principles must be adapted to the fact that the work of imaginative literature tends to communicate as emphasized earlier, through an *artistic* rather than

<sup>1</sup> The first two sections of this poem appeared in *La Gazette rimée* in 1867. Only the last two relate to the Commune and appear to have been added in 1872. At that time several inconsequential changes were made in the first two sections.

<sup>2</sup> There is universal agreement that "*Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie*" was probably written in the summer of 1871. The manuscript for "*L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple*" bears the date of "mai 1871".

through an analytical structure; that it tends to evoke rather than to explain.

In fine, it is my own belief that Communard imaginative literature, if approached carefully with guidelines such as have been suggested here, can command historical attention and will indeed yield insights of value for understanding the consciousness of the Commune's supporters. Conceivably, the methods and the observations themselves might offer some relevance to analysis of imaginative literature associated with other revolutionary movements. At all times one would have to reckon with the fact that the material is much more complex than any previous studies of Communard literature have been willing to grant; yet one must also avoid overemphasizing particularities to the point of obscuring the presence of any definite pattern. It would be illusory, moreover, to pretend that this kind of evidence is generally as valuable as certain other documentary material. Any effective utilization of the literary pieces that have survived would seem to require an equal willingness to adapt to both the insights *and* the limitations that are inherent in the very nature of artistic communication.

As for the Communard literature itself, rather than suggest here a hypothesis to be verified, I would prefer to close by recalling the three basic questions that would best guide work in this area: 1) Is there indeed a clearly discernible body of surviving literature associated with support of the Paris Commune between its inception and the amnesty of 1880? 2) Does the literature afford significant insights into Communard attitudes during the Commune and during the decade of the repression? 3) Do these literary pieces illuminate some of the central issues involved in the experience of the Commune? The answers cannot be the point of departure for the enquiry.