



Detail from Drypoint Beaudelaire by MARIE ST. GEORGE

Original Size 8¾" x 6"

THE JOURNALS OF SIXTEN THE PAINTER

MATTHEW CORRIGAN

During the year in Chicago, Sixten kept prolific journals about himself and Madeleine — journals that read not unlike a tour through some terrible disease. Interspersing the always trenchant (though often pained) observations can be found the first real statements on his art. He temporarily set aside the actual painting of his ideas on canvas, and instead tried to content himself with working out an aesthetic upon which to base his later work. He began that treacherous ordeal of investigating the nature of art itself. Even for the true artist, I suspect, such periods can be dangerous — at least if physically dissociated from the development of technique itself. The year in Chicago verifies this to some extent. It was to be a frustrating year for Sixten, because he was able to do little painting. There were new courses to teach — and he was conscientious enough to want to teach them well. And then there was much to read and learn on his own.

Madeleine was far enough away from him in New York to allow him to work things out for himself. The past summer in Toronto made him realize how deeply attached he still was to her — but it had made him realize also that he could not yet live with her if he was to make anything at all of his talent as a painter. While the year in Chicago did not give him as much time as he would have liked, it did give him time to work certain false notions out of his system. It had to be just for a year, though — no longer. His immediate aim was to acquire enough money during that year to take at least eight months off to paint.

The main notebook, affectionately called *Vade Mecum*, is a black artist's notebook full of almost translucent sheets. It is here before me now and even as I write demands to be allowed to speak.

Chicago: September, 1964

Journals begun with little hope of success.

Am now 1,000 miles from her in the strange concrete civilization that is Chicago. I feel I am a new man — having left Toronto, and what seems now like my youth, behind. Chicago is new to me. Only after four days here can I write these words and understand the true extent to which my surroundings are strange and newly formidable.

The school is small, almost downtown, a kind of junior college that has an art division in which they claim a boast of sorts. I met one kindly gentleman, who fortunately happened to be my department chairman. He referred to my letters as though he had just been reading them and expressed a hope that I enjoy working at the school. He showed me around the studios and showed me also the equipment I would be able to use in my lectures on Quattrocento and Modern Art.

Simone's introduction to a young man has helped me locate a manageable apartment in Fullerton. I am pleased with its modesty and with some paint (and some paintings!) it will be quite livable. It is a frightening thought to be alone in such a strange new city. Were it not for my two crates of canvases and my paints I would think I were dead and had entered a new life. These meager possessions and my memory of Madeleine are the only links with any past.

September 14

My very thoughts are reduced to the exigencies of living (how long have I been out of touch with the struggle of daily eating and sleeping?). I have taken so much for granted because of Madeleine. Ah Madeleine! My spirit lodged eastward in another urban quarry! It has been almost three weeks since we loved and were — simply — together enisled. My love!

September 16

My loneliness grows more each day. It is strange but it seems at times to have nothing tangible to do with her. Now I understand her remark once that our love grew with little or no real relation to the other person. It is almost a loneliness for every other person beyond the beloved (a loneliness that would grow surely to illusion size if one allowed it) — and is more closely associated (on the various substrata of consciousness) with the individuals that we brush against and fall in love with each day of our separate lives.

Tuesday, September 22

Met my classes yesterday and today. A terrifying feeling of responsibility descended upon me as I stood before them, trying to contrive a brilliant spontaneity. Halfway through my first class I had the inconsolable feeling I was telling them everything I believed in. I kept going, watching their anxious shelved faces up the auditorium seats. (Always a new experience to wonder what they think of you!) It will not be easy teaching these courses unless I have a canvas before me and hours in which to experiment. I fear they will soon grow impatient with the necessarily slow approach which a history of art course needs. I was always impatient when I was in their place a few years — how many? — ago.

Saturday morning

These amnesia crazed nights when nerves are left opened, left raw — as though someone cut the tips off (letting electricity stream out!) just as one were trying to manage sleep. How it was necessary to stop the whirling of the imagination (how much a twitching nerve that can seem to be!) by getting up and throwing myself into some new book on art. This has been the most difficult week of teaching I have ever put in.

Sunday

'I know I could love you now for all time and be forever faithful to you.' Why had I not answered her with what was on the tip of my tongue all through the phone call! Is it that, in love, there is always a variation in the lovers' feelings about each other — in their need for each other and in their ability to give to the other? At any given moment in a love affair it is a fact that one loves the other to a lesser extent.

