

VERSION ANGLAISE ET COURT THÈME

I. VERSION

Felix Young finished Gertrude's portrait, and he afterwards transferred to canvas the features of many members of that circle of which it may be said that he had become, for the time, the pivot and the centre. I am afraid it must be confessed that he was a decidedly flattering painter and that he imparted to his models a romantic grace which seemed easily and cheaply acquired by the payment of a hundred dollars to a young man who made "sitting" so entertaining. For Felix was paid for his pictures, making, as he did, no secret of the fact that in guiding his steps to the Western world affectionate curiosity had gone hand in hand with a desire to better his condition. He took his uncle's portrait quite as if Mr Wentworth had never averted himself from the experiment; and as he compassed his end only by the exercise of gentle violence it is but fair to add that he allowed the old man to give him nothing but his time. He passed his arm into Mr Wentworth's one summer morning—very few arms, indeed, had ever passed into Mr Wentworth's—and led him across the garden and along the road into the studio which he had extemporized in the little house among the apple-trees. The grave gentleman felt himself more and more fascinated by his clever nephew, whose fresh, demonstrative youth seemed a compendium of experiences so strangely numerous. It appeared to him that Felix must know a great deal; he would like to learn what he thought about some of those things as regards which his own conversation had always been formal but his knowledge vague. Felix had a confident, gayly trenchant way of judging human actions which Mr Wentworth grew little by little to envy; it seemed like criticism made easy. Forming an opinion—say on a person's conduct—was with Mr Wentworth a good deal like fumbling in a lock with a key chosen at hazard. He seemed to himself to go about the world with a big bunch of these ineffectual instruments at his girdle. His nephew, on the other hand, with a single turn of the wrist, opened any door as adroitly as a house-thief. He felt obliged to keep up the convention that an uncle is always wiser than a nephew, even if he could keep it up no otherwise than by listening in serious silence to Felix's quick, light, constant discourse. But there came a day when he lapsed from consistency and almost asked his nephew's advice.

"Have you ever entertained the idea of settling in the United States?" he asked one morning, while Felix brilliantly plied his brush.

Henry James, *The Europeans* (1878)

II. THÈME

Les jours où l'humeur et le temps qu'il faisait lui en laissaient le loisir, il allait à sa barque et, accroché à la rive, dans son ruisseau, il rêvait. Sa barque était vieille et prenait l'eau : elle avait été faite quand le surintendant réorganisait les canaux et était peinte en blanc, encore que les années eussent écaillé la peinture qui la recouvrait. La barque avait l'apparence d'une grande viole que Monsieur Pardoux aurait ouverte. Il aimait le balancement que donnait l'eau, le feuillage des branches des saules qui tombait sur son visage et le silence et l'attention des pêcheurs plus loin. Il songeait à sa femme, à l'entrain qu'elle mettait en toutes choses, aux conseils avisés qu'elle lui donnait quand il les lui demandait, à ses hanches et à son grand ventre qui lui avaient donné deux filles qui étaient devenues des femmes. Il écoutait les chevesnes¹ et les goujons s'ébattre et rompre le silence d'un coup de queue.

1. chevesne (variété de poisson d'eau douce) : chub

Pascal Quignard, *Tous les matins du monde* (1991)

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