How easy it is to word one's confusion! Madeleine! — nothing of what I wanted to say transpired into words as I stood in that phone booth at midnight and talked a thousand miles into your small ear. Oh Madeleine!

Man in love, it seems to me, gives woman his power bit by bit over a lifetime. Are we not biologically supported in this? After a certain age, each time the male act is committed it is with that much less physical power. In this one way a man looks on a woman as having not quite the same sense of sacrifice as himself. With her the atrophy is emotional: the loss of the feeling of desire. But a man loses the outward ability. Thus the cruelty of it all!

On the other hand, woman lives in a state of virtual pain: the

erotic cycle. The cycles of her life are not wound about the ecstasies and frustrations of ideology (the grail idea) but rather around the erection and detumescence of pain within her. Woman! — the beautiful instrument of purgation of the human race, through whom pain and the moans of the centuries are let loose; in whose womb an age stretches its fruit-like sack and extends into ripeness.

Does it follow then that woman is the true seeker of crucifixion? — that it is she who eternally seeks death by thorned agony? — that the Christian example is plagued by indifference because of a misrepresentation of the sexes? Is it not true that the greatest of man's human powers is in his resurrecting a woman from death-in-life by giving her a greater burden of pain?

Monday evening

What little satisfaction the weekend brought; preparing courses, writing my soul out (or trying to!) on these pages. I even avoid unpacking my canvases; it is as though they must await some promised sabbatical to be once again worked over. The thought of oil paint: myriad oleaginary smells, open wound colors: nauseates me. Likewise the dull eggshell canvases, awaiting my touch mockingly. I have so much work in me now — that each day I fail to resolve myself in terms of my art I come further from ever rescuing my spirit from this labyrinth I have frustratingly wound for it since my youth.

Perhaps I am meant only to be a great teacher! Ha! It would take a lifetime!

In two weeks I get my first paycheck. I will postpone my debts another two weeks and go to see her. This loneliness is critical. And the w-a-i-t-i-n-g is interminably ruinous to mind and body. Oh! to recover one's health again!

Thursday, October 1

The small campus is glorious these days at noon. Clear autumnal, tumbling blue skies; with Chicago, a high rise of grey steel set against them. There is always the continual sweep of large jets, their faint feathery trails absorbing the blueness. The trees around the small buildings of the campus are filled with a final seasonal burst of life: it is beautiful to penetrate their color: brownnut, greenolive, redmaple, whitebirch. At nights the air is cold and moist with the full heaviness of the lake. I love cities that draw their air from some large body of water.

The city alights, a litany of blue venal light. Sky recedes like a

spectrum toward its darkest violets. And I will now walk and think of fall and of Madeleine . . .

Friday 2

Youth! Their ripefruit faces bearing down on me like they bear down on a speculative question. They are at once beautiful and terrifying, at once begging and disdaining, at once innocent and depraved. Augustine saw in them the perturbation of the ages: even saw in them — the demonic!

Wednesday 7

Today: the faces of new women: so ripely beautiful: so anguished. Madeleine is but a type after all, and for me all beauty must revolve around her in some way. Yet it is possible to love magnanimously. For who would fardels bear to grunt and sweat under the monogamous life! (Are those Terrance's words? I fear they are.)

Today in the cafeteria at college: I saw the first flirtation woman ever made at man: its design was as archetypal and simple as the curve of a cloud. And I responded, mnemonic man that I am.

Those slimmed bronze knees sitting down on a chair beyond me: her face a scurry toward modesty, disdain. The knees rubbing together like the clashing of bronze in sunlight: darkling toward flame, fleshwarm, lust burned. And the legs moved together. Crossed each other like swords, shielded on each knee with dull browngold. Lust bound! How well the eyes manoeuvred a half disdainful smile, though they saw me only circumferentially. Animals see thus; a panoramic vision which registers movement alone, and shading, the infinitesimal **chiaroscuro** of movement. She had seen me. Of this I was sure. Because the legs moved uneasily. Parted one whole inch as though the whole body relaxed before me, me centered with peeled eyes upon her there . . . Unripe legs in winter probably. Cold-bound. Whitening. With red hoaring the calves. Knees rubbing with the cold. Like meat just before it bruises. No! she is a summery sundialed gal — I can tell! Soaks it up. The warmth of a thousand suns . . . Had Soren noticed in the Danish white-cheese of Regina's crossed legs a pattern of his later white madness? . . . his ontological madness?

Legs together again. Like a gate closing. Afraid of trespassers, surveyors, voyeurs of all sorts: against me, I can tell. 'You have had a look, now starve to death man. Me, I am for the gods, a perfectly aged viande, a faceless wonder . . . with legs — eleven, tanned,

stemming from the dark brown river of my nether regions. After death you can know me, after the long game, the long tease of life (in which I will make you ride up and down my legs like a juggler does a warm satchelled ball). But now! **Noli me tangere**. For I am Caesar's.

Legs close now. As though possessing me and all men. Ah! She moves decisively. The game is over. Her legs part rudely. Hold apart a full four, no more, inches, as she rises; the shields of her knees straighten for war, the calves achieve full pith again, the sun-caressed flanks glorious! In one ferret-glance she tells me I am caught — looking! She knows! It is as though I have ridden naked in a circus before her. Intrepidly, a tall dark Caesar of a youth has slid darkly from a niche in the room to abscond with her beauty. Intrepidly she turns from me and walks on golden legs through doorways invisible with glass.

Such reflections arise deep in the chthonic regions of my soul — and are, upon closer scrutiny, alien to me.

Womanhood! How illusive you are for the artist to contemplate. Yet there is no art anywhere without your form tracing it purer.

Suddenly, this evening, I miss Madeleine terribly.

Friday

There are days when I fear the love I bear mankind: when I fear my trepidation at a woman's head, turning. Ah! I am stuffed with the Judaic-Christian love paradox — which dictates how I should love all men equally.

Why is it that whenever I am reminded of Christ I think of Terrance? Something amiss here. Is it his long equine visage, which always looks as if it has been roughly towelled by the women of Jerusalem? Is it his wounded body arising from the shower, flagellated? The face of Terrance ripens in the extreme toward the faces of Christ in Piero della Francesca, who, in fact, must have 'seen' the divinehead himself.

Friday night, late

Today! whole forgotten vistas of my boyhood came back to me enlivened with sense, with color and smell and even the synaesthetic feelings of well-being associated with these (how I felt then at such and such a time). For example I remember clearly a certain lake-district near Berne: Seeland: and the smell of the earth there in early summer when the evenings were yet cool and fragrant

with the new fields of grass and small densely scented flowers; there was a deep gash cut in the earthside with the new bog flora, an immense burrowing of scent into the sea-borne land-borne air. There was a time then when I believed the green finches sprung from the thick buds of dark deciduous trees . . .

There was always color to excite me — and smell. The mountains drew the horizon out — giving another five-mile perspective to the eye and pulling one's horizontal vision as far as it would go — thus giving the eye degrees of color otherwise impossible to find on earth. The eye was flooded with vistas then — and the degradations of color only great expanses can stroke alive in us.

Every trauma of childhood had a way of becoming lost in the sudden revelations of concealed beauty. And my small mind accepted such revelations for what they were: titillations of an unripe imagination: gifts brought to herald the summer. I remember standing one summer evening high atop a cliff on the North Sea watching the silhouettes of warships at calm two miles off shore. The sun had left the sea bludgeoned, a dark cold cobalt. While the sky moved ethereally and uneasily, evanescent like air out of a tire, darkening the grass greener at my feet and cooling my ankles. There was a radio station a half mile along the cliffs and I thought I heard its syllabic ritual singing in the otherwise calm air. I imagined the world was at such euphonic peace. Then the next morning I heard the rumbling of the guns. I wanted to return to the cliffs to view whatever was happening on the day-lighted sea — but my dear aunt would not let me. The village became a conspiracy of whispers. That was the day the telegram arrived from Berne and I learned of my father's death. The event became clear to me only years later when it was explained to me that my father was a hero and had died at the end of a Gestapo chain . . . his flesh reaching perhaps the color of the sea I had loved and worshipped so much the night before.

This was a week before my mother arrived with two tickets to America on a freighter. The crossing was like a fifteen day church service. Everyone seemed to be whispering as though an abrupt shout would trigger our death. My mother was ruined with grief. I could not touch her; or the deep hurt that cripple her from within. She became homiletic and fearful for our lives. I did not understand what the words meant — 'a world at war.' When we reached New York one pale mistral morning my mother's heart broke down: she collapsed in my arms in tears. "We are safe. We are alone and safe." I did not understand how lost joy could be coupled with such des-

pair. And I did not like the way the land was limed in dismal mist. Where had all the color gone? I could not even recognize the new smells.

I do not remember much between the summer and the following winter because that day in New York began my sickness. It must have begun while at sea. Something contracted that summer playing on whitestone beaches — or perhaps at sea from one of the strange sailors with eyes like sea-worn nacre shells, and suddenly given in to by my body that first morning in New York. I remember hearing some terrible shouting outside the cabin door and my mother crying . . . anguish about my having to stay on board. My limbs were shaking by then. I remember wanting to get up to comfort my spectral mother beside me, trying to compress her grief in an already tear-ruined face. I remember noticing that the ship had stopped and the berth was perfectly still for the first time since we left Wilhelmshaven. Yet I was shaking, terribly. And my poor mother tried to quell her convulsions by pressing her head deeper in my side . . . Outside the cabin an excited Swiss ran up and down the passage disintegrating over a new phrase he had just learned for the first time: UnitedStates . . . UnitedStates . . . A m m e r i c a a

When I awakened from my sickness weeks later I noticed that all colors had changed: the sky was a different blue; water reflected that blue differently; flora held new intensities, lacked others . . . I knew then I would have to paint reality in order to know it.

Saturday

A new and frightening thought — is it possible to have a Chorale or a **Tempest** or a Mahler's Tenth Symphony ONLY if one has 'accidentally' lived through it all? In other words, managed **not** to be destroyed by it somehow?

Sunday

So long since I noticed the season, fall. Warm struggling days. Cold nights. At six tonight . . . the horizon was drenched in a mauve mist undercoated with that bromide glow — sunset! — the vast perplexing iris of the universe. Later, amethyst mist hung heavy and languorous over the city; straining its lifebeat; clogging its arteries with the heaviness of sleep.

Later the fog came: silver against the black. Lights fell through the fine dampness as from a supersaturated solution, in fine clouds of iridescent moisture. Green and red and blue neon stained the night and encintured the retinae with rainbows. Cars hollered blunt indif-

ference; their sounds intensified in the night's sap. Faces shone with an ivory wanness; some wandering toward sleep, others awakening to love or some need they thought to be love. The church I suddenly visited (in search of communion with Madeleine?) was in a state of depredation prior to repair. It looked as though it had been ravaged and sacked by marauders. The altar gaping wide, raped. Benches upturned. A thick web of light fell from a naked bulb pendant in the ceiling — it caught the particles of unsettled dust and plaster and illuminated them. The tabernacle was opened. Nothing inside. There was only the depredation, the spoilage to pray to — if one could ever again find the formula of prayer. I imagined before me a terrible scene — numerous Madeleines lying ravaged. How could I ever paint the details of such visions?

How carefully our memories preserve utterances, images. And how carefully the body remembers the image and touch of the beloved — the same way a deep cut will forever carry the nature of its wound or a healed limb will flinch on the stair where it fell and was fractured. All the while I peered at that scene I felt her touch upon me, as though my skin were being magnetized by her presence in the church. My whole body reflexed toward her spectre — perhaps toward her distant desire sluggishly moving somewhere in New York.

It was a long damp walk home. Many faces nude with anguish. Did they know? Could they hear in that thick pencilled-in air the wails of the Almighty?

Wednesday, October 14

The deep sense of responsibility in my work to look straight into the hearts of my pupils — to respond to all those eyes viewing me bleedingly for love. Often I walk into my class the same way one walks into a great book: I give it myself. Other times I peel truths for them as one might a piece of stage fruit.

Today Cezanne! How right I felt teaching his vision. In Chicago! The secret heart of America!

Monday, 19th

Returned from Madeleine under a grave fatigue. Steeped in consciousness on the plane late Sunday night — letting memory's wheel spin its scenes before my eyes. Cold miserable winter in New York. We never left my hotel, except once to visit Simone. The violence of lovemaking — that surging, recurring swell that will draw no abatement from nature. The sheer cutting violence of her mouth and how our cheeks were splotched with our lips' blood. For some

indescribable reason she reminded me of a mad torn rabbit jerking itself free from a trap only to tear itself deeper, so that with each stab of pain there was an increase of energy that finally brought it to its death . . . She wants to get married!

The pulls and stretchings of lovemaking seem never to draw her upward to any special elation. Always, her body seems to be curtailed by too avid a concentration, so that she is left foundering on the periphery of some ecstasy she screamed her heart out for. And then the dull groaning. It was as though her passion opened out a thousand new directions or postures or possibilities — but she was unable to choose any one in particular and the act itself became a search rather than a culmination. The old male mis-statement of the thing, I suppose! What is it man expects of woman, anyway?

Later, wiping the blood from her cheeks, from me, from her pale legs (I thought I had bit her lip but it was my **own** blood on our cheeks), she told me she would often awake when younger to find her lips swollen and the young man's teeth marks on the inside of her mouth. (Beta Kappa kisses, I suppose.) When her kisses grew vicious I could see how they had bit into her if only to hold on — almost as a self-defense against the undertow of that passion-torn body. Our conversation in the deep relaxation following: like unborn waves nudging the calm surface.

'You spoil life by all your inhibitions born of your moral upbringing — Oh to be free thinking, free acting —'

I was exhausted, but: 'Madeleine stop trying to mirror others after your own self and searching. Some people are naturally closed off and not left dangling and 'ungathered' as you say.'

'I hate systematic people! You're too easily made happy,' she replied. 'It would require no challenge to keep you happy.'

I padded a small ripe berry of blood from her cheek with my handkerchief. **My Blood!**

* * *

December 27: I am with her for the holidays. It is a period of great perturbation for Madeleine for she is at this time afraid of an involvement with one of the executives in the company where she works. My natural reaction was one of jealousy when I discovered his assertions of love and his proposals some weeks ago — but I now see it as almost necessary for Madeleine to experience this. After all, her life will probably be one great proposal! — she

is too gifted and beautiful for me to think otherwise. My indifference last night, or rather the silent moment in which I feigned indifference, was all she needed to let herself go. **She went with him last week to the company Christmas party.** I should not have questioned her. It is always jealousy's most fatal shortcoming — the pathological rising of curiosity — whose factual result we usually already intuit but whose psychological effect we can't calculate.

They have become very close friends at work during the past year, enjoying each other's companionship in a way impossible both to **his** wife or to **myself**. He has known about me for some time — and has remarked that were he unmarried, he would consider her 'fair game.' I find consolation by accrediting this man, whom I have never seen, with a basic emotional immaturity. Most likely he is unable to touch his wife to the quick in any way — and she, being more intelligent than he is, is not totally satisfied with him. He is one of that vast crowd of unintelligent, insensitive men — who ride on the waves of life and never know from whence arises its undulations. (How much of this is wishful thinking on my part?) Life rolls off him in his repetitious jokes, in his flippant handling of thoughts, in his shallow gaze. He seems to want from life the same unmeaningful handshake he offers his business confreres. Yet there must be something worthwhile to him. He respects his wife's feelings, and has enough decency not to perpetrate upon Madeleine an impossible affair.

She told me of the evening spent with him, as we drank late last night. We were in the Spanish room of a fashionable hotel watching a pair of flemenco dancers, with eyes elongated and craven, their skin-costumes alive like peacocks.

Madeleine had been drinking constantly all evening. I carefully kept behind her for I was deeply disturbed at what she had told me and wanted to remember all she would say. No details, however, had been asked or given up to that moment.

'If you want to know, I had a wonderful time. He is a magnificent dancer.'

'Did you go out after —?'

'Yes, we drove around. He likes to drive at night.'

'Did he t-o-u-c-h you?' The words could not override my tremor.

'Touch?' Her tongue played with it a moment. 'What-do-you-mean-by-touch?'

'Like I touch you.'

'Don't ask' — Her eyes were blurred like a child's after sleep.

'I have a right to know.'

'No, no right.'

'He kiss you?'

'Yes-s.'

'Was it happy?'

'Yes—Don't please.' She drank a sip of the exotic emerald drink.

'Did he like you?'

'I hurt him, he struck me across the face.'

'Hit you — why?'

Her eyes lit up to the hollow wooden arpeggio of the dancers' feet. I saw the flash of their costumes reflected in her wide listless eyes.

'Why did he hit you?' I asked innocently, certain that I knew why.

'I hurt his feelings. I told him he could tell all the men at work I liked him.' Her words fell suddenly in the lap of silence that followed the dance. Applause filtered through the dense ochre room.

What did it all mean I wonder? Somehow I was satisfied then and pursued it no longer. We made ardent love afterwards but she was tired with alcohol — the one thing that fatigues her easily. As I felt her frailty and vulnerability beneath me, I drew a warm breath of tenderness for her. Never, I knew, could I hurt her. Yet even as I write this, I wonder. What has happened to the angry jealousy I once experienced at such revelations? Am I changing in my love?

Today . . .

The fear of bones breaking . . .

